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Dear Saints,

My how quickly a year has flown by! Here we are, one year later, and looking for the coming of a king after God's own heart in 1 Samuel.

As we begin a new year and a new volume in the Rooted devotional, I wanted to remind you of our intentions. Our hope in providing this devotional was: 1. To encourage a rhythm of personal daily devotional times among the whole congregation. 2. To supplement Sunday's sermon as we seek to understand the overall flow of the story of the Scripture. and 3. To have all of our congregation "on the same page" so that we could encourage one another through the scripture we're hearing preached and the passages we're reading in our personal time of study.

You'll note one change in this devotional that is different than previous volumes. Day 4 is actually a series of questions for you to answer as opposed to commentary or devotional thoughts on the passage. Our hope in the coming volumes is to have more days with questions and fewer days with the staff's devotional thoughts. That way, our voice becomes quieter and the Spirit of God's voice looms larger as He speaks to you through His word.

We're praying that volume 3 of the Rooted devotional will be true to its name. That as a result of your time with the Lord in prayer and study of the word, that you'll be more rooted in the word of God and in the work of Christ.

Yours for the Faith,
Jay Joye

Seeing Christ in the Old Testament

“Do you not know that from every little town and village and tiny hamlet in England there is a road leading to London? Whenever I get hold of a text, I say to myself, ‘There is a road from here to Jesus Christ, and I mean to keep on His track till I get to Him.’” These words were shared by a veteran minister to a young preacher. We’d read it and echo a hearty amen, recognizing our tendency to be like the pharisees and search the scriptures with very little thought: ³⁹ ***You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me.***” (John 5:39)

In order to help you better search for Christ in the Old Testament, perhaps you can read the scripture from a different set of lenses. Below are six ways for you to find Christ in the Old Testament:

1. **History Teacher**

- The Bible is written as one story with four main chapters: creation, fall, redemption, restoration.
- What if you attempted to view the passage you were studying as if it were an account of history? What if you noted where it was in relation to creation? What if you noted where it was in relationship to redemption? What if you noted where it was in relation to restoration?

2. **English Teacher**

- The truth is we find certain “literary” themes throughout the Bible. Certain truths, concepts, words. One of the ways we can look for Christ is to recognize the themes and see how they are fulfilled in Him.
- Exs: Kingdom, Exile, Sabbath

3. **Artist**

- Look for types: people, things, events or institutions that seem to form pictures or shadows that are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ.
- For example:
 - People, Abraham is a type of Christ, because like Christ, he answered the call of God to leave all that was comfortable and familiar to go out to create a new people of God.

- A thing, the bronze snake was a type of Christ, that was raised up so that all who looked upon it might be saved.
- An event, like the exodus, as God defeats his enemies and delivers his people from bondage, so too Christ defeats his enemies and delivers his people from bondage.
- An institution, like the temple, that through right sacrifices God is pleased to dwell with his people, and in much the same way through the sacrifice of Christ, God is pleased to dwell with His people.

4. *Weatherman*

- As weatherman make predictions, tentatively promising a certain outcome, we find throughout the scripture that certain promises are made. These promises are not just in clear messianic prophecies but in promises like the first evangel in Genesis 3:15: “he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

5. *Librarian*

- The book of the Bible we’re studying stands on the shelves amidst a library of 65 other books that have allusions and connections to the book we’re studying. What we can do to work to Christ is to check cross references, to consider places where the text we are studying actually shows up in other places in Scripture.
- See the Treasury of Scripture Knowledge (free online).

6. *Bank Teller*

- When determining a counterfeit a bank teller or analyst has to do both comparing and contrasting. It looks for similarities and also notes the differences.
- In comparison, we ask, does the message show by analogy who God in Christ is for us today?
- In contrast, we consider the way in which what is true of New Testament believers is far greater than Old Testament believers.

PLANTED

in God's Word

PRAY FOR ILLUMINATION

- Incline my heart to your testimonies. (Ps 119:36)
- Open my eyes to see wonders in your word (Ps 119:18)
- Unite my heart to fear your name (Ps. 86:11)
- Satisfy me with your steadfast love. (Ps. 90:14)

LOOK AT THE TEXT

- What's the authors big idea?
- What things jump out at you from the passage?
- Are there words or phrases that are repeated?

ASK QUESTIONS OF THE TEXT

- What do certain words/images mean
- How should the text be understood in its context?
- How does this passage point to the person, nature, or work of Christ?

GAZE ON THE TEXT

Choose two or three most important insights or verses from your reading:

- **Adoration:** How does this lead me to adore God and His attributes?
- **Confession:** How does this lead me to confess to God? What wrong thoughts, feelings, and behavior happen in me when this is forgotten? How is this sin being caused by faith in something else?
- **Thanksgiving:** How can I thank Christ for being the ultimate answer to this sin?
- **Supplication:** What does this lead me to ask God for?

TAKE-AWAY FROM THE TEXT

- Sin to avoid.
- Promise to claim.
- Example to follow.
- Command to obey.
- Knowledge of God or self.

EXPERIENCE GOD

Jonathan Edwards said, "There is a difference between believing that God is holy and gracious, and having a new sense on the heart of the loveliness and beauty of that holiness and grace. Like there is a difference between having a rational belief that honey is sweet, and having the actual experience of its sweetness."

DECIDE WITH WHOM TO SHARE

WEEK 53 THE GOD OF ISRAEL CANNOT BE CAPTURED By Dennis Watson

This week we encounter a problem that faces God's people—

substituting form for substance. This can be called superstitious idolatry. The Israelites believed they had experienced defeat because of the absence of the ark. Then they believed they would be victorious because they had it. Well, it didn't work for them. God is the One who provides, not a good luck charm, not even the religious kind.

Day 1- First Read 1 Samuel 4

Too often God's people fail to seek His will and direction in prayer before they proceed. Israel went into a battle with the Philistines. However, they did not seek God's direction before going to battle. Then, after experiencing a major defeat, 4,000 killed, they asked, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?" They really didn't ask God nor did they seek to understand if they had made a wrong decision. Instead, they decided on their own that they needed to have the Ark of the Covenant, believing it would save them from their enemies. There is no "it" that saves. God is the One who saves and delivers. They had turned the ark into a good luck charm. So they retrieved the ark and brought it to where they were and had a great celebration because they assumed it would give them victory. For a moment, when the Philistines heard the clamor of the celebration they were fearful. However, they got themselves together, attacked the Israelites and killed thirty thousand soldiers! This time including Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. With the ark in their possession, they were no better off; they were worse!

A man ran to tell Eli what had happened. He told him four things:

- 1) Israel has fled
- 2) Many have been slaughtered

- 3) His two sons are dead
- 4) The ark has been captured by the enemy

At the news, Eli also fell over dead! The judgment of God was on the house of Eli because of the corruption of his two sons. The judgment of God was on the Israelites because they were not seeking Him, they were really practicing superstitious idolatry.

Young Samuel received this message early on and shared it with Eli as prophecy from God of coming judgment.

But the sadness was not yet finished. The wife of Phinehas, one of Eli's sons, went into labor and delivered a son. She named him Ichabod, which means "The Lord has departed." Then, she too, died.

What a sad day! This was fulfillment of the prophecy given to Eli through Samuel in chapter three.

We need to avoid any kind of superstitious idolatry. Only the Lord can protect and save us. We need no good luck charms. Not even the Bible is to be something we use in a superstitious manner.

Ask the Lord to enable you to look only to Him. He, alone, can deliver.

Day 2- First Read 1 Samuel 5

The enemy of the Israelites, the Philistines, thought they had done a really good thing. They had captured the ark. Like the Israelites, they thought it would somehow bring them good fortune. They set it beside a statue of the false god, Dagon. The next day the statue had fallen over. They set it up again but the next day it had fallen again, now with its head and hands broken off. The hand of the Lord was against them because they had taken the ark. The people of the town of Ashdod, where the ark had been taken, got tumors and many of them died. They figured out it was because they had

the ark. So they sent the ark to another town called Gad. The hand of God was against Gad also so they sent it to Ekron. The ark had become a “hot potato” that no one wanted.

The Philistines were idol worshippers! The Israelites were just as wrong to treat the ark as a good luck charm. The Philistines simply added it to their many idols. God judged them for it. Their false god statue was totally helpless, as all false gods are. The people made the statue and then had to help it up. God was punishing the Philistines in keeping with His promise to Abraham. God told Abraham that He would make him into a great nation, and He would bless anyone who blessed Israel and curse anyone who cursed Israel.

Our God is the only true God. All false gods are idols made by men. Thank God for His greatness and power. Look to Him not as a rabbit’s foot or a genie in a lamp. Look to Him as your Heavenly Father.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- First Read 1 Samuel 6:1-16

The problem facing the Philistines is severe. Clearly, they think that their gods are stronger because they defeated Yahweh’s people and captured His Ark. But their god Dagon has fallen face-down before the Ark, and like Humpty Dumpty all the king’s horses and all the king’s men couldn’t put him back together again. The hand of the Lord is very heavy against the Philistines- “the men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven [5:12].”

This Ark must go back to the Israelites. The kings and their men don’t know how to accomplish this, so they go and consult the priests who should know how to deal with the gods. The professionals devise a way to test Yahweh, making it as difficult as possible. They want to know beyond a shadow of a doubt whether this is just coincidence or whether this severity is from Yahweh-God. Send the Ark back on a cart drawn by cows that

have never been yoked before; further, make those cows nursing mothers and take their calves back to Philistia. What mother would abandon her nursing babies?

The cows go straight back to the Israelites at Beth-shemesh. God gives his testimony to the pagan Philistines on their own terms. It might be said that God spoke to them in a low voice, the lowing of cattle not the speech of prophets. And the Philistines are responsible for the revelation God has given them. Did the Pagans see the power and authority of the one true God Yahweh and repent or did their hearts remain hard like the Egyptians before them?

God has not left himself without a witness across the peoples of the world in our day or in days past. His power and work is clearly on display for all to see. The Philistines know of Yahweh's interaction and severe judgment on the Egyptians, see 1 Sam 6:6. The priests warn the leaders to not be like Pharaoh and have hard hearts. They should have had the testimony of God's people, Israel. Though they are not of the covenant people of Yahweh, they have the cow-revelation of Yahweh to add to their knowledge of God. God has stooped to reveal himself even to the enemies of Israel. May we not infer that God is not opposed to one day bringing near all those who are far off by the blood of the Messiah. Ephesians 2:12 tells us to remember that we [Gentiles] were at one time "separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having **no hope** and **without God** in the world."

The Philistinian priests recognize the pattern that the true God has set forth, a guilt offering must accompany the Ark. However, golden rats and tumors are not going to suffice. Ephesians 2:13-14 says that "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace . . . that he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross." Consider the testimony that Christ preaches

through his blood that we need not receive the severity of God but have peace with him.

Day 4- First Read 1 Samuel 7:1-11

1. What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. How does the lamb offering lead us to think about the sacrifice of the Lamb of God?
5. How does God provide the mercy of deliverance to the Israelites? How does he provide mercy in our day?
6. Genuine repentance, says Samuel, is tangible repentance. It's all well and good to have tears and sorrow over sin [v2] but true repentance moves to concrete action (put away the foreign gods)[v3]. What is God calling you individually to do in repentance? Consider the need of the church for ongoing, continual repentance [Rev 2:4-5]. How do you think God is calling Young Meadows to repent?

7. Repent of the sins that God has revealed to you in this study. Pray for the mercy of God to be shown to you. Pray for the heart of repentance at Young Meadows and for the concrete actions Young Meadows should take in repentance.

Day 5- First Read Isaiah 52:10 and Luke 2:25-32

We learned this week that the people made a huge mistake in looking for a thing, the ark, to save them. They were being superstitious. We must be careful not to confuse form with substance. The Israelites failed to see that the ark only represented the presence and power of God. It was not the actual power and presence of God. This week we saw that the enemy of God, the Philistines, were fearful of God because they had seen how He had saved Israel from the Egyptians (1 Samuel 6:6). In Isaiah 52:10 we read that God would reveal His salvation through Jesus to all people. This was prophecy—history written in advance. In Luke 2 a man by the name of Simeon holds the baby Jesus and declares, *“My eyes have seen Your Salvation.”* Connect the dots. God is in the salvation business. The Egyptians had seen God save the Israelites out of bondage. The Philistines had seen God save the Israelites from the Egyptians and had heard of His saving them. At Jesus’ birth an old man says that by seeing Jesus he had seen God’s salvation.

I sometimes hear people say, regarding their walk with God when they are going through tough times, “It doesn’t work.” What is the “it” they are referring to? To be a Christian is to have a relationship with God. No relationship is about “it” working.

If you have received Jesus, God’s Son, who died for your sins and was raised again you too, have seen His salvation firsthand!

God never wanted His people to look to a thing, like an ark, or to a man, like a king or prophet. His ultimate goal is for His people to look to Him. How is your relationship with God?

Week 54 Israel Demands a King

By Chris Watson

Sometimes we want what we want, we want it now, and we will listen to no one! This is right where we find Israel this week. Even after God, through His servant, telling the people that they really didn't need a king, they still insisted and so they got what they asked for. As we will see this week and in the weeks to follow, it wasn't exactly the best decision they ever made.

Day 1- First Read 1 Samuel 8

Israel wanted a king! When Samuel gave them the answer they were not looking for, they insisted anyway. Not only did Samuel not want them to have a king, neither did God. A king would reign over Israel but now was not the time. Deuteronomy 17:14-15 tells us that God would appoint such a king and it would come from the line of David. Of course, Jesus would be Israel's king in time but this was speaking of David.

“This request was, of course, out of order. It was true that prophecy had long before intimated that Israel would one day have a king (Genesis 17:6,16; 35:11; 49:10), and God had made provision in the law for the appointment of a king (Deuteronomy 17:14,15). Because of the law of the tenth generation (Deuteronomy 23:2) that time had not yet arrived in God's plan for a king for Israel; therefore, the plea by the elders was presumptuous. It could not wait on God's time. However, as is true of all evil, this presumptuous cry by the elders to Samuel for a king came with some arguments to try to justify their request even though their request was out of order. The elders presented to Samuel a fourfold argument for why Samuel should accede to their plea for a king.”¹ We see from Ruth 4:18-22 that the 10th generation would be David, David was to be the king but the people jumped the gun. “Finally God in judgment granted Israel a

¹ Keith Fordham, “Change of Government” adapted from John G. Butler

king and gave Samuel the unpleasant task of making Israel a king. Samuel had to lead Israel in making the difficult transition from one form of government to another. The results of this change of government, in which Israel got their way instead of following God's way, brought much grief and many problems not only to Samuel but also to all Israel."² In two weeks we will see that God chooses a king in His time and in the manner in which He chooses.

Instead of the people trusting God and listening to the words that Samuel spoke concerning what would happen if they were to have a king, they didn't care and insisted. They wanted what they wanted. Some might ask why God would allow this if it wasn't His plan. It was His permissive will. In other words He would permit it and allow the people free will to make their own choices. We see, though, that they would face some very tough times for doing things their way and wanting what all the others nations had, a physical king. In demanding a king they, in essence, were rejecting God.

Today, let us not take plans into our own hands and insist that we want or need something without seeking God's direction and plan. It may not be God's plan or, as in this case, it just might not be His timing. Whatever the case, seek Him and His ways! Remember, if you are seeking God with all you have you won't have to wring your hands asking, "Am I in God's will?" For if you are seeking God and Him alone you are in God's will.

Day 2- First Read 1 Samuel 9

1 Samuel 8 ends with the Lord telling Samuel to give the people a king. In this chapter we see the process taking place. We see the Lord's providence at work here. God's providence simply means that He is in control and that He directs all things. The God who

² Keith Fordham, "Change of Government" adapted from John G. Butler

created all things directs everything like a director leads an orchestra.

We see that God orchestrated the seemingly lost donkeys of Saul's father so that Saul and Samuel would meet up and, in the end, Samuel would anoint Saul. The Lord used something like lost donkeys to bring this process together.

God can and will use anything; we have seen this already in the first few books of the Old Testament. God's providence is alive and well. He can use seemingly large and small things to get our attention, pull His plan together, or just remind us that He is in control.

How have you seen God's providence at work in your life? Maybe the family you have, the place you live, the church you are a part of, the job you have, etc. Don't just think on all these things today but share at least one of them, telling someone how you have seen the hand of God at work in your life. Perhaps you were aware God's providence was at work or maybe you didn't even notice it until later. Thank God for His divine plan and that He is always in control.

Be thankful that He can and will use even our foolish decisions as a part of His plan, though obedience is what He desires!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- First Read 1 Samuel 10:1-8

Samuel predicts multiple signs for Saul to give him confidence in the Lord. It is because these signs are so abnormal and so detailed that they are so significant. You are going to meet two men at this precise location- next to Rachel's tomb. They'll have this very specific word for you- your donkeys are found. Then, you are going to meet three men at the oak of Tabor, one with three goats, one with three loaves of bread, and one with a skin of wine. The one carrying the bread will give you two loaves. In fact you are going to start prophesying with a group of prophets, and this is

going to be such an unusual occurrence for you, Saul, that you will be a new man. These predictions are so specific they are beyond any human ability to “see” the future. They must come from Yahweh. When all the signs come to pass, as verse 9 tells us they do, they should give Saul a special confidence in the Lord. Saul, Yahweh has really authorized you to be King of Israel (v1). Yahweh is really going to give you his presence to help you be king (v7). These signs should bolster the confidence and faith of Saul, and assure him for the future.

Saul, you will receive the power of the Spirit (v 6-7) and you will receive the direction of the word through Samuel (v8). Pastor and commentator, Dale Ralph Davis, writes:

This much is clear: Saul the king, who is promised Yahweh’s power, is to submit to Samuel the prophet who brings Yahweh’s word. “I shall make known to you what you are to do.” Yahweh’s Spirit gives power, but that power is to be exercised in obedience to Yahweh’s word. The Spirit and the Word must never be separated. What right have we to think we can enjoy the Lord’s power and presence when we deny his lordship by trampling on his word (Luke 6:46)?

Christ asks in Luke 6:46, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I tell you?” We desire to be like the one who builds his house on the foundation of rock and the floods and rains cannot shake it. This one is the one who hears Christ’s words and does them. We are going to see this week and next that even though God has anointed Saul as king, even as he has given him power through the Spirit, Saul will not heed the word of Yahweh. He is like the one who built his house on the ground without a foundation and when the stream broke against it the ruin of that house was great. Pray that God would fill you with obedience for every word of Christ.

Day 4- First Read 1 Samuel 10:17-27

1. What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. When Samuel reads the people the rights and duties of the king in verse 25, how do you think this contrasts with the normal rights and duties that kings claim? Look at 1 Sam 8:9,11. See what kind of king God is in Deut 17:12-20. Israel's king is actually himself under the law of God; submission to that law should eliminate tyranny and abuse.
5. What does our modern culture look to in order to provide justice and eliminate tyranny and abuse? Google "reformed Christian view of critical theory" and look at how today's culture tries to use a philosophy like critical theory to address injustice and oppression in the world.
6. Consider that Saul is under a law to govern his kingship, not to destroy his kingship but to allow it to function properly. God's people are under God's law and commandments, not to spoil the Christian life but in order to protect it. Consider one of the passages

from Romans 12-15, Galatians 5-6, Ephesians 4-6, Colossians 3-4, or the letter of James. How do the applications of the commandments of God keep the Christian free in purity of life, holiness of desires, absence of bitterness, balance in relationships, demonstrating concrete compassion? How does the law become not a dreadful curse for the Christian but turn to joyful obedience?

7. Pray for the joy of obedience to the law of God. Pray for your joy in applying a certain application of the law found in one of the New Testament passages above.

Day 5- First Read Daniel 9:24-26

This prophecy contains a lot but in the end it's all about Jesus. You might remember some time back we went through a Sunday night study that dealt specifically with end time prophecy, specifically this prophecy. We see first that there will be a day when sin will come to an end. Can you imagine that? We can only imagine it because we have never experienced it. All we know is sin. We know that there will be a day of no more sin, no heartaches, no sickness, no wrecks, no need for hospitals, policemen, or security because all sin will be removed. So the prophecy first speaks of a day where there will be no sin.

It also speaks of a day where righteousness will last forever. Not only will there be no sin but there will be a day where only excellent things abound, the things of God. God's goodness will be all around and it will reign and prevail.

This prophecy also speaks of the Anointed One who will come in that day and rebuild Jerusalem, God's city, where His people will live. This is God's Anointed One which is Jesus. He is the only

one that can do away with sin and bring forth righteousness. So even Daniel, years before Jesus, was prophesying about Him.

Jesus is everything! He is our hope. He is the reason we breathe, not to mention the reason that we can. He is our hope for victory and freedom from sin and our hope for a relationship with God. He is our only hope to heaven and our hope day by day. Thank Jesus for being our hope!

WEEK 55 SAUL DISOBEYS THE LORD

By Dennis Watson

Chuck Missler says that Saul was God's "911" man. He was an interim king before the king that God intended, which was David. God gave the people what they wanted but warned them of the consequences. God's permissive will in this case was a stop-gap measure. Saul did not obey God. Well, like most of us, he would partly obey. Partial obedience is disobedience. This week we will see Saul forfeit his kingdom due to disobedience. Always remember that God is in control.

Day 1- First Read 1 Samuel 15:1-3

It is a dangerous thing to leave your spiritual enemies lying around! Sin is the believer's enemy. Sin robs the believer of the life that God intends for the believer to have. In fact, Paul uses words to describe sin that make sin sound like an enemy who takes control (see Romans 6:12). The Amalekites were enemies of God's people and He wanted them eliminated. Not partially eliminated, but totally! God told Saul to lead his army against the Amalekites and completely wipe them out. That sounds very mean and cruel, but God is serious about sin. His ultimate plan is a new heaven and earth where right, truth, and holiness prevail. The Amalekites were idol worshippers who had attacked Israel when they were fleeing Egypt. God is not mean: He is loving, gracious, and kind, but He hates sin! That is why He sent Jesus to rescue people from sin and its consequences.

God's judgment on sin is a good thing. Think of a person with cancer. A doctor who is a good doctor will attack the cancer. He is not mean, but he sees something in a person's body that has to go. That may include surgery, which is radical, painful, and takes time for recovery. The treatment may also include some kind of therapy like chemo or radiation, both of which are very tough to endure. However, when all goes well the cancer is eliminated or 'judged.' God's judgment on sin is just like that. Sin is a cancer and God has

taken extreme steps to get rid of it. In Jesus' death on the cross God took extreme steps to judge sin and take away its power and consequences. God's ultimate plan is the total elimination of sin and its consequences. He will make a new heaven and new earth in which there will be no sin.

Thank God for His judgment on sin! Judgment is painful but it is a good thing. He is not mean. He is righteous and holy and He plans for all of creation to be the same.

Day 2- First Read 1 Samuel 15:4-12

As I write these words, Israel and the Middle East are very much in the news. Israel is being shot at by her neighbors the Palestinians (led by Hamas.) Those attacks are unprovoked but, as has been the case throughout Israel's history, nations are jealous and hate Israel. Very interestingly, in keeping with today's passage regarding Israel, Israel warns the Kenites of the attack and instruct them to get out of the way. Today, I am talking about 2014, when attacked without provocation Israel warns their attackers of the incoming missiles, before Israeli forces retaliate.

Saul obeyed God's instructions and attacked the Amalekites. However, he only partially obeyed. Partial obedience is disobedience. Saul partially obeyed and defeated the Amalekites, but did not totally wipe them out. God had made it clear they were to take no prisoners and they were not to take any of their stuff, they were to burn it. However they took King Agag as prisoner and they took the best of the animals. Not only did Saul disobey in this way, he took credit for the victory and built a monument for himself. Instead of giving glory to God he took glory for himself.

*I am the LORD, that is My name; And My glory I will not give to another, Nor My praise to carved images. **Isaiah 42:8***

At times I am prone to this kind of living—partial obedience. It is obeying in some areas and feeling like that obedience earned me

some points to take liberty of disobedience in others. It seem like this was Saul's thinking but it would be costly. It always is. And remember, all we do in obedience to Him is for His glory, not ours.

As you pray, ask God for the grace to be fully obedient!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- First Read 1 Samuel 15:13–23

The theme of chapter 15 can be found in verse 1. Saul, “listen you to the voice of the words of the LORD.” The verbal root of the word in Hebrew (shama) which means to listen, hear or obey, occurs eight times in this chapter. [Look in verses 1, 4 (not discernable in English), 14, 19, 20, 22 (twice) and 24] In the Hebrew there is a direct correlation between hearing and obeying. Sometimes we run into a problem finding the right English word to give us the full meaning. In the West we tend to think about hearing or listening as a mental activity. But this word demonstrates nicely the contrast with the Hebrew connotation which stresses a physical action. To understand shama correctly our hearing is demonstrated in our obedience- to obey is to hear.

Saul comes to Samuel in verse 13- Look, I have obeyed the Lord. And Samuel knows from his revelation in the Lord that Saul and the people have not obeyed. They haven't heard the Lord. Verse 14 Samuel says, I don't need to see, I can hear your disobedience.

Samuel: What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear? Strike one, Saul.

Saul: Oh, we brought those to sacrifice to the Lord.

Samuel: Stop! Just stop, Saul. Why did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Strike two.

Saul: I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, but it was the people, they took the best of the things devoted to the Lord to sacrifice to YOUR God.

Samuel: Has the Lord as great a delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Strike three, Saul, you're out.

Jesus says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." [Mat 11:15] Think of this in terms of the Hebrew understating, not just our western mental acknowledgement. Not just to listen, but to obey. We can find ourselves arguing, rationalizing our obedience, like Saul. Samuel calls it out in verse 23, failure to listen to the Lord, to obey, is rebellion and arrogance. It is in the same category as pagan idolatry. But Christ goes on to say in Matthew 11:30 that "his yoke is easy and his burden is light." Paul tells us in Romans 6:17-18, "that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness."

A slave obeys his master; we will either live as slaves of Christ's righteousness or as slaves of sin. May grace-fueled obedience from the heart free you to grow in Christ's likeness.

Day 4- First Read 1 Samuel 15:24-35

1. What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?

4. Is Saul's repentance genuine?

5. What are the characteristics of true repentance? What are some Bible verses that list these characteristics?

6. Are there areas in your life that you need to turn away from sin and turn in repentance to God? Is your life marked by disobedience to God in any area of life? Write these areas down.

7. Pray through the areas of sin and disobedience God has revealed to you. Ask for God to forgive you for the specific sins you wrote down. Pray and ask God for his power to change you from your sinful patterns and give you a humble heart of submission.

Day 5- First Read Isaiah 28:14–16 and 1 Peter 2:5–9

Today we look at an Old Testament prophecy that finds its fulfillment in Jesus. This one is very clear. Isaiah spoke of a cornerstone that will be a foundation stone. In the New Testament the writers acknowledged that Jesus is that cornerstone and foundation stone.

A cornerstone is a symbol of the aligning truth of life. In construction a cornerstone is the first stone laid. When it is laid correctly all of the other stones are lined up with it and the wall is straight and strong. Then the whole foundation is built correctly.

It is easy to follow lies. We just align ourselves with people who will tell us what we want to hear. The promise is that their way will be good for us. Israel's leaders had turned to Egypt for help and deliverance instead of following God consistently. This was not the first time they had aligned themselves with a pagan foreign

nation. It is so easy to get out of alignment. Israel was out of alignment because she had turned to another foundation and had sought to build on that foundation rather than the true foundation.

Isaiah gave a message to correct the leaders of Israel. He rebuked them for following foreign nations and making lies their refuge rather than God. The appeal was for them to turn away from foreign alliances and turn to God.

This week we have seen the inconsistency of King Saul. His obedience to God was only partial, which is really disobedience. Isaiah gave us a prophecy that one day God would send the true foundation of life. Peter confirmed that foundation is Jesus. Jesus alone is the true cornerstone and foundation stone. Build your life on Him and Him alone!

Week 56 God Chooses a New King

By Chris Watson

It's always better to do things God's way. Israel decided to do things their own way when they desired a new king before it was time. This week, though, we will see God choose a king over Israel. While it would take time for him to come to his reign, God's plan would be made known.

Day 1- First Read 1 Samuel 16:1-3

Samuel is given what seems to be a pretty tough job. With Saul technically still king, though the Lord has rejected him, God told Samuel to go and anoint the next King of Israel, as God showed him. Wow! This was a tough job. He had instructions from the Lord, but he was technically going against the king, seeking to overthrow him, in a sense. Samuel was scared for his life, and rightfully so. I wonder if Samuel was always looking to see if Saul was around, while he was on this journey and during this process.

Remember that God is choosing a new king because of Saul's disobedience to follow the Lord's command. Of course, the reasons the Israelites wanted a king in the first place were wrong and not in God's plan. We see in this account that disobedience is costly.

Samuel made the choice to trust God on his journey. God told him (verse 3) what he was to do. Samuel didn't depend on his own understanding or give into his fears or weaknesses, he trusted God. As believers we are to do the same and we can. We have God's Word and know God's desire and plan. We just need to carry it out. It is often uncertain, uncomfortable, lonely, and not what everyone else is doing. However, we can choose to trust men and the things of men or we can trust God. As we have seen up to this point in the Old Testament God has been faithful and will continue to be. God gave Samuel an indication, or at least a direction, of where the next king was coming from as He asked him to bring

Jesse to join in on the sacrifice. Remember, we saw the genealogy of Perez in the book of Ruth and it included Jesse. We saw that Boaz and Ruth were Jesse's grandparents. Samuel may not have connected the dots yet but he knew that Jesse was to be part of the sacrifice with him.

May we trust God in all we do, wherever we find ourselves. Whether we find ourselves afraid, weary, lonely, happy, sad, joyful, scared or tired, let us be like Samuel and put our trust in God! Not lagging behind or going ahead but walking step in step with the Creator of the world, the Lamb of God.

Day 2- First Read 1 Samuel 16:4-10

Samuel was once again following God's lead looking for the next king. He first thought it was Eliab, the oldest son as he must have looked like a king. However, it wasn't Eliab nor was it any of the six other sons with Jesse. Before Samuel asked him if there were any other sons, the Lord told Samuel not to consider appearance or height. For the Lord does not look at the things men look at, the outward appearance, but rather God looks at the heart (verse 7).

Kings were expected to be good looking and large in stature as that's what the people expected. But God told Samuel not to look for these things, because the heart is what matters and God would choose someone whose heart was right. This is true with Jesus. In Bible times, the Jews expected a Messiah that would create fanfare, be macho looking, be demanding etc. However, Jesus came riding in on a donkey, not exactly what they expected from a king: this was just one of the many reasons they missed the Messiah.

God looks at all hearts. The outside of a person can be handsome, beautiful, in shape, almost perfect looking and yet inside can be just the opposite. A person's appearance on the outside can be "not so good" by the world's standards, and they can have a heart of

gold. Of course this isn't saying that it has to be one or the other, but God looks only at the heart.

What is your heart like? Is it in tune with God? Is it seeking Him and His plans? Or, is it angry, bitter, unforgiving, mean spirited, hateful, conniving, or divisive? Are you worried more about your physical appearance compared to your spiritual appearance?

Today, may our heart be in tune with the things of God. May our hearts be beautiful because we have and know God. As David said, *“create in me a clean heart oh God and renew a right spirit within me” (Psalm 51:10)*. May our spiritual condition be one that we always keep in check and ask God to continue to work on us. What does your heart look like? If it needs to be redirected towards God, ask Him to help you and begin every day tuning your heart to His.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- First Read 1 Samuel 16:11-13

God chooses some of the most unlikely people into his service. David was considered so insignificant that they didn't even invite him for this very special visit of the Lord's prophet. He was so insignificant they just left him out in the fields caring for sheep. He's so obscure that we don't even find his name out until verse 13. But if the selection of the obscure David surprises us, the selection of David's greater son really reveals God's penchant for surprise. God just doesn't seem to work according to human standards.

He's just one of us, and they took offense. [Mark 6:3]

He has too much fun, some complained. [Matt 11:18-19]

He's not from the right place, others protested. [John 7:41-42]

Messiah's don't suffer! That should settle it. [Matt 27:42-43]

None of these human judgments seem to matter to God, for his word says in Psalm 118:22 and 1 Pet 2:4. “The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.” And Psalm 188:23 tells us that we should marvel at it. In Jesus Christ we have the revealed wisdom of God upon which all of our faith rests. We

should delight in the unsearchable ways of God; reveling in the beauty and wonder of God's surprises honors him.

Day 4- First Read 1 Samuel 16:14-23

1. What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Why does the Spirit of the Lord depart from Saul? Why does the Holy Spirit not leave a true believer today?
5. Did you know that the Hebrew root *ra'ah*, "to provide" or "to see" is found nine times in Chapter 16? First in Verse 1, literally- "I have seen among his sons a king for myself." There is a sense that God does not passively see a king, but that he provides the king." See if you can't use a resource like the interlinear bible found at https://biblehub.com/interlinear/1_samuel/16.htm to discover the other instances of this root word. It is translated with the verb "provide" (verses 1,17); "see, look at" (v 6,7 [three times], 18) and as nouns meaning "appearance" (v 7, 12) This root of looking and providing contrasts with the "not chosen" (negative + bahar) in verses 8,9,10. The one that Yahweh looks to and provides will be his chosen one. What does Saul ask for his servants to see to, or to provide?

6. Consider David's ministry of consolation to Saul. Soon Saul will hate David, yet the passage of 1 Sam 16:14-23 is instructive for Christ's disciples. As Saul will hate David, and as he is rejected by God yet sustained by David's service, so the world hates Christ's people (John 15:18-21) yet, in its doomed state, is only benefited by them. Christians are the salt of the earth (Matt 5:13) who keep the world from being worse than it is. Christians are a divinely-granted restraint upon the earth's purification and keep the world from drowning in its own vomit.³ How does the pattern revealed in David's service to Saul play out in your life?

7. How is God revealing to you to serve the people of Montgomery; how is the city benefiting by your service? Pray that God would encourage you to be the salt of the city and reveal to you his will for your service in the face of opposition.

Day 5- First Read Psalm 95:1-3

Psalm 95 is a great psalm, especially the first 3 verses. In fact, take time to read them over again. This psalm tells us to sing to the Lord as He is the Rock of our Salvation and we are to praise Him with music. As we see in this passage this is just one reason music is part of our weekly Sunday worship and should be part of our

³ Thoughts taken from Dale Ralph Davis in 1 Samuel: Looking in the Heart, p.176.

everyday worship. God tells us to sing and praise His name with music.

Worship should be our lifestyle. We often think of music when we think of worship. Music is one way to worship but we also worship in how we live our lives to and for Jesus. However, worship through music is very important. David tells us to worship through music and song. Scripture also tells us to make a joyful noise. When you sing to and about God it does something for your soul. You are singing truth back to God. I am sometimes saddened when I look around at the various worship opportunities and see people not singing. Why do I feel sad? Because God tells us to sing! He doesn't tell us to sing if we have the best voice. He doesn't tell us to sing when we want to, or sing when we feel like it, but to make a joyful noise. We are singing to and worshiping the God of the universe. Verse 3 of this passage tells us that the God we serve is the King of all Kings. May we live, sing, and play to Jesus with everything we are.

In your quiet times sing to Jesus. Listen and sing words of truth back to Him. The next time you are in corporate worship, sing with all you have. Maybe you have never really been one to sing during Sunday worship. Maybe you drift off into space or watch other people. I challenge you to try singing to the God of the universe. It will do a work in you; God will do a work in you as you sing truth back to Him. So wherever you are, make a joyful noise.

WEEK 57 DAVID AND GOLIATH

By Dennis Watson

David was secretly anointed king by Samuel, but it was more than fifteen years before the death of Saul and David's public acknowledgement as king. During that fifteen year period there were many biblical historical events, one of which was the victory of David over the Philistine giant, Goliath. Looking back to the account of Ruth and Boaz, it is possible to see the hand of God moving events and people into place to make David the king of Israel. This is so important because David's line would be the royal line into which Jesus, the King of Kings, would be born and the Kingdom eternally established. This week's account shows the incredible power of God at work through a very young David.

Day 1- FIRST READ 1 SAMUEL 17:1-10

The nation of Israel was in an ongoing war with the Philistines. At this point the two armies were at a standstill. It appeared that nothing was going on except the daily taunting by the Philistine giant, Goliath. The plan was that the two armies would designate a man from each army to represent them in a one-on-one battle. Goliath would represent the Philistines. Goliath was over nine and a half feet tall. His body armor weighed approximately 125 pounds which, in itself, was probably about the weight of David. The head of his spear weighed fifteen pounds. David had already entered the service of King Saul to play music for him to calm him down. He would go back and forth from shepherding to serving the king.

On this occasion David had been sent by his father to take some food to his brothers who were in Saul's army. God's timing is always perfect. The whole Israelite army, including King Saul, was terrified of Goliath and his morning and evening taunts.

The Israelite army was defeated by default. They were overcome with fear and believed they had no one to represent them before the giant, Goliath.

It seems that today there are many giants taunting believers and we have already been defeated by default. Just remember, that as believers we are God representatives (ambassadors). **1 John 5:4** says, *”For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.”*

Thank God today that He is our victory.

Day 2- FIRST READ 1 SAMUEL 17:11-27

In the new covenant God’s Spirit comes to live in the believer and He will never leave. That is a blessing! However, in the Old Testament the Spirit of God would rest upon a person, but not always abide. We read that the Spirit was taken from Saul because of his disobedience (1 Samuel 16:14). The people of Israel wanted a king so they would be like other nations. They wanted a king to go out and fight for them. However, now that the Spirit had departed from Saul, he was just as frightened of Goliath as the rest of his army. They needed one who would lead the way in victory.

When Saul and his army saw Goliath they saw an undefeatable foe. However, when David saw Goliath he saw an enemy of God. David came to the camp of the Israelite army and talked with them about what was going on. While he was talking with them Goliath issued one of his daily taunts to the Israelites. He watched as the army of Israel ran away in fear and hid from Goliath. The men told David that the man who defeats Goliath would be given riches along with the king’s daughter and would be exempt from taxes. David’s next question had to do with the identity of the giant:

And David said to the men who stood by him, “What shall be done for the man who kills this Philistine and takes away the reproach

from Israel? For who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” 1 Samuel 17:26

It seems that David’s main concern was the defying of God’s army! Did anyone else have that concern? It seems not! They were more fearful for themselves, rather than giving any thought to what this giant was really doing! David took no thought for his own safety, but only for the name of God and His army.

Where was David’s fear? It was not at all present. He had a heart for God! He trusted God with a simple believing faith. He believed that if he stood with God, God would give the victory.

Fix your eyes on the living God and ask God to ignite in you a burning faith in Him.

**Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- FIRST READ 1 SAMUEL
17:28-37**

This passage is smack dab in the middle of the narrative of God’s battle with Goliath. It’s a passage that begs us to look backwards and forwards again. The antagonist, Goliath, has been taunting God’s people and questioning God each day. He comes forward, bronze armor gleaming in the sun. Verse 5 tells us this coat of mail really looks like the scales on a fish or a serpent. It forces us to look back to the garden, when another serpent questioned God’s authority. It takes us back to God’s promise to one-day crush the head of this serpent. This promise makes us jump forward in the story in 1 Sam 17 to think of the final showdown between David and Goliath. A stone from David’s sling will literally crush Goliath’s head. David will cut off the head of the serpent-tongued Goliath. It pushes us forward to that glorious day that Christ, though his heel is bruised on the cross, emerges triumphant from the grave. He defeated Satan and the curse of sin forever.

However, we are right in the middle of this story, neither at its beginning, nor at its end, but right in the middle of the struggle.

We see David actually has three Goliaths to battle. The Philistine giant defeated in verse 50 and two other antagonists- Eliab and King Saul. Hear the older brother's contempt in Eliab's voice in verse 28, "With whom did you leave those few scraggly sheep? I know your heart is evil." Eliab is meant to be a mirror. We remember in chapter 16 how as he came forward, Samuel thought, surely this is the one to be anointed. But, Samuel could not see into the heart as God could. We see now what is inside this man's heart as he gets angry at his little brother's godliness [v26]. He mirrors Saul, but he also mirrors the contempt of Goliath, and if we are not careful we will see our reflection too in Eliab. As it was for David so too for Christ. For all of his brothers rejected him and his words. The Pharisees were jealous and envious of Christ and sought to kill him [Matt 27:18].

If Eliab mirrors the contempt of Goliath, then King Saul mirrors the mind of Goliath. You are not able to fight this Philistine for you are but a boy and he has been a man of war from his youth says Saul. So too for David's greater Descendant, even his disciples didn't understand what was in the mind of Jesus, they had the mind of Satan. Jesus was teaching them that the Christ must suffer and in three days be raised from the dead. But his disciple Peter rebuked Jesus and said, "This shall never happen to you" [Matt 16:22]. Jesus responds, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." [Matt 16:23]

This passage reminds us of the cosmic battle raging for the hearts and minds of men and women. Though we sometimes feel that we are in the midst of the battle, and it is true that we face dangers, toils, and snares of many kinds, like David, the outcome is never in question. Be overjoyed that the ultimate battle is won in Christ; he has overcome Satan and the grave to bring eternal life.

Day 4- FIRST READ 1 SAMUEL 17:38-58

1. What observations do you make about this verse? (facts, big ideas, repetition, parallelism, imagery, etc)
2. What's not clear in this passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. How does the contempt of Goliath reflect the contempt of God in our own age?
5. How does God provide deliverance to the Israelites? Why is it important that we know from what family this deliverer comes from?
6. Reflect on God's deliverance in your life? Write down a specific time that God delivered you. What does the New Testament say about your deliverance? For example, Colossians 1:13-14 tells us that "God the Father has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Find at least two other passages that describe the deliverance of God for believers.
7. Pray first by thanking God for his deliverance of you and second ask God to show you how you can share the truth of God's deliverance in Christ Jesus with someone specific that you know.

Day 5- FIRST READ PSALM 95:3-8

In the book of Psalms we find some very significant connections. As you read in Psalms pay close attention to wording that is applied to Jesus in the New Testament. Be sure to keep in mind the things Jesus said and did and what the other New Testament writers wrote about Jesus.

Many of the psalms were written by King David at times in his life that were either very positive or very stressful. In those psalms he expressed some thoughts that look forward to the redeemer. Psalm 95:5 talks about the One who created all the heavens and the earth. Colossians 1:16 says that Jesus is the One who made all things. In fact, it says that all things were made by Him and for Him. David says that since He is the creator we should worship Him and acknowledge that He is the maker of all things. Look around and see all that He has done and worship Him in the beauty of His creation.

David used another phrase that causes us to worship Him, “*We are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.*” This is an expression of God being our Shepherd. Jesus says in John 10:11 that He is the Good Shepherd and goes on in John 10:16, to say that His sheep hear His voice. When you put the two passages together (Psalm 95:7-8 and John 10:16) we are to hear His voice and maintain an attitude and life of submission to what He says. We are to hear His voice and not harden our hearts.

Is there a place in your heart that is hardened to the Words of Jesus? If so, ask Him to make your heart pliable and obedient to Him.

Week 58 The Ark of God

By Chris Watson

This week we will skip pretty far ahead in our devotions. In fact, between last week and this week's devotions Saul became jealous of David and went after him attempting to kill him. In the end though, David leaned over Saul and could have killed him, but spared his life not once but twice! During this time, Saul even inquired of a medium and sought to consult a spirit as he was not following the ways of God. In the end, Saul took his own life. We pick up this week after David is anointed King over Judah.

Day 1- First Read 2 Samuel 6:1-10

David wanted to bring the ark back to Jerusalem. Remember, the ark had been separated from the tabernacle and other places of worship for around 100 years. They were bringing it into Jerusalem on a new cart (v 3). Was this how the ark was supposed to be moved? No. From Exodus 25:14 and 1 Chronicles 15:15 we know that the ark was to be carried with poles. So, to begin with, they were transporting the ark incorrectly. Either they didn't know, didn't take the time to find out, or just didn't care.

We are reminded from the Word of God (Numbers 4:15) that if anyone touched the ark or the holy things they would die. Remember, the ark was a visual reminder of the very presence of God. God is holy, sinless, and righteous. When Uzzah touched the ark, he was immediately killed. It was the very presence of God and they were not following God's plans on how it was to be carried.

It seems a pretty harsh thing to do to Uzzah. He was only trying to make sure the ark was safe after the oxen stumbled. However, according to how the ark was to be carried, it should have not been pulled behind oxen in the first place. Because Uzzah was a sinner in the very presence of God, he was killed instantly.

There are two important truths we can learn here. When God speaks and gives us specific instructions from His Word, or instructions to us as an individual that is consistent with His Word, we are to follow those instructions. We are not to obey later if we have time or ignore them altogether. We are to be obedient immediately. We also learn a little about the holiness of God and our own unholiness. The fact that a life was taken because he touched the ark demonstrates God's holiness. Not only does it show us God's holiness, it shows us another reason we need the blood of Jesus. Without the blood of Jesus we have no hope of God! Thanks be to God for His holiness and that He sent Jesus to die for us so we could have a relationship with Him.

Day 2- First Read 2 Samuel 6:11-15

Notice that in yesterday's devotion the ark was on a new cart, but today the ark is being carried like it was supposed to be. Apparently, David and others got their focus right and carried the ark the way they had been instructed. At this time the ark was at Obed-Edom's house and that household was being blessed.

This time when they began moving the ark, those carrying it took only six steps before David made a sacrifice and began to dance before the Lord. I believe David realized the importance of the ark. He was also thankful and grateful, as he was following the Lord's plan and nothing negative had happened. He wanted to give thanks! David realized that the desire to bring the ark to Jerusalem, back among God's people, was becoming a reality. David was so overcome with the presence of God and His holiness and mercy that he began to dance. That's right! The king was dancing before the Lord, and he wasn't just dancing. Verse 14 tells us he was *dancing with all of his might*. That means he was dancing with everything he had in him, everything he was worth! He was thankful that the ark of the Lord was with them, grateful that no one was dead this time and thankful that God was blessing him and

giving him direction. He was expressing what was in his heart. He was worshipping.

Do you worship like this? Do you worship with all that you have? That's how I want to sing praises and worship Jesus, with all that I am, not caring what people may say or think. We serve and worship an audience of one, Jesus Christ. I challenge you this week to worship Jesus with all that you have and, as was said of David, with all of your might!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- First Read Leviticus 16:1-9

As we examine the passage for this week, we see obvious foreshadowing to Jesus merely in the act of sacrifice for the atonement of sin. It points us directly toward God's ultimate sacrifice of His Son. The specific instructions in Leviticus of how God wants his people to conduct a sacrifice sets them apart from the sacrificial practices that were being conducted around them to false gods. These very specific, potentially life altering instructions remind us that God is a God of order and intentionality. There is a deliberateness about which each sacrifice must be conducted, and it reminds us of the deliberateness in which he sent his own Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins (**I John 4:10**). Without the Levitical law, we would not understand our sin or what God expects of us. Without understanding our sin, we couldn't see our need for atonement. And without recognizing that need for atonement, we would miss His gift of grace at the cross.

As far back as the garden, God has been providing a covering for us. In each instance, from the animal used to create clothes to cover Adam and Eve for their first sin to the animals used to fulfill the law of repeated burnt offerings all the way to the ultimate death of God's Son at the cross, a blood covering sacrifice was and is required. This final sacrifice would be the only thing that could allow us to be *presented as holy and blameless* before a righteous God (**Colossians 1:22**).

Day 4- First Read 2 Samuel 6:16-23

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. What does the text seem to emphasize about Michal's response to David? Why do you think Michal is referenced as the daughter of Saul instead of David's wife, which is how she's referred to in the previous text, and how might it connect to her heart attitude with David bringing the ark back?
5. How is David fulfilling the role of a Priest and King? How does Jesus fill both of those roles as well?
6. It's unlikely that Michal began to despise David in a moment's notice. What are some things that cause us to grow hard of heart towards God's people or the work of God? As Michal was more concerned about the presentation of the king than rejoicing in the Lord's presence in the ark, what are some more external things that cause you to lack joy?

7. Ask God to reveal to you ways in which your heart has been hardened toward God's people or the work of God.

Day 5- First Read Psalm 132:1-14

In this psalm we see Jesus. His name is not mentioned per se, but He is right there. In verse 11-12 it says, *“The Lord swore to David a sure oath from which he will not turn back: “One of the sons of your body I will set on your throne. If your sons keep my covenant and my testimonies that I shall teach them, their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.”* The end of verse 12 is talking about Jesus. Jesus would sit on the throne forever and ever. As we know from several texts in the Bible, including Matthew 1, Jesus and David are in the same family line. So when God says that *“their sons will sit on your throne forever and ever,”* He is including David, but referring to Jesus.

This psalm is also about David making plans to bring the ark to the city with great rejoicing. As we see from this week's devotions, David did bring the ark in and carried out that desire. We remember that the ark was the presence of God, so in this way God lived among His people. This whole passage is intertwined with Jesus.

Once we begin to put the pieces together and begin to better understand God's Word and the history of events connecting everything together, we see the intricate details and prophetic nature of the Old Testament. The whole Bible is about God. The Old Testament points forward to Jesus and the New Testament teaches us to live in a love relationship with Him and to follow Him. If you have ever read a mystery novel, you often read it wondering who might have done what and you often don't find out until the end. In the Bible though, everything points to Jesus. Old and New Testament alike, it's all about Jesus, all about Him. I hope and pray the more and more you read and study the Old

Testament the more you will see this and the more you will get excited about God and His Word. Take some time today to thank God for His Word, the very words of God, and to thank Him for His intricate details and how He continues to show us how Jesus is weaved throughout the Old Testament. Thanks be to God, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

Notes

WEEK 59 DAVID THE PSALMIST

By Dennis Watson

King Saul became outraged and hated David. This was due to his jealousy of David. Saul's son, Jonathan, and David became very close friends. On several occasions Saul tried to kill David but Jonathan warned David of the coming attack. Through it all, David continued to honor King Saul and would not "lift his hand against the Lord's anointed." On at least two occasions David was in a position to take Saul's life, but refused to do so.

David was referred to by God as, "a man after my own heart." However, David was a man, which means he was also sinful. Thank God that He uses weak and sinful vessels. David became involved in adultery with Bathsheba, which led to the murder of her husband, Uriah. The result of this sin was heartbreak for the family of David. God used David but the consequences of this sin plagued him throughout his life. Although God does forgive sin, it sometimes brings with it some very devastating consequences.

David was a shepherd, king, and warrior. He was also a songwriter. I believe that songwriters, to some extent, are also philosophers. A song writer looks at things, thinks about them, and then expresses feelings and ideas about them in songs or poems. So add philosopher to David's resume. He is the best known songwriter in all of history. As you read the psalms that David wrote it becomes easy to pick up on his mood. Occasionally there are words that tell us exactly what is going on. Psalm 23 is by far the best known of David's psalms. This week we will look at the beloved 23rd Psalm.

Day 1- FIRST READ PSALM 23:1-3

On our most recent beach vacation our two granddaughters were both about 18 months old. At times I would follow them at a safe distance as they toddled on the beach. They did not know I was keeping watch over them. They were oblivious to my watching

eyes. I thought about that and realized that is what God does. He watches over us and, for the most part, we are oblivious. Yet He still keeps His watch. David wrote this psalm as one who had been an experienced shepherd. He kept watch over the sheep. He protected them and fed them and took them to the water's edge to drink. He brought this picture to bear in his own life saying, "*The Lord is my shepherd.*"

David knew the heart and the task of a shepherd. He also knew that much of his life he lived in constant danger. As a shepherd he lived in danger of wild animals. Later, Saul wanted and tried on numerous occasions to kill him. He faced the giant, Goliath. He faced murderous plots from his own children. As king there were always people who wanted to bring him down. He faced struggles, most of which were far more severe than our own. He found comfort knowing that God was His shepherd.

In these first three verses David finds strength and comfort in his Shepherd's nourishment, restoration, and guidance. Our Good Shepherd nourishes, restores us, and guides us. David found comfort and encouragement. Please know that although most of the time you may be oblivious, our Shepherd is always keeping watch.

Try to stay aware that God is always keeping watch over you as One who provides and protects. Allow that truth to bring comfort and strength.

Day 2- FIRST READ PSALM 23:4

Once again it appears that David is speaking from experience; the experience of a shepherd. But he is also speaking from the experience of one who was being pursued by his enemy for the purpose of killing him. David lived for a long time with Saul chasing him down to kill him, only out of jealousy. On at least two occasions David had Saul right there in front of him and Saul did not know it. Yet David did not kill Saul. The pursuit of Saul to kill David was relentless, yet God spared and protected David. David

knew that God had spared his life. He knew God had a purpose for him. He was to be king. As he experienced these things he did not fear, though he was in death's valley. On at least three occasions in the Psalms we read, "*What can man do to me*" (56:4, 11; 118:6). David came to know and trust that God was his shepherd and could deliver him from his enemies.

He speaks of two of the shepherd's tools—the rod and the staff. The rod was a weapon of defense. He used it to fight off would-be attackers. He kept the sheep safe from the lions and bears using the rod. The staff was an instrument used to give direction to the sheep. I have pictured this in my mind as a tool the shepherd uses to gently keep the sheep on the correct path with a nudge, hopefully, but at times a little more than a nudge. I have heard it said that at times a shepherd would break the leg of a sheep that had a tendency to stray. In doing this the sheep could not stray, but the shepherd would then be forced to carry the sheep. David says that the shepherd's rod and staff gave him comfort.

The protection and guidance of the shepherd for his sheep is due to his love and care of the sheep. That truly is comforting!

Thank God for His shepherding care!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- FIRST READ PSALM 23:6

David structured Psalm 23 completely around imagery and parallelism. As the reader goes line by line, the Psalm weaves in and out of imagery of the Shepherd caring for sheep and how our great Shepherd literally cares for us. David draws the reader in to contemplate the experience of a helpless sheep, utterly dependent on the shepherd for provision, protection and care. Even in the most desperate of situations, walking "through the valley of the shadow of death," David has now drawn the reader to consider casting out fear by trusting this Shepherd who is ever-present.

As we jump to the last verse for today's reading, David draws this Psalm to a close with future hope and expectation that has been developed from the first five verses of the Psalm. David's confidence is that "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." This isn't a passive following. Rather, the word David uses is more like "pursue" or "chase after." God's goodness and mercy are faithfully pursuing His own! It's also worth noting that the word typically translated "mercy" here is *hesed*, which is "steadfast love." We see one of the major themes of the whole Bible on display in this powerful profession of faith by David. He is confident of God's steadfast love to pursue His own people. God's steadfast love can also be defined as "loyal love", God's covenant love where He has committed Himself to His people, or as Paul Miller calls it, "God's stubborn love." Miller goes on to describe it by saying, "It combines commitment with sacrifice. *Hesed* is one-way love. Love without an exit strategy. When you love with *hesed* love, you bind yourself to the object of your love, no matter what the response is." David's confidence to "dwell in the house of the LORD forever" comes from him seeing God's steadfast love actively on display in his own life in the Shepherd who protects, cares for and provides for him, and the One who has prepared a table for him even in the presence of his enemies (v. 5). God has committed Himself to His people in covenant.

The Scriptures are the progressive unfolding of how God is fulfilling His promises to redeem His people, to be their God and to make them His people. This theme of God's unrelenting, pursuing steadfast love finds its culmination in the person of Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. It is Christ who is pursuing His people, even as they have rejected Him, that they may know their only hope of salvation is found through faith in Christ. And it is that steadfast love that Christ pursues His people all the way to the Cross, willing to be killed, sacrificed for the sins of His people that they may in turn receive His righteousness through faith in Christ. For Jesus Himself even bears witness to David's profession here.

Jesus proclaims in **John 10:11**, “*For I am the good shepherd, The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*” Christ Himself is the perfect Shepherd who makes sure no sheep that is His is lost, that provides and protects, and is even willing to lay down His own life for His sheep.

Meditate today on how you have seen God’s steadfast love pursuing you in your life. How might thinking of God’s *hesed* love affect how you walk through the trials you are experiencing now?

Day 4- FIRST READ PSALM 23:5

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What’s not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. What imagery stands out to you in verse 5? How is it different from what has been used so far in this Psalm? How might it go together or intensify what has been used already?
5. In a sense, Christ has prepared a table before us, in the presence of our enemies. How does the Lord’s Supper communicate the message of Psalm 23 to His people?

6. What are some “enemies” that seem to be pressing you on all sides right now? (Anxiety, lies, false accusations, discouragement, etc)

7. Spend some time praying, naming those “enemies” in your life which make life feel like such a “valley of the shadow of death.” Ask for eyes to see God’s faithful, pursuing steadfast love in your life and how He has “prepared a table before” you.

Day 5- FIRST READ 2 SAMUEL 7:1-17

On day five we look at a passage from Psalms or one of the prophets to see how it points to Jesus.

In this passage we read that David wanted to build a house for the Lord and, in particular, for the ark of God. He saw that he had a nice cedar home and the ark was in a tent. The prophet Nathan received a word from God for David. He told David that he would not be the one to build the house for God. Nathan told him that God had blessed David and made his kingdom and his name great. The Lord used this as an opportunity to tell David some things about his place in the future. In this passage we find what is known as the Davidic Covenant. This covenant had great meaning for David, but also for today, in particular, for Israel and the church.

I am sure that for David, there was initial disappointment that he would not build the temple, but to know that his son would build it was a blessing and encouragement. He was encouraged to know that his throne and line would continue. What the Lord started in Abraham would continue through David’s family. He would continue to shepherd the people.

For Israel, the Davidic Covenant builds on the covenant the Lord made with Abraham. It, too, speaks of the land, the nation, and the Messiah. The Lord told David there would be rest for the people.

The rest was in the land but, ultimately, it looked forward to the coming Messiah and His kingdom that would bring rest. He also told David that He would establish David's house. The word 'house' is used fifteen times in this chapter. It refers to David's palace, the temple, and to David's dynasty, culminating in the Messiah Jesus Christ. The coming Savior was prophesied in Genesis 3:15—He would be human. In Genesis 12:3, the Savior would be born of Abraham's line—a Jew. In Genesis 49:10 we read that He would come through the tribe of Judah. In Micah 5:2, we are told He would be born in Bethlehem. In these passages, David was told that his house and kingdom would be forever.

For believers today, the Davidic Covenant encourages us, because we see God's plan unfolding from the beginning. In Matthew 1:1 Jesus is called the "*Son of David, the Son of Abraham.*"
Connecting the dots! God is in control. The whole universe finds its origin in Him, its destiny in Him and He is moving history toward that glorious destiny! Sing praise to Him!

Notes

Week 60 Solomon and the Temple

By Chris Watson

In reading books such as 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles, you will find that these books have accounts of the same activities. For instance, you will find in 2 Samuel and in 1 Chronicles similar accounts with different focuses of Saul taking his life and the ark being brought back to Jerusalem. In between 2 Samuel and today's devotions, David had been at war for several years. This is also the time he yielded to temptation with Bathsheba. This week we pick up in 1 Chronicles 22 where Solomon is going to be instructed to build the Temple of God.

Day 1- First Read 1 Chronicles 22:7-10

The time had come to build the temple of the Lord. As today's passage tells us, David originally hoped to build the temple, but because he had too much blood on his hands, God told David that his son, Solomon, would build it instead. Notice in verse 9 and 10 that God told David before Solomon was born that Solomon would be the one to build the temple. This didn't happen by chance. The Lord had planned this out in advance and had given His plan and message to David. God would bring Solomon into this world, through David, to build the temple of the Lord and, as scripture tells us, he would bring peace. Of course, we know that God would actually bring the peace, but He was going to do it through Solomon.

The temple, of course, was where the presence of the Lord would be and God had raised Solomon up for this time. In 1 Corinthians 6:19, we are reminded that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. To believers this means the Holy Spirit, God Himself, lives in us! It means that God dwells in our hearts and is with us wherever we may go. You and I are God's temple. He made (built) us to be His dwelling place, just like He dwelt in the temple that Solomon would build. This means I can seek God any time, pray at any time, cast my cares on Him at any time, and call on His name

at any time. The very presence of God, which dwelt in the Temple that Solomon built, lives in every believer today. Incredible!

We need to be reminded that we have the very presence of God, the Holy Spirit, living in us. He walks with us, talks with us, and guides us. Just like the Lord gave David instructions for the temple and who was to build it, that same Lord instructs and guides us every day. The Creator of the universe dwells in us, we are His temple. Today, let us recognize that we are a living temple and that God is in us. Might we live our lives to honor God.

Day 2- First Read 1 Chronicles 22:11-19

Not only was the Lord preparing and giving instructions to Solomon through David concerning the temple, but He was also raising up other leaders to help Solomon build the temple. This was no small feat. Marty Machowski from the Long Story Short devotion says if you were to translate the gold and silver alone to today's time and values it would be in excess of 84 billion dollars. We are not talking about a measly temple. This temple was being built for the Lord and it was to be done right.

Notice the words that David gave to Solomon, words that we should heed today. In verses 12 and 13 he told Solomon to observe the laws and decrees of the Lord, be strong and courageous, and do not be afraid or discouraged. He also told him in verse 19 to devote himself to the Lord and that the building of the temple was for the Name of the Lord. What words of wisdom, spoken by David, to his son Solomon! I believe these were words from the Lord, given to David, to encourage and challenge Solomon as he set out on this step of obedience. I am sure Solomon would look back and remember these words encouraging him to keep following the Lord and to be obedient while building the Temple. The temple was a building with great detail that took years for Solomon to build.

As we saw yesterday, you and I are temples of God and He is still working on us. At times we get discouraged when we don't feel like we are where we need to be. At times in our lives we can become scared or unsure. At those times we need to hear the words that David gave to Solomon, to devote ourselves to the Lord and realize that all of what we do needs to be for Him. God continues to work on us, refining, guiding, directing, and sometimes rebuking us. Thank God He is still working on us and wait and trust on the Lord.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- First Read 1 Chronicles 28:1-19

As David gave his speech to the officials of Jerusalem he reminded them of God's direction. Let's look at verses 4-5 again. *"Yet the Lord God of Israel chose me from all my father's house to be king over Israel forever. For he chose Judah as leader, and in the house of Judah my father's house, and among my father's sons he took pleasure in me to make me king over all Israel. And of all my sons (for the Lord has given me many sons) he has chosen Solomon my son to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the Lord over Israel."* David affirms God's sovereignty in choosing David as a part of His plan for His people. We hear echoes of God's choosing of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua and others as a part of God's redemptive purposes for His people. God is at work and David affirms that here yet again. And it is David's son Solomon that God chooses to build His temple and promises to establish his kingdom forever if he is faithful to God's commandments and rules. Solomon is indeed faithful to build the temple, but he fails to be obedient as he allows false worship into Israel through all his wives and concubines from other religions.

God is faithful, however, to establish David's house forever. David's sin brings discord in his own house and Solomon's disobedience will eventually split the kingdom, but God has already established a line of David that He will bring the Savior of the world through. Jesus Christ will come as the perfect King,

obedient to all God's rules and commandments to establish a kingdom that won't split, but will endure forever.

As David lays out the plans for God's temple to Solomon, it's clear to note the detail given. The intention isn't for Solomon to just build whatever he so pleases. Rather, God cares how He is worshipped. Our Holy God is detailed in how His temple is to be built as it will be a place of His resting with his people. The image is that as the ark of the covenant of the Lord rests in the temple as God has delivered His people to the promised land. It's almost as if now God rests echoing His rest from His creating work of Genesis 2:1-3. His people are experiencing a rest in the land, but one that will eventually come to an end. That rest comes to an end with oppression from their enemies and ultimately going into exile. God will eventually offer them a rest that is lasting, that isn't dependant upon their faithfulness, but one that is purchased by Christ's perfect obedience. In Christ, we experience the promises offered of being "in the land" and one day we will dwell in His house forever, a lasting rest for all eternity.

How does seeing God's redemptive plan unfold and God's working through David and Solomon give you encouragement today?

Day 4- First Read 2 Chronicles 7:1-18

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?

4. Verses 1-3 are filled with imagery and phrases used throughout the Psalms and OT literature. What stands out to you? What does this language emphasize in this passage?

5. What assurances does God give to His people in the passage? What comfort is there for us today?

6. How do you see the promise of God's presence in this passage? What is the NT promise of God's presence with His people? (see Ephesians 1:13, 2:22)

7. God warns Solomon to walk in God's commandments. Spend some time evaluating your own heart today of ways you have failed to be faithful to God's word. Spend time confessing your unfaithfulness, repent and receive the forgiveness offered in Christ alone.

Day 5- First Read Isaiah 60:16-20

What a glorious day this will be! Our Passage today speaks of eternity with our Lord. Just look at the things that will or will not be. We will meet our Redeemer face to face. We will no longer experience violence or destruction. There will be no more sun because God will be our light. Wow! That's exciting.

As believers, we are experiencing God right now. As each new day appears, hopefully we are learning and growing as we spend time with Him in prayer and reading scripture. We will be with God for the rest of eternity. If we are going to spend eternity with God, we should get to know Him and walk in His ways while here on earth.

When we enter God's presence we will be amazed. We will also be sinless and live in a never ending sinless environment. You and I can't exactly fathom this idea. All we have ever known is sin. We were born into sin and we sin; it is all around us. So when we say we will live for eternity with God in a sinless heaven we can only imagine what that will be like. Not only will there be no sin, but we will be with God for eternity and things will be perfect. There will be no pain, no heartache, no sickness, no hate, no more lying, cheating, or stealing. Thanks be to God for what He has and will do.

Right now we are preparing for that day. Of course, if you are a believer you know God and God is where you are, but on that day we will experience God in an incredible fashion. On earth we grow, learn, study, and walk hand in hand with God and we know heaven will be much like this. May our time here prepare for us for what is to come. And, of course, may we desire for others to know God through Jesus and may we share His truth with everyone we meet. Thank God today for the fact that He is with you right now and when you enter heaven He will be with you forever. Spend some time thinking what that day might look like!

WEEK 61 THE KINGDOM IS DIVIDED

By Dennis Watson

At the very beginning of his kingship Solomon humbly asked only one thing of the Lord. He asked that the Lord give him a wise and understanding heart so that he could be the king he needed to be. God answered that prayer and made him wise and discerning, but also gave him great riches and honor. King Solomon was off to a great start. The Lord allowed him to build the temple that David wanted to build. The temple was completed in seven years. The Queen of Sheba came to see the greatness and wealth of Solomon's reign. But a great beginning does not guarantee a great ending. In fact, the failure of Solomon to guard his own heart led to his downfall and his kingdom being divided.

Day 1- FIRST READ 1 KINGS 11:1-8

Proverbs 4:23 is one of the proverbs attributed to King Solomon in which he wrote, "*Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it spring the issues of life.*" This is one of my favorite verses and, in fact, a life verse for me. However, it was in this very thing that Solomon failed. He gathered to himself 700 wives and 300 concubines. In essence, he had 1,000 wives! That led to his downfall. With these wives came hundreds of false gods and Solomon became an idol worshipper. Starting out, his heart was devoted and loyal to God, but with his wives, many whom were the result of alliances with foreign kings, his affections were compromised. The danger here was the departure of his heart from following God. This is called divided affections. At first it is subtle and does not seem like such a big deal. However, eventually the heart is totally turned away from the Lord.

Solomon was the son of King David. King David was a man who was loyal to God. He was not perfect. He was a real human. However, his heart was loyal to God. Solomon started out like his father. He loved the Lord and only wanted wisdom and understanding to lead the people. It is sad when a person does not

guard his heart. The heart is considered the place of our affections. Solomon no longer had a heart for God. His heart had departed from God. A departed heart can lead to some pretty devastating things. The most devastating of all is the forfeiture of blessings. Perhaps the greatest blessing of all, apart from the personal relationship we have with God through Jesus, is the blessing of being used of God. God chose Solomon to be the king after David. He chose Solomon to be the one to build the temple. It seems there were many more opportunities for Solomon to be blessed as an instrument of God.

What about your heart? Has there been a time in your life when you were walking more closely with God? A departed heart usually happens over time. The heart grows colder over time. If your heart is moving away from God, seek Him with your whole heart. As David said, *“Delight yourself in the Lord.”*

Day 2- FIRST READ 1 KINGS 11:9-12

David wrote in **Psalm 53:1**, *“The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God.’”* Wisdom is skill in godly living. It is taking the Truth of God and applying it to daily living. I have come to believe that the people of God often live like fools. By that I mean we at times live like there is no God. It is not our confession but at times it is our profession—living like there is no God. Sadly, many of God’s own people merely give lip service to Him—*“honoring Him with their lips but have removed their hearts from Him” (Isaiah 29:13)*. Solomon began with confession and a matching profession of loving and serving God. As he continued and turned to idols he lost his way. The man who wanted wisdom more than anything else became foolish in his living.

The wisest man in the world, and a great king, now found himself standing before the judge of the universe. I do not believe God was angry with Solomon. No, this is a case of the warning of **Galatians 6:7**, *“Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.”* Solomon became a victim of his own

folly. His kingdom would be taken from him. We see God's mercy in this, in that He told Solomon this would not take place while he was alive because God was keeping His word to David.

This is very agonizing. I have seen godly people with what seemed to be incredible potential forfeit the opportunity to be used of God in an incredible way. Greater love for other things drags their heart away. Possessions, lust, and longings for things with which we become obsessed can cause our hearts to be drawn away from God.

Ask God, by His grace, to enable you to keep your heart set on Him.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- FIRST READ 1 KINGS 11:13-40

In 1962 Mary Wells recorded a song entitled, "Two Lovers," that went to the top ten on the music charts. The song says, "Well, I've got two lovers and I ain't ashamed Two lovers and I love them both the same." I know that quite often songs say ridiculous things and this one is no exception. Jesus says that we cannot have two masters because we will love one and hate the other (Luke 16:13). Solomon could not have two masters either. He turned away from the Lord and pursued false gods. He may have claimed to love God, but His affections were elsewhere.

The result was exactly as the Lord said; the kingdom was torn away from Solomon. Ten of the tribes were torn away, thus dividing the kingdom. The math says there were two left, but only the tribe of Judah was actually left. This also included the small tribe of Benjamin which was associated with Jerusalem. The southern kingdom would be known as Judah and the northern kingdom as Israel.

This passage says that Solomon would spend the remainder of his life as king, for the sake of his father, David. God had made a promise to David that he would have a son on the throne forever.

So Solomon remained king. The long-term view was to Jesus who would come from the tribe of Judah and, in particular, from the line of David. God is in control and faithful to His covenant promises.

Solomon received bad news mixed with good news. The bad news was that most of the kingdom was torn away from him. The good news was that he would remain king over Judah and God would keep His promise. This promise comes to us also. There is bad news and good news. The bad news is that there is sin in the world that seeks to tear us away from the blessed design of God. But the good news is the gospel of Jesus who came to restore the image of God to all who will receive Him, that He came to bear the punishment for our sin that we might become children of God through faith in Christ! Do you have this hope today? Have you put your trust in Christ for your salvation? If not, let today be the day you turn in faith to Christ. If you have, rejoice and thank the Lord for His gracious promises of salvation that have been secured in the atoning work of Christ, that He bore the judgement for our unfaithfulness that we might receive His righteousness due to His faithfulness on our behalf.

Day 4- FIRST READ 1 KINGS 11:41-12:20

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. How did Solomon make the yoke heavy on the people of Israel? (1 Kings 4:7, 9:15)

5. Jesus says in Matthew 11:28-30 that His “yoke is easy and burden is light.” Compare what life under King Solomon and life for the believer under King Jesus.

6. Rehoboam listens to the counsel of his younger advisers instead of the counsel of the older men, choosing pride and further oppression of the people. Why would he have chosen the advice of the younger men? What does it reveal about his own heart? How have you seen the impact of choosing similar wrong counsel in the past affect your life?

7. The older men tried to counsel Rehoboam to be a servant to the people, to look out for the interests of the people. It’s uncomfortable and even unpopular counsel, but it reflects the priority of King Jesus. Pray for wisdom today to walk in the wise counsel of God’s Word, to live by God’s priorities over the priorities that reflect our own comfort and pride.

Day 5- FIRST READ PSALM 132:8-14

We have seen on many previous occasions that God established a kingdom that will be forever. That is not “temporarily” forever but “eternally” forever. Saul was the first king of Israel, an interim king before God’s intended king of Israel. That king would be David. This psalm was probably a song that was sung by the people when they carried the ark into the temple Solomon built.

The psalm speaks what we have already seen, “*For the sake of your servant David*” (1 **Kings 11:13**). God made a promise to David that one from his family would be the king and that the line of David would continue. We know that there was a long line of kings that came from David’s family tree. However, the ultimate fulfillment was in Jesus, the King of King and Lord of Lords. The dynasty of David would continue forever.

It is a wonderful thing to know that all of this is the result of God’s sovereignty. This promise to David was totally dependent upon God and not on the behavior of David’s offspring. Just look and see the character of the kings starting with David. They were all sinful! God is the faithful one and the kingdom is totally dependent upon His faithfulness.

God established the eternal kingdom. The line of David is fulfilled in the Messiah-- Jesus Christ. He is the One who will be King forever. He is called the son of David (Matthew 1:1). All of this culminates in Jesus. All that we have studied and read to this point is about God establishing a people, a nation, and kingdom that would ultimately be eternal!

In today’s passage the term ‘Zion’ is used. Zion is Jerusalem. It is not just the temporal Jerusalem, but also the New Jerusalem spoken of in Revelation. In the book of Revelation we read these words:

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.

Revelation 21:2-3

The kingdom that God speaks of is the eternal one. It starts with David and continues, by the grace of God, through the Line of David. Jesus is the King of Kings and He will reign forever!

Week 62- God Provides for Elijah in Miraculous Ways

By Chris Watson

The kingdom is now divided and the Israelites are at it again. They are worshipping and following other gods, doing things their own way, and not seeking to trust the Lord. Many of the kings were leading the people to do things totally opposite of what the Lord desired and what His will was. As we will see this week, the Lord often raised up prophets to show the people the error of their ways, seeking to lead the people back to God.

Day 1- First Read 1 Kings 16:29-17:7

Fifty plus years had passed since the kingdom was divided (1 Kings 12). Between the division and this passage, Israel had gone through several kings while Asa was king of Judah for forty one years. Toward the end of Asa's reign, we learn that Ahab became king over Israel. As we see in today's reading, Ahab was one "bad dude." He even set up idol worship and built an altar for Baal. Verse 30 tells us that Ahab did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than those before him.

However, notice how God intervenes. Ahab was going against the ways of God, totally doing that which was not right in the eyes of God, and seeking to worship false gods. God sent Elijah along to tell King Ahab that there would be no rain over the next few years except at Elijah's word. Notice he tells Ahab this with the authority of the Lord, the King of Israel (verse 17:1).

We don't read that the Ahab's "gods" helped him out but we do read that the one true God fed Elijah and provided water for him. God was letting Ahab know, through Elijah, that He was in control. No man-made god or person could do what only God could do. God was in control and he provided for Elijah's needs.

Isn't there peace in knowing that God is in control? In spite of the storms of life, the ups and downs, and the highs and lows God is in

control. He was letting Ahab know who the one true God was. Be thankful we don't serve a God who is powerless, unmerciful, unjust, or unloving. Rather, we serve a God who is holy and righteous and He will make sure that His name is known. He accomplished this through Elijah. How might God want to use your life to help others hear and grasp the power and love of your God?

Day 2- First Read 1 Kings 17:8-16

The widow trusted God to an extent. Without rain, things had gotten so bad that all she had left was a handful of flour and a little oil. Elijah found her gathering sticks before she was going home to make a meal for her and her son to eat before they died. But notice what she does when Elijah asks her to make a small cake of bread for him before making one for her son and herself. She does just that! Just as Elijah told her, there was enough food for Elijah, the widow and her son and they didn't run out, food was always there when they needed it. She trusted Elijah (God) enough to do what Elijah had said.

Not only did the widow trust God but so did Elijah. He trusted what the Lord told him in verse 14, that the flour would not be used up and the jar of oil would not run out! Elijah trusted that the Lord would provide. If the Lord had not provided, this woman would have died after Elijah had taken all that she had!

I want to trust God like that. I want to trust God and His words. We have His very words here in the Bible. We have heard them and now we need to trust them and take them to heart. We need to believe them even for our next meal as Elijah and the widow did. They were following God in some very wicked times and they trusted that God was in control.

Let us realize that God is sovereign and always in control. Take some time today to write down some things that you are trusting

God for, putting them in His hands. Pray over those things and trust God to carry out His will and His plan.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- First Read Luke 4:16-30

We can flash forward to the New Testament to hear Jesus reference this very story of Elijah and the widow. Word has already spread about Jesus's ministry, and was "being glorified by all." (v. 15) But Jesus returns to His hometown and begins teaching in the synagogue as was His custom. The passage He reads from a Messianic prophecy from Isaiah. Everyone in attendance is amazed and marveled that Jesus as he went on to say that "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." He was teaching with such authority and power already and connecting the Scriptures to Himself.

But Jesus knows the heart of man. He knows that He will be accepted by some and rejected by others. So Jesus shares a proverb that exposes their hearts, getting past their initial amazement at the wonders and teaching of His ministry. He then shares stories from the Old Testament prophets Elijah and Elisha. Here Jesus is echoing back to a time when King Ahab rejected God's message and so God sent Elijah to a foreign widow instead of to any in Israel. Similarly, God is rejected by Ahab's son during Elisha's time as a prophet. And God sends Elisha to heal Naaman the Syrian rather than those in Israel. Israel had turned to false gods and God in turn showed His saving grace to even Gentiles. This analogy immediately enraged the people in the synagogue as now they tried to drive Jesus out to kill Him. He cut through their initial praise to expose that their hearts were actually far from God. He was showing them that many in Israel had grown hard towards the Lord, so the Lord was taking His Gospel to the Gentiles. Jesus exposed their superficial approval of Him. But here we also see that God's saving purposes have always been for more than just Israel. Jesus shows that He won't be accepted in His own

hometown, among His own people and must continue to go out to the Gentiles as well. God's plan of redemption is for the nations!

Jesus's deity is on display here as well. He is heading off the rejection of His own people before it even is beginning. He is aware of the deepest thoughts of their hearts and He is exposing them. King Jesus is bringing His kingdom, and it will be for people from every tongue, tribe and nation. (Rev. 7:9) We ought not be surprised that as we share our hope in Christ that we will experience rejection. Our own Lord did and so shall we. But, we should also expect that Jesus is committed to growing His own kingdom and has chosen to use us. Pray for the boldness to be faithful in sharing the gospel message of salvation in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ alone!

Day 4- First Read 1 Kings 17:17-24

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. There is a repetition of the phrase "the word of the Lord" in all of chapter 17. What is this repetition highlighting as God is working in Zarephath and has brought a drought to Israel?

5. In verse 20, Elijah prays with seeming uncertainty. But really he laments the situation before the Lord as he continues to cry out for the Lord to heal the boy. Elijah is acting in faith even as he is lamenting the hardship of the situation. How do you see Elijah's faith on display?

6. The woman professes faith in God's word and that Elijah is really from God in verse 24. What are some other examples of how God confirms His messengers in Scripture? Think about Old Testament prophets as well as the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles in Acts.

7. What is happening in your life worth lamenting right now before the Lord? Write out a prayer lamenting the pain of your suffering to the Lord. Then, ask the Lord to bring life to your situation, healing to your hurting as you remind yourself of His sovereign power from this passage today. Even if he doesn't bring healing the way you want, trust that He is the God who hears the cries of His people and is working His sovereign plan.

Day 5- First Read Psalm 78:23-39

These few verses give us a very clear picture of the life of the Israelites. I have often said they had the "bent neck" syndrome. Their necks would bend towards God then away, towards Him and then away again, and it happened over and over again as this passage shares. Verses 36-38 says "*But then they would flatter him*

with their mouths, lying to him with their tongues; their hearts were not loyal to him, they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he was merciful; he forgave their iniquities and did not destroy them. Time after time he restrained his anger and did not stir up his full wrath.” They would lie to God. They were not loyal, even unfaithful to the covenant, but He was merciful and forgave them, not destroying them.

What a loving God we serve. Sure God hates sin and it has to be punished, but He loves us just like He loved the Israelites. God is faithful, we are not! I may not be able to speak for you, but speaking for myself, I often do things my own way, not God’s. By the grace of God I usually recognize my foolishness quickly (though not all the time.) God then reminds me who I am and who He is. I wish I could say it has only happened once, but I can look back and see how I have questioned God in the past. Maybe thinking God didn’t know what He was doing, or deciding to do things my way instead of God’s. By His grace, He was patient as He loved me through His blood, conviction, and His choice! I can be just like the Israelites, following God with everything I am one minute and in the next minute questioning what He is doing. Thank God, He doesn’t leave.

God waits for us with open arms. If we are caught in blatant sin, God waits for our return! If we are making unwise choices, God waits for our return. If we are questioning God’s choices or motives, God waits for our return. Even if we have run far, far away like the prodigal son, God waits for our return. Verse 38 tells us, “he was merciful and forgave their iniquities.” Praise God, He has done the same for us. He didn’t leave us in our sin but He brought us to Himself to walk hand in hand with the Creator of the world and the Savior of our souls.

Spend some time today thanking God that He forgives and that He is patient! May we model His forgiveness and His patience as it has been given to us.

WEEK 63 ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL

By Dennis Watson

In American history there was a real showdown known as the shootout at the OK Corral. It lasted thirty seconds and took place Wednesday afternoon, October 26, 1881. In Israel's history there was a showdown on Mount Carmel that took longer than thirty seconds and, in this showdown, God once again showed Himself all powerful. This week we will look at that showdown and see how God used the prophet Elijah and how the event points to Jesus.

Day 1- FIRST READ 1 KINGS 18:1-19

Last week we were introduced to the prophet Elijah. God sent Elijah to King Ahab to tell him that, due to the wickedness of his kingdom and the idolatry in the land, there would be a drought. Elijah told the king that there would be no rain and then he hid himself. During the time of the famine, as instructed by God, Elijah stayed by a brook and was fed by ravens. When the brook dried up his provisions came from God, through a widow. God knows how to care for His people.

Also during this time King Ahab was back in Israel, enduring the drought and famine. After more than three dry years there was little or no water and no place to graze the animals, in particular, the horses used in battle. King Ahab had the caretaker of his house, Obadiah, go in one direction while the king went in another to look for water and grass to feed the animals. Obadiah was a believer. His name means "Servant of Jehovah." He was serving the Lord behind enemy lines by hiding the prophets from King Ahab's murderous wife, Jezebel. During the search for grass and water Obadiah met up with Elijah. Elijah told Obadiah to tell King Ahab that he had found Elijah, but Obadiah was fearful because he knew that Elijah could just disappear. He feared that when the king came, Elijah would be gone. But he was not.

In the encounter with Elijah, King Ahab greeted him, calling Elijah the “troubler of Israel.” In reality, as Elijah responded to the king, it was the king who troubled Israel by leading the people to worship the false god Baal.

Now, approximately three and a half years later (see Luke 4:25 for the length of the drought), Elijah was to present himself to the king and let him know there would be rain. God was sending Elijah to announce the end of the drought. He was going to show that it was not the false god Baal who controlled the weather, but the one true God of Israel. We also see here how God provides for His own.

Thank God for His provisions for us and His sovereignty.

Day 2- FIRST READ 1 KINGS 18:20-35

Talk about bold! Elijah followed God’s leading in throwing down the gauntlet. He challenged the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah to meet him on Mount Carmel for a test to see who the real God was. The children of Israel and the 850 prophets of the false gods come together and Elijah presents the challenge. The false prophets went first at Elijah’s urging. They took a bull, cut it up, and put it on an altar and called out to their false gods to burn up the offering. For six hours the false prophets cried out to their gods but nothing happened. Elijah mocked them by saying that maybe their god was on vacation, eating, or maybe asleep. They cried out and were cutting themselves but nothing happened. It was an exercise in futility!

Then Elijah called the people to come close. He alone rebuilt an altar that had been there but was in disrepair because it had not been used. He used twelve stones, representing the twelve tribes of Israel, although the nation had been divided. He put the wood on the altar along with the bull that he had cut up. He then wanted to make sure there was no doubt that this would be a miracle of God. He had the people bring buckets of water to pour on the bull and the wood. There was so much water that it filled the trench Elijah

had dug around the altar. The altar, the wood, and the bull were soaked with water.

Elijah was grossly outnumbered. There were all of the Israelites who had made no commitment at the beginning of this challenge. He asked them, “*How long will you falter between two opinions?*” They were noncommittal by their silence. Elijah was alone but not really alone. Martin Luther said, “One with God is a majority.”

Elijah was alone with God, but he was in the majority!

Ask the Lord to enable you to trust Him more so that you can stand alone with Him.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- FIRST READ 1 KINGS 18:36-38

This whole setup—the challenge, the altar, the sacrifice, and even the water was God’s idea. Elijah prayed and acknowledged that he had done all of this, “*at Your Word.*” God had planned this and set it all up to display His power and majesty. As I read those words it makes me think of the words of Peter recorded in Acts 2:23 regarding Jesus:

This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. Acts 2:23

God set the whole thing up for Jesus and His death on the cross. God showed His power over the false gods at Mount Carmel and He showed His power over death, sin, and Satan, at the cross of Jesus Christ.

The goal of both encounters was to turn God’s people to Himself. Elijah cried out and the fire came down from heaven, burned up the bull, the wood, and licked up all the water! God orchestrated the battle, then fought and won it! He showed Himself to be the victor. At the cross Christ offered Himself as an offering sacrifice

for our sins. He wasn't forced to the Cross but did so willingly according to the eternal purposes of God. He drew the line and then fought and won the battle to liberate us from sin and its power. When Jesus was raised from the dead the victory of all victories was won! Oh victory in Jesus! In Christ, we are new creations. We live!

As we rejoice over our salvation purchased by the definite atoning work of Christ on the Cross on our behalf, may we be vigilant to pray for the same in the lives of those around us. May we cry out to God to turn the hearts of friends and family that don't know Christ. Make a list today of some people that you want to see the Lord work in their lives and pray for God's victory in their lives today.

Day 4- FIRST READ 1 KINGS 18:39-45

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Look at all the details mentioned in v. 38 about the fire falling. Why are those details mentioned? How does it impact the people's response in vs. 39?

5. How do you see Elijah's faith in God on display in v. 41-45?

6. Even after the great display of fire from heaven, Elijah had to wait on the Lord to deliver the rain. This seems to be a pattern of the Scriptures. The ultimate offering has come and been accepted. Christ has come in the flesh. He has died and been raised from the grave. So what are we waiting for now? How do we wait on the Lord patiently waiting now? Make a list of what future realities we are awaiting at Christ's second coming.

7. Elijah is forced to wait on God. Seven times his servant has to go look. We see waiting on the Lord as a theme throughout the Scriptures (Ps. 37:7, 34). How are you having to wait on the Lord right now? What has been difficult for you about it?

Day 5- FIRST READ PSALM 98:1-9

This wonderful psalm is a celebration of God's victory of salvation. Since we are reading this with hindsight we know that there were many victories like the one we just looked at this week with Elijah and the prophets of Baal. This psalm ultimately is celebrating the victory of salvation that was won at the cross when Jesus died. It is this psalm that was the inspiration for the wonderful hymn by Isaac Watts, "Joy to the World." We think of it as a Christmas carol but it is really a kingdom hymn. Although we get excited and carried away at Christmas time, Jesus did not focus on His birth but on the cross and the victory won there. The hymn says, "Joy to the world, the Lord is come. Let earth receive her King."

The psalmist was not familiar with Jesus but he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, not knowing that he was writing about one to come many centuries later. He wrote about celebration and singing. He spoke of salvation that was known by all the nations. It was the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross that made salvation known to the nations.

The cross of Christ ushered in the victory but the final victory cry will be when Jesus rules and reigns in the New Heaven and the New Earth. That celebration will take place for eternity. In the meantime we sing new songs and play instruments and join with the seas, rivers, and the hills as they celebrate the victories and the anticipated victory! The psalmist was looking forward to an event to come and inviting all to celebrate. We look back to victories in the Old Testament and the victories at the cross and empty tomb. We also look forward to the establishment of the rule and reign of the King of Kings. We have a reason to celebrate!

Thank God for the call to sing and celebrate. Now do it for all time and beyond!

Week 64 Elijah is Taken up to Heaven

By Chris Watson

From last week's devotions to this week's readings a few things have happened. Ahab was killed in battle and just as Elijah and Micaiah had prophesied, the dogs licked up his blood. Remember, he was a wicked and evil king. We also learn that God was not necessarily going to bring disaster to Ahab but would wait and bring it to his house in the days of his son (1 Kings 21:29). In 2 Kings 1, we see that judgment take place on Ahab's son. Ahaziah became king over Israel, but his reign only lasted two years before he died. His death was not so much the result of falling through a roof, but when he fell he consulted another god instead of God. Because of this, he never recovered from the fall. Ahaziah had no son, so Joram succeeded him. We also see in 1 Kings 19 the call of Elisha as a prophet. He became Elijah's attendant. This leads us to where we are today.

Day 1- First Read 2 Kings 2:1-6

Elijah was about to be taken up into heaven and we know that he and Elisha knew this. Obviously, God had revealed to them what was going to happen. In 1 Kings 19 we see the call of Elisha as Elijah's attendant. Also in today's passage, we see that Elijah was Elisha's master. While it was a master/ attendant relationship, Elisha wanted to go wherever Elijah went as the Lord sent him. Their relationship was one of godly love and I believe they learned from each other. He put Elisha with Elijah so when the time came Elisha would be ready to continue the work from the Lord as Elijah had. Elisha was so loyal and he wanted to go wherever Elijah went. He also wanted to be present when Elijah was taken up.

God was preparing Elisha, in essence, to take Elijah's place. Elijah was mentoring Elisha and God was getting them both ready for what was to happen. Who is mentoring or discipling you and who are you mentoring or discipling? In other words, who is pouring

into your life the things of God and life experiences and into whose life are you pouring the things of God?

We all need someone pouring into our life and visa versa. Are you pouring into someone else's life? I believe if you are married it starts with your spouse and then your kids. For men, what other men are you pouring into? Women, what other women are you pouring into? Knowing that in time, others will need to carry the torch as it is passed on. Sometimes we do this by default, but it's best done on a regular basis with one person as you glean the truths of God. May we all be like Elijah knowing in time we will be called to heaven and wanting to ready those believers that will come behind us. May all who come behind us find us faithful!

Day 2- First Read 2 Kings 2:7-14

This must have been quite an experience for both Elijah and Elisha! Can you imagine the story that Elisha had to tell when he got back across the water? We will see tomorrow that not even the fifty men that were with them believed what had happened.

Notice what we see both from Elisha and Elijah, a desire to follow and obey God for His glory, not their own. Elisha had asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit and he knew Elijah's spirit followed God. These men followed God and spoke truth, and it wasn't always easy. In a time when many were not God-fearing or they followed God with all of their hearts.

As believers we must speak the truth like Elijah and Elisha, but we must do so in love. Know that when speaking the truth, based on God's Word, many will question you, laugh at you, or even shy away from you. Elijah found himself in a cave because he thought he was the only one still serving God. Standing on the truth, speaking the truth, and standing on the Word of God can sometimes be lonely; however with God near we are definitely not alone.

What are you standing on and for? Are you standing on the Word of God and His truth? Are you standing on your opinions? Are you focusing on what others say or what God's Word says? May we be like Elijah and Elisha and stand on the Word of God and speak truth and live. Be ready as others might leave, laugh, or even say you are crazy. God is still near, He is what we need!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- First Read Mark 9:2-9

I am a Yankee who went to college in the South. One summer when I was home in Pennsylvania, I was a server in a restaurant. I was serving a large group of people for a business lunch. After a few minutes I realized that I recognized the accent of the woman at the head of the table. She sounded just like Lavan, a friend from college. When I had an opportunity I asked her where she was from. Sure enough, she was from the same small town, Harleyville, SC, as my friend! Even better, she knew Lavan. "He practically grew up at my house." I smile everytime I think about that story because it was the first time I got to play the game I saw many Southerners play- the "Do You Know _____?" game. I had always watched in fascination as my southern friends met someone then spent the next several moments naming people they knew until they discovered a mutual friend-which they always did.

This story in Mark 9 reminds me a little bit of the "Do You Know _____?" game. Here we see Jesus, God is the flesh, not just telling Peter, James and John that God the Father, and Elijah and Moses know Him. He showed them! God is saying to Peter, James and John, "Do you know Moses? Do you know Elijah? Do you know my Son, Jesus?" God Himself confirms the standing of Jesus His beloved Son by speaking from a cloud in the presence of the Old Testament heroes, Moses and Elijah. These heroes were there to bear witness to Peter, James, and John of the deity of Jesus. And who better to do that? These disciples knew Moses as the bearer of the law and the greatest mediator Israel had known up to that point.

They knew Elijah as the great prophet who walked with God and pointed people to His Word.

God was not just confirming His beloved Son to His disciples, He was also preparing them for the death and resurrection Jesus would experience. Jesus is the greater Moses who constantly lives to intercede for His people. He is the greater Elijah who perfectly walks with the Father in order to pay the penalty of death for our sins. Moses and Elijah appear to Peter, James and John to confirm the message of Jesus and link Him to the Old Testament. God speaks to Peter, James, and John in order to confirm the deity of Jesus. They still didn't get it. They still failed to see who Jesus is and what He was doing. And yet, because Jesus came to save them and us from our unbelief, we get to hear the Father's voice saying, "You are my beloved child in whom I am well pleased."

Day 4- First Read 2 Kings 2:15-22

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. What did Elisha do when he was mocked by the young boys?

5. How does Jesus' response to the mockings and betrayals he experienced differ from Elisha's response?

6. When was the last time you felt mocked or disrespected? How did you respond? How does Jesus' sacrifice for you stir you to respond differently?

7. Share your response to #6 with someone today.

Day 5- First Read Malachi 4:4-6

If we take our passage today and then turn over to **Matthew 11:13-14** we read, "*For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.*" We also see this account in the other gospels. Elijah was the one to come and he came through John the Baptist. John wasn't Elijah reincarnated, but he represented Elijah!

John Phillips says, "When Jesus came the first time, God did indeed send a forerunner: John the Baptist, who came in the spirit of Elijah to call the nation back to God. The nation responded by murdering John and crucifying Christ."⁴

Many of the Jews are still waiting for the first Elijah, if you will (John the Baptist), as some didn't accept that John was coming in the spirit of Elijah. They are looking for Elijah himself. In fact, if you remember the study of the Feasts of Israel, months back, the Jews even place a cup for Elijah known as The Cup of Hallel or Elijah's cup as they are still waiting on him to come before the

⁴ John Phillips Commentary Series, -Exploring the Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary

Messiah. Since the time when Jesus walked the earth until now many Jews have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah and the prophecy concerning Elijah is just one reason.

Thank God for His word and how it is all connected. Thank Him for allowing you to understand it, grow in it, and study it. Pray for those who have not yet seen the truth and their eyes have not yet been opened. Pray for people you know who have heard the truth conveyed to them in a clear way but still have not put their faith in Jesus or who can't believe that Jesus would love them. Pray specifically that the Jews will in fact see the true Messiah! Pray for God's name to be proclaimed throughout the earth!

WEEK 65 ELISHA'S MINISTRY

By Dennis Watson

Many biblical historical events took place after the showdown on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. When Elijah was taken up to heaven, he told Elisha that his request for a double portion of his spirit would become a reality. “This was not a request for twice as much of the Holy Spirit, or for a ministry twice as great as that of Elijah, but for a greater degree of the inner spirit that motivated the great prophet.”⁵ Elisha continued the ministry of Elijah. During Elisha’s ministry he worked ten miracles. We will look at a few of those this week. However, the important thing to note is that God who was providing the power for the miracles. There would come One far greater who would work even greater miracles—Jesus.

Day 1- FIRST READ 2 KINGS 4:1-7

Elisha was like a son to Elijah, which explains why he asked for a double portion of his spirit. The oldest son in the family was to receive a double portion of the inheritance. Obviously, Elisha saw himself not just as one of the sons of the prophet but as Elijah’s firstborn and therefore thought he deserved the double inheritance. We see this was his request in **2 Kings 2:9** where he requested “*a double portion of his spirit.*”

This account sounds a lot like the one about Elijah and the widow whose flour and oil did not run out during the time of the drought. This widow had many debts. When Elisha asked her what she had, she told him all she had in the house was a little oil. In this case Elisha told the widow to go and gather all the jars she could from her neighbors. After she had done this she returned home. She, along with her sons, filled all of those jars from the little oil she had until they were all full and then the oil stopped. Elisha told her

⁵ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series)-Old Testament-The Bible Commentary-History

to go and sell all of that, pay her debts, and live on what was left over.

What a mighty miracle! This was a miracle, no natural explanation, an act of God through Elisha on behalf of the widow. The widow really wanted a solution to her predicament. Elisha told her what to do and she followed the man of God's instructions completely and God provided for her needs miraculously. She believed and acted on her belief. The oil continued to flow until her needs were met. She had and practiced abiding faith. Abiding faith is faith that is acted upon not just talked about.

Ask God for His grace so that you may have abiding faith.

Day 2- FIRST READ 2 KINGS 4:8-17

Serving God shows up in serving others. When you see someone who loves to serve others it is often motivated by the blessings of God. God gives blessings. Blessed people bless people. In today's biblical historical account there is a woman who wanted to bless Elisha. I believe that the woman and her husband were serving without ulterior motives. However, God knew the woman was childless and longed to have a child. So the man and woman fixed a little room for Elisha in which he could stay when he was in their area. One day Elisha was so moved by what they had done he asked the woman what he could do for her, but she did not tell him anything. Elisha's servant told him that she had no son and her husband was old. Elisha announced to her that she would have a son. The next year, she did!

We see in scripture that there are times that God gave children to women who had none. Sarah had Isaac. Rebekah had Jacob and Esau. Rachel had Joseph. Hannah had Samuel. Elizabeth had John the Baptist. Of course, the greatest miraculous birth of all was the birth of Jesus to Mary, the virgin! He was fully God and fully man.

God is so kind to us. Think of the many kindnesses He has shown to you. Give thanks to Him for His kindness and be prepared to show kindness to others and to also be a servant.

Ask God for the grace to be a servant.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- FIRST READ 2 KINGS 4:18-37

Have you ever longed for something only to have it taken away from you? If so, you can relate to the Shunamite woman in today's reading. We finally get the thing we long for the most and it is taken away from us. We wonder if the joy was even worth the grief we now experience. We feel our despair even more keenly due to the loss of what we once had. The joy of the Shunammite woman at the birth of her son turned to great grief when her son died. Without hesitation she went to the only person she knew could possibly help her. The man of God, Elisha. Elisha came to the boy and twice laid across him with his body, "his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, his hands on his hands" following the example of his predecessor, Elijah in 1 Kings 17:21. Elisha did this twice until the child sneezed seven times and was restored to life.

With a double portion of Elijah's spirit, Elisha only had to lie down on the child two times instead of three times to restore life to this little boy. But Elisha's spirit is only a foreshadow of the Spirit of God revealed in the resurrection of Jesus. Here we see Jesus leave heaven to come to earth and dwell with us. He rushed to the aid of the sick, the blind, the deaf to heal them. But the greatest healing He did for us was in His death on the cross. When Elisha lay on the boy he did not give up his life for the boy. When Jesus laid down His life He gave His perfect record for us by sacrificing Himself on the cross. God accepted this sacrifice and the Spirit of God raised Jesus from the dead. The Shunammite woman's son one day did die and so will we. But because of Christ's death and

resurrection, we have the promise of eternal life with Him (Romans 8:11).

For the Christian, this promise of eternal life means that as Tolkein said, “everything sad is becoming untrue.” This does not mean we do not mourn when we lose those we love. But it does mean we grieve with hope. We grieve with tears, and wailings, and groanings because we know we were not made for sin, destruction, and death. But we look forward to the day our joy will be restored to us in Christ. Look up, Christian. Look beyond. Look for the unseen joy that is coming to you because your Savior died and rose again!

Day 4- FIRST READ 2 KINGS 4:38-41

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What’s not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. What is happening in the land that makes this even more meaningful to the sons of the prophets?
5. Elisha removed the “harm” from the pot of stew just like Christ removed the wrath from the cup by drinking it for us (Matthew

20:22). Read 2 Corinthians 5:21 to see how Christ accomplished this for you.

6. What will you change today to better display the righteousness of Christ to others?

7. Share your response to #6 with someone today.

Day 5- FIRST READ HABAKKUK 1:5-12 AND ACTS 13:38-48

Often during the Old Testament days God would use a godless, foreign enemy to bring judgment upon His people when they were disobedient and not seeking Him. Habakkuk questioned why God did not do something since the people were being so evil. God told Habakkuk that He was going to do something very unusual. A foreign enemy would attack suddenly and violently.

Paul used this passage in Acts to tell the people God was going to act suddenly and in a very unusual way. Paul was thinking of when God sent Jesus to bring the good news. Paul told them the amazing thing God had done in their day was to send Jesus to die on the cross. Paul was alerting the people to warn them just as Habakkuk did. He was warning them not to miss the blessing of the coming of Jesus and His death and resurrection. In both cases Israel did not believe what God told them. The message of Paul was clear—do not miss what God has provided for you in Jesus Christ your Savior.

However, the Jews rejected the words of Paul because of envy. Their hearts were resistant to the gospel. This is a turning point in

the book of Acts. It is expressed in the words of Paul and Barnabas to the Jewish people:

“ And Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly, saying, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken first to you. Since you thrust it aside and judge yourselves unworthy of eternal life, behold, we are turning to the Gentiles.” Acts 13:46

The focus would now be to take the message of Jesus and salvation to all nations.

What about you? Have you received the wonderful news of God’s salvation! Don’t miss it!

As we come to the last section of the Old Testament we move from the time of the judges to the time of the kings. Technically speaking Samuel was not just a prophet and a priest, he was also the most significant of the judges. Samuel provides the transition from a very loose tribal government to a monarchy. Then we come to Saul, the first king anointed by Samuel. We then see King David the king who established the royal line leading to Jesus, the true King. The next section of our reading will contain a lot of action that you need to hold on to as we enter into the phase of biblical history that will lead us into the New Testament journey.

Week 66 NAAMAN IS CURED

By Chris Watson

As Americans, we seem to always think we need to have an answer for everything or need to be able to explain everything. Sometimes we even want to know why God does what He does or why He uses the methods He does. This week, we will be looking at the account of Naaman's cure. God used a method to heal him that Naaman wasn't exactly looking for. As believers, we need to trust God's plan no matter if it makes sense to us.

Day 1- Read 2 Kings 5:1-7

The Syrians had attacked the kings of Israel during a time in which the kings were leading people to worship idols against God. We see from Verse 2 that during the raid, those in Aram's camp took a little girl captive and took her to the house of Naaman to serve his wife.

We can imagine this was very scary for the little girl. However, she obviously trusted God and apparently was well aware of Elisha. She didn't tell Naaman to go to Baal or any of the other false gods. Instead, she directed him to Elisha who was a prophet of the one true God. She believed that God could heal Naaman of his leprosy.

Although she was probably afraid after being taken away from her parents, she trusted God to take care of her. She also trusted God to heal Naaman. Most importantly, she had a childlike faith. As adults, we often complicate everything. We talk about why God can't do something or how He can't save someone we know. We doubt He can heal a relationship or solve struggles that we are going through. However, we should be like this little girl and have a childlike faith. Having a childlike faith doesn't mean everything will happen according to my wants and desires, it means I trust God for what only He can do. I trust God to get it right and I put it in His hands. In Matthew 18:3 and Luke 18:7, the Bible talks about

coming to God like a child with childlike faith, meaning we come to God completely, trusting not just what He can do, but, trusting in Him alone.

Our trust in God should be like that of a child. This doesn't mean we will not struggle with questions; however, we will put our faith solely in God, like a child. Through these struggles, we can walk hand in hand with God knowing He is in control, just like this little girl knew and put into practice. Will you trust God today? Will you trust His plan and purpose even when it doesn't make sense to you?

Day 2- Read 2 Kings 5:8-14

Pride can be a nasty sin! In fact, pride and selfishness are often the underlying reasons for the sin in our life. Naaman was told that he could be healed. Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman to tell him what to do in order to be healed, but Naaman didn't like what was told. He thought God would heal him in a different way. Perhaps by the touch of Elisha's hands? We read that he went off in rage because of what he was told to do in order to be healed.

Thankfully, he had servants/friends that talked sense into him asking "wouldn't it be a 'great thing' to be healed? Why not follow Elisha's instructions and wash yourself in the river." Naaman listened to his servants and went and washed himself in the river.

We all need godly friends to hold us accountable and give us direction when we become nearsighted. We don't need just any friends, but godly friends who will give wise and biblical counsel! If the friends in Naaman's life hadn't encouraged him to follow the instructions given to him by Elisha, he probably would have been leprous for the rest of his life. We don't need people in our lives that tell us what we want to hear, we need those that follow God and tell us what we need to hear.

Often when we experience difficult situations in our families, work, church, school, etc, we become so focused on the situation we can't seem to think straight. I believe Naaman wasn't thinking straight; he had the chance to be healed, but he had a temporary moment of insanity! During times like this, we need to cling to God, His Word, and godly friends who will give godly counsel. Take some time today to thank God for the friends in your life who give you godly counsel and make sure to let them know you are thankful for them. If you don't have such friends, ask God to place people in your life who will hold you accountable and walk this road with you!

Day 3- Connect to Jesus- Read 2 Kings 5:15-19

Many people have noted that we live in a culture of outrage. We see it all over social media, and if we're honest we see it in ourselves. NPR reports, "Anger draws internet clicks, which is to say that many people now have a motive or even a business model for getting you mad." In short, people make money off our anger and outrage. In our story this week, we see Naaman, a high ranking general in the Syrian army, desperately needs help and yet he becomes outraged and offended when Elisha tells him how to be healed. He is a leper in need of healing and he doesn't want to do the one thing the prophet tells him to do to be whole: bathe in the Jordan River.

Sometimes grace is offensive. It outrages us to realize that we bring nothing of value to God. Accepting the free gift of salvation requires no grand gestures and there is no possible way we could repay Him. Indeed, what we bring to God is filthy and unholy to Him. Just like Naaman, all we can do is humble ourselves and accept the free gift of grace yet we can't believe we can't repay God for His kindness to us. Grace is free and it doesn't depend on anything we do, or say, or give.

Grace can be offensive. We can find ourselves working to repay God because we choose to believe that His wonderful salvation cannot be free. Tim Keller reminds us we have to repent of our own righteousness, “Lay your deadly doing down, down at Jesus feet. Stand in Him, in Him alone, gloriously complete.” Where are you trapped today in the offense of grace that causes you to drive yourself to repay God? Repent and receive again the free gift of God’s grace.

Day 4- Read 2 Kings 5:20-27

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What’s not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. What did Gehazi do and what was his punishment?
5. Gehazi tried to use God’s blessing for his own gain. How is Jesus so different from Gehazi?

6. What blessing of God can you share today expecting nothing in return?

7. Share with someone how God has blessed you (but try to refrain from sharing how you have blessed others).

Day 5- Read Psalm 111

God's Word is living and active and Psalm 111 is proof of that. Today we are going to do something a little different. Read Verse 2-9, reread and think on them again. In the space provided, going verse by verse, write down specific instances in scripture that each verse is talking about. For instance, Verse 6 we could say, "the fall of Jericho" or "the parting of the Red Sea" or we can think of another instance where God showed His power. After writing down how we have seen Him do these things in scripture, come back and write down how we have seen Him do some of these things in your own life. At the end of your time, thank God for His great power and faithfulness.

Verse 2

Verse 3

Verse 4

Verse 5

Verse 6

Verse 7

Verse 8

Verse 9

Week 67 The Fall of Israel

By Dennis Watson

After Israel divided in 930 BC, the northern kingdom was known as Israel, and the southern kingdom was known as Judah. The northern kingdom existed for about 200 years, from 930-722 BC. During that time the northern kingdom, Israel, had a total of 20 kings, all of whom did evil in the sight of the Lord and, for the most part, pursued idolatry. While Judah had only one dynasty for her 350 year history, Israel had nine dynasties. (A dynasty is a succession of rulers who are members of the same family or a single ruler of a family different from those before and after him.) Of the twenty kings in Israel, seven were assassinated. It was a very difficult time. Hosea and Amos were the prophets who gave warning to Israel of its coming fall due to corruption. This week, we look at the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel.

Day 1- Read 2 Kings 17:1-5

The kings of the northern kingdom of Israel were, for the most, part evil. There are two ways to turn in life-- to evil and Satan, the enemy of God, or to holiness and the God who is holy. The northern kingdom of Israel had a long history of idolatry. King Hoshea ruled in Israel for nine years and was their last king. From the beginning, just after the kingdom of Israel divided, the northern kingdom followed a course of idolatry. The temple of the Israelites' true God was located in Jerusalem which was in the southern kingdom. All of the people in the northern kingdom would travel every year to the temple in Jerusalem to pay their tithes and taxes. For this reason, the southern had more wealth. The kings in the north turned to idolatry trying to establish their own gods-- false gods. For this reason, the people of the northern kingdom turned away from God. King Hoshea conspired with Egypt's King So for help. Rather than turning to God, he turned to a godless nation for help. The prophets Hosea and Amos gave warnings to the kings and prophesied of the coming captivity.

When King Shalmaneser of Assyria heard that King Hoshea had turned to Egypt for help, he came and arrested Hoshea and threw him in prison. God used the pagan king of Assyria to bring King Hoshea to a place of desperation.

King Hoshea was in a real fix. He had sought help from an ungodly nation. He thought he could live his life without God. God used the King of Assyria, King Shalmaneser, to seek to bring King Hoshea to a place of repentance. Hoshea was counting on God to rescue him. In fact, it appears that God used this situation to accomplish His purposes.

I believe it was Charles Solomon who said something like this: “Often God puts you in a fix so that He can fix you. But when you try to fix the fix that God sent to fix you, you are really in a fix.” King Hoshea was in a real fix.

Make sure you turn to the one true and holy God when you are in a fix. He is the only One who can fix you.

Day 2- Read 2 Kings 17:6-14

Soon after King Hoshea was thrown into prison, the Assyrian army began to take the people of Israel into Assyria as captives or exiles. There were two major exiles for the people of God. This one was associated with the fall of Israel in 722 BC and the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah in 586 BC, when its inhabitants were taken into Babylon. We will look at the fall of Judah and the exile of her people in a few weeks (week 71).

The reason for this captivity of the people of the northern kingdom of Israel is recorded in **2 Kings 17:14**: *But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the Lord their God.*

God gives us His Word to guide us and part of that guidance is to warn us. The prophets had warned the people of the northern Kingdom of Israel, but they were ignored and the people did not follow their instructions. Warning signs are everywhere and the wise follow them. Instead of following the warnings of the prophets, the Israelites followed the lead of the pagan nations around them and imitated them. They built altars to false gods. Instead of destroying the Israelites, God had them taken into captivity with a plan to later redeem them. It is interesting to note here that 724 years earlier Israel had been delivered from captivity in Egypt. Now they have appealed to Egypt for help and because of this appeal and other sins, they were sent into captivity in Assyria. King Hoshea had already been arrested and thrown into prison. The people were now taken into captivity.

Sin and rebellion have serious consequences. God will not forsake us, however, we often have to live with consequences of our choices.

Ask God for the grace to live a life tuned to Him and His Word.

Day 3- Read 2 Kings 17: 14-17

I hope as you are reading this, the COVID-19 pandemic is a thing of the past! But today, it is very much present-in my home. Both my husband and daughter have it. As the pandemic has gone on and on and on, we have been lulled into thinking we couldn't get COVID. Like many people, we made choices disregarding the guidelines of the CDC thinking we would be okay. And now we have the virus. In our passage today, we read of the horrifying reality that occurs when we turn from God, in small ways, thinking it won't matter. But in the end it leads to death.

The people of Israel did as their fathers did. They turned from the worship of the true and living God. "But they would not listen, but were stubborn, as their fathers had been, who did not believe in the

LORD their God. They despised his statutes and his covenant that he made with their fathers and the warnings that he gave them. They went after false idols and became false, and they followed the nations that were around them, concerning whom the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them” (2 Kings 17:14-15). This led to all kinds of evil. They disregarded the commandments of the Lord. They made two metal calves. They worshipped Baal and eventually offered their children as sacrifices to this false god. They killed their children to appease a creation of their own mind.

I am sure when the fathers of these Israelites were stubborn and chose not to obey the Lord, they did not envision their grandchildren being placed on an altar and killed as a result of their choices. Sin always takes us farther than we want to go and takes from us more than we want to give. But thanks be to our God that He forgives us. “Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old” (Micah 7:18-20).

When we turn our backs on God He does not require us to sacrifice our children to pay for our sins. Instead, He sacrificed His own Son so that we could receive pardon for stubbornness, for despising His laws, for disregarding His warnings. Sin will lull us back into believing that our small choices of turning from God don't really matter. The grace of God displayed in the sacrifice of Jesus reminds us that our obedience in matters big and small is an offering to God in worship for His great love for us.

Day 4- Read 2 Kings 17:18-20

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. The fathers of Israel not only led their own sons astray, who else did they lead astray?
5. In this passage we read that God cast His people out of His sight. Were they really cast from His sight? Who was cast from God's sight and forsaken by Him (Mark 15:34)?
6. Read John 6:37. What promise can you cling to because Christ was cast out?
7. Who can you encourage today in their struggle with sin and suffering? Remind them that because they are in Christ, God will not cast them out.

Day 5-Read Psalm 78:1-8

The greatest need of all people is the Word of God. I know that there are a lot of daily needs like food, clothing, and shelter. The problem that brought Israel to this point was ignoring and rebelling against the Word of God. It bears mentioning again: there is evil and there is good. You choose one and turn from the other. We know good because we know the One who is the source of good. He is the Holy God made known to us in the Bible. The Word of God, the Bible, is where a person's faith comes from.

This psalm, along with many other passages in the Old Testament, speaks of Jesus. In this case, it speaks of how Jesus would come and teach using parables. We know this is true because Matthew 13:35 applies the words found in Psalm 78:2 to Jesus. He said that He would speak in parables. In the gospels, we see that indeed He did speak in parables.

When you read and study in the Old Testament, you are reminded very quickly that God continues His work. It is said that one-third of the Bible is prophecy. You have to read it thinking not only about the situation being spoken of, but also thinking of what is to come. Jesus is the One who fulfills all of the law and the prophets. Ultimately, what we read in both the Old and New Testament is the story of Jesus. We will one day be united with Him forever in the New Heaven and New Earth fully realizing that all we found in the Bible was about Him.

Give thanks to our Lord God for His Word and Words to us.

Week 68 Good King, Bad King

By Chris Watson

Last week, we read that the Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyria. We also learned that the kings of Israel were completely wicked. In fact, out of the 19 kings of Israel, only one was “somewhat” good. Can you imagine that? This week, we will read about Hezekiah, who was a really good king over Judah. Of all the kings of Judah, there were only four that were good kings that sought after God. The rest of the kings were wicked and did things as they saw fit.

Day 1-Read 2 Chronicles 29:1-30

In this week’s lesson, we read about a good king of Judah, King Hezekiah. During the time of Judah, there were only four good Kings, four “somewhat” good kings and twelve bad kings. To put it bluntly, the bad kings didn’t follow God at all. In fact, 160 years before Hezekiah took the throne, the kings of Judah followed anything but God. Thankfully, Hezekiah followed God and the things of God. From today’s scripture reading, we can see that he took the time to try and wipe out all the bad things in Judah, including clearing out and repairing the temple. The wicked kings had made a mockery of the temple by bringing in idols. Hezekiah was determined to make things right. Not only did he clean and repair the temple, he also offered sacrifices to the Lord and sprinkled blood on the altar for the sins of the people.

Hezekiah could simply have followed the ways of the other kings and everyone would have been happy. However, God put Hezekiah at this place for this time. He used him to bring people back to God.

Many times, things happen that are out of our control. There might be things that have happened before our time. Sometimes, people do evil things that affect others in the future. Someone growing up

in a family that doesn't have a history of following the Lord might find it easier to follow along as people did before, even if he or she now knows God and has learned about His ways. Maybe there are those who have gone before you that haven't exactly modeled Jesus to you. Maybe there were generations before you who didn't follow God at all. However, God desires for you to follow Him, and not to do what comes naturally or easily. May we daily surrender to the things of God. Regardless of what has gone on before us, may we be like Hezekiah and as Verse 2 of Chapter 29 says, might we do what is right in the eyes of the Lord.

Day 2-Read Chronicles 32:32-33:13

Manasseh rebelled against God and against his father, Hezekiah. Just about everything his father had accomplished in putting the focus back on God, Manasseh undid. He rebuilt the high places, built altars to false gods, and even put idols back into God's house. Manasseh was evil and sought to do the opposite of just about everything his father did.

Although we don't know for sure, we can assume Hezekiah taught his son about the one true God and told Manasseh to worship only Him. It's important that we not only teach our children about God, we need to teach them the foundation for our beliefs, rather than just telling them what to believe and how to believe. How do we know it's true? How do we know it's accurate? How do we know we serve the One True God? Truth be known, these are hard questions, but these are questions that will be asked. We need to be ready to give an answer for the hope within us. This doesn't mean we will know every answer or we will be the one with the most Bible knowledge, but we want to be able to share with our families why we believe what we believe. We want them to know our faith is not just a blind faith. We want them to know it is a faith that has been developed through the study of God's Word and through spending time with God in prayer.

There are many great resources that offer great insights to help us understand how we know we have the truth. One such resource is www.answersingenesis.org. You can enter just about any word or phrase in the “Search Bar” and find resources on things from “How we know the Bible is accurate?” to “Did God create the universe?” There are other websites available such as www.truelife.org, and www.rightnowmedia.org. That might also be helpful.

Most importantly, we need to ask the hard questions and then make sure we can answer them on our own. Does this mean our kids will be perfect angels if we teach them God’s truths? Of course not, but as they start school, go on to college, or enter the workplace, it will help them to more fully develop their own faith. Our children can know that what they have heard is the truth.

Day 3-Connect to Jesus-Read 2 Chronicles 30:1-26

More often than not I wake up in the middle of the night, solving problems, worrying, and taking inventory of what I did wrong the day before. In those dark moments when Satan is accusing me of all that I am not and all that I should be, I cling to the precious truth that Jesus is always there making intercession for me. He never sleeps. Even at 2 am He is standing before the Father pleading my case based not on my perfect record, but His.

In our story today we read of Hezekiah’s bold proclamation, calling the children of Israel and Judah back to the Lord. Hezekiah realized he and the people needed to repent and turn back to the Lord so he called them to come and celebrate the feast of Passover. Hezekiah was operating as both king and prophet, ruling the people and calling them back to God. It seems the priests of Israel were ashamed they had not been fulfilling their duties and they resumed their duties. The people were so happy to be keeping the feast they decided to extend it another seven days. They were so glad to be going before the Lord with their sacrifices, their

repentance, their thanks and their praise. And the Lord heard them.

How much happier should we be that our High Priest constantly lives with His Father always living to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25)? We don't have to wait for our leaders to call us to remember God's ways and to sacrifice before Him. Our King has made Himself the sacrifice for us. We don't have to wait for our Priest to feel shamed into doing His job; He already bore our shame and conquered sin and death. We don't have to sigh with longing for the Passover celebration next year when we can celebrate God's deliverance. We can come boldly before the throne in any state we are in and at any time we choose because our Passover lamb has already been slain once for all time. Rejoice today that your High Priest hears you, intercedes for you, and makes a way for you to come to the Father.

Day 4- Read 2 Chronicles 33:14-23

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, did both good and evil in the site of God. What does the passage tell us about the evil he did? What does it tell us about the good he did?

5. Reading about these kings of Israel and Judah makes us remember how difficult it really is to be faithful to God all of our days. Look up Revelation 19:11 to remember what one descriptor of our King.

6. How does Christ's faithfulness call you to greater faithfulness today?

7. Share with someone your commitment to renewed faithfulness today.

Day 5- Read 2 Kings 19

Once again, God's plan prevails. Sennacherib, the king of Assyria, had threatened Jerusalem. In fact, we see in Verses 9-13 of today's passage that the King of Assyria taunted them, called them out, and made a joke and mockery of the One True God! He even went on to say that those who had gone before him had destroyed many of their people and their god hadn't saved them, so why should Hezekiah think that his God would? This Assyrian king wasn't backing down and he sought to put fear in God's people and in particular, Hezekiah.

Hezekiah then did what we should all do when faced with fear, doubt, and struggles; he took it straight to the Lord. God answered through Isaiah, and in short, told Hezekiah (Verses 32-34) that not only will none of what the Assyrian king said come true, but he would even shoot an arrow in the city to save the city for His sake and for the sake of His servant, David. Thus the chapter ends with 185,000 Assyrians begin taken by his own sons.

Throughout this account, we understand that God's plan and His will, always prevails. No matter how evil the king, authority, or those that seem to be in charge are, God is ultimately in control. God will work everything out according to His plan, even when we can't see how or understand why, we can still trust God. We have learned through scripture and many other accounts that God can truly be trusted.

We must remember out of this tribe, the tribe of Judah, would come a remnant, as we read in Verse 30. Who would come from this tribe of Judah? Our King, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. God's plan would prevail, even in the chaos of the moment that Hezekiah faced. He took his concerns, his anxieties, and his doubts to the Lord and God's plan was fulfilled. Let us always trust in God and God alone.

Week 69 Jonah and Nineveh

By Dennis Watson

Jonah was a prophet who prophesied at least once to King Jeroboam II of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 14:25). He prophesied that the kingdom would regain some territory previously lost. However, in the book of Jonah, there is no activity in the north mentioned. Instead, it tells of a message God gave to Jonah to deliver to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. It may have been that he had retired in the region of Joppa. However, his life was suddenly interrupted with a message from God to take a 550 mile trip and travel to a Gentile city and announce God's coming judgement. The Assyrians were enemies of Israel. Jonah did not like the people nor did he want to see them repent and be spared the destruction that was coming. "To Jesus, the will of God was food that satisfied Him; to Jonah, the will of God was medicine that choked him."⁶ This week we will look at the biblical historical account of a man of God who did not initially want to follow God's instructions, but ultimately did.

Day 1-Read Jonah 1:1-6

In Psalm 139, David says that there is no place you can go to get away from God. Too bad Jonah didn't connect with that truth. The Lord gave Jonah very clear and specific instructions to, "*go to Nineveh, that great city, and call out against it, for their evil has come up before me.*" Verse 3 opens with a very short, three letter word that gets a lot of people in trouble - "but." Jonah knew what he was to do, but instead he got on a ship and went in the opposite direction. Nineveh was the capital city of Assyria and the people were enemies of Israel. Jonah had a problem with prejudice. He did not like Gentiles and especially these Gentiles. He could have had a slogan like, "The only good Assyrian Gentile is a dead one." He did not want them to repent. He wanted God's judgement to

⁶ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series)- Old Testament- The Bible Exposition Commentary- The Prophets

come upon them and bring their destruction. Jonah wanted no part of warning them.

Jonah had several problems. He had an attitude problem. First, he had the wrong attitude toward the word of God. Like many people, he thought the word of God was optional. He apparently believed he could take it or leave it when the Lord told him to go to Nineveh.

He also had a wrong attitude toward the will of God. He was convinced there was no way God could really care about the people of Nineveh. These people were Israel's enemies and God could not possibly want them to repent.

He also had a wrong attitude toward circumstances. He thought circumstances were working for him. He went to the boat, bought a ticket, went down inside the boat and went to sleep. He thought everything was working out great. Little did he know those circumstances were working to put him alone with God and a big fish!

Not a good place to be! Well, maybe it was a good place. Often, the Lord allows us to run just far enough to get to a desperate place where we can better hear Him.

Thank the Lord that He always knows right where you are and He can speak to you anywhere, anytime, under any circumstances, even under water!

Day 2-Read Jonah 1:7-2:10

The great 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said God never allows His children to sin successfully. Was that ever true for Jonah! Jonah found himself trying to do the impossible - run away from God. He boarded a ship with great sailors. When the storm came, Jonah was asleep down inside the ship, oblivious to what

was going on. The sailors awakened Jonah and asked him to pray. They had been praying to their false god while Jonah, a follower of the one true God, was sleeping. Now they wanted him to pray, too. The sailors cast lots to discover who was at fault for causing the storm; the process pointed to Jonah. They asked what was going on and Jonah came clean with them, telling them he was running from the Lord. When they asked what they could do to calm the storm, Jonah told them to throw him into the sea. The sailors were not willing to do that, so they just paddled harder. Their efforts didn't work. So they prayed to the Lord asking that He not hold this against them and they threw Jonah into the sea.

The Lord was patient with Jonah's sin of rebellion. Instead of allowing him to drown in his rebellion, God prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. God put Jonah in a place to think for three days. I assume it was a pretty smelly, cold and damp place; however, he was alive. While in the belly of the big fish, Jonah prayed. He prayed for God's help. He also accepted God's discipline, trusted God's promise, and surrendered to God's will. No doubt he was in a very precarious predicament. You could even say that his prayer was coerced. Maybe a better word would be desperate. He had nowhere else to turn. I've been in that position before. Not in a big fish, but definitely in places where I knew I had nowhere else to turn. I have discovered that is not such a bad place to be. We are all desperate. We are desperately in need of the Lord and for what only He can do.

Then, the Lord had the big fish vomit Jonah onto dry ground. God rescued Jonah from the mess he caused for himself. Thank the Lord that He saves even though we are all undeserving.

Day 3-Connect to Jesus-Read Matthew 12:39-41

Jesus refers to the story of Jonah in Matthew when the scribes and the Pharisees are insisting that he provide them with a sign to

prove that he was who he said he was. Jesus has been doing miracles and providing signs left and right, but the religious leaders are asking for just one more--not because they need one more. They are looking for ammunition to use against Jesus. They are stubborn and hard-hearted.

Jesus tells them that the only sign they are getting is the sign of Jonah. These religious leaders know the sign of Jonah well. They've taught the Old Testament story of Jonah's disobedience and his discipline. They know the story but they've missed the point. They've missed the fact that Jonah is pointing to a greater Jonah--Jesus, who willingly left the glory of Heaven and was fully obedient to his mission. The sinless one who pursues sinners--not just one group of sinners but sinners from all over the world.

Tim Keller says, "In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus says, "One greater than Jonah is here," and he's referring to himself: *I'm the true Jonah*. He meant this: Someday I'm going to calm all storm, still all waves. I'm going to destroy destruction, break brokenness, kill death. How can he do that? He can do it because when he was on the cross he was thrown--willingly, like Jonah--into the ultimate storm, under the ultimate waves, the waves of sin and death. Jesus was thrown into the only storm that can actually sink us--the storm of eternal justice, of what we owe for our wrongdoing. That storm wasn't calmed--not until it swept him away. If the sight of Jesus bowing his head into that ultimate storm is burned into the core of your being, you will never say, "God, don't you care?" And if you know that he did not abandon you in that ultimate storm, what makes you think he would abandon you in much smaller storms you're experiencing right now? And, someday, of course, he will return and still all storms for eternity. If you let that penetrate to the very center of your being, you will know he loves you. You will know he cares. And then you will have the power to handle anything in life with poise."⁷

⁷ Tim Keller, *The Prodigal Prophet: Jonah and the Mystery of God's Mercy* (Viking, 2018) p.206-207.

Day 4-Read Jonah 3:1-4:11

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of these verses?
How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. What was Jonah's message to Nineveh and how did it cause the Ninevites to "turn from their wicked ways"?
5. How is Jonah's attitude toward the enemy different from Jesus'?
6. Have you ever resented God's mercy toward another? What does this reveal about your own heart and your understanding of grace?
7. Spend time praying for God to pour His grace out on someone with whom you have fundamental differences.

Day 5-Read Isaiah 2:1-4

Can you imagine a time when there will be no war or conflict of any kind? That is what is described here in Isaiah. There is coming a time, in the last days, when people from all nations and races will come to Jerusalem to worship God. The weapons of war will be transformed into instruments of peace and farming. What could cause such a transformation? There is coming a time of separation-a time in which The Lord will separate those who are His children from those who have rejected Him and remained in their sin. The ultimate basis of the separation is Jesus. No one is capable of making himself acceptable to God. God removes the sin of those who receive Jesus as the One who takes away their sin and makes them acceptable to God. Those who receive Him will be transformed and given new bodies that cannot sin. This picture is so vivid in the Bible that people from all nations will come to worship the One True God.

Until that time, all believers are to love their enemies and share with them the truth of God's salvation. Jesus told us to love our enemies and then He went to the cross to show His love and provide forgiveness and salvation for all who will receive Him.

Jonah did not care for his enemies. He didn't want them to experience the love and forgiveness of God, he wanted them to experience His wrath. What about you? Have you received His love and forgiveness? Is there anyone you want to experience His wrath? Ask God to place His love for others within your heart; especially your enemies.

Week 70-Josiah, the Eight-Year Old King

By Chris Watson

During the past several weeks, we have seen a good king of Judah in Hezekiah, and after him, bad kings like his son, Manasseh and his grandson, Amon. We have seen that some of these kings were pretty young, but today we see one of the good kings of Judah, Josiah, who was a mere 8 years old. Makes me think, what was I doing at the age of 8? I surely wasn't fit to be a king.

Day 1-Read 2 Chronicles 34:1-7

Can you imagine being a king at 8 years old? What a huge responsibility! Notice in the 8th year of his reign, he began to seek the Lord and then he followed in obedience. He began to undo everything that his father and grandfather had done. As we learned a few weeks back, they had set up false gods, Asherath poles along with carved idols, and cast images. King Josiah spent some time undoing all of this evil that had gone on before him.

Notice what Verse 2 says, *“And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left.”* Josiah was a good king before the Lord, meaning he followed the ways of God and continuously sought Him. Now, we obviously know he was not perfect; he sinned just like everyone else. By the grace of God and only through God, he kept himself on the right course. He didn't take detours and he didn't get sidetracked. He didn't let those who had gone before him decide his path. He followed God.

Let us follow God, not veering to the left or to the right, letting only the one true God determine our steps. Today may your prayer be, “Lord I want to love and follow You with all that I am. I don't want to let others or past experiences determine my steps. I want to walk step by step with You.” Remember, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, we are responsible for our words, actions, and

thoughts. The same was true for Josiah. He could have followed the ways of those who went before him, but, thankfully he followed God, the one true God. Under God's direction, he followed the steps God had placed before him. Seek God with all of your heart and follow what He has planned for you!

Day 2-Read 2 Chronicles 34:8-31

At age 26, Josiah began to repair the temple. Under his father and grandfather, it had fallen into disrepair and he was going to change that. As we read today, in the process of cleaning out and repairing the temple, Hilkiah the priest, found the Book of the Law. The Book of the Law refers to the Torah which contains the first 5 books of the Bible, certainly the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy. When the Book of the Law was brought to Josiah, he tore his robe as a sign of sorrow, repentance, and totally being undone! While Josiah was already seeking to follow God with all he had, he now had the words of the Law. Upon hearing those words, he realized that he, along with all of the Israelites, had not kept the word of the Lord. (Verse 21) After sending for Huldah the prophetess, Josiah was told that the Israelites had indeed sinned against the Lord and totally forgotten about Him. However, the Lord would not punish Josiah. Josiah was grateful and he promised to obey God and His Word as long as he lived. (Verses 29-31)

Two things from today's passage seem very clear. First, God's people had purposely chosen not only to forget about Him, but they totally disgraced Him, His name, and His Word. The Book of the Law had apparently been hidden somewhere in the temple, yet no one had bothered to try to find it, let alone find out what it said. The people of Israel were totally disobedient to the Lord.

Secondly, the people disgraced the Word of God. They didn't care what God and His Word said. They lived as they wanted. They preferred to live out their selfish and lustful desires rather than to follow God. They neglected to read, hear, or study the Book of the

Law, which was evident by the fact that no one even knew where it was.

As Christ followers, we must not put aside His Word. We must not leave our Bibles to collect dust, stay in our car for weeks on end, perhaps not even being able to find them. It is God's Word and it instructs us on how to know God more and how to follow Him. Do you want personal revival in your own life? Read and study God's Word and live by it. Do you want to invest in others? Mentor them in God's Word and teach them the truths. May we not disregard God or His Word. If you have done so, confess your sin and repent, turning back towards God and His Word.

Day 3-Connect to Jesus-Read 2 Chronicles 34:32-35:19

Verse 33 of Chapter 34 says that the people did not fail to follow God as long as Josiah lived. With God's directions and guidance, Josiah and the people turned their hearts back to God. Because Josiah had decided to clean up and repair the temple, they found the Book of the Law. Because they found the Book of the Law, they could carry out the Passover just as God intended. We read in Verse 18-19 of Chapter 35, the Passover had not been celebrated like this since the time of Samuel and none of the other kings of Israel had celebrated such a Passover.

In leading the Israelites to return to celebrating the Passover, Josiah not only leads God's people to remember God's deliverance from Egypt, but they also look forward to God's ultimate deliverance of His people through the promised Messiah. They look back and remember the blood of the slain lamb that was spread over the doorposts and with it the mercy that was shown to the firstborn. Their resulting faithfulness during Josiah's reign is not just the result of being reminded of the law. It's the result of being reminded of God's promises and His faithfulness to them. As we look back on the Passover, we also look forward to the mercy shown to us through Jesus, the Lamb of God, who willingly

allowed Himself to be sacrificed on our behalf. We are reminded that Christ came and gave His life for ours. His blood doesn't cover the doorposts, but it covers our sins. In His mercy, He took our sins and transferred to us His righteous standing before God.

Like the Israelites, it is easy for us to forget who we are in Christ and all that we have been given and forgiven. It is easy for us to live our lives with a spiritual amnesia. Like the Israelites, we need the reminders from God's Word that point us back to Christ and help us to remember His great love for us. Each time we take communion, we are reminded that we don't have to be perfect because Jesus lived the perfect life for us. We don't have to live in shame and condemnation. He took those to the cross on our behalf so that we could live in perfect fellowship with God. Praise Him!

Day 4-Read 2 Chronicles 35:20-27

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Why do you think Josiah chose to fight Neco who claimed that he was advancing at God's instruction?

5. Compare how Josiah had clearly heard and obeyed the voice of God in the Book of the Covenant with how he missed the voice of God in the messenger to the king of Egypt.

6. Jesus did not come looking like the Pharisees expected. When might you be tempted to miss or dismiss the voice of God because of your preconceived notions about the messenger? How can we gain discernment?

7. Ask the Lord to open your eyes to all of the ways in which He is at work.

Day 5-Read Daniel 7:9-14

Daniel 7:13 speaks of “*a Son of Man.*” Many years before Christ would come to earth, Daniel was prophesying about Jesus. In Luke 5:24, we see one of the first times Jesus is called the Son of Man. He had healed a paralyzed man and told him to pick up his mat and go home. The religious leaders during this time were intrigued with Jesus, but they still had their doubts that he was truly the Son of God. The religious leaders were aware of the prophecies concerning Jesus. Many of the Jews could not and would not accept that Jesus was God’s Son. To many, He was a troublemaker and a hinderer to their plans, but few saw Him as the Messiah.

Who do you say that Jesus is? Is He just a way to heaven? Is He your “good luck” charm? Is He called on only when needed? Or, is He your Lord and Savior? In **John 17:3**, Jesus says, “*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” This means that the Son of Man (Jesus) is much more than just a way to heaven, although He is that.

Forgiveness of our sins through the blood of Jesus, not only allows

us to spend eternity with God in Heaven, but it allows us to walk in a relationship with God right now. You can have that relationship right now, right here, everyday. While receiving Christ as your Lord is of highest importance, you are to spend the rest of your life learning and growing in the salvation that Jesus has given you. We learn that we are saved from sin, saved from ourselves, saved from the enemy, and saved from hell. We also learn that we are saved to righteousness, we are saved to heaven, we are saved to victory, and most importantly, we are saved to God Himself, to a relationship with the almighty God.

As we read in Daniel, concerning the Son of Man, we know this was pointing forward to Christ, the Savior of the world.

Today, thank God for your salvation and for the Son of Man. Be thankful for all that is wrapped up in the salvation of, and from, Jesus Christ.

Week 71 The Fall of Jerusalem

By Dennis Watson

One of the many things I am learning in our journey through the Old Testament is that God is always at work (see John 5:17) and people in the Bible responded to His activity in one of three ways: ignore, rebel, or surrender. This week we look at the fall of Jerusalem. What a sad streak of rebellion and disobedience! The people and the kings heard the Lord's prophets and their warnings, but chose to continue to ignore and rebel. The good news is the captivity would not last forever, and the people were promised a time to return to the land and a new King!

Day 1-Read 2 Kings 23:31-24:20

How do you respond to the warnings of God? The law of sowing and reaping is a reality of life and especially the Word of God: *Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.* **Galatians 6:7-8**

So again, how do you respond to the warnings of God? As a believer, nothing can separate us from the love of God. The same was true of the people of God in the Old Testament. They would not cease to be the people of God. However, they did experience curses when they disobeyed and blessings when they obeyed. The kings of Judah were off and on in their following of God. The last four kings of the southern kingdom of Judah continued the practice of idolatry. The words, "*did evil in the sight of the Lord*" were used to describe the life of the last four kings of Judah. These kings were kings in Judah where Jerusalem was the capital. It was their disobedience or rebellion that ultimately led to the fall of Jerusalem. There was a bright spot in the line of kings after King Manasseh. King Josiah led with some positive changes. It was the reign of King Josiah that held off the destruction. However, with

the reign of King Jehoahaz, there was a return to idolatry. Jehoahaz reigned only a few months before being captured by the Pharaoh of Egypt. Then came Jehoiakim, who ruled eleven years. After Jehoiakim came Jehoiakin, who ruled only a few months before being captured by Nebuchadnezzar. Tomorrow we will look at the last king--Zedekiah.

The sin and failure of these kings would not go without chastisement of the Lord. Chuck Missler says the following about chastisement:

Chastening is evidence of God's hatred for sin and His love for His people. We can't conceive of a holy God wanting anything less than His very best for His children, and the very best He can give us is a holy character like that of Jesus Christ. God is not a "permissive parent" who allows His children to do as they please (Cf. Rom 8:29; Mt 3:17; 12:18; 17:5). Obedience builds character; sin destroys character; and God can not sit by and watch His children destroy themselves (Cf. Prov 3:11-12; Heb 12:5-11).

Are you concerned about the warnings of God? Ask Him for the grace to live a life of surrender.

Day 2-Read Jeremiah 25:1-11 and 2 Chronicles 36:1-21

When I was a child, my mother made it clear to me that I was to come home when the street lights came on. I would often push it and stay a little bit longer until she had to call me. If she called twice, I was in real trouble. That meant I could not go out of our yard for a week! I had been warned!

A warning is an act of mercy and kindness. A warning provides an opportunity to turn and get it right. For a period of 23 years, the Lord had given a warning to the people of Judah to turn away from worshipping idols and to return to the Lord. God was being kind

and patient. The prophet Jeremiah delivered the message, but the message was ignored. The people and the kings refused to hear Jeremiah's message and repent. He told the people that if they did not turn to the Lord, He would send Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, to take the people into captivity. The Lord referred to King Nebuchadnezzar as "My servant." He was God's servant in that the Lord used him to destroy Jerusalem and inflict the Lord's judgement.

The period of captivity would be seventy years. Why seventy years? Why did God predict that the Babylonian Exile would last 70 years? (605-536 BC) The answer seems to be that this was the number of years the people had failed to observe God's Law of a "Sabbath rest" for the land. God had decreed that every seventh year the land was to lie fallow (Lev. 25:3-5). The people were not to sow their fields or prune their vineyards. If the people would fail to follow this command, God would remove them from the land to enforce this "Sabbath rest" (Lev. 26:33-35). The writer of 2 Chronicles indicated that the 70-year Babylonian Captivity promised by Jeremiah, allowed the land to enjoy its "Sabbath rest" (2 Chron. 36:20-21). Therefore, the captivity lasted 70 years probably because this was the number of Sabbath rests that had not been observed for the land.⁸

Heard any warning lately? Ask the Lord to enable you not to ignore or rebel, but to surrender.

Day 3- Connect to Jesus- Read Jeremiah 23:1-8

God sent the prophet Jeremiah to the kings and the citizens to warn them. However, they did not listen to the warnings. **2 Chronicles 36:16** tells about their response, *"But they kept mocking the messengers of God, despising his words and scoffing at his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord rose against his people, until*

⁸ The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty

there was no remedy.” For that reason, God raised up the King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, to attack Judah and take the people into captivity in Babylon for seventy years.

In today’s passage, we see God’s judgement on the ‘shepherds’ or leaders who have not cared for His people. God first promises to hold them accountable; then He promises to gather and care for His people. He points forward to a day when Jesus, the Good Shepherd, will lovingly and perfectly shepherd His people, laying down His life for them (John 10:11-18). He knows His sheep intimately and they know His voice. He will care for them, search out and pursue the lost sheep and bring them back into the fold (Luke 15). He will provide for all of their needs (Psalm 23).

We are so often like the Israelites, putting our hopes in our earthly leaders. Even the best of leaders, the godliest of men, are unable to be the Good Shepherd that we ultimately need. Only Jesus can know us or meet our needs in that way because Jesus knows that our greatest need is an intimate relationship with Himself. And He gave His life that we could have it.

Day 4- Read 2 Kings 25:1-15 and Lamentations 1:1-3

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What’s not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?

4. 2 Kings 25:5 tells us that Chaldeans overtook the king on the plains of Jericho? Why might this be significant?

5. Lamentations 1:1 says that Jerusalem has become like a widow. Why is that an appropriate analogy? What does it mean that she has become a forced laborer or a slave?

6. Lamentations 1:2 tells us that Jerusalem weeps for her lovers and friends which have turned on her. What are those things or people in your life that you have looked to to comfort you in ways that only Christ can?

7. God's people were devastated by their capture and on the surface, their circumstances looked hopeless, but God would bring restoration. Seek out and encourage someone who is devastated by their circumstances and has lost hope. Tell them or remind them of God's plan for redemption and restoration through Christ.

Day 5-Read Jeremiah 32:37-41

Can you imagine being hauled off to some strange country and living there for an entire lifetime? It must have been very hard on the people to be snatched up and taken away. The very thought is terrifying. The Lord spoke again through Jeremiah to encourage the captives that this would not be the end of His covenant people. He gave them hope in the time of their despair. He said He would once again gather His people from all the lands where they had been exiled and He would bring them back to the land of Israel where they would live in safety. He expressed He would be their God and they would be His people.

He would not only gather them and return them safely to the land, but He promised to give them a new heart! He would give them an everlasting covenant. This “everlasting covenant” is another term for the “New Covenant.” The covenant spoken of by Jeremiah was spoken of by Jesus when He was with His disciples at the Last Supper. In **1 Corinthians 11:25** Jesus says, “*This cup is the new covenant in my blood.*” God was making it clear to the exiles that He would take care of them. He is letting them know He would provide for them in ways beyond their comprehension.

Once again, we get this great perspective. We read about the historic event, we read about God’s promise, and we read in history how God did exactly what He promised. God is faithful! Give thanks to Him for His faithfulness. Live with anticipation of what He still has in store for us. Cherish the new covenant which is written on your heart.

Week 72 Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

By Chris Watson

We begin looking today in Chapter 2 of Daniel. However, if we look at Daniel 1:1-2, we see some of the same history we read about last week. This account picks up with Daniel and some friends that were following God during captivity. The King had issued orders for these men to be fed a certain type of food and trained so that after a set amount of time they would enter into the king's service. The rest of Chapter 1, we see Daniel and his friends refusing to eat the king's food. Instead, they ate vegetables and drank water. At the end of 10 days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the other men who had eaten the royal food. We pick up at the beginning of Chapter 2 today.

Day 1-Read Daniel 2:1-16

Humans are limited and King Nebuchadnezzar's magicians, sorcerers, and astrologers found this out. The king not only wanted them to interpret the dream, but he wanted them to tell him what his dream was before interpreting it. Of course, they couldn't do it, they were humans after all. So, the King had decreed that all the wise men, including Daniel, were to be executed. (On a side note, did you notice that in Verse 7, he gave three of the young men new names? Those young men were Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Many know this account, but remember those names; we will see them again next week.) Once Daniel heard that he was to be next, he went to the king and asked for time so he could interpret the dream.

Daniel, unlike the king's men, knew the one true God. He knew that God was on his side and while he needed God to do what only He could do, he was trusting that God would do just that. In Verse 6, did you notice that Daniel and the other three young men were all from the tribe of Judah? Daniel put his complete trust in God and, as we will find out tomorrow, he pleaded with God to do what

only He could do. Daniel trusted God. Even if God had not done what Daniel asked, Daniel would have kept worshiping Him and not bowed down to the other “gods.”

Daniel had been placed at this time, for these events, to be used by God. While the king was bad and desired to kill anyone in his way, God put Daniel and the other men at this particular place, for this particular time. Daniel had trusted God completely and put everything that he had on God.

Do you ever find yourself in difficult, awkward, or hard circumstances? God may have us in these situations to work in and through us. It may be hard, it may be trying, and like Daniel, our very lives may be threatened.

We, then, have the choice to trust in God or trust in ourselves. Regardless of the outcome, we can know that God is in control! Is your trust in yourself, other people, or God? Have you been let down time and time again? May your prayer today be that you put your trust in God.

Day 2-Read Daniel 2:17-30

Oh, what a great God we serve! As we read today we find out that God revealed the mystery of the dream to Daniel. Daniel then went to the king and told him that no man could do what he was asking, but that there was a God in heaven who reveals mysteries (Verse 28). That’s the God that we still serve today.

Notice Verses 20-23. These verses bring such comfort and peace in times of uncertainty and chaos. In fact, in dealing with various situations over the last few months and then reading this passage, I was reminded that God is in control and my mind was put to rest. Daniel recognized he was not the one doing this. It was all God. From these verses, look below at what our God does:

- 1) He changes times and seasons. God gives us spring, summer, winter, and fall. He directs the sun, moon, and stars.
- 2) He sets up kings and disposes them. God is in control of all that is going on around us. Even with all the evil and corruption in our current politics, God sees, knows, and is in control. We have also been reminded that God directed the king's hearts.
- 3) He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning. God leads, directs, and guides those who fear and follow Him.
- 4) He reveals deep and hidden things. This is exactly what He did with Daniel. He was the only one that could have given Daniel the information that he needed. God speaks to our hearts as we grow deeper and deeper with Him and He shows us things that may be hidden.
- 5) I thank You and praise You - Most importantly we are to praise and worship God. Whether He gives us what we ask for or not, He is in control.

Thank God today that He is in control. If He controls the seasons, the kings, gives all wisdom and reveals deep and hidden things, He is certainly in control of what we may be walking through right now. Trust Him with it. As one author wrote, "When you can't see His hands, trust His heart."

Day 3-Connect to Jesus-Read Daniel 2:31-45

Only Daniel could interpret Nebuchadnezzar's dream and interpret it, he did! He basically told the king that after him other kingdoms would rise. Many scholars believe that the head (gold) of the statue represents King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, the arms and chest of

silver represents the Medo-Persian Empire, the belly and thighs of bronze represent the Greek Empire, and the legs of iron represent the Roman Empire⁹. The rock that we see in Verse 35 represents Jesus and the mountain is a picture of God's kingdom. The rock destroys the statue.

John Piper describes the scene this way: “The statue was targeted by a stone, which flew into the dream like a comet, smashed into the statue's feet, and, on impact, shattered the entire statue like safety glass. With one blow, the statue exploded into a pile of rubble, pulverized into a heap of human superpower dust, barely hitting the ground before the wind blew it all away into oblivion. The small meteoric stone, now on the ground, began to grow and expand into a mountain that covered the entire earth — the image of a new and unshakable kingdom now spread out over every continent, displacing all the world's superpowers in history. The fall of this giant man-statue is meant to remind us of David's sling-whirling, Goliath-defeating precedent. In both cases, the world's powers must fall before the reign of a Davidic king.”¹⁰

We see Christ referred to as the “rock” in other places in the New Testament, including 1 Corinthians 10:4. We read in Matthew 7:24 that a strong and sturdy house is built on the rock, which is Jesus. In Romans 9:33, Paul says the rock of God's truth is Jesus.

All other kingdoms and royalty will pass away. We see this in history with kings in the Bible, kings of years ago, and even kings and leaders of today. Their kingdoms have or will pass away, but the ultimate kingdom, the kingdom of God, will stand forever. Nothing will take it down. Earthly kings and leaders are just that, earthly. However, God's kingdom will reign forever.

⁹ Long Story Short, Marty Machowski, 365

¹⁰ John Piper, “God's Agenda on Debate Night”, [desiringgod.org](https://www.desiringgod.org), <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/gods-agenda-on-debate-night>

Day 4-Read Daniel 2:46-49

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. How did the Lord use the fear of certain death, impossible odds, and the power of God alone to save to impact the Kingdom of Babylon?
5. How was Daniel's posture before Nebuchadnezzar similar to Christ's posture? How was it different?
6. The king seems to glorify Daniel more than God. How are we often tempted to do the same? How are we often tempted to steal glory that belongs to Christ?
7. Memorize and reflect on Philippians 2:1-11.

Day 5-Read Isaiah 12:1-2

What is your salvation? When your back is against the wall and there is nowhere else to go, where do you go? The answer to this question often helps us know who we really trust when faced with struggles and difficulties and who or what we credit when life is great.

Verse 1 of this passage speaks of God's anger. God hates and despises sin. How do we know that? We know because of what He allowed His Son to experience on the cross. He loved you and me so much and desired a relationship with us, but our sin had to be paid for. The only One that could pay the price was the Righteous One!

Isaiah tells us that God is our salvation. When Jesus took our sins, all of God's anger and wrath was poured out on Jesus. Therefore, when we place our faith in Jesus and in what He has done for us on the cross, we are forgiven. When God looks at us now, He doesn't see sin, wrath, or anger, He sees the blood of His Son. It is the blood of His Son which allows us to know God in a real way and allows us to commune with Him always.

Just think! God is our salvation in many ways. God has saved us from ourselves, which most of the time is our greatest enemy. Our own attitudes, selfishness, and sin are often what keep us from fully experiencing Jesus. God has saved us from ourselves, from the enemy, from hell, and from sin itself. He has not only saved us from these things, but He has saved us to many things. He has saved us to Heaven. He has saved us to do good works, but we must understand we are not saved by good works. He has saved us to be in relationships with each other to know that we have brothers and sisters in Christ. However, most importantly, as **John 17:3** says, *He has saved us to Himself*. Eternal life is to know God and to know Jesus forever. I am saved from my past by Jesus,

meaning God has paid for the sins of my past. I am saved presently, meaning God saves me everyday from myself, and I am saved for the future, which means I am saved to a relationship with God in Heaven.

God through Jesus is my salvation. As Isaiah says, *He is my strength and my song*. Thank God for your salvation, what He has saved you to, from, and what we get to look forward to as well.

Week 73 Four Men in the Furnace

By Dennis Watson

The power and the presence of the Lord among His people is evidenced all through the Bible. It is especially seen when bold faith is practiced. The book of Daniel is about several things but one of the most significant is bold faith. It is seen in **Daniel 1:8** as, *“But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king’s food, or with the wine that he drank.”* We see it again in **Daniel 2:28** when Daniel says, *“But there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries.”* In Daniel 3:18, Daniel’s three friends are about to be thrown into the furnace and they proclaim they know God will take care of them, *“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.”* This week we see powerful evidence of faith in the Lord!

Day 1-Read Daniel 3:1-12

It is not unexpected to see a godless king filled with arrogance. After all, it has correctly been said that “power corrupts.” It requires a strong godly faith to remain in-check when power is conveyed by way of position. King Nebuchadnezzar proved that power really does corrupt the ungodly. He made for himself a huge gold statue of himself, which was about 90 feet tall. Talk about an over-inflated ego! He then, through his cabinet, sent word throughout the land at the dedication of the statue, all people were to bow down and worship it when they heard the music begin to play. If anyone refused to bow down and worship the statue when the music played, they would be arrested and thrown into a furnace of fire.

What a position to leave the people of God in! Three of Daniel’s young Israelite friends determined not to violate the first commandment which says, *“You shall have no other gods before me.”* They took a stand and, when the music played, they did not

bow down and worship. Some of the enemies of God and His people could hardly wait to tell on Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

It seems the ungodly are always looking for ways to test the faith of Jesus' followers. As the writer of Ecclesiastes says, "*There is nothing new under the sun.*" We live in a time very much like the days recorded in Daniel. Believers in Jesus are mocked and, on occasion, set up to be tested or expose their stance. We should welcome such opportunities rather than complain about them. Light shines the brightest in the darkest of times.

Ask the Lord to enable your faith to shine in the darkness.

Day 2-Read Daniel 3:13-18

There was a confrontation between King Nebuchadnezzar and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. He had issued an order that all the people were to bow down and worship his statue when the music played. They had refused and the King confronted them, "*Is it true, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you do not serve my gods or worship the golden image which I have set up?*" They stood firm! The King threatened them again with the fiery furnace. They told him they were not worried because they knew their God would take care of them and continued expressing their bold faith by saying, "*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.*"

A huge showdown! What would you do? We face these kinds of showdowns almost daily but we fail to recognize their significance. Belief and practice do not always line up. After all, it can be hard when your life is on the line. The determining factor is what you love the most. That is really what is at stake. What do you really determine to be most important, even to the extent of loss of friends, position, and yes, even life? For these three young men,

there was no question. They would stand clearly on the side of the Lord and Truth. In doing so, they left the outcome to Him. We often rationalize the “your faith or your life” issues. Sometimes we rationalize that it would be better to have a live believer than a dead one. Oh, really? What about this case where there were so few faithful believers? What if there were three less? Was that their problem or the Lord’s? They concluded it was the Lord’s problem and they trusted Him to handle it best, and in doing so, He was exalted.

The bold faith of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego is a testimony to their God and His greatness. Ask the Lord to enable you to trust Him more so that others will see His greatness.

Day 3-Connect to Jesus-Read Daniel 3:19-27

When it was reported to King Nebuchadnezzar that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego refused to bow down to the king’s statue, the king was very angry. He ordered the furnace heated up seven times hotter than normal and the three tied up and thrown into the furnace. He was so angry he did not wait to have their clothes removed. They were thrown in the furnace tied up and clothed. The haste and heat caused the death of some of the king’s guards. The three Israelites were not afraid, they stood firm and unshakable.

In verses 17-18, they reply boldly to the king, “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.” Tim Keller says, “Do you know what they’re saying? We serve and love God for Himself, not for what He gives us...They are saying we trust God period. Not God plus, plus, plus, plus. We trust God. We obey Him because He’s worth it, for Himself, not for what we get out of it. And as a result, they can handle anything. Behind this statement is

something all believers know. Yes, God can rescue you from death. But He will always rescue you through death. Because if you die in him, you will wake up in his arms where there is nothing but freedom and liberation, and joy, and therefore, you're always safe.¹¹

Suffering is inevitable, even for those who love God. We see this throughout Scripture. First Peter 1:6-7 reminds us that God uses suffering to reveal and refine our character. Isaiah 43:1-2 tells us that like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, God is with us in our sufferings. Tim Keller says, "You will feel Jesus Christ in the furnace *with* you to the degree to which you know that Jesus Christ was thrown in the ultimate furnace *for* you. No God saves like this!"¹²

Day 4-Read Daniel 3:28-30

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Suppose the story read that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego died instantly in the fiery furnace. Would this outcome negatively impact your view of God's sovereignty? Would you still view this as a great story of faith even if they died?

¹¹ Tim Keller, "The King and the Furnace"

¹² Tim Keller, "The King and the Furnace"

5. These men went into this situation as a group. In what ways does the faith of those around you help or hinder your own?

6. Is there a situation in your life where you are begging God to intervene? If he doesn't deliver you *from* the situation, will you trust Him to deliver you *through* it?

7. Who in your life is currently in a fiery furnace--a diagnosis, a troubled relationship, financial hardship, etc.? Will you commit to pray that they will know Christ's presence in the furnace?

Day 5-Read Isaiah 12:3-6

At the end of last week, we looked at the first two Verses of Isaiah 12. We saw how Isaiah expressed that God would, through the Savior Jesus Christ, replace His anger with grace and salvation. Jesus came to seek and to save that which was lost. Today, in the remainder of Isaiah 12, we see how we should respond after God saves us.

Jesus is our salvation. The Lord sent Jesus into the world to take away the power and consequences of sin. The results in our lives, according to today's passages, should be at least three specific things. First of all, what He has done should result in thanksgiving. What a blessing the Lord has provided for us. The Lord has accomplished forgiveness and salvation for us in Jesus Christ. We are forgiven and accepted by God, not based on our behavior, but totally because of His goodness and grace. Give Him praise and

thanksgiving for what He has freely given you in His Son Jesus Christ.

Secondly, as a result of what the Lord has done for us, we are to tell others about His gift for us, which is also for others. Make known His gift of salvation. In other words tell everyone in the world what He has done for you and for them. Make it known!

Thirdly, we are to celebrate by singing and shouting in great exuberance. Great joy and rejoicing should characterize our lives on a daily basis. Are you joyful and celebrative? If not, give more thought and consideration for the Lord's salvation.

Now pause for a few minutes, are you a person who lives with thanksgiving, rejoicing and an attitude of telling others what the Lord has done in your life? Ask the Lord to enable you to live a life that expresses rejoicing and thanksgiving for His gift of salvation.

Week 74 The Glory Belongs to God Alone

By Chris Watson

There is no good in us; scripture reminds us of this. If this is true, then we cannot and should not get the glory for doing anything right or good (based on truth and God's Word). We are inclined to sin, inclined to disobey, inclined to leave God, and inclined to do whatever we want to do. However, when God works in and through us, it is not us but God in us. The Apostle Paul calls this *"the hope of glory, Christ in us."* When God does something great, either in you or through you, make certain you are pointing the glory back to Him.

Day 1-- Read Daniel 4:1-18

King Nebuchadnezzar had another dream and this time it was of a tree. It was a big, nice, abundant tree where even animals found shelter and the birds nested in it. In the dream, the branches were to be cut off and the tree cut down as well, but the stump remained in the ground. Then the tree changed to a "him" as we see in Verse 15 and it was said that he would have a mind of man, but would be given the mind of an animal. Tomorrow we will see exactly what this dream meant.

Notice Daniel's name and the name that the king gave him. We saw this in Chapter 1, but in this chapter, we see the meaning of the name Belteshazzar. He was named after one of the king's gods and it is even said the spirit of the holy gods was in him.

Even after the king had seen the one true God work in and through Daniel and even after he had seen Daniel's God work a miracle in the fiery furnace, he apparently was still resisting the one true God. We know this because he called the magicians, the enchanters, the astrologers, and the diviners, once again to come and interpret his dream. If he had fully believed in the one true God he would have sent for Daniel immediately.

The king is stuck in his old ways. Although he had seen God do some great things and had acknowledged Him as the one true God, he was still not totally getting it. He was either not totally convinced, set in his ways, still giving into sin, or all of the above.

What about you? Do you fully trust God? Or, do you sometimes fully rely more on other people or things for direction, guidance, and wisdom? I think, at times, we all “forget” just what God has done and we seek to depend on our own understanding or another person’s understanding, because it’s what comes natural. May we always trust and put our hope in God. We have seen Him work mightily in our lives and we have seen through scripture just how He works in mysterious ways. Today, may your prayer be to fully trust God all of the time. When you waiver, jump right back on course.

Day 2-- Read Daniel 4:19-26

I am sure you can imagine why Daniel is perplexed in Verse 19. First, he probably can’t believe that the dream is speaking of the king and, second, he is the one that is going to have to tell the king the bad news.

Daniel told the king that he is the tree and the stump of the tree meant his kingdom would be restored when he acknowledged Heaven rules. We can imagine the king was not very happy when he heard this interpretation.

Today’s reading reminds us that God is in control. God is sovereign over the kings, presidents, leaders, you, me, every country, and every person. We need to trust God is always in control. This doesn’t mean things will go the way we want them to go or that we won’t face struggles and trials. The scripture tells us we will. Yet, the scripture also reminds us that God is in control.

Scripture tells us that in the end every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God. We can either do that willingly now or willingly later. Of course, if we answer His call now, we can spend our lifetime in a love relationship with Him. He will walk with us and guide us and we will spend eternity with Him.

God often does whatever it takes to get our attention. What He desires is for us to walk in step with Him. Are you walking in step with Him? Are you listening to His voice? Are you obeying Him? Are you seeking His plans? May we seek to always be walking in tune with God so that we can enjoy God and He can use us out of our obedience!

Day 3-- Connect to Jesus-- Read Daniel 4:27-33

Oh, how the mighty have fallen! You don't have to look far in our culture to find celebrities once living in the lap of luxury who fall from grace. Be it Tiger Woods, Harvey Weinstein, Oscar Pistorious, Lance Armstrong, Bill Cosby. The list goes on and on.

Topping that list in the ancient world is King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. He was a king who had it all and yet subsequently lost it all as quickly as it was gained. Daniel himself warned him in v. 27: ***“break off your sins by practicing righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the oppressed, that there may be perhaps a lengthening of your prosperity.”*** The promise was that God would continue to extend his prosperity if only he would practice righteousness and show mercy. This the greatest king of Babylon refused to do.

Now juxtapose this great King of Babylon with the great King of all Heaven and Earth. How remarkable that Christ Jesus made it his mission to practice righteousness. Indeed, his every action towards others conformed to God and His righteousness. Countless are the examples of mercy shown to others by this great

King of Heaven. To think that He would be subjected to humiliation, a humiliation even worse than Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar became as a bird of the air, but Jesus Christ, the great King of Heaven and Earth became as a criminal. His prosperity was cut short, despite his insistence on righteousness and mercy. We bear the benefits and the prosperity of his humiliation. Despite our own struggles with practicing righteousness and the dearth of merciful acts towards others, his prosperity is transferred to us. Give thanks to God today that Christ has suffered the greatest humiliation so that we might enjoy the greatest prosperity.

Day 4-Read Daniel 4:34-37

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Note all of the ways that Nebuchadnezzar describes God. Why do you think he would use those identifications?
5. How are those same identifications true of Jesus Christ? What difference does that make for believers?

6. What area of your life do you need to follow Nebuchadnezzar's example and humble yourself and "look to Heaven?"

7. What person do you think the Lord is calling you to share your response to question 6?

Day 5-Read Psalm 118:19-24 and Acts 4:11-12

Both passages today speak of a cornerstone or a stone which the builders rejected. A cornerstone is the first stone that is put down when constructing a building. Marty Machowski says, "the entire foundation of the building must line up to the cornerstone in order for the building to be strong and solid."¹³ In other words, the cornerstone or the first stone is vitally important because the rest of the building depends on it.

We know from the New Testament that many people, including the Jews, rejected Jesus. These passages say many rejected Jesus. Jesus is the cornerstone upon which everything is built. Jesus is the only right and secure cornerstone! If Jesus is not the foundation, then anything built is destined for total destruction.

The first part of the verse says they rejected the cornerstone, but the verse goes on to say He became the capstone, meaning God raised Him to the highest point. He is the authority and dominion over all. The house or apartment you live in was built on a foundation. If that foundation is faulty or wasn't laid correctly, you would probably know it by now. All of the walls, doors, and roof depend on a correct foundation. If it's not correct then everything else will be faulty.

¹³ Long Story Short, Marty Machowski, 376

If Jesus isn't our foundation, then our foundation will be faulty at best. In time it will crumble. If our foundation is money, fame, job status, popularity, relationships, or pride, (just to name a few,) eventually, the foundation will crumble leaving us with nothing. We must not be like the people we read about in Acts and reject Jesus as the cornerstone. Rather we must receive and place that cornerstone as the foundation of our life. From that we build (or Christ builds) us. If our foundation is not Jesus, then we are in trouble. Today, what is your foundation? Is your foundation things? Is your foundation people? Could it be money? If it's anything other than Jesus, confess it to Him and ask that He be our foundation. Don't reject His foundation, as it's the only true foundation and the only one that can be reliably built upon.

Week 75 Daniel in the Lion's Den

By Dennis Watson

In week 73 we saw faith in the fire. This week we see faith in the jaws of lions. This is another occasion of people striking at the followers of the Lord. We should expect this and allow God to use it. All that happens in life is not about us. If we go through life as His followers, all occasions become about Him. None of these events should draw attention to us. As with Daniel, on the occasion that brought him into the lion's den, it was about revealing the greatness and power of the Lord. This week, we see how Daniel's faithfulness to the Lord put him in the lion's den.

Day 1-Read Daniel 6:1-9

It appears there was a change in Babylonian leadership before this point. King Cyrus of Persia defeated Babylon and placed a king over Babylon by the name of Darius. King Darius organized the region into 120 segments with satraps over each one. Those 120 were divided into three areas with a governor over each one. Daniel was one of those governors. It is clear that the wisdom and ability of Daniel was recognized, even to the point that King Darius thought about appointing him over the whole region.

The other two governors and 120 satraps were obviously jealous of Daniel and sought for a way to discredit him, but they could find nothing of which to accuse him. Daniel was squeaky clean. In fact, it says Daniel was "faithful," of "excellent spirit" and "no fault was in him." Therefore, the group devised a plan to discredit Daniel regarding his God. They knew Daniel faithfully prayed to the one true God three times a day. The whole group got together, went to King Darius, and convinced him to make and sign a decree that for thirty days no one was to pray to any person or god except to King Darius. Anyone who violated the decree would be thrown into the lion's den.

Envy and jealousy can be a real problem for the people who are plagued by it, and also, by those who are the victims of the attack. When a person lives a life of faithfulness to God, others may become envious or jealous and seek to discredit them or make them look bad. Are you on one side of envy or jealousy? Which side? If you are jealous of someone, seek to establish your security in the Lord alone. If you are the victim, rejoice that God has counted you worthy to join in His suffering.

Day 2-Read Daniel 6:10-18

Did Daniel know of the experience of his three friends Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego? I feel certain he did. What about the people in the king's court? Did they forget that their God delivered them from the fiery furnace? Regardless, Daniel was still going to obey God!

We are often confronted with the challenge of whether to obey God or man. Again, "*there is nothing new under the sun.*" It happened in the days of Paul and Silas in the New Testament and in the days of Daniel. Contrary to the King's decree, Daniel went home and got down on his knees as he normally did, three times a day, and prayed and gave thanks to God. As you would expect, they were waiting and watching to catch Daniel in the act of praying. Once again, it appears that both governors and the 120 satraps went before the king and reported that Daniel had been praying. Now the king had to honor his decree and throw Daniel into the lion's den.

King Darius realized what had happened. He had been set up. He was displeased with himself for making such a decree and painting himself into a corner. In order to save face, he had to throw Daniel into the lion's den. He wanted to let Daniel off the hook, but he was stuck. He did all he could to get out of throwing Daniel into the lion's den. The king had to do it. He gave order to have Daniel thrown into the lion's den. King Darius expressed his own trust in

Daniel's God by saying to Daniel, "*Your God whom you serve continually will deliver you.*" King Darius fasted all night and could not sleep because he was so very upset at what he had gotten himself into.

Daniel's trust in the Lord was a witness to King Darius. It had an impact on the king who eventually trusted in the Lord, to an extent. Ask the Lord to provide grace for you to trust Him like Daniel.

Day 3-Connect to Jesus-Read Daniel 6:19-23

The lion. Long a symbol of various traits. In some venues, a symbol of majesty. In others, a symbol of strength. Often a symbol even of courage or justice. But when it comes to Daniel and the lions' den, some have seen that the shutting of the mouths of lions was far greater than just power and majesty.

In fact, one commentator noted that the lions of Daniel chapter 6 are a bigger symbol. "The destructive power of lions expresses the disharmony and chaos of the universe." For Israel reading this account, they would have seen the lions as representing all that is wrong in the world. And the shutting of the mouths of lions was a symbol that "in the promised age (the age to come), the chaos of creation will be restored to order and harmony." Does that make sense? In this story of Daniel, Israelites were having their hope restored. As lions symbolize how messed up this world is, God was setting things in proper order. He was instilling hope in a people, a people who had grown accustomed to exile, by revealing that things would not always be broken.

It would be centuries later that the assurance of that restoration of what is broken would come. It would come through another Daniel, one who was at the right hand of the king of Heaven-as opposed to the right hand of the King of Persia. It would come through Jesus Christ, who faced something far worse than being ripped apart physically by lions. He would face being ripped apart

spiritually from the Father. Daniel was spared this violent death, yet Christ was subjected, so that the harmony we were created for could be experienced. Praise God for the many aspects of that harmony that we already experience through Jesus Christ, while also praying for those areas of life where you would long to see harmony, the “mouths of lions shut.”

Day 4-Read Daniel 6:24-28

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What’s not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Another pagan king and another ascription of praise! What similarities does Darius’ identifications of Daniel’s God bear with Nebuchadnezzar’s identifications in Ch. 4? Why this description?
5. What comfort is offered in the judgment of Daniel’s accusers in 6:24? How does a believer receive comfort from the judgment of the wicked?
6. What area of your life is the Lord calling you to rest in the work of the living God? What area is He calling you to rest in His judgment upon the wicked rather than taking matters into your own hands?

7. As Christ calls us to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,” spend some time praying for those who have been adversarial towards you.

Day 5-Read Psalm 118:26-29 and Matthew 21:6-9

We looked at Psalm 118:19-24 last week. These verses speak about Jesus hundreds of years before He came into the world as God in the flesh. Today, these passages continue speaking of Jesus as the One who comes in the name of the Lord. This Psalm also speaks of Jesus being the light God has sent to shine in darkness. It is amazing to see Jesus all through the Bible. This is why we are calling this study, “Connecting the Dots.” In the New Testament we see these connections being made, which enable us to recognize how these verses were speaking of Jesus.

In Matthew 21:6-9, it is recorded that Jesus came riding on a donkey into Jerusalem. Along the way people lined the streets crying out, “*Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!*” This is why we call that particular Sunday, Palm Sunday. On that first Palm Sunday, people were lining the road and placing their coats and palm branches on the road for Jesus as He rode a donkey into Jerusalem. This is a direct fulfillment of what was spoken of hundreds of years earlier.

In **John 8:12**, Jesus tells the people, “*I am the light of the world.*” This correlates to Psalm 118:27 where God says that He has given us the light. Jesus is the light of God that has come into the world to provide His light in a sin darkened world.

The final verse says, “*His mercy endures forever.*” One translation sometimes translates this word ‘loving kindness.’ This is expressed in John 3:16. God has, in Jesus Christ sent His love into the world. In Jesus Christ, it all comes together.

Give thanks to the Lord for His light, loving kindness, and for sending Jesus, His gift of salvation.

Week 76 The Exiles Return

By Chris Watson

Open your Bible to Isaiah 44:27 and read all the way to Isaiah 45:12. Approximately 150 years before God used Cyrus to allow His people to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple; Isaiah wrote and prophesied about it. This wasn't a second option or a plan "B" that God came up with. This was part of His original plan, as we see from reading in Isaiah. This week we will read the account of the beginning of the rebuilding of the temple.

Day 1-Read Jeremiah 29:7-14 and Ezra 1

If you recall in Week 71, we saw the fall of Jerusalem. We can read about this in several places, including 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, and Jeremiah. Today, in our first passage, we read part of a letter which was written by Jeremiah to the elders, priests, prophets, and all the people that king Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. Remember, they were carried into exile because they refused to listen to the warnings and the words God spoke through His prophets. They were words of warning, words instructing them to turn to God and follow Him and leave all other gods behind. In today's passage, Verse 11 is one of the most quoted verses found in the Bible. It speaks as a promise to God's people (Israelites), stating that He will prosper them and give them a hope and a future. The Lord is letting the Israelites know He still cares and loves them and after all these years they will seek Him and He will bring them back to the place from which He carried them into exile!

God then raised, or used King Cyrus, by softening his heart to begin allowing the people to gather items and start going back to Jerusalem, in Judah, to rebuild the temple. The prophecy in Jeremiah 29 is coming true here, in Ezra 1. God's people had chosen to go their own way, but God had committed to them that after 70 years of exile in the Babylonian Empire they would gather

items and begin to rebuild the temple. To top that off, we read in Ezra 1:7 that King Cyrus brought out the articles belonging to the temple, which king Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem.

This is an amazing account as we see that which God spoke through His prophets, specifically Jeremiah, begin to take place. This is not coincidence or by chance, but by God's plan. God was using all of this to fulfill His plan. The Israelites were still His chosen people and He desired for their hearts to turn back to Him as they called out to Him.

God is always in control. He loves His children and while we may put ourselves in a bind, due to foolishness or disobedience, God doesn't go anywhere. He desires to walk with us, and grow with us. Isn't God's love and grace amazing? Take some time today to thank Him for who He is and what He has done.

Day 2-Read Ezra 3:1-7

God's people were back to worshipping Him through various means, including burnt and freewill offerings. As Verse 3 says, they were following exactly what was written in the Law of Moses. Notice that they didn't waiver. Verse 3 says they continued to build the altar and make sacrifices, despite the fear of other people around them. Remember that King Nebuchadnezzar had knocked down all the walls so the people were open to attacks. However, they trusted God and knew what they were doing was right and what God wanted.

The Israelites had tried all of the other ways. They had sought other gods, tried things on their own, disobeyed God, and selfishly did things as they wanted as we read in the book of Judges. As we see in Ezra 3, at least they were back on the right path, seeking and worshipping God.

What about you? Are you on God's path? Are you seeking and obeying Him? Or are you like the Israelites when they were doing things on their own? Have you tried things on your own in the past and now realize that God's way is the best? Or maybe you tried things on your own, years ago, but are now walking in the ways of Jesus. If you are far from God, come back. He is waiting. He desires for you to worship Him and walk in a relationship with Him. Just like the prodigal son, come home. If you are in God's will, thank Him for your salvation; thank Him for saving you from those times of foolishness in the past. Also, take some time to pray for family members, friends, and co-workers who are following their ways rather than God's. Ask God to bring them back to Him so they will seek and follow Him. All other ways leave us empty and always wanting more!

Day 3-Connect to Jesus-Read Ezra 3:8-13

We're one or the other. Either "glass half-full" or "glass half-empty" people. But did you know that those whose philosophy of life is more optimistic live 11-15% longer than those who see the glass half-empty. In Ezra 3, it may seem that both the "glass half-full" and "glass half empty" people are present. There are those who, at the founding of the temple's foundation, rejoiced at this special time in God's redemptive plan: "***they shouted with a great shout when they praised the Lord.***" On the other hand, there were also those who "***wept with a loud voice when they saw the foundation of the house being laid.***" There was a cacophony of rejoicing and weeping at the same time.

Echoing in the ears of those rejoicing and those grieving were the same words: ***He is good, His steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.*** Those rejoicing would have heard those words and would have confidence that the temple's new foundation was evidence of that steadfast love. Those weeping would have heard those words as a promise that surely the meager beginnings of this temple would blossom into its previous glory. But one would guess

those mourners would look both backwards and forwards. Looking back at what was and hopefully longing forward at the restoration that was to come. And what they saw at present was merely “*a beginning.*” (3:8)

This is the very situation that we all find ourselves in. We look backwards, considering the blessings of the garden of Eden that Adam and Eve experienced, and we mourn that things are not what they were. Yet we hopefully long forward, desiring for the full restoration of all things. The hope that we have for that restoration is grounded in another “*beginning.*” The work of redemption through Jesus Christ was a foretaste of the kingdom that is to come, but his death and resurrection marked “*a beginning*” whereby God and man are united, and all longing for the full restoration. So today, rejoice at the beginnings of restoration that Christ Jesus has accomplished. Yet, mourn specifically for those reminders that the kingdom has not yet fully come.

Day 4-Read Ezra 4:1-5 and 17-24

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What’s not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Why would the exiles not allow the adversaries of Israel to assist in the restoration? What would be their major concern?

5. What marks do the adversaries' indictment of Israel share in common with the adversaries' indictment of Christ several hundred years later? What motivates their indictments?

6. When's the last time you were reviled or persecuted for the sake of Christ? What does the lack of persecution reveal? How is the gospel to be applied to that reality?

7. Spend time praying through the beatitudes, especially Matthew 5:9-11.

Day 5-Read Haggai 2:6-9 and John 2:19-22

Jesus is the temple. We see this in our passage in John today and also in Haggai's prophecy. The prophecy was looking forward to Jesus as the temple.

You and I can call on Jesus' name anytime, wherever we go. We don't have to go to a temple, church, or special place to call on God's name. As believers, Jesus is always right with us, meaning we are the temple in which God dwells. God's people together make up God's Church and we can worship and meet with Him corporately as He has called us to.

In our daily lives we can call on God, the Creator of the universe. Had a bad or good day? You can call on God's name. Things falling apart or going great? You can call on God's name. Are you at Church or sick at home in bed? You can call on God's name. Are you in the US or halfway across the world? You can call on God's name. We see in scripture that Emmanuel means God with us. He is not just with us on Sunday or when things are going

great, God is always with us. Jesus lives in us. In fact, take some time to read these words, even if you know the son, and think on them today. Find yourself singing this and be reminded of this truth today:

He lives, He lives, Christ Jesus lives today!
He walks with me and talks with me along life's narrow way.
He lives, He lives, salvation to impart!
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart.

Jesus lives in us. In Colossians, Paul says He is the hope of glory, Christ in us. Today, let us focus on Jesus being with us always. He does, in fact, walk and talk with us. He lives with us and knows us. May we know and walk with Him.

Week 77 The Temple is Completed

By Dennis Watson

It is an amazing blessing to be reminded time and time again that God is in control. The words of **Proverbs 21:1** ring forever true, especially as played out in the book of Ezra: *The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.*

In Ezra as in the other books that describe the return of the exiles from captivity in Babylon, it is clear that the Lord God is directing the activity of pagan kings. Decrees were made by these kings providing protection and provisions for Israelites returning to Jerusalem. Of course it was the Lord who was providing the real protection and provisions, but He was doing it as He gave direction to the hearts of these kings. This week, we will look at the amazing provision of the Lord for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem.

Day 1-Read Haggai 1:1-15 and Ezra 5:1-5

Last week we saw that the people stopped building the temple because their enemies were harassing them. The people became discouraged and stopped building the temple and turned to building their own homes. As a result nothing they did prospered. They became frustrated. The harder they worked for them. The Lord did not bless their efforts because the temple was in shambles but their own houses were extravagant.

The Lord raised up prophet Haggai to give them a message. The message was clear and direct-- "stop building your houses and get to work on the Lord's temple." They had started and stopped. Although they had said, "it is not time to build the temple," Haggai told them that the Lord said it was time to return to building His house. As soon as they went back to work on the temple, a local governor by the name of Tattenai ordered them to stop. This time they refused to stop.

How difficult is it for you to do what the Lord wills? These people had returned to Jerusalem to rebuild-- the walls, their homes and the temple. They started building the temple, but got discouraged and turned to their own houses. Has that ever happened to you? You knew there was something that the Lord wanted you to do. You got started and then were interrupted, perhaps by hurt or discouragement. Hurt and discouragement can cause people to get their priorities out of order. Has this happened to you? Is there something you have put before the Lord? If so, ask Him for the grace to get your priorities back in order.

Day 2-Read Ezra 6:1-12

It appears that Governor Tattenai was really put out when the people continued building the temple. The people in charge of overseeing the construction were so focused on the Lord that they just kept building. They could not be stopped. Governor Tattenai was outraged, so he sent a letter to King Darius asking that a search be made of the royal records to see if there had really been a decree by King Cyrus of Persia permitting the people to rebuild the temple. The search was made and the record revealed that there had been such a decree. Can you imagine the aggravation of Governor Tattenai? He had to let the people continue to build.

The aggravation was only getting started. King Darius included some other things in his letter of response to Governor Tattenai. King Darius instructed Governor Tattenai to assist the construction by providing the needed funds! Can you imagine the outrage? He not only had to allow the construction to continue, but now he had to pay for it! I love it! Indeed the *“king’s heart is in the hands of the Lord and He directs it like rivers of waters.”* It gets better still! Governor Tattenai was to provide all animals as well as whatever else they might need for sacrifices in their worship. There was one more thing, those who interfere with the decree were to be hanged on a tree!

What an amazing account of seeing God in control! Although King Darius was not a believer, he even said in **Ezra 6:12**, *“May the God who has caused his name to dwell there overthrow any king or people who shall put out a hand to alter this, or to destroy this house of God that is in Jerusalem. I Darius make a decree; let it be done with all diligence.”*

Give thanks to God for His sovereignty!

Day 3-Connect to Jesus-Read Ezra 6:13-22

Some have estimated that an ant mound can contain nearly 500,000 ants. Others approximate that a flock of starlings can number upwards of 1.5 million. Some calculate that one school of herring can number up to four billion. These numbers seem staggering, not too unlike the numbers associated with the dedication of Solomon’s first temple. 22,000 cows and 120,000 sheep and goats were sacrificed in the dedication of that glorious temple.

Those numbers compared to the numbers associated with the dedication of this rebuilt temple are meant to be staggering. God had brought back Israel from exile; surely the sacrifices should number in the hundreds of thousands. Yet, the sacrifices were but 100 bulls, 200 rams, and 400 lambs. The sacrifices available were paltry compared to Solomon’s day, and the temple was equally as paltry. Though the passage proclaims hope over the reality of the restoration, as meager as it was, it also longs for a greater restoration which far surpasses.

Centuries later during the time of Herod, the temple would finally regain and perhaps surpass the opulence of Solomon’s temple, and would totally eclipse the meagerness of the temple in Ezra’s time. That greater restoration was achieved, as the opulence of the former temple could not compare to the temple that Christ Himself

would establish through the sacrifice of His own life. That sacrifice was more inestimable than 22,000 cows or 120,000 sheep or goats. For the very Son of God would climb upon the altar of the cross to dedicate and consecrate a new temple. This new temple would surpass the glory of both Solomon's and Ezra's rebuilt temple, because it is built with the beautifully sanctified and consecrated living stones that are believers. Today, try to number the beauties of the Savior upon which this temple was founded, and try to count the blessings of the living stones that the Lord has placed around you.

Day 4-- Read Ezra 7

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. Three times the phrase, "the hand of the Lord was on him" was used. (Ezra:7:6, 9, 28) What do you think it means that "the hand of the Lord was on" Ezra? How did that reality empower Ezra?
5. What hints of Christ do you find in the passage?

6. Given that the “hand of the Lord” is upon you because of the work of Christ Jesus, what might He be calling you to do that would require great courage?

7. In Ezra 7, God works through a non-Christian to bring about the restoration of that which is broken. Write a letter to encourage another, Christian or non-Christian, who serves to restore that which is broken.

Day 5-Read Zechariah 3:1-5

How vivid is your imagination? These passages describe a courtroom-like scene. Picture this: there are three actors in this vision that the Lord showed to Zechariah. The first is the priest, Joshua, who was standing before the second actor in the vision, the Angel of the Lord. The third actor in the vision is Satan. Joshua is representative of God’s people. The Angel of the Lord, who we have already seen, is a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus, and of course, Satan is the one who opposes God and man.

Joshua, representative of the Lord’s people, stands clothed in filthy clothing before the Angel of the Lord. The dirty clothing represents his sins and the sins of all people. Satan, observing the dirty clothing, slings accusations toward Joshua. We see this in Revelation 12:10 where Satan is referred to as “the accuser of our brethren.” The Lord (Angel of the Lord) interrupts Satan and tells him that Joshua has been rescued from the fire. The Lord then gave Joshua bright, clean, white clothes to put on. This is a vision of what God does for us in Jesus Christ.

Now, back to your vivid imagination; can you picture that same scene but instead of Joshua, it is you? Satan is day and night accusing you. It is often easy to believe his accusations because of

our sins and failures. However, in Jesus Christ, the Lord God has made you clean and pure. The Lord has rebuked your accuser telling him to shut his mouth because He had washed you clean in the blood of His only begotten Son. Picture it! The accuser has been silenced by the work of God. You have been washed pure in the cleansing blood of Jesus!
Give thanks to the Lord for His work of cleansing in Jesus Christ!

Week 78 Nehemiah

By Chris Watson

Last week we read that the temple was completed. However, even though the temple was complete, the walls of Jerusalem were still in piles of rubble and needed to be repaired. We have seen God raise many people up in the Old Testament for various tasks. This final week in Nehemiah is no different. He called Nehemiah to complete the work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Day 1-- Read Nehemiah 1

Our historical account picks up in Nehemiah 1, as Nehemiah heard that the walls of Jerusalem were still broken down and he was deeply saddened. This meant that God's temple and God's people were open to attack. Notice Nehemiah's response to this, he was broken down before God and sought Him in prayer.

In Verses 5-7 Nehemiah recognized his sins and the sins of Israel, realizing their actions were wicked and they had not obeyed God's commands or laws. Notice that before he offered up this part of the prayer, he acknowledged God for who He is and then asked Him to please be attentive to his prayer. Nehemiah was broken before God and sought after Him.

In Verses 8-9, He reminded God, but he was really just reminding himself, that He had said if the Israelites were unfaithful, they would be scattered among the nations, but if they returned to Him, He would bring all of His chosen people back to a place He had chosen as a dwelling for His name.

In Verses 10-11, He then asked and prayed for God to give him favor with the king.

Nehemiah prayed and sought God the entire time. Our daily life should consist of seeking God throughout every day. We should

certainly all have a quiet time when we seek God daily. As we are at work, at school, on the ball field, or at home, we should be in a continual attitude of prayer, seeking God's direction and guidance. Today, as you go about your day, seek God in prayer, always calling out to Him. As we will see with Nehemiah, He will answer. His answer may not come when we want it or hope it will, but God will answer.

Day 2-Read Nehemiah 2

God had raised Nehemiah up for this time. In fact, Verse 12 even says that God had put it in Nehemiah's heart to rebuild the walls. This was God's plan, and Nehemiah had to be obedient. Can you imagine yourself being put in Nehemiah's shoes?

As Nehemiah entered the king's presence, the king realized that Nehemiah was sad and asked what was wrong with him. Again, Nehemiah prayed to God before asking the king to let him return to Jerusalem to build the walls. Nehemiah prayed when he was in need of courage to follow God's instructions. He prayed and God answered.

What about you? What has God raised you up for? Many of us already know some of the answers. Are you a husband? God has raised you up to love your wife as Christ loved the church; He has raised you up to be obedient. Are you a wife? God has raised you up to be loving and submissive to your husband. Are you a child or a teenager? God has raised you up to be obedient to your parents at this time. God shows us clearly some of the things we are to do. However, as with Nehemiah, there are times that God reveals that He wants us to step out in faith. It can't be done on our own; we can't do it with our strength, and we certainly can't do it for selfish reasons. Maybe God has called you to teach, preach, be on mission with Him, meet a need, to be a friend to someone who is hurting. The list goes on and on! What has God called you to do and are you being obedient? Even when it gets hard, as it did for Nehemiah

in Verse 20, trust that if this is what God sent you to do and you obey. He will lead you and grant you the success He has in mind. What has God raised you up for?

Day 3-Connect to Jesus-Read Nehemiah 3

It's hard to read Nehemiah 3 without joining the dwarves in whistling: heigh ho, heigh ho, it's off to work we go. The constant repetition throughout the passage, "***they laid its beams, and set its doors, and its bolts, and its bars,***" almost mimics the falling of hammers and the sawing of saws. Yet, it's anything but drudgery, for Zion is being rebuilt. Jerusalem, which once lay desolate, now is being resurrected as all of Israel sets their "hands to the plow."

Well, almost all of Israel. Verse 5 notes, "***next to them the Tekoites repaired, but their nobles would not stoop to serve their Lord.***" All of Israel was employed in the task of rebuilding Jerusalem with each group responsible for their own corner of the kingdom, but one group refused to get their hands dirty. These unstoopable nobles refused to "bring their necks to the service of the Lord." To refuse to bring the neck was to refuse to come under the yoke of another. Contrast their actions with the actions of that great high priest, Eliashib (God restores), who certainly could have pulled rank on these nobles. He, as v. 1 affirms, "***rose up with his brothers the priests, and rebuilt the sheep gate.***" These priests, the ones responsible for representing God to the people, and bringing the people to God, were not so proud that they were unwilling to condescend to be a part of the rebuilding. Indeed, they knew that *city* of God could not be restored were there not a means for the *people* of God to be restored, through the sacrifice of the many lambs who would pass through that gate. And so Eliashib and his brothers gladly offered up their necks to the Lord so that the sheep gate could be rebuilt.

Centuries later another "Eliashib" (God restores) would bring his neck to the service of the Lord. Another high priest, more noble

than the Tekoite nobles, would stoop to serve the Lord, for He would condescend from the glories of a Heavenly Jerusalem into a creation more broken than this ransacked city. He put His hand to the plow in restoring Israel, healing the sick, exorcising the unclean, and loving the outcast and even those who often struggle to condescend. Your Savior's work is now your restoration, and he calls you to a similar work of restoration. Where have you struggled to bring your neck to the service of the Lord? What might His work of restoration in you be leading you to do?

Day 4-- Read Nehemiah 4 and 6:15-16

1. What observations do you make about these verses? (facts, big ideas, repetition, imagery)
2. What's not clear in the passage that you want to study more about?
3. How does the context impact your understanding of this verse? How does it relate to the rest of the passage before?
4. On two occasions the anger of Sanballat is recorded. Why ultimately would Sanballat be angry at the rebuilding of the wall?
5. The citizens of Jerusalem worked to rebuild with both the sword and the trowel. What are the respective purposes of the sword and the trowel?

6. How did Jesus bear both the sword and trowel in his ministry for you? What it would look like for you to bear both the sword and the trowel?

7. Who might you encourage to pick up the sword and trowel? How will you encourage them?

Day 5-- Read Zechariah 3:8-10

We have seen Jesus throughout this Old Testament study in many ways. In Verse 8 of today's passage, we read again about Jesus being referred to as the branch. Remember, in several passages we have seen Jesus the Messiah, being referred to as the branch. We will also see this reference in the New Testament Study.

Each year, the Jews celebrate the Day of Atonement, in which they are reminded of their sins and that only God could cleanse them. Years before Jesus would come and die on the cross; Zechariah was speaking of the branch that would come, which is Jesus.

When Jesus came, He would pay for all the sins of the world. Sins from before Jesus, while Jesus walked the earth and all the sins that will ever be committed. No longer are sacrifices needed to cover sin. The blood of Jesus can take away or wash every sin once and for all. Those in the Old Testament were made right by putting their faith and hope in God and we are made right when we put our faith and hope in Jesus, the One who takes away all sins. Jesus would pay for the sins of all.

As we end our Old Testament study, take some time to be reminded of how we have seen Jesus during this time. Thank God for Jesus, for what God has taught you, and for what He will continue to teach you as we jump into the New Testament.

Appendix

MOSES FLEES TO MIDIAN

By Dennis Watson

God was preparing a deliverer for His people to deliver them from Egyptian bondage. In the Bible Moses' life is divided into three 40-year periods. Each of these periods were preparation for Moses.

First forty years in Egypt

Second forty years in Midian

Third forty years in the Exodus wanderings

The second forty years were the result of being ahead of God's timing. Moses sought to rescue a Hebrew from an Egyptian. The second forty years were a time of leading sheep, also to prepare Moses to lead a large number of people.

The third forty years were the result of God's call in His timing. God's timing is always perfect.

God has a way of getting us where He wants us to be. This week we look at God preparing Moses for the great work of delivering His people from bondage.

Day 1- Read Acts 7:20-22

It is safe to say that Moses grew up advantaged. I am not talking about the advantage of being brought up in Pharaoh's palace. He was God-advantaged. God placed him in the palace of Pharaoh to prepare him for what God had in store for him and the people in Egypt.

God is always at work. He is never inactive. Look at the words of Jesus:

But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” **John 5:17**

Isn't it great how God cares for us? Last week we saw how God protected the infant Moses and placed him in a safe place—a basket in the Nile River and then in the Palace of Pharaoh. See, he was advantaged although it was a difficult time for his parents and all the Jacob-Israel family.

God used the first forty years of Moses' life to prepare him for the middle forty and the last forty years of his life. He was, in Pharaoh's household, God-advantaged. In fact, when we as God's own are seeking to be in His will, even when we are not, we are God-advantaged! While in Pharaoh's palace God was at work preparing Moses for what was to come.

I believe Moses loved God and was called according to God's purpose. Even when he was seeking to do what was right by killing an Egyptian that was beating a Hebrew, God used it. Moses was doing the delivering work, he was just too early. God used it to fuel Moses' passion and get him out of town. But more of that tomorrow.

For today we need to understand that the God-advantaged

Moses experienced education that thoroughly prepared Him for the two most history-impacting periods of his life. I do not believe that during that time Moses was thinking to himself, “God is preparing me for something special.” Yet God always is and has been preparing His own for special times to come. It is safe to say that God had Moses where He wanted him and was preparing the way. He was preparing him “*in all the wisdom of the Egyptians.*” Here is what Adam Clark says in his commentary about this regarding the Egyptians:

"Who were, at that time, the most intelligent and best instructed people in the universe. Philo says, Moses was taught arithmetic,

geometry, poetry, music, medicine, and the knowledge of hieroglyphics."¹⁴

God is eternally good! He is always seeking to adjust us to His plan. The problem comes when we resist the adjustment. It is our part to trust Him as He is at work. Moses was right in his desire to rescue his people. It was just not the right time.

Just think about how you, too, are God-advantaged. Think about the times He worked things out in your life when you were not particularly happy with the circumstances. Now you can look back and see how God was at work, working things out for His will. God works to conform us to His plan.

Day 2- Read Exodus 2:11-15

Moses was aware that the people in bondage being used for slave labor were his "*brethren*." He went out one day to check on them to see how they were holding up under their burdens. He saw one of his "*brethren*," one of the Hebrews being beaten by an Egyptian. In his passion and concern he intervened and killed the Egyptian. The next day he saw two of his "*brethren*," Hebrews fighting and once again he intervened to stop them. One of them questioned Moses, asking if he was going to kill him like he killed the Egyptian the day before. Moses was fearful, and when word came to Pharaoh that he had killed an Egyptian, Moses had to run for his life.

But thank God, His children are God-advantaged. Even when we jump ahead and try to take things in our own hands, He orders things according to His wise ends. As far as Moses' intervention between the Hebrew and the Egyptian, things were not yet ripe for the deliverance of the Jacob-Israel family. Warren Wiersbe explains the situation like this:

¹⁴ Adam Clark's Commentary

"The measure of Egypt's iniquity was not yet full; the Hebrews were not sufficiently humbled, nor were they yet increased to such a multitude as God designed: Moses is to be farther fitted for the service, and therefore is directed to withdraw for the present, till the time to favor Israel, even the set time, come."¹⁵

God's timing is perfect. Man's timing is either too early or too late. It was not time. However, the time was coming; just forty more years.

It seems like the perfect time to mention this verse:

" And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up." **Galatians 6:9**

Keep doing what you believe God has you to do. It can become wearisome and monotonous but keep at it. God has a plan and the plan will come together in His time. Don't grow weary. The harvest will come.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Deuteronomy 18:15-22 and Acts 3:22-26

Read Deuteronomy 18:15-22 and Acts 3:22-26 Reading the Bible is so much fun. It is like reading a novel again when you have already read it and already know how things turn out. It is great to read these accounts with the reminder that it is the Sovereign God of the Bible who is in control. With each reading new details and connections are discovered. With His Word, God has given us an incredible treasure. Each week there is a day to specifically connect to Jesus.

God gave Moses instruction to write about prophets in the law. There would be other prophets but Moses was one of the first. Moses wrote that there would be a prophet like himself who the people were to hear and if they did not, the people would be

¹⁵ Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament.

accountable to God. Adam Clarke writes in his commentary that the prophet to come would be, “a prophet, a legislator, a king, a mediator, and the head or chief of the people of God. This was the very person of whom Moses was the type, and who should accomplish all the great purposes of the Divine Being. Such a prophet as had never before appeared, and who should have no equal till the consummation of the world. This prophet is the Lord Jesus, who was in the bosom of the Father, and who came to declare him to mankind. Every word spoken by him is a living infallible oracle from God himself; and must be received and obeyed as such, on pain of the eternal displeasure of the Almighty.”¹⁶

In the passage in Acts 3, Peter was connecting Jesus the Messiah of God to the words spoken by Moses in Deuteronomy. Jesus was the One who would give the hearers a new law. This time in Acts was a transition period. The Jews were given one final opportunity to accept the Messiah. Of course, we now know that they did not, and Paul came on the scene as the apostle to the Gentiles.

It is amazing to read these words and see them come to fruition. God provided His prophets to speak forth God’s Word to His people. The Jews would be responsible to hear the message of the greater prophet, but their failure opened the door to the Gentiles. Jesus was the mediator, the lawgiver, the One who performed signs and wonders and was the true King.

Adam Clark summed it up this way:

"God never commissioned any human beings to give laws to mankind but Moses and Christ; and therefore, as a lawgiver, Christ alone resembles Moses; for to the present hour none but themselves have given laws in the name of God, which he has

¹⁶ Adam Clarke's Commentary.

ratified and confirmed by the most indubitable and infallible signs, proofs, and miracles."¹⁷

The biblical, historical, account goes on. Rejoice and celebrate what God has done!

Day 4- Read Exodus 2:16-21

It is amazing how God does things. When Moses transferred leadership responsibilities to Joshua, he told him, "*It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.*" **Deuteronomy 31:8.** Here is an incredible biblical truth: The Lord, "*He is the one who goes before you.*" God led Moses to the land of Midian and the Midianites. Talk about going before Moses! Who were the people and what was this land? The Midianites were descendants of one of Abraham's sons Midian by Keturah whom Abraham married after Sarah died. The Midianites were the descendants of Midian and therefore children of Abraham. It seems that God had an incredible way of keeping it all in the family. God had prepared a special place and a branch of the family for Moses to go to. For forty years he was safely being prepared for what was to come. He got married and started his family. He took care of his father-in-law's sheep which was great preparation for shepherding the people of Israel.

God provided Moses with a training ground with spiritual heritage:

"God guided Moses to Midian, because the Midianites were of the seed of Abraham, and retained the worship of the true God; so that he might have not only a safe, but a comfortable settlement among them; and through this country he was afterwards to lead Israel, which, that he might do the better, he now had opportunity of acquainting himself with it. Hither he came, and sat down by a well; tired and thoughtful, waiting to see which way Providence

¹⁷ Adam Clarke's Commentary.

would direct him. It was a great change with him, since he was but the other day at ease in Pharaoh's court.¹⁸

This was a forty-year period of transition in which God went before Moses. Just think, as you walk with the Lord, He goes before you. He has already been there and prepared the way. Trust Him and move forward with confidence and trust in Him.

Day 5- Read Exodus 2:22-25

What about the Hebrew people in bondage in Egypt? They had been there for four hundred years. Hearing their cry under their bondage was no surprise to God. However, now they were ready for rescue. God knew! He told Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 15:13-14, that Abraham's descendants would be in bondage in a strange land for four hundred years. God also told Abraham in the same passage that after that time, after the four hundred years, his descendants would "come out with great possessions." Now was the time. The people were crying out to be delivered. Moses was ready and the rest of the world was prepared.

Here we have another transition. God is spoken of like a mere man who "hears" and "remembers." But He is not like a man. These are anthropomorphic statements. God knows everything. He does not remember like a person who forgets. Human attributes are given to God. God never learns, remembers or hears at least not in human terms.. He knows all. Man's cries connect him to God. It is the case of a person coming to the end of themselves and seeking God. The Hebrew people, the Jacob-Israel family, could not do anything to deliver themselves from their bondage. They were in a place of desperation.

Desperation meets a dead end when a person meets Jesus who is saying, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" **Matthew 11:28**. It is not necessarily God's plan for

¹⁸ Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament.

us to labor and be heavy laden. It is however, His plan that we seek Him and cry out to Him.

Moses was ready. The Jacob-Israel people were ready. The surrounding nations were ready. The time had come. It was a time determined by God.

We end this week prepared for what comes over the next four weeks which is one of the most pivotal times in all of history—the birth of the nation of Israel! Through God’s call to Abraham God brought His promise to the world. Through His call of Moses, he delivered the Jacob-Israel family which became a nation, the nation of Israel. Through the nation of Israel God brought the Messiah, Jesus Christ the Savior into the world. What an amazing God and what an amazing plan!

THE LEVITICAL FEASTS

By Chris Watson

There are seven Jewish festivals, or feasts, outlined in the Bible. While they are mentioned throughout Scripture, we find instructions for all seven feasts in Leviticus 23. Leviticus 23:2 literally refers to the seven Jewish feasts as “appointed times,” also called “holy convocations.” These were days appointed and ordained by God to be kept to the honor of His name. These times of celebration are important not only to Israel, but also to the overall message of the Bible because each one foreshadows or symbolizes an aspect of the life, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of Leviticus contains God’s instructions to His chosen nation, Israel, on how they were to worship Him. It contains detailed instructions about the duties of the priests as well as instructions on observing and obeying God’s Law and the sacrificial system. God designated seven specific feasts that Israel was to celebrate each year. Each one of these Jewish feasts is significant both in regards to the Lord’s provision for His people and in regards to the foreshadowing of the coming Messiah and His work in redeeming people from every tribe, tongue, and nation. While Christians are no longer under any obligation to observe any of the Old Testament feasts (Colossians 2:16), we should understand their significance and importance.

The feasts often began and ended with a “Sabbath rest,” and the Jews were commanded not to do any customary work on those days. Both the normal weekly Sabbath and the special Sabbaths that were to be observed as part of the Jewish feasts point us to the ultimate Sabbath rest, which is found only in Jesus Christ. It is a rest that Christians experience through faith in the finished work of Christ upon the cross.

Beginning in the spring, the seven Jewish feasts are Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of

Weeks, the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Tabernacles. The Jewish feasts are closely related to Israel's spring and fall harvests and agricultural seasons. They were to remind the Israelites each year of God's ongoing protection and provision. But, even more importantly, they foreshadowed the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Not only did they play significant roles in Christ's earthly ministry, but they also symbolize the complete redemptive story of Christ, beginning with His death on the cross as the Passover Lamb and ending with His second coming after which He will "tabernacle" or dwell with His people forever.¹⁹

Day 1- Read Exodus 12:1-20 and Leviticus 23:4-8

The first 3 feasts happen back to back, almost simultaneously. The Feast of Unleavened Bread starts the very day after Passover is celebrated. Then, on the second day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Firstfruits begins.

Passover reminds us of redemption from sin. It was the time when Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, was offered as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. It is on that basis alone that God can justify the ungodly sinner. Just as the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the doorpost of Jewish homes caused the Spirit of the Lord to pass over those homes during the last plague on Egypt (Exodus 12), so those covered by the blood of the Lamb will escape the spiritual death and judgment God will visit upon all who reject Him. Of all the Jewish feasts, Passover is of the greatest importance because the Lord's Supper was a Passover meal (Matthew 26:17-27). In passing the elements and telling the disciples to eat of His body, Jesus was presenting Himself as the ultimate Passover Lamb.

The night of the first Passover was the night of the tenth plague. On that fateful night, God told the Israelites to sacrifice a spotless lamb and mark their doorposts and lintels with its blood (Exodus

¹⁹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jewish-festivals.html>

12:21–22). Then, when the Lord passed through the nation, He would “pass over” the households that showed the blood (verse 23). In a very real way, the blood of the lamb saved the Israelites from death, as it kept the destroyer from entering their homes. The Israelites were saved from the plague and their firstborn children stayed alive. From then on, every firstborn son of the Israelites belonged to the Lord and had to be redeemed with a sacrifice (Exodus 13:1–2, 12; cf. Luke 2:22–24).

The children of Israel in Egypt followed God’s command and kept the first Passover. However, none of the Egyptians did so. All through Egypt behind the unmarked, bloodless doorways of the Egyptians, the firstborn children died at midnight (Exodus 12:21–29). “*There was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.*” (**verse 30b**). This dire judgment finally changed the Egyptian king’s heart and he released the Israelite slaves (verses 31–32).

Along with the instruction to apply the Passover lamb’s blood to their doorposts and lintels, God instituted a commemorative meal: fire-roasted lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread (Exodus 12:8). The Lord told the Israelites to “*Observe this rite as a statute for you and for your sons forever*” (**Exodus 12:24**), even when in a foreign land.

To this day, Jews all over the world celebrate the Passover in obedience to this command. Passover and the story of the exodus have great significance for Christians as well, as Jesus Christ fulfilled the Law, including the symbolism of the Passover (Matthew 5:17). Jesus is our Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7; Revelation 5:12). He was killed at Passover time and the Last Supper was a Passover meal (Luke 22:7–8). By (spiritually) applying His blood to our lives by faith, we trust Christ to save us from death. The Israelites who, in faith, applied the blood of the Paschal lamb to their homes become a model for us. It was not the Israelites’ ancestry or good standing or amiable nature which saved

them; it was only the blood of the lamb that made them exempt from death (see John 1:29 and Revelation 5:9–10).²⁰

The Feast of Unleavened Bread followed immediately after Passover and lasted one week, during which time the Israelites ate no bread with yeast in remembrance of their haste in preparing for their exodus from Egypt. In the New Testament, yeast is often associated with evil (1 Corinthians 5:6–8; Galatians 5:9), and, just as Israel was to remove yeast from their bread, Christians are to purge evil from their lives and live a new life in godliness and righteousness. Christ as our Passover Lamb cleanses us from sin and evil, and by His power and that of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are freed from sin to leave our old lives behind, just as the Israelites did.

The Feast of Firstfruits took place at the beginning of the harvest and signified Israel’s gratitude to and dependence upon God. According to Leviticus 23:9–14, an Israelite would bring a sheaf of the first grain of the harvest to the priest, who would wave it before the Lord as an offering. Deuteronomy 26:1–11 states, when the Israelites brought the firstfruits of their harvest before the priest, they were to acknowledge that God had delivered them from Egypt and had given them the Promised Land. This reminds us of Christ’s resurrection as He was the “*firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Just as Christ was the first to rise from the dead and receive a glorified body, so shall all those who are born again follow Him, being resurrected to inherit an “incorruptible body” (1 Corinthians 15:35–49).²¹

Thank God for His incredible plan. This plan was not a Plan B or an “oh no” plan but God’s plan because He knew we would sin. The Passover specifically pointed to Jesus hundreds of years before He was born. Thank God for the ultimate sacrifice.

²⁰ <https://www.gotquestions.org/what-is-Passover.html>

²¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Jewish-festivals.html>

Day 2- Read Leviticus 23:9-14 and Acts 2:1-4 and 40-47

The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) occurred 50 days after the Firstfruits festival and celebrated the end of the grain harvest (the Greek word Pentecost means “fiftieth”). The primary focus of the festival was gratitude to God for the harvest. This feast reminds us of the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise to send “another helper” (John 14:16) who would indwell believers and empower them for ministry. The coming of the Holy Spirit 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection was the guarantee (Ephesians 1:13–14) that the promise of salvation and future resurrection would come to pass. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in every born-again believer is what seals us in Christ and bears witness with our spirit that we are indeed “joint heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:16–17).²²

Since the Feast of Weeks was one of the “harvest feasts,” the Jews were commanded to “present an offering of new grain to the Lord” (Leviticus 23:16). This offering was to be “two wave loaves of two-tenths of an ephah” which were made “of fine flour . . . baked with leaven.” The offerings were to be made of the first fruits of that harvest (Leviticus 23:17). Along with the “wave offerings,” they were to offer seven first-year lambs that were without blemish along with one young bull and two rams. Additional offerings are also prescribed in Leviticus and the other passages outline how this feast was to be observed. Another important requirement of this feast was when the Jews harvested their fields, they were required to leave the corners of the field untouched and not gather “any gleanings” from the harvest as a way of providing for the poor and strangers. (Leviticus 23:22).²³

After the spring feasts conclude with the Feast of Weeks, there is a period of time before the fall feasts begin. This time is spiritually symbolic of the church age in which we live today. Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection are past, we have received the promised

²² Ibid

²³ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Weeks.html>

Holy Spirit, and now we await His second coming. Just as the spring feasts pointed toward the Messiah's ministry at His first coming, the fall feasts point toward what will happen at His second coming.

We see in our reading today that the Holy Spirit came and did a great work. It is often said, "it would have been cool to have lived in Jesus' time and walked with Him." I agree it would have been , however, Jesus walks with us daily, every second of our day. He is with us even as we sleep. We have the Holy Spirit, the same Holy Spirit that came at Pentecost. Thank God for His Spirit.

Day 3- Read Numbers 29:1 and Leviticus 23:23-25

The Feast of Trumpets was commanded to be held on the first day of the seventh month and was to be a "*Day of trumpet blast*" **Numbers 29:1** to commemorate the end of the agricultural and festival year. The trumpet blasts were meant to signal to Israel that they were entering a sacred season. The agricultural year was coming to a close; there was to be a reckoning with the sins of the people on the Day of Atonement. The Feast of Trumpets signifies Christ's second coming. We see trumpets associated with the second coming in verses like **1 Thessalonians 4:16**, "*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.*" Of course, the sounding of the trumpet also indicates the pouring out of God's wrath on the earth in the book of Revelation. Certainly, this feast points toward the coming Day of the Lord.

The Feast of Trumpets began on the first day (at the new moon) of the seventh month. Its name comes from the command to blow trumpets (Leviticus 23:24; Numbers 29:1-6). It is also called Rosh Hashanah, which means "Head of the Year," because it marks the beginning of the Jewish civil calendar. During this celebration, no

work of any kind was to be performed, but burnt offerings and a sin offering were to be brought before the Lord.

In the Leviticus passage, the words trumpet blasts are a translation of the Hebrew word *teruah*, which means “a shout” or “a blowing.” It appears that the *shofar* (ram’s horn) was to be blown at this time, as it was on the other new moons (Psalm 81:3). Jewish tradition indicates that both the ram’s horn and the priestly silver horns (*hazozerah*) were used in the Feast of Trumpets.

The Feast of Trumpets was important for several reasons. First, it commemorated the end of the agricultural and festival year. Also, the Day of Atonement fell on the tenth day of this month and the Festival of Booths began on the fifteenth day. The blowing of the trumpets on the first day of the month heralded a solemn time of preparation for the Day of Atonement; this preparation time was called “Ten Days of Repentance” or the “Days of Awe.” The trumpet sound was an alarm of sorts and can be understood as a call to introspection and repentance.²⁴

In the New Testament, we see that the Lord’s Second Coming will be accompanied by the sound of a trumpet (1 Corinthians 15:51-52; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). Each of the judgments in Revelation 8-9 is also signaled by a trumpet. Just as the *shofar* called the Jewish nation to turn their attention to the Lord and ready themselves for the Day of Atonement, so will the “trump of God” call us to heaven and warn the world of coming judgment.

Are you right before God? Have you trusted Him as Savior? If not why not call on the Lord now to save you from your sins? If you are saved, ask the Lord in what areas of your life He needs to do a work. Take some time this week for introspection and repentance. Remember it's God's grace and kindness that leads us to repentance.

²⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Feast-of-Trumpets.html>

Day 4- Read Leviticus 23:27-28 and Hebrews 10:1-12

The Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27-28), also known as Yom Kippur, was the most solemn holy day of all the Israelite feasts and festivals, occurring once a year on the tenth day of Tishri, the seventh month of the Hebrew calendar. On that day, the high priest was to perform elaborate rituals to atone for the sins of the people. Described in Leviticus 16:1-34, the atonement ritual began with Aaron, or subsequent high priests of Israel, coming into the holy of holies. The solemnity of the day was underscored by God telling Moses to warn Aaron not to come into the Most Holy Place whenever he felt like it, only on this special day once a year, lest he die (v. 2). This was not a ceremony to be taken lightly and the people were to understand that atonement for sin was to be done God's way.

Before entering the tabernacle, Aaron was to bathe and put on special garments (v. 4), then sacrifice a bull for a sin offering for himself and his family (v. 6, 11). The blood of the bull was to be sprinkled on the ark of the covenant. Then Aaron was to bring two goats, one to be sacrificed "*Because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been*" (v. 16), and its blood was sprinkled on the ark of the covenant. The other goat was used as a scapegoat. Aaron placed his hands on its head, confessed over it the rebellion and wickedness of the Israelites, and sent the goat out with an appointed man who released it into the wilderness (v. 21). The goat carried on itself all the sins of the people, which were forgiven for another year (v. 30).

The symbolic significance of the ritual, particularly to Christians, is seen first in the washing and cleansing of the high priest, the man who released the goat, and the man who took the sacrificed animals outside the camp to burn the carcasses (v. 4, 24, 26, 28). Israelite washing ceremonies were required often throughout the Old Testament and symbolized the need for mankind to be cleansed of sin. But it wasn't until Jesus came to make the "once for all" sacrifice that the need for cleansing ceremonies ceased

(Hebrews 7:27). The blood of bulls and goats could only atone for sins if the ritual was continually done year after year, while Christ's sacrifice was sufficient for all the sins of all who would ever believe in Him. When His sacrifice was made, He declared, "*It is finished*" **John 19:30**. He then sat down at the right hand of God, and no further sacrifice was ever needed (Hebrews 10:1-12).

The sufficiency and completeness of the sacrifice of Christ is also seen in the two goats. The blood of the first goat was sprinkled on the ark, ritually appeasing the wrath of God for another year. The second goat removed the sins of the people into the wilderness where they were forgotten and no longer clung to the people. Sin is both propitiated and expiated God's way—only by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. Propitiation is the act of appeasing the wrath of God, while expiation is the act of atoning for sin and removing it from the sinner. Both together are achieved eternally by Christ. When He sacrificed Himself on the cross, He appeased God's wrath against sin, taking that wrath upon Himself: "*Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved from the wrath of God.*" **Romans 5:9**. The removal of sin by the second goat was a living parable of the promise that God would remove our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12) and that He would remember them no more (Hebrews 8:12; 10:17). Jews today still celebrate the annual Day of Atonement, which falls on different days each year in September-October, traditionally observing this holy day with a 25-hour period of fasting and intensive prayer, often spending most of the day in synagogue services.²⁵

Take some time today to thank God that He made an atonement for our sins. Some have broken up the word atonement like this, at / one / ment. God did this for us through Jesus so we could be "at one" with God. Thank Him for the ultimate sacrifice.

²⁵ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Day-Atonement-Yom-Kippur.html>

Day 5- Read Leviticus 23:33-37

The Feast of Tabernacles, also known as the Feast of Booths and Sukkot, is the seventh and last feast that the Lord commanded Israel to observe and one of the three feasts that Jews were to observe each year by going to *“Appear before the Lord your God at the place that He will choose”* **Deuteronomy 16:16**. The importance of the Feast of Tabernacles can be seen in how many places it is mentioned in Scripture. In the Bible we see many important events that took place at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. For one thing, it was at this time that Solomon’s Temple was dedicated to the Lord (1 Kings 8:2).

It was also at the Feast of Tabernacles that the Israelites, who had returned to rebuild the temple, gathered together to hear Ezra proclaim the Word of God to them (Nehemiah 8). Ezra’s preaching resulted in a great revival as the Israelites confessed their sins and repented of them. It was also during this Feast that Jesus said *“If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”* **John 7:37–39**

The Feast of Tabernacles takes place on the 15th of the Hebrew month Tishri. This was the seventh month on the Hebrew calendar and usually occurs in late September to mid-October. The feast began five days after the Day of Atonement and at the time the fall harvest had just been completed. It was a time of joyous celebration as the Israelites celebrated God’s continued provision for them in the current harvest and remembered His provision and protection during the 40 years in the wilderness.

As one of the three feasts that all “native born” male Jews were commanded to participate in, the Feast of Tabernacles is mentioned multiple times in Scripture, sometimes called the Feast of the Ingathering, the Feast to the Lord, or the Feast of Booths (Exodus 23:16; Deuteronomy 16:13). As one of the pilgrim feasts (when Jewish males were commanded to go to Jerusalem), it was

also the time when they brought their tithes and offerings to the Temple (Deuteronomy 16:16). With the influx of people coming to Jerusalem at that time, we can only imagine what the scene

must have been like. Thousands upon thousands of people coming together to remember and celebrate God's deliverance and His provision, all living in temporary shelters or booths as part of the requirements of the feast. During the eight-day period, so many sacrifices were made that it required all twenty-four divisions of priests to be present to assist in the sacrificial duties.

We find God's instructions for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles in Leviticus 23, given at a point in history right after God had delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt. The feast was to be celebrated each year on "*The fifteenth day of this seventh month*" and was to run for seven days (Leviticus 23:34). Like all feasts, it begins with a "*holy convocation*" or Sabbath day when the Israelites were to stop working to set aside the day for worshipping God. On each day of the feast, they were to offer an "*Offering made by fire to the Lord*" and then after seven days of feasting, again the eighth day was to be "*a holy convocation*" when they were to cease from work and offer another sacrifice to God (Leviticus 23). Lasting eight days, the Feast of Tabernacles begins and ends with a Sabbath day of rest. During the eight days of the feast, the Israelites would dwell in booths or tabernacles that were made from the branches of trees (Leviticus 23:40–42).

The Feast of Tabernacles, like all the feasts, was instituted by God as a way of reminding Israelites in every generation of their deliverance by God from Egypt. The feasts are also significant in that they foreshadow the work and actions of the coming Messiah. Much of Jesus' public ministry took place in conjunction with the Holy Feasts set forth by God.

The three pilgrim feasts where all Jewish males were commanded to "*appear before the Lord in the place he chooses*" are each very important in regards to the life of Christ and His work of

redemption. We know with certainty that the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread are symbolic of Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. Likewise, we know that Pentecost, which marked the beginning of the Feast of Weeks, was the time of Jesus' bodily ascension. And most scholars would agree that the Feast of Tabernacles is symbolic of Christ's Second Coming when He will establish His earthly kingdom.

Are you ready for His second coming? Are you looking for Him? It could be any day now. Make sure you are ready for the time is coming!

KORAH'S REBELLION AND AARON'S ROD BUDDER

By Dennis Watson

What an incredible biblical event the Exodus was! According to Adam Clarke's Commentary, there could have been 3,263,000 people who left Egypt in the Exodus event. That is a lot of people. It is often said that ministry would be easy if it weren't for the people! Of course, this is a silly statement because there would be no need for ministry if there were no people. Moses and Aaron had a real challenge on their hands. This week, we look at two events in which the leadership authority of Moses and Aaron are affirmed.

Day 1- Read Numbers 16:1-19

The people of God, after the Exodus, were not a spiritually minded people. Although they had seen the many miracles of God before and after the Exodus, they were still not willing to see the hand of God. One of the great problems facing people in churches, homes and businesses is that of authority. Someone has to take the lead. Parents have authority in the home, teachers in the classroom, managers in businesses, and civil authorities in cities, states and nations. When that authority breaks down, our homes, our churches, our businesses and our communities are in trouble.

The situation in today's text is one where the authority of Moses and Aaron is challenged. A Levite, by the name of Korah, begins to be critical of Moses and Aaron and then begins to talk with others who were responsible for the care of items of the tabernacle. Korah was a descendant of Kohath. Here is what Warren Wiersbe says about this group:

“The Kohathites carried the tabernacle furniture when Israel marched to a new location, and they camped on the south side of the tabernacle, across from Gad, Simeon, and Reuben. Perhaps this

explains how Korah was able to get Dathan, Abiram, and On, three Reubenites, to join him in his crusade.²⁶

As sad as it was, this happens too often. Their complaint against Moses and Aaron was they were taking too much upon themselves and exalting themselves above the others.

J. Vernon McGee describes the issue that is usually the real problem:

Now, actually, the charges made in this rebellion were not true to the facts. They were absolutely unfounded. Moses was not taking too much upon himself. If we go back in his history, we find that when God called him, he refused. He didn't feel capable of leading these people. Even after God had trained him in the wilderness, he didn't want the job. He asked for a helper, and God gave him Aaron. Moses was the meekest man on earth. When Joshua wanted to silence the prophets, Moses said that he wished all of God's people might prophesy. He didn't have a jealous bone in his body. My friend, we have seen that Moses was not sinless, but he certainly was not guilty of taking too much upon himself. What was really the root trouble here? It was the jealousy of Korah.²⁷

Moses was a humble leader. However, the most important thing about Moses was that he was God's choice to lead the people. This does not mean he was the most capable or best qualified, but he was chosen by God and that made him the most qualified.

The stage was set for a showdown for God to affirm those whom He had called to lead His people. God would show who the real authorities were.

²⁶ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – Pentateuch.

²⁷ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

Day 2- Read Numbers 16:20-35

God honors those He chooses to be in authority and He takes seriously the task He has called them to do. He also expects other people, and in particular those under their authority, to respect and follow their lead. David had been chosen by God to be king, but Saul was still king although God had rejected him. Saul was trying to kill David. On at least two occasions, it appeared Saul had been delivered into David's hands for him to kill. On one such occasion, David cut off a corner of Saul's robe and later showed it to Saul so he would know that David did not take advantage of the opportunity. David regretted what he had done saying to his men, *"he Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed."* **1 Samuel 24:6.** David had respect and honor for God's man of authority although he was behaving like a madman.

Korah and his followers were rebelling against both Moses and Aaron. There was no valid reason for this. It was simply a case of jealousy and wanting to be in their leadership role. Moses and Aaron were the chosen vessels of God. God was about to do a "new thing" to show who His chosen leaders were.

God told Moses and the people to separate themselves from these rebellious people because He was going to "*consume them.*" Moses and Aaron once again intercede for the people. God tells Moses to get the congregation away from Korah, Dathan and Abiram. Moses tells the people that he had done the things he had done "*Not of my own will.*" **(Verse28)** The Lord was going to demonstrate that He had sent Moses and Aaron to lead and be the ones in authority. God would "*Create a new thing, and the earth would open its mouth and swallow them up.*" **(Verse16:30)** This is exactly what happened to Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and their households. God caused the leaders of the rebellion and their households to be swallowed up by an earthquake. Then the two-hundred and fifty

others who joined in by burning incense in the bronze censers were consumed by fire.

God judged the rebels who challenged Moses and Aaron, but more importantly, God affirmed Moses and Aaron as His chosen leaders. They may not have been deemed the smartest or humanly most qualified, but God's call qualified them.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Matthew 28:18-20

This passage is known as the Great Commission. In verse eighteen, Jesus acknowledges that all authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him. God placed all things at His feet and before Him every knee will bow. Jesus is the ultimate authority. In the Great Commission, Jesus confers authority on believers to go into the whole world and make disciples. God gave authority to Moses and Aaron to lead the people. Their authority came from God. God gave all authority to Jesus and Jesus gave His followers authority. This authority is not a thing to be grasped, but to be humbly used to serve Jesus and others.

Paul writes in several places that the church is the body of Christ and each part of the body has a job to do. You can read this in Ephesians 4:11-14. To the church, God gave leaders with authority to lead and guide God's church. This authority is not to be used to lord over anyone, but to provide humble leadership. Jesus had authority, but He led gently and then laid down His life. In fact, in John 10:18, Jesus speaks again of His authority which is seen as humble:

"No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father." **John 10:18**

Another picture of God conveying authority on Jesus was at His baptism. God affirmed Him in His baptism with these words:

“and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.” **Matthew 3:17**

Then, in the resurrection, God confirmed the authority of Jesus.

In Hebrews, the writer says the people in the church are to obey and submit to those who exercise authority over them:

“Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” **Hebrews 13:17**

J. Vernon McGee explains this:

There are some ministers who use this verse and say that the members of their church are to obey them. However, it seems rather that the thought here is of leadership. He is speaking of spiritual leaders, and spiritual leaders are to lead folk to Christ. If a man is presenting Christ and is attempting to bring people into the presence of Christ, then that is a man to whom you should be loyal. But to be loyal to a man simply because he is the pastor of a church is not what Paul is talking about at all.²⁸

When God places leaders in the body, they need to be followed. Not without careful wisdom, but with humility giving consideration to the leaders as being God’s instruments. Someone has to lead and God has given such servant-leaders to His church.

Day 4- Read Numbers 17:1-8

What a big deal this affirmation was! God affirmed the priesthood of Aaron. The people were questioning the leadership status of Aaron just as they did Moses. God affirmed the priesthood of Aaron with resurrection. The resurrection is life out of death. This was not a case of reviving. Each of the tribal leaders were to have a

²⁸ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

rod with their name on it. The twelve rods were then placed in the tabernacle before the Lord and the rod that blossomed would be the man God chose. All of these rods were dry, dead and without life or any hope of life. The day after the placement of the rods in the tabernacle, Aaron's rod not only budded, but produced ripe almonds. One out of the twelve dead rods came to life and produced fruit. Clearly the priesthood of Aaron was affirmed by God through resurrection.

Now this same thing is true of Jesus. His place as our great high priest was affirmed and confirmed by His resurrection:

The priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ rests upon the fact of His resurrection. We are told very frankly in the seventh chapter of Hebrews that if He were here on earth, He would not be a priest. He did not come from the priestly tribe of Levi. His resurrection made Him a priest. Then it tells us not every man becomes a priest. *"And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron."* **Hebrews 5:4** Aaron was God's called priest. The evidence was the budded rod -- the resurrection.²⁹

But this affirmation of priesthood goes further. Look at this:

"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light." **1 Peter 2:9**

Our standing before God is made possible, confirmed, and affirmed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This confirms the resurrection He has made possible for us. We were dead, but He has made us alive. Life out of death is only possible by the miraculous power of God! There is not a priesthood in the world today recognized by God, except the priesthood of believers in His church!

²⁹ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee.

Day 5- Read Numbers 16:37-40 and 17:10-13

Aaron's dead, dry rod that bloomed and produced fruit was totally a miracle of God that anticipated the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ and even anticipated our own resurrection. The theme of resurrection is absolutely essential to Biblical truth. God told Moses to keep Aaron's rod that budded in the Ark of the Covenant "*Before the testimony, to be a sign against the rebels.*" God wanted the people to be reminded that He had confirmed Aaron's priesthood so they would not complain. According to Hebrews 9:4, also in the Ark of the Covenant, was a pot of manna and the Ten Commandments. These were to remind the people of God's activity on their behalf.

God gave these and other reminders for the people of Israel to follow and obey God. Warren Wiersbe says that believers today also have an abundance of reminders:

To encourage believers today to be obedient children, the Lord has given us His Word (John 17:17), the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19-20), the Lord's Supper, reminding us of the death of Christ and His promised return (11:23-34; 1 John 3:1-3), and the interceding Savior in heaven (Heb. 4:14-16; Rom. 8:34). Before we judge God's ancient people, perhaps we'd better examine our own hearts to see if we've submitted to the authority of His Word and of His appointed leaders.³⁰

God has always had a plan for His people. Whether it was moving three million people out of slavery in Egypt or leading a body of believers to be on mission with God in His world, God has always had people of authority in place to lead the way. It is significant that God's people be reminded to follow the leaders He has in place. I like to put it this way, if I, as a pastor of God's church, am leading them, the people should be willing to follow. If my leading

³⁰ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – Pentateuch

is biblical, moral, and ethical, then, the people should follow. Everyone has an opinion and we need to be free to express our opinions. However, there comes a time and place to follow those entrusted to lead

BALAAAM'S FEEBLE ATTEMPT TO CURSE ISRAEL

By Dennis Watson

There are so many occasions recorded in the Bible of enemies seeking to eliminate the people of God. This is not just true of the history recorded in scripture, but it is also true of attempts recorded in history after the Bible. In modern times, we have the attempt by Hitler and the Nazis and more recently by the Iranians to “wipe Israel off the map.” We have thousands of years of recorded history since Israel came into existence and a multitude of enemies seeking to eliminate them. Most of those enemies have been incredibly larger and more powerful in appearance. However, God made a promise and He is faithful. This week we look at a king by the name of Balak who became fearful of the people of Israel and called on a prophet by the name of Balaam to come and curse the people of Israel.

Day 1- Read Numbers 22:1-20

We know a lot about Balaam, but in many ways he still remains a mystery. He was a prophet. He was a Midianite and he was mentioned three times in the New Testament by way of warning.

The King of Moab, Balak, became terrified of the people of Israel. He had seen what they had done to some of the other nations and the people of Moab were “*sick with dread*.” King Balak sent a delegation to see this supposed prophet Balaam to ask him to come and curse Israel. This way, King Balak figured he could defeat Israel. The delegation from King Balak went to Balaam with payment in hand. They told Balaam why they were there. Balaam told them he wanted to sleep on it and hear from God, and he would let them know the next day. God appeared to him during the night and told Balaam not to go with them and not to curse the Israelites because they were blessed. Balaam reported to them the next morning refusing to go with them because, “*The Lord has refused to give me permission to go with you.*” (Verse 13)

The delegation returned, but King Balak was not giving up. He sent another delegation who were “*more numerous and honorable.*” (Verse 15) This time, Balaam refused again, but added a caveat saying, “*Even if Balak gave me a house full of silver and gold I could not go beyond the word of my Lord to do more or less.*” (Verse 18) I believe he was indicating he was holding out for more money. Once again, he told them he would let them know the next day what God said. Balaam was pushing for his own will. What he got was God’s permissive will. What we have here is Balaam’s temptation. Balaam was flirting with his own will and God let him go, but still he could only say what God told him.

How often have I done that? I know what God’s will and way is, but I want to push back and allow myself to be tempted. That is where Balaam was. His true colors would come shining through. Don’t flirt with temptation!

Day 2- Read Number 22:21-38

This time God permitted Balaam to go with King Balak’s men, but God was not pleased. In fact, God was angry with Balaam for going. God’s permissive will allows us to venture where He would prefer us not to go, but God allows us to walk down those roads when we are insistent. Even though serious, there are some very humorous parts of this account.

God was giving Balaam an opportunity to get it together and repent. Balaam saddled his donkey and went with the men, but God sent an angel to stand in the way with a drawn sword. The donkey was smart enough to turn aside, but Balaam refused to pay attention. So, Balaam beat the donkey and got her back on the road. Once again, the angel stood in the way leaving nowhere to go because there was a wall on either side. When the donkey saw the angel, she pressed Balaam’s foot against the wall. Once again, Balaam beat his donkey. The donkey journeyed on with Balaam riding, but this time, the angel stood in the way making the way so

narrow, there was no place to go. Balaam, in his aggravation and frustration, beat his donkey again. This time the donkey spoke to Balaam. The exchange between Balaam and his donkey went on for a bit. Ultimately Balaam repented and said he would go back home, but God allowed him to continue with the instructions that he could only speak what God said.

So how does this apply? Have you ever pushed so hard to do something you wanted to do and God permitted you to go that way? My experience has been that God also gave me opportunities like He did with Balaam to turn back to His will and way. God still uses donkeys! Pay attention. Don't let the donkey discern God's will while you are not paying attention.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Numbers 24:11-19

Balaam delivered a total of seven prophecies or oracles, but not once did he give even a hint of a curse on Israel, only blessings. This really angered King Balak. The first three prophecies were blessings. Balaam was faithful to God in that he told King Balak

he would only speak what God told him. After the first three prophecies, King Balak told Balaam to leave and go home and neither bless nor curse Israel. But before leaving King Balak, Balaam gave four more prophecies. Here is what the website gotquestions.org says:

“Before he left, Balaam reminded the king that he had said from the very beginning he could only say what God told him to say. Then he gave the king four more prophecies, gratis. In the fourth prophecy, Balaam foretold of the Messiah: “A star will come out of Jacob; / a scepter will rise out of Israel. / He will crush the foreheads of Moab, / the skulls of all the people of Sheth” (verse 17). Balaam's seven prophecies were seven blessings on God's people; it was God's enemies who were cursed.”³¹

³¹ <https://www.gotquestions.org/Balaam-in-the-Bible.html>

Who was anticipating the coming of the Messiah? There are other prophecies in the Old Testament regarding His coming. Daniel prophesied in the east and gave a very clear prophecy that would indicate the time of His coming. It is significant this prophecy of Balaam came out of the east, because it was out of the east that wise men came seeking the one who was born King of the Jews. Where would the wise men have learned about the star? How would they have come to associate it with a king born in Israel?

Every year at Christmas, we have sermons, plays, songs and displays of wise men coming to worship the Christ child. Most likely they made the 800 to 900 mile journey because they knew about the prophecies of Balaam and Daniel, both of whom were in the east when they made their predictions. Daniel even gave an indication of when to expect His arrival. (Daniel 9:24-27).

Few were expecting His arrival except Simeon, Anna and these wise men.

I hope you are enjoying connecting the dots. What an amazing thought that even the wise men did some dot connecting to find Jesus!

Day 4- Read 2 Peter 2:15 and Jude 11

We are reminded that Balaam was a prophet used by God to bless Israel and to give others a prophecy about the coming of the Messiah. We saw early on he had a problem with temptation in the area of greed or coveting. The New Testament mentions Balaam three times and not once is it flattering. We will look at two times he was mentioned today and the third tomorrow. The third one was his downfall.

What is "the way of Balaam"? Peter says he was *"The son of Bosor who loved the wages of unrighteousness."* (Verse 15b) Balaam knew that he should not go and prophesy against Israel, but he loved the price that was being offered to him. He pushed to go and

God allowed it, although he could not speak anything except what God said. He was hoping to somehow get a payday from King Balak. “The way of Balaam” is the covetousness of one who does religious work for personal profit. Balaam was after money and was willing to sacrifice his principles for it. Peter was warning the readers not to covet to their detriment. They would be sacrificing their personal and Christian convictions for financial gain. Ultimately we will see this is exactly what Balaam did.

J. Vernon McGee gives a great explanation of the “error of Balaam” found in Jude:11:

"The error of Balaam here in Jude is that he thought God would have to punish Israel for their sins. He did not recognize that there is a morality that is above natural morality. He thought that a righteous God had to curse Israel. He was totally unaware of the morality of the Cross. It is taught in the Old Testament that God can maintain and does enforce His authority, but He can be just and the justifier of a believing sinner. Balaam did not understand that God would forgive the nation Israel when they turned to Him. It is sometimes difficult for someone to understand how a man can be converted. When I worked in a bank, was led to Christ, and wanted to study for the ministry, my fellow workers, most of whom were church members, could not understand how I could study for the ministry. And they had ample reason to wonder about that, by the way. They couldn't understand that God had forgiven me and that I had a new life now. They just didn't believe that. They didn't believe it because they couldn't understand it. This is the same problem that Balaam had." ³²

God has settled the sin issue. For the Israelites, He did it with the bronze serpent, temporarily. God has gone to great lengths to remove our sin and guilt. We often look at other people and think to ourselves that they are unworthy of God's forgiveness. That is true, but it is true of all of us. He has made us worthy through the

³² Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

work of salvation through Jesus Christ. Do not think anyone is beyond the reach of God's love.

Day 5- Read Numbers 25:1-9 and Numbers 31:16

You really have to hand it to Balaam. He only spoke what God said regarding Israel when King Balak called on him to curse Israel. He blessed rather than cursed, but he found a way to bring about the trouble King Balak sought. In Revelation 2:14, Jesus said He has some things against the church at Pergamos. He said they held the "*doctrine of Balaam.*"

*But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. **Revelation 2:14***

You read about this in Numbers 25:1-9. The source of the problem is spelled out by Moses in **Numbers 31:16**:

*Behold, these, on Balaam's advice, caused the people of Israel to act treacherously against the Lord in the incident of Peor, and so the plague came among the congregation of the Lord. **Numbers 31:16***

Balaam did not curse Israel, but he came up with a plan for King Balak to weaken the people. The plan was to infiltrate Israel with ungodly people who practiced idolatry. Balaam told King Balak how to put a stumbling block before the children of Israel: Balaam wasn't able to curse Israel, but he knew how to defile them and seduce them into sin so great that Jehovah would judge them. Balaam suggested to Balak (31:16) that the Moabites (25:1) and Midianites (v. 6) convene a religious feast to honor Baal, and invite the Jews to attend. The feast, of course, would involve idolatry and abominable immorality and would be a flagrant violation of Israel's covenant with the Lord. Moab was related to Israel through Abraham's nephew Lot, and the Midianites were the

allies of Moab, so there was no reason why the Jews shouldn't be "neighborly." What Balaam couldn't do by appealing to the⁹⁸

demons, he accomplished by appealing to the flesh and inviting the Jews to "enjoy themselves" at Baal Peor.³³

Balaam was a wicked prophet. He was not a false prophet. He did hear from God and God did give him some true prophecies to speak. Balaam was not right with God and ultimately his true colors came shining through. Guard your heart lest you too be used of the enemy to put a stumbling block before others.

³³ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – Pentateuch.

THE NEXT GENERATION: A NEW BEGINNING

By Dennis Watson

The book of Deuteronomy is a book of transition. The generation that left Egypt some forty years earlier has died off, all except for Joshua, Caleb and Moses. Moses is writing or at least speaking this and we know the book of Deuteronomy closes with his death on Mount Nebo after the Lord allows him to see the land because *"The Lord showed him all the land"* **Deuteronomy 34:1**. The closing chapter of Deuteronomy was most likely written by Joshua. *"And then the Lord buried him."* No one knows where Moses was buried, but we do know he made it into the promised land because we read that Moses and Elijah were with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration. (Matt. 17:1-3; Luke 9:28-31) The book of Deuteronomy is about the transition from the leadership of Moses to that of Joshua. It is about reminding the people of their history and it is about entering the land.

Day 1- Read Deuteronomy 1

One of the great teachings of scripture, I believe, is that you cannot stay where you are and follow God. The life of walking with God is not a stationary one. To follow God is to keep moving. We must move in order to join Him in the next thing He has in store. The Israelites, under Moses leadership, were led out of Egyptian bondage in order to enter the land of promise and live there as the people of God. They were to be a shining light to the rest of the world. The journey they started was one that should have taken only eleven days, but due to their rebellion and disobedience, it took thirty-eight years. An eleven day journey turned into a generation of wandering. Moses told the people it was time to move in. They had dwelt where they were long enough.

Moses reviewed their history in the book of Deuteronomy. God had told them that He had provided the land and given it into their hands. Their part was to go and get it, but they decided to have Moses send in a team of twelve spies to check out the land and see

if they could take it. God had already told them it was theirs! It was not time to investigate, it was time to move in. However, ten of the spies gave a report that the people of the land were taller and greater and the cities were fortified. To the ten, it was an impossible task. That is the main reason for the years of wandering and floundering in the wilderness. None of the generation of people standing on the threshold of the Land of Promise would enter in except Caleb and Joshua. Not even Moses would go into the land. That entire generation would die off in the wilderness wandering.

How many blessings of the Lord are missed or forfeited because of unbelief, disobedience and rebellion? How many have you missed because you would not take the next step to follow God into the next adventure?

So where are you? Is your obedient surrender up to date? Was God trying to hurt or bless the people of Israel? Is there a mission trip in your future? Is the blessing of tithing and giving the next step? I may not even be close, but you get the point. What is your next step?

Day 2- Read Deuteronomy 6:1-12

The year I graduated from high school, the Jackson 5 recorded “ABC, 123.” Michael Jackson was 11 years old. It was 1970. The song is about how simple and easy love is. It is as easy as “ABC, 123.” Well that is true to an extent. Many things are simple, but living them out is the challenge.

God gave instructions to Moses to teach the people of the next generations the simple basics of walking with and obeying God. He gave them laws and statutes. He never intended for the specifics of the law to be the focus. They were not just to be learned, but incorporated into daily life.

Back to the ABC's. I read every day. I never pay much attention to the letters of the alphabet as I read, but each one is necessary for me to be able to read. The same is true when I am writing devotions. I write words using the keyboard of my laptop and that keyboard is made up of letters of the alphabet. I never think of the individual letters but of the words and sentences I am writing. Simple, right? Again, yes and no. What makes it simple is that years ago I was taught the letters of the alphabet. I learned, like most, the ABC song (not the Jackson 5's). Then, I was taught the sounds of those letters by themselves and then their sounds in conjunction with one another. The sounds became words and the words became sentences and communication. Over time and with much practice, those letters became instrumental for learning and communicating. The basics were learned early and soon became second nature. I never have to review the ABC's. They are a part of my mental makeup.

Moses was giving instructions for teaching the next generation about the ways and the things of God as they entered the Promised Land. These were to be instrumental for them to be the special people of God. They were to be God's people to communicate God to the rest of the world for generations to come.

The teaching of the laws and statutes of God were elementary but were to become much more.

Here is how Paul addressed the failure to move beyond the basics:

*For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, **Hebrews 5:12***

Have you been and are you moving on from the basics? Are you helping those of the next generation also move on from the basics?

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS- Read Deuteronomy 34 and Luke 9:28-31

Moses' life can easily be divided into three equal sections. The first forty years were the years in Egypt from the time of his birth until he fled after killing an Egyptian. The next forty years were spent in Midian taking care of the flocks of his father-in-law, Jethro. The last forty years were spent leading the people of God out of Egyptian bondage and through the wilderness wanderings. Moses was, like the entirety of the generation except for Joshua and Caleb which left Egypt, not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of their rebellion and disobedience. In God's mercy and grace, He allowed Moses to go to Mount Nebo to the top of Mount Pisgah to see the Promised Land.

And the Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there."

Deuteronomy 34:4

Then, Moses died and it says that the Lord buried him. Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died and he was still strong and had good vision. The Lord had truly blessed him.

It is sad to think that Moses only saw the Promised Land from the top of a mountain. Think again! We have this incredible account in the Gospels about the transfiguration when Moses and Elijah were with Jesus. Warren Wiersbe explains it this way:

However, all was not lost; for Moses did arrive in the Holy Land centuries later when he and Elijah joined Jesus in glory on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-3; Luke 9:28-31). Moses even talked with the Lord Jesus about "His decease [exodus]" that

He would accomplish on the cross at Jerusalem. (Moses knew something about an exodus!)³⁴

What the law could not do, Jesus did—get Moses into the Promised Land. Talk about amazing grace! Talk about the mighty power of God. Jesus is the Way for Moses too!

Day 4- Read Deuteronomy 16:1-8

When the people who had been in bondage left Egypt, forty years earlier, they left with special instructions. In these verses, they are told that the event is to be remembered with a special event and feast. The event and feast is known as Passover. On the night of their departure the Israelites were instructed to make special preparations so that they could leave Egypt in great haste. A special lamb was to be killed and cooked and its blood smeared on the door frame of all of the houses of the people of Israel. The blood was to be a sign to the angel of death to pass over this house because all inside were people of Israel who believed, and obeyed God and were ready to depart Egypt to move to the Promised Land. They were to eat a special Passover meal with each part of the meal having significant meaning.

Remember Deuteronomy is a review of their history and the law, a review to prepare the new and surviving Israelite generation as they entered to take possession of the Promised Land. As they were about to enter the land Moses instructs the next generation to observe the Passover celebration annually. The Passover celebration was to be a new beginning platform. This platform had three planks which were to remind and inspire and become instructional.

³⁴ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary – Pentateuch

Plank one, we will call independence day. They were to remember that they had been in bondage in Egypt and the Passover Celebration was their vehicle of independence.

Plank two, we will call victory day. They were to be reminded in the Passover Celebration of the victory God gave them as He miraculously delivered them from their enemy.

Plank three was to be a reminder of the new beginning not only out of Egypt but into the Land of Promise.

Greatest of all is we now know the Passover Celebration and event anticipated a lamb that would be slain for our independence from sin. It represented our victory over the grave and the new beginning we have been given of new life in Christ.

Jesus was our Passover Lamb. In fact, Jesus was killed on Passover. It was the night He shared the Last Supper with His followers and, for believers, that event became our Passover observance. It is a celebration of deliverance from sin. It is our celebration of victory over sin, death, and the grave. It is our new beginning because each day we are being made new by the work of Jesus Christ through His resurrection.

Day 5- Read Deuteronomy 30:15-20

In **John 14:6b** Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth and the life.”* Jesus is all of these. The only way to have the way, truth and life is to have Jesus. In today’s passage, God calls the people to a decision. They have the choice of life or death and blessings or cursing. The people were about to enter the Land of Promise. The blessings and benefits of the land were dependent upon their choice. God’s gift of salvation and deliverance are unconditional. God delivered the people out of Egypt and had given them the land. The blessings and enjoyment of the land were determined by their obedience to go take the land and live in ongoing fellowship with God. God placed a choice before them. The choice is life and

good, or death and evil. The choice is phrased differently, but it is the same—choose life that comes from God or choose a death type of existence out of fellowship with God.

Remember, these are God’s people. If they followed faithfully, they would live in the land and enjoy its blessings and benefits. If not, they would be scattered, but the land would always be theirs. When they were scattered He would bring them back.

The greatest blessing of all is God’s gift of salvation. We cannot lose that. However, we can miss out on the richness and benefits of fellowship with Him. God makes the relationship possible and He maintains it. We are responsible to maintain fellowship with Him.

The next generation was about to enter the land! They needed to know that two significant themes of following the Lord God are love and obedience. The two go together. I like the way J. Vernon McGee puts it:

I repeat it again: Love and obedience is the great theme of Deuteronomy. If this was so important for the children of Israel, how important it is for you and me in this day of grace when we have been given so much more light? Since we have been given more, our responsibility is greater. One of the things I pray for more devoutly than anything else is that I may be kept close to Him today. Oh, friends, we need to be kept close to the Lord Jesus Christ. How important it is!³⁵

However, remember He keeps us through salvation by the blood of Christ. We stay close by fellowship through obedience.

³⁵ Thru The Bible with J. Vernon McGee

