

**BE
GOD'S**

Light



VOLUME 2
READINGS, DEVOTIONS, POEMS

Fishers United Methodist Church

Introduction

This year-long study of the Old Testament is a follow-up to the previous studies on the four Gospels (“Be with Jesus”) and the rest of the New Testament (“Be on Mission”).

The Old Testament can be intimidating for many Christians. It is much longer (929 chapters) than the New Testament (260 chapters). Additionally, the Old Testament covers a much longer time period (2000 years plus) than the New Testament (less than 100 years). Also, it contains several kinds of literature including history, poetry and prophecy. Some of these are difficult to understand, further confounded by the fact that the prophetic books are not in the kind of sequential order that the modern reader is accustomed to.

To address these challenges, this study contains just 235 daily readings, only about one-fourth of the Old Testament. We will cover the grand sweep of the entire Old Testament, but many chapters will be left to the reader for further study. Still, we will explore the history of the people of God from creation to the time period only a few hundred years before Jesus. As we do so, we will explore what the prophets had to say to challenge and encourage the people to turn their lives toward God. While the wisdom literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs) are not a part of the daily readings, they will be referenced throughout the devotions to give insight to the themes covered.

Together, the Old Testament and New Testament are part of God’s continuous story. That is why they are both in the Bible! Along the way, we will examine how Jesus was the fulfillment of the Old Testament, and how the two testaments fit together.

There are several components to this year-long exploration:

1. **Daily Scripture Readings** – Actually, they are five days a week. Consider reading each weekday to anchor your day in Scripture.
2. **Daily Devotions** – These are written by me and correlate with the daily readings to help you think more deeply about what you are reading.
3. **Daily Poems** – These are written by my sister-in-law, Rev. Dr. Martha FrizLanger. They will help you imagine the Old Testament through poetry.
4. **Weekly Studies** – These studies, written by my colleague Rev. Dr. Ben Greenbaum, are great tools for small groups and classes.
5. **Weekly Sermons** – If you cannot attend worship with us in person, you can always watch them online, [visit fishersumc.org/begodslight](http://fishersumc.org/begodslight) for easy access, or view them in the Fishers UMC app.
6. **Weekly Podcasts** – Ben and I and some special guests will spend some time each week dialoguing about that week’s readings, visit fishersumc.org/begodslight for easy access.

As with the previous studies, throughout my devotions for the “Be God’s Light” study, I use capital letters when referring to Jesus: Son, King, Messiah, His, He, Him, etc. This sets Jesus apart from other mere humans. An exception is when talking about his relationships (e.g. “Mary’s son”). I do the same for references to God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. The hope is that we are all drawn to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in this study as One who is Holy, yet approachable through His kindness and salvation. All Scripture references are NIV unless otherwise noted.

It is my prayer that you will be motivated to explore the Old Testament like you never have before, then pursue God and minister for Him to a waiting world. It is my hope that you will “Be God’s Light!”

Enjoy the journey!

Rev. Mark A. Ellcessor
Senior Pastor, Fishers United Methodist Church

3/18/2024
WEEK 11 DAY 1

Priestly Offerings



Scripture LEVITICUS 7

Devotional

In Leviticus 19:2, the Lord says, "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy." This call to holiness is carried throughout Scripture. In the New Testament, 1 Peter 1:13-16 says, "Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: 'Be holy, because I am holy.'"

The Book of Leviticus is about living into that calling to be holy. It includes instructions for worship, offerings, priests, purity, hygiene, morality and seasonal feasts. Recall the Hebrews had just come out of hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt. They would need divine direction if they had any hope of establishing a healthy culture where they were free and in charge.

The first several chapters of Leviticus deal with special offerings the people and priests were to make before the Lord. Why were each of these important for the people of God? How can we apply them today?

The Grain Offering - to honor God for all that we have

The Fellowship Offering - to thank God and be in fellowship with Him

The Burnt Offering - to make payment for general sin

The Sin Offering - to give sacrifice for unintentional sin

The Guilt Offering - to give sacrifice for intentional sins against God or people

All of these demanded humility from the worshiper. When people brought these offerings to the Lord, they were acknowledging that He was God and they were not. When you give God your tithes and offerings, what does it do in you? How is this an act of humility? In what other ways do you worship God sacrificially?

Through His death on the cross, Jesus made a final sacrifice. Colossians 1:19-20 puts it like this: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." Thank Jesus for His great sacrifice for your sins!

Poem

God's Diet

*No fat allowed from animals
Its high cholest'rol burn
Chew on the steak,
Enjoy the wine
But fat to me return
The meat enjoy
But not the blood
Potatoes don't need gravy
Fruit, grains and vegetables;
Good choice!
The pure begin now craving*

3/18/2024
WEEK 11 DAY 1

The Ordination of Aaron and His Sons



Scripture LEVITICUS 8

Devotional

In addition to the sacrificial offerings, God set aside priests to lead the people in worship and life. As part of the tribe of Levi, Aaron's descendants alone would serve as priests. They would make the offerings and stand in the gap as mediators between the people and God.

What do the following passages say about those who lead in ministry?

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Hebrews 13:7).

"Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you" (Hebrews 13:17).

"Not many of you should become teachers, my fellow believers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly" (James 3:1).

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28).

"So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Poem

Anointed

*Pour your holy oil upon me, LORD
May it heal all my wounds
so I may truly live
In your will*

*Pour your holy oil upon me, LORD
May it kindle all the light
so I may shine
In the darkness*

*Pour your holy oil upon me, LORD
May it enrich all my words
so I may woo
All your people.*

3/20/2024
WEEK 11 DAY 3

Death and Warning for Disobedience



Scripture LEVITICUS 10

Devotional

In today's passage, two of Aaron's sons died for their disobedience, and the remaining two sons were warned. Holiness and obedience matter to God. Time and again throughout Scripture we see people paying the ultimate price for disobedience.

In Joshua 7, a man named Achan stole silver, gold and a robe from among the things that had been devoted to God. Israel lost an ensuing battle with an enemy, and Achan lost his life for his disobedience.

In Acts 5, a husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira lied about the amount of money a piece of property sold for, pretending to give all the proceeds to the newly formed Christian Church. They paid for their disobedience with their lives.

Certainly people don't die for every act of disobedience. If they did, Earth would have a population of zero. But disobedience has its consequences. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 says, "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people."

Jesus simply said, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). Good question. Are there any aspects of disobedience to God that reside in you? Do you have any ways that show disrespect to the holiness of the Lord? What is the Lord saying to you?

Poem

Wrong Way

*As I was traveling down the road
A warning sign I spied
"Wrong Way"—
The message clear to me
Of this, I can't deny*

*But turn around?
Retrace my path,
And thus my travel lengthen?
And thus, the "Do Not Enter" sign
My strong will then did strengthen*

*I chuckled to myself,
I did!
The warning sign behind me
Was soon forgotten as the road
Seemed passable and empty*

*It was not 'til
The road gave way
A precipice a-crumbling
And as I plummeted to doom
I realized my stumbling*

3/21/2024
WEEK 11 DAY 4

Food that is Clean and Unclean



Scripture LEVITICUS 11

Devotional

In these regulations, Israelites were forbidden from eating certain foods. Beef and lamb were in; pork and rabbit were out. Fish was fine; shrimp was not. Sparrow and quail were permitted on the table; owl and hawk were not. Many Jews still follow the kosher diet to this day.

There were certainly some health benefits for eating the accepted meats and avoiding the forbidden species. But this is more about holiness before God. As with regulations regarding having sexual relations or experiencing menstruation, the animals were not evil in and of themselves. Partaking of them, though, made one unclean for worship.

In Acts 10, God gave Peter a vision and told him to eat both the clean and unclean animals from today's reading. Peter protested, saying that he had observed the dietary law diligently. The Lord replied, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Christians are allowed to eat any food. More importantly, non-Jews are allowed to become Christians.

Some have used this passage in Acts 10 to suggest that all of the law spelled out in the Old Testament is no longer valid. This is not the case. To equate being allowed to eat bacon with being permitted to engage in any kind of sin is a stretch. That is why a careful reading of the entire Old and New Testaments should shape our theology and practices.

The main point, again, is that God desires in us holiness of life. How is the Lord challenging you to be holy? Are there any ways in you that need to be cleansed? What will you do about it?

Meditate on these verses from Psalm 119:36-40.

³⁶ Turn my heart toward your statutes
and not toward selfish gain.

³⁷ Turn my eyes away from worthless things;
preserve my life according to your word.

³⁸ Fulfill your promise to your servant,
so that you may be feared.

³⁹ Take away the disgrace I dread,
for your laws are good.

⁴⁰ How I long for your precepts!
In your righteousness preserve my life.

Poem

Don't Eat The Creepy Crawlies

*One year for Christmas
Brother got
A toy called Creepy Crawlies
A baking tool with
Mold for bugs
For biggies and for smallies
We poured the plastic
In the mold
And watched delighted baking
Aroma pungent
Filled the room
Mad science in the making
We'd pop them out,
And in our mouths
We joked and showed each other!
"Don't eat those nasty things,"
Mom said
"Obey me, I'm your Mother!"
"But, we're just having fun,"
We said
"There's nothing really wrong!"
"You stop; you'll choke;
Now listen up!
I'm saving you from harm."*

3/22/2024
WEEK 11 DAY 5

The Day of Atonement

Scripture LEVITICUS 16

Devotional

In Leviticus 8 we saw that Aaron and his descendants were set aside to serve as priests before God.

Aaron himself was set apart in a special way, as high priest. He alone would be allowed to enter the Most Holy Place to make sacrifices one day a year, on the Day of Atonement. This practice carried forward as the people moved their worship out of a tent-made tabernacle and into a stone-construction temple. This day of Yom Kippur is still observed by Jews every fall.

On the Day of Atonement, people rested from their work, fasted from food, and abstained from sexual relations. They were expected to have contrite hearts and repent of their sins. The high priest would enter the Most Holy Place and offer the blood of a sacrificed bull and goat to atone (make amends for) the sins of him and the people (also see Hebrews 9:7).

When Jesus died on the cross, the massive curtain that kept the people out of the Most Holy Place was torn in two during an earthquake (Matthew 27:51). Jesus provided access for every one of us to God's heart and holiness (also see Hebrews 10:19-22). In Romans 3:25 Paul wrote, "God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood."

Speaking of the sacrifices made by the high priest on the Day of Atonement, the New Testament says, "But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins. It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Hebrews 10:3-4). What was impossible for the high priest to do in a thousand years of Yom Kippur, Jesus did for all time in one day on the cross. Our sins are forgiven forever!

Have you repented and offered your sins to Jesus? He is waiting for you. Do you feel like you have sinned too greatly and that you are in debt to God too much? Perfect. You are in exactly the right place. Colossians 2:13-14 says it well: "When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross."

Spend some time with God, offering yourself to Him with purity of heart. Ask Him to wash you clean from your sins. Trust Him to guide you onto His path.

Poem

Poor Goat, Scape Goat

Poor goat
Scape goat
Scared and bleating.
Men's hands heavy upon your head.
Men's hands heavy upon your back.
Sin placed there.
So many hands.
So much sin.
What a heavy cross to bear.

Poor goat
Scape goat
Scarred and bleeding.
Men are beating you with rods.
Men hate you because you are
Now their sin.
So many stripes.
So much flogging.
What pains you suffer for their sake.

Poor goat
Scape goat
Scorned and breaking.
Men chase you away despising you.
Men push you outside the city wall.
Nail sin to the yoke.
Rejecting you.
Deserting you.
Now you are left to die alone.

Poor goat
Scape goat
Sacred and blessing.
God separated you from the sheep.
God cast you out because of their sin
On your back.
Man of Sorrows
Acquainted with grief.

Jesus remember me when you come
into your kingdom.

"There is a green hill far away
Outside the city wall
Where the dear Lord was crucified Who
died to save us all.
O, dearly, dearly has He loved..."

3/25/2024
WEEK 12 DAY 1

The Sabbath Year and Jubilee



Scripture LEVITICUS 25

Devotional

The Hebrew people had a number of ways to mark their days and remind them of God's goodness. These are described in Leviticus 23 and 25. Let's take a look:

The Sabbath - Every seven days they were to observe the Sabbath by resting, refraining from work, and worshiping the Lord.

The Passover and Festival of Unleavened Bread - A reminder of how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt.

Firstfruits Offering - A way to thank God for the bounty of the harvest.

The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) - Another time of gratitude for God's provision.

The Feast of Trumpets (later Rosh Hashanah - New Year's Day) - Blessing God for His favor.

Day of Atonement - An annual sacrifice for the sins of the people.

Feast of Tabernacles - A weeklong way to remember the 40 years in the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land.

The Sabbath Year - A rest for the land every seven years.

The Year of Jubilee - Every fifty years, debts are forgiven, slaves are freed and land is returned to bring about social balance.

Why were each of these important for the people of God? What are some of the periodic celebrations you observe? How do they make you thankful for the people or things being commemorated? Which of them draws you nearer to God?

Poem

Yippee! Jubilee!

*Yippee, Jubilee!
The land can finally rest
Set free, weekly
Sabbath life expressed
Beauty, cleanly
Scrub prepare for feast
Glory, gaily
Blessing now increase*

3/26/2024
WEEK 12 DAY 2

The Nazirite Vow & the Priestly Blessing



Scripture NUMBERS 6

Devotional

Making a promise in private is one thing. But making the commitment publicly adds power to the promise. That is why people are baptized before the believing community. That is why couples get married in front of family and friends. Others are witnesses to the vows that are made.

This Nazirite vow of dedication to the Lord was done publicly as well. The people who embarked on this journey would not eat or drink anything that came from the grape. In addition, the men let their hair grow continuously for as long as they were fulfilling their time of dedication to God.

The most well-known person in the Old Testament who took a Nazirite vow was Samson. He famously let Delilah cut off his hair, breaking his Nazirite vow and robbing him of his God-given power.

His counterpart in the New Testament is John the Baptist. Though it is not specifically stated that he took a Nazirite vow, his calling to never drink alcoholic beverages, his earthy appearance, and his life devoted to the Lord apart from social norms certainly fits the bill.

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 says, "When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it." Making commitments to God are good. Fulfilling those vows are better.

What are some of the promises you have made to God? How has the Holy Spirit helped you fulfill them? Have there been stumbling blocks that have tripped you up in your efforts to complete your vows? What is the Lord calling you to do?

Deuteronomy 23:21-23 puts it plainly: "If you make a vow to the Lord your God, do not be slow to pay it, for the Lord your God will certainly demand it of you and you will be guilty of sin. But if you refrain from making a vow, you will not be guilty. Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the Lord your God with your own mouth."

Poem

Benediction

*Today in church, I bowed my head
As the pastor lifted holy hands to bless.
The sleeves cascaded down like wings;
I was transported to heaven's throne
room.*

*Lifted high, the arms of YHWH,
Holding hands with Christ on the right
And the Spirit on the left-
Unified in the blessing
Angels bending; powers and
principalities, too.*

*Faces covered, prostrate before the
throne.*

*At heaven's door I stood, looking in
Awed by the spectacular sight!
I felt like Esther, scared, yet propelled
To enter the scene, to dare--*

*The septer of welcome was extended to
me*

*Full of beauty and grace
Around the throne, faithful prophets,
Priests and pastors stood with arms
lifted*

*Clasping hands in the stance of blessing
Their heavenly linen sleeves draping.
"Blessing, favor, knighthood be upon her,
YHWH,*

*guard your precious treasure!
Shine light and keep your face upon her,
YHWH,*

*bestow all gifts of beauty and grace!
Delight and spotlight her,
YHWH,*

*Fill her cup to overflowing; make her
whole and sated!*

*She is marked with your holy name,
YHWH,
Behold, your blessing is upon her!"*

*YHWH's knowing eyes shone and lips
parted*

Into a wide grin of love.

*"Come, My Child,
Beloved of the Kingdom"*

I ran into the arms, enveloped.

I walked out the church door

Knighthood to a calling,

Marked by YHWH's name,

Empowered by the love of Christ

And sealed by the Holy Spirit's grace.

3/27/2024
WEEK 12 DAY 3

Bread and Meat from Heaven



Scripture NUMBERS 11

Devotional

Back in Exodus 16 after the people were freed from bondage, they cried out to against Moses and Aaron saying, “If only we had died by the Lord’s hand in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death” (v. 3).

In response, the Lord rained down bread from heaven, called manna, described as “thin flakes like frost on the ground” (v. 14) which “was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey” (v. 31). Psalm 78:24 called it “the grain of heaven.”

But it wasn’t meat like they were used to in Egyptian slavery. By the time we get to today’s reading, the people were sick and tired of manna. They complained, “If only we had meat to eat! We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost—also the cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite; we never see anything but this manna!” (Numbers 11:4-6).

God had provided food from heaven month after month. But it wasn’t good enough. So God rained down quail from the sky. The complainers got their meat, but lost their lives in the process. Why is it that we often are not content with what we have?

1 Timothy 6:6-10 says, “But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

How has God provided for you in your life? What has he rained down from heaven? Are you content? Are there any areas of discontentment in your life? What is the root of them? Do you need to reorient your thinking?

As Paul once said, “I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13).

Poem

Camp Taberah

*grumble grumble
yuck yuck yuck
mumble mumble
bleh
icky icky
gag gag gag
sicky sicky
poo
manna manna
everyday
boring boring
ugh
draggy draggy
no can do
yawn yawn yawn
malaise
stagnant stagnant
drudgery
zombies in a maze
weary weary
tedious
save us save us
Lord*

3/28/2024
WEEK 12 DAY 4

Moses is Opposed by His Family



Scripture NUMBERS 12

Devotional

It's one thing to have your enemies oppose you. It's another to have the people you lead grumble against you. But it's a whole different level when your family turns on you.

Miriam and Aaron were Moses' sister and brother. They had been with him through the hardest of times. Miriam busted out in song after they passed through the Red Sea. Aaron was named as the progenitor of Israel's future priests. They were a family who stuck together for the good of the people they were leading.

But they didn't like Moses' choice of a wife. The only wife we know about is Zipporah from Midian in Arabia. They were complaining about a wife from Cush in Africa.

Exodus 12:38 tells us, "Many other people went up with" the Israelites when they left Egypt. Perhaps Moses married one of these African women from the area of modern day Ethiopia. Or maybe Zipporah was darker-skinned, and this was a derogatory way of pointing out that Moses had not married a Hebrew. The former option is most likely.

In an act of divine irony, God gave Miriam leprous skin "white as snow" in contrast to the wife of Moses with blacker skin. The Lord was telling her not to worry about someone's skin color and ethnic background. In contrast, Moses' character is lifted up by the Lord as a very humble man, God's servant, and faithful in all God's house (v. 3, 7).

How do you think Moses felt about this opposition from his siblings? How do you deal with family conflict and criticism?

In the end, Moses interceded for his rebellious sister. 1 Timothy 5:8 reminds us of this truth: "Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever."

Poem

Back Stage Whispers

*So why is he important?
Is he the only one?
Does not the Lord of heaven and earth
Speak to us--everyone?
He's always in the lime light;
He's always center stage
Just who, now, does he think he is?
Is he now all the rage?
We think we should get credit;
We've done our share of work
We'd like a plaque or trophy
To state how much we're worth.
We're tired of being tech crew!
This work behind the scenes
Is dull and boring; we're stars, too,
Who really should be seen
So, see here, God Director,
It's time you changed the play.
Rewrite the script, we want some lines
We want to have our day*

2/29/2024
WEEK 12 DAY 5

Spies Explore the Promised Land

Scripture **NUMBERS 13:1-2, 17-33**

Devotional

Even before the Israelites left Egypt, God promised them, “And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the Lord” (Exodus 6:8). The land of Israel was God’s Promised Land.

Now it was time to explore that land and its people, towns, and landscape. It makes sense to check things out before taking action. In Luke 14:28-30 Jesus said, “Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won’t you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? For if you lay the foundation and are not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule you, saying, ‘This person began to build and wasn’t able to finish.’” It is prudent to be prepared.

The exploration team was gone for forty days. When they returned, there were two different perspectives. Ten of the spies warned their fellow Israelites that they didn’t have a chance against the more powerful people already in the land. They admitted that the land and its produce were very good. But they saw themselves as inferior to the bigger, stronger people who lived there.

Joshua and Caleb gave the minority report. Here’s what they said:

“We should go up and take possession of the land, for we can certainly do it.” (Numbers 13:30)

“If the Lord is pleased with us, he will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us.” (Numbers 14:8)

“Only do not rebel against the Lord. And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will devour them. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us. Do not be afraid of them.” (Numbers 14:9)

In retrospect, we know that Joshua and Caleb were right, while the other ten were wrong. How do you discern what is good advice from bad? How do you know whether the majority or the minority has it right? What did Joshua and Caleb say in their report that should have given the people confidence? What gives you confidence as you make hard decisions?

Poem

Scouting

*Shhh!
Quiet!
Pst!
Over here!
Check this out!
Make sure they don't see you...
Leave no tracks.
Remember.
Blaze the trail.
Find their camp.
Mark their strength.
Scan the land.
Wow, the bounty!
See the grapes?
Milk and honey
Stomach rumble
Such abundance!
Water fresh
Fields of cattle
House of bricks
Dare we enter?
Dare we try?
What's the risk?
Will we die?
Let's retreat.
Tuck back the tree
Tread so softly.
Ponder.
Cross back
Hush...
Quiet...
Shh....*

4/1/2024
WEEK 13 DAY 1

The Back to Egypt Rebellion

Scripture NUMBERS 14

Devotional

From the day they left slavery in Egypt, there was always a contingent who stirred up the people to believe that harsh forced labor in Egypt was better than the challenges of freedom. They had said, "We'll die of thirst." And God provided water from a rock. They cried, "We'll die of hunger." And God rained down bread from heaven. Now they were shouting, "We'll die by the sword."

Their answer? Replace Moses and head back to Egyptian bondage. Every organization has a back-to-Egypt committee. Churches are not exempt. People remember the good old days, even if they weren't so great at the time. Fear of the future swallows up pain of the past. In this case they talked about stoning Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb so they could submit themselves once again to Egyptian whips.

God was fed up. Incredibly, Moses interceded for the very people who wanted to depose and assassinate him. Jesus did the same for us. The Bible says, "The mind governed by the flesh (that is, the sinful mind) is hostile to God" (Romans 8:8). Yet Jesus Himself "bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed" (1 Peter 2:24). Our sins are an act of hostility to the Lord, so He died to forgive us!

Beyond that incredible display of God's love, Jesus told us to live the same way. In Luke 6:27-28, Jesus said, "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you."

This is a tall order. It's easy to love those who are loving. But Jesus expects us to love in our hearts, pray with our mouths, and bless with our actions those who hate us in their hearts, curse us with their mouths, and mistreat us with their actions.

Are there people who have hurt you? What is the Lord telling you to do about it? Can you be like Moses who interceded for those who wanted to do away with him? Can you be like Jesus who gave up His life for those who committed hostile acts of sin against Him?

As you pray the Lord's Prayer, ask God to help you forgive as you have been forgiven:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.

Poem

Let's Go Back

*Let's go back
I'm too afraid
Whose idea was it to move ahead
anyway?
Let's go back
Sure, it wasn't great
But at least we knew what to
expect...
Let's go back,
If I remember correctly
It wasn't so bad, drugery, perhaps,
but safe.
Let's go back,
Who's with me?
We don't want to be daring, after
all.
Let's go back,
Forget the promise.
I'm having trouble remembering it
anyway.
Let's go back,
Now that I've had time to think
I think it would be better.
Let's go back...*

4/2/2024
WEEK 13 DAY 2

Korah Rebels against Moses



Scripture NUMBERS 16

Devotional

Being rebellious is risky business. Being rebellious against God is downright dangerous. In this encounter, many rebels were swallowed by the earth, hundreds were burned by fire, and thousands perished by plague. Korah and his fellow insurgents insolently said to Moses and Aaron, "You have gone too far!" Now it appears that the Lord was saying the same thing to them.

This episode served as a memorial call to holy living a generation later when the people prepared to enter the Promised Land (Deuteronomy 11:5-7). It was incorporated into Israel's hymnal as a sacred reminder of God's awesome authority (Psalm 106:16-18). And it is referenced in the New Testament as a warning against corrupting the faith with rebellious teachings and practices. Let's take a look at what Jude, the brother of Jesus, said in his letter:

"I felt compelled to write and urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to God's holy people. For certain individuals whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord... In the very same way, on the strength of their dreams these ungodly people pollute their own bodies, reject authority and heap abuse on celestial beings... Yet these people slander whatever they do not understand... Woe to them! They ... have been destroyed in Korah's rebellion" (Jude 1:3-11).

The rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram led to nothing but pain and grief. In their jealousy, they wanted to take what was not theirs. Their uprising was an affront to God. Fifteen hundred years later, Jude seemed to be saying the same thing. When Christians replace the grace of Jesus with immorality, idolatry and false teachings, God's very Word is assaulted. Be warned!

Are there any ways in which you have grabbed the reigns out of God's hands, trying to take authority over your own path in life? How is God calling you to submit your life entirely to Him?

Poem

Power Hungry

*Power hungry,
Never happy,
Always wanting more.
"Look at me!"
"You know I'm better"
"I've the highest score."*

*"Even though I've been
Assigned a task I
Am to do-Yours looks greater,
Higher paying-
Let me trade with you."*

*Greedy glaring,
Anger staring,
Looks that seek to kill;
Grabbing, stealing,
Never healing,
Cultivate ill will.*

*Camp divided-
Now two sided;
Unity defiled.
Who determines
Who's the guilty
In this tragic trial?*

*Only God can
Cleanse the garbage
Of our nasty greed.
O, refine us
With your fire!
Make us one, indeed!*

4/3/2024
WEEK 13 DAY 3

Aaron's Staff as a Sign to the Rebellious



Scripture NUMBERS 17

Devotional

In Numbers 16, when Korah and his fellow insurrectionists rebelled against Moses and Aaron, they wanted a piece of the priestly pie. They saw the honor that was bestowed upon the priests, and how Aaron was allowed to enter the Tent of Meeting for intimate encounters with God. They had no idea about the responsibilities that came along with those privileges. Numbers 18 lays out some of those sacred duties that must be carried out exactly as the Lord directs.

Sandwiched in between is this story in Numbers 17. God decided to give them a clear sign that would end their rebellion and allow them to accept that Aaron's descendants would be priests serving in the tabernacle. So He turned a dead, detached stick into an almond-producing living branch. This staff was to be kept in the ark of the covenant as a warning to anyone who thought being rebellious was a good idea.

Hebrews 9:4 in the New Testament says that "the gold-covered ark of the covenant... contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron's staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant." Each of these three objects were miraculous works by the hand of God as the people wandered in the desert between Egyptian slavery and Promised Land sovereignty.

Why were each of these important for the people of Israel throughout their history? If you could set three objects aside as a continual reminder of how God has guided you, what would they be?

Take time to thank God for His provision, protection and purpose in your life. Psalm 107:8 is a declaration to Him: "Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unending love and his wonderful deeds for mankind."

Poem

Aaron's Staff

*The shepherd's staff, the herder's rod
Authority which comes from God
The flock's protection, evil kill
The sheep's correction from self will
The symbol of miraculous power
A banner waving blessing's shower
Standard in the wind*

*The leader's name, the emblem's crest
Announcing forth the nation's best
Ancestral tribe streams in full view
The colors show the values true
Thrown on the ground, submission
states
Awaiting now predestined fate
Standard dips to God*

*It's Aaron's staff which buds with life
It's Aaron's rod which ends the strife
It's Aaron's standard guards the tent
Its priestly calling to repent
The almond drupe bears fruitful there
And cancels bitterness, despair
Standard planted deep*

4/4/2024
WEEK 13 DAY 4

Ceremonial Cleansing



Scripture NUMBERS 19

Devotional

Here in the Old Testament, this chapter is filled with interesting questions that come up. Why was a red heifer used for this sacrifice? How do ashes of the burned heifer make the person collecting them unclean, but when mixed with water make people ceremonially clean? How does all this work?

From New Testament times forward, we continue to ask those kind of questions often when it comes to faith. How does Jesus' death on the cross save me from eternal death for my sins? How can the Spirit of God live in me, yet I can continue to sin? How is it that I am not saved by good works, but I am called to good works? How does all this work?

The passage in Hebrews 9:13-14 ties together these Old and New Testament concepts. "The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!"

Hebrews 11:1 says, "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Faith is not a science formula, with clear proofs for each side of the equation. Faith is more about trusting God's way and obeying God's will.

How has God made you both outwardly and inwardly clean? Are there any areas where you still need the cleansing touch of the Lord? Are you trusting God's way and obeying God's will? What is God saying to you?

Poem

Ash

*The heifer bawled
As it came to the place
Of sacrifice
The red of its blood
Staining the red of its coat
And all was burned
Not a speck of life
Or hide Or bone
Or even dung
Remained
Only silent
Ash*

*As I come, crying, LORD,
To the place
Of sacrifice
Pour your blood
Over my stained hide
And burn away all of me
So not a speck of my old life
Or mask
Or pride
Or even the waste
Remains
Only silent
Awe*

4/5/2024
WEEK 13 DAY 5

Moses Denied Promised Land for Disobedience



Scripture **NUMBERS 20:1-13, 22-29**

Devotional

It was just one little word. God said “speak,” not “strike.” When the people grumbled for the umpteenth time, God told Moses to gather the people together then, “Speak to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water.” So Moses gathered the assembly, “raised his arm and struck the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out.”

Why would Moses strike the rock when God clearly told him to speak to the rock? It’s simple. His past success deafened him to God’s present instructions. Back in Exodus 17:6, just after the people were freed from slavery, they quarreled with Moses about a lack of water. That time God told Moses, “Strike the rock, and water will come out of it for the people to drink.” He did so, and it worked.

But this time, God said, “speak to the rock.” Moses just couldn’t (or wouldn’t) hear God clearly. He reverted to what worked before. He was trusting in his own leadership skills rather than honoring God as holy in the sight of the people. For that, Moses and Aaron were told they would not enter the Promised Land. This had to be a gargantuan disappointment.

Years later, when God was preparing Joshua to lead the people into the Promised Land, Moses wrote, “At that time I pleaded with the Lord: “Sovereign Lord, you have begun to show to your servant your greatness and your strong hand. For what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do the deeds and mighty works you do? Let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan” (Deuteronomy 3:23-25).

God’s answer was to the point: “That is enough... Do not speak to me anymore about this matter... But commission Joshua, and encourage and strengthen him, for he will lead this people across and will cause them to inherit the land” (Deuteronomy 3:26-28).

We don’t always get everything we want. Sometimes we stumble over sin, get detoured with disobedience, or just wander in the wilderness. Other times God has different plans in place for our lives. Though Moses was discouraged that he would not get to experience the finish line, he continued to lead the people for years to come right up to it.

What is on your bucket list? Have you ever asked God what His bucket list for your life is? If you made a Venn diagram of God’s and your bucket lists, what would overlap and what would not?

Poem

Beating The Rock

*Sometimes
My anger
Is so great
Against my brothers
My sisters
I begin beating
The Rock
Taking my anger out
Upon God's
Generous servant
Instead of
Remembering
God's Word
Spoken
Is enough
It is what creates
And brings forth
Living
Water*

4/8/2024
WEEK 14 DAY 1

The Bronze Snake on a Pole



Scripture **NUMBERS 21:4-9**

Devotional

Enough is enough. Ever since God parted the Red Sea, the once-enslaved Israelites unleashed a cascade of complaints against God and Moses. Here's a quick review of only some of their grumbings:

- "The water is bitter" (Exodus 15)
- "We're hungry" (Exodus 16)
- "We're thirsty" (Exodus 17)
- "We want a tangible god" (Exodus 32)
- "We want better food" (Numbers 11)
- "We want better leaders" (Numbers 12)
- "We can't defeat the people" (Numbers 14)
- "We want to be the priests" (Numbers 16)
- "We're thirsty...again" (Numbers 20)
- "We detest this miserable food" (Numbers 21)

Finally, God had had enough. He was up to His ears leading the people through the rugged desert. He didn't have time to listen to more complaining. So he sent poisonous snakes to take care of them, until yet again Moses interceded for his ungrateful flock. At God's instruction, Moses made a bronze snake that brought healing to people when they saw it.

The most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16. But the two verses that precede it reference this Old Testament event. Take a look at what Jesus said about Himself, whom he refers to as the Son of Man: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:14-16).

Jesus would be lifted up on a criminal's cross and bear the sins of the world. By His death, He would defeat the poisonous venom of "that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan" for ever and ever (Revelation 20:2, 10). Believing in Jesus is the only way we can be freed from our slavery to sin and become children of God (Galatians 4:7).

For that great gift of salvation, we should have nothing but gratitude. Philippians 2:14 reminds us, "Do everything without grumbling or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, 'children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation.'"

Poem

Snake Bites

It is true.

*If your life is
Full of complaining
The fangs will turn,
Strike
And bite you.*

4/9/2024
WEEK 14 DAY 2

Balaam and His Talking Donkey



Scripture NUMBERS 22

Devotional

Balaam was a prophet for profit. For the right price, he would offer a blessing or place a curse on people. Here, he is summoned from far away to come and curse the Israelites, so that the Moabites could be victorious over them.

Apparently, Balaam had some knowledge of the Lord God. He talked to Him and heard from Him. Yet Balaam still worked as a pagan sorcerer. Being with God and hearing His voice were not enough to get him to give up his ungodly ways.

This story is filled with irony. This man who was renowned to be able to speak for the gods was spoken to by a lowly animal. This sorcerer who was supposed to be able to see the spiritual world was “out- visioned” by a donkey. This pagan prophet was having a full on conversation with his beast of burden instead of with a deity.

In the following chapters of the book of Numbers, Balaam spoke a number of oracles that favored Israel. But for all his troubles, Balaam didn't go down in history very well. Money and paganism led him to continued acts of blessing and cursing for profit.

In the New Testament, Peter wrote about people who sell out on God: “They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Bezer, who loved the wages of wickedness. But he was rebuked for his wrongdoing by a donkey—an animal without speech—who spoke with a human voice and restrained the prophet's madness” (2 Peter 2:15-16). Jude 1:11 agrees, saying that ungodly false teachers in the church “have rushed for profit into Balaam's error.”

Have you ever been tempted to compromise your faith for something shiny? Have the latest philosophies of the secular world clouded your understanding of God? If an animal, who sees and hears everything we do, could speak to you, what would it say?

Poem

Consultation Advice

*Don't think for a moment
A teller of fortunes
A paid prophet
A fanciful seer
Can tell you the future
Or give you some wisdom
Or send you directions
For life.
It would be better
To consult
An ass.*

4/10/2024
WEEK 14 DAY 3

Teach Your Family to Love the Lord your God



Scripture DEUTERONOMY 6

Devotional

It was time to think about the future. For forty years the Israelites would wander in the desert between Egyptian slavery and Promised Land sovereignty. God was guiding them every step of the way, providing food, water, leadership, commandments, victory and more. And once they entered the land He had promised, He would not abandon them.

Psalm 127:3 says, "Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him." Everyone wants their children and grandchildren to be taken care of. We go to great lengths to write wills to ensure that our offspring receive our worldly wealth.

Even more important is to pass on our spiritual wealth. How might a person with children or grandchildren follow the advice from this chapter to pass on a spiritual legacy? Answer that for each of these verses:

Be careful to obey God's commands.

Impress them on your children.

Talk about them at home and away from home.

Make symbols to make them memorable.

Write down your faith.

Do not forget what the Lord has given you.

Fear, serve and follow God only.

Don't put God to the test.

Rehearse the story of God often.

Poem

Shema!

*Shema, my child
God is one, holy, holy
God is love, glory, glory
God alone, solely, solely
Give yourself
Which is why you were created*

*Shema, my child
Let me whisper in your ear
Let me breathe into your mouth
Let me anoint your aching eyes
With a truth
Which will give you life*

*Shema, my child
As the sun opens your eyes
As we walk along the way
As I tuck you into bed
Take in love
Which will feed your every hunger*

*Shema, my child
Here's the best I can give you
Here is honey in your mouth
Here is balm for your pain
Spirit's oil
Which anoints your very soul*

4/11/2024
WEEK 14 DAY 4

The Covenant with Moses

Scripture **DEUTERONOMY 28:1-29**

Devotional

In this study of the Old Testament, we have seen that covenant is an important word in the Bible. A covenant is a legal contract between two parties. In Bible times, it served as a binding agreement that could not be broken. The primary covenants in the Old Testament are those that God makes with Noah (Noahic Covenant), Abraham (Abrahamic Covenant), Moses (Mosaic Covenant), and David (Davidic Covenant). All these point to the ultimate covenant God makes through Jesus (The New Covenant). We have been looking at each of these throughout this study.

The Mosaic Covenant is spelled out in great detail in Exodus through Deuteronomy. God was beginning to fulfill his covenant with Abraham by freeing the Israelites from Egyptian slavery and bringing them into the Promised Land. There they would be free from enslavement, but also free to live as they choose. So God gave them the Ten Commandments and many other decrees and laws to help them make the right choices.

Here in Deuteronomy 28, we see the difference between "if" and "if not." The first fourteen verses are based on fulfilling the conditional clause, "if you fully obey." People will be blessed, crops will be abundant, enemies will be defeated, and the heavens will be opened. Living for God is a good thing. And good things result.

The remainder of the chapter is based on fulfilling the conditional clause, "if you do not obey." Blessings will become curses, abundance will turn into scarcity, victory will flee into the arms of defeat, and God will seem like a distant idea. Living for self seems like a good thing. But not-so-good things result.

When John wrote his gospel, he made sure to include what Jesus said about obeying. In John 8:31 Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples." And in John 14:15 He declared, "If you love me, keep my commands." Being a follower of God means obeying God.

On a scale of one to ten, where are you on the spectrum between "I don't obey God" to "I completely obey God?" What needs to happen to nudge that number a little higher?

Poem

The Test

*The test lies before each
Each moment a choice
To what will you answer?
Both speaking their voice
The voice of your own will--
Rebellion your way?
The voice of God's Spirit?
Which will you obey?
Each whispering sound wave
One curses, one bless
Each brings forth a lesson
A consequence test*

4/11/2024
WEEK 14 DAY 5

Joshua to Succeed Moses

Scripture DEUTERONOMY 31

Devotional

Last week we read about Moses disobeying God by striking a rock to get flowing water instead of speaking to it as God had commanded. Because of that, God told Moses that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land. Instead, He told Moses to commission Joshua to lead the people across the Jordan River to inherit the land.

Here near the end of Deuteronomy is that commissioning moment. In front of the people and leaders of Israel, the elder statesman empowered the emerging leader with these words:

“Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their ancestors to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged” (v. 7-8).

Why would each of these phrases have been important for Joshua to hear? Has anyone ever spoke words of encouragement or commissioning over you? How did that impact you?

Moses spent the rest of this chapter preparing for the legacy after his death. He wrote down “in a book the words of the law from beginning to end” (v. 24). These would become the first five books of the Bible, which we have explored so far in this study. While he may have had others who contributed, compiled and edited, the books of Moses (also known as the Torah) are the basic foundation of all Scripture.

Additionally he wrote down a song for the people to sing, reminding them of God’s provision of the Promised Land and His expectation for obedience to His law. This song is written down as Deuteronomy 32. Look it up and read through it, and imagine yourself as one of the children of Israel rehearsing the story of God.

Poem

I Realized I’m Old Today

*I realized I’m old today
No longer can I carry loads
Upon my shoulders
Which at one time
Were easy
A source of pride
A job well done
My center*

*I realized I’m old today
The dreams I had for the future
I know now I will not actualize
They seemed so attainable
But now
A source of grief
A life mis-spent
My sorrow*

*I realized I’m old today
Who will listen to this wisdom?
When the gray ones in my life
Called to me to sit and chat
I had my busy present with
Another thing to do
Another place to go
My agenda*

*I realized I’m old today
How can I make the most
Of these precious last days, weeks
Autumn years of splendor
I hand
Off to another to carry on
Off to the future the joy
My prayer*

*I realized I’m old today
One final mountain before me
The path of peace with God
Who will meet me in the mist
I step
Toward the sunset of red delight
Toward the Tent of Meeting with
My LORD*

4/15/2024
WEEK 15 DAY 1

The Death of Moses and Rise of Joshua



Scripture DEUTERONOMY 34

Devotional

Moses had led the people of God for forty years, freeing them from Egyptian slavery, crossing through the Red Sea on dry land with the waters split apart, guiding them through the barren wilderness, writing down the Ten Commandments and the rest of the Torah, and leading them to the precipice overlooking the Promised Land. There he died, leaving the task of crossing the Jordan River and possessing the land to his successor Joshua.

The final verses of the Book of Deuteronomy sum up his life: "Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel."

His legacy would endure. Moses is mentioned after his death two hundred times in the Bible. When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain, he met with Moses (the embodiment of God's law) and Elijah (the embodiment of God's prophets). Upon reflection, what would you say are the top five moments from Moses' life?

Psalm 90 is titled, "A prayer of Moses the man of God." Read through this psalm and ask God to guide you in your life just as he did Moses.

- 1 Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations.
- 2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the whole world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- 3 You turn people back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, you mortals."
- 4 A thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night.
- 5 Yet you sweep people away in the sleep of death—they are like the new grass of the morning:
- 6 In the morning it springs up new, but by evening it is dry and withered.
- 7 We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation.
- 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence.
- 9 All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan.
- 10 Our days may come to seventy years, or eighty, if our strength endures; yet the best of them are but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.
- 11 If only we knew the power of your anger! Your wrath is as great as the fear that is your due.
- 12 Teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.
- 13 Relent, Lord! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.
- 14 Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.
- 15 Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.
- 16 May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.
- 17 May the favor of the Lord our God rest on us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands.

Poem

Bury Me, Yahweh

*Bury me, Yahweh,
Catch my last breath
Then return it to Your breathing*

*Bury me, Yahweh,
Close my eyelids to this world
Then rock me to sleep*

*Bury me, Yahweh,
Wash the death stink away
Then clothe me in Your
righteousness*

*Bury me, Yahweh,
Sing Your love song around me
Then turn my mourning into joy*

*Bury me, Yahweh,
In the depths of Your earth
Then form me anew*

*Bury me, Yahweh,
Dig a place for me in Your heart
Then remember me on the day of
Your coming*

4/16/2024
WEEK 15 DAY 2

Be Strong and Courageous



Scripture JOSHUA 1

Devotional

Forty years in the desert wilderness after leaving Egypt, the Israelites were ready to conquer the land God had promised them. This land was promised to Abraham some five hundred years earlier. Now God called it “the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own.”

Joshua would be their leader, having been chosen for the task by God Himself. Thirty-nine years prior to this moment, Moses tapped Joshua and eleven other people to spy out this same land to see if they could take it then. Joshua and Caleb said yes but were outmaneuvered by the other ten spies. As a result, the Israelites had to wait four more decades to take what God had promised to give them.

The bottom line is that the people were afraid and thought they were too weak to take the land. Perhaps that is why we see the phrase “be strong and courageous” so frequently in this chapter. How many times can you find it? What is the context? Why was this so important for them to hear?

Are there any areas of your life where you need to hear the message “be strong and courageous” from the Lord?

Remember that Joshua spent forty years being trained for this moment. Sometimes he was up on the mountain of God with Moses (Exodus 24:13). Other times he was down in the valley leading the people into battle (Exodus 17:13). Often, he was with Moses in the Tent of Meeting where Moses met with God face to face (Exodus 33:11). And Joshua was chosen by God and anointed by Moses to be the national leader to guide the people into the Promised Land (Numbers 27:18; Deuteronomy 1:38).

How did all this equip Joshua for the difficult task ahead? How have your experiences and training developed you for what you have coming up in your life?

1 Corinthians 16:13 says, “Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong.” This call to be strong and courageous is wind to our sails as we navigate the stormy waters of life.

Poem

Commands Of God To The Servants Of God

*Arise! Get up! And make a stand!
You're called to higher standard
Be full awake, Cast off all sloth
Grab hold of Spirit's banner!*

*Now go! Move forward! Full advance!
Cross over into unknown
Each marching stride with confidence
Past passions overthrown*

*Full claim wherever you may trod
Expand the Kingdom's borders
I will be with you where you tread
Obeying every order*

*Be strong! Put muscle to your task!
Faint not! Forth without waver
Put training, discipline, to test
Lean into God's great favor*

*Let courage, boldness, be your staff
Speak clearly what is true
Care not for dangers in the field
Vict'ry belongs to you*

*A great inheritance is yours
A prize beyond all measure
For generations yet to come
A blessing of great treasure*

*Now meditate upon God's word
From it, be not distracted
All else will one day pass away
God's truth be all which lasted*

4/17/2024
WEEK 15 DAY 3

Spies Survey Jericho



Scripture JOSHUA 2

Devotional

One of the consistent themes of the Bible is that God often picks the unlikeliest of people to carry out His purposes. Jacob was a deceiving manipulator when God renamed him Israel. Joseph was a self-centered braggard when the Lord used him to save the world from starvation. Moses was a murderous fugitive when God gave him a forty-year assignment. And Rahab was a pagan prostitute when she helped the Israelites conquer Jericho.

It doesn't stop there for Rahab. She became the mother of Boaz who married Ruth. Through that lineage, Rahab became the great-great-great grandmother of David, the greatest king in Israel's history. And the genealogy of Jesus shows that Rahab the prostitute was His ancestor (see Matthew 1:1, 5).

Why do you think that God uses flawed people for His perfect plans?

The Zondervan Study Bible helps us see how Rahab's declaration in verses 9-11 is spoken in such a way that the first half (abcde) is a mirror image of the second half (edcba). Take a look.

a: I know that the Lord has given you this land
b: and that a great fear of you has fallen on us
c: so that all who live in this country are melting in fear because of you
d: We have heard
e: how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt (at the beginning of the 40 years)

e: and what you did to Sihon and Og, the two kings of the Amorites east of the Jordan, whom you completely destroyed (at the end of their 40 years)
d: When we heard of it
c: our hearts melted in fear
b: and everyone's courage failed because of you
a: for the Lord your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below

These patterns helped the people of God discover and remember what was written in Scripture long before the printing press. What can you discover about God from this declaration?

Poem

The Scarlet Cord

*A promise made for safety
A blood red, scarlet cord
Protection for God's people
A sinner's great reward
Salvation for the trusting
Who dwell in hiding place
The cover of the shielding host
Meant for the human race
It's origin at altar
The sacrificial site
Exchanging foul existence
For fully righteous life
This cord weaves all through hist'ry
From Eden to the cross
A bow on every gracious gift
Bestowed on all the lost
O, Scarlet Cord of Rescue,
May you my signal be
O, may I run for cover
Let death pass over me
Your blood poured out, full scarlet
The dye upon my door
Your scarlet cup of blessing
My covenantal core
Until the final battle
When comes the victory
My banner furled, your scarlet cord
In love, remember me*

4/18/2024
WEEK 15 DAY 4

Israel Crosses the Jordan River

Scripture JOSHUA 3

Devotional

Forty years earlier the Lord parted the waters of the Red Sea so that the enslaved Israelites could walk to their freedom on dry ground (Exodus 14:22). That entire generation died in the wilderness for their disobedience (Numbers 32:13). Now a new generation would cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land on dry ground. God told Joshua that this would demonstrate that He was with him just as He had been with Moses.

The Jordan River connects the Sea of Galilee in the north to the Dead Sea in the South. Even farther north is Mount Hermon, covered with snow throughout the winter. In the springtime during the grain harvest, the melting snow runs into the tributaries, flowing into the Sea of Galilee and flooding the Jordan River. This miracle of God halted the flow of a river which moments earlier had been bursting and roaring downstream.

In Matthew 17:20, Jesus said to His followers, "Truly I tell you, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you." Later, when the disciples couldn't figure out how any person could be saved, Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matthew 19:26). God is still in the miracle business.

Have you ever experienced God doing the impossible? How did it make you feel? In what ways did your faith grow because of it?

Is there an aspect of your life where you need a miraculous touch from God right now? What about something in your family, community, or world? Take some time right now to pray to God, who is still in the miracle business!

Poem

The Ark Goes Forth Before Me

*When life's journeys are ended
When I reach Jordan's shore
When facing final battle
God's Promised Land, the Door
The Ark goes forth before me
Borne on my High Priest's back
His covenantal tablets
God's precepts all intact
The priestly rod of Aaron
The almond branch, full bloom
The manna, Bread of Heaven
Great banquet to consume
I'll step into the river
Now, dry land, straight The Way
With tambourine and dancing
I'll lift my voice in praise
The Truth, the Light, before me
A lamp unto my feet
My Champion, with two-edged sword
My Enemy defeats
The Life, once marred and sinful,
Is now redeemed and saved
With resurrection power
By conqu'ring of the grave
The Ark goes forth before me
No fear have I to dread
Death's shadowed valley, I'll not fear
My Savior's path I tread*

4/19/2024
WEEK 15 DAY 5

Twelve Stones as a Memorial



Scripture JOSHUA 4

Devotional

It's important to find ways to keep things from being forgotten. Every Thanksgiving our children and their families come to our house for three days of keeping memories alive. During one of the meals, we always share what the past year has given us and what the next year has in store. Sometimes the sharing contains painful experiences or challenges. Other times the past, present and future are nothing but blessings. Always, we see God's hand at work.

In today's Scripture, God wanted to make sure that the Israelites always remembered what He had done for them, and that He would be with them forever. The monument made of twelve stones ensured that the miraculous crossing of the Jordan would never be forgotten. Joshua told them, "These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever."

I have some memorial stones in my own life:

- My three-acre homeplace, where I grew up from birth to college.
- Industry Church, where Sunday School teachers shaped my childhood.
- Gethsemane Church, where my faith took shape in my teen years.
- Slater Hill at Purdue, where I received my call to ministry.
- Cookson Hills in Oklahoma, where on four week-long mission trips I developed a heart for serving.
- The apartment in Durham, North Carolina, where Lisa and I began our married life together.
- Memories at each of our churches and homes, where we raised our family.
- The tombstone of my dad and mom, who shaped my life in countless ways.

What are some of the memorial stones in your life? How have they impacted you? What is one that you need to set up for what God is doing in your life today?

Poem

Twelve Stones From The Jordan

*When crossing the river
When sailing through storms
When treading death's valley
When flesh presents thorn
God's grace all sufficient
Will be there for you
Twelve stones from the Jordan
Reminder of truth
How God gave you passage
Death's powers he killed
His calming of windstorms
His words, "Peace, be still!"
His presence in shadows
Of valleys you faced
The thorns from the cursing
His mercy, full grace
So pick up the stones
From the journey you made
Remember God's goodness
From peril He saved
They are 'Ebenezer'
"My God helped me here!"
Twelve stones from your Jordan
God's sustenance clear*

4/22/2024
WEEK 16 DAY 1

The Fall of Jericho

Scripture **JOSHUA 5:13-6:27**

Devotional

Decades earlier, when God used a burning bush to call Moses to go back to Egypt and free the people from slavery, the Lord said, "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground" (Exodus 3:5). In today's passage, God's messenger repeats those same words to Joshua. Though separated by time and distance, both Moses and Joshua encountered the holiness of God. That required reverence.

But the military strategy for taking the city of Jericho had to sound a little suspect to Joshua and the Israelites. Rather than relying on skilled commanders and trained soldiers with weapons, the conquest tactic involved priests blasting trumpets and a shouting army. God wanted them to know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it was by His power, not theirs, that they were able to take the Promised Land.

Joshua's oath in verse 26 is sobering: "Cursed before the Lord is the one who undertakes to rebuild this city, Jericho: At the cost of his firstborn son he will lay its foundations; at the cost of his youngest he will set up its gates." Five hundred years later this pronouncement would come true during the reign of King Ahab: "In Ahab's time, Hiel of Bethel rebuilt Jericho. He laid its foundations at the cost of his firstborn son Abiram, and he set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub, in accordance with the word of the Lord spoken by Joshua son of Nun" (1 Kings 16:34).

In Christ's day, Jericho was still a trouble place. When Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, he began it by telling of a man who was beaten, robbed, and left for dead on the notorious road leading to Jericho (Luke 10:25-37). It was also in Jericho that the religious people gasped with disgust when Jesus welcomed a man named Zacchaeus, a repentant collaborator with the occupying Roman authorities (Luke 19:1-10).

No place is beyond the touch of God. Some people have hard memories of their childhood home, schools, or communities. As adults, some people have had tough experiences in a marriage, workplace, or church. But no place is beyond the touch of God.

Ephesians 2:12-13 tells us that before we were Christians, we were "without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ." Jesus is the rebuilders of broken walls! Ask the Lord to show up in the difficult places of life. If He can do it for Zacchaeus in Jericho, He can do it for you.

Poem

The Commander Of The Army
Of The Lord

*Who stands with you in battle?
Who fights against your foes?
Who clears the way before you?
Who conquers fearful woes?
Who tumbles mighty fortresses?
Who with a two-edged sword
Divides the bone and marrow
By Holy Scripture's word?
Who, on the bridge from heaven,
Ascends, descends in dreams?
Who stands beside the King of Kings
Abasing Satan's schemes?
Who is your faithful watchman
Upon the city wall?
Who champions God's causes?
Who lifts any who fall?
Who, with the heav'nly hosts above,
Protects God's Iron Rod?
Who comes before the blessed ones
With messages from God?
Who, unbeknownst to princes,
To shepherds shares the news
Of Christ's full incarnation
The cursing to defuse?
Who ministers in deserts
To tempted victor's needs?
Who wipes the blood drops f
rom the brow
Of faithful on their knees?
Who guards the tomb of glory
'Til stone is rolled away?
Who greets the mourning women
With news at break of day?
Who comes to open prison's doors?
Who closes jail guards' eyes?
Who ushers souls across the sea
Into Heaven's new life?
Who escorts loved disciple
To see the vict'ry won?
Who rides beside the snow white horse
Of God's victorious Son?*

4/23/2024
WEEK 16 DAY 2

The Sun Stands Still

Scripture JOSHUA 10:1-15

Devotional

Halley's Comet makes a trip around the solar system every seventy-six years. Its next scheduled appearance will be in 2061, when I am 100 years old. I can't wait. The solar eclipse, which passed over my house two weeks ago, was another reminder that our universe is the handiwork of God. The next one to pass over Indiana will be in twenty years. Maybe there's a better chance that I'll see that instead of Halley's Comet.

But the miracle in today's Scripture is other-level power of God. The sun simply stayed put high in the sky for a full day. This is astronomically impossible. In other words, child's play for the Creator of the universe. The key to understanding this is found in the last sentence of verse 14: "Surely the Lord was fighting for Israel!" God was intervening and would get the glory for the victory.

It's all too easy to give ourselves credit for the things we have experienced in our lives. After all, we had no control that we were born into a particular family or in a certain country. In fact, we had no control that we were born at all. Our lives, from the moment of conception, are in the hand of God.

Psalms 31:14-15 says, "But I trust in you, Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands." And after experiencing devastating loss, Job said this about God: "In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind" (Job 12:10).

Scientists believe that there are more stars in the universe than grains of sand on the earth. The same God who spoke every star, planet, moon, and comet into being is the same God who knows you intimately from womb to tomb. The next time you are unsure about the power of God, just look to the sky. The next time you are doubting the love of God, just look in the mirror.

Poem

But You

*Our enemies are noisy with shouts of
mocking scorn
With spun lies and false witnesses they
spew from morn to morn
But you, be not distracted
But you, be not afraid
But you, focus upon your King
But you, on Christ be staid*

*Sometimes we face a giant, sometimes
our people shake
Sometimes the armor of this world
we're tempted to uptake
But you, pick up your five stones
But you, armed with God's word
But you, stand on the battle field
But you, in strength of God*

*We often are outnumbered, captured
and bound in jail
Before authorities we will stand, our
faith in Christ they rail
But you, do not be frightened
But you, in strength be meek
But you, declare salvation
But you, God's Spirit speak*

4/24/2024
WEEK 16 DAY 3

The Covenant Renewed & Death of Joshua



Scripture JOSHUA 24

Devotional

It had been thirty years since the feet of priests stopped the flow of a river in flood stage, since the blast of trumpets tumbled the walls of Jericho, and since the stand-still sun provided a victory at Gibeon. After more victories, the Promised Land was allotted to the twelve tribes of Israel. They settled.

And apparently, they settled... spiritually. In the ensuing three decades the relative peace brought spiritual complacency. The people who had witnessed and experienced the mighty hand of God became bored with God. It's not like they abandoned Him completely. It's almost never that way.

Theologians call it religious syncretism, which Wikipedia defines as "the blending of religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation of other beliefs into an existing religious tradition." A little Christianity. A little mysticism. A little human secularism. A little American dream. Blend for thirty years. Drink with reckless abandon.

For the occupiers of the Promised Land, they had their own mixed drink. A little of the one true God. A little of the gods of Egypt, where they had spent centuries in slavery. A little of the beliefs of the people on the other side of the Jordan River, where they spent the past 40 years. And a little of the pagan practices of people among whom they were living at present.

Among this backdrop, Joshua delivered his parting words as an old man close to death: "Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshiped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:14-15).

What stands out to you from this challenge? What is applicable to our situation today? In what ways is God calling you to throw away your syncretistic beliefs and practices? How is He challenging you to make a declaration for you and your household to serve Him only?

Poem

Recount The Grace

*Scroll through the memories
of your past
Remember all your stories
How God delivered you from harm
Revealed mirac'ulous glories*

*Recall the ancients, brave and true
Who on their knees won battles
How with great courage
crossed dark seas
Embarking Spirit's travels*

*From roots of faithful ones now grow
As in Christ's vine abide
Recount the grace which
holds you fast
Saint branches, either side*

*'Tis blessing which surrounds
you now
While waking and while sleeping
'Tis Christ above, beneath, all 'round
His grace guarding and keeping*

4/25/2024
WEEK 16 DAY 4

The Cycle of Sin

Scripture **JUDGES 2:6-23**

Devotional

At the beginning of Joshua's leadership, God raised him up before the people, who "stood in awe of him all the days of his life, just as they had stood in awe of Moses" (Joshua 4:14). At the end of his life, Joshua challenged the people to decide if they were going to follow the one true God or the various false gods of the surrounding nations. They heartily responded, "We will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:21).

But after Joshua and his peers died, today's reading says, "another generation grew up who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their ancestors" (Judges 2:10-12). How sad. It only takes one generation to abandon the faith of their forebears.

The book of Judges repeatedly portrays what is known as the cycle of sin. Think of these as moving full circle in a clock-like progression.

Israel serves the Lord.

Israel sins and follows false gods.

Israel is defeated and oppressed by enemies.

Israel cries out to God.

Israel is led by a judge (military leader) raised up by God.

Israel is delivered by God through the judge.

Israel serves the Lord (and the cycle starts over).

Go back through today's reading and see if you can find these aspects of the cycle of sin. You will find them throughout the book of Judges. And you will find them in our own lives as well. In what ways do we participate in the cycle of sin? What can you do to safeguard yourself against falling into the cycle?

In the New Testament, Colossians 3:5-10 provides good insights: "Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator."

Poem

I Do Not Know The Man

*When Israel settled Goshen
Way down in Egypt's land
They multiplied abundantly
Like beaches grains of sand
The covering of Joseph
The favor on this band
Was lifted when a new king rose
"I do not know the man!"*

*When Promised land was settled
Inheritances grand
Great battles won by faithful
When peace filled all the land
With Joshua's full resting
Unraveling of God's bans
Rebellion filled the Promised Land
"We do not know the man!"*

*Despite judges' intentions
Despite the prophets' call
Despite the fullness, promises
Despite God's gift to all
When God's lamb faced the slaughter
Surrounded by his band
They all deserted, scared, denied
"I do not know the man!"*

*Now you, dear Pilgrim, listen
As fruitful, multiply
While settling in grace land
As you in Christ abide
Learn from the ones before you
Your soul's faith full demand
And don't be caught denouncing
"I do not know the man!"*

4/26/2024
WEEK 16 DAY 5

Deborah Delivers Israel from Jabin

Scripture JUDGES 4

Devotional

It might surprise some that a woman was recognized as a prophet and judge of Israel during the Old Testament. God spoke directly to Deborah, promising deliverance from the king of Canaan and his military commander Sisera. She called on her own military commander, Barak, to gather an army of ten thousand men to do the job.

But Barak wouldn't do it unless Deborah went along. It was unheard of for a woman to go into battle. Perhaps Barak wanted to unseat her from her role as prophet and judge. Maybe he was simply afraid of the powerful Sisera and his army. Or possibly he recognized that God was with Deborah, and he wanted her by his side.

The battle would take place on Mount Tabor, by the Kishon River. It was ten thousand Israelites on foot verses the vast army of Sisera supported by nine hundred iron-clad chariots. Israel didn't stand a chance. Except they won. How?

Deborah's song in Judges 5 gives some insights.

"When you, Lord, went out from Seir,
when you marched from the land of Edom,
the earth shook, the heavens poured,
the clouds poured down water." (v. 5)

"From the heavens the stars fought,
from their courses they fought against Sisera.
The river Kishon swept them away,
the age-old river, the river Kishon.
March on, my soul; be strong!" (v. 21-22)

God poured down a torrential thunderstorm, flooding the Kishon River and the surrounding land. The iron-clad chariots bogged down and were rendered useless. God gave the victory, for which a woman, Deborah, received honor. Even the enemy commander Sisera fell to a woman with a tent peg in one hand and a hammer in the other. As a result, "the land had peace forty years" (Judges 5:31).

What does this story teach you about God? What does it say about people? What about you?

Poem

Opportunities

*Deborah:
Show me, LORD
Who it is you're calling
May they respond with willing feet*

*Barak:
Lead me, LORD
Let me not shirk battle
Arm me in truth as I stand firm*

*Jael:
Use me, LORD
In the fight 'gainst evil
Give mighty strength by your right
hand*

*All:
Send me, LORD
With your vict'ry message
To those oppressed longing for hope*

4/29/2024
WEEK 17 DAY 1

Gideon, Warrior in a Winepress



Scripture JUDGES 6

Devotional

Gideon was just a farmer trying to stay out of trouble. Normally a person would thresh wheat on a hill in the open air, so the lighter chaff could blow away. But that would invite trouble from the neighboring marauders. So, Gideon hid his crops in a winepress buried into the earth. Better to have wheat with some chaff in it than no wheat at all.

He never saw himself as a judge, military commander, or even a leader. In verse 15 he said, "My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." Verse 27 adds that "he was afraid of his family and the townspeople." Yet God chose him to tear down his own father's altar to Baal, cut down the pagan Asherah pole, and lead a military defeat of the oppressive invaders who were ruining Israel's livelihood.

Even after God appeared directly to him and provided protection and direction in such profound ways, Gideon still wasn't sure. He famously put out a fleece on back-to-back nights with two different impossible requests. God patiently fulfilled his requests. Fearful Gideon with a low self-esteem would become the "mighty warrior" that God saw in him.

How do you see yourself? Do you see yourself as the sum total of all your fears and failures? Do you believe the lie that God could never love, call, and commission somebody like you?

Imagine you have two pieces of paper. On one you write down all your weaknesses, problems, and sins. On the other you simply write the word "God." Then, God tells you to throw the first piece of paper into the fireplace. What are you left with? That's all you need.

Acts 10:34-36 says, "God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all."

You are not the sum total of your failures. You are not the sum total of your successes. You are the sum total of God's grace poured out in Jesus Christ.

Poem

The Crutch Of The Fleece

*Those grounded in scripture
Those walking with God
Those close to the Shepherd
Those trusting his rod
Do not need the fleece
Nor the faith of another
To heed the Lord's calling
To fear's doubts recover
'Tis only the downtrod
The weak one, oppressed
Who challenges God's word
With signs is obsessed
But you, stride with courage
God's mission complete
Bind up your weak limbs
Throw the crutch of the fleece
Stand up, you are healed now
Shake off illness' mat
Throw strength into God's will
Your people impact
Run into the battle
With God by your side
Do not fear the Evil
In confidence stride*

4/30/2024
WEEK 17 DAY 2

Gideon Delivers Israel with 300 Men



Scripture JUDGES 7

Devotional

Gideon was just a fearful farmer who God convinced was a mighty warrior. He accepted the challenge, but at least he had thirty-two thousand men to fight the battle with him. Until twenty-two thousand left because they were scared, leaving a respectable force of ten thousand men who weren't scared.

Then nine thousand seven hundred of them were sent home for getting a drink of water in the wrong way, kneeling down and taking their eyes off the horizon.

I have been to the region in Israel where these men might have been culled from the herd. The streams there are very small. In places you could jump over them. Everywhere you could walk through them without getting your calves wet. We're not talking the mighty Mississippi. Think babbling brook. It makes sense that the men would have to get down on their knees to get a drink. Ninety-seven hundred of them did so.

That left only three hundred men with trumpets and jars and torches, up against a huge camel-riding army. Hardly a fair fight... for the Midianites! They didn't stand a chance against the Lord God. When they heard three hundred men blowing trumpets, smashing jars, lifting torches, and proclaiming victory shouts, they must have thought there were thousands of soldiers behind each trumpeter. Mayhem followed. The victory was the Lord's.

The ways of God often don't make sense to the world. We think bigger is better. More is mightier. Wealthier is weightier. But God's economy works differently. That's how God used Gideon, the self-proclaimed least important person in his family, which was the weakest clan of the entire tribe, with three hundred band members from the trumpet section to defeat a vast army of marauders.

In explaining how to get ahead in the Kingdom of God, Jesus said, "the last will be first, and the first will be last" (Matthew 20:16). It's upside-down. It's counter intuitive. It's non-sensical. Except it isn't. When God is in the equation, all you need is a humble heart and willing spirit.

What does this story teach you about how God works in the world? How might the Lord be calling you?

Poem

Pare Me Down, Lord

*Pare me down, Lord
Yes, Lord, whittle away
All the baggage, excesses
Which get in Your way
Things which distract me
Upon which I lean
Keep me from fully trusting
True faith thus to glean
And when I think that
You have whittled enough
You then decide, gently,
On things that are tough
For me to give over
To release unto You
The props I am grasping
Which substitute truth
And then, only then,
Send me forth to the fray
As I'm now liberated
From what gets in Your way
To show Your full glory
Through me, Your weak vessel
As to battle I go
As with evil I wrestle
Yes, pare me down, Lord
Have your will, have your way
As I witness Your power
And as You win the Day*

5/1/2024
WEEK 17 DAY 3

Jephthah Makes Deadly Vow

Scripture JUDGES 11

Devotional

Again, we see the theme that God uses a nobody from nowhere to accomplish His purposes. Jephthah was despised by his own family. It wasn't his fault that his father had relations with a prostitute, resulting in his birth. He didn't create the scenario that his dad and mom went on to have several other children of their own. The family dysfunction wasn't his doing. But he is the one who paid the price. They sent him packing to go live with other people. He would be somebody else's problem.

That is, until they needed him. When they thought that he could solve their problems they invited him back into the family fold. The hole in his heart was so big that he went right back to where he had been rejected. He would risk his life in the hope of being restored to his relatives.

In some ways, this might have been a rash decision. Maybe he was given to impulsive words and actions. His desire to win favor back from his family was so strong, that he made a rash vow in hopes of earning God's favor (which he already had): "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

Some years ago, I was in Ethiopia where I visited a boy we sponsored through World Vision. His very small mud house was occupied by him, his mother and sister, and the family cow (yep, it slept inside). Three thousand years ago, it was common practice to keep your livestock inside the family house, where they were protected from harsh elements, wild animals, and unscrupulous thieves.

Jephthah might have thought that one of his sheep or goats would exit his house, as they came and went throughout the day. Instead, he was cheerfully greeted by his only child. His heart sank.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one" (Matthew 5:33-37).

What do you learn from Jephthah's story? How might his challenging background have led him to bad choices? What aspects of his life were beyond his control? Which ones were within his grasp? How does this intersect with your own life?

Poem

Don't Go There

*Lord, I am facing a battle so hard
I've done all I can to be ready
My arms have been strengthened
True friends, either side
I pray to be steady
Will you be my guide?
What offering is needed
To prove I am ready?
A vow?
A promise?
A sacrifice costly?*

Don't go there!

*Lord, can I trust you will hear me today?
I've done all I can to solicit--
My guilt I've repented
I've crucified pride
The Enemy threatens
Who will be my guide?
Is an off'ring still needed
To ensure Your defense?
A vow?
A promise?
A claim undeliverable?*

Don't go there!

5/2/2024
WEEK 17 DAY 4

The Birth of Samson



Scripture JUDGES 14-15

Devotional

By the time of the period of Judges, some things were entrenched in Israel's history and faith. To be childless was unthinkable. To see the face of God meant death. And to be a Nazirite (see Numbers 6) was a serious commitment. All of these come together in the story about Samson's birth (see Judges 13).

Before Samson was even conceived, an angel of the Lord told his mother, "the boy will be a Nazirite of God from the womb until the day of his death" (Judges 13:7). To be a Nazirite meant he would never eat any spiritually unclean food, never drink any fermented beverage, never cut his hair, and never touch a dead body.

As Samson was growing up, the Israelites were oppressed by the Philistines. So, who did Samson choose for a wife? A Philistine, of course. Do your best to retell the story of these two chapters in your own words. As a refresher, here is the plot.

Act I - Samson and the Girl

Act II - Samson and the Lion

Act III - Samson and the Riddle

Act IV - Samson and the Foxes

Act V - Samson and the Two Ropes

Act VI - Samson and the Donkey's Jawbone

Act VII - Samson and the Spring

Act VIII - Samson and the Israelites

What does this story teach you about God, people, and yourself?

Poem

Strength

*Lion's strength, Jaw to prey
Righteous strength, Kneel to pray
Which is stronger? Earth or heav'n?
In the battle, which will win?*

*Honey's strength, Sweet to taste
Passion's strength, Sweet in haste
Which is stronger? Who can know?
Truth or deceit soon will show*

5/3/2024
WEEK 17 DAY 5

Samson and Delilah



Scripture JUDGES 16

Devotional

God blessed Samson with supernatural strength. But he had a weakness for women. In yesterday's reading we saw how Samson's first love, a wife chosen from the people who were ruling over Israel, resulted in troubled times. While his first mistake was marrying the Philistine woman, his fatal error was giving in to her when she sobbed, "You hate me! You don't really love me. You've given my people a riddle, but you haven't told me the answer" (Judges 14:16).

And in today's reading we see how his dalliance with a prostitute led to near entrapment, and his love affair with Delilah ended with his own demise. Again, his fatal attraction was doomed when he yielded to Delilah's manipulative pleading, "How can you say, 'I love you,' when you won't confide in me? This is the third time you have made a fool of me and haven't told me the secret of your great strength" (Judges 16:15).

Women were his kryptonite. Actually, his blinding passions were his kryptonite.

Samson and Superman are not alone. We all have an area or two that stymies our progress in life. Caving to criticism. Selfish ambition. Lustful thoughts. Alcohol or other substances. Childhood trauma. Fears. Shyness. Arrogance. Illness. The list goes on. If you were honest with God, what would you say your biggest problem areas are?

In the New Testament, Paul relayed these words God spoke to him, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9). It is good to know that Jesus gives us grace to overcome our weaknesses.

How is the Lord asking you to abandon your brokenness and embrace His grace?

Poem

Bad Hair Day

Long hair
Sleek hair
Curly, shiny tresses
Healthy
Bouncy
Vanity expresses
Pompadour
Full glamour
Pride now fully showing
Risky cut
Pixie cut
Full shave, bald bestowing
Crew cut
Mohawk
Flip begins disaster
Mullet
Afro
Undercut the Master

5/6/2024
WEEK 18 DAY 1

Ruth Vows to Stay with Naomi



Scripture RUTH 1

Devotional

During the period of the book of Judges we have a beautiful story told in the book of Ruth. The story begins in Bethlehem. At the conclusion of this book, we see that Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of King David, and the ancestor of Jesus. That is why Joseph and Mary had to travel to Bethlehem when she was about to give birth to the Son of God (Luke 2:1-8).

But Ruth herself was not from Bethlehem. She was not even from Judah, or a Jew at all. Rather, she was from Moab, on the other side of the Dead Sea. It was there that she met and married one of the people who left Bethlehem during a famine in search of a better place to live and eat.

In time, Ruth's husband died, as did his brother and father. She was left alone with her foreign mother-in-law, a woman named Naomi. After the famine had ended and her husband and sons had died, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. Perhaps there she could be provided for by a relative. She released her two daughters-in-law from any obligation.

It is then that Ruth famously replied, "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried" (Ruth 1:16-17).

Think about each of these statements. What would the implications be for a Moabite woman moving among the Israelite people?

Where you go I will go.

Where you stay I will stay.

Your people will be my people.

Your God will be my God.

Where you die I will die.

Where you are buried I will be buried.

Poem

Grace Presence
Dedicated To Lisa

*The great grace to enter a family
So very unlike one you've known
To learn a new way of being
Unusual customs be shown
This is the grace honed in marriage
This is the great task to pursue
Allowing another increasing
A willing decreasing of you*

*The patience to stay at a bedside
Of one who is sickly, in need
The courage to stand at a graveside
With family adopted, to grieve
This presence, the offering of true love
This presence, this carrying lift
When borne long with empathy sharing
Becomes a miraculous gift*

*Then staying with faithfulness steady
As new journeys span forth ahead
When future's path dark lies before you
When choosing another instead
"Wherever you go, I'll be with you,
Wherever your home, there is mine
I'll travel this life set before you
I'll carry your burden as mine"*

5/7/2024
WEEK 18 DAY 2

Ruth Gleans from the Fields of Boaz



Scripture RUTH 2

Devotional

Naomi the Israelite arrived in Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law Ruth the Moabite at the time of the barley harvest. Hungry and husbandless, the two women had to think of a way to get food. In their day, women from that part of the world who didn't have a husband or father to provide for them often had to resort to begging or prostitution to make ends meet. But they had a better option.

So, Ruth went to pick up leftover grain that the barley harvesters missed. This field belonged to Boaz, a relative of Naomi. This man Boaz was the son of an Israelite named Salmon and his wife Rahab, a Canaanite and former prostitute who helped the Hebrew people conquer her hometown of Jericho (see Joshua 2). It is ironic that, in order to not resort to prostitution, Ruth gleans grain from the field of a man who was born to a former prostitute.

In fact, the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 lists five women in the forty-two generations listed. For each one, what does this say about how God works in our lives, no matter who we are?

Tamar (Matthew 1:3; Genesis 38) – She was a Gentile woman who veiled her face and pretended to be a prostitute in order to have sexual relations from her father-in-law Judah, after the death of her husband.

Rahab (Matthew 1:5; Joshua 2) – She was a Canaanite prostitute who hid Joshua's spies so that they could overthrow the city of Jericho. She married Salmon and they had a son named Boaz.

Ruth (Matthew 1:5; Book of Ruth) – She was a Moabite woman who moved to Bethlehem with her mother-in-law after all the men in the family died. She married Boaz and they became the great-grandparents of King David.

Bathsheba (Matthew 1:6; 1 Samuel 11-12) – She was the wife of a Hittite soldier named Uriah, but had an affair with King David when her husband was away at war. After David arranged for Uriah's death, she married David and gave birth to Solomon, who would become the next king.

Mary (Matthew 1:16) – A thousand years after Solomon, Mary was betrothed to a man named Joseph when she became pregnant with the Son of God by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Poem

Prophetic Gleaning

*Fields harvested
Bounty extracted
Mine exhausted
Abandoned
Only the needy
The ones on the fringe
Stoop for the crumbs
Under table
To grind grain
Small loaf
For empty mouth
For starving soul
Last meal?
Oil spent?
Prophetic gleaning*

5/8/2024
WEEK 18 DAY 3

Ruth Approaches Boaz as Kinsman-Redeemer



Scripture RUTH 3

Devotional

After Boaz showed Ruth extreme kindness, her mother-in-law Naomi told her, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers" (Ruth 2:20). Sometimes this is translated as kinsman-redeemer.

Remember that women had few options in Old Testament times. In order that a widow wouldn't have to resort to begging or prostitution, Deuteronomy 25:5-10 stated that the brother of the widow's deceased husband had to become her new husband. Their first son they had together would carry on the name of the dead brother.

If he wouldn't or if there was no living brother, the next closest relative could serve as the kinsman-redeemer. All of this is playing out in today's reading. Boaz promised to marry Ruth as her kinsman-redeemer if the one man more closely related refused.

Boaz was deeply impressed with Ruth, whom he called a "woman of noble character." He had previously told her how moved he was that she left her parents and homeland to take care of her mother-in-law among people she didn't know (Ruth 2:11). Now when she was offering to be married to him as her kinsman-redeemer, he told her, "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor" (Ruth 3:10).

It seems as if it was her kindness more than anything that attracted Boaz to Ruth. Kindness is a theme throughout the Bible. In the New Testament, Colossians 3:12 says, "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Why is kindness such an important virtue for people who follow God? Who has shown you great kindness? How did that impact you?

Poem

Redeemer

*A piece for the rag man
All tattered and soiled
Refuse in the trash bin
Abandoned*

*Worn thin by life's hardships
Crisp shininess gone
Full hopelessness borne
Forgotten*

*The humble position
Laid low, trampled down
The patch, only piece left
Submission*

*Yet, eyes seeking treasure
Through many piles pores
Uncovers the dirty gem
Diamond*

*A crafty outsmarting
A slave holder tricked
A purchasing agent
Redeemer*

5/9/2024
WEEK 18 DAY 4

Ruth Marries Boaz

Scripture RUTH 4:1-17

Devotional

Recall that when a woman's husband died, her husband's brother was responsible to marry her and produce children in the name of the dead brother. If he refused, it was a disgrace. In front of the community's elders, the widow would remove one of the sandals of the man and spit in his face. That man's family line would be known as The Family of the Unsandaled (Deuteronomy 25:10).

In today's reading, Boaz went to the nearest relative of Ruth's deceased brother and offered him the man's land as well as his widow. Here the closest relative removed his own sandal. It was now a legal transaction in front of the elders. He did not want to fulfill his duty as the kinsman-redeemer. He would leave that to Boaz.

The elders spoke a blessing over Boaz. After he and Ruth married and had a son, the women of the community spoke a blessing over Naomi. She would be cared for the rest of her life because of her faithful daughter-in-law. They named their child Obed, who became the grandpa of King David. The spoken blessings were fulfilled!

As you reflect on the book of Ruth, finish these sentences:

Naomi is...

Ruth is...

Boaz is...

God is...

Poem

What Happens?

What happens when scarcity pushes you from comfort onto foreign ground?

Expansion of love.

What happens when overwhelming grief leaves you in despair?

Unexpected comfort.

What happens when the journey is long and tiring?

Faithfulness becomes your friend.

What happens when you hope for the familiar but life has moved on?

Steadying presence.

What happens when you hunger and thirst for hope?

Hardworking companionship.

What happens when you long for love?

Wise counsel.

What happens when you risk everything?

Compassionate notice.

What happens when you stand up for another?

Saving redemption.

What happens when you vow to love?

Pregnant future.

What happens when you cry out to God in humility?

Kingdom fulfillment.

What happens when you wait for God's perfect will?

Unimagined way.

5/10/2024
WEEK 18 DAY 5

The Birth and Dedication of Samuel



Scripture 1 SAMUEL 1

Devotional

Samuel served the people of Israel as their last judge:

¹⁵ Samuel continued as Israel's leader all the days of his life. ¹⁶ From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. ¹⁷ But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the Lord. (1 Samuel 7:15-16)

Samuel also served the people of Israel as their first prophet:

¹⁹ The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground. ²⁰ And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. ²¹ The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. (1 Samuel 3:19-21)

Samuel then was a bridge between the period of conquest and judges and the period of kings and prophets. He would anoint Saul as Israel's first king, then David as the second king. We see in today's reading how the Lord prepared Samuel for this great calling even before he was conceived in the womb.

His mother Hannah, desperate for a baby, promised to raise a firstborn son with the Nazirite vow (Numbers 6, see Devotions for Week 12, Day 2). After she conceived, gave birth, and weaned her son, Hannah fulfilled her promise and dedicated Samuel to the Lord. He would grow up under the tutelage of Eli the priest in the house of the Lord at Shiloh, a fifteen-mile journey from her home.

Think of the different people in the story so far: Samuel, Hannah, Elkanah her husband, Elkanah's other wife Peninnah and her sons and daughters, Eli the priest, and Eli's two sons Hophni and Phinehas. How do you imagine each of these reacted to the arrangement that Hannah made with Eli? How might these have affected Samuel as he was growing up?

Poem

Drunken Prayers

*Raw longing
Unquenched grieving
Chest beating
Cruciform mourning
Barren womb
Sleepless tears
Whipping mocking
Misunderstood hopes
Drunken prayers*

5/13/2024
WEEK 19 DAY 1

Eli and His Sinful Sons

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 2:12-36

Devotional

In the previous reading, we saw that Samuel served as Israel's last judge and first prophet. Here we see that he also carried out the duties of a priest, wearing the priest's official garment, a linen ephod (v. 18). Normally, the priesthood was passed from father to son. But Eli's sons were not fit for the job. They profaned the sacrifices by greedily taking more than their share, and they desecrated the tent of meeting by sleeping with the women who served there. Speaking through a man of God, the Lord said to Eli, "Why do you honor your sons more than me?"

That's a good question. What do you do when friends and family say, do and post things that are clearly outside of the ways of God? It is easy to overlook the indiscretions of others. It's even easier when they are done by loved ones. To keep peace in the family, Eli allowed his sons to become "scoundrels... (with) no regard for the Lord." His neglect ended up costing his sons their lives. What might Eli have done that could have changed the trajectory of their lives?

The priesthood was supposed to pass from Eli down through generations to come. But the Lord told Eli that his negligence would eventually result in the end of the priesthood in his entire family line. 1 Kings 2:27 records this taking place under Israel's third king, Solomon who "removed Abiathar from the priesthood of the Lord, fulfilling the word the Lord had spoken at Shiloh about the house of Eli." Unfaithfulness has far-reaching consequences.

In Exodus 34:6-7, the Lord told Moses, "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."

However, there is good news. The curse of generational sin can be stopped in its tracks. Galatians 3:13-14 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole.' He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."

What does this lesson teach us about our ancestral heritage? What does it tell us about the legacy we leave for future generations?

Poem

Apathy's Costly Price Tag

*I asked them once
I told them twice
But now
I'd rather rest
Than discipline
Than truly see
The wand'ring
From what's best
Perhaps on own
They'll find their way
I'm tired
Of constant nag
Ignore them once
Allow them twice
Apathy's costly
Price tag*

5/14/2024
WEEK 19 DAY 2

The Lord Calls Samuel

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 3

Devotional

I received my call to ministry on a wintry night in February 1982 with snow falling on Slater Hill at Purdue University. I remember it like it was yesterday. Though I didn't know everything that would happen over these past four decades, I did have a strong sense that God was giving me GOOD news.

But Samuel's call to ministry started with BAD news. He would have to tell Eli that God was going to bring about the end of his priestly family line. At first Samuel kept it to himself. Who could blame him? Eli was his priest, mentor, and surrogate father. He must have loved him deeply.

Verse 19 gives us the result of Samuel's faithfulness: "The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground." What an interesting phrase. Today we might say "fall on deaf ears." His words weren't ignored. The entire nation of Israel recognized him as a prophet who spoke the word of God.

We are called to be faithful with whatever task God gives us. A few chapters later, when the Israelites were clamoring for a king, Samuel said to them, "And I will teach you the way that is good and right. But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you" (1 Samuel 12:23-24). There it is again. Serve God faithfully.

Proverbs 3:3-4 says, "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man." A commitment to love and faithfulness yields a positive and productive life.

How is God calling you to be faithful with His purposes for your life? How can you be more faithful with your words, actions, relationships, and calling?

Poem

Calling

*It takes a childlike list'ning
It takes a silent night
When all the world is sleeping
When all the soul is quiet
To hear the central calling
To hear the voice of God
Life's weaving threads a-looming
Life's weaving shuttle rod
Your name pierces the darkness
Your name whispered in ear
Your answer trust's submission
Your answer strong and clear
My quiet soul is longing
My quiet life is still
O speak, your servant's list'ning
O speak, what is your will?*

5/15/2024
WEEK 19 DAY 3

The Philistines Capture the Ark

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 4

Devotional

Recall that “the gold-covered ark of the covenant... contained the gold jar of manna, Aaron’s staff that had budded, and the stone tablets of the covenant” (Hebrews 9:4). Each of these three objects represented miraculous works by the hand of God as the people wandered in the desert between Egyptian slavery and Promised Land sovereignty. The ark embodied the very presence of God.

It was natural for them to think that bringing the ark of the covenant into battle would give them victory where they had only experienced defeat. The problem is that Eli’s wicked sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were in charge of the ark. God had already spoken against them. The result? They and their dad all died, Israel was defeated again, and the ark of God’s covenant was captured by the enemy.

God is more interested in our inward character than our outward authority. Hophni and Phinehas were priests, sons of their father Eli who was the recognized priest of the people. But let’s not forget that “Eli’s sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord” (1 Samuel 2:12). They profaned the sacrifices by greedily taking more than their share, and they desecrated the tent of meeting by sleeping with the women who served there.

In the New Testament, the book of Galatians was written to people who had accepted Jesus Christ as their savior. Paul warned them to walk by the Spirit, not by the desires of the flesh. Take a look at these passages, and think about what it means to have Godly character in life:

¹⁹ *The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Galatians 5:19-21)*

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-25)*

Poem

Correction

*God will not be an amulet
God will not be a charm
God is not “luck” to lace your neck
Or wear upon your arm
God is not bottled genie
A prayer, Your wish and will
God’s cause is not your easy life
Nor magic healing pill
Instead, your life belongs to God
God’s glory to display
It is not for our selfish rights
But built for Kingdom ways
So let your prayers be not for self
A Santa Claus like list
But know ‘tis God’s will to desire
For Him you do exist
Your place is not upon a throne
Ordering your will and way
Your place is at the feet of Christ
Your longing, to obey*

5/16/2024
WEEK 19 DAY 4

The Ark is Returned to Israel



Scripture 1 SAMUEL 5-6

Devotional

The Philistine army was having no problem defeating the Israelite army. But they had no power over the ark of God's covenant. Curiously, they sent it on its way with a gift of five gold tumors and five gold rats, representing the plagues which were wreaking havoc on the five Philistine rulers and their people.

In the classic film, "Raiders of the Lost Ark," Indiana Jones and Nazi Germans outmaneuvered one another, thinking that possessing the ark would make them invincible. Apparently, they forgot to read 1 Samuel 4. Still, in the movie all kinds of bad things happened to those who tried to steal it away. For this, they should have consulted 1 Samuel 5-6, where broken idols and skin diseases and seventy corpses attested to God's power and authority.

In and of itself, the ark of the covenant was a box. It was made of and filled with materials found on earth. It was a box. It was not God.

Yet it was the ark of God. It was not the thing itself, but how they treated it that led to their downfall. The Israelites put their two most corrupt priests in charge of it. The Philistines treated it like a magic wand, shoving it into the temple of a false idol. Once returned, more Israelites curiously popped open the lid to gawk at the contents when only the Levites were authorized to do so. In every case, they were treating the ark of God's covenant like any other idol.

Nothing in our physical world is God. But everything has been made by God. 1 Timothy 4:4-5 says, "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."

How should we treat church buildings? How should we look after nature? How should we interact with people, even those we don't like? How should we take care of ourselves?

Poem

Know This

*God does not need an armored guard
Nor soldiers strong for fighting
God does not need wise counselors
To give His mind a-righting
Though God may use us, make it known
God can fight battles on His own
And thus preserve His glorious throne
God's pow'r is un-surpassing*

*God's presence causes gods to fall
Without a word they topple
God's presence causes arms to fail
The proud and strong to wobble
Creator of each human form
His presence 'fore each one was born
He knows those who will be
transformed
And those who will reject Him*

*So put aside your prideful boasts
Your empty ego praises
Were not the Lord strong at our side
No pow'r could ever raise us
Out of the enemy's held wrist
Out of the grave's defying fist
So, Christian, ponder and know this
It's only God who saves us*

5/17/2024
WEEK 19 DAY 5

Israel Asks for a King

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 8

Devotional

The people of Israel gave Samuel several reasons they wanted a king:

- Samuel was old and couldn't lead them as judge & prophet much longer.
- Samuel's sons were corrupt and couldn't be counted on.
- A king could lead them into battle.
- All the other nations had a king.

Up to this point, the nation of Israel had been a theocracy. Though the Lord spoke through people like Abraham, Moses, Joshua and Samuel, God was their true ruler. That is why the Lord told Samuel, "...it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king" (v. 7). Out with the theocracy; in with the monarchy.

In response to their request, Samuel warned the people about what having a king would mean for them:

- The king would create a national army with a draft.
- People would be conscripted as servants and slaves for the king.
- The king would take their land and property for his personal use.
- Taxes.

Their response? "We want a king over us." And the rest is history. Under the first three kings (Saul, David, and Solomon) they were a united nation. Then civil war split the nation into the northern kingdom of Israel with nineteen kings and the southern kingdom of Judah with nineteen kings and one queen. They were in continual conflict with each other. Instead of being united under the authority of a king, having monarchs did just the opposite.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel lasted about 250 years until they were conquered by Assyria. Israel was forever assimilated into the Assyrian people. Those living in Canaan became known as the Samaritans, a mixed breed of people with syncretistic religious practices.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah remained an additional 135 years until they were conquered by and exiled to Babylon. In future years, a remnant was allowed to return to Judah and rebuild Jerusalem.

The rest of this Old Testament study is dedicated to exploring the ramifications of this request, "We want a king over us." Be careful what you wish for!

Poem

Be Careful!

*Be careful what you ask for
With envious, glutt'nous eyes
Instead of trusting Yahweh
To be your constant guide
Don't give your trust to char'ots
Or armies swelling pride
The only one to rule you
Is Jesus at your side*

5/20/2024
WEEK 20 DAY 1

Samuel Prepares Saul to be King



Scripture 1 SAMUEL 9

Devotional

Saul was a natural choice to be Israel's first king. He was tall, dark, and handsome. He was a good son from a prominent family. And he was God's choice to rule over the people and lead them against their Philistine enemies.

But Saul himself was not a fan of the idea. He thought of himself as somebody from an inconsequential clan in a small tribe. Nevertheless, Samuel had heard from God. He sat Saul at the head of the table, gave him a king's feast, and told him that he had a message from God for him.

Saul had everything going for him. He should have been one of the greatest kings in the history of the world. Instead, he was one of the worst. He was indeed anointed king, as we shall see in the next reading. But later he was rejected as king by God Himself. He had failed the faithfulness test. The crown went to his head.

He would have done well to have listened to Psalm 10:16-18:

- ¹⁶ The Lord is King for ever and ever;
the nations will perish from his land.
¹⁷ You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted;
you encourage them, and you listen to their cry,
¹⁸ defending the fatherless and the oppressed,
so that mere earthly mortals
will never again strike terror.

Revelation 17:14 reminds us that Jesus "the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

Why is it important for us to live our lives under the Lordship and Kingship of God? What stands in the way of that most in your life? Successes? Failures? Praises? Cutdowns? Distractions? Influences? Something else?

Poem

A Head Above The Rest

*God gives to some great beauty
And others, strong physique
Still others, bright intelligence
Yet some, humble and meek*

*Each has a gift for sharing
To bring about what's best
Though some seem always winning,
"A head above the rest"*

*And yet, there is deceiving
If surface all you view
For God looks on the inside
When character reviews*

*Those seeming great advantage
Ahead, above the rest
Might end up lacking what it takes
When put to final test*

*So close your eyes when judging
In prayer, discern what's true
And be surprised by choices
God has in store for you*

5/21/2024
WEEK 20 DAY 2

Saul is Anointed and Made King



Scripture 1 SAMUEL 10

Devotional

“You will be changed into a different person.”

Samuel made this promise to Saul as he left him and headed for home. He told Saul that he would experience several signs along the way. Verse 9 sums it up: “God changed Saul’s heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day.” If Saul was going to fulfill God’s call, he had to be a different person on the inside.

And he would need to fulfill external expectations too. After Saul was declared king, verse 25 says, “Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the Lord.” Saul couldn’t just “feel” like a godly leader; he had to “be” one.

This is true for Christians in the modern world as well. Surrendering to Jesus means internal conversion and external transformation. In Ephesians 4:22-24 Paul wrote, “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”

Our worldview influences our lifestyle, and vice versa. How we think affects how we behave. The opposite is also true. Our internal and external worlds are inextricably intertwined. Righteousness and holiness define who we are in the prayer closet and in the public square.

We will soon see that Saul’s downfall came when he took on the roll of a priest. But God didn’t assign him a priest’s functions. The Lord assigned him a king’s duties and allowed him to participate in a prophet’s utterances as well. God had changed Saul’s heart for the good. Then Saul changed his own heart for bad.

“You will be changed into a different person.”

How has God changed you? What are your spiritual gifts? Who has God called you to be? What has God called you to do? And just as importantly, who has God called you NOT to be and what has He called you NOT to do?

Poem

Tabor

*There is a mount named Tabor
Quite smaller than it seems
A place of revelation
A place, discerning dreams
Its name is quite confusing
Both “purity,” “bad luck”
“Misfortune,” yet “encouragement”
A mother lode, now struck*

*Once called to Tree of Tabor
There others you will meet
A-journeying to Bethel
The House of God, His seat
Will you accept the calling?
The offering of God?
Will you proceed to Gilbeah,
A hill which you need trod?*

*And once upon this hillside
Will you two prophets meet,
Transfigured with the Son of God,
To worship at His feet?
Will you join in the wonder?
Will you bear transfixed gaze?
Will you long to remain in place
Or move ahead in praise?*

*Then on to Gilgal, move you,
With Ebenezer stones
To mark your life’s intention—
The calling in your bones
Rise up prophetic speaking
Your will to God’s now bent
Anointing oil upon you
From Holy Spirit sent*

5/22/2024
WEEK 20 DAY 3

Samuel Rebukes Saul for Making Offering



Scripture 1 SAMUEL 13:1-15

Devotional

“What have you done?”

This is the question God asked Adam and Eve after they ate the forbidden fruit.

It's the question the sailors asked Jonah when it was revealed to them that the life-threatening storm was his fault.

And here it is the one that Samuel posed to Saul after he disobeyed God's Law by usurping the duties of a priest.

“What have you done?”

To this question, Adam and Eve deflected blame toward anybody but themselves.

Jonah accepted the blame, then took the easy way out, asking the sailors to throw him overboard rather than obeying God.

And Saul responded with classic rationalization, refusing to own up to his failure: “When I saw... I thought... So I felt compelled...”

“What have you done?”

Adam and Eve were banished from the garden.

Jonah was swallowed by a huge fish.

Saul lost the hope of an enduring kingdom.

“What have you done?”

Poem

Compelled

*With chaos circling round you
It's hard to wait for God
What seems like tardy “relief-means”
Breaks Patience's holding rod
We feel compelled to action
Despite God's “Wait” command
And end up in destruction
Unable then to stand
It's often God will come to you
At the last hour's chiming
'Tis best to pray and stay awake
And wait for godly timing
So put to rest your hurried thoughts
Anxiety's loud voicing
“Be still, My Soul, for I will wait
Upon the hour, God's choicing!”*

5/23/2024
WEEK 20 DAY 4

The Lord Rejects Saul as King

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 15

Devotional

In the previous reading, we saw that God removed the hope of an enduring kingdom from Saul's family line, because he unlawfully took on the role of a priest. Here we see that the Lord rejected Saul himself as king, because he disobeyed a direct command from God.

This passage often makes us ask why God would order Saul's army to destroy every human and animal associated with the Amalekites. For context, recall that the Amalekites were the first ones to attack the Israelites just after they fled Egypt and crossed the Red Sea on dry ground (Exodus 17:8-16; 1 Samuel 15:2). That was over four hundred years earlier. For the ensuing four centuries, the Amalekites attacked with armies and terrorized with guerilla warfare, killing men, women, and children. The solution was their utter defeat.

Saul and his men obeyed... sort of. They killed all the people (except the king) and destroyed all the animals (except the good ones). Saul's justification was that he was planning on sacrificing those good animals as an offering to the Lord. Needless to say, God was not impressed.

The phrase "to obey is better than sacrifice" in verse 22 is repeated in various forms throughout the Old and New Testaments. In Mark 12:33, Jesus said, "To love [God] with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

Sometimes we put the rituals of religion above our devotion to God. It's not that offerings and sacrifice are bad. It's just that love and obedience are better. That's what it means to follow God.

How is the Lord challenging you to love Him more deeply, obey Him more completely, and follow Him more closely?

Poem

Rejection

*You're favored by the people
You're winning on all sides
You're conquering your battles
You're making many strides
It all looks good around you
Your holding royal rod
Yet wanton disobed'ence brings
Rejection from your God*

*It might make sense in your mind
Your motives might seem right
With rationale you state your case
Seems clever, pure and bright
But here is where you're lacking—
Depending on yourself—
Your offering rejected
Your heart by God be dealt*

*It is the heart God's longing--
One only after God
One holding firm obed'ence
One guarded by God's rod
Even a minor offense
Can change your course in life—
One truly on the Way of Christ
Or one consumed by strife*

*So learn this lesson, Child of God,
Don't make the same mistake
Of those who've gone before you
When tempted, stay awake
Be on your guard 'gainst voices
Which call to ways untrue
Attune your ears to only One
The Way, The Life, The True*

5/24/2024
WEEK 20 DAY 5

Samuel Anoints David to be the Next King

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 16

Devotional

My mom was the youngest of eight girls. There was a twenty-year gap between the oldest and my mother. All the sisters raised families in and around Muncie, Indiana. They remained close and Mom was always loved by her sisters. They got together for parties, family gatherings, and faraway trips. But, being the youngest, Phyllis clearly wasn't the leader of the pack.

In today's reading, we see that David was the youngest of eight boys. When Samuel consecrated his dad and brothers, they didn't even call David in from tending the sheep. He was just Little Davey, out doing his thing. They would let him know if anything important happened.

The Lord had told Samuel, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (v. 7).

In Acts 13:22-23, Paul was trying to convince some leaders of the Jewish synagogue to put faith in Christ. He referenced this Old Testament passage, saying, "After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.' From this man's descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised."

Think about it. Samuel had to ask Jesse if he had any more sons before the dad even thought about inviting his youngest to the ceremony. Only then was David consecrated, became Israel's greatest king, and the ancestor of Jesus a thousand years later.

Have you disqualified yourself or anyone else from God's calling to do great things? What are the reasons? Limited talent, resources, training, looks, or background? What would God say about this?

Poem

How Long Will You Mourn?

*How long will you mourn for what is
not to be
Instead of advancing with God?
Get up
Wipe your tears
Fill your ram's horn with oil
Stop questioning and see how God
sees?*

*How long will you go by what's seen
with your eyes
Instead of discerning with God?
Be patient
Reject
Until God points to truth
Behold the anointed, God's prize!*

*How long will you kick 'gainst the
goads of our Lord
Instead of accepting His will?
Cast off
All depression
Repent! Be washed clean!
Be humble, be fully restored!*

5/27/2024
WEEK 21 DAY 1

David and Goliath

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 17

Devotional

Even though David had been anointed in front of his family to be the future king, he still had an image problem. While his three oldest brothers were lined up for battle with the Philistines, David was still stuck tending the sheep. He just couldn't overcome them seeing him as baby of the family. His oldest brother even rebuked him for leaving the flock in the field to view the battle in the basin.

Who could blame them? Goliath stood over nine feet tall, wore 125 pounds of armor and hoisted a fifteen-pound spear. David was the unimpressive, ruddy runt of the family. But we know the end of the story.

Writing about the future Messiah, Isaiah 53 says that Jesus was unlikely to defeat the even greater giant called sin. Read this passage and see what parallels you can draw between what David did to the giant and what Jesus did to sin.

- 1 Who has believed our message
and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?
- 2 He grew up before him like a tender shoot,
and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him,
nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.
- 3 He was despised and rejected by mankind,
a man of suffering, and familiar with pain.
Like one from whom people hide their faces
he was despised, and we held him in low esteem.
- 4 Surely he took up our pain
and bore our suffering,
yet we considered him punished by God,
stricken by him, and afflicted.
- 5 But he was pierced for our transgressions,
he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,
and by his wounds we are healed.
- 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray,
each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him
the iniquity of us all.
- 7 He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.
- 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away.
Yet who of his generation protested?
For he was cut off from the land of the living;
for the transgression of my people he was punished.
- 9 He was assigned a grave with the wicked,
and with the rich in his death,
though he had done no violence,
nor was any deceit in his mouth.
- 10 Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer,
and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin,
he will see his offspring and prolong his days,
and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand.
- 11 After he has suffered,
he will see the light of life and be satisfied;
by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many,
and he will bear their iniquities.
- 12 Therefore I will give him a portion among the great,
and he will divide the spoils with the strong,
because he poured out his life unto death,
and was numbered with the transgressors.
For he bore the sin of many,
and made intercession for the transgressors.

Poem

Handling Fear

*How does one handle the
fear of the day---
The hot ice a-coursing
through veins?
Temptation to hunker,
temptation to hide?
Temptation to run, speak
words which divide?
Temptation to doubt God,
temptation to blame?
Temptation to tuck tail, not
stay?*

*How does one muster the
strength to have faith
When all else are paralyzed,
frozen?
To join in the wailing, to
shake without prayer?
To join hopeless mantras
which poison the air?
To give up identity, status of
chosen?
To let evil enter your gate?*

*Or will you be lone in your
fearlessness, faith
And run in while all else take
flight?
You enter with nourishment,
strength for the weary
You enter with boldness, not
armor you carry
You enter with five stones in
leather now heaving
You enter in God's name to
fight*

5/28/2024
WEEK 21 DAY 2

Saul Tries to Kill David

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 19

Devotional

King Saul had already been told that the kingdom would be ripped away from him and given to somebody else. Even worse, 1 Samuel 16:14 says, "Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him." So, Saul enlisted his would-be successor to play music, which brought the king relief (1 Samuel 16:23).

But David's dramatic success over Goliath certainly made Saul jealous. David also became best friends with King Saul's son, Jonathan. Gaining a high rank in the army, David had success after success on the battlefield. People danced in the streets singing, "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). The next day Saul took his spear and tried to pin David to the palace wall, prior to the time mentioned in today's reading.

David fell in love with the king's daughter Michal. Seeing an opportunity to have the threat to his throne killed in battle, Saul offered David his daughter's hand for one hundred Philistine foreskins. He brought back two hundred. David was now best friends with Prince Jonathan, married to Princess Michal, and anointed by Samuel to be King David after Saul's death.

Retell the story from today's reading from the perspectives of Saul, David, Jonathan, Michal, and Samuel, seeing what these reveal about the ways of God.

Poem

Hurt By The One You Love

*What now could be more painful?
What now could be more cruel?
Than when your love turns on you
And challenges a duel
A duel you cannot fathom
A duel you can't engage
You long for peace between you
He sits in seat of rage
How do you fight the anger?
How do you bind the wounds?
Offenses all imagined
Death curses breathing doom
Do you stand up against him?
Seek help from God above?
Where can you nurse the broken
heart
Hurt by the one you love?*

*O Lord, I only wanted
To seek your best for him
How oft' I went to battle
Hoping to gain a win
For all he would accomplish
For all to bring him best
To soothe his aching soul wounds
Allow his spirit rest
I'll sacrifice my body
I'll not raise vengeance's sword
Instead I'll live in exile
Until you speak the word
Which brings about true healing
Or your ordaining light
If I must die to conquer death
You resurrect all right*

5/29/2024
WEEK 21 DAY 3

Jonathan Saves David's Life

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 20

Devotional

This story highlights the special friendship bond between David and Jonathan. David was anointed to be the next king. As the prince, Jonathan should have been the next king. But Jonathan would rather lose his crown than lose his friend. Nothing mattered more than David's safety.

What do the following verses teach us about friendship?

"One who has unreliable friends soon comes to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." (Proverbs 18:24)

"As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." (Proverbs 27:17)

"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up." (Ecclesiastes 4:9-10)

"Do not be misled: 'Bad company corrupts good character.'" (1 Corinthians 15:33)

Jesus said, "Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." (John 15:13-15)

Poem

Jealousy

*It starts with low self esteem
Perhaps an overindulgence
In the youth
Which spoiled the child
Leaving the young one
Gluttonous
For the spotlight
Center stage
To be shared with
No one*

*Too much adoration
Too much compensation
Too little discipline
Too little consequences*

*And then
Another
Comes along
Who by sheer grace
Turns the eyes of
The crowd
Away from the spoiled one
Unto the deserving one*

*And then
Jealousy
That deadly evil
Chains the heart
Captive
And emits
Murderous
Thoughts and actions
Destruction
The fruit*

*It starts with low self esteem
Perhaps an overindulgence
Of self*

5/30/2024
WEEK 21 DAY 4

David Spares Saul's Life in a Cave



Scripture 1 SAMUEL 24

Devotional

Let's review how obsessed Saul was with killing David through the chapters of 1 Samuel:

Saul tried to kill David with a spear (ch. 18).

Saul tried to kill David with a spear again (ch. 19).

Saul tried to send David into a dangerous battle zone so that the Philistines would kill him (ch. 18).

Saul tried to kill David in his bed while he was sleeping (ch. 19).

Saul threatened his own son Jonathan, then demanded he bring David in to kill him (ch. 20).

Saul killed eighty-five priests for providing food and shelter for David (ch. 22).

Saul enlisted all his army to destroy David and his six hundred men on the run (ch. 23).

Okay, let's return to today's story. Given all this history, what surprises you about the events that took place? What did David do and say? What did Saul do and say? What can we learn from this?

Poem

Deal With It As You Wish

*When God can trust His servant
When God can trust the heart
God gives a broad horizon
To choose how played the part
Of great decision making
Of how you'll throw your pitch
When faced with life's great
challenge
"Deal with it as you wish"*

*And thus the choice before you
To honor God and man
Or yield to fleshly passions
Which feelings raw demand
To love God and your neighbor
Or choose the vengeful way
When God can trust His servant
God's grace will be displayed*

5/31/2024
WEEK 21 DAY 5

David Spares Saul's Life in a Camp

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 26

Devotional

We learned in yesterday's reading that Saul had a heartfelt conviction to stop trying to kill David. Even though King Saul had promised peace, David stayed away for his own protection. In his absence, Saul gave David's wife Michal to another man (1 Samuel 25:44). Obviously, Saul had returned to his old ways of despising David. In today's reading, Saul headed out with three thousand trained soldiers to hunt down and eliminate David. Saul's heartfelt conviction was short-lived.

Have you ever been inspired to make a life change, then gone back to your own ways? What does the following parable of Jesus in Matthew 21:28-32 have to say about this?

²⁸ "What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

²⁹ "'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

³⁰ "Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

³¹ "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the kingdom of God ahead of you. ³² For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

At the end of today's reading, Saul again makes a heartfelt commitment to David, saying, "May you be blessed, David my son; you will do great things and surely triumph." Do you believe him? Why is it sometimes so hard to do the right thing?

Poem

Leave It Up To God

*A natural inclination comes when
someone is not kind,
To take revenge, to strike a blow,
to plot a plan in mind
To steep in anger, make your
threats, withhold your love long
time*

*Yet God, in wisdom calls to us, "All
vengeance is full mine."*

*In prayer, place all in God's fair
hand; in truth, commit your steps
Allow God's Spirit's cleansing power
to purge your inner depths
If punishment is needed or a
disciplining rod
The best advice is always there—to
leave it up to God*

6/3/2024
WEEK 22 DAY 1

David Escapes to the Philistines

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 27

Devotional

After David spared King Saul's life in a cave (1 Samuel 24) and in a camp (1 Samuel 26), he knew he still wasn't safe from the king's wrath. So, he and his six hundred men escaped into enemy territory. Among these six hundred refugees were his brothers and other family members, along with "those who were in distress or in debt or discontented" (1 Samuel 22:1-2). Misery loves company. The plan worked. David joined up with the Philistine leader named Achish, and Saul stopped searching for him.

David and his six hundred misfits became an effective raiding party, strengthening the reign of the Philistines. While David and his men really raided people who were enemies of his own people (v. 6), he duped Achish by saying he had defeated fellow Israelites and those who were friendly to them (v. 10). He didn't leave any survivors, fearing that his deceptive actions would be discovered (v. 11). Again, it worked. Verse 12 tells us that Achish trusted David saying, "He has become so obnoxious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant for life."

Did David do the right thing by covering up his actual activities? He knew that he couldn't go home and simply rejoin Saul's army, where he had been commissioned to do battle against the very people he was now vanquishing. He knew that he would be Israel's king one day, and that those who were being defeated now would not be a threat to their borders later. He knew that Achish would never allow him to stay in Philistine territory if he was only defeating the enemies of Israel.

We return to the question: did David do the right thing?

Poem

Where Can I Go?

*Where can I go when the
enemies come?
Can I hide in the mountains?
Call troops with my drum?
Shall I stir up the souls of my
comrades with pipes?
Shall I pull out my armaments
ready for strife?
Where can I go when the
enemy comes?
Run to the shelter of God*

*Where can I go when attacked
by a friend?
A brother? A sister? A family friend?
A violent sunder with
edges all shredded?
When family reunions become
something dreaded
Where can I go when allies
turn on me?
Under God's sheltering wing*

*Where can I go when I feel all alone?
When grief all consuming turns
tears into stone?
When heart is so broken,
its parts are all scattered
When treasures of earth
seem to no longer matter?
Where can I go when
in ashes or pit?
Close to the Master do sit*

6/4/2024
WEEK 22 DAY 2

Saul and the Witch of Endor

Scripture 1 SAMUEL 28

Devotional

Saul had taken a strong stand against sin by removing the mediums and spiritists from Israel. Earlier, the prophet Samuel had said, "For rebellion is like the sin of divination" (1 Samuel 15:23). Later, the Lord would tell Moses, "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God" (Leviticus 19:31). Sorcerers, mediums, necromancers, and other forms of witchcraft are denounced from the beginning to the end of the Bible.

But desperate times call for desperate measures. Saul cried out to the Lord, but he got no response through dreams, prophets or Urim (a small object used by priests to discern God's will). Frantic for an answer, Saul turned to one of the people he had expelled. He took a strong stand against sin, until that sin seemed like it would meet one of his needs.

Do you know that your neighbors, coworkers, and classmates are aware that you go to church? They are looking to you to see if your walk matches your talk. 1 John 1:6 says, "If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth."

There's a word for that: hypocrite. Many people today say they don't go to church because the church is full of hypocrites. This word hypocrite is a Greek term meaning "actor" or somebody on the stage who is pretending to be somebody they are not. They are "players."

Jesus had strong words against hypocrites, saying, "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (Matthew 23:2-3). In the Gospel of Matthew alone, Jesus spoke against hypocrites fifteen times.

Are there any ways in you where your walk is out of alignment with your talk? Do you have any things you keep secret from family, friends, or people at church? Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you as He reveals these inconsistencies to you. Then ask Him what changes you need to make in your life and do them.

Poem

Witchcraft

*We're told to avoid every
hint of witchcraft
Not because it is not real
But because it's a trap
Don't go to a séance to speak
to the dead
Not because it's a guise
But because it's all lies
Don't dabble, don't wink,
don't be caught in such places
Not to ruin your fun
But because it will you leave undone
Avoid every hint of such evil and
demons
Not because it silly
But because it is evil*

6/5/2024
WEEK 22 DAY 3

Saul Commits Suicide in Defeat to Philistines



Scripture 1 SAMUEL 31

Devotional

King Saul's life came to a sad and inglorious end. His army was fleeing, his sons were killed in battle, and he was critically wounded. After committing suicide, his severed head was dishonored by being paraded on a Philistine victory march, his armor was defiled by being placed in a pagan temple, and his body was disgraced by being fastened to a wall for public humiliation.

1 Chronicles 10:10 tells us that eventually they "hung up his head in the temple of Dagon," their pagan, false god. Not long before Israel made Saul their first king, the Philistines had captured the ark of God and placed it in the temple of Dagon. Overnight, the Dagon statue fell on its face, head and hands broken off, with only its body remaining (see 1 Samuel 5:1-5). Now the head of Saul was placed before the headless body of Dagon as the ultimate insult. Encounters with Dagon were bad bookends to Saul's troubled life.

The people of Israel had asked for a king, like the other nations had, to solve their domestic and international problems. Instead, they got a paranoid monarch who led them away from dependence upon God and into dependence upon Philistine false deities.

The Bible says, "So you must live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living to satisfy your own desires. You didn't know any better then" (1 Peter 1:14, NLT).

What are the "gods" in your life that never seem to go away? Are there any sins or temptations you just can't shake? What is the Lord asking you to do about it?

Poem

We Stand Here Today

*We stand here today
by the body of Saul
A youth filled with promise,
admired by all
A young king beset
with depression and rage
A man trapped and locked up
in jealousy's cage
A person so scattered in mind with
blind hate
Who instead turned on friends,
reason could not abate
Who gave up his kingdom
and lost his own soul
Because he lost sight of his
God and God's goal
He never would listen to those
he should trust
A truly sad life now returns
to the dust*

6/6/2024
WEEK 22 DAY 4

David Laments Deaths of Saul and Jonathan



Scripture 2 SAMUEL 1

Devotional

As we turn the page from 1 Samuel to 2 Samuel, the story shifts from King Saul and the prophet Samuel to King David and the prophet Nathan. Upon receiving news of the death of his nemesis Saul and his best friend Jonathan, David mourned and wept and fasted for both.

Now that the king and all the prominent princes were dead, David would be king. The young man who lied about killing Saul came bearing the crown. He was certainly hoping to be rewarded handsomely. Instead, he paid with his life. Even though Saul had tried to kill David multiple times, he was still the Lord's anointed king.

As tribute, David wrote a lament for King Saul and his son Jonathan. This form of poetic expression became the trademark for how David would interact with God. He went on to write half of the one hundred fifty Psalms. Read through this lament again. What descriptions and words about Saul and Jonathan stand out to you? What does this say about David's character? How can you incorporate this into your own life?

In the New Testament, when Stephen was being stoned to death as the first Christian martyr, he cried out to Jesus, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7:60). In doing this, he fully embraced what Jesus had said on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). The way of Jesus is the way of forgiveness. David lived this out when he lamented Saul's death. A thousand years later, his descendant Jesus embraced it as a model for all time.

Again, pray the Lord's Prayer. Ask God to help you forgive as you have been forgiven:

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy Name,
thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses
as we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory
for ever and ever. Amen.

Poem

My Heart Pours Out Deeply

*My heart pours out
My tears will not end
I've sorrow for king
And my very true friend
O, would that we three
Could have stood side by side
And returned full victor'ous
In peace to abide
The waste, O, the wreckage
Of home, kingdom, race
The greatest destruction
Of family and place
My heart pours out deeply
My tears will not end
On this day I've lost
Both my king and my friend*

6/7/2024
WEEK 22 DAY 5

David King of Judah; Ish-Bosheth King of Israel



Scripture 2 SAMUEL 2

Devotional

David's transition to the monarchy was anything but smooth. He was anointed king over the southern half known as Judah. But the northern portion called Israel was loyal to one of Saul's surviving sons, a forty-year-old man named Ish-Bosheth. The once-united nation was now in civil war, with Abner leading Israel's military and Joab leading Judah's.

In a moment of clarity, Abner called out, "Must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize that this will end in bitterness?" He was right. Much blood would be spilled before the nation reunited under David and remained that way under his son Solomon. But eventually, Israel and Judah would divide again, leading to the downfall and defeat of both nations.

A millennium later, Jesus spoke about our spiritual battle against the forces of darkness. He said, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand" (Matthew 12:25).

In a speech during his campaign to be elected President, Abraham Lincoln quoted Jesus when he said, "'A house divided against itself cannot stand.' I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other."

Division often leads to disaffection and dissolution. This holds true for political, social, and spiritual conflicts. We see this played out every day. It's also true on a personal and relational level. Marriages, families, and other relational ties are put under undue stress when things are introduced that threaten unity.

What is the Lord saying to you regarding issues of unity and division in your life?

Poem

The Crown

*The crown upon my head is placed
The kingdom is now mine
It's come with such a wrecking ball
Of jealousy and crime
O, God, why is this sorrow now
When all should be rejoicing
I stand alone in grief's engulf
While others praises voicing
The blood which many sacrificed
In pomp is soon forgotten
The grave destruction's
rotting smell
Now fragrant petals trodden
The heavy weight upon my head
With gold and jewels bedecked
Forsake me not the many thorns
Which soon most will forget
Beneath my smiles and
perfumed robes
My grief I carry hidden
Of comrades lost in battle sore
Of tears which come unbidden*



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