

VOLUME 3
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, <u>visit fishersumc.org/begodslight</u> 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 <u>fishersumc.org/begodslight</u> 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

6/10/2024 WEEK 23 DAY 1

David Becomes King over All Israel

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 5:1-13

Devotional

In the previous reading of 2 Samuel 2, we saw that the Israelite people split in two. The northern portion was known as Israel, with Ish-Bosheth as their king and Abner as their military commander. The southern part was called Judah, with David as their king and Joab as their commander.

Seven years later, Abner defected to David, then was put to death. Ish-Bosheth was murdered on his own bed (2 Samuel 3-4). This left Israel without a king or military commander, so they came to David and anointed him to be their king. Now the entire nation of Israel was united under King David.

One of David's first acts was to conquer Jerusalem, known as Zion, the City of David. Since that day Jerusalem has been the epicenter of Jewish conflict, as well as blessing. David built the royal palace there, and his son Solomon built the temple. In Psalm 68:16 David called Mt. Zion "the mountain where God chooses to reign."

A thousand years later, Jesus would cry out, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing" (Matthew 23:37). A few days later they crucified Jesus on Mt. Zion.

Today, Jerusalem is divided into the Jewish, Christian, Armenian, and Muslim Quarters. The Muslim Dome of the Rock is built on the site of Solomon's temple. Jerusalem is still a place of both conflict and blessing.

Take some time to pray for Jerusalem. Pray for its people, that they may live in peace with one another.

Poem

Shepherd King's Prayer

Great Shepherd, Good Shepherd, I sit before You upon Your Rock With my heart strings tuned to praise You Selah!

You have given me eyes keen To scan the horizons of Your borders To comprehend the vastness of Your provision Selah!

You have strengthened my arm With Your Right Arm And have given me courage to battle Selah!

My feet are fleet as they run through Your fields No stumbling or tripping stone or hole

Will You allow to cripple me Selah!

These sheep from Your pastures Strong, weak, close, wandering You have placed under my care Selah!

Your rod to defend, Your staff to rescue Your anointing oil to heal All in my knapsack Selah!

Keep me humble in victory Allow me rest under stars May Your peace be my blanket Selah! 6/11/2024 WEEK 23 DAY 2

David Brings the Ark to Jerusalem

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 6

Devotional

Around 40 years earlier, the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines, who kept it for half a year then returned it when all kinds of troubles came their way (see 1 Samuel 4-6). Eventually it ended up for twenty years at the house of a guy named Abinadab, who gave his son the job of guarding it (1 Samuel 7:1-2).

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.

Today's reading adds that it is, "the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark." It was to be treated with great reverence. In fact, in Numbers 4 specific instructions had been given for how only the Levitical priests were to take "care of the most holy things" (v. 4). When it was time to move it, only they were to do so using poles. Verse 15 says, "they must not touch the holy things, or they will die."

How did David initially treat these instructions on how to handle the ark? (2 Samuel 6:3-5)

How did David respond when Uzzah died for touching it? (2 Samuel 6:8-10)

What did David do when he found out that Obed-Edom had been blessed for housing the ark? (2 Samuel 6:11-15)

How did David respond to his wife when she criticized him for "vulgar" display of worship? (2 Samuel 6:21-22)

David was a man after God's own heart. But he wasn't perfect. What do you learn from David's different interactions with the ark of God in today's reading?

Poem

Carrying The Ark Of The Lord

The name of God is not to be loaded And borne upon wheels of convenience

The Ark of the Lord is not to be pulled

By beastly plodding dumbness
The name of God is to be borne upon
The clean lips of God's people
The Ark of the Lord is to be carried
upon

The golden poles of God's royal priesthood

The name of God is not to be taken in vain

To trump up a swear or a cause The Ark of the Lord, so holy, holy, holy

Is not to be defiled or propped by unclean hands

6/12/2024 WEEK 23 DAY 3

David's Son will Build the Temple

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 7

Devotional

The nation had been unified. Jerusalem had been conquered. David's palace had been built. The ark of God had been brought to the holy city. The only thing remaining was to build the temple to be the center of worship for the Jewish people. David was ready to take up that task.

But God said no to David. It would be David's son who would build the temple. It would even become known as Solomon's Temple. David wouldn't get the credit.

Have you ever been told no by God? Was it something you really wanted to do? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?

Take some time right now to pray to God in the way that David did in this reading. Here are some prompts from his prayer to get your started:

"Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"

"What more can I say to you? For you know me."

"How great you are, Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears."

"And now, Lord God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning me and my house. Do as you promised."

"Sovereign Lord, you are God! Your covenant is trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. Now be pleased to bless [this task that you said no to me, but yes to someone else]."

Poem

Tent Dwelling Faith

The nomadic faith Which moves here and you Which sets up, then breaks camp In order to keep up With cloud and fire Calls us. each one--The ark of God--To live in the Tent of Meeting To dwell and tabernacle Upon whatever sod or sand Alongside stream or in desert cleft Wherever the Spirit wind Blows our tumbleweed lives Whose only provision is Daily manna Whose only grounding Is the tent peg pounded into The hands and feet Of our God

David & Bathsheba

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 11

Devotional

Long before David killed Goliath, spared Saul's life, or became Israel's king, God declared that David was "a man after His own heart" (1 Samuel 13:14). This view of David endured. A thousand years later, the early Christians saw David in the same way (Acts 13:22).

So how could a man after God's own heart do such a terrible thing with somebody else's wife? And where was his heart for God when he tried to cover up his dalliance by having the innocent husband killed?

Why do good people do bad things?

In the New Testament, Paul addressed this problem for Christians. In Romans 7:21-24 he states, "So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?"

What a great question. Who will rescue me? Is there any hope for me?

Paul provides the answer in verse 25: "Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!" Jesus has the power to forgive you for past sins and free you from sinning in the future. Hallelujah!

Take time to repent of your sins right now. Ask the Lord to forgive you and to free you from those sins.

Poem

Not Good

A king stays home while sons are at war Not good

Eyes wander upon heights of boredom Not good

Lust is triggered and temptation knocks Not good

Harder pushing upon doors barred off Not good

Objectifying God's created beauty Not good

Grabbing what is not yours Not good

Planting tares in another's field Not good

Weaving a web of deception Not good

Killing what is honorable Not good

Being blinded to one's own condemnation Not good

Nathan Rebukes David

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 12

Devotional

In today's lesson, Nathan the Prophet confronts David the King with his adultery and murder. This could have resulted in Nathan's death; nobody was more powerful than a king. But Nathan thought it was worth the risk. He was speaking for God.

First, Nathan set David up by telling him a madeup story about a rich farmer who stole a poor man's little lamb. This ticked off David. Why do you think David was more upset about a nameless guy's ewe lamb than he was about his own stealing of a man's wife and life?

Nathan's mic drop line had to stun David: "You are the man!" That little ewe lamb was Uriah's wife Bathsheba. David already had at least seven wives. Did he really need another man's wife to fulfill his desires? The judgment of God spoken through Nathan was hard to hear for David. It had to be hard to say for Nathan.

Everyone needs a Nathan. We all need somebody who will risk the relationship to speak truth into our lives. Everyone wanders into Stupidville from time to time. Only a good, godly friend will rebuke us and drag us out of there. David thought so highly of Nathan that he named one of his sons after him (2 Samuel 5:14). Nathan was somebody he loved and trusted and listened to.

Who is your Nathan? When someone speaks truth into your life, how do you tend to respond? Denial? Defensiveness? Embarrassment? Pride? Sorrow? Anger? Laughter? Repentance? Change?

Proverbs 12:15 says, "The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice." Proverbs 1:5 adds, "let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get quidance."

Poem

O, For A True Friend!

A friend in need, indeed, I need When illness has o'ercome me When all seems lost When weak and torn O, for a true friend beside me!

A friend in need, indeed, I need When arrogance has blinded When sin takes rein When filled with pride O, for a true friend to chide me!

A friend in need, indeed, I need When all have left, forsaken When graces gone When all forlorn O, for a true friend to guide me!

A friend in need, indeed, I need When storms around me gather When Satan prowls When chased by dogs O, for a true friend to hide me! 6/17/2024 WEEK 24 DAY 1

Absalom Avenges His Sister's Rape

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 13

Devotional

With the addition of Bathsheba, David now had eight wives who are named in the Bible, plus some other wives and concubines who are not named. The Bible mentions nineteen of the sons, but only one of the daughters. Her name was Tamar. She and her full brother Absalom were born to the wife named Maacah. Their half-brother Amnon, David's oldest son, was born to the wife named Ahinoam.

Amnon's egregious actions set in motion a ripple of waves that would build into an eventual tsunami. Two years later, Absalom would kill his brother Amnon, then flee for his life from his father. Three years after that, Absalom would return to Jerusalem at his father's request, but was not allowed to see his own dad. This went on for the next two years, until he was finally granted an audience with the king, who kissed his son. Four years later, Absalom rebelled against his father and set himself up as king. More on that in tomorrow's reading.

Where did all this begin? When Amnon raped his half-sister? When Absalom took matters into his own hands by killing his brother? When David had an affair with another man's wife, then had her husband killed? When David married multiple women, setting up tension in the family?

It's true that one action can often lead to a worse reaction. Here's a better question: at what points could all of this have been ended?

Are you carrying around the weight of any harmful things that have been done or spoken to you? What could you do to end it? Are you bearing the guilt of errors from your past? What could you do to release it?

Read Psalm 103:8-13 and ponder what it says about this topic.

- 8 The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love.
- 9 He will not always accuse,

nor will he harbor his anger forever;

- 10 he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities.
- 11 For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him;
- 12 as far as the east is from the west,

so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him

Poem

Beware

Beware of the voice which speaks into your ear

Encouraging, "Grab it; embrace cavalier!"

The spirit so lib'ral will you falsely steer

The "Jonadab" license brings outcome severe

Beware of your innocence—snares unaware

Which blindly you enter, escape not prepared

When suddenly re'lized, you haven't a prayer

You're ravaged and pillaged and left in despair

Beware of your apathy, truth left unsaid

The procrastination which creeps in your bed

Which states, "There's tomorrow..;" intention in head

Yet never addressing, avoidance instead

Beware of your bitterness, vengeance you steep The plotting and evil into life will creep

The ripple effects through your family will sweep

You're left in a current, a whirlpool too deep

6/18/2024 WEEK 24 DAY 2

Absalom Conspires Against his Father David

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 15

Devotional

Yesterday we read how David gave his son Absalom the silent treatment for his murder of another son Amnon. After several years, Absalom desperately pleaded "I want to see the king's face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death" (2 Samuel 14:32). Execution was better than isolation.

The absence did not make Absalom's heart grow fonder. Rather, it embittered him toward his father the king. He spent the next four years planning and plotting to overthrow the crown and place it on his own head. David and his entourage fled the holy city in what looked like a sad funeral march.

In nearly four decades of ministry, I have seen many forms of broken family relationships. Among the saddest is when an adult child and their adult parent have not been on speaking terms for years, if not decades. Each person feels justified for their silence. Each one rationalizes the way they defame the name of the other. Both have the power to end it; neither has the humility to do it.

I have witnessed the same kind of freeze-out between co-workers, neighbors, church members, and siblings. For followers of God, this should not be. Jesus offered a hard teaching about this in Matthew 5:22-24

"But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment...
Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

What do these verses teach us about reconciliation with others?

Poem

Hearts Become Stolen

Someone who is shrewd with a hidden agenda

Can easily turn hearts of men By being available, posing to listen With falseness, humility bend

Despite all the offerings of great understanding

A mask hides the power he seeks Soon hearts become stolen, nabbed into a bag

Then carried away by deceit

Discernment is needed as politics play With actors upon your life's stage The ones who cajole you with promises large

With flattery, lock you in cage

From whom will your faithfulness never be stolen?

Just where does your loyalty lie? With eyes and ears open, all falsehood expose

With truth, propaganda defy

Absalom is Killed in Battle

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 18:1-18

Devotional

The sad saga of David's son Absalom came to a tragic end. Eventually, he would be undone by his greatest attribute. 2 Samuel 14:25-26 says, "In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him. Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair once a year because it became too heavy for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels [five pounds] by the royal standard." If only he had been bald! But I digress.

Absalom had built a monument in his own name and to his own honor. He convinced people to join him in shouting, "Absalom is king!" He flushed his father off the throne and away from Jerusalem. Monument. Crown. Throne. He had it all. Yet today any scholar of the Bible would not name him as one of the kings of Israel. He was just an angry pretender. His name would be forgotten if not for his acts of rebellion.

It didn't have to be this way. While he might never have become king after David's death, he could have done so much for his father's kingdom. Rather than leading a coup, he could have been serving in the king's court. Instead of fighting against his father, he could have been battling for him.

The same is true for us. Jesus calls us to drop everything else in life to follow Him. But our own selfish desires too often get in the way, creating a wedge between us and our calling. Jesus put it like this in Luke 14:31-33...

"Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Won't he first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. In the same way, those of you who do not give up everything you have cannot be my disciples."

What aspects of your own self-interests stand in the way between you and God's best for you? What would your life look like if those were eliminated? What's keeping you from burying those in the backyard of your life?

Poem

Deal Gently, Go Softly

Deal gently, go softly With this one—my child— Despite his rebellion His temperament wild I can't stand against him My love can't defile Heart broken, for my sake, Deal soft with my child 6/20/2024 WEEK 24 DAY 4

David Mourns Deeply for Absalom's Death

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 18:19-19:8

Devotional

Yesterday we read how David's son Absalom was killed in battle after rebelling against his father and proclaiming himself as king. Absalom's death would have meant that David could safely return to his throne in Jerusalem. But when he received the news, he could only cry out, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Rather than a victory march, the people who had fled their homes returned with mournful, heavy hearts. They joined their king in weeping for his dead son, at least on the outside.

The king's commander, Joab, is the one who had killed Absalom. He confronted David for outwardly grieving his rebellious son. He warned the king that everyone would turn on him if he didn't change his tune. Joab was a fierce, decisive warrior. He had previously killed Abner and Amasa, rival commanders who were political threats to his position. Perhaps he saw Absalom the same way, figuring the only way to keep his top military position was to eliminate the biggest threat to David's throne.

When this book of 2 Samuel gives way to 1 Kings, David names his son Solomon to take his place on the throne. But there, Joab backed the wrong horse, conspiring with Adonijah to become the next king instead of Solomon. Joab paid for all this treachery with his life. Thinking of all those Joab had killed, Solomon said, "May the guilt of their blood rest on the head of Joab and his descendants forever. But on David and his descendants, his house and his throne, may there be the Lord's peace forever" (1 Kings 2:33).

Numbers 32:23 says, "your sin will find you out." It's true. We can't hide forever. Paul put it like this in 1 Timothy 5:24, "The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them."

That's the bad news. But the opposite is equally as true. Paul goes on to say, "In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever" (1 Timothy 5:25). It's up to you which kind of trail you want to leave.

Poem

Grief Unquenchable

None can know My grief unquenchable It cannot be sated My Love, O, My Love

The black hole Eternally gaping Sucking life, never filled My Love, O, My Love

Were it I Instead of you How much better My Love, O, My Love

Never again
Will my Son rise
A dawn to greet me
My Love, O, My Love

The dark shroud
Of grief's tomb
I cannot unbind
My Love, O, My Love

Go away! Do not try to Console me... My Love, O, My Love

David's Last Words and His Mighty Men

Scripture 2 SAMUEL 23:1-23 | Poem

Devotional

David had lived a remarkable life. Beginning as the youngest and least important in his own family, he became a giant-killing, nation-unifying, enemydefeating king of Israel. Yet at the end of his life, the Bible makes sure to mention the "mighty men" who stood by his side in both war and peace. Some of them were known as The Thirty. A few were simply called The Three. One was declared to be as famous as The Three. Without them. David wouldn't have accomplished all that he did.

Who has helped to make you who you are today? Who are your Thirty? Who are your Three? Is there One who stands out?

Pause right not to make a list of those who have impacted your life. Then thank God for each person and the way they have influenced you for the good. As you do, keep in mind how the Bible calls us to give thanks for others. Here's an example of Paul in Philippians 1:3-11.

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

7 It is right for me to feel this way about all of vou, since I have vou in my heart and, whether I am in chains or defending and confirming the gospel, all of you share in God's grace with me. 8 God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.

9 And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, 10 so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless for the day of Christ, 11 filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.

The Prayer Of The Names Of The Mighty Men Of David

Josheb-Basshebeth— Dwelling in rest Eleazar—God has helped Shammah—Lost and desolate Abishai—God's gift Benaiah—The LÖRD has built Asahel—God has created Elhanan—The grace of God Helez-Freedom Ira-Watchful Wind Abiezer—Father of Help Sibbekai—A woven thicket Zalmon—A shade of His image Maharai—Loss, desolation Heled—A hill Ithai—God is with me. God exists Benaiah—The LORD has built Hiddai—A praise, a cry Abi-Albon—Father of strength, valiant Azmaveth—Strong as death Eliahba—Hidden by God The sons of Jashen—The Sons of Old/the Ancients Jonathan—God has given Ahiam—A friend, A brother of Mother/City/Land Eliphelet-God delivers, God is my release Eliam—The nation, the people of God Hezro—The bulwark/

defense of God

Igal—He will redeem

of the Wanderer, the

Ira-Watchful Wind

LORD, God's flame

Uriah—My light is the

of him who licks or laps

Naharai—My nostrils, hot

Gareb—Scrape the leprosy

LORD

Stranger

anger

Paarai—The opening of the

The son of Hagri—The Son

Zelek—The shadow or noise

As I dwell in the rest and sabbath of my God God continually helps me Though I feel lost and desolate

God's gift to me will be The building, the creating of His arace Which is Freedom Within the Watchful Wind of the Holy Spirit

God, as Father of my help. Has woven a thicket over me To shade me in the shadow of His image

In my loss and desolation God has set me upon a hill Upon which I realize the presence of God with me

The LORD has built within me A cry of praise unto My Father of strength Which makes me valiant. Stronger than death

In the past, God has hidden My ancestors of old, the ancient ones: God has given them A friend, a brother of the motherland of Israel

God delivers and liberates The nation of God, His people He provides for them a bulwark, a defense A gate, an opening, Into His redemption

The wanderer and stranger in repentance Bow in the shadow of His thirsty anger As the Holy Spirit's flaming wind Scrapes the leprosy of their sin Exposing it and refining it By the light of truth

A Brotherly Battle for Kingship

Scripture 1 KINGS 1:1-53; 2:10-25

Devotional

In this classic power struggle for dominance as David' life was slipping away, Adonijah and Solomon set aside their brotherly love and took sibling rivalry to a new level. Adonijah gathered together the military commander, a leading priest, and his brothers. But one of David's mighty men, another priest, and a prophet would not join Adonijah as he tried to usurp the throne from his ailing father.

In the end, David named Solomon to be the next king. The entire city of Jerusalem joined in the celebration. Adonijah's buddies abandoned him, leaving him shaking in his sandals and clutching to the altar. Solomon told his half-brother that he would be safe as long as he pursued peace in a worthy manner.

But when Adonijah asked to have Abishag as his wife, it was tantamount to asking for David's crown to be placed on Adonijah's head. Abishag was part of King David's harem, the one who kept him warm as his dying body chilled. Solomon's mother did not understand the implications. But he did. So Solomon had his brother put to death, realizing he was never going to relinquish his fingerhold on the throne.

We don't always love those who hold positions of authority in government. In this highly charged political season, that is very evident. But whoever wins the upcoming election, that person will be our president. We are to pray for and respect those in authority over us.

Romans 13:1-2 says, "Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves." Adonijah would have done well to live that kind of life.

Solomon knew that leadership comes with great responsibility. As the author of the book of Proverbs, he had much to say on the subject. He would write, "When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.... By justice a king gives a country stability, but those who are greedy for bribes tear it down" (Proverbs 29:2, 4).

Take time to pray for and honor those in authority over you. Their task is great.

Poem

Power Vacuum

In political science a void can occur When someone in power is weak Old age, poor decisions or vision can blur

Then others, their ranking will seek

The gluttonous vacuum will seek to be filled

It sucks every force to rush in Its longs for a coup, a dictator, a guild

A warlord fanatic to win

Bedfellows align, strange alliances form

Each asserts their entitlement strong

The struggle for power becomes the new norm

And sweeps all in its pathway along

A peaceful transition of power is rare

Most changes bring blood baths and strife

The vacuum cord trips each one climbing pow'r's stair

And can end in the taking of life

6/25/2024 WEEK 25 DAY 2

Solomon Asks God for Wisdom to Lead

Scripture 1 KINGS 3



Except.

This little word negates everything that comes before it.

A woman is faithful to her husband, except for her occasional affairs.

A man is honest at work, except for the money he embezzles.

"Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places." These high places had been the sites of pagan worship for the Canaanites, not the kind of place where one could honor God faithfully.

Exceptional.

This word amplifies everything around it.

The woman was an exceptional wife.

The man was an exceptional employee.

Though the word is not specifically used in this chapter, it is descriptive of Solomon's request to God for wisdom. God was moved by his exceptional request. God had said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." Most people would ask for health and wealth, fame and a great name. But Solomon simply asked for wisdom to govern well.

And this he did throughout his life.

Except.

Solomon didn't apply his wisdom to his love life.

He collected wives like kids collect baseball cards. 1 Kings 11:4 -6 says, "As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been.... So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord; he did not follow the Lord completely, as David his father had done." We'll look at this more closely next week.

In Proverbs 4:25-27, Solomon would write, "Let your eyes look straight ahead; fix your gaze directly before you. Give careful thought to the paths for your feet and be steadfast in all your ways. Do not turn to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil." If only Solomon had listened to his own advice.

What about your life can be summarized by "except"?

What about your life can be summarized by "exceptional"?

How is God calling you to reconcile the two?

Poem

Prayer

Holy God, Source of all Creator of majesty Sole proprietor of glory

Your servant stands before you A child so small A man so weak A king so overwhelmed

Generations before me Have failed Have sinned Have lost their way

Only you can provide Discernment Wisdom Guidance

And so, I beg you Speak Lead Bless

That your kingdom on earth Might reflect your kingdom in heaven Might do your will Might give you all glory and honor

For I am nothing without you So small So weak So overwhelmed

But you, O Lord, my holy God Are source of all Are creator of majesty Are sole proprietor of glory

Solomon Builds the Temple

Scripture 1 KINGS: 5-6

Devotional

In the verses preceding today's reading, the Bible says that Solomon was recognized from the Far East to Northern Africa as the wisest man on earth. His understanding about plant and animal life, coupled with the thousands of proverbs and songs he composed, made him a celebrity among wisdom-seekers. This made him the perfect person to complete the job of building the temple, as God had promised to his father David.

Made of precisely cut massive stones and imported cedars, the temple was adorned with cedar and olive wood, with gold and bronze features, statues and carvings. It would serve as the awe-inspiring center of worship for nearly four hundred years.

Impressive as it was, the temple was just a building. It did not prevent the people from adopting the pagan ways of their neighbors. It did not keep them from false religious practices. And it did not protect them from God's judgment.

Over three hundred years later, the prophet Jeremiah warned the people that the temple was just a building. He proclaimed, "This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, 'This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord!" (Jeremiah 7:3-4). The people ignored him. Not much later, Jerusalem was invaded, the temple was destroyed, and the people were taken captive.

If they had only listened to Jeremiah when he went on to say, "If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever" (Jeremiah 7:5-7).

The majestic appearance of Solomon's temple was meant to draw people closer to God, so that their hearts and actions would be sold out to Him. Psalm 11:4 reminds us, "The Lord is in his holy temple; the Lord is on his heavenly throne. He observes everyone on earth; his eyes examine them."

Do you go to church? Good. Does your sanctuary inspire you? Great. "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Superb.

Poem

sacrifice

How Beautiful The Temple Of God

How beautiful the temple of God Who's foundation is the Rock of Ages Who's structure is sound, without corruption

Like the Cedars of Lebanon Where finest incense of prayer Burns at its core, wafting up to the heavens

A sweet, sweet offering to the Lord Who's doorway and walls are adorned With the crimson red cloth Of a repentant and forgiven soul Who's heart is an altar Constantly a-flame with sacrifices pure And given with joyful abandon Who's light is ever burning Constantly tended by the dutiful priest Residing, pouring the oil of the Spirit Who's salt is sprinkled upon each

As the covenant is remembered and restored

And proclaimed within and with out Who's instruments are tuned for praise As the mighty deeds of the Lord Are remembered and sung Who's floors are swept clean of sin's yeast

Who's tables are turned Who's rooms are free from the exchange of mammon Who fast Who delight

Who become as God's glory descends How beautiful the temple of God

Solomon Builds His Palace

Scripture 1 KINGS 7:1-12; 9:1-9

Devotional

One of my favorite places to visit is Washington, D.C. Spread throughout our nation's capital are memorials to World Wars I and II, Korea, and Viet Nam (where my cousin's name is etched on the wall). Monuments to presidents Washington, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt and Kennedy dot the landscape. Our three branches of government are encased in the White House, Capitol Building, and Supreme Court. Vast buildings and complexes dedicated to our country's history, art, military, fallen heroes, and religious roots are everywhere.

Solomon's palace complex was meant to be that kind of spread. Think of it like a combination armory, assembly hall, courthouse, royal residence, and housing development for Solomon's harem. Once the temple and palace were completed, everything seemed set for a tremendously blessed future.

Then God made some "IF" statements.

IF you walk before me faithfully with integrity of heart and uprightness...

IF you or your descendants turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them...

The results of fulfilling the first IF would be a neverending throne.

The results of living into the second IF would be a destroyed temple and a ridiculed people.

Knowing this in advance, why do you think Solomon allowed his multiple wives to influence him to follow false gods? And why would so many of the future kings have done the same thing? Did they think God was lying or kidding? Did they think they could get away with it?

What about you? Are there any IF statements of God where your life is on the wrong side of the equation? What is the Lord challenging you to do about it?

Read Proverbs 1, written by Solomon. How does this inform the topic addressed in this devotion?

Poem

Building Blocks

We would be building a family, a home

A house full of comforts, a life of shalom

Companions and friendships, great things to pursue Great building blocks stacking, accomplishments true

Yet in this pursuit of great things here on earth--Employment, commitments, days full marked with mirth--It's good to remember short days on this sod Beware of the building blocks thwarting our God

The temples or homes which we build here today
Are hearts fully open to Jesus'
way
With fire burning brightly, Christ, our corner stone
The Word of God paving the path to God's throne

Solomon Brings the Ark to the Temple

Scripture 1 KINGS 8:1-21

Devotional

The Ark of the Covenant embodied the presence of God. It was a gold-covered box that contained a jar of manna, Aaron's staff, and the stone tablets of the ten commandments. It was a reminder that God had provided for the people in their deliverance from Egyptian bondage into Promised Land freedom.

Solomon had the ark brought into the newly constructed temple. It was placed in the Most Holy Place. A massive curtain secured the Most Holy Place from wandering eyes. Only the high priest was allowed in the room where the ark was placed. And he could only go there once a year to make a sacrifice for the sins of the people with the blood of goats and calves. This had to be repeated every year.

When Jesus died on a cross a thousand years later, the Bible says, "the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom" (Mark 15:38). Here is how the New Testament book of Hebrews describes what Jesus did: "He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12).

Did you catch that? When Jesus died for our sins, he opened access to God's Most Holy Place, providing forgiveness of sins for all eternity through his blood. You and I don't have to wait for a high priest to sacrifice a lamb and sprinkle its blood on the ark of the covenant. Jesus IS our High Priest. Jesus IS the sacrificial Lamb of God. Jesus IS the blood of the covenant. Praise be to Jesus!

Make a prayer of thanksgiving from the Christ Hymn, found in Philippians 2:5-11.

5 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

6 Who, being in very nature God,

did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

7 rather, he made himself nothing

by taking the very nature of a servant,

being made in human likeness.

8 And being found in appearance as a man,

he humbled himself

by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross!

9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is

to the glory of God the Father.

The Ark Of The Covenant

The Holy of Holies, God's presence abiding

The High Priest appointed in raiment, residing

The Blood of the sacrifice offering

Atonement for sin, Wrath's great crevice repair

A great Hallelujah released from my breast

As all of my turmoil is now put to rest The Ark of the Covenant, mysteries save.

Bursts opens releasing God's Word from the grave!

7/1/2024 WEEK 26 DAY 1

Solomon's Wisdom & Splendor on Display

Scripture 1 KINGS 10

Devotional

The most tired I have ever been was after an overnight flight to Ethiopia. On the first day there, we were set to meet the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church (their version of the Pope). To prepare me, an assistant showed me thousands of years of Ethiopian history in the form of oil paintings hanging on a several walls.

Speaking broken English in a thick Amharic accent, he showed me a painting of the Queen of Sheba, who had visited Solomon with all kinds of gifts. The guide said she returned pregnant with Solomon's child and the Jewish faith. He said that Israel later sent the Ark of the Covenant to Ethiopia for safe keeping, and that they have it today. I guess nobody told Indiana Jones. Who knows how much fact and fiction are blended into that oil painting.

What we do know is that Solomon's wealth and wisdom were drawing global attention. He tossed away silver like bad pennies and doled out wisdom like parade candy. He imported domestic and wild animals for his pleasure and made weapons of war from pure gold. He sat on an imposing throne from where he commanded his fleet of ships and stockpile of chariots. The tributes, taxes, imports, and exports only added to Solomon's riches.

Back when Solomon began his reign, he asked God for wisdom to lead the people. God replied, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life" (1 Kings 3:11-14).

With all this, Solomon was not satisfied. As he grew older, he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes where he said, "I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Ecclesiastes 1:13-14).

He went on to lament, "I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired male and female singers, and a harem as well—the delights of a man's heart. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me" (Ecclesiastes 2:4-9).

His conclusion: it's all meaningless. All the wisdom and wealth in the world didn't make him happy. Fame and fortune are fleeting when one draws near to death. Hebrews 13:5 says, "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.""

Great Value

Some strive for full bank accounts, gems to bedeck Yet mammon becomes slavery's chains on our neck A treasure is hidden in Scripture's vast fields A pearl of great value, true Wisdom it yields Great coffers of gold cannot buy Wisdom's worth For nothing is greater in all of the earth

Ah, there it is. God is enough.

Solomon's Demise through His Idolatrous Wives

fripture 1 KINGS 11:1-13, 26-43

Devotional

Solomon's glorious life withered to an inglorious end. All the wisdom and wealth in the world just made him depressed. And all the women in the world might have satisfied his flesh but emptied his soul. These foreign wives enticed him to forsake the Lord and worship Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Molek. The pagan practices for those who worshiped these false gods included sexual sin and child sacrifice. These were an abomination to the Lord.

But Solomon and the Israelites just couldn't help themselves. If others were practicing these things, they couldn't be all that bad. We aren't that different. What are some of the beliefs and practices of our modern culture that are widely accepted by Christians?

The nation of Israel had been largely unified under the first three kings of Saul, David, and Solomon. But after Solomon's death, the northern kingdom of Israel would split from the southern kingdom of Judah. Solomon's descendants would rule Judah from Jerusalem. But Jeroboam would lead a successful secession and rule in the north.

This division would never be resolved. Over the next few centuries, the kings would mostly continue to lead the people astray. The people would never be united around worshiping the Lord alone, even though over a dozen prophets would call them to do so. The rest of the Old Testament follows the history and prophets of Israel and Judah.

It didn't have to be this way. Solomon knew better. Read what he wrote in Proverbs 5. Then ask yourself what he should have done differently.

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ear to my words of insight,

2 that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge.

3 For the lips of the adulterous woman drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil;

4 but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword.

5 Her feet go down to death;

her steps lead straight to the grave.

6 She gives no thought to the way of life;

her paths wander aimlessly, but she does not know it.

7 Now then, my sons, listen to me; do not turn aside from what I say.

8 Keep to a path far from her,

do not go near the door of her house,

9 lest you lose your honor to others and your dignity to one who is cruel,

10 lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich the house of another.

11 At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent.

12 You will say, "How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction!

13 I would not obey my teachers or turn my ear to my instructors.

14 And I was soon in serious trouble in the assembly of God's people."

Poem

Dowry

What does it cost one to gain a good wife?

Reception of dowry? Alignment for life?

What comes with a union? What does each one bring?

What blessings? What curses are sealed with the ring?

The Wisdom of God counsels voking with equal--

Be careful of unions, e'en if they are legal--

For dowry, purse heavy, comes with hidden cost

In gaining the world, you might pay with soul's loss

7/3/2024 WEEK 26 DAY 3

Rehoboam King of Judah, Jeroboam King of Israel

Scripture 1 KINGS 12

Devotional

The history books of the Old Testament can be a bit confusing. 1 & 2 Chronicles are a retelling the same period as covered in some of the other books. Here is a brief overview of these history books and the prophets who ministered during those times.

1 Samuel

Saul is king over the united nation of Israel. David is anointed to be the next king. Samuel is the primary prophet.

2 Samuel & 1 Chronicles

David is king over the united nation of Israel. Nathan is the primary prophet.

1 Kings 1-11 & 2 Chronicles 1-10

Solomon is king over the united nation of Israel. Ahijah is the primary prophet.

1 & 2 Kings & 2 Chronicles

The united nation splits into two nations. The Northern kingdom of Israel has several kings. Prophets include Ahijah, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos, and Hosea. Israel was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC.

The Southern kingdom of Judah has several kings, centered in Jerusalem. Prophets include Obadiah, Joel, Micah, Isaiah, Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah. Judah was conquered by Babylon in 586 BC.

Esther

A glimpse into the period of when many people of Judah were exiled into Babylonian captivity. Prophets include Daniel and Ezekiel.

Ezra & Nehemiah

The return of captives to Jerusalem, where they rebuilt the walls and temple of the city. Prophets include Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi.

What's Ahead

Over the next twenty-one weeks, we will weave in and out of the stories of these kings and prophets, covering a five-hundred-year period of Israel's history. It is the most difficult part of understanding how the Old Testament fits together. But don't give up now! There is so much to learn about God, others, and ourselves.

Today's reading covers the beginning of the nation splitting into two. What stands out to you from this chapter of the Bible?

Poem

Counse

From whom do you seek counsel? Whose lips speak in your ear? The voices which delight you? That tickle; cavalier? What seems to grab attention? Does caution or does praise? Or will you set them both aside Discernment full to raise? Will you seek Wisdom's guidance E'en when it cuts your grain And seek to do the will of God E'en if costs earthly gain?

7/4/2024 WEEK 26 DAY 4

Ahijah's Prophecy Against Jeroboam

Scripture 1 KINGS 14

Devotional

This reading records the sad beginning of the northern kingdom of Israel. King Jeroboam was the low benchmark by which future kings of Israel would be measured. The previous chapter tells of his response to a man of God who warned Jeroboam about his ungodly practices: "Even after this, Jeroboam did not change his evil ways, but once more appointed priests for the high places from all sorts of people. Anyone who wanted to become a priest he consecrated for the high places. This was the sin of the house of Jeroboam that led to its downfall and to its destruction from the face of the earth" (1 Kings 13:33-34).

Even earlier, the prophet Ahijah gave Jeroboam this news from God: "See, I am going to tear the kingdom out of Solomon's hand and give you ten tribes" (1 Kings 11:31). In today's reading, the same prophet Ahijah delivered bad news to Jeroboam's wife about her son's death and her husband's demise. Being a prophet in Israel or Judah was a tough job.

The second half of the chapter is about King Rehoboam of Judah in the south. Under his corrupt leadership, Judah turned away from God and engaged in the pagan practices of the culture around them.

Read Psalm 14, which was written by their predecessor King David. What could these two kings and their people have learned from this psalm? What does this psalm say to you?

1 The fool says in his heart,

"There is no God."

They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.

- 2 The Lord looks down from heaven on all mankind
- to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God.
- 3 All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one.
- 4 Do all these evildoers know nothing?
- They devour my people as though eating bread; they never call on the Lord.
- 5 But there they are, overwhelmed with dread, for God is present in the company of the righteous.
- 6 You evildoers frustrate the plans of the poor, but the Lord is their refuge.
- 7 Oh, that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion! When the Lord restores his people, let Jacob rejoice and Israel be glad!

Poem

One Who Sees Without Sight

One who sees without sight, but instead has God's vision Is one who speaks the Truth—joint from marrow division For God sees the heart not the outward appearance And can cut to the core without false interference.

7/5/2024 WEEK 26 DAY 5

God Feeds Elijah by a Raven and a Poor Widow

Scripture 1 KINGS 17

Devotional

For the next two weeks, we turn our attention to the northern kingdom of Israel. King Jeroboam had set the standard of evil practices, only to be followed by six other kings spanning the next thirty-five years who did the same. Israel was off to a terrible start. A common phrase for these kings is like this one: "But Omri did evil in the eyes of the Lord and sinned more than all those before him. He followed completely the ways of Jeroboam son of Nebat, committing the same sin Jeroboam had caused Israel to commit, so that they aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, by their worthless idols" (1 Kings 16:25-26).

After those six kings, a man named Ahab rose to power as Israel's king. His life would be summed up by his introductory bio in 1 Kings 16:30-33, "Ahab son of Omri did more evil in the eyes of the Lord than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, but he also married Jezebel daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria. Ahab also made an Asherah pole and did more to arouse the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, than did all the kings of Israel before him."

To counter these evil practices, God raised up the prophet Elijah. He would have a difficult task, trying to get Ahab and the worshipers of Baal and Asherah to turn their hearts back toward the Lord. For strength, Elijah would have to be completely dependent upon God.

Think about the miracles described in this chapter. What was miraculous about the drought? How was Elijah being fed by ravens illogical and impossible? This miracle took place near his hometown of Tishbe in the Kerith Ravine.

Then Elijah was instructed to go to the land of the Phoenicians, in Zarephath in the region of Sidon, near the hometown of Jezebel who had married King Ahab. What happened there with the woman who offered Elijah her last bit of flour and oil? Why did God allow the boy to die then be restored to life by the actions of Elijah? How might all these miracles have built Elijah's faith to be a prophet during the reign of Ahab?

Nine hundred years later, Jesus was in his own hometown of Nazareth, which was in the territory once ruled by Ahab. One Sabbath, he stood up in the synagogue and read a prophecy from the Old Testament. Then He said, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21). Jesus knew that the locals would want the hometown hero to do miracles in their presence. Here is His response:

"Truly I tell you... no prophet is accepted in his hometown. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zarephath in the region of Sidon" (Luke 4:24-26).

This response made his boyhood neighbors, friends, and relatives so furious that they tried to throw him off a cliff. What is the message weaving through the Old and New Testaments in these stories? What is the application for our lives today?

Poem

'Til The Ravens Do Come

Along this life's journey, this wilderness land, A hunger and thirst will occur For this world is barren, its cisterns are foul

Its ground trampled, rocky, o'ergrown.

The seeds of your faith will need fight to produce

When fountain dries, locusts do swarm:

Cry out loud for manna, share last flour and oil.

Trust God will feed even in drought.

Let not grief nor doubt keep you down, but on knees Like dogs, feed on Lord's table's crumbs:

For it is enough, daily manna, God's word,

And wait 'til the ravens do come.

Elijah and the prophets of Baal

Scripture 1 KINGS 18

Devotional

Ahab had made his choice. He abandoned Yahweh and hitched his life to the fertility god Baal and his fertility consort Asherah. Baal was the false god of Ahab's wife Jezebel. Her father was King Ethbaal and her own name might have meant "Baal exalts." Elijah boldly confronted Ahab, saying, "I have not made trouble for Israel... But you and your father's family have. You have abandoned the Lord's commands and have followed the Baals."

Once everybody had assembled on Mount Carmel, Elijah turned his attention to the people, declaring, "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal is God, follow him." His question rings through the millennia. Are there any ways that you waver between following the one, true God and other religious ideas?

Symbols are important. The pagan deity Baal was often depicted by a bull, which symbolized strength, power, fertility, and sexual pleasure. Remember that King Ahab "began to serve Baal and worship him. He set up an altar for Baal in the temple of Baal that he built in Samaria" (1 Kings 16:31-32). From the days of the golden calf in the time of Moses to the altars to Baal in the time of Ahab, the bull had been symbolic of how the people so frequently abandoned Yahweh and were drawn to false deities. So, what does Elijah choose in his confrontation with the prophets of Baal? Two bulls.

Another important set of symbols were the twelve stones Elijah used to construct his altar. These represented the twelve tribes that formed the unified nation of God's people, before ten of the tribes split away to form their own nation, which Elijah was now confronting. The prophet knew that this attraction to Baal worship would entice the entire people of God, not just the northern kingdom of Israel.

In the cesspool of idolatry that Ahab and Jezebel had created, there were still some people who remained clean in their faithfulness to God. The same is true today, when the winds of culture and religious leaders often blow against the truth. There are those who remain steadfast before God.

In the New Testament, the brother of Jesus would write, "And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops" (James 5:15-18).

What do these Old and New Testament passages teach us about being faithful people of God, despite what else is going on around us?

Poem

Obadia True

Devout believer, child of faith Aiding prophets' great campaign Light of God in Sin's domain Obadiah True

Enters present evil reign Message of God to proclaim Will not let fear him restrain Obadiah True

Witness bravery of God's saints Holding courage, does not faint Sees God's fire consume Sin's taint Obadiah True

Will I be like you someday? Will I hold my fear at bay? Will I see God work displayed? Obadiah True?

The Lord Appears To Elijah

Scripture 1 KINGS 19:1-18

Devotional

After his victorious showdown against the prophets of Baal, you might think that Elijah would be euphoric. Rather, he was despondent, as evidenced by verses 3 and 4: "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life... he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness... 'I have had enough, Lord,' he said. 'Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors.'"

At God's command, Elijah then walked forty days from the northern tip of Israel to beyond the southern tip of Judah. He ended up on Mt. Sinai (Horeb), where God had given Moses the Ten Commandments.

Centuries later, Jesus took three of His disciples to the top of a very high mountain, when there "appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus" (Matthew 17:3). The embodiment of the Law and the Prophets were having a conversation with Jesus, when God spoke from heaven saying, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!" (Matthew 17:5). That is our call: Listen to Jesus only.

In Romans 11:2-5, Paul wrote: "God did not reject his people, whom he foreknew. Don't you know what Scripture says in the passage about Elijah—how he appealed to God against Israel: 'Lord, they have killed your prophets and torn down your altars; I am the only one left, and they are trying to kill me'? And what was God's answer to him? 'I have reserved for myself seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal.' So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace."

Understand this clearly. Moses was not God. Elijah was not God. They merely pointed to Jesus, who was God in the flesh. We are called to be completely sold out to Jesus. For Baal is not God. Other religious deities are not God. Modern cultural ideologies are not God. But Jesus is God in the flesh. And we are called to be His remnant when others seem content to drift toward the false promises of the world.

That is our call: Listen to Jesus only. He may be speaking to you in a gentle whisper. Will you listen for His voice? Will you obey what He says?

Poem

Not Alone

Exhaustion after battle Despite win, soul is rattled Depression can ensue

Alone, the tired warrior Licks wounds in silent corridor Cries loneliness to God

"I am the only one left!"
"Tis better that I face death!"
"Abandoned, Lord, I feel."

The honest cries of grieving Our God, our Lord, receiving Ushers a message true

"You're not alone, I tell you "Seven times thousand are true "Remember that I hold you"

"So rest, dear child, in Sabbath "This be your constant habit "I'll minister to you"

Elijah Anoints Elisha

Scripture 1 KINGS 19:19-21

Devotional

At the end of yesterday's reading when Elijah was on Mt. Sinai, God gave him these instructions: "anoint Elisha son of Shaphat from Abel Meholah to succeed you as prophet" (1 Kings 19:16). This meant that Elijah would have to walk the long distance back to near where he had started from. Forty days there. Meet with God. Forty days back. Nobody ever said a mission from God is easy.

Elijah's ministry wasn't finished. But God told him to go find his successor while he was still active in ministry. Elijah was to think about his legacy in terms of who he could develop to carry on when he was gone. So, while he had the strength to take a forty-day journey, climb a mountain, then take another forty-day hike, Elijah found his apprentice. He showed Elisha that he was going to pass him the baton when he threw his own cloak on the young man.

After saying goodbye to his dad and mom, Elisha was all in. In a burn-the-ships moment, he made a barbeque out of his plowing equipment and pair of oxen, turning them into ash in the air and meat in the stomachs of his fellow workers. This former farmer would become protégé prophet to Elijah. The concluding verse says it all: "Then he set out to follow Elijah and became his servant."

This is the same attitude that we are called to have with Jesus, who said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). These three actions (deny, take up, follow) are about being allin with Jesus (surrendering self, surrendering life, surrendering freedom). Elisha couldn't become a prophet by listening to epic stories about Elijah. We can't become disciples of Jesus by attentively listening to sermons.

Perhaps in a reference to this Elijah-Elisha story, Jesus told would-be followers, "No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62). What about you? Are there any familiar things in your life you need to surrender in order to become a committed follower of Jesus? If so, it might be time for a little backyard barbeque.

Poem

Lord Of The Mountain, Lord Of The Valley

Lord of the mountain Lord of the valley The highs, the lows My life, you know Where can I go That you are not with me?

Flatten the mountain Raise up the valley Prepare the Way Make straight your day Repent, I say Behold the Lamb of God

When joy does fill me When grief distills me Lord, you are there Minister care Comfort You share Come, Holy Spirit, come! 7/11/2024 WEEK 27 DAY 4

Elijah Confronts Ahab & Jezebel

Scripture 1 KINGS 21

Devotional

Ahab and Jezebel had been nothing but bad for Israel. They encouraged the worship of Baal and Asherah, constructing altars, temples, and idols for those purposes. The king and his wife displeased God greatly. Verses 25 and 26 sum up their reign: "There was never anyone like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, urged on by Jezebel his wife. He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the Lord drove out before Israel."

Enter Elijah, the prophet of God tasked with the dirty job of speaking truth to corrupt people. His previous encounters included a showdown with their false prophets of Baal. Now he had to confront them for killing a guy and stealing a farm that had been in his family for generations. I doubt that Elijah got many gifts for Prophet Appreciation Month.

The word of the Lord that Elijah had to deliver was harsh: Ahab would face disaster, his wife Jezebel would be eaten by dogs, and their descendants would be wiped off the map. Elijah's rationale for this indictment of Ahab was "because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the Lord."

How we live matters to God. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 says, "Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God."

It seems hopeless, doesn't it. Until you read the next verse: "And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). Thanks be to Christ!

We must remember that Paul was writing 1 Corinthians to people who believed in Jesus. Just like Ahab, they knew better. Just like Ahab followed the practices of the Amorite culture, and the Corinthians followed the practices of the Greco-Roman culture, too often we follow the practices of our secular, relativistic culture. Just like Ahab and the Corinthians, we know better.

Are there any ways in which you have "sold yourself" to the ways of the world around you? How is God calling you to repent and align yourself more completely with Jesus?

Poem

Jezebel

Jezebel, you wicked queen! Your lies, deceit are not unseen Your vile contending is obscene God will not tolerate it

One day you will be cast low down One day your power and your crown Will in the depths of hell be drown God's wrath avenge the faithful

'Til then, may faithful servants stand Against, what seems, your pow'rful hand As you contaminate the land Lord, give us strength to conquer!

Elijah Calls Fire from Heaven

Scripture 2 KINGS 1

Devotional

Ahab's was killed in battle when an arrow found its way between his sections of armor, causing him to bleed out on the floor of his chariot. 1 Kings 22:37-38 recounts his demise, saying, "So the king died and was brought to Samaria, and they buried him there. They washed the chariot at a pool in Samaria (where the prostitutes bathed), and the dogs licked up his blood, as the word of the Lord had declared."

Things didn't get better when Ahab's son Ahaziah became king of Israel. The Bible says, "He did evil in the eyes of the Lord, because he followed the ways of his father and mother and of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. He served and worshiped Baal and aroused the anger of the Lord, the God of Israel, just as his father had done" (1 Kings 22:52-53).

This allegiance to false gods is why King Ahaziah consulted a false Baal god instead of the one true God who had delivered the people into this promised land. Obviously, the prophet Elijah's job was not done.

But Ahaziah didn't care. He was the king. He could consult any god he wanted, and he could command any prophet he wanted. So, he sent a platoon of fifty soldiers to forcibly bring Elijah to tell the king to his face what he had proclaimed from afar. That and the following platoons met with a fiery death. It's never good to try to overpower the power of God.

Ahaziah found this out the hard way. He died not because of his fall through the lattice of his upper room, but because he consulted Baal instead of Yahweh. The first of the Ten Commandments declares, "You shall have no other gods."

In our lives, we must be careful to be dedicated to Christ alone. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 warns us, "For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants also masquerade as servants of righteousness. Their end will be what their actions deserve."

There will always be someone telling you that God is not real, or that God is just one of many paths to heaven, or that Jesus and Buddha and Baal are all the same. Don't be deceived. Dedicate your life to Christ alone today.

Poem

Let The Fire Fall

Consuming fire of the Living God Refine my heart All dross dispel Purity I desire Let the Fire fall!

Great Holy Spirit, Living God Upon my head A flame ignite Your power to speak Let the Fire fall!

A living altar in my heart Your flame a constant Eternal light A fragrant offering Let the Fire fall!

A Double Portion

Scripture 2 KINGS 2

Devotional

Elijah's ministry came to an end in dramatic fashion. Because he was taken to heaven in such a way, many believed he would come back at a future time. Nearly nine hundred years later, rumors reached the ears of both Herod and the disciples that people were saying Jesus was Elijah (Luke 9:8, 19). And when Jesus was dying on the cross, people mocked, "Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down" (Mark 15:36).

John the Baptist also had to deny rumors that he was Elijah (John 1:21). They certainly dressed alike, both wearing garments made of animal hair secured by a leather belt (2 Kings 1:8; Mark 1:6). And each one called the people to repentance and challenged them to follow God alone. An angel even declared that John would go "in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord" (Luke 1:17).

Elijah had left his mark in the world. Now that he was leaving, God would lift up the next leader of the prophets. That would be Elisha, who picked up Elijah's cloak, the symbol of his prophetic authority. The double portion that he requested is reminiscent of an oldest son who would inherit a double share of his father's estate. Elisha's prophetic ministry would endure some fifty years through the reigns of four kings of Israel.

At the outset of Elisha's ministry is this episode of his encounter with the boys who were jeering at him. While I have sympathy with Elisha for being bald, and while I am a big fan of the Chicago Bears, this story is more about idolatry than anything else. Bethel had become a center of Baal worship. Elijah had confronted the prophets of Baal. These young guys were probably not wanting his successor Elisha to disrupt their pagan practices as well. So, they told him to "Get out of here."

It was clear that Elisha's request for a double portion would not be easy. Twice as many years as Elijah. Double the number of corrupt or conflicted kings to deal with. Two times more grief. And yes, twice as many miracles.

Has God ever asked you to do something great that was also very hard? How did you handle it? What did you learn? What is God calling you to do next?

Poem

By My Side

Go not before and leave me I will not lag behind But stepping in your footsteps And with your hand in mine We'll walk this Way together For you have been my guide This final journey forward I'll keep you by my side

We'll reminisce the vict'ries
We'll ponder Wisdom's past
We'll visit holy places
'Til Jordan ends our path
We'll share our love and hopings
A double portion bless
It's by your side I will remain
'Til you're laid down to rest

And then after the whirlwind Of grief, absent of you I'll celebrate all I have learned While walking in your truth I'll pick up now the mantle Prepare to make great strides And carry forth the mission Your spirit by my side

The Miracles and Message of Elisha

Scripture 2 KINGS 4

Devotional

Elisha inherited the role of being the lead prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel from Elijah. Since being established eighty years earlier by evil Jeroboam, Israel had been ruled by a series of kings who led people into idol worship. Take a look at the kings who ruled Israel during Elisha's fifty years as a prophet:

Joram "did evil in the eyes of the Lord" (2 Kings 8:18). There was famine and war during most of his reign.

Jehu "destroyed Baal worship in Israel," yet "was not careful to keep the law of the Lord" and "did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit" (2 Kings 10:28, 31).

Jehoahaz "did evil in the eyes of the Lord by following the sins of Jeroboam... So the Lord's anger burned against Israel" (2 Kings 13:2-3).

Jehoash "did evil in the eyes of the Lord and did not turn away from any of the sins of Jeroboam" (2 Kings 13:11). Still, he recognized Elisha as a prophet.

Recall the miracles of Elisha from today's reading. For each one, retell it in your own words. How might each miracle have shown God's power, given Elisha authority, and been a message to the people under such corrupt leaders? Also, how does this miracle impact your faith? Here they are to get you started:

The Widow's Oil

The Woman's Son

Death in the Pot

Feeding of a Hundred

Poem

Pouring Oil

The beauty of unity—pouring oil Anointing the head Appointing the priest Brings joy to the worship of God

The essence of healing—pouring oil The bowl filled with prayers The vial soaked with tears Awakens the hope of the soul

The gift for the poor—pouring oil Rich bread for the children Prophetic inheritance Overabundant reward

The pow'r of disciples—pouring oil Keeps passion's fire burning Counteracts Evil's dowsing Heart's altar the Spirit be tending 7/17/2024 WEEK 28 DAY 3

Naaman Discovers Humility in Desperation

Scripture 2 KINGS 5

Devotional

It's all about humility. In today's reading, how did Naaman show humility...

To his slave girl?

To his master?

To his servants?

To Elisha?

To Gehazi?

To God?

Elisha's servant Gehazi appeared in yesterday's reading as well as today's. He is the one who was with Elisha when the young child was restored to life. This came after Gehazi's failed attempt to keep the boy's mother away from Elisha and his failed attempt to raise the boy on his own. Then, in today's story, he appears again. How did Gehazi show a lack of humility...

To Elisha?

To Naaman?

To his servants?

To God?

Read Proverbs 22:1-4 and consider the wisdom of living a life of humility.

A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.

2 Rich and poor have this in common: The Lord is the Maker of them all.

3 The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty.

4 Humility is the fear of the Lord; its wages are riches and honor and life.

Poem

The Small Tasks

"I love you so much I would die in your place!

Take the bullet, my life give for you!" This vow of the masculine suitor so bold

Proclaimed, ardent passion, felt true But daily, the small tasks, which keep love alive

Are often forgotten, ignored,

These routine appointments, the regular bore

Seem small, insignificant, chores

"O Jesus, I'll serve you, I promise, 'til end:

My heart is yours, captive I'll be!" This vow of the newly graced sinner, with tears

Proclaimed, ardent passion—by me But daily obed'ence in small tasks I'm giv'n—

A pure, clean soul tended with care— Are often ignored, choosing love of this world

Chasing after flesh passion's affair

O, give me the heart of a small servant girl

Who sees this life as truly it is Who, knowing her place, ready at master's side

Attends to the small tasks, and wills Every morning, each ev'ning and at sun's high noon

To bring comfort and joy in her wake To kneel and wash feet, to stand ready to serve

All for love and obedience sake

Edom's Destruction and Israel's Restoration

Scripture OBADIAH 1

Devotional

For the last few weeks, we have been focused on the kings and prophets of the northern kingdom of Israel. Now we shift to the southern kingdom of Judah, headquartered in Jerusalem. Things down south had been similar to life in the north, but not quite as bad. Some of Judah's kings had truly honored God and destroyed the idols. But some had sold themselves out to idolatry.

Because of this checkered past, the people of Judah were wishy-washy with their faith in God, unity with one another, and defense against enemies. One such enemy was Edom, a nation located south of the Dead Sea where the Israelites had wandered for forty years after leaving Egypt. The conflicts between Judah and Edom were hundreds of years old. By the time of Obadiah, Edom was threatening the very existence of Judah.

The people of Judah needed a prophet of God to speak hope into their lives. Enter Obadiah. We don't really know much about this prophet. We don't even know for sure when he was alive and ministering – there's nearly a three-hundred-year gap between the earliest and latest dates put forth by scholars.

But we do know the content of his one-chapter message. Edom would be destroyed, and Israel/Judah would be restored. How do the following prophetic messages ring true no matter when they were written, including in our modern day?

"The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, 'Who can bring me down to the ground?'" (v. 3)

"All your allies will force you to the border; your friends will deceive and overpower you; those who eat your bread will set a trap for you, but you will not detect it." (v. 7)

"Because of the violence against your brother Jacob (Israel), you will be covered with shame; you will be destroyed forever." (v. 10)

"The day of the Lord is near for all nations. As you have done, it will be done to you; your deeds will return upon your own head." (v. 15)

"But on Mount Zion (Jerusalem) will be deliverance; it will be holy, and Jacob (Israel) will possess his inheritance." (v. 17)

"Deliverers will go up on Mount Zion to govern the mountains of Esau (Edom). And the kingdom will be the Lord's." (v. 21)

Poem

Once The Lord Has Spoken

Who can speak a word
Once the LORD has spoken?
Who dares to take up sword against
God's will?
Who can brag in might
Once the LORD has spoken?
Who tempts to cheat the Master in
His yield?

Who can claim reward
Once the LORD has spoken?
Who hides the loot from battle God
has won?
Who can crush God's saints
Once the LORD has spoken?
Who brags when head is stomped by
God's Son?

7/19/2024 WEEK 28 DAY 5

Jehu Kills Jezebel, Ahab's Family, and Prophets

Scripture 2 KINGS 9:30-10:36

Devotional

Ahab was the evil king who married wicked Jezebel, both leading the people into Baal worship. Elijah's showdown against the prophets of Baal were during Ahab's reign. After Ahab died, his wife Jezebel and their family lived on. In fact, the new king Joram embraced them, literally. 2 Kings 8:18 says that Joram "followed the ways of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had done, for he married a daughter of Ahab. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord." Things kept getting worse.

So Elisha sent some prophets to anoint a new person, Jehu, to be king of Israel while Joram was still alive. But not for long. Jehu confronted Joram and said, "How can there be peace as long as all the idolatry and witchcraft of your mother Jezebel abound?" (2 Kings 9:22). In one quick battle, Jehu killed King Joram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah.

He then turned his attention to Jezebel, Ahab's male descendants and loyal leaders, and the remaining prophets of Baal. Verse 28 sums it up: "So Jehu destroyed Baal worship in Israel." This would have been great, had it not been for the very next verse: "However, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam son of Nebat, which he had caused Israel to commit—the worship of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan."

Why would he have stamped out Baal worship but propped up calf worship? Perhaps it was in part political. Baal worship was connected to Ahab, from whom he was usurping the throne. Maybe it was in part spiritual. Calf worship had been with the people since their time in Egypt, and was accepted by the people, and probably by Jehu himself.

In the New Testament, James 4:7-8 says, "Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double minded." Being double minded with our beliefs and practices has always been a trap.

How about you? Are you double minded in any aspects of your walk with Christ? Are there any parts of the Bible that you dismiss because they are illogical, or any ways of the world that you embrace because they are popular? How can you apply these two strong statements made by James:

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you.

Poem

Jezebel Damned

If caught in the sight of a Jezebel A sniper full trained disposition Your back be a target Your flesh be devoured Through cunning, deception and pride

This demonic spirit's seduction The powerful tend to embrace Her ways diplomatic Her tempting dramatic Through beauty, and sugary lies

She loves to break unity's beauty By causing a jealousy rift Lures faithful to cheating Fakes truth by deceiving Through panic, confusion and myth

Oppressed by this demon, it's weighty To all in your circle of love Unless she's thrown over Damned, expelled o'er Hell's wall Through fasting, the Spirit and prayer

Joash Is Rescued & Hidden for Six Years

Scripture 2 KINGS 11

Devotional

Recall from yesterday's reading that Jehu killed King Joram of Israel and King Ahaziah of Judah in one battle. Jehu became king of Israel in the north, while Athaliah became queen of Judah in the south. The queen mother embraced idol Baal worship and ruled with a brutal iron fist, killing her relatives so that nobody could take her crown.

Only her grandson Josiah was spared, simply because he was rescued in a cloak-and-dagger operation. The priests and military commanders looked at Josiah as the rightful boy king. The queen mother was put to death; her grandson the boy king took the throne. And you thought your family gatherings were rugged.

Since the new king was only seven years old, Jehoida the priest took charge, at least spiritually. How would each of these following two actions have been important to put the southern kingdom of Judah back on the right path?

Jehoida the priest re-established the covenant between the Lord and the people.

Jehoida the priest got the people to smash the altars and idols of Baal.

Getting rid of the worldly ways of life and committing to the godly ways are both important when it comes to getting our lives aligned with the Lord. In Colossians 3:1-3, Paul states, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

How is the Lord calling you to set your heart and mind on things above?

Poem

Sathar סָתֵר (hidden)

In a safe place, I'm hidden So Death cannot steal This life I've been given Preserved by God's will Whether in woven basket Placed upon Nile's waves Or nursed by a servant Her bedroom to stay Or born in a stable By dream, Egypt rushed Or under His wings Mv soul. anxious. hushed In the cleft I am hidden So Death cannot steal This life I've been given 'Til God does reveal The purpose He's given Created for good To serve in His kingdom His will to secure Thus "under His wings Mv soul shall abide' Clutched tight in Christ's hand Held close by His side

Joash Restores the Temple

Scripture 2 CHRONICLES 24

Devotional

Joash became king at the ripe old age of seven. Since he was a boy king, Jehoida the priest guided the people and instructed the king. Some years later, Joash decided it was time to make some repairs to the temple in Jerusalem. It had been built during the reign of Solomon a hundred and fifty years earlier, so it was time for some restoration work.

Initially, the priestly repair committee was put in charge of collecting money and making repairs to the temple. But things got stalled in the bureaucracy and nothing got done. By the time Joash was thirty years old, he decided to take matters into his own hands. He got his royal secretary and high priest to work out a system to start paying people who were construction specialists. The work got done.

But then things fell apart for Joash. Jehoida the priest had kept the king on the right path with the Lord. But after the priest died, the king's officials got in his ear. He caved to their bad influence, and in turn led the people to "abandoned the temple of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, and worshiped Asherah poles and idols." How sad. They put all that time and money into fixing up the temple, then deserted it to worship poles and idols instead.

The result? "Because of their guilt, God's anger came on Judah and Jerusalem." The Arameans attacked Jerusalem, killing many leaders and wounding King Joash. In 2 Kings 12:18, we see that Joash bought his way out of the problem by giving the king of Aram sacred objects and gold from the temple. The king of Aram withdrew from Joash, but so did his own people. At the age of forty -seven, he was assassinated in his own bed.

What did Joash do right? Why did he make an about face? Who influenced him during the various times in his life?

In Galatians 5:7, Paul wrote, "You were running a good race. Who cut in on you to keep you from obeying the truth?"

Who has your ear? Who influences you for good or for bad? What can you do to keep the wrong people from cutting in on you to pull you away from the truth of God?

Poem

Repairing The Heart

The center of our worship The center of our soul Can be destroyed by enemies Who ravage it, their goal Destruction can come swiftly When violence holds the key Or it can happen over time In varying degrees Ignoring daily tending Allows dust, rust to form Without lamps lit and sacrifice Its altar won't be warmed In order to restore it Great cost it will demand Not only time and riches But Love's almighty hand So open up your window And let fresh Spirit come Repent, your cleansing agent Strip off all of Sin's scum Then straighten what is crooked Repair, forgive the wrongs And kindle then Heart's altar With love and praise's song Come in the Holy Holies And stand before God's throne Reclaim vour heart for Christ alone Your light on Hill be shone

7/24/2024 WEEK 29 DAY 3

An Invasion of Locusts & Call for Repentance

Scripture JOEL 1

Devotional

Joel carried out his prophetic ministry during the reign of Joash, who we read about yesterday. Recall that Joash "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord all the years Jehoiada the priest instructed him. The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there" (2 Kings 12:2-3). It is in the context of Joash's duplicity that Joel was a prophet.

Look at these portions of Joel's message. How are these passages timeless calls to abandon sin and embrace God in Joel's time and in ours?

Hear this, you elders; listen, all who live in the land. Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your ancestors? Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation. (Joel 1:2-3)

Put on sackcloth, you priests, and mourn; wail, you who minister before the altar. Come, spend the night in sackcloth, you who minister before my God; for the grain offerings and drink offerings are withheld from the house of your God. (Joel 1:13)

Declare a holy fast; call a sacred assembly. Summon the elders and all who live in the land to the house of the Lord your God, and cry out to the Lord. (Joel 1:14)

Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. (Joel 2:13)

"And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions." (Joel 2:28)

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the Lord has said, even among the survivors whom the Lord calls. (Joel 2:32)

Poem

Repent

O, deaf ears Be opened To hear the wilderness cry "Repent"

O, sleeping eyes Awaken To see your bridegroom approaching "Repent"

O, weak limbs Be strengthened To run the race set before you "Repent"

O, body Cast off sin To be clothed in Christ's righteousness "Repent"

O, stiff knees Bend To bow before your judge "Repent"

O, back Straighten To stand, and once standing, stand "Repent"

O, mind Be transformed To renewed ways of thinking "Repent"

O, soul
Be refreshed
To be graced by Christ's blood
"Repent"

7/25/2024 WEEK 29 DAY 4

Elisha Dies & His Bones Resurrect a Man

Scripture 2 KINGS 13

Devotional

Yesterday we read how Joel was the prophet in the southern kingdom of Judah while Joash was the king. During that same time period, Elisha was the prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel. He prophesied during the reigns of four kings, all of whom allowed or encouraged various forms of idol worship (see Week 28, Day 2).

After ministering and confronting corrupt kings, false prophets, and wayward people for fifty years, the Bible simply says, "Elisha died and was buried." In life and in death God used him to perform miracles and proclaim truth. He had left a legacy that we are still talking about today, over 2800 years later.

All of us are called to leave a legacy to our family, church, community, and world. Consider these passages from 1 & 2 Timothy, and ask what they say about leaving a legacy:

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Timothy 4:14-16)

If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God... Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. (1 Timothy 5:4, 8)

I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also." (2 Timothy 1:5).

You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. (2 Timothy 2:1-2)

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15)

Poem

The Lord's Arrow Of Victory

The LORD's arrow of victory Shoots forth from God's brilliant rain bow

Through the window of Heaven, His Warrior is given To fight all God's enemies below

As the prophets proclaim God's great victory

Over sin, blight and darkness of night Let the throngs shout their praise, As our tambourines raise

Vict'ry's song vanquishing death's plight

"The LORD's arrow of victory! Blessed is the one who's quiver is full!"

Jehoash Captures Amaziah & Plunders the Temple

Scripture 2 CHRONICLES 25

Devotional

Back in the southern kingdom of Judah, Amaziah had become king when his father Joash was assassinated. Unfortunately for Amaziah, it was "like father, like son." He followed the good ways of his dad, as well as the bad ways. 2 Kings 14:3-4 sums it up like this: Amaziah "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord... In everything he followed the example of his father Joash. The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there."

This flip-flopping became a way of life for Amaziah. In today's reading, he obeyed God when a prophet told him to send the hired troops from Israel home. Then he disobeyed God when he made a conquered enemy's false gods his own. We see this theme of being half-in and half-out with God over and over in Scripture. Let's review:

Adam and Eve walked with God, then slithered with Satan.

Abraham was credited with God's righteousness, but passed off his wife as his sister to save his own skin.

Jacob wrestled with God and prevailed, but couldn't subdue his own deceitful tendencies.

Moses humbly led God's people to freedom, while disqualifying himself from the promised land due to pride.

Samson took a vow to serve God only, yet couldn't overcome his desire for wayward women.

David was a man after God's own heart, while letting his heart be drawn to another man's wife.

James 1:13-15 says, "When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death."

How does this apply to you?

Poem

Amaziah and Jehoash

Amaziah, "strength" and might Large in number, lost in strife Large in ego, tumbles down Weak in spirit, loses life

"God has given" battle to King Jehoash, worship true Given vict'ry, given gold Given "strength," attack subdued 7/29/2024 WEEK 30 DAY 1

Jonah Flees God and is Swallowed by a Fish

Scripture JONAH 1-2

Devotional

Jonah was a prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II, who was a spiritually evil but politically powerful king. Jeroboam II expanded the territory of Israel to their original borders, just as Jonah himself had prophesied (2 Kings 14:25).

But farther northeast was the city of Ninevah, the heart of the Assyrian nation. Assyria was going through a period of challenging times, stalling their expansion as a world empire. However, they were a continual menace to Israel. Jonah saw them as a real threat to one day conquer and destroy Israel.

So, when God called Jonah to go northeast and preach to Ninevah, he got on a ship headed due west. Running from God is never a good idea. How did God use a storm, some sailors, and a huge fish to redeem Jonah from his own disobedience? How did God use those three days and nights to change Jonah's heart?

In Mattew 12:39-40, Jesus said, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

After Jonah emerged from the fish, he went to Ninevah and led them to repentance. After Jesus came forth from the tomb, He commissioned His followers to make disciples. What other similarities do you see between Jonah and Jesus?

The final words of Jonah's prayer inside the fish are worth reflecting on. Make them your prayer today:

"Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them. But I, with shouts of grateful praise, will sacrifice to you. What I have vowed I will make good. I will say, 'Salvation comes from the Lord.'"

Poem

The Runaway Prophet Proverbs

The runaway prophet escaping from God Will soon realize his folly

The runaway prophet speaking more than he's told Will one day be silenced by God

The runaway prophet extolling himself Will, by God, be kicked in the knee

The runaway prophet out to curse those God loves
Will be swallowed by fish or kicked by an ass

Jonah Obeys God and is Angry

Scripture JONAH 3-4

Devotional

In yesterday's reading, we saw how God called Jonah to head northeast and preach to the people of Ninevah. Instead, he ran from God, boarding a ship headed due west. After being thrown overboard, a huge fish vomited him up right back where he started in the seaport town of Joppa. God repeated his command, and this time Jonah obeyed.

Every preacher dreams about giving a message and watching as people flock to the altar and change their lives. But when this happened in Ninevah, Jonah got ticked off. The people of Ninevah were the enemy of the Israelites. They had been threatening to wipe Israel off the map. Now they were turning their hearts to the God of Israel? Jonah was so mad at God that he wanted to die.

This story is more about the character of God than of Jonah. The Lord knew that Ninevah, the capital of Assyria, had ruled with an iron fist. They had been filled with idolatry and violence. They were far from God. The final verse of this book gives us an insight into the nature of God when He says, "And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left?"

In Mattew 12:41, Jesus said, "The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here." That something greater was Jesus Himself, who died for our sins.

Romans 5:6-8 puts it like this: "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

You and I are quite like the people of Ninevah. All humans are. But God has always been concerned for people, and that includes you. In fact, the Bible says that God is patient, "not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). Will you turn to Him today? Is there someone you know who seems too far from God to be redeemable? How does God see that person? How is God calling you to be a "Jonah" to that person? Will you run away, or will you humbly obey?

Poem

Beware!

Beware when a root of bitterness grows deep in your heart.
Beware when you curse your enemy.
Beware when you believe God is shading your prejudice.
Beware, for Death's worms will eat your flesh.

Uzziah's Prideful Downfall

Scripture 2 CHRONICLES 26

Devotional

At the same time that Jeroboam II was ruling Israel in the north, Uzziah was king of Judah in the south. Like his father before him, Uzziah was basically a godly man who allowed pagan practices of the people to continue. 2 Kings 15:3-4 sums up his life: "He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, just as his father Amaziah had done. The high places, however, were not removed; the people continued to offer sacrifices and burn incense there."

During Uzziah's half-century reign, Judah's military, agriculture, infrastructure, and economic situations all improved. Then comes the kicker line: "But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall." He tried to usurp the priest's duties, and when confronted he simply raged at the eighty priests and the high priest. As a result, the Lord inflicted him with leprosy, and he lived out his remaining years in isolation.

Proverbs 15:31-33 says, "Whoever heeds lifegiving correction will be at home among the wise. Those who disregard discipline despise themselves, but the one who heeds correction gains understanding. Wisdom's instruction is to fear the Lord, and humility comes before honor."

What could Uzziah have learned from this proverb? What about you? Are there any ways that pride could lead to a downfall? How do you respond when others correct you? How should you respond?

Hebrews 12:11 tells us, "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

How does this verse add to your understanding of today's topic?

Poem

Set

Set your sights on the LORD Seek first that Way You'll grow strong in your Spirit His commandments obey

Set not yourself high throned Seeking after Pride's way You'll grow sick in your flesh You'll lead others astray

Locusts and the Plumb Line

Scripture AMOS 7

Devotional

The prophet Amos ministered at a complacent period in the northern kingdom of Israel's history. Jeroboam II was a very evil king who encouraged idol worship. He followed the ways of his namesake, Jeroboam I, was the first king of Israel over one hundred and fifty years before Amos.

But Jeroboam II was also a successful king. During this period, there was economic prosperity throughout Israel. The wealthier people got, the more they took advantage of others. They began oppressing the poor and conscripting them into slavery. All the while, the nation of Assyria continued to be a shadowy menace to their peace, prosperity, and freedom. Within a few years, Assyria would conquer neighboring Babylon.

Amos warned the people to turn to God, get their lives in order, and stop oppressing others. His message is summed up beautifully in the verse made famous by Martin Luther King, "But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a neverfailing stream!" (Amos 5:24).

If the Israelites didn't change their ways, judgment would come. What was the message embedded in the images of the locusts, fire, and plumb line?

The prophetic words of Amos were not well received. Even the priest of Bethel in Israel told the shepherd prophet from Judah to pack up and go home. Amos was undeterred and concluded this chapter with some sobering words: "Israel will surely go into exile, away from their native land." This would come true. Only a few decades later Assyria would conquer them, and the northern kingdom would disappear forever.

If God were to hold a spiritual plumb line up to your life, in what ways would you be standing straight? Are there any areas where you would be out of alignment with the ways of God? What measure is God calling you to take to straighten things out and stand firm?

1 Corinthians 15:58 says, "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Poem

I Am So Small

If you send forth your locusts To destroy all I've grown I will starve and not stand I am so small

If you send forth your fire To consume all I've known I will faint and not stand I am so small

If you send forth your Spirit To empower my faint heart I will speak and will stand Though I am so small

If you send forth your blessing To encourage my soul I will fight and will stand Though I am so small 8/2/2024 WEEK 30 DAY 5

A Basket of Ripe Fruit & Silence in the Temple

Scripture AMOS 8

Devotional

The prophetic words of Amos fell on deaf ears. As he began his ministry, Jeroboam II was a very evil king. When he died, he was succeeded by his son Zechariah, who also did evil. Six months later, Zechariah was assassinated by Shallum who became the new king. But only one month later Shallum was assassinated by Menahem, who ascended to the throne. The era was marked with conspiracy, idolatry, oppression, and heavy taxation.

A decade or so later, Assyria would attack and take captives from Israel. Another decade later, Assyria would complete the conquest, and the northern kingdom would disappear forever. This would fulfill the Lord's words in verse 2, "The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer." The people would be separated from their homeland.

Perhaps even sadder would be the separation from God. Verse 3 says, "In that day... the songs in the temple will turn to wailing. Many, many bodies—flung everywhere! Silence!" Later Amos speaks for God in saying there will be "a famine of hearing the words of the Lord" (v. 11). The people had walked away from God so far that they could no longer hear Him.

In John 7:34, Jesus was speaking to the religious leaders who refused to believe in Him when He said, "You will look for me, but you will not find me; and where I am, you cannot come." They thought He was headed for Greece; He was actually talking about going to heaven. Those who do not go to heaven will experience an eternity of silence in the temple.

In yesterday and today's readings from Amos 7-8, the Lord showed Amos several word pictures to warn the people to get right with God.

A swarm of locusts could strip you clean.

A raging fire could devour the land.

A spiritual plumb line could show your misalignment.

A basket of fruit could demonstrate that the time is ripe for judgment.

What have you learned from these passages in Amos?

Poem

Judgement Is Coming

The pulpits empty
The pews barren
The hearts broken
The land ravished
The family gone
The scriptures abandoned
The praise of God ceased
The eyes blinded
The ears deafened
The tongue mute
The lamps oil-less
The light extinguished

The judgment is coming The prophets foretell

The judgment is coming Coming Coming

Here



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