

**BE
GOD'S**

Light



VOLUME 4
READINGS, DEVOTIONS, POEMS

Fishers United Methodist Church

Introduction

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

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

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

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

There are several components to this year-long exploration:

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

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

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

Enjoy the journey!

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

8/5/2024
WEEK 31 DAY 1

A Promised Ruler from Bethlehem



Scripture MICAH 5

Devotional

The last few days we looked at the ministry of Amos in the northern kingdom of Israel. This week we head south to Judah. We begin with Micah, who was a contemporary of Isaiah. Both men prophesied during the reigns Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah in Judah.

However, Micah's ministry was to those in both the north and the south. Micah 1:1 states, "The word of the Lord that came to Micah... the vision he saw concerning Samaria [the capital of Israel] and Jerusalem [the capital of Judah]." His book is a warning to both kingdoms, cautioning them that each would fall to invading powers. This, he said, was part of the Lord's discipline and care for His people. It was all part of God's plan.

Out of the ashes of their destruction would come one who would lead the people back to the heart of God. That person would be the Messiah!

Over seven hundred years later, when wise men showed up to worship newborn Jesus, King Herod questioned his religious scholars about where the Messiah would be born. Their answer in Matthew 2:6 is a quote from Micah 5:2: "But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." Whether vanquished by Assyria, conquered by Babylon, or under Roman oppression, God would not abandon His people.

Look at the characteristics of this coming Messiah as described in Micah 5. How would this have brought hope to the people in Micah's day? How was this understood by the wise men in Jesus' day? How does this speak to you in our day?

He "will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." (v. 2)

"He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." (v. 4)

"And he will be our peace when the Assyrians invade our land and march through our fortresses." (v. 5)

Poem

In The Small And Insignificant

*Despite all signs of defeat
Despite depression and despair
In the small and insignificant
A whisper
A cry
A birthing
Of Hope
The House of Bread
Ushers in
The Word
The Ruler
The Shepherd
The Strength
The Majesty*

And then

*Despite all signs of defeat
Despite depression and despair
Great security
Peace
Deliverance
No longer
In the small and insignificant
But in every atom
Of every being
Of every nation
Of all creation
Bringing victory
Advent promise
Enemy destruction*

8/6/2024
WEEK 31 DAY 2

Isaiah Is Commissioned by God



Scripture ISAIAH 6

Devotional

With sixty-six chapters, Isaiah is the longest of the prophetic books. We will cover four of those chapters this week, and another three from later in the book in a few weeks.

Isaiah ministered to the southern kingdom of Judah. Today's reading sets his call in the context of the death of King Uzziah, who had led the people well, establishing a strong military, agriculture, infrastructure, and economy. However, he allowed the people to continue their ungodly practices of idol worship, and he himself tried to usurp the priests' duties in the temple.

Because of their unfaithfulness, Isaiah warned them that judgment was coming through invading nations. Review these portions of Isaiah's encounter with God. What does each teach you?

"I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple."
(v. 1)

Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.
(v. 2)

And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. (v. 3-4)

"See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." (v. 7)

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (v. 8)

He said, "Go and tell this people: 'Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving.'" (v. 9)

Then I said, "For how long, Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken." (v. 11-12)

Poem

Woe Is Me!

*Woe is me
If I stand alone
Before the Holy
Unclean
Foul lipped
Descendant of Adam*

*Woe is me
If I stand alone
Before the Enemy
Unarmored
Silent voiced
Uncircumcised heart*

*Woe is me
If I stand alone
Before the council
Unprepared
Forgotten prayer
Denyer of my Savior*

*Woe is me
If I stand alone
Before the Throne
Unclothed
Forsaken Grace
Without Christ's blood*

8/7/2024
WEEK 31 DAY 3

The Virgin will Give Birth to a Son



Scripture **ISAIAH 7:1-17**

Devotional

Things were heating up in the old middle east. The northern kingdom of Israel (called Ephraim in today's reading) had made an alliance with Aram. They thought this could protect them from Assyria and give them dominance over the southern kingdom of Judah.

Ahaz was now the Judah's king, one of the worst they ever had. 2 Chronicles 28:2-4 reveals his character: "He followed the ways of the kings of Israel and also made idols for worshiping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his children in the fire, engaging in the detestable practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree."

After some stinging defeats at the hands of Israel and Aram, King Ahaz sent messengers to the king of Assyria, "I am your servant and vassal. Come up and save me out of the hand of the king of Aram and of the king of Israel, who are attacking me" (2 Kings 16:7). To pay for his ungodly alliance, he emptied the temple of silver and gold. Then as an act of spiritual defiance, he set up pagan worship stations all over Jerusalem and nailed shut the doors of the temple (2 Chronicles 28:24-25).

In Isaiah 7:9 from today's reading, it says, "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all." Ahaz completely ignored this warning. He also declined on a generous offer from the Lord: "Ask the Lord your God for a sign, whether in the deepest depths or in the highest heights" (v. 11).

So the Lord gave a sign, familiar to those who are Christians. Isaiah 7:14 is repeated in Matthew 1:23: "'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel' (which means 'God with us')." Jesus is the true fulfillment of God's sovereign promise to rescue His people!

Have you accepted Jesus as Savior and Lord?
How is He the fulfillment of God's sovereign promises to you?

Poem

In The Secret Place

*In the secret place
Of prayer
A message
A calling
A promise
"Let it be to me..."*

*In the secret place
Of womb
A conception
A life
A hope
"Let it be to me..."*

*In the secret place
Of stall
A birthing
A crying
A future
"Let it be to me..."*

*In the secret place
Of heart
A trusting
A calling
A promise
"Let it be to me..."*

8/8/2024
WEEK 31 DAY 4

To Us a Child is Born



Scripture ISAIAH 9:1-7

Devotional

As we have seen, the northern kingdom of Israel was about to fall to the Assyrians. The people would be captured and assimilated into Assyrian culture. The ten tribes that made up Israel included Zebulun and Naphtali mentioned in today's reading. All would be lost.

But Isaiah gives a word of hope, saying, "in the future [God] will honor Galilee" (v. 1). Galilee would become the region where Jesus grew up and made the headquarters of His ministry, over seven hundred years later.

When Matthew wrote his gospel about Jesus, he included these words from Matthew 4:12-17:

¹² When Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, he withdrew to Galilee. ¹³ Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali—
¹⁴ to fulfill what was said through the prophet Isaiah:

¹⁵ "Land of Zebulun and land of Naphtali,
the Way of the Sea, beyond the Jordan,
Galilee of the Gentiles—

¹⁶ the people living in darkness
have seen a great light;
on those living in the land of the shadow of death
a light has dawned."

¹⁷ From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."

These words are a quote from Isaiah, who later went on to say in Isaiah 9:6-7,

⁶ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.
And he will be called

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

⁷ Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.

He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.

The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.

How was Isaiah's prophecy timely for the people in his day? What does it mean for us today?

Poem

The Light, Darkness Dispersion

*Once upon a time ago
On tent camp
expedition
With daughter and
some friends of mine
Had outing as our
mission*

*The tents were up, the
campfire stoked
The sun sank low, then
dark
And just as bed rolls
hit the floor
My daughter's needs
did start*

*"Mommie, I have to
'go' real bad!"
"Ok," I said, reluctant
And so we set off to
the 'john'
With ease? I was
expectant*

*But dark the night,
and rutted path
Thick tree roots made
us stumble
My fault—the flashlight
left in tent—
Next obvious, our
tumble*

*But then a beam of
light appeared,
My friend, had heard
our waking
A flashlight beaming
from her hand
Rescue, her
undertaking*

*We walked along, now
path full lit
Each step secure and
certain
We reached our
destination, safe
The light, darkness
dispersion*

*On the way back, my
daughter, young
Asked now the light to
hold
She pointed beam way
down the path
And all her steps were
bold*

*But once again a tumble
came;
My wise friend gave a
teaching
"You must keep beam
upon your feet,
Not far ahead, you're
reaching."*

*"The beam is there to
light your feet
Each step illuminating
Just like the Word of
God, our light
The darkness overtaking."*

*Safe now, tucked in, may
daughter's breath
At ease, deep in her
sleeping
But I awake, did ponder
long
God's word, anew, now
teaching*

*"Behold, a people,
darkness tread
A great Light they shall
see!
God's glory beaming all
around
Your camp; rejoicing be!"*

*My prayer that night,
"Darkness disperse!
Your Light, my life
illumine
And hold my hand along
life's path—
Grant me this close
communion."*

8/9/2024
WEEK 31 DAY 5

The Root Of Jesse



Scripture ISAIAH 11

Devotional

Much of Isaiah's prophetic writings applied to the events of his day as well as the future Messiah. Isaiah was honest with both Israel and Judah, telling them that they will be conquered by other nations as God's judgment for their unfaithfulness.

Three hundred years earlier, Jesse was the father of King David. The root of Jesse would be someone who came from that family line. In Matthew 1, verses 1 and 6, the gospel opens with, "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the [descendant] of... Jesse the father of King David." Matthew wanted to make sure the reader knew that Jesus was the root of Jesse spoken of here in Isaiah chapter 11.

The Jews from Israel and Judah would be conquered and scattered throughout the world in the coming centuries. But Isaiah gave them hope that they would be reunited. Isaiah 11:11 prophetically says, "In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, from Elam, from Babylonia, from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean."

Compare that with who was in Jerusalem at the birth of the Christian Church in Acts 2:9-11, "Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome... Cretans and Arabs."

The people of God were dispersed into many parts of the world. Indeed, the final gathering of all His people will be when Christ returns and reigns over the whole earth.

Look over today's reading again. What else stands out to you in Isaiah's prophetic words about the shoot from the stump of Jesse?

Poem

A Fruitless Tree

*A fruitless tree
Sawed down to stump
The Jesse line
A-tumble
But roots sunk deep
In fertile soil
Produced a Shoot
Full humble*

*Its spirit wise
Its counsel strong
Its knowledge
"Lord alone!"
Its fruit, delight
For nations all
The fruitless tree
Re-born*

*This Shoot, the Hope
This Shoot, the Peace
This Shoot, the Joy
The Love
This Shoot, fulfillment
Promised long
God's glory
From above*

*Judgment with justice
Now is seen
Righteous, the bark,
The belt
Faith, truth, its Fruit
Creation saved
Under Its shade
To dwell*

8/12/2024
WEEK 32 DAY 1

Hosea's Dysfunctional Family

Scripture HOSEA 1

Devotional

This week we move back to the northern kingdom of Israel, focusing on the prophecy of Hosea. He ministered at a time when Israel was under immense external pressure from the Assyrians, who regularly invaded Israel's territory, demanding heavy tribute and taking captives along the way.

During Hosea's time, there was also chaotic internal confusion from Israel's own kings. When Hosea began his work, evil king Jeroboam was near the end of his life. Four of the next five kings were assassinated. The sixth king made an alliance with Egypt, but watched helplessly as Assyria conquered Israel, deported the people, and resettled Samaria with foreigners to replace the Israelites.

The Bible says, "All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against the Lord their God, who had brought them up out of Egypt from under the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt. They worshiped other gods and followed the practices of the nations the Lord had driven out before them, as well as the practices that the kings of Israel had introduced" (2 Kings 17:7-8).

The book of Hosea is a loud warning about this very thing. The Lord told him, "Go, marry a promiscuous woman and have children with her, for like an adulterous wife this land is guilty of unfaithfulness to the Lord." He then named his children Jezreel (the city where one royal dynasty was annihilated, only to be replaced by one just as wicked), Lo-Ruhamah (meaning "not loved") and (Lo-Ammi (meaning "not my people"). The message was clear: Israel had abandoned God and would be disciplined for it.

But there was hope. After the period of discipline there would be reconciliation. Hosea chapter 2 is a poetic picture of that future, where God says, "In that day..."

"You will call me 'my husband'" (v. 2).

"I will respond to the skies... and they will respond to Jezreel" (v. 21-22).

"I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one'" (v. 23a).

"I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'" (v. 23b).

Eight hundred years later, when Paul wrote the book of Romans, he wanted to express how much God cares for people, even though all of us have sinned and deserve His divine wrath. He wrote in Romans 9:22-26...

22 What if God, although choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? 23 What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory— 24 even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the Gentiles? 25 As he says in Hosea: "I will call them 'my people' who are not my people; and I will call her 'my loved one' who is not my loved one," and, "In the very place where it was said to them, 'You are not my people,' there they will be called 'children of the living God.'"

Have you ever felt you were unworthy of God's love and unfit to be called his child? Great! You are in the perfect place to receive His grace and mercy. If you would like to do that right now, ask the Lord to forgive you as you embrace Jesus as the Savior and Lord that He is.

Poem

Crazy Assignment

*The dawn found me a-praying
Kneeling down before my King
The command for my life
"Take this unfaithful wife
Love her and keep her
All your years be full of strife."*

*The command left me stricken
Had my ears misheard God's word
A known crazy assignment
Seeming out of alignment
"Take on failure;
Your love in long confinement."*

*"Love one broken, unfaithful
Stay true to your given task
She'll despise you and hurt you
She will leave and desert you
You stay true, though,
True full love be your virtue."*

*This life's crazy assignment
Felt cruel—life of torment
Man of sorrows, full of grief
Love unfaithful, no relief
"I believe, Lord,
Help my flailing unbelief."*

8/13/2024
WEEK 32 DAY 2

Hosea's Reconciliation with His Adulterous Wife

Scripture HOSEA 3

Devotional

If things weren't bad enough for Hosea, his promiscuous wife abandoned him and their shamefully named children for the arms of other men. Hosea not only went and got her, but he paid good money to pry her out of whomever she had given herself to.

While this sounds too crazy to be true, that's exactly what God had done for the northern kingdom of Israel during their two-hundred-year history. Of their nineteen kings, all but one of them were noted for doing evil and leading the people to worship false idols. Yet God did not give up on them. He sent them prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, and now Hosea to warn them to turn away from evil and become faithful to God. For two centuries, the Lord had been the spurned husband ever pursuing His promiscuous bride.

And He does the same with us. He pursues. He loves. He forgives. He saves. In 2 Corinthians 6:2, Paul quoted another prophet when he wrote, "In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." We aren't prepared for heaven because we are good, but because He is.

In Luke 15:1-7, some religious leaders were hassling Jesus for spending time with known traitors and sinners. So Jesus told them a story. Here it is.

"Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."

In what ways is this story similar to what Hosea did? What kind of people does God pursue? Do you believe that the Lord is pursuing you like that? Who is somebody you know that needs to hear of God's gracious pursuit?

Poem

Love Like The Lord

*Love like the LORD
Even though they're unfaithful
Love like the LORD
Even while they do stray
Love like the LORD
Leave it to the Good Shepherd
To search, rescue, save them
To return to God's way*

*Love like the LORD
Even when they betray you
Love like the LORD
When denial does come
Love like the LORD
And forgive with abundance
The blindness, the deafness,
The hatred they hoard*

*Love like the LORD
Even in disagreement
Love like the LORD
When they're caught up in sin
Love like the LORD
Even when bold face lying
Remember we all bear
The stain deep within*

*Love like the LORD
Even though persecution
Love like the LORD
And continue in prayer
Love like the LORD
When hell grips your descending
And wait for the LORD's
Resurrection at dawn*

8/14/2024
WEEK 32 DAY 3

Israel Will be Caught in the Whirlwind

Scripture HOSEA 8

Devotional

“They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind” (v. 7). Oh, how this describes Israel’s past and future. The people of the northern kingdom of Israel had continuously abandoned the Lord for the false gods and practices of their pagan neighbors. Now they would face the whirlwind of destruction by the invading Assyrian army.

“Though Ephraim [Israel] built many altars for sin offerings, these have become altars for sinning” (v. 11). Their places of worship looked holy. But what took place there was far from it. Rather than making offerings for their sin, they had offered themselves to more sin.

“I wrote for them the many things of my law, but they regarded them as something foreign” (v. 12). Two hundred and fifty years earlier, the Lord had given them the Ten Commandments and the rest of the law. They knew right from wrong, but chose wrong over right.

“Israel has forgotten their Maker and built palaces” (v. 14). The people forgot that it’s all about God. Rather, they made it all about themselves. When some people hear, “Love the Lord with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself,” they say, “Oh good, I can love myself.”

Israel’s story is our story.

Sowing wild oats.
Profaning God’s holiness.
Disregarding God’s Word.
Forgetting our Maker.

How is God calling you to turn from your waywardness and turn toward Him?

Poem

Judgement Sifting

*A time will be coming
When the LORD’s wrath releases
A great judgment sifting
When all chaff will be burned
When dark hearts are exposed
And our motives are measured
When evil is vanquished
And many will mourn*

*Then how will the righteous
Respond to the weeping?
Will they sit in sorrow
Paralysis feel?
Or will they join voices
Of praise jubilation
As Justice is poured out
The great scroll unsealed?*

*When finally the prayers
Of the martyrs in heaven
Whose blood is appealing
To God’s sovereign pow’r
Are answered--God’s vengeance—
With swift judgment sifting
The trumpets shall sound
At that great judgment hour*

8/15/2024
WEEK 32 DAY 4

God's love for Israel



Scripture HOSEA 11:1-11

Devotional

Ask any parent how they feel when their child goes astray, and you will hear sadness in their voice. But any loving parent will never stop loving their wayward child. In today's reading, we see God as a loving parent who refuses to give up on His lost sons and daughters. Praise the Lord for who He is!

In Luke 11:11-13, Jesus said, "Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

That's who the Lord is. Ever pursuing. Ever loving. Ever blessing.

It's not like Israel got off scot-free. They would pay for snubbing God and sniffing around idolatry. For that, they would be conquered by the Assyrian kingdom, never to rise to power again. The northern kingdom as a nation would vanish forever.

But Israel as a people would never be abandoned by God. A remnant from Israel in the north and Judah in the south would return to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. God wasn't done with His people, even though many times they had been done with Him.

That is who the Lord is. Never abandoning. Never leaving. Never forsaking.

Romans 8:35-39 says, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ...No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Have you surrendered your life to Jesus? If so, what does it mean to you that you are in the grip of God's grace?

Poem

Little One

*Little one as I hold you, skin to
skin to my breast
Little one as you hear my heart
beating in chest
Little one, how I love you; you are
precious, you're mine
Little one, I'll protect you, to your
cries, I'll incline*

*Little one as you walk and you
stumble about
Little one with rebellion you
tumble about
Little one, I will pick you up, heal
all your sores
Little one, even in your rebellion,
my love I will pour*

*Little one when you wander away
from the fold
Little one, I will rescue, in my arms
I'll hold
Little one, 'til your kicking and
fighting do cease
Little one I will teach you the
hymn of my peace*

*Little one when you're faithful, I'll
smile with great pride
Little one as you run, I will cheer at
your side
Little one, when exhausted, I'll
provide you with rest
Little one, 'til you come and return
to my breast*

8/16/2024
WEEK 32 DAY 5

The Future Blessings on Israel



Scripture HOSEA 14

Devotional

This book began when Hosea married a promiscuous wife and had children given names reminiscent of Israel's unfaithfulness to God. The Israelites said, "You're not my God." To that the Lord replied, "You're not my people." The northern kingdom of Israel ignored Hosea's metaphorical warnings and continued to prostitute themselves to false gods. For this they would be conquered by the invading Assyrians.

But exile would lead to restoration. This final chapter in the book of Hosea opens with a verse that says, "Return, Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall!" Though God was disciplining them, He was also saying, "You'll always be my people." That's why He says, "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them" (v. 4).

Not only would Israel be blessed in the future, but it would also be a blessing to others. People in the future would enjoy the future abundance of God's favor on them, as one relishes the fragrance of a lily, the shade of a cedar, and the fruit of the vine.

This harkened back over a thousand years earlier when God said to the patriarch Abraham,

"I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;
I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:2-3)

Ultimately, this would be fulfilled in Jesus, the descendant of Abraham and the Son of God. Ephesians 1:3 says, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ."

The ripples of God's promises through Abraham, Israel, and Jesus are still spreading today. How has God blessed you? How is He calling you to be a blessing?

Poem

Returned

*A package received from the parcel
post man
A package, rough handled and torn
Inside, product broken
The damage immense
Returned to the vendor
Replacement expense*

*A soul was thrown down by the liar
satan
A soul, rough handled and torn
Inside, all was broken
The damage immense
Returned to the Father
Repair, great expense*

*A new life received, healed by the
Son of Man
A new life, undamaged, reborn
Inside, heart created
The beauty immense
Returned to the Garden
At Mercy's expense*

8/19/2024
WEEK 33 DAY 1

Israel Falls to Assyria



Scripture 2 KINGS 17

Devotional

The northern kingdom of Israel had split away from the southern kingdom of Judah two hundred years earlier. Israel's capital was Samaria, while Judah's capital remained Jerusalem. In those two centuries, all the kings of Israel were corrupt, leading the people to forsake God and embrace idolatry. Finally, God had seen enough. Samaria was conquered and the people of Israel were exiled to Assyria.

But Samaria was too important of a region to leave uninhabited. So the king of Assyria brought in foreigners to repopulate the area. These expatriates blended their own pagan religious practices with those being taught by Jewish priests. They intermarried with Jews who remained in the land, making a new mixed race of people. These people became known as the Samaritans.

Seven hundred years later when Jesus arrived, the Samaritans were still in the land, sandwiched between Galilee in the north (where Jesus grew up and set up his headquarters) and Judea in the south (where Jesus confronted temple practices and was crucified). The Jews of Galilee and Judea despised the Samaritans, viewing them as mixed-race people with mixed-religious practices.

In John 4, Jesus initiated a conversation with a Samaritan woman while His disciples were away purchasing food. Her response in verse nine illustrates this animosity between the two groups: "The Samaritan woman said to him, 'You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?' (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)" Undaunted, Jesus offered the woman the living water of salvation, and sent her home as an evangelist to bring other Samaritans to Him.

Think about it. For over two centuries the people of God turned away from the Lord and practiced idolatry. Then for over seven centuries, the new inhabitants of the land somewhat worshiped the Lord while keeping their cultic, evil practices in place. But God was not done with them. Jesus went straight into the calloused heart of Samaria and led others to believe in Him for eternal life.

In what areas of your life are you part-in for the Lord, and part-in for ungodly practices? Do you believe that God has not given up on you? Are there others who you have dismissed as being far from God? How is the Holy Spirit nudging you to be like Jesus to them?

Poem

Evil In The Sight Of The Lord

*Do not be deceived
Our all seeing God
Discerns in the darkness
Your hidden foul plots
Your deeds are recorded
One day, wage will pay,
Turned over, lost freedom
To death and decay*

8/20/2024
WEEK 33 DAY 2

Hezekiah Removes Idolatry



Scripture **2 KINGS 18:1-8**

Devotional

With the northern kingdom assimilated into Assyria, we turn our attention to the southern kingdom of Judah for the remainder of this Old Testament study. Unlike their cousins to the north, Judah had been led by some kings who did right and some kings who did evil. In fact, when Hezekiah became king, Judah had been led for most of its years by kings who did good or mostly good, and only some years by kings known for doing evil. Hence, Jerusalem was in much better shape spiritually than Samaria.

Still, Hezekiah's immediate predecessor was King Ahaz, who was the king of Judah when Assyria conquered Israel to his north. Nervous that the same fate awaited him, Ahaz gave huge sums of money to the king of Assyria, paying for it with the gold and silver from the temple in Jerusalem. Adding insult to injury, Ahaz nailed shut the doors of the temple, set up pagan worship stations all over Jerusalem, and sacrificed his own children to false gods (2 Chronicles 28:24-25).

But Ahaz did one thing right. He had a son named Hezekiah who "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord." Ahaz ruled together with his son Hezekiah for the last fourteen years of his reign, beginning when Hezekiah was only a boy. It was during this co-kingship that Assyria conquered Israel and Hezekiah watched his father desecrate the temple and embrace pagan practices. After his father died, Hezekiah succeeded him as king at age 25 for the next eighteen years.

The first thing Hezekiah did was to undo his dad's evil practices. 2 Chronicles 29:3-5 says, "In the first month of the first year of his reign, he opened the doors of the temple of the Lord and repaired them. He brought in the priests and the Levites, assembled them in the square on the east side and said: 'Listen to me, Levites! Consecrate yourselves now and consecrate the temple of the Lord, the God of your ancestors. Remove all defilement from the sanctuary.'"

Hezekiah's actions must have been very courageous. He was going against the ways of his dad, the people, and the pagan Assyrians who were threatening him. Why do you think he did right when it seemed so unpopular and dangerous? How are you being called to stand up to wrong and proclaim what is right? Are there any things from your family, community, or culture that need to be undone and made right before God?

Poem

Cleansed

*Throw open the windows
Burn all that's decayed
Smash all the corruption
Make haste, don't delay
Remove all that's hidden
Bring into the light
Restore what is broken
Make crookedness right
Wash off all the dirt that's
Collected in sink
Let God's word refine you
Transform what you think
Then set a great banquet
Deck your table with best
With everything cleansed now
Receive Heaven's Best*

8/21/2024
WEEK 33 DAY 3

Hezekiah Celebrates the Passover



Scripture 2 CHRONICLES 30

Devotional

When Hezekiah reopened the nailed temple doors, he commissioned the Levites to consecrate themselves and purify the temple. He also destroyed the idols that took the people away from their devotion to the Lord. 2 Chronicles 29:35-36 says, "So the service of the temple of the Lord was reestablished. Hezekiah and all the people rejoiced at what God had brought about for his people, because it was done so quickly."

But Hezekiah didn't stop there. He knew that the Passover was central to Hebrew history. It reminded them how God had delivered the people from Egyptian slavery and brought them into the promised land, where they were now living. The Passover rooted the people in the promises of God. Hezekiah decided it was time to celebrate a massive Passover feast.

Since the northern kingdom of Israel had already been conquered, Hezekiah was free to invite people from Israel to the Passover celebration in Jerusalem. He made them a promise: "If you return to the Lord, then your fellow Israelites and your children will be shown compassion by their captors and will return to this land, for the Lord your God is gracious and compassionate. He will not turn his face from you if you return to him" (v. 9). Sadly, some of the people scorned and ridiculed him.

Jesus experienced this same kind of scorn and ridicule. When He was dying on the cross, Jesus cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46). These are the opening words of Psalm 22, which goes on to say, "But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people" (Psalm 22:6). Hezekiah would not be alone in receiving scorn and ridicule for his offer of hope.

Nonetheless, many people descended on Jerusalem for the Passover festival, including Jews and foreigners who were living in Samaria, along with Jews from Judah of the southern kingdom. This passage says it was the greatest celebration since the days of Solomon, over two hundred years earlier.

Why is it so important to thank God by remembering our past? How do the Christmas and Easter seasons help you connect deeply with the Lord? What can you do this week to celebrate all that God has done?

Poem

Let's Unite!

*Let's unite and stop the fight
Let's be reformed to God
Throw off our differences and strife
Worship in one accord*

*Let peace and purity abide
Let's focus on essentials
Agree to disagree with grace
Live into God's potential*

*Perhaps, then, God will once again
His holy space inhabit
Offering rest from violent strife
Our entry into Sabbath*

8/22/2024
WEEK 33 DAY 4

Hezekiah Prays for God's Deliverance



Scripture **2 CHRONICLES 32:1-23**

Devotional

Hezekiah's tunnel is an underground channel carved out of the rock that was used to get water from one side of Jerusalem to the other. Tourists to the city can walk through this tunnel even today. When fighting for land in an arid place, water warfare is an important strategy. Hezekiah also fortified the walls, organized and weaponized his army, and told everyone to prepare for battle with the confidence that God was on their side.

The king of Assyria was not impressed. He had defeated other nations with other gods. Just a few decades earlier, another Assyrian king had conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, who had the same Lord as Hezekiah's southern kingdom of Judah. So, Sennacherib king of Assyria sent Hezekiah king of Judah a message: "On what are you basing your confidence, that you remain in Jerusalem under siege?" (v. 10).

With nowhere else to turn, Hezekiah summoned Isaiah the prophet, and the two of them cried out to God in heaven. Isaiah 37:16-20 records the words of Hezekiah's prayer:

16 "Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You have made heaven and earth. 17 Give ear, Lord, and hear; open your eyes, Lord, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to ridicule the living God. 18 It is true, Lord, that the Assyrian kings have laid waste all these peoples and their lands. 19 They have thrown their gods into the fire and destroyed them, for they were not gods but only wood and stone, fashioned by human hands. 20 Now, Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you, Lord, are the only God."

What stands out to you in this prayer? How did the Lord respond? What happened to Sennacherib and his massive army? What was the response of the people of Jerusalem?

Poem

In Which Camp?

In which camp will you pitch your tent?

Which campaign will you join?

Will strength and courage in the LORD

Be your triumphal song?

Or will you listen to the taunts--

The mockers and deriders--

Who scatter seeds of violence, fear,

The goal of vile dividers?

In which camp will you set your mind?

The one which trusts in horses?

Or will you join the ones on knees

Lifting their prayer filled voices?

8/23/2024
WEEK 33 DAY 5

Hezekiah Will Live, but Judah is Doomed



Scripture 2 KINGS 20

Devotional

Hezekiah had been a very faithful, good king. He loved the Lord, trusted Him in prayer, and restored proper worship to Jerusalem. God gave Hezekiah success over his enemies and wealth beyond comprehension. 2 Chronicles 32:27-29 says it well:

“Hezekiah had very great wealth and honor, and he made treasuries for his silver and gold and for his precious stones, spices, shields and all kinds of valuables. He also made buildings to store the harvest of grain, new wine and olive oil; and he made stalls for various kinds of cattle, and pens for the flocks. He built villages and acquired great numbers of flocks and herds, for God had given him very great riches.”

Feeling good about his restored health and promise of more life, Hezekiah let down his guard and showed off his wealth to the Babylonians. As Isaiah prophesied, a hundred years later the Babylonians would return to Jerusalem, destroying the walls and temple, stealing the wealth, and exiling the people to Babylon.

Everybody has a weak spot. For Hezekiah it was his wealth. For others it is successes or failures, substances or distractions, baggage or honors, bragging or complaining. It doesn't really matter what it is. It's anything that distracts you from God's best for you. Call it your spiritual Achilles heel.

1 Peter 5:8-9 says, “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith...”

What is one of the spiritual weak spots in your life? How might Satan try to use that against you? How could you resist him?

Poem

You Are Going To Die

*Put soul house now in order
You are going to die
Days numbered now remember
You are going to die
Take Jesus as Savior
You are going to die
Repent of any trespass
You are going to die
Store treasures up in heaven
You are going to die
Forgive all those around you
You are going to die
Make peace with all your neighbors
You are going to die
Tune heart strings with shout praises
You are going to die
Remember you are mortal
You are going to die
Close eyes and rest in Jesus
You are going to die*

8/26/2024
WEEK 34 DAY 1

Comfort for God's People in Captivity



Scripture ISAIAH 40

Devotional

The prophetic ministry of Isaiah spanned sixty years and four kings of Judah. Here's an overview of those kings during Isaiah's ministry:

Jotham (mostly good) – during Isaiah's first 5 years.

Ahaz (completely evil) – during Isaiah's next 20 years.

Hezekiah (completely good) – during Isaiah's next 29 years, including 11 years when he reigned jointly with his son Manasseh.

Manasseh (completely evil) – during Isaiah's last 5 years, plus the 11 years when he reigned jointly with his father Hezekiah.

In the midst of Isaiah's ministry to Judah in the south, Israel in the north was wiped out by Assyria. There was a constant threat that Assyria would do the same to Judah. Though good king Hezekiah held them off, Isaiah prophesied that the future Babylonian empire would do the job, saying to Hezekiah, "The time will surely come when everything in your palace, and all that your predecessors have stored up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left, says the Lord. And some of your descendants, your own flesh and blood who will be born to you, will be taken away, and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." (2 Kings 20:17-18).

Jerusalem would be destroyed. The temple would be demolished. The people would be taken into Babylonian captivity. Though Isaiah gave no timeline, this is exactly what happened one hundred years later.

In today's reading, Isaiah gives hope for those future inhabitants of beleaguered Jerusalem: "Comfort, comfort my people." Beyond that, his words prophesied the future Messiah Jesus who would come over a half millennium after that. The gospel writers saw John the Baptist as the one who fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy to "Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him" (Matthew 3:3).

Later, 1 Peter 1:24-25 quotes Isaiah 40:6-8, reminding us that our temporal lives on earth are like the white puffball of a dried-up dandelion: "All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever."

Amid despair, there is hope.
In brokenness, there is comfort.
Though temporary, our lives are eternal.

How do you rely on the promises of God's hope, the comfort of His presence, and the certainty of His eternity?

Poem

Nacham

*Breathe, sigh
Let the sobbing out
Curl up into the soft embrace
Your sorrow is over*

*Repent, console
Let your burden down
Run back down the road to home
Your sin is covered*

*Be comforted, ease
Let your arms extend
Receive the compassion of your
God
Your mourning has been heard*

*Soothe, relax
Let your wounds be dressed
Allow the balm to remove the pain
Your healing has begun*

*Weep, sob
Let your walls be rebuilt
Lay down the weapons of warfare
Your peace has come*

8/27/2024
WEEK 34 DAY 2

The Suffering Servant



Scripture ISAIAH 53

Devotional

This famous chapter of Isaiah looks beyond the coming Babylonian conquest into a future time when the Messiah would appear as the Suffering Servant. How were each of these verses fulfilled by Jesus seven hundred years after Isaiah penned them?

See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted (Isaiah 52:13).

Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any human being and his form marred beyond human likeness (52:14).

He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground.
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him (53:2).

He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem (53:3).

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted (53:4).

But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities;
the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed (53:5).

We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way;
and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all (53:6).

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth (53:7).

Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the Lord makes his life an offering for sin, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the Lord will prosper in his hand (53:10).

After he has suffered, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities (53:11).

Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors (53:12).

Poem

Servant Life

A-wakening at night to answer the cries

To feed

To rock

To lullaby

Arising at dawn to set house in order

To cook

To wash

To mend

A-walking to fields to labor in sun

To weed

To prune

To reap

Abiding in love despite other's sin

To care

To forgive

To aid

Abandoning self, dreams laid down

To support

To serve

To cheer

Accepting the cost of discipleship

To transform

To discipline

To meditate

Absorbing the blows of insult, betrayal

To carry

To comfort

To bear

8/28/2024
WEEK 34 DAY 3

We All Have Gone Astray



Scripture ISAIAH 64

Devotional

When I was growing up, I helped my dad for endless hours in our back garage, where he repaired and repainted wrecked cars. There we had a bucket of used, dirty rags. They had been used to wipe the grime and grease off damaged car parts. The rags were used to clean the cobwebs, dust, and dirt off the walls, so as not to interfere with the paint jobs. They were utilized when we hosed down the cement floor then dried up the muddy puddles left behind. The rags were sometimes soaked with paint, primer, and thinner.

Imagine what my mom would have said if I had used those filthy rags to help her do the dishes, dust the furniture, or clean the picture window in the living room! That's the point Isaiah made when he said, "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags." We simply can't make up for sins by faking God out with good deeds.

Rather, we are called to let God remake us as He desires: "Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand" (v. 8). Take a moment and sing the words of this hymn to the Lord, offering yourself to Him as you do:

Have Thine own way Lord
Have Thine own way
Thou art the potter I am the clay
Mold me and make me after Thy will
While I am waiting yielded and still

Have Thine own way Lord
Have Thine own way
Search me and try me Master today
Whiter than snow Lord wash me just now
As in Thy presence humbly I bow

Have Thine own way Lord
Have Thine own way
Hold over my being absolute sway
Filled with Thy spirit till all can see
Christ only always living in me

Poem

Sheep

*Bleating lamb within a stall
Ewe will lick you cleaning
Bounding forth, a free-for-all
To the pasture greening*

*Nibbling on the tender grass
Chewing cud while resting
Hooves sink in some deep morass
Butting heads a-testing*

*Wandering off away from flock
Danger there is lurking
Horns in thorns do interlock
Freed by shepherd's working*

*Following the shepherd's voice
Safety now be finding
Rod and staff make path your choice
In the fold abiding*

8/29/2024
WEEK 34 DAY 4

Manasseh's Sins & Repentance Before the Lord



Scripture **2 CHRONICLES 33:1-20**

Devotional

At the end of Isaiah's life, Manasseh had become king. He reigned jointly with his father Hezekiah, who was a very godly man, for eleven years. But when Hezekiah died, Manasseh began a forty-four-year reign that promoted pagan shrines, idol worship, sorcery, and human sacrifice, including one of his own children. He paid no attention to the Lord or His prophet. He did whatever he wanted.

But after he was taken prisoner to Babylon over a thousand miles away, he had a come-to-his-senses moment. When God restored him to his throne in Jerusalem, he removed the idolatrous objects and restored the altars, temple, and worship of the Lord. Now he did whatever God wanted.

Why is it that some people choose to learn the hard way? It would have been much better if Manasseh had faithfully served the Lord from the beginning. After all, he was only a twelve-year-old boy when he served alongside his father, who was known for being a devoted follower of God who restored temple worship and destroyed idolatry. Until his dad's death, he had known nothing else but faithfulness to the Lord. Then he took over and fell apart.

Ephesians 6:1-3 says, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise— 'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.'"

This is echoed in Proverbs 1:8-10 which says, "Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. My son, if sinful men entice you, do not give in to them."

What are some of the good words and ways that your parents passed down to you? Are there any that you are resisting to make part of your life? If you are a parent, what are some ways that you are praying for your offspring, hoping that they will come to their senses? Take time now to offer yourself to the Lord.

Poem

Tearing Down By Building Up

*A beautiful foundation laid
A cornerstone firm planted
The walls built up, a roof is staid
A blessed life is granted*

*But tearing down by rebel heart
All goodness left in rubble
The locust come, all peace departs
Life cursed with only trouble*

*Then building up of altars false
Abomination growing
The enemy attacks, assaults
Destruction all bestowing*

8/29/2024
WEEK 34 DAY 5

The Lord's Anger against Nineveh



Scripture NAHUM 1

Devotional

Nahum prophesied in the middle of Manasseh's reign in Judah. Recall that Assyria attacked Jerusalem and took Manasseh as prisoner to Babylon before returning him to finish out his time as king. Even so, Assyria remained a huge threat to the existence of the Jews in the Promised Land.

But Nahum said not so fast, Assyria. His three-chapter prophecy is a judgment on the nation, headquartered in the city of Ninevah. Here's the overview:

Nahum 1 - The Lord is angry with Ninevah.

Nahum 2 - Ninevah and the Assyrian empire will fall.

Nahum 3 - Woe to the city and people of Ninevah.

Over a hundred years earlier the prophet Jonah reluctantly went to Ninevah and warned the people to repent or be overthrown. When Jonah's message reached the king of Ninevah, he issued a proclamation telling his citizens, "Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish" (Jonah 3:8-9).

But alas, the repentance did not last. The Assyrians resumed their treacherous ways. They had already conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, repopulating Samaria with foreigners with idolatrous practices. Now they were threatening to do the same to the southern kingdom of Judah.

How would Nahum's message have been a comfort to the people of Judah? How might it have been seen by the rulers and warriors of Assyria?

About fifty years after Nahum's words, his prophecy came true. The Assyrians were overthrown by the Babylonian Empire, which became the new world power. It was the Babylonians who would conquer Judah and destroy Jerusalem shortly after that.

The message in Nahum 1:3 says, "The Lord is slow to anger but great in power; the Lord will not leave the guilty unpunished." This should have been heeded by both the Assyrians and the Jews. Neither paid attention. Both paid the price.

Are there any warnings that the Lord is giving to you? What Scriptures are a shot across the bow of your life? Do you have any family, friends, or fellow believers who are speaking words of truth into you? Will you pay attention?

Poem

Nahum

*How do you feel when you hear
of God's wrath?*

*This bold jealous God with a
vengeance dust path?*

*Does it cause you to quake as
the mountains do crumble?*

*Does your soul violent shake
when recounting your stumble?*

*When God's power is preached,
do you cheer or faint shrink?*

*Does the coming of God cause
your soul mind to think?*

*Does the judgment of God bring
you comfort or fear?*

*Do you keep your lamps
trimmed as the Lord's day
comes near?*

9/2/2024
WEEK 35 DAY 1

Josiah Removes Idolatry from Judah



Scripture **2 CHRONICLES 34:1-7**

Devotional

Josiah became king when he was only eight years old, after his father was assassinated. Both his father (Amon) and grandfather (Manasseh) did evil, worshiped idols, practiced sorcery, and participated in child sacrifice to the false gods. Since his father only ruled for two years, he would have known his evil grandfather.

Unfortunately, he would not have known his great-grandfather Hezekiah who honored God throughout his life. But Josiah's young heart was bent toward the Lord in the same way. When he was just sixteen, he decided to seek God wholeheartedly. By the time he was twenty, he was purging Judah of the idols that had been honored by his father and grandfather.

In the New Testament, Paul sent a young man named Timothy to minister to the Christians in the corrupt city of Ephesus. He wrote to him, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:12-13).

Abraham was a hundred years old when Isaac was born to him.

Moses was eighty when God called him to free the Israelites.

Timothy was a young man when Paul put him in charge of the church in Ephesus.

Josiah was a child when he became king, a teenager when he sought God, and twenty when he purged the nation of evil.

How old are you? Do you ever think you are too young or too old to do anything significant for God? What would the Lord say about that?

Poem

Give Me The Heart

*Give me the heart of Josiah
Who began each day seeking
Your face
Who did right in Your eyes
Who each morn his praise rise
Who cleansed, purged all idols
erased*

*Give me the heart of young
David
Who patterned his heart after
Yours
Your name was his vanguard
Your shelter his reward
Life proved mercy, justice
endures*

*Give me the heart of my
Savior
Who knelt, always seeking
your will
Who spoke only your words
Your full favor procured
Who died to self, meekness
fulfilled*

9/3/2024
WEEK 35 DAY 2

Josiah Repents upon Hearing God's Law



Scripture 2 KINGS 22

Devotional

Josiah was eight when he became king. Yesterday we read that he was sixteen when he started wholeheartedly seeking the Lord, and twenty when he purged Judah of idolatry. Today we see that he was just twenty-six when he called for the restoration of the neglected temple.

During this repair work on the temple, someone found the Book of the Law (the first five books of the Old Testament). When these were read to Josiah, he humbled himself, tore his royal robes, and wept before God. Everything his evil father and grandfather had done was now being laid bare before the Lord.

After inquiring from the Lord, the prophet Huldah spoke for Him. She told Josiah that he would die before seeing the coming disaster that would come to the people of Judah. Less than forty years after Josiah died, Jerusalem was sacked by Babylon.

It's so sad that the people of God had so thoroughly neglected the word of God. It was right there in the temple, just waiting to be read and followed. But it wasn't nearly as interesting as golden calves, wooden Asherah poles, sexual promiscuity, and fiery human sacrifices.

The average American home has around four or five Bibles. Researchers say that over 85 percent of U.S. households own a Bible. And nearly everyone has access at their fingertips to countless Bibles on smart devices. The word of God is everywhere.

As you read Psalm 119:97-105, reflect on the God's word for your life.

- ⁹⁷ Oh, how I love your law!
I meditate on it all day long.
- ⁹⁸ Your commands are always with me
and make me wiser than my enemies.
- ⁹⁹ I have more insight than all my teachers,
for I meditate on your statutes.
- ¹⁰⁰ I have more understanding than the elders,
for I obey your precepts.
- ¹⁰¹ I have kept my feet from every evil path
so that I might obey your word.
- ¹⁰² I have not departed from your laws,
for you yourself have taught me.
- ¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!
- ¹⁰⁴ I gain understanding from your precepts;
therefore I hate every wrong path.
- ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp for my feet,
a light on my path.

Poem

Josiah, Josiah

*Josiah, Josiah, young king, only eight
Supported by Yahweh, this foundation
great
Purging, correcting your nation's
mistakes
Josiah, Josiah, young king, only eight*

9/4/2024
WEEK 35 DAY 3

Josiah Renews the Covenant with God



Scripture **2 KINGS 23:1-30**

Devotional

When Josiah was twenty years old, he began the process of purging Judah of the wicked idolatry that had become so pervasive. Now, after hearing and proclaiming the first five books of the Old Testament, he completed the task. Here's a quick listing of the godless practices the people of God had embraced but Josiah purged from their presence:

Articles for Baal, Asherah, and astrology in the temple.

Priests who burned incense to Baal, the sun, moon, and stars.

Wooden poles dedicated to the Canaanite fertility goddess, Asherah.

Housing quarters for male shrine prostitutes in the temple.

High places for worshiping pagan idols.

Low places for sacrificing children in the fire to Molek.

Altars to false gods built by his grandfather and other kings of Judah.

Mediums and spiritists who led the people in witchcraft.

Household gods and idols that were ubiquitous throughout the nation.

These practices started bit by bit. Others who lived near them were doing them, so why shouldn't they? Soon it was everywhere. John Wesley once said, "What one generation tolerates, the next generation will embrace." Sometimes, what is needed is for someone to clean house.

1 Peter 2:1 says, "Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind." Are there any ungodly ways that have crept into your life? Do you have any practices or habits that you know God wouldn't approve of? What would it look like for you to clean house?

Poem

The Word Of God

The Word of God, creation!
The Word of God brings light
The Word of God, a two-edged sword
The Word of God, truth right
The Word of God oft hidden
The Word of God, revealed
The Word of God, times whispered
The Word of God, brave steeled
The Word of God, great comfort
The Word of God brings faith
The Word of God triumphant
The Word of God balmed swathe
The Word of God our banquet
The Word of God our rule
The Word of God eternal grace
The Word of God rich jewel
The Word of God, a washing
The Word of God, deep peace
The Word of God a scattered seed
The Word of God increase

9/5/2024
WEEK 35 DAY 4

The Coming Destruction & the Day of the Lord



Scripture ZEPHANIAH 1

Devotional

Zephaniah began his prophetic ministry the same year that eight-year-old Josiah became king of Judah. As Josiah was purging the nation of idolatrous objects and priests, Zephaniah was calling the people of Judah to return to God spiritually.

When the word of the Lord came to Huldah, she said to king Josiah, "This is what the Lord says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and aroused my anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched" (2 Kings 22:16-17).

Zephaniah echoes these prophetic words, saying, "That day will be a day of wrath—
a day of distress and anguish,
a day of trouble and ruin,
a day of darkness and gloom,
a day of clouds and blackness" (Zephaniah 1:15).

God is serious about His people following Him completely. When Jesus was asked what a person has to do to inherit eternal life, He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Luke 10:27, quoted from Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18). In both the Old and New Testaments, our call is to be all in with God.

In Zephaniah 2:3, the prophet summoned the people of Judah to repent of their sins, saying, "Seek the Lord, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the Lord's anger." It wasn't too late to get right with God.

At the end of time, there will be a great judgment day, when we all stand before the Lord. Revelation 20:12-13 paints the picture: "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done."

Have you surrendered your life to Jesus? He is waiting for you. It's not too late to get right with God.

Poem

The Day Of The Lord

*Sweep away the cobwebs
Sweep away the sin
Sweep away rebellion
Let new life begin*

*Tremble, tremble mountains
Tremble, tremble man
Tremble, tremble mighty oaks
Idols crumble, ban*

*Trumpets lift your voices
Trumpets sound your horn
Trumpets hail the judgment
Gnashing teeth, all mourn*

*See, the Lord is coming!
See, the Lord appear!
See, His day is dawning!
Jubilee the year!*

9/6/2024
WEEK 35 DAY 5

Nebuchadnezzar Attacks & Jehoiachin Is Exiled



Scripture 2 KINGS 24

Devotional

After the death of King Josiah, things unraveled for the nation of Judah.

Josiah's son Jehoahaz lasted only three months, before being dethroned and carried off to Egypt by Necho.

Another son Jehoiakim then took over the throne for his brother, but eleven years later he was bound in shackles and taken to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar.

Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin then became king at the age of eighteen, ruling for only three months until he too was carted off to Babylon.

Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah became the new king. His plan was to rebel against the superpower of Babylon. He lasted eleven years, until Babylon came and finished off Jerusalem. They took him to Babylon, where the last thing he saw before putting out his eyes was the killing of his sons. Zedekiah was the last king of Judah, as the Babylonians completely conquered the nation.

During the reigns of all these evil kings, the prophets Habakkuk and Jeremiah were calling the people to repent and change their ways. But they would not listen. Jeremiah became known as the weeping prophet because of the grievous nature of his message to deaf ears and calloused hearts. He even wrote a book called Lamentations if that doesn't tell you how he felt.

These kings had prophetic voices calling them and the people to return to God. They also had role models in previous godly kings like Josiah and Hezekiah. But they chose to shut them out and go with the worldly ways of the ungodly voices and bad role models that were also present.

Ephesians 5:1-3 says, "Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people."

Every culture has God's example and the world's example for us to choose from. In what ways are you following God as your true leader? How are you wandering off in the ways of your worldly culture? Are you willing to make a course adjustment? Who will you ask to help you and walk with you?

Poem

Evil, Evil

*Evil, evil
Evil kings
Evil, evil
Death now brings
Evil, evil
Deadly stain
Evil, evil
Sin, full reign
Evil, evil
Stubborn heart
Evil, evil
Humans marked
Evil, evil
Not unseen
Evil, evil
Must be cleaned
Evil, evil
Exiled band
Evil, evil
Foreign land*

9/9/2024
WEEK 36 DAY 1

Habakkuk's Complaints to God



Scripture HABAKKUK 1

Devotional

Recall that Assyria had vanquished the northern kingdom of Israel a century earlier. By the time Habakkuk became a prophet to the southern kingdom of Israel, Assyria itself had just been conquered by Babylon, which was becoming the new evil empire.

Habakkuk confronts God, asking Him why He allows evil people to go unpunished, and even to flourish. Many people ask the question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" Habakkuk turns that on its head, asking the Lord, "Why do good things happen to bad people?"

After I graduated from college, I was working as a computer programmer. I thought I needed to build up some money before marrying Lisa and going off to seminary for a master's degree. Lisa's dad told me, "When God calls, you don't have the right to put Him off." With his blessing, I asked Lisa to marry me that evening!

I told my boss that I would be resigning from my job to pursue a career being a pastor. His response startled me. He looked me in the eyes and said, "What a waste of a good mind." Then he went on to question the existence of God. Actually, he questioned the goodness of God with questions like this:

"Why would a good God allow misery in the world?"

"Why are innocent children allowed to suffer?"

"Why would God allow evil people to get away with terrible things?"

My boss was asking the same questions as Habakkuk, who asked God:

"Why do you make me look at injustice?"

"Why do you tolerate wrongdoing?"

"Why then do you tolerate the treacherous?"

"Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?"

What questions do you have for God? How do you think He answers the questions raised in this devotional?

Poem

Is It Okay?

Is it okay to complain to the LORD—

To cry out, to shout, to whine you are ignored?

Is it right in your grief to ask questions? How? Why?

To weep all the day? To shake fist at the sky?

Is our God big enough to hear all of our groans?

Does God not know the sourcing of all of our moans?

Can we trust God enough to be patient, God's timing?

Can we wait on the plan of God's perfect designing?

Can we sit calm in silence, knowing God will supply?

Or will we give up, curse God's name and then die?

9/10/2024
WEEK 36 DAY 2

Habakkuk's Prayer to the Lord



Scripture HABAKKUK 3

Devotional

Yesterday we looked at Habakkuk's questioning God with why He was allowing evil people to go unpunished and even to flourish. The Lord answered the prophet in Habakkuk chapter 2.

Here in Habakkuk 3, we see the prayer of the prophet in response. We might summarize it like this:

God is all-powerful.

God is in control.

God is sovereign over everything from mountains to rivers, from celestial bodies to tiny grapes, from where my feet traverse to where my soul ends up.

Today, write your own devotional. Find a creative way to praise God for who He is and what He does!

Poem

Teach Us To Pray

*Teach us to pray like the prophets
of old
With humility, courage and power
Whether down in the streets, with
the ones brought low
Or when standing amongst those
in power*

*Teach us to pray and recount your
great deeds
How your faithfulness cannot be
shaken
How the mighty have fallen when
hell bent on pride
How the humble to heaven were
taken*

*Teach us to pray when your full
wrath we know
As with fire, flood evil's consumed
Let us call on your mercy, so
steady, so just
Upon all of us righteously doomed*

*Teach us to pray when our world's
upside down
When confusion runs wild in our
streets
Call us from fear to your throne
room of grace
There your sovereignty, love we
will meet*

9/11/2024
WEEK 36 DAY 3

The Call of Jeremiah



Scripture JEREMIAH 1

Devotional

For the next two and a half weeks we will focus on Jeremiah's prophetic ministry and writings. Jeremiah ministered for forty years, calling the kings and people of Judah to repent and change their ways. They didn't listen, and Jerusalem was conquered by the superpower of Babylon. Jeremiah, known as the "weeping prophet," watched helplessly as the temple and walls around Jerusalem were destroyed, and as the best and brightest of Judah were captured and exiled to Babylon in three different waves of deportation.

In order to carry out this difficult prophetic ministry, Jeremiah leaned heavily on his call from the Lord. In verse five, God told Jeremiah that before he was even born, three things were true:

1. God knew Jeremiah.
2. God set apart Jeremiah.
3. God appointed Jeremiah as a prophet to the nations.

How would each of these truths sustain Jeremiah through his four decades of prophesy when kings and people refused to listen and rebelled against his teachings?

During his call, the Lord gave Jeremiah confidence for the difficult task before him. God told him:

1. You're not too young.
2. I'll give you what to speak.
3. Don't be afraid. I am with you and will rescue you.

How would each of these have been a confidence builder for Jeremiah over his next forty years of ministry?

In the New Testament, Paul wrote, "I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ" (Galatians 1:11-12). This divine call sustained Paul through the ups and downs of ministry, just as Jeremiah's did for him.

Is there a time in your past when God clarified your identity, calling, and promises? How have those sustained you over the years?

Poem

From The Knitting

*From the knitting in womb, I have called you
I have purposed great plans for your life
You will speak what I tell you
Fear not harm, I will rescue
Though my call is to live days of strife*

*See, my people have torn themselves from me
Wretched faithlessness full on display
You will speak of disaster
A sworn enemy master
They'll ignore every warning you say*

*But my truth from your mouth you will counter—
A great exile from all they have known
Their lives will know violence
Their lyres will silence
'Til my great reproof is shown*

9/12/2024
WEEK 36 DAY 4

Unfaithful Israel Called to Return to Her Husband



Scripture JEREMIAH 3

Devotional

Jeremiah was ministering in the southern kingdom of Judah. A hundred years earlier, the northern kingdom of Israel had been conquered and deported to Assyria. Israel had a score of evil kings who led the people into abandoning God and embracing false gods made of stone and wood. The Lord called this adultery, since He had promised Himself as a husband to the people. Jeremiah recalls this dark final chapter in the northern kingdom with God's statement: "I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries" (v. 8a).

Then Jeremiah turned his attention to the southern kingdom of Judah with these words of the Lord: "Yet I saw that her unfaithful sister Judah had no fear; she also went out and committed adultery" (v. 8b). The people of Judah watched what happened to the people of Israel, then went ahead and did the very same things that got them disciplined by God and conquered by a foreign power. Why is it so hard for humans to learn from others' mistakes?

But all was not hopeless. God made this offer to the people of Judah:

- "Return, faithless people, for I am your husband"
- "I will choose you... and bring you to Zion"
- "I will give you shepherds after my own heart"
- "I will cure you of backsliding"
- "No longer will they follow the stubbornness of their evil hearts"
- "They will come... to the land I gave your ancestors as an inheritance"
- "Surely in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel"

What do we learn about God from these promises?

Read Psalm 145:17-19 as a prayer and reflect on who God is and what He does for us.

¹⁷ The Lord is righteous in all his ways
and faithful in all he does.

¹⁸ The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.

¹⁹ He fulfills the desires of those who fear him;
he hears their cry and saves them.

Poem

How I Loved You

*How I loved you
Cared for you
Protected you
Warned you
Yet you ran
From your home
To wallow
In filth
Prostituting yourself
Defiling your purity
As the jehons ravished
Spreading disease
Leaving you
Barren*

*Shall I love you
Give welcome
Extend forgiveness
Embrace?
Shall I run
To your gutter
And lift you
From filth
Humbling myself
Limiting myself
As the wolves circle
Threatening death
Bringing you
Home*

9/13/2024
WEEK 36 DAY 5

The Ruined Linen Belt & Destructive Wineskins



Scripture JEREMIAH 13

Devotional

During the time of Jeremiah, Judah was caught in the middle of a power struggle between Egypt to the south, Assyria to the north and Babylon to the east. Good King Josiah reigned over Judah for thirty-one years, beginning when he was eight years old. He reformed the spiritual climate of the nation, purging the idols dedicated to the Baals and Asherah, restoring the temple in Jerusalem, and rededicating the people to God and Scripture.

Yet the conflict still raged around Judah. King Josiah was killed in battle with Egypt. His successor lasted only three months, and was captured and taken to Egypt because he was supporting Babylon. The next king in line sided with Egypt, only to be killed by Babylon a decade later. Yet another king of Judah lasted only three years, to be removed by Babylon when Jerusalem was under siege. The final king of Judah, Zedekiah, tried to join with Egypt to revolt against Babylon, until the bitter end when Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonian empire.

In today's reading, Jeremiah wrote: "This is what the Lord says: 'In the same way I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. These wicked people, who refuse to listen to my words, who follow the stubbornness of their hearts and go after other gods to serve and worship them, will be like this belt—completely useless!'" (v. 9-10). In what way did the linen belt convey the message of what was coming to Judah? Today, how have we allowed our tie to the Lord to deteriorate?

In the second metaphor, Jeremiah compared a wineskin filled with wine to God's people filled with the drunkenness of unfaithfulness and idolatry. What stands out to you about this teaching? In what ways are we filled with the wrong things in our lives today?

In Luke 5:37-39, Jesus said, "And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'" What was the "old wine" in Jeremiah's time? What would the "new wine" have been like? Think about us today? What are our old and new wines?

Poem

Linen Belt

*Linen belt
Priestly band
Binding grace
From God*

*Linen belt
Priestly work
Wind blows free
No sweat*

*Linen belt
Priestly vows
Hidden, defiled
Rotted promises*

*Linen belt
Priestly betrayal
Unfaithful people
Covenant smashed*

9/16/2024
WEEK 37 DAY 1

The Potter & the Broken Flask



Scripture JEREMIAH 18

Devotional

Let's not be confused. God is the potter. We are the clay. Too often we try to make God in our image. We have it exactly backward. What do the following verses teach us about this truth?

"Can I not do with you, Israel, as this potter does?" declares the Lord. "Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, Israel." (Jeremiah 18:6)

"Woe to those who quarrel with their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'The potter has no hands'?" (Isaiah 45:9)

Yet you, Lord, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. (Isaiah 64:8).

"But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" (Romans 9:20)

In a time of worship, sing this hymn to God, offering yourself to the Potter with all humility.

1
Have Thine own way, Lord,
Have Thine own way;
Thou art the Potter,
I am the clay.
Mould me and make me
After Thy will,
While I am waiting,
Yielded and still.

2
Have Thine own way, Lord,
Have Thine own way;
Search me and try me,
Master, today.
Whiter than snow, Lord,
Wash me just now,
As in Thy presence
Humbly I bow.

3
Have Thine own way, Lord,
Have Thine own way;
Wounded and weary,
Help me, I pray.
Power, all power,
Surely is Thine,
Touch me and heal me,
Savior divine.

4
Have Thine own way, Lord,
Have Thine own way;
Hold o'er my being
Absolute sway.
Fill with Thy Spirit
Till all shall see
Christ only, always,
Living in me.

Poem

Clay

*Wet clay
From the earth
Moldable
Supple
Submitting to
The Potter's Hands*

*Wet clay
Spinning wheel
Shaped
Lifted
Submitting to
The Potter's Hands*

*Drying clay
Weathered rack
Waiting
Dormant
Submitting to
The Earth's Culture*

*Firing clay
Intense heat
Exposed flaws
Tortured
Cracking under
The Flame's Refining*

*Broken clay
Disappointment
Thrown away
Useless
Lying in
The Potter's Field*

*Abandoned clay
Shards all scattered
Pieces missing
Any hope?
Any rebuilding by
The Potter's Hands?*

9/17/2024
WEEK 37 DAY 2

Jeremiah is Beaten and Put in the Stocks



Scripture JEREMIAH 20

Devotional

At God's command, Jeremiah spoke harsh words to the kings and people of Judah. They had abandoned the Lord and embraced the false gods and idols of their day. He called them to repent of their evil and return to God. Rather than listening to his prophetic warnings, they beat the messenger and put him in the stocks. Even after his release, Jeremiah warned his accusers that they would be conquered and exiled to Babylon. That took courage.

Yet as soon as he finished with them, Jeremiah changed his tune as he complained to God. Jeremiah told the Lord that His call had brought him insult, reproach, terror, and danger. He rued the day he was born and wanted to quit.

But he couldn't quit. The word of the Lord was like fire in his bones. It had to come out of him as sure as lava has to burst out of an active volcano. So he pressed on.

In the New Testament, Paul was another man who was called by God to convey a message that would anger many. In 2 Corinthians 11 he reflected on his life up to that point saying, "I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was pelted with stones, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my fellow Jews, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false believers. I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked."

What did it take for people like Jeremiah and Paul to keep on keeping on despite difficult times? Have you faced some challenges in your life because of your faith? Are you facing any now? How can you turn your problems into praises? What is the fire in your belly that just has to come out, regardless of the circumstances and consequences?

Poem

Prophet's Life

*Called from birth
Set aside
Holy
Limited
Submitted fully
To truth*

*Called to purity
Set aside
Holy
Limited
Submitted fully
To cause*

*Called to preach
Lonely life
Holy
Pierced eyes
Submitted fully
To God*

*Called to persecution
Painful life
Holy
Mocked
Submitted fully
To taunting*

*Called to God
Only friend
Holy
Deserted
Submitted fully
To abandonment*

9/18/2024
WEEK 37 DAY 3

Two Baskets of Figs



Scripture JEREMIAH 24

Devotional

The Babylonian empire attacked Judah and took exiles from there back to Babylon in three waves over more than twenty years. The first period of deportation took place in 605 BC under King Jehoiakim. During this wave, Daniel was taken captive.

The second round of Jews deported to Babylon happened in 597 BC under King Jehoiachin. Ezekiel was exiled during this wave.

The third period of deportation ended Judah's monarchy in 586 BC under King Zedekiah. Today's reading took place between the second and third waves of deportation. The two baskets of figs represented two kinds of people from Judah.

The good figs stood for the people already exiled to Babylon. God promised to watch over them, build them up, plant them deep, give them a heart for Him, make them His, and bring them back home in the future. How would each of these promises have been an encouragement to the people who had been deported?

The bad figs stood for King Zedekiah and those who were defiantly making an alliance with Egypt instead of turning their hearts back to God. Words describing their future included abhorrent, offence, reproach, byword, ridicule, cursing, banished, sword, famine, plague, destroyed. How should these words have been a stark warning to those remaining in Judah? In the end, they did not listen, and all of these things happened to them. Why?

For us today, what are some of the promised blessings for following God? By contrast, what are some of the clear warnings of discipline for refusing to follow God?

Everyone knows John 3:16. But the next few verses are less familiar. How do they add to today's topic?

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. (John 3:17-18)

Poem

A Tisket, A Tasket

*A tisket, a tasket
Two figs fill two baskets
One fruit fine, the other spoiled
One delight, other recoiled*

*A dipple, a deeple
Two promises, two people
One safe and guarded though exiled
One unrepentant, garbage piled*

*A wiffle, a waifful
One God who is faithful
One righteous, justice seeking force
One God determines human course*

9/19/2024
WEEK 37 DAY 4

Seventy Years of Captivity



Scripture JEREMIAH 25:1-14

Devotional

You can hear Jeremiah's pain as he pleads with the people of Judah: "For twenty-three years... I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened."

One of the great laments of any preacher is that nobody is listening. In the Beatles song, "Eleanor Rigby," there is a line that every pastor can identify with:

*Father Mackenzie
Writing the words of a sermon
That no one will hear
no one comes near
Look at him working
Darning his socks in the night
When there's nobody there
what does he care?*

Like any preacher, Jeremiah understood that he was not alone in his feelings of exasperation. In the three hundred years prior to him, God sent prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Joel, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and many others. Referring to them, Jeremiah wrote, "And though the Lord has sent all his servants the prophets to you again and again, you have not listened or paid any attention" (v. 4).

In the end, the people of God rejected God Himself. Verse seven states, "But you did not listen to me," declares the Lord, "and you have aroused my anger with what your hands have made, and you have brought harm to yourselves." As a result, God said to Judah, "This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (v. 11). At the end of that period, Babylon itself would face the Lord's discipline.

When Jeremiah wrote this, he had been warning them in vain for twenty-three years. Sadly, he would preach and prophesy another eighteen years, warning the people to abandon their idolatry and turn back to God. Nobody listened.

In Mark 4:24, Jesus said, "Consider carefully what you hear... With the measure you use, it will be measured to you—and even more." What are you hearing from the Lord? Are you listening? Are you changing the way you think? Are you changing the way you live?

Poem

Take This Cup Away From Me

*I'm thirsty, LORD
From sweating blood
I need to drink
I come unto Your well
I dip my prayer bucket
Into the deep
Wishing for living water
Spring clear, clean
Not cistern stagnant
Defiled
But when I draw
From Jacob's well
I smell the sin
Fermenting
Polluted, yes
My heritage
Which fills my cup
Your deserved wrath—
Take this cup
Away from me*

*Not my will
But Yours be done*

9/20/2024
WEEK 37 DAY 5

A Letter to the Exiles

Scripture **JEREMIAH 29:1-23**

Devotional

In the previous devotions we have seen that Jews from Judah were deported to Babylon in three waves, and that the exile would last seventy years after the final wave began. Imagine what it would have been like to be forcibly relocated to a foreign nation that had decimated your homeland. How would you feel? What would you do?

Jeremiah, often the purveyor of bad news, sent this upbeat letter to the exiled Jews living in Babylon. He encouraged them to make the most of their new situation. He advised them to build houses, settle down, plant gardens, raise families, build the economy, and get along with their captives. Think about it. Seventy years is a long time. All of the adults who were deported to Babylon would die there.

The famous passage in Jeremiah 29:10-14 was not meant for them. It was meant for their grandchildren and great-grandchildren. God promised to their descendants that he would bring them back to Judah, prosper them, and give them hope and a future.

Deuteronomy 6:6-9 says, "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates."

Joel 1:3 puts it plainly, "Tell it to your children, and let your children tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation."

Think about seventy years from now. What year will it be? How old might your children or grandchildren or great-grandchildren be? What can you do right now that would impact their lives seven decades away? What kind of spiritual legacy can you leave for future generations?

Poem

How Do We Live?

*How do we live on this strange foreign soil?
How do we sing to the LORD?
How do we keep our heartstrings tuned to pure pitch?
How do we live for the LORD?*

*How do we live in a culture untrue?
How do we shine for the LORD?
How do we season salt covenant vows?
How do we live for the LORD?*

*How do we speak to the neighbors we meet?
How do we hold to the LORD?
How do we multiply and fruitful be?
How do we live for the LORD?*

*How do we hold fast to the pathway of Christ?
How do we walk with the LORD?
How do we keep our ways pure 'midst the filth?
How do we live for the LORD?*

9/23/2024
WEEK 38 DAY 1

Jehoiakim burns Jeremiah's Scroll



Scripture JEREMIAH 36

Devotional

In Jeremiah 25:3, the prophet lamented, “For twenty-three years... I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened.” Here in chapter 36, he decided to try another tactic. He dictated while a scribe wrote down his words. The scribe would then take the scroll to the temple to proclaim what Jeremiah had been saying for nearly a quarter of a century. His goal was the same as it had always been – that they would turn from their wicked ways and receive forgiveness.

Eventually, Jeremiah’s words were read directly to Jehoiakim, the corrupt king of Judah. Rather than repenting, the monarch burned the scroll bit by bit until it was in the ash heap of history. Or so he thought. Jeremiah had his scribe write it down again. You read a section of it today.

Quoting from Isaiah 40:6-8, Peter wrote, “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever” (1 Peter 1:24-25).

When it comes to Scripture, we have several choices. We can ignore it, like the people of Jeremiah’s day did. We can refute it, like King Jehoiakim did. We can silence it, like the king’s officials did. Or we can embrace it, like Jeremiah’s scribe did.

What is your approach to Scripture? When you read the ancient scrolls of God, do you do so with indifference? With a hardened heart toward God? With preconceived modern cultural notions? With thoughts that you will never understand it, so why try? With expectation that God will speak to you and change your life?

Two great ways to respond to any passage in the Bible is to create an “I believe” and an “I will” statement. What do I believe about God, faith, life, people, myself, etc. based on this passage? And, what will I do, change, become, etc. as a result of what God is saying to me in this passage?

Go ahead, give it a try with today’s reading!

Poem

Fiery Scroll

*The grass withers
The flower fades
Papyrus, too, can burn
But stop the growth?
Destroy the glory?
God's truth always remains*

*The Word of God
Forever stands
Despite those who would stop it
It goes forth like
A mighty wind
The Spirit's great deposit*

*The Word of God
Cannot be hushed
Though many try to drench it
A fiery scroll
Never consumed
It's power never quench-ed*

9/24/2024
WEEK 38 DAY 2

Jeremiah is Thrown into a Prison



Scripture JEREMIAH 37

Devotional

Yesterday we read how King Jehoiakim burned the scrolls that contained the words of Jeremiah. Things didn't get any better for Jeremiah under King Zedekiah. Verse 2 says, "Neither he nor his attendants nor the people of the land paid any attention to the words the Lord had spoken through Jeremiah the prophet."

Times were tense in Judah. The power struggle between the Egyptian and Babylonian world powers raged on. Jerusalem was caught in the geographical and political middle. King Zedekiah threw his support toward Egypt. Jeremiah warned him that this would backfire, and Babylon would return to burn Jerusalem to the ground.

Jeremiah saw that things in Jerusalem were relatively calm, with Egypt and Babylon both backing away for a while. So he decided to get out of Dodge to claim some family land. But on his way out of town, he was arrested, accused of trying to defect to the enemy, beaten, and thrown into a dungeon for a long time. Jeremiah had no intention of leaving his people. He only desired for them to stop leaving God. It's an interesting thing about hearing hard truths. Often our first response is to shoot the messenger.

When Jesus sent out His twelve disciples for ministry, He warned them that they would be persecuted by everyone from family members to government leaders (see Matthew 10:16-23). Saying yes to God does not guarantee a Sunday stroll down Easy Street. Sometimes it means following Jesus down the Via Dolorosa, "the way of sorrowful suffering" that Jesus walked on the way to His crucifixion.

Jeremiah had been prophesying for forty years when the events in today's reading took place. A year later, Babylon would return and finish off Jerusalem. From his dungeon cell, Jeremiah the weeping prophet must have mourned for his people, too stubborn to change their hearts and turn back to God.

How does today's reading impact you in your world today?

Poem

In Prison I Am Free

*Though bolted, chained and caged like
beast
Though guarded by the sentries
Though stone is sealed, and death is
marked
In prison I am free*

*Though mocked and beaten fierce with
canes
Though lions circle round me
Though fiery furnace threatens life
In prison I am free*

*Though persecuted, thrown to beasts
Though cut in half or stoned
Though crucified, abandoned, lone
In prison I am free*

9/25/2024
WEEK 38 DAY 3

Jeremiah is Thrown into a Cistern



Scripture JEREMIAH 38

Devotional

2 Chronicles 36:11-12 says, “Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He did evil in the eyes of the Lord his God and did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet, who spoke the word of the Lord.” During those eleven years, he had hundreds of opportunities to listen to Jeremiah and change his ways. Rather, he put his fingers in his ears and did as he wanted.

2 Chronicles 36:13-14 describes Zedekiah’s evil ways, right up to the day Jerusalem was leveled by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon: “He became stiff-necked and hardened his heart and would not turn to the Lord, the God of Israel. Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people became more and more unfaithful, following all the detestable practices of the nations and defiling the temple of the Lord, which he had consecrated in Jerusalem.”

It is no wonder then, that in today’s passage King Zedekiah turned a blind eye when Jeremiah was dumped in a muddy cistern to starve. Then, after rescuing the prophet in order to have a private session with him, the king responded to Jeremiah’s advice to yield to Babylon by saying, “I am afraid of the Jews who have gone over to the Babylonians, for the Babylonians may hand me over to them and they will mistreat me” (Jeremiah 38:19). In the end, Zedekiah only cared about himself.

In Philippians 3:7-9, Paul wrote, “But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.”

Compare and contrast Paul’s statement with what you have learned about Zedekiah. What is this saying to you in your approach to life and faith?

Poem

The Pit

*They hate me, LORD
I'm in the pit
They threw me here to die
They bloody now
My garment cloak
In mud I lie and writhe*

*They mock me, LORD
Cistern my home
Their filth encircling round me
Their filthy rags
They draw me out
Yet into slavery sell me*

*You see me, LORD?
I spoke your truth
Why do you then defile me?
Their ears are stopped
Their eyes hate filled
Their lies cut deep, revile me*

*How long, dear LORD
Will you not see
And close your ears to my cries?
Have you not called me
From the pit
To Kingdom's reign in Thy skies?*

9/26/2024
WEEK 38 DAY 4

The Fall of Jerusalem



Scripture JEREMIAH 39

Devotional

Today's reading records the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians. It is the end of the southern kingdom of Judah. The northern kingdom of Israel had fallen to the Assyrians nearly 140 years earlier. Now the entire promised land was under foreign control. The people had abandoned God completely. This story of Jerusalem's conquest is also recorded in 2 Chronicles 36. Read that passage here and see what new insights you can glean compared to the passage in Jeremiah.

¹⁵ The Lord, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. ¹⁶ But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

¹⁷ He brought up against them the king of the Babylonians, who killed their young men with the sword in the sanctuary, and did not spare young men or young women, the elderly or the infirm. God gave them all into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar.

¹⁸ He carried to Babylon all the articles from the temple of God, both large and small, and the treasures of the Lord's temple and the treasures of the king and his officials. ¹⁹ They set fire to God's temple and broke down the wall of Jerusalem; they burned all the palaces and destroyed everything of value there.

²⁰ He carried into exile to Babylon the remnant, who escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and his successors until the kingdom of Persia came to power. ²¹ The land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested, until the seventy years were completed in fulfillment of the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah.

Poem

Jerusalem, The Beautiful

*Jerusalem, the Beautiful
The hill where God resides
Your temple gates
Your altar's fire
May in you I abide*

*Jerusalem, the Beautiful
Why do your walls now tumble?
Your prayers are hushed
Your songs have stopped
Your faithfulness has crumbled*

*Jerusalem, the Beautiful
My longing for you heighten
O Zion, haste
O Zion, shine
Your people now enlighten*

*Jerusalem, the Beautiful
Rebuild your walls and temple
Your arms stretch wide
Your shofars blow
'Til all God's hosts assemble*

*Jerusalem, the Beautiful
The hill where God resides
Your temple gates
Your altar's fire
May in you I abide*

9/27/2024
WEEK 38 DAY 5

Jeremiah Mourns for Fallen Jerusalem



Scripture LAMENTATIONS 1

Devotional

Not long after the fall of Jerusalem, Jeremiah the “weeping prophet” wrote the book of Lamentations to the people of Judah exiled to Babylon. He lamented the brokenness and emptiness of Jerusalem, once the city of God, now a pile of charred rubble. He poured forth his emotions in verse 16, saying:

“This is why I weep
and my eyes overflow with tears.
No one is near to comfort me,
no one to restore my spirit.
My children are destitute
because the enemy has prevailed.”

For over four decades Jeremiah poured out his heart to kings and prophets, priests and people. They just wouldn't listen. This five-chapter book of Lamentations captures his grief.

Six hundred years later, Jesus would cry over Jerusalem. By then the city, walls, and temple had been rebuilt. But the corrupt practices of priests and politicians persisted.

Jesus cried 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. Look, your house is left to you desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord’” (Luke 13:34-35).

Sometime later, as Jesus was preparing for His inevitable arrest and crucifixion in the Holy City, the Bible says, “As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, ‘If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God’s coming to you’” (Luke 19:41-44).

How is God calling you to cry out for your city? What do the people need? What will you do about it?

Poem

Go Away!

*Go away!
I cannot be comforted
All I know are tears*

*Be quiet!
I cannot hear condolences
All I know is grief*

*Veil your face!
I cannot abide your eyes
All I know is darkness*

*Walk away!
I have nothing for you
All I know is emptiness*



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