

In our 6th book of Connecting the Dots, we studied the Kingdom of Israel under the rule of King Saul and King David. The last king of Israel, before the division, was King Solomon. After his reign, the kingdom was divided into two kingdoms. Judah was the southern kingdom and Israel was the northern kingdom. Book 7 opens with the ministry of the prophet Elijah. We will be looking at several prophets and their ministries and we will conclude with Ezekiel in the valley of the dry bones. All of these accounts are significant in the process of connecting the dots which all link to the True King, King Jesus.

WEEK 79 ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL -----Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

Read 1 KINGS 18:1-19

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

During this time, King Ahab was back in Israel enduring the drought and famine. After more than three dry years, there was little or no water and no place to graze the animals, in particular, the horses used in battle. King Ahab had the caretaker of his house, Obadiah, go in one direction while the king went in another to look for water and grass to feed the animals. Obadiah was a believer. His name means "Servant of Jehovah." He was serving the Lord behind enemy lines by hiding the prophets from King Ahab's murderous wife, Jezebel. During the search for grass and water, Obadiah met up with Elijah. Elijah told Obadiah to tell King Ahab that he had found him, but Obadiah was fearful. He was afraid Elijah would disappear before the king could get there. But Elijah stayed right where Obadiah had found him.

In the encounter with Elijah, King Ahab greeted him by calling him the “*Troubler of Israel.*” In reality, it was King Ahab which troubled Israel by leading the people to worship the false god Baal.

Approximately three and a half years later (see Luke 4:25), Elijah was to present himself to King Ahab to let him know rain would be coming soon. Elijah was to show that it was the one true God of Israel who controlled the weather and not the false god Baal. We also see here how God provides for His Own.

Thank God for His provisions for us and for His sovereignty.

Day 2

Read 1 KINGS 18:20-35

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

Then, Elijah called the people to come close. As they watched, he alone rebuilt an altar of the Lord that was in ruins. He used twelve stones to represent the twelve tribes of Israel. He put wood on the altar along with the bull that he had prepared. He then wanted to make sure there was no doubt this would be a miracle of God so he had the people bring buckets of water to pour on the bull and the wood. They used enough water to soak the wood, the bull, and to completely fill the trench Elijah had dug around the altar.

At the beginning of this challenge, Elijah was grossly outnumbered. All of the prophets and all of the Israelites made no verbal commitment when he asked them, "*How long will you falter between two opinions?*" They were noncommittal by their silence. Elijah was alone, but not really alone. Martin Luther said, "One with God is a majority." Elijah was alone with God, and he was in the majority!

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

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read 1 KINGS 18:36-38

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

This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. Acts 2:23 (NIV)

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

The goal of both encounters was to turn God’s people to Himself. Elijah cried out and the fire came down from heaven, burned up the bull, the wood, and licked up all the water! God orchestrated the battle, then fought and won it! He showed Himself to be the victor. At the cross, He did the same. He drew the line and then fought and won the battle to liberate us from sin and its power. When Jesus was raised from the dead, the victory of all victories was won! Oh, victory in Jesus!

God hears and answers our prayers. Give thanks for the victory He gives.

Day 4

Read 1 KINGS 18:39-45

At the first of this encounter, the people were silent. They had nothing to say as they lived their lives “*Between two opinions.*” Now that God had showed Himself mighty and powerful, they fell on their faces and declared, “*The Lord He is God! The Lord He is God!*” The people joined with Elijah and followed his instructions to execute the prophets of Baal.

The power of God was further displayed as the three and a half year drought had come to an end. Even before his prayer, Elijah told the people including King Ahab, “*Go up and eat for there is the sound of abundance of rain.*” Elijah went up again to Mount Carmel and prayed for the Lord to send rain. He sent his servant to look toward the sea to see if there were any clouds. His servant looked seven times and on the seventh time, the servant reported that there was a small cloud about the size of a man’s hand. He sent a warning to King Ahab to get on his chariot and ride back to Jezreel before the rain came. The Lord gave Elijah special strength and he took off running and beat Ahab to Jezreel.

God keeps His word! You can count on it and live by it. Elijah trusted the Lord to do what He said He would do and then lived his life accordingly. Trust Him and walk with Him in obedience and surrender.

Thank God for His sovereignty.

Day 5

Read PSALM 98:1-9

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

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

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

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

WEEK 80

GOOD KING JEHOSEPHAT IN BATTLE-----

-----Dennis Watson

King Jehoshaphat was the fourth King of Judah after the kingdom had been divided. He was a good king—he started well and accomplished many positives. On one occasion, he had the opportunity to lead the people into a battle where there was no humanly possible way for them to be victorious. Enjoy reading this historical account of praise that leads to victory.

Day 1

Read 2 Chronicles 17

Chapter 17:1 opens with a word that indicates historical narrative which follows the end of Chapter 16. “Then,” after King Asa died and was buried, his son, Jehoshaphat, reigned in his place. He was off to a great start as king. In fact, Verses 3-6 explain why he was doing so well. The Lord was with him because he followed the ways of his great, great, great, grandfather David. He sought God, rather than the false gods, and followed God’s commandments. For these reasons, God established his reign and blessed and prospered Jehoshaphat.

Jehoshaphat delighted in the Lord. He was aggressive in making known the Word of God. He sent five of his leaders, along with nine Levites, and two priests on mission trips to the cities of Judah for the purpose of teaching the Law. King Jehoshaphat wanted to make sure the people of his kingdom knew and understood the Word of God. He wanted them to be certain of whose people they were.

Jehoshaphat had a clear understanding of his task as the King of Judah. He created an environment in which the Word of God would thrive. Since he was faithful to the Lord and His Word, God honored Jehoshaphat. The surrounding nations brought him gifts and the nation continued to prosper.

In addition to his spiritual leadership, he built up the nation militarily and made sure they stored up supplies in the cities to provide for the needs of the people.

God honors His people when the leaders seek the Lord and teach His truth and His ways. Truly, Judah had a good and godly king. Pray for our nation's leadership that they, too, will lead in a God honoring way.

Day 2

Read 2 Chronicles 18

Jehoshaphat was off to a good start as king, but he made a bad choice when he connected with King Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel. He made marital, military and commercial alliances with the wicked kings of the northern kingdom. This particular alliance almost cost him his life.

King Ahab asked King Jehoshaphat to go with him to take the strategic city of Ramoth-Gilead. Ahab said he had already received the go ahead from his 400 (false) prophets, but Jehoshaphat wanted to inquire of the prophet from the Lord first. Ahab said the prophet of the Lord was named Micaiah, *“But I hate him as he never prophesied any good concerning me.”* King Ahab reluctantly sent for the prophet Micaiah who had been in prison and to his surprise, Micaiah told him, in a mocking tone, to *“Go prosper, and they shall be delivered into your hands.”* Although Ahab was surprised, he rebuked Micaiah for not telling him the truth. When rebuked, Micaiah explains, in a more serious tone, the Lord had sent a lying spirit to his 400 prophets to tell King Ahab to go into battle so he would be killed. After answering the king, Micaiah was sent back to prison.

King Ahab and King Jehoshaphat went to Ramoth-Gilead to fight. Ahab went into battle in a disguise but Jehoshaphat went in wearing his royal robes. The king of Aram instructed his army to look only for King Ahab. The soldiers surrounded Jehoshaphat thinking he was King Ahab because he was the only one dressed like a king. Jehoshaphat cried out and the Lord diverted the attackers away from him and by the grace of God, Jehoshaphat escaped. Ahab was killed in battle by a random archer.

Have you ever found yourself in a place where you should not have been and you realized it was only by the grace of God you made it out without serious trouble? I am often reminded of how many times the Lord protected me when I made a foolish choice. Give thanks to the Lord for His mercy and protection.

Day 3

Read John 10:16-28

When I was a young boy playing little league baseball, there was one voice I could always hear above all others and it was my mother's voice. It was not because she was louder than anyone else, it was because I knew her voice and I was tuned into it. **I knew her voice.** At times, it was firm and correcting, while at other times, it was sweet and tender. On the field, it was cheering. Rest assured I could definitely hear her when she was calling for me from the back porch, "Dennis, come home!" Whatever the occasion, I knew her voice and heeded it (most of the time). The account yesterday really made me think about what voices we are heeding? It all has to do with which voice you are listening to and listening for. Whose voice have you made a habit of listening to?

The religious leaders in Jesus's day were like King Ahab. They chose not to listen to messages from God. Like King Ahab, they wanted to hear only what they already believed and anything else was rejected. Jesus said that those who are His sheep tune into His voice, listen and follow Him. They hear His voice bringing correction, guidance and feeding. The sheep hear the shepherd leading them to green pastures and still waters. They love and trust the shepherd and were ready and eager to hear and follow! Jesus said, "*My sheep.*" These were the sheep of His pasture, they were His own, He had purchased them. He loved and cared for them. Jesus said, "*They hear My voice.*" It was His voice they were listening for and wanting to hear. The sheep were familiar with the shepherd's voice! They trusted their Shepherd. Jesus said, "*They follow Me.*" He is not describing a rebellious following, but a trusting and dependent following. They knew when He called He had something good in store because they trusted Him.

Are you listening to His voice? His voice comes from His Word and from His Spirit living in you. You must actually train yourself to hear His voice because there are many voices shouting for your attention. Begin everyday tuning to the voice of The Good Shepherd. Practice listening to, listening for, and following His voice.

Day 4

Read 2 Chronicles 20:1-19

Historically, God's people have often been under attack. What are we to do when that happens? This biblical account of Jehoshaphat is a great resource for fighting those battles. First we read that there was an alliance of nations coming to attack. The people of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir were coming together to attack Israel. King Jehoshaphat was fearful so he, "*Set himself to seek the Lord.*" One of my favorite verses is **Psalm 56:3** "*Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in you.*" In fact, all of Psalm 56 is a great message about seeking the Lord in our times of fear. He rallied the people of Judah to come together to seek the Lord and pray.

King Jehoshaphat stands before the people in front of the sanctuary and asks help from the Lord. He was asking questions in which he was really making declarations in prayer. These are true confessions about God.

You are the God of our fathers.

You are the God in heaven.

You rule over all the kingdoms of the nations.

In Your hand is power and might.

No one can withstand You.

You are the One who drove out the inhabitants of this land before Israel.

You gave this land to the descendants of Abraham, Your friend forever.

They dwell here and have built You a sanctuary in Your name.

If disaster of any kind comes, we will stand in this place before You in Your name and cry out and You will hear us and save us.

Here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir.

Will you judge them because we have no power against them; we do not know what to do but our eyes are on You.

Then he told God, *“They are coming to attack so Lord we are counting on you.”* All of the people stood before the Lord and waited on Him.

After Jehoshaphat’s prayer, the Lord sent the prophet Jahaziel. He tells Jehoshaphat and all of the people gathered with him not to worry or fear because this battle is not theirs, it is God’s. He told the people that tomorrow they were to go out against the enemy. They were to *“Position yourselves, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord who is with you.”* Then, the people worshipped the Lord celebrating the coming promised victory.

When trouble comes, this needs to be our standard first response. We need to acknowledge our weakness and then confess what is true about our God and wait on Him to provide the victory. How much time do we spend feeling anxious? Too much!

Remember this, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God ; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.”* **Philippians 4:7 (NKJV)**

Day 5

Read 2 Chronicles 20:20-30

I like the first word of Verse 20 in the NKJV “so.” King Jehoshaphat and the people prayed and worshipped as the Lord, through Jahaziel, gave them instructions and the promise of victory. Then Verse 20 begins “*So, they rose early in the morning and went out.*” Do you know what that means? They were confident in the Lord to deliver. They went out, took their positions and trusted the Lord to fight the battle. Obedience is a major requirement for experiencing God. You cannot really know God personally and experientially apart from trusting Him to the point of obeying Him. Doing otherwise is only knowing about Him. To trust and obey Him is to know Him firsthand by experiencing Him. We can know the people went out with full intentions of obeying Him.

King Jehoshaphat then told the people to “*Believe in the Lord your God, and you shall be established.*” He then put the choir and singers out front followed by the army. The singers proclaimed, “*Praise the Lord, for His mercy endures forever.*” When the singing and praising started, the Lord set ambushes against Judah’s enemies and they were defeated. In Psalm 22:3 KJV, we find God inhabits the praise of His people. Praise is where God lives, it is where He is welcome. When the people sang praises to the Lord and made that their first line of moving out, they were saying, God is with us and we trust Him.

When should we give thanks and praise God? All the time, but especially when we feel attacked and the odds are against us. We are told in both the Old and New Testaments to praise and give thanks to the Lord all of the time. When we praise and give thanks to the Lord, we are declaring His goodness and anticipating that goodness.

Praise is where God resides.

Week 81 Elijah is Taken up to Heaven----- -----Chris Watson

From last week's devotions to this week, we see a few things have taken place. We read that Ahab was killed in battle and just as Elijah and Micaiah had prophesied, the dogs licked up his blood. He was a wicked and evil king but God chose not to bring disaster to Ahab directly, He would wait and bring it on his house in the days of his son (1 Kings 21:29). In 2 Kings 1, we see that judgment take place on Ahab's son, Ahaziah, after he became king over Israel. His reign lasted two years before he died. His death was not the result of falling through the roof as much as when he fell he consulted another god, asking if he would live, instead of asking God. Since Ahaziah had no sons his brother, Joram, succeeded him.

Day 1

Read 2 Kings 2:1-6

God had revealed to both Elijah and Elisha that Elijah was about to be taken up into heaven. In 1 Kings 19 we see the call of Elisha. In verses 19-21 we see Elijah taking him under his wing, and verse 21 refers to Elisha as Elijah's attendant. While it was a master/ attendant relationship, Elisha wanted to go everywhere Elijah went. Their relationship was one of godly love and I believe they learned from each other. God knew their relationship before it was made known that Elijah would be taken up to heaven. He put Elisha with Elijah so when the time came to take Elijah to heaven, Elisha would be ready to continue the work and direction from the Lord. Elisha didn't want to miss when God took Elijah to heaven. He wanted to be there to experience it; he wanted to see his master and mentor be taken up.

God was preparing Elisha to take Elijah's place. Elijah was mentoring him and God was getting them both ready for what was to happen. Who is mentoring or discipling you and who are you mentoring or discipling?

In other words, who is pouring into your life the things of God and life experiences and into whose life are you pouring the things of God? Elijah was preparing Elisha for his departure and getting him ready to continue on with God's work.

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

Day 2

Read 2 Kings 2:7-14

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

Notice what we see from both Elisha and Elijah, a desire to follow and obey God for His glory, not their own. Elisha had asked for a double portion of Elijah's spirit knowing Elijah's spirit was one which followed God. These two men followed God and spoke truth, and it wasn't always easy. In a time when many were not God-fearing or followers of God, they followed God with all of their hearts. They were definitely not in it for their own credit but because they knew and walked with God. They spoke truth.

Look at what what Elisha asks for:

“Elisha, having this fair opportunity to enrich himself with the best riches, prays for a double portion of his spirit. He asks not for wealth, nor honor, nor exemption from trouble, but to be qualified for the service of God and his generation, he asks, (1.) For the Spirit, not that the gifts and graces of the Spirit were in Elijah's power to give, therefore he says not, “Give me the Spirit” (he knew very well it was God's gift), but “Let it be upon me, intercede with God for this for me.” Christ bade his disciples ask what they would, not one, but all, and promised to send the Spirit, with much more authority and assurance than Elijah could. (2.) For his spirit, because he was to be a prophet in his room, to carry on his work, to father the sons of the prophets and face their enemies, because he had the same perverse generation to deal with that he had, so that, if he have not his spirit, he has not strength according to the day. (3.) For a double portion of his spirit; he does not mean double to what Elijah had, but double to what the rest of the prophets had, from whom so much would not be expected as from Elisha, who had been brought up under Elijah. It is a holy ambition to covet earnestly the best gifts, and those which will render us most serviceable to God and our brethren. Note, we all ought, both ministers and people, to set before us the example of our

predecessors, to labor after their spirit, and to be earnest with God for that grace which carried them through their work and enabled them to finish well.”¹

He is asking to be qualified for God’s service and to know God deeper. He doesn’t ask for money, fame or personal items, he asks for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit because he knew Elijah followed God. If we could have “anything” what would we ask for? Elisha asking for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit showed his heart was in the right place. Is our heart right before the Lord today? Are we wanting to know God more intimately? Are we walking with Him? Ask the Lord to keep you close to Him.

¹ Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Mark 9:2-9

Some 800 years after he was taken to heaven in a whirlwind, Elijah came back to earth and appeared with Moses, Peter, James and John as Jesus was transfigured. In Verses 5 and 6, we read that Peter was frightened as Moses and Elijah stood before them. You can imagine why Peter was frightened, he knew these two men died many years ago!

Jesus was trying to help Peter, James, and John understand that Elijah and Moses were pointing to Jesus. “Elijah’s life pointed forward to Jesus as a prophet who would bring God’s Word to His people. The life of Moses pointed forward to Jesus as a mediator who would stand in the middle for us, pleading with God. Jesus traded His perfect life for our sinful one that we might be saved. To be sure the disciples understood who was most important, God the Father spoke out saying that Jesus was His son. Jesus remained while Moses and Elijah disappeared.”²

God made it clear to the disciples that everything points to Jesus by meshing the Old Testament and the New Testament together on the mountain top. We have seen many other scriptures in the Old Testament point to Christ as well. Genesis 3:15 and the story of Abraham willing to sacrifice Isaac are just a few symbolic samplings of how God’s word points to Christ.

All of God’s Word points to Jesus who is our only hope. He is not only our hope to have our sins forgiven, but our hope to have a relationship with God. Thank God for His Word and how it directs everything to Jesus!

² Marty Machowski, Long Story Short, 324

Day 4

Read 2 Kings 2:15-22

The 50 men wanted to go and look for Elijah. In Verse 7, these men were referenced as the “*fifty men of the company of the prophets.*” Elijah taught these men about God as well as how to pray and listen to Him. Now, the one they had looked to was gone.

We have read about many men of faith in the scriptures like Moses, Abraham, Elijah, and David. These were men others looked up to for spiritual guidance and direction. I believe God places people in our lives that lead us closer to Him and who also challenge us to walk more in tune with Him. Discipleship is a man or woman of God leading and instructing others in His ways. Elijah was that person for those 50 prophets and they wanted to physically look for him because they had spiritually looked to him for godly wisdom and counsel.

While it is biblical to have godly men and women to look to, the best person to keep our eyes and focus on is Jesus. Others can and will let us down. Like Elijah, those we look to for wisdom and counsel will one day be gone. However, we should be careful to make sure our guidance and direction is ultimately found in our relationship with Jesus, the One who will always be here, never leaving or forsaking us, but walking hand in hand with us.

Take time today to thank God for those people in your life who are spiritual mentors and leaders for you. You may want to give them a call, send them a text or email to let them know how much they encourage you. Most of all thank God for His leading and His direction in your life!

Day 5

Read Malachi 4:4-6

After reading our passage today, turn to Matthew 11:13-14 to read, *“For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to accept it, he is the Elijah who was to come. Whoever has ears, let him hear.”* John the Baptist wasn’t Elijah reincarnated, but he represented the prophet Elijah in the New Testament.

John Phillips says, “When Jesus came the first time, God did indeed send a forerunner: John the Baptist, who came in the spirit of Elijah to call the nation back to God. The nation responded by murdering John and crucifying Christ.”³

Many of the Jews are still waiting for the first Elijah, if you will (John the Baptist), as some didn’t accept that John was coming in the spirit of Elijah. They are looking for Elijah himself. In fact if you remember the study of the Feasts of Israel, months back, the Jews place a cup for Elijah known as The Cup of Hallel or Elijah’s cup as they are still waiting on him to come before the Messiah. Since Jesus came until now many Jews have not accepted Jesus as the Messiah and the prophecy concerning Elijah is just one reason.

Thank God for His word and how it is all connected. Pray for those who have not yet seen the truth. Pray for people you know who have heard the truth but still have not put their faith in Jesus. Pray for those who can’t believe Jesus could love them. Pray specifically for the Jews to see the true Messiah!

Pray for God’s name to be proclaimed throughout the earth!

³ John Phillips Commentary Series, -Exploring the Minor Prophets: An Expository Commentary

WEEK 82 ELISHA'S MINISTRY---- Dennis Watson

Many biblical historical events took place after the showdown on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Just before Elijah was taken up to heaven, Elijah told Elisha that his request for a double portion of his spirit would become a reality. “This was not a request for twice as much of the Holy Spirit, or for a ministry twice as great as that of Elijah, but for a greater degree of the inner spirit that motivated the great prophet.”⁴ Elisha continued the ministry of Elijah. During Elisha’s ministry, he worked ten miracles. We will look at a few this week, however, the important thing to note is that it was God who was providing the power for the miracles. There would come One far greater who would work even greater miracles—Jesus.

Day 1

Read 2 KINGS 4:1-7

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

This account sounds a lot like the one about Elijah and the widow whose flour and oil did not run out during the time of the drought. The widow had many debts. When Elisha asked her what she had, she told him all she had in the house was a little oil. In this case, Elisha told the widow to go and gather all the jars she could from her neighbors.

⁴ Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series)-Old Testament-The Bible Commentary-History

After she had done this, she returned home. She, along with her sons, filled all of those jars from the little oil she had until they were all full and then the oil stopped. Elisha told her to go and sell all of it, pay her debts, and live on what was left over.

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

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

Day 2

Read 2 KINGS 4:8-17

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

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

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

Ask God for the grace to be a servant.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read 2 KINGS 4:18-37

Job lost just about everything he had and then said, “*The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away*” (**Job 1:21**). The woman in yesterday’s account did have a child, but there came the day that all parents fear, the child died. God had graciously provided her a much wanted son and now he had died. Elisha was a miracle worker. There are ten miracles that God worked through him. We have already seen the miracle of the oil for the poor widow. We have seen the miracle of the birth of a son to the Shunammite woman and her husband. We will now see another miracle.

The woman went in search of Elijah, found him, and told him of the death of her son. She knew where to turn when she found herself in a hopeless situation. She knew that through a miracle of Elisha, God had miraculously given her a son. Because of this, she knew to go find the man of God and tell him what had taken place. Elisha went with the woman to her home where the child lay dead. God empowered Elisha to work a miracle by raising the Shunammite woman’s son from the dead.

We have a wonderful perch from which to read the Bible. We know about the greatest miracle worker of all—Jesus.

However, Jesus did not come to be a miracle worker. He came, “*To seek and to save that which was lost.*” I am thankful for and am truly amazed at the miracles recorded in the Bible and, in particular, those of Jesus. That for which I am most thankful is that Jesus came to deal with the number one enemy of God and man—sin. The greatest miracle of all was when Jesus died on the cross and took away the power of sin over all people! Sin plagues us every day, but Jesus won the victory and proved that victory is in the resurrection. Sin’s power has been removed!

Thank God for the glorious miracle of the defeat of sin’s power and consequences through Jesus Christ!

Day 4

Read 2 KINGS 4:38-41

After the fall, God said He would put enmity between the woman and the serpent and the woman's offspring and the serpent's offspring. Of course, that enmity was far reaching beyond just the enmity between Satan and mankind. Conflicts arose within nature. There would be thorns and weeds man would have to deal with in raising food. We see the conflict between man and the wild animals, but also with poisonous plants. In today's account, Elisha works another miracle when a meal of the prophets becomes poisoned.

A stew was being prepared and one of the prophets was out gathering food items to be put in that stew. Unknowingly, some kind of poisonous vegetation was placed in the pot. Immediately upon being tasted, it was discovered that it was poisonous. The men cried out to Elisha, "*Man of God, there is death in the pot.*" Elisha put flour in the pot and the poison was removed. The flour did not make the difference, it was the miraculous power of God.

Can you imagine what it was like for Adam and Eve in the Garden to eat freely from all of the vegetation except from the forbidden tree? They did not have to think about sickness or death because such things did not exist. God will one day remove all of the effects of sin, sickness, and death. In the New Heaven and Earth, there will be no poison. Look at how Isaiah describes that time:

The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, The leopard shall lie down with the young goat, The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; And a little child shall lead them. ⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze; Their young ones shall lie down together; And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, And the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. ⁹ They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. Isaiah 11:6-9 (NKJV)

Paul writes in Romans 8:21 that creation will be delivered from the bondage of corruption.

Give thanks to God for His power over the corruption brought to creation by sin. Anticipate the glorious time of deliverance from corruption!

Day 5

Read HABAKKUK 1:5-12 and ACTS 13:38-48

Often during the Old Testament days, God would use a godless foreign enemy to bring judgment upon His people when they were disobedient and not seeking Him. In the passage in Habakkuk we read today, Habakkuk asked God why He did not do something since the people were being so evil. God responded by telling Habakkuk that He was going to do something he would not believe. A foreign enemy would attack suddenly and violently.

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

However, in the account in Acts, the Jews rejected the words of Paul because of envy. Their hearts were resistant to the gospel. It was here that a turning point occurred in the book of Acts. It is expressed in the words of Paul and Barnabas to the Jewish people: *“Then Paul and Barnabas grew bold and said, “It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken to you first; but since you reject it, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, behold, we turn to the Gentiles.” Acts 13:46 (NKJV)*

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

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

WEEK 83 NAAMAN IS CURED-----Chris Watson

As Americans, we seem to think we need to have an answer for everything or need to be able to explain everything. Sometimes we even want to know why God does what He does or why He uses the methods He uses. This week, we will be looking at the account of Naaman's cure. God used a method to heal him that Naaman wasn't exactly looking for. As believers, we need to trust God's plan. No matter if it makes sense or whether or not we would have done it the same way, we need to trust and obey following God's ways and plans.

Day 1

Read 2 Kings 5:1-7

The Syrians had attacked the kings of Israel during a time in which the kings were leading people to worship idols and turning them away from God. During one of King Aram's raids in Israel, a young girl was taken captive and given to Naaman to be a maid for his wife.

We can imagine how this situation was scary for this young girl as she was taken away from her parents. She trusted God and believed that He would heal Naaman of his leprosy. She directed Naaman to Elisha who was a prophet of the one true God.

This is an example of childlike faith. As adults, we often complicate everything. We talk about why God can't do something or how He can't save someone we know. We doubt He can heal a relationship or solve struggles that we are going through. However, we should be like this little girl and have childlike faith. Having childlike faith doesn't mean everything will happen according to my wants and desires, it means I trust God for what only He can do. I trust Him to get it right and I put it in His hands. In Matthew 18:3 and Luke 18:7, the Bible talks about coming to God like a child with childlike faith, meaning we come to God completely, trusting not just what He can do, but, trusting in Him alone.

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

Day 2

Read 2 Kings 5:8-14

Pride can be a nasty sin! In fact, pride and selfishness are often the underlying reasons for the sin in our life. Elisha sent a messenger to Naaman to tell him what to do in order to be healed and Naaman went off in a rage. He thought Elisha would immediately call on the name of the Lord or maybe he would just wave his hand over him to cure him.

Thankfully, he had servants and friends that talked sense into him by asking “Why not follow Elisha’s instructions and wash yourself in the river?” Naaman listened to his servants and went and washed himself in the river seven times as instructed.

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

Often when we experience difficult situations in our families, work, church, school, etc, we become so focused on the situation that we can’t seem to think straight. I believe Naaman wasn’t thinking straight; he had the chance to be healed, but he had a temporary moment of insanity. During times like this in our lives, we need to cling to God, His Word, and godly friends.

Take some time today to thank God for the friends in your life that give you godly counsel. Make sure to let them know you are thankful for them. If you don’t have such friends, ask God to place friends in your life that will hold you accountable and walk this road with you!

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read 2 Kings 5:15-19

Naaman had experienced healing by the one true God and he knew it! Initially, he wasn't willing to go to the Jordan River and wash himself in it as he was instructed to do. When he realized it was God who healed him, he went back to Elisha and expressed how thankful he was to God for healing him. In Verse 19, he said he would not offer sacrifices or burnt offerings except to the Lord even though he knew there were expectations and rituals that were expected of him from the king.

The focus of this passage, is the end of Verse 15 where Naaman realizes that the God of Israel is the one true God. Naaman wasn't an Israelite. In fact, he was in possession of the Israelite girl they had captured. God chose to heal a non-Israelite to show the Israelites that He was the one true God and also to show that the Gospel would be for all peoples. It would not be just for the Israelites, but for everyone. This is why God sent Jesus. In this account, while God was seeking to get the attention of the Israelites, He was also pointing forward to Jesus. God was showing how the God of Israel was the God of all and that He desired all people to come to know Him, not just the Israelites.

Romans is a book that focuses on God's love and helping the Israelites understand that Jesus was for all people, including the Gentiles. (Gentile- any person who was not a Jew) God's desire was to reach all nations and all people. **Luke 4:27** reads, "*And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed—only Naaman the Syrian.*" One possible reason could have been for God to show His love among all people while another reason could have been that some of the Israelites weren't following the one true God.

Isn't it great to know that God loves all people and He sent His Son Jesus to show that? **2 Peter 3:9** says, "*The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he*

*is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” Everyone means all people, red, yellow, black and white. In 2 Kings, God was showing us that the God of the universe is for all people, in all places, at all times. John tells us in **Revelation 7:9**, “After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.”*

There will be all types of people in heaven because Jesus is for everyone. Are you sharing Jesus with all people? Your co-workers, classmates, friends, and enemies, they all need Jesus. We have been given the gift of life in Jesus and He desires for us to share it with everyone that will receive the free gift of salvation! Who will you show and share Jesus with today?

Day 4

Read 2 Kings 5:20-27

What a turn of events we read about today! Naaman was cured and all seemed well until Gehazi, Elisha's servant, decided to take matters into his own hands. He believed Elisha had been too easy on Naaman by not accepting any of the gifts Naaman had brought for him. Gehazi set out to find Naaman to take the gifts from him.

Notice what Gehazi says to Naaman in verse 22 of Chapter 5, "*My master sent me to say.*" Not only should he not have gone after Naaman, but he also said that Elisha sent him. He was totally misrepresenting his master Elisha, he was lying. As we see at the end of this account, Elisha knew what his servant was doing and Gehazi was punished severely, he was struck with leprosy.

I don't want to be like Gehazi; I don't want to misrepresent my Master, the Lord Jesus Christ. We might say that God wants me to do this or God told me to say that when in fact, God had nothing to do with it. We simply did or said what we desired and we added God's name to the end of the statement. However, God does speak to us as we seek Him through His Word and through prayer. God often tells us what we need to do, say, or where we need to go. Therefore, we need to make sure it is God's ways, words, and thoughts we express, not our own. If we misrepresent God there are often consequences that follow. Consequences we won't like. We don't want to be like Gehazi taking matters into our own hands; we should listen to our Lord, trust Him and do what He says. Today, will we follow our ways and our thoughts or will we follow God's ways and His thoughts?

Day 5

Read Psalm 111

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

Verse 2 _____

Verse 3 _____

Verse 4 _____

Verse 5 _____

Verse 6 _____

Verse 7 _____

Verse 8 _____

Verse 9 _____

WEEK 84 JOEL AND THE DAY OF THE LORD-----

-----Dennis Watson

John Piper says the sovereignty of God is the very stitching that holds the gospel together. The suffering of Jesus, the murder of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus are all the very fabric of the gospel. The suffering of man in a fallen world is also part of the gospel. Man is broken and in need of a Savior. But first, man must see that he is broken and cry out to God for His rescue. In the Book of Joel, we see the suffering of the people of Israel. God sent Joel to call the people to confess their sin, repent, and return to the Lord.

Day 1

Read Joel 1:1-13

“Hear this, you elders, And give ear, all you inhabitants of the land! Has anything like this happened in your days, Or even in the days of your fathers?” **Verse 2** Essentially, Joel is saying, can you believe what has happened? That is how Joel opens his book. A locust plague has devastated the land of Judah but it is a picture of what is to come when four attacking armies come and devastate the nation. The results are troubling. The whole nation has been impacted; the farmer, the priest, and the vinedresser. The impact has not only hit the crops, but also their economy.

We regularly see earthquakes, famines, pandemic, disease and many other natural disasters. These may not be directly caused by God but they are the result of the fall of man and the accompanying judgment. We live in a fallen world which has been and will continue to be devastated by sin. Look at this verse in Romans:

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. **Romans 8:20-21 (NKJV)**

God is always at work. The devastation we see is not so much the direct action of God, but comes as the result of living in a world

which has been impacted by sin. The Lord has sent Joel with a message for the people. They have seen the devastation of the locusts and there will be coming attacks by four kings who will also devastate the land and the people. He is saying, “You have seen the locusts, but you have not seen anything yet.” The struggle is real. The people are in great anguish from what has happened. Joel has been sent by God to call the people to cry out to Him and seek Him in repentance.

Almost daily, and especially as I write these words during the Covid 19 pandemic, humanity is in some kind of difficulty. This world is in a fallen state and the daily struggle is due to sin. For this reason, we ought to be able to recognize our desperation and need. Verse 13 calls for the spiritual leaders to lament, wail, and put on sackcloth. The crying out is due to the great need and the sackcloth is associated with repentance and sorrow for sin.

We have many reminders before us that we are desperate and at times, our desperation is obvious. We can humble ourselves and seek the Lord or we can be humbled by circumstances. Seek the Lord daily! We are a desperate and dependent people.

God has subjected all of creation to futility. He did so in hope. The hope is that mankind will see his desperate plight in a fallen world and will cry out to God. Have you? Are you?

Day 2

Read Joel 1:14-20

Joel, the son of Pethuel, is the author of the book of Joel. This is all we know about him. We see he had a message from the Lord to deliver to the people. God is the source of the message that was given to Joel. The message of Joel had to do with a time of judgment which they had already been experiencing and a time of judgement yet to come.

This was a time of great turmoil and loss resulting in fear and desperation. The people were in a really bad way. In Verse 14, the priests and leaders of the people were told to respond in three ways. They were to *“consecrate a fast.”* Fasting is a way to focus and express that they were serious about seeking God regarding this matter. They were also to *“call a sacred assembly.”* The wording here means to have a time of restraint. The fasting was a time of restraint from food and drink. There would also be a time of restraint from pleasure and secular employment. The third way to respond in the desperate time was to *“cry out to the Lord.”* With the desperate times they were under, they were told by God, through the prophet Joel, to gather all the elders and the people at the temple. They were to cry out to the Lord, to confess their sins and pray for mercy.

Joel told the people what was going on and what was about to happen in the near future. We are first introduced to a major theme in Joel 1:15, *“Alas for the day! For the day of the Lord is at hand.”* This is a phrase that appears in many books of prophecy in the Old Testament. It is used in Isaiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Obadiah and Zephaniah. It refers to a time of judgment on the sins of Israel and other nations. In the New Testament, we see it can also be used to apply to the ultimate day of judgment which will come at the end of time.

Judgment was in place and more was to come. We live in similar days. We know that because of God’s righteousness and holiness, a final judgment is coming. It is important we prepare for that day.

First, we prepare by receiving God's gift of salvation. This gift guarantees our entrance into eternal life. We also prepare by living lives of service so when we, as believers, come before the "*Judgment seat of Christ*" we will receive rewards which have been prepared for those who have served faithfully (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Judgment is to result in brokenness and repentance. God has promised judgment. Jesus Christ took our judgment. Judgment was either settled for you at the cross of Christ in a moment in history or will be settled for you in hell for eternity.

Day 3

Read Joel 2:1-17

The theme of the Book of Joel is “the day of the Lord” and it will be a day of God’s wrath and judgment. It is a time in history, several times, in fact, when God brought wrath and judgment on the people in order to get their attention and have them come to a point of repentance.

Gotquestion.org gives this brief definition:

”The phrase “the day of the Lord” usually identifies events that take place at the end of history (Isaiah 7:18-25) and is often closely associated with the phrase “that day.” One key to understanding these phrases is to note that they always identify a span of time during which God personally intervenes in history, directly or indirectly, to accomplish some specific aspect of His plan.” His plan is to have the people of God repent and turn to Him.

In Chapter 2, we read that “the day of the Lord” is also eschatological, which has meaning in the future regarding end time events. Jesus uses terminology which connects to Joel 2:11. Chapter 2 opens with a statement and concludes with, “For the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand.” In Chapter 1, the day of the Lord is about what was being experienced by the people in the locust plagues. The first part of Chapter 2 is an appeal to repent. Judgment has at its goal, sorrow for sin and repentance. In Joel 2:11 Joel uses the terms, “For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?”

For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be. 22 And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect’s sake those days will be shortened. Matthew 24:21-22 (NKJV)

Jesus is talking about that part of the tribulation which is the second half of the seven-year tribulation period. The tribulation has three purposes:

1. Punish unbelieving gentiles for the way they have treated the Jews.

"I will gather all nations and bring them down to the Valley of Jehoshaphat. There I will enter into judgment against them concerning my inheritance, my people Israel, for they scattered my people among the nations and divided up my land." **Joel 3:2**

2. Bring about a worldwide revival.

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." **Matthew 24:14**

"Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel." **Revelation 7:4**

¹⁴ I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. ¹⁵ Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. ¹⁶ Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. ¹⁷ For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." **Revelation 7:14-17**

3. Break the will of the Jewish nation.

⁹For I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground. ¹⁰ All the sinners among my people will die by the sword, all those who say, 'Disaster will not overtake or meet us.'"

*.¹¹ "In that day I will restore David's fallen tent. I will repair its broken places, restore its ruins, and build it as it used to be, ¹² so that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations that bear my name," declares the LORD, who will do these things. **Amos 9:9-12***

God is in control of history! It is all in His hands. Trust Him to finish what He started!

Day 4

Read Joel 2:18-32 and Acts 2:14-21

When the Old Testament speaks of judgment of sin, the coming of Christ is anticipated. You see, since the fall of man, God has been seeking to bring man into a restored relationship with Him. He is doing this for His glory because man was made in God's image to reflect His glory, but sin killed that image. That plan, in fact, was in place before the creation of the world. As we read the Bible, we see God's plan of redemption and restoration being played out in God's story or "His-story."

God is on the way to restoration! This includes the New Heaven, New Earth and the New Jerusalem. God has a special plan for all of His people. There is a great look into the future which includes God's declaration, "*Behold, I make all things new*" (**Revelation 21:5**).

In these passages in Joel 2, we see that after the people repent God is going to restore the land. He is going to bless them with crops, new wine and oil. He will restore the years the locusts have eaten, which means judgment will be removed. Then there is coming a day He will do something anticipated and prophesied. He is going to pour out His Spirit.

It is anticipated and hoped for by Moses:

Then Moses said to him, "Are you zealous for my sake? Oh, that all the LORD'S people were prophets and that the LORD would put His Spirit upon them!" **Numbers 11:29 (NKJV)**

It is prophesied in Joel 2:28-32 and then fulfilled in Acts 2:14-22. In the Acts passage, Peter quotes from Joel saying what happened on the Day of Pentecost was prophesied in Joel. When the Holy Spirit came on those first believers in Jerusalem, Peter said it was fulfillment of what Joel said.

The event recorded in Acts 2, when the Holy Spirit was poured out, was when the church was born and empowered. Since that

glorious day, the Holy Spirit has been poured out on all who have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The church, since that historic, prophesied pouring out, has prospered and spread the gospel around the world.

Give thanks to the Lord for how He got the message and restoration to you. Also, get in on what He is doing to reach others with the gospel.

Day 5

Read Joel 3

The Book of Joel is about judgment, brokenness, repentance and restoration. The Book of Joel is also packed full of eschatology especially regarding Israel. We see this beautifully laid out in Chapter 3. God is faithful to His promises with Israel.

The gentile nations will be judged at the end times for how they mistreated Israel. We see this in Verses 1-8. You even see eschatological references in Verse 2. There is going to be a battle in the “Valley of Jehoshaphat” in which God will war with the gentile nations and defeat them. This is a reference to the battle of Armageddon found in Revelation 16:16. God will restore the fortunes of Israel and defeat her enemies.

When King Jesus comes, everything will change. We know this to be true because we see it in the book of Revelation after the great tribulation, the millennial reign of Christ, the casting of Satan into hell. Then comes the New Heaven and the New Earth and the New Jerusalem. In Verse 17, we see reference to God dwelling in “Zion, my holy mountain” and that “Jerusalem will be holy.” All of this is about God’s plan in eternity for His people. This, of course, is all believers including Jews and especially those who will be saved out of the great tribulation.

Connect the dots!

Look at Zechariah’s prophecy,

“And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they pierced. Yes, they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.” **Zechariah 12:10 (NKJV)**

Many Jews in the tribulation will see Jesus as He really is and believe.

Look at Paul's words about his people,

*And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written: "The Deliverer will come out of Zion, And He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; ²⁷ For this is My covenant with them, When I take away their sins." **Romans 11:26-27 (NKJV)***

Israel failed God many times. So have each of us. This is not a case of all Jews will be saved, but a remnant representing Israel. Look at what Tony Evan says about Romans 11:26-27:

‘God will fulfill his promises to Israel. Even though a partial hardening has come upon them (11:25), they will experience future salvation. Once the fullness of the Gentiles has come (11:25), God will pick up his program with Israel again. All of this will happen during the tumultuous end times, when Jesus returns as the Deliverer to eliminate all godlessness. In that day, all Israel that survives the great tribulation will be saved (11:26).’⁵

What an opportunity to give God praise and thanksgiving for how He thought of everything and then caused it all to happen without violating man's free will. He works within His system and accomplishes His will and plan.

⁵ Tony Evans Bible Commentary-The:Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda

WEEK 85 MICAH-----Chris Watson

Micah was a native of Moresheth, a small town on the border of the city of Gath (1:1, 14). He ministered to both the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah, prophesying the destruction of Samaria (1:5-9) and Jerusalem (1:8-16). He also foresaw the birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem (5:2). Micah ministered “in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah” (1:1). And because he saw Samaria’s future judgment, which occurred in 722 BC, the likely time period for his ministry is between 730 and 690 BC.

Historical Background

In Micah’s day, the kingdoms of Judah and Israel were in the midst of positive economic changes. New wealth in the cities, primarily because of a long period of peace, allowed the rich to expand their wealth to the detriment of the lower class. This led to privileges being extended to one group while being denied to the other. With more wealth, people had the wherewithal to indulge other appetites—which sometimes manifested themselves in sin and moral degradation. In both kingdoms, the greater the wealth, the greater the distance there was between the people and their God. Micah called Samaria and Judah to repent and turn back to the Lord.

Message and Purpose

The message of Micah is that God is displeased with social injustice, declining morality, and living without a view to the Messiah’s kingdom reign. Micah wanted his own people in the southern kingdom of Judah to know that God was just as upset with them as he was with the rebellious northern kingdom of Israel. He condemned the social inequities of his day that did not reflect God’s kingdom principles that they were to be living out until the Messiah came. Those in power were practicing bribery, confiscating the fields of the people, oppressing the poor, and abusing women and children. They were disregarding the Mosaic law and its protections for the vulnerable. Personal holiness was also absent as the people lived in decadence.

Micah directly connects the Messiah's reign with the everyday living of his people. God would not ignore the people's insensitivity, unrighteousness, and oppression. There is to be a direct connection between our faith and our social concerns. Micah's message is that the spiritual must not become disconnected from the social. When the spiritual is applied to the social in righteous ways, God blesses.⁵

God sought to use Micah to speak to the people, but like so many times, they went their own way. God extended His mercy and grace to them as He extends it to us today.

⁵ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda.

Day 1

Read Micah 1:1-7 and Micah 2

The idolatry in the northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah had become so great that the Lord was going to come out of His holy place down to earth to address it (Micah 1: 3-5). As a result of the people's rebellion against God and His covenant, Samaria would become a rubble of ruins and would be smashed. In the first two chapters of Micah, the people and their leaders did not care about walking with God or hearing the words of the Lord from Micah. In fact, they were very evil. The people would prefer to hear prophecy about wine and drink as mentioned in Micah 2:6 and 11. Warren Wiersbe described this passage as the court is conveyed, the Judge (God) arrives and then names his defendants (Israel and Judah) and speaks of their covetousness, false prophets and idolatry. Thankfully, God also speaks on hope for the future.

“We study the last few verses of chapter 2 (12-13) and find that the Lord will gather a remnant for himself. God, throughout scripture, always had a remnant. A remnant is that which was ‘left’ if you will. “A remnant returned to Judah after the Babylonian Captivity, but it never became the great nation that the prophets promised. That will happen when the Lord returns, claims His chosen nation, and establishes His kingdom. The Messiah is described in verse 13 as ‘One who breaks open the way’ (NIV), that is, who opens the doors that confine the Jews in the various nations so that He might bring them to their land. God certainly did this when the exiles left Babylon, but the promise here is for the last days when the Messiah shall come to overcome His enemies and redeem His chosen people. Micah’s first message aroused the opposition of the false prophets, but it didn’t change the hearts of the people. Thus he gave a second message, announcing that ‘the Deliverer is coming. But we today need to deal with our sins of covetousness, selfishness, and willingness to believe ‘religious lies.’ We must abandon ‘soft religion’ that pampers our pride and makes it easy for us to sin. Why? Because “our God is a consuming fire” (Heb. 12:29), and ‘The Lord shall judge His people’ (10:30). Remember, judgment begins in the house of the Lord (1 Peter 4:17).⁶

⁶ Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Concerned (Micah).

Though the nation of Israel would rebel against God, there would always be a faithful remnant that would trust Him and seek to do His will. Are you a part of the remnant? Are you hearing God's voice and following Him? He wants to know you personally and wants to walk with you daily. Is there willful sin in your life which is holding you back from truly following God? Ask the Lord to capture your heart and stay focused on Him. If you are part of the remnant, thank Him for saving you.

Day 2

Read Micah 3 and Micah 4:1-8

Micah 3 begins with how the leaders and prophets hated good because they were corrupt and perverted everything that was right. When their time of trouble would come, the leaders would cry out to the Lord, but He would not answer them. Micah made it clear that the leaders, priests and prophets would be condemned. They assumed God was on their side (Micah 3:11) and yet, they could not be more misguided as Jerusalem would be reduced to rubble. (Micah 3:12).

Leaders must walk with God and not intentionally lead their people astray. I'm reminded of **Matthew 18:6**, "*If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea.*" We are to walk with God, not wanting anyone to stumble.

Sin is costly, and will always take us further than we ever intended going. "What would be the result of the leaders' flouting God's law? Their holy city and temple would be destroyed, and thousands of Jewish people would be exiled to Babylon (Micah 4:10). God would rather destroy the city and the beautiful temple than allow His people to defile His property by their sins. The destruction of Jerusalem in 606-586 is a reminder to God's people that when God says, 'Be holy, for I am holy,' He really means it!" For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests" (Lam. 4:13) the nation was defeated and the city and temple were destroyed. That's why the prophet opened his message by rebuking the spiritual leaders of the land, not the unbelievers. If Micah were ministering among us today, he would probably visit denominational offices, pastors' conferences, Bible colleges, and seminaries to warn Christian leaders that privilege brings responsibility and responsibility brings accountability."⁷

⁷ Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Concerned (Micah).

Chapter 4 makes an abrupt change as we go from reading condemnation on the leaders and the destruction of Jerusalem to the hope and promise of the future in the last days. In the midst of the bad news, Micah delivers great news. A restored kingdom will come to Jerusalem, the future millennial kingdom of the Messiah.

Tony Evans said “People will come to the Lord to settle their disputes. War will be a thing of the past, and there will be no one to frighten the righteous (4:3-4). Christ’s millennial kingdom will bring the peace and security everyone has been dreaming of. When the LORD of Armies speaks, conflict comes to an end (4:4). And he will reign over them in Mount Zion (4:7). In light of this future glory for the people of God, Micah and those who sided with him declare their convictions. Though they may be surrounded by idolatrous people who walk in the name of their gods, kingdom men and women will walk in the name of the LORD . . . forever (4:5). Such people wear their commitment to God on their sleeves each day.”⁸

Whatever you are facing right now, God is faithful. One day there will be no more sin, war, or heartache. Everyone who knows God will spend eternity with Him.

⁸ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God’s Kingdom Agenda.

Day 3

Read Micah 5 :1-5

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, it's all about Jesus! We have come to the middle of the week which always focuses on Jesus. The book of Micah is truly prophetic in nature. In Chapter 5, Micah spoke of Jesus and what was to come.

“Verses 2-5 definitely refer to Messiah. God selected ‘the little town of Bethlehem’ as the place where the King of the Jews was to be born. It was this prophecy that the priests shared with the magi who came to Jerusalem looking for the King (Matt. 2:1-12). Bethlehem (‘house of bread’) has an interesting history. Jacob's favorite wife, Rachel, died near Bethlehem when she gave birth to Benjamin, and she was buried nearby (Gen. 35:16-20). Matthew cites this when he reports the slaying of the innocent children by Herod (Matt. 2:16-18; see Jer. 31:15). In her pain, Rachel named her son Ben-oni, which means ‘son of my sorrow’; but Jacob renamed the boy, calling him Benjamin, ‘son of my right hand.’ These two names remind us of our Lord's suffering and glory, the cross and the throne at the Father's right hand. Ruth and Naomi came to Bethlehem; there Boaz fell in love with Ruth and married her. Ruth is an ancestor of the Messiah (Matt. 1:5). Of course, David was Bethlehem's greatest son; and it was through David's family that the promised Messiah would be born (2 Sam. 7; Matt. 1:1; Luke 1:26-27; Rom. 1:3). The Jews knew that their Messiah would come from Bethlehem (John 7:42).

In this prophecy, Micah reveals a number of important facts about the Messiah. To begin with, He is eternal God, for His ‘goings out are from old... from days of eternity’ (see NIV margin). Jesus stepped out of eternity into human history, sent by the Father to die for the sins of the world (1 John 4:14). But He is also truly a man, for He is born as a human child. We have here the miracle of the Incarnation (John 1:14).

You would think that the very Son of God would come to a great city like Athens or Jerusalem, but He chose to be born in a humble stable (or cave) in Bethlehem. But the day would come when He would be glorified and take His throne in heaven; and one day, He shall return to be Ruler over His people.

However, before He can stand as a Shepherd and care for His flock, His own people must reject Him. Between the cross and the Kingdom Age, Israel will be ‘given up’ by the Lord until the time when Jesus returns and the nation is ‘born’ into her kingdom (see Isa. 66:8). This King will reign to the ends of the earth and will bring peace to all nations. Today, of course, Christ gives peace to all who will come to Him by faith (Matt. 11:28-30; Rom. 5:1).

Micah presented an encouraging scenario to the people, but they didn't seem to grasp the significance; for if they had, they would have turned to the Lord in gratitude and repentance. Whenever a prophet foretold the future, it was to awaken the people to their responsibilities in the present. Bible prophecy isn't entertainment for the curious; it's encouragement for the serious.”⁹

Paul Harvey used to have a show and he often talked about “The rest of the story.” We know the rest of the story. Maybe if the Israelites had listened their story might have ended differently. God has given us a truth and a warning. The truth is we often don't listen. Is God speaking to you today? Is it time to be saved? Is He telling you to obey Him? Have you been walking away from Him or are you in continuous sin? Do you need to come back and call on Him?

⁹ Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Concerned (Micah).

Day 4

Micah 6

Micah 6:8 is a familiar verse often quoted, *“He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God?”* What happened for this verse to be written?

The sins of the people were hidden behind religious activity and routine worship, but their hearts were not in it. It reminds us of another verse found in **Matthew 15** and **Isaiah 29**, *“they worship me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.”* In Micah 6: 6-7, the Israelites were trying to bargain with God by asking what they could do to remove their guilt and sin. It was as if they wanted penance, but did not actually repent and trust God. They thought whatever they did would actually please Him.

We now get to Micah 6:8. What the prophet told them was undoubtedly what they did not want to hear. It was not about bringing a sacrifice and their sins would be forgiven. This verse is not about the act of doing something, but about a lifestyle. He tells them do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God. This isn't a checklist, but a day by day, minute by minute type of mindset.

The people still didn't want to listen to God's prophet, Micah. They were told they had sinned and there would be consequences for their actions. The judgment was the collapse of their economic system including crops, investments and the enjoyment of all they had accumulated. The second judgment of the people would be the ruin of the nation by Babylon.

God loves us. He wants us to know there are consequences for our sin. We have been given amazing grace even though we are still sinners. Paul wrote in **Romans 6:2**, *“You died to sin, why would you live in it any longer?”* Do you want to walk humbly with your God? Worship with a clean heart, repent with a confessing spirit, and give praise that God sent His only Son to die for you.

Day 5

Micah 7

Micah was full of grief as he wrote this passage. With the corruption of the officials and the unfaithfulness of the people of the land, Micah knew judgment was coming. As I was reading and studying Micah 7, I came across the following, written by Warren Wiersbe who expressed it well.

"The voice of the nation (Micah 7:8-10). Perhaps the prophet is speaking on behalf of the remnant as he expresses their faith and courage. The enemy gloated over the defeated Jews and asked in derision, "Where is the Lord your God?" (v. 10 NIV; see Ps. 42:3, 10; 79:10; 115:2) . But the people trust God and have confidence that, though they were in darkness, they would see light; and though they had been defeated, they would eventually conquer their enemies and trample them like mud in the streets. Since these events did not occur after the Assyrian and Babylonian invasions, they must be assigned to a future time. According to Jesus, the Jewish nations will experience great tribulation and become the target of all the Gentile nations in the end times (Matt. 24:15-31). In the end, however, Christ will return and give His people great victory.

The voice of the prophet (Micah 7:11-14). Micah speaks to the city of Jerusalem and assures her that, though she had been attacked and destroyed, she would one day be rebuilt. The prophets speak in glowing terms of Israel having a new city and temple (Isa. 2:1-5; Ezek. 40-48). Not only that, but also the boundaries of the nation would be expanded to include more territory than she had before. In the light of this great promise, the prophet lifted his heart to the Lord in prayer (Micah 7:14) and asked Him to be the faithful Shepherd of Israel and care for His people (see 5:4; Isa. 40:11; Ps. 80:1). Micah longed for "the good old days" when the land was fruitful and peaceful and the people were like obedient sheep who followed their Shepherd.

The voice of the Lord (Micah 7:15). God replied to His faithful servant and assured him that He would indeed watch over His flock and care for them, just as He had when they had departed from the land of Egypt. The "exodus" image is sometimes used in Scripture to point to the "exodus" of the Jews in the end times from the nations of the world to their own land (Isa. 11:15-12:6; 35:8-10; 43:14-20; 51:9-11). God will perform great wonders for His people at a time in their history when the nations are united against them.

The voice of the prophet (Micah 7:16-20). When Israel departed from Egypt and God opened the sea, the other nations heard about it and feared (Ex. 15:14-16; Josh. 2:8-11). But the wonders the Lord will do for Israel in the last days will startle the nations even more. The Gentiles will see the power of God and be ashamed and unable to act. They will come out of their hiding places to submit to the Lord. It will mean total victory for Israel. But the most important event will not be Israel's victory over her enemies but God's victory over Israel. The prophet was confident of the unchanging character of God. "Who is a God like You?" (Micah 7:18 NIV) reminds us of the meaning of Micah's name, "Who is like the Lord?" He is a God who pardons sin, forgives transgressions, and delights in showing mercy. He shows compassion to His people and deals with their sins with finality. Some students see Israel's exodus experience illustrated in verse 19:

The Egyptian army was buried in the depths of the Red Sea and ended up in the mire. Micah knew that God would not go back on His promises or His covenant agreements with His people. The people weren't always true to Jehovah, but He will be true to His people (2 Tim. 2:12-13). What He promised to Abraham, the father of the nation, He will fulfill in his many descendants. Micah could have sung:

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word.

In the coming of Jesus Christ to this world, God fulfilled some of the promises He made to the Jews (Luke 1:72-73), and He will fulfill the rest of His promises as well. "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ" (2 Cor. 1:20 NIV).

Few passages in Scripture contain so much “distilled theology” as Micah 7:18-20. We see in them a reflection of what God told Moses on the mount (Ex. 34:5-7). The better we know the character of God, the more we can trust Him for the future. The better we know the promises and covenants of God, the more peace we will have in our hearts when things fall apart. When Micah wrote this confession of his faith, the future seemed hopeless; yet he had hope because he knew God and fully trusted Him.

No matter how dark the day, the light of God’s promises is still shining. No matter how confusing and frightening our circumstances, the character of God remains the same.

You have every reason to trust Him!”¹⁰

¹⁰ Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Concerned (Micah).

WEEK 86 HOSEA'S RADICAL LOVE----Dennis Watson

Hosea is a book about a message from God, however, it is much more than that. It is a living illustration about the message. God gave Hosea a message and then He made Hosea's life, marriage and family the illustration of the message. God's love is pure. It is both caring, gracious and kind and it is judging, correcting and rebuking. God's love will not leave people where they are when they are out of His will or pursuing false gods. Hosea's message is one of love that both disciplines and lures. We see this played out in the drama of Hosea.

Day 1

Read Hosea 1

Hosea had a message from God for the people of God. It was a message which he spoke, but more importantly, it was a message dramatized in Hosea's personal and family life. Hosea's name means "to save or deliver." God begins to deliver the message with God's call of Hosea. This is definitely not the kind of call we are used to seeing in the Bible. God's call originates with instructing Hosea to go and marry a prostitute and have children of prostitution. God gives the reason for such an extreme step, "*For the land has committed great harlotry by departing from the Lord.*" It is as clear as it can be, the reason God's call to Hosea took this form. God was going to display for Hosea and his listeners what was going on and what was going to happen. God's people had been unfaithful to Him and He was going to seek to lead them to repent.

Hosea immediately obeyed God's instruction and marries a prostitute by the name of Gomer. He submitted himself and his family to God's dramatic presentation. They had a son and he was given the name, Jezreel, which means "to sow" or "to scatter." The name, in this case, had to do with judgment. Jezreel was the name of a city which had historical significance. God was saying that He was going to bring judgment on Israel.

Hosea and Gomer also had a daughter and named her Lo-Ruhamah. Her name means “no mercy.” The reason for the name, once again, had significance for the people of Israel. God would no longer have mercy on Israel. Israel ignored the kindness and mercy shown to them by God in the past.

They had a third son and named him Lo-ammi which means, “not my people.” This is a picture of God’s response to their rejection of Him. They had chosen for themselves that He was not their God and He declares they are not His people. This is all about God’s judgment for their unfaithfulness. Here is how Tony Evans expresses it:

“After delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt, God had made a covenant with them. He promised that if they would keep his commands, they would be his own special “possession” (Exod 19:5). But, Israel had forgotten that the blessings under God’s covenant were conditioned on their obedience.”¹¹

Remember God’s faithfulness to you. Keep in mind His mercy and grace. Give thanks for His goodness and faithfulness. Remember, lest you forget!

¹¹ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God’s Kingdom Agenda.

Day 2

Read Hosea 2:1-13

The marriage is over. The divorce proceedings had begun. When the blessings of God are withdrawn because of disobedience, it is important to be reminded that the relationship is not lost. All that God was doing and is doing, in judgment and discipline, is to draw His people back to Himself. He causes or allows His people to get into situations of their own doing which results in their undoing. The Lord is letting His people go, just like Hosea let Gomer go. The goal was for Gomer and God's people to discover that God is the one who gives food and provisions. He will allow His people to become frustrated, dissatisfied, and desperate. They will wander and pursue their "lovers," but will not be satisfied.

Sin never satisfies. The pursuit of sin results in futility and a longing for more which leaves you exasperated. We see this taught in other places in scripture. In Romans 1:28, we read that those who were practicing perversion, God gave over to their passions. I believe the context is so they would see their error and turn to the Lord. We read in **1 Corinthians 5:5** that Paul spoke about the man living in perversion in the church by telling the people to, "*Deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*"

God disciplines His people so they will turn to Him.

"And you have forgotten the exhortation which speaks to you as to sons: "My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6 For whom the LORD loves He chastens, And scourges every son whom He receives." Hebrews 12:5-6 (NKJV)

Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. Hebrews 12:11 (NKJV)

We see how this is working in **Hosea 2:7**, *“She will chase her lovers, But not overtake them; Yes, she will seek them, but not find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband, For then it was better for me than now.’”*

God is not cruel. He is loving and kind, but will not force Himself on you. He will allow you to come to your own conclusion that you need and want Him. This usually comes when you discover your own way does not lead to contentment, but greater discontentment.

Are you seeking to stay fresh in your fellowship with the Lord? If not, return to Him now. Do not miss out on His blessings.

Day 3

Read Hosea 1:10-2:1 and Hosea 2:14-23

After the message of judgment regarding the names of the children, suddenly Hosea inserts a message of hope in the second half of Chapter 2. What a turnaround! When the Lord talks about judgment, He also gives a message of hope. Although the circumstances are bleak, Hosea talks about future hope and glory. He brings up the promise which was first given to Abraham about the massive number of descendants which will come and cannot be numbered. He promises that those who were not God's people will be called "*Sons of the living God.*" This makes me think of the words of John 1:12, "*But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God*" (John 1:12-13). All of this shows how it is God's plan to bring judgment, so He can bring blessings.

In Chapter 2 of Hosea, we read words of God which express love and compassion through Hosea. God says He "*Will allure her (Israel).*" He will speak comfort to Israel. These are words that reflect the love of a husband for his bride. He is going to woo her. All of this brings up thoughts of divine romance. This is God's plan. He is wooing His people into a relationship that is expressed in the Bible as a marriage. There is a turn from the names of "no mercy" to "mercy given." Those who were named "not my people," are now His people and they will say, "You are my God."

The breakup, the divorce is in the past, and God is taking all of the initiative to bring Israel back to Himself. When we were lost and separated from God, He made the move. He came and sought us, the lost. He took the initiative even though He had done nothing wrong. Thank Him now for His great love for you.

Day 4

Read Hosea 3

Once there was a little boy who made a little sail boat with his own hands. He would go and sail the little boat in a lake near his house. One day, a big gust of wind filled the sail of the little boat and it went out of site. It was gone, lost forever. The boy was heartbroken. About a year later, the little boy was out with his mother at a yard sale and something caught his eye. It was his little boat and it was for sale. He dug deep into his pockets and came up with the price to buy back his own little boat which he had made. Now it was more precious to him than ever. He made it, it was his. He lost it, found it and bought it back again. It was, now twice his.

How gloriously beautiful is the dramatic imagery of Hosea, Chapter 3. It is a short chapter with so much overwhelming imagery. The jilted husband, Hosea, is instructed again by God to go and love his unfaithful wife, but this time he has to pay a price for her. She has sold herself into prostitution and has no way out. The ugliness of this can only be expressed by what is really conveyed here. Gomer is not only unfaithful, she has sold herself to one who was now her handler. In more modern terms it would be a pimp. She was now the possession of another. Her husband had to go before everyone and buy back his own wife at a price. How humiliating that must have been. He married her when she was a prostitute. She became his wife and they had children together. She left him and returned to her “lovers” who used her and took advantage of her. Now he had to go out in public, find her and buy her back. Humility! Obedience! Love!

As I write these words alone in my office, I am moved to tears by this incredible picture so dramatically played out for the people to see. What moves me is that this is what happened to not only me but to all Jesus followers. Thank you, Lord, for loving me with a love that is so deep, so real, so surreal and to think, I must be really precious to You. I am twice yours.

Day 5

Read Hosea 14:1-9

We make a big jump to the final chapter of Hosea. It is hard to cover a 14-chapter book in five devotions. Our goal is to get the essence of the message. The message of the book of Hosea is God loves you even though you do not deserve it. This message is not only in the words of the book, but also in the drama of Hosea and Gomer's relationship and family. Gomer was undeserving of Hosea's love and redemption just as you and I are undeserving of God's love and redemption.

The call of God in Hosea is for God's people to repent and return. I believe this is an ongoing activity of the Jesus follower. Conviction is sweet. Don't get me wrong, it is not always enjoyable, but staying up-to-date with the Lord is a huge necessity! Sheila is very quick to let me know when I am not meeting her needs as her husband. I hate it when she does this, but she cannot quit. When we regularly read God's Word and allow it to speak and convict, we stay up-to-date with repentance, returning to Him in obedience. This allows us to stay in fellowship with Him. He keeps the relationship, we keep the fellowship.

In verse two, the people are told to pray. He tells them what to say, he tells them, "*Say to Him.*" The "Him" here is God. Just as Hosea was telling them what to say he is also speaking to us. He tells us what to pray. It is rich being able to pray back to God the prayers He tells us to pray. Here he tells us to pray that He will take away our iniquity and receive us graciously. We are then to use our words and lips to make confession of praise. Others cannot save us. Horses cannot be our hope of deliverance (see Psalm 33:17). We will not depend on idols we have made. Our mercy comes from God.

The outcome of all of this confessing, repenting, praising and obeying, is experiencing the ways of the Lord which are always and only the right way. This will make our walk righteous and not just foolish stumbling.

God is righteous and good to give us His Word and His light. Give thanks and walk daily, up-to-date with Him.

WEEK 87 THE FALL OF ISRAEL----- Dennis Watson

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

Day 1

Read 2 Kings 17:1-5

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

Hoshea and threw him in prison. God used the pagan king of Assyria to bring King Hoshea to a place of desperation.

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

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

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

Day 2

Read 2 Kings 17:6-14

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

The reason for this captivity of the people of the northern kingdom of Israel is recorded in **2 Kings 17:14** *“Nevertheless they would not hear; but stiffened their necks, like the necks of their fathers, who did not believe in the LORD their God.”*

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

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

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

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read 2 Kings 17:15-17

It is very difficult to read these words about God's people! How low can they go? People can plunge to incredible depths when they turn away from God. If people reject the one true holy God, there is a vacuum that is filled by the evil one. People either follow the Holy One or the evil one. Jesus said in **Matthew 12:30**, "*He who is not with me is against me.*" There is no neutrality! How did they get to this point of evil? It was a gradual slide down a slippery slope. These were God's people. He would not turn away from them.

Yesterday, we read the devotion talking about consequences of sin and disobedience. We have all experienced the consequences of sin. Consequences come in varying degrees. Some are short-lived, while others last a lifetime. When the Israelites did not enter the Promised Land after Caleb and Joshua gave a good report, the consequences were forty years of wandering and a whole generation who did not get to enter the Promised Land. In this case, the consequences were equally devastating. The ten northern tribes, known as Israel, ceased to exist. The people were scattered. For many years, the people were in bondage until the time of regathering. No matter how bad their sins, God never abandoned His people. He did eventually gather them again. He sent Jesus to ultimately deal with the problem of sin.

No matter how far a person turns away from God, there is always hope of restoration. For those who have come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ, nothing can separate them from the love of God.

Give thanks to God for His forgiveness that is found in Jesus Christ. None of us is sinless, but He has taken care of our sin in Jesus.

Day 4

Read 2 Kings 17:18-20

Unfortunately, the list of people who have experienced consequences due to foolish decisions and choices is exhaustive and continues to grow. For example, young athletes who make choices that get them in trouble with the law forfeit their opportunity to play in college or in the pros. Quite often a lifetime of regrets is made by what happens in just a moment.

The kings in the northern kingdom were evil. That is why they were rejected by God, thrown into prison, and taken captive. We read in these verses that this problem was also beginning to take place in the southern kingdom of Judah. God continued to protect Judah because there were some good kings who worshipped Him and obeyed His commands. We will soon see they also disobeyed the Lord and failed to heed the warning of the prophets.

Consequences are often very difficult and can last a long time. God uses circumstances to teach us and bring us to a place of desperation and repentance. This teaching also allows the consequences to leave a very bad taste in our mouths, leading us to want to avoid making those same choices again. Often, these consequences are the very wakeup call we need!

So it is, that both Israel and Judah would go into captivity. God brought devastating consequences on His people. But it doesn't stop there, the words of the Bible are filled with promises of God redeeming and bringing His blessings once again on His people.

Give thanks to God for the consequences He has brought into your life. Make sure to allow those consequences to turn you toward Him.

Day 5

Read Psalm 78:1-8

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

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

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

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

WEEK 88 GOOD KING, BAD KING -----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read 2 Chronicles 29:1-30

Thankfully, Hezekiah followed God and the things of God. From today’s scripture reading, we see that he took the time to try and wipe out all of the bad things in Judah. The wicked kings had made a mockery of the temple by bringing in idols. Hezekiah was determined to make things right. Not only did he clean out and repair the temple, he also offered sacrifices to the Lord and sprinkled blood on the altar for the sins of the people.

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

Many times, things happen that are out of our control. There may be things that happened before our time. Sometimes, people do evil things that affect others in the future. Someone growing up in a family that doesn’t have a history of following the Lord might find it easier to follow along as people did before, even if he or she now knows God and has learned about His ways.

Maybe there are those who have gone before you that did not exactly model Jesus to you. Maybe there were generations before you who didn’t follow God at all. God desires for you to follow Him and not to do what comes naturally or easily. May we daily surrender to the things of God. Regardless of what has gone on before us, may we be like Hezekiah and David as **Verse 2 of Chapter 29** says, *“He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord.”*

Day 2

Read 2 Chronicles 32:32-33 - 33:1-13

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

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

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

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

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read 2 Chronicles 30:1-26

In today's passages, we see Hezekiah call everyone from Israel and Judah to the temple to celebrate the Passover. Remember, the Passover goes all the way back to when the Israelites were in bondage to the Egyptians. The destroyer (Exodus 12:23) was going to go through every house and strike the first born of every family. God commanded the Israelites to put blood over the door so their homes would be "passed over" and no one in their house would die. The next morning the Egyptians were wailing and crying, but the Israelites had been spared.

Hezekiah called on Israel and Judah to observe the Passover. This was a special time during which he called all people to return to the Lord and put away their sin and seek Him. At this time, they slaughtered the Passover Lamb and offered burnt offerings. The blood was a reminder that their sin needed to be washed away.

This account in 2 Chronicles points to Jesus. Jesus died for our sins and we no longer need to offer sacrifices for those sins. Jesus was our Passover Lamb. I pray that you have put your trust in Jesus. If you haven't, it is as simple as recognizing your sin, acknowledging your sin before God, and trusting that Jesus came to die for those sins.

If you have trusted Jesus, heed Hezekiah's words today found in **2 Chronicles 30: 6-9**: *At the king's command, couriers went throughout Israel and Judah with letters from the king and from his officials, which read: "People of Israel, return to the LORD, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, that he may return to you who are left, who have escaped from the hand of the kings of Assyria. ⁷ Do not be like your parents and your fellow Israelites, who were unfaithful to the LORD, the God of their ancestors, so that he made them an object of horror, as you see. ⁸ Do not be stiff-necked, as your ancestors were; submit to the LORD. Come to his sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. Serve the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you. ⁹ 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.”

May our eyes ever be on Jesus and may our prayer be to serve the Lord our God and to return to Him and Him alone.

Day 4

Read 2 Chronicles 33:14-23

God often uses whatever means necessary to get our attention. In 2 Chronicles 33:10-11, we see that Manasseh and the people would not listen to the Lord, so He brought the army of Assyria against them. They took Manasseh prisoner and bound him in shackles like a slave. In his distress, he called out to the Lord. It took being a prisoner in shackles for God to get his attention.

God gets our attention through prayer, worship, and time spent with Him. He desires for us to walk in step with Him. God will use circumstances in our lives or in the lives of others to draw us to Him. It may be something He orchestrates or something He allows to get our attention.

However, God wants us to live out of a love relationship with Him. Thankfully, He got Manasseh's attention, after which, Manasseh trusted and followed the Lord. God's Word tells us that our hearts harden each time we hear His voice but choose to disobey or ignore Him. It can get to the point where we may not be able to hear God speak anymore, not because He stopped speaking, but because we have become so hardened to His voice that we don't recognize it anymore.

We should always want to hear God's voice. I don't want my heart to be hardened to the things of God, do you? I don't want God to have to get my attention in some distinct way because I am choosing to go my way and ignoring Him. I want to walk in step with God so I must continually acknowledge my faults to stay in line with God. As the song says, "Just a closer walk with Thee." Are you growing closer to the Lord or farther away? Hear His voice and run to Him.

Day 5

Read 2 Kings 19

Once again, God's plan prevails. Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, had threatened Jerusalem. In fact, we see in Verses 9-13 of today's passage that the King of Assyria taunted them, called them out, and made a joke and mockery of the one true God! He even went on to say that those who had gone before him had destroyed many of their people and their god hadn't saved them, so why should Hezekiah think that his God would? This Assyrian king wasn't backing down and he sought to put fear in God's people and in particular, Hezekiah. Hezekiah then did what we should all do when faced with fear, doubt, and struggles; he took it straight to the Lord. God answered through Isaiah, telling Hezekiah that none of what the Assyrian king said come true, but he would not enter the city or even shoot an arrow in the city of Jerusalem (Verses 32-34). Isaiah told Hezekiah the Lord would defend the city for His sake and for the sake of His servant, David (Verse 32). The chapter ends with 185,000 Assyrians being killed and the Assyrian king withdrawing. Later, the wicked king's life was taken by his own sons.

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

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

WEEK 89 JONAH AND NINEVEH-----Dennis Watson

Jonah was a prophet who prophesied at least once to King Jeroboam II of the northern kingdom of Israel (2 Kings 14:25). He prophesied that the kingdom would regain some territory previously lost. However, in the book of Jonah, there is no activity in the north mentioned. Instead, it tells of a message God gave Jonah to deliver to Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. It may have been that Jonah had retired in the region of Joppa. However, his life was suddenly interrupted with a message from God to take a 550 mile trip and travel to a Gentile city and announce God's coming judgment. The Assyrians were enemies of Israel. Jonah did not like the people nor did he want to see them repent and be spared the destruction that was coming. "To Jesus, the will of God was food that satisfied Him; to Jonah, the will of God was medicine that choked him."¹² This week we will look at the biblical historical account of a man of God who did not initially want to follow God's instructions, but ultimately did.

Day 1

Read Jonah 1:1-6

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

¹² Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - Old Testament - The Bible Exposition Commentary - The Prophets

Jonah had a definite attitude problem!

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

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

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

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

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

Day 2

Read Jonah 1:7-2:10

The great 19th century preacher, Charles Spurgeon, said God never allows His children to sin successfully. Boy was that true for Jonah! Jonah found himself trying to do the impossible—run away from God. He boarded a ship with great sailors. When the storm came, Jonah was asleep down inside the ship, oblivious to what was going on. The sailors awakened Jonah and asked him to pray. They had been praying to their false gods while Jonah, a follower of the one true God, was sleeping. Now they wanted him to pray, too. At this point, Jonah had pretty much trashed his testimony. The sailors cast lots to discover who was at fault for causing the storm; the process pointed to Jonah. They asked what was going on and Jonah came clean with them, telling them he was running from the Lord. When they asked what they could do to calm the storm, Jonah told them to throw him into the sea. The sailors were not willing to do that, so they just paddled harder, but their efforts didn't work. No amount of effort can fix our greatest problems. So, they prayed to the Lord asking that He not hold it against them and they threw Jonah into the sea.

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

Jonah's ordeal ended when the Lord had the big fish vomit Jonah onto dry ground. God rescued him from the mess he caused for himself. Thank the Lord that He saves even though we are all undeserving.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read Matthew 12:39-41

No one can thwart God's plan. No matter how stubborn and rebellious we may be, we will never hinder God's plan. However, we may miss out on experiencing God's blessings and benefits. Sin can never stop God's plan! God knows all things and He is always in control. God knew what Jonah was going to do. He knew Jonah would get on a ship and try to escape Him. God planned for Jonah to be swallowed by a great fish. He leaves us free to make our choices, but still He accomplishes His purposes.

We often think things "just happen." Take a moment to think about the crucifixion of Jesus, it didn't "just happen." It was all a part of God's plan. In fact, we read a lot about this in the prophecies given in the Old Testament. God was moving all things and orchestrating history to accomplish His purpose for His glory and praise.

God is always at work. In the Bible we read about people who ignored God, rebelled against God, or surrendered to God. Jonah did not ignore God, but he rebelled and went in the opposite direction.

Jesus took the biblical historical account of Jonah in the belly of the fish for three days and used it to say that He would be in the grave for three days. Jesus spoke of the event of Jonah being swallowed by the great fish as a real historical event. Just as the Lord rescued Jonah from the belly of the fish, He would rescue Jesus from the grave through the historical event called the resurrection.

Warren Wiersbe writes, "The life of Jonah cannot be written without God." Charles Spurgeon said, "take God out of the prophet's history, and there is no history to write."

Give thanks to the Lord for His writing of history in advance.

Day 4

Read Jonah 3:1-4:11

We see a huge change the second time around, when Jonah was no longer in the belly of the fish. The Word of the Lord came to Jonah and this time, instead of boarding a ship to get away from God's instruction, we read, "*So Jonah went to Nineveh.*" He repented and obeyed. It is one thing to say you are sorry when you do something wrong, but it is another to turn and do what is right. Jonah still was not happy. As Jonah preached the warning of God all around Nineveh, the people miraculously turned from their sin and turned to God. God chose not to destroy the people of Nineveh.

God warns us about our sin because He is serious about sin and holiness. He also loves people and does not find pleasure in the death of the wicked. God sent Jonah to warn the people of Nineveh so they would turn away from their sin. God is not desirous of any to perish, but that all would be saved.

We are all guilty of sin and, in reality, deserve only death and destruction. Jonah failed to understand he was in a relationship with God, not because he deserved it, but because of God's grace and mercy. Is there anyone or any group of people you would want to see God punish? Often, we are so overcome with anger over a person's behavior or lifestyle that we believe they deserve God's wrath. It is God's desire to show all people grace and mercy. We are to do all we can to see people brought into this kind of relationship with God. It appears that the people of Nineveh just did not know. God used Jonah to tell them and then God delivered them. Someone told you about God's plan to save, shouldn't you tell others? Tell even those you consider your enemies.

Ask the Lord for the grace to show grace to others.

Day 5

Read Isaiah 2:1-4

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

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

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

WEEK 90 JOSIAH, THE EIGHT-YEAR-OLD KING

-----Chris Watson

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

Day 1

Read 2 Chronicles 34:1-7

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

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

Let us follow God, not veering to the left or to the right, letting only the one true God determine our steps. Today, may your prayer be, “Lord I want to love and follow You with all that I am. I don’t want to let others or past experiences determine my steps. I want to walk step by step with You.” Remember, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, we are responsible for our words, actions, and thoughts. The same was true for Josiah. He could have followed the ways of those who went before him, but, thankfully he followed God. Under God’s direction, he followed the steps that God had placed before him. Seek God with all of your heart and follow what He has planned for you!

Day 2

Read 2 Chronicles 34:8-31

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

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

Secondly, the people disgraced the Word of God. They didn't care what God and His Word said. They lived as they wanted. They preferred to live out their selfish and lustful desires rather than to follow God. They neglected to read, hear, or study the Book of the Law, which was evident by the fact that no one even knew where it was.

We must not leave our Bibles to collect dust. Do we let them stay in our car for weeks on end? Perhaps we are not even able to find them. As Christ followers, we must not put aside His Word. We must remember our Bible is God's Word and it instructs us on how to know God and how to follow Him.

Do you want personal revival in your life? Read and study God's Word and live by it. Do you want to invest in others? Mentor them in God's Word and teach them the truths. May we not disregard God or His Word. If you have done so, confess your sin and repent, turning back toward God and His Word.

Day 3 CONNECT TO JESUS

Read 2 Chronicles 34:32-35:19

The Passover we read about here was celebrated the correct way. They had the Book of the Law and, as we see in 2 Chronicles 35:12, they sought to follow it in how they celebrated the Passover. Josiah and his officials provided the animals for the sacrifices. In all, there were 40,000 animals that were sacrificed as the people celebrated the Passover.

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

When you and I celebrate the Lord's Supper, we can look all the way back to Abram. He was going to sacrifice his own son, but God provided another sacrifice. More specifically, we can look to the first Passover, when God saved them after they placed blood over their doors. We no longer have to place blood over our door or offer sacrifices. Thank the Lord, the ultimate sacrifice was paid for you and me. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we must think of the blood that was poured out for our sins so we can have the promise of heaven, but more importantly, we can have a relationship with God. When you read about the Passover, take time to thank Jesus that He is our Passover lamb. We always want to celebrate the Lord's Supper just as He intended with our eyes fixed and turned to Jesus!

Day 4

Read 2 Chronicles 35:20-27

Even great leaders have their times of not making good decisions. The account today of Josiah, is one of those times. After Josiah stepped up to question Neco, the king of Egypt, Josiah went on to fight him even after Neco tried to warn him that if he opposed him, he would be killed.

Josiah may have questioned whether or not God really told him that, but we see in Verse 23 that the chronicler says Josiah would not listen to God's command. Maybe Josiah's emotions got the best of him. Either way, we know he disguised himself and went into battle where he was shot by archers and later died.

Commentators disagree on whether God had really spoken to Neco, but from what we see here, He apparently had. Matthew Henry says, "The Scripture does not condemn Josiah's conduct in opposing Pharaoh. Yet Josiah seems to deserve blame for not inquiring of the Lord after he was warned." Either way, Josiah didn't take the time to seek God in this matter of opposing Neco. We may remember a similar account with Joshua after the victory at Jericho. Joshua went in to defeat Ai, but was severely defeated because he didn't seek God before he began. If he had, he may have discovered that Achan had sinned, causing God not to be on their side.

Everyone is human; no one is perfect except God. We know that spouses, kids, family, and even friends with the best intentions, will not always make the best decisions concerning where God is leading them. This includes even those that seek to honor and follow God with all they have. As we face struggles, difficulties, and hard times like Josiah was facing, may we first take it to the Lord in prayer. We must trust Him, not taking things into our own hands. For Josiah, it cost him his life.

Day 5

Read Daniel 7:9-14

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

Who do you say that Jesus is? Is He just a way to heaven? Is He your “good luck” charm? Is He called on only when needed? Or, is He your Lord and Savior? In **John 17:3**, Jesus says, “*Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, who you have sent.*” This means that the Son of Man (Jesus) is much more than just a way to heaven, although He is that. Forgiveness of our sins, through the blood of Jesus, not only allows us to spend eternity with God in Heaven but it allows us to walk in a relationship with God. You can have that relationship right now, right here, everyday. While receiving Christ as your Lord is of highest importance, you are to spend the rest of your life learning and growing in the salvation that Jesus has given you. We learn we are saved from sin, saved from ourselves, saved from the enemy, and saved from hell. We also learn we are saved to righteousness, to heaven, and to victory, but most importantly, we are saved to God Himself, to a relationship with the almighty God.

As we read in Daniel, concerning the Son of Man, we know this was pointing forward to Christ, the Savior of the world. Today, thank God for your salvation and for the Son of Man. Be thankful for all that is wrapped up in the salvation of, and from Jesus Christ.

WEEK 91 THE DRY BONES-----Chris Watson

“God had assured them (God’s chosen people), in the foregoing chapter (Ezekiel 36), that he would gather the house of Israel, even all of it, and would bring them out of their captivity, and return them to their own land; but there were two things that rendered this very unlikely. That they were so dispersed among their enemies, so destitute of all helps and advantages which might favor or further their return, and so dispirited likewise in their own minds; upon all these accounts they are here, in vision, compared to a valley full of the dry bones of dead men, which should be brought together and raised to life. The vision of this we have (v. 1-10) and the explication of it, with its application to the present case (v. 11-14). That they were so divided among themselves, too much of the old enmity between Judah and Ephraim remaining even in their captivity. And so the prophet slides into a prediction of the kingdom of Christ, which should be set up in the world with God’s tabernacle in it, and of the glories and graces of that kingdom (v. 23-28).”¹³

Day 1

Read Ezekiel 37:1-4

Can you imagine walking into a cemetery and talking to bone that are scattered all about? If someone saw you talking to those bones, they would probably think you were crazy! In today’s passage we see that Ezekiel was focused on God and he wanted to do whatever God told Him to do. The Jews, God’s chosen people, had been through so much, most often because of their own disobedience, that they had lost hope.

“Ezekiel was to tell the bones that God would make breath enter the bones and they would come to life, just as in the creation of man when He breathed life into Adam (Genesis 2:7). Ezekiel obeyed, the bones came together, flesh developed, skin covered the flesh, breath entered the bodies, and they stood up in a vast army. This vision symbolized the whole house of Israel that was then in captivity. Like unburied skeletons, the people were in a

¹³ Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Concerned (Micah).

state of living death, pining away with no end to their judgment in sight. They thought their hope was gone and they were cut off forever. The surviving Israelites felt their national hopes had been dashed and the nation had died in the flames of Babylon's attack with no hope of resurrection.

The reviving of the dry bones signified God's plan for Israel's future national restoration. The vision also, and most importantly, showed that Israel's new life depended on God's power and not the circumstances of the people. Putting 'breath' by God's Spirit into the bones showed that God would not only restore them physically but also spiritually. The Israelites residing in the Holy Land today are not the fulfillment of this prophecy. It will be fulfilled when God re-gathers believing Israelites to the land (Jeremiah 31:33; 33:14–16) and Christ returns to establish His Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 24:30–31)".¹⁴

Have you been saved? Do you feel like you have lost hope? God wants to save you and give you hope. There is ALWAYS HOPE with God in this life, but more specifically in the one to come.

Thank Him for the hope that He gives. With God there are no hopeless situations.

¹⁴ <https://www.gotquestions.org/valley-dry-bones.html>

Day 2

Read Ezekiel 37:5-10

The situation for the Jews was dire. They were in calamity with no hope and they were in despair. Matthew Henry says, “The Jews in Babylon were like those dead bones, unlikely ever to come together, to be so much as a skeleton, less likely to be formed into a body, and lest of all to be a living body.”

Read today’s scripture again, but this time count how many times you see the word “I”, and count how many times “I” refers to the Lord. In the New King James, it is used 7 times and 3 times the word “I” refers to the Lord. The following statements refer to the Lord, the other 4 times refer to Ezekiel:

Surely, I will cause breath to enter into you. Verse 5

I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Verse 6a

Then you shall know that I am the Lord. Verse 6b

Ezekiel was prophesying but the Lord was the one who would bring forth life and hope to the dead bones. Ezekiel was to prophesy to the dead bones. He was to “preach” to them. The word was to go out just as it is to go out today. However, no matter the quality of the prophecy or preaching it is nothing without the Lord. Did you catch that? It is the same with you and me, no matter what we do, it is nothing without the Lord. The Lord was the one that would cause breath to enter the bones, and put flesh and skin upon them, not Ezekiel.

God, through the Holy spirit is the one who saves. We pray, we preach, we tell, we proclaim, but God saves. It is our responsibility to proclaim the Word of the Lord. Has the Lord breathed life into you? Have you trusted Him? Has He saved you? If not, would you call on Him now? If you have, are you proclaiming the Good News? **Acts 1:8** tells the people that they will “*Be His witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the utter most parts of the world.*” May we witness well.

Day 3

Read Ezekiel 37:11-14

God commanded Ezekiel to prophesy to the wind and told him what to say. In the Hebrew language, the word *ruah* can mean wind, breath, or Spirit. Jesus made use of this when He spoke to Nicodemus about the blowing of the wind and the new birth through the Spirit (John 3:5-8). There's also a reference here to the creation of Adam in Genesis 2. At his creation, Adam was complete physically, but he had no life until the breath of God entered into him (v. 7). When Ezekiel spoke the living Word of God, the breath from God entered the dead bodies and they lived and stood to their feet.

The Lord then explained the meaning of the vision. The dead dry bones represent the whole Jewish nation, both Israel and Judah, a divided nation and a dead nation, like bleached bones on a battlefield. Israel's situation seemed hopeless, but "with God, all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26). There will come a day when God's living Word of command will go forth and call His people from their "graves," the nations to which they have been scattered across the world (Ezek. 37:21; Jer. 31:8; Matt. 24:31). The Children of Israel will come together, but the nation will not have spiritual life until they see their Messiah, believe on Him, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit of life (Ezek. 39:29; Zech. 12:9-13:1). The nation will be born—and born again—"in a day" (Isa. 66:7-9).

Of course, there's a spiritual application in this vision for any individual or ministry that is in need of new life from God. Too often God's people are like that standing army, lifelike but not alive. How does the life come? Through the Holy Spirit using the faithful proclamation of the Word of God. Said Charles Spurgeon, "Decayed churches can most certainly be revived by the preaching of the Word, accompanied by the coming of the heavenly breath from the four winds." From time to time, in response to His people's prayers, the Lord has seen fit to send a new "breath

of life" to His church and His servants, and for that blessing we should be praying today. ¹⁵

Have you come to Jesus? Are you walking with Him? Are you alive?

¹⁵ Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Reverent (Ezekiel).

Day 4

Read Ezekiel 37:15-28

The nation of Israel was a united people until after the death of Solomon. His son's unwise and arrogant policies divided the kingdom in 931 B.C., with ten tribes forming the Northern Kingdom of Israel (also called Ephraim or Samaria) and the tribes of Judah and Benjamin forming the Southern Kingdom of Judah. The Northern Kingdom soon went into idolatry and apostasy and in 722 B.C. was taken by Assyria, but Judah had some good kings and maintained the Davidic line and the ministry at the temple. However, toward the end of Israel's political history, some very weak kings reigned and the nation drifted into idolatry and unbelief. The Lord finally brought the Babylonians to chasten His people. There is a political Israel today, but the majority of the Jewish people are scattered around the world.

“This is the last of Ezekiel's ‘action sermons.’ He took two sticks, each one to represent one of the divisions of the Jewish nation. One he labeled ‘For Judah’ and the other ‘For Joseph.’ Like a performer before an audience, the prophet announced that the two sticks would become one in his hands—and they did! The people saw what he did but they didn’t understand what he meant by it. He explained that the Lord would gather the people together to one place, their own land of Israel. He would make them one nation, obedient to one king, and (most important) worshiping one God. There would be no more idols or disobedience to the law of the Lord.

But what would maintain the unity of the people? For one thing, the Lord would cleanse them and renew spiritual life within them so that they no longer had any ambitions to compete with one another. Old jealousies and enmities would be gone (Isa. 11:13) and Israel and Judah would together humble themselves and seek the Lord (Jer. 50:4; Hosea 11:1). Another factor is that their one king would be the Messiah, and He would shepherd them with love and grace. He would be their “prince forever” (Ezek. 37:25) and serve as the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6).

Third, the Lord would so order and bless the land that the nation would be one (Ezek. 37:25). This will be further explained in

chapter 45. The nation would be governed by a ‘covenant of peace’ (37:26; 34:22-25), which is the ‘New Covenant’ that Jeremiah wrote about in Jeremiah 31:31-34. But central to the nation’s unity will be the new temple (Ezek. 37:26-28) where the glory of God will dwell. In their wilderness days, Israel had the tabernacle to unite the camp of Israel, with each tribe assigned a specific place to pitch their tents. The temple in Jerusalem was also a source of unity, for three times a year the men had to go to Jerusalem to celebrate feasts, and the people were allowed to offer sacrifices only at the temple.

In chapters 40-48, Ezekiel will go into detail describing this future temple and its ministries. God called it ‘my tabernacle’ (37:27) because the Hebrew word means ‘a dwelling place.’ God’s presence with His people will sanctify the land, the temple, and the nation, just as He promised in His covenant (Lev. 26:11-12). The nations of the earth will come to worship the Lord with His people Israel (Isa. 2:1-5) and ‘the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea’ (Hab. 2:14).

Whether it’s the Children of Israel or the saints in the church today, the Lord wants His people to be united. ‘Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity’ (Ps. 133:1). Paul appealed to the believers in Corinth to cultivate unity in the church (1 Cor. 1:10), and he exhorted the Ephesian believers to ‘make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace’ (Eph. 4:3, NIV). Sometimes it takes prayer, sacrifice, and patience to maintain the unity of God’s people, but it’s important that we do so. Jesus prayed that His people might be one and manifest to the lost world the living unity between Christ and His church and among believers and local churches (John 17:20-23). A divided church is not a strong church or a church bearing witness to the grace and glory of God. God’s people today need the fresh wind of the Spirit to give us new life from God and new love for one another.¹⁶

The only thing that unites all of us is the Lord. This is something that ALL believers have in common. Be united in Christ.

¹⁶ Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Reverent (Ezekiel).

Day 5

Read Psalm 23

Often we hear this Psalm read at funerals. Verse 4 is probably one of the most recognized and quoted scriptures. This Psalm can also be applied to many areas of life. It was particularly relevant to where the people were in Ezekiel.

Let's break it up:

The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

Does this mean we shall get all we want? No. Rather it means that at the Lord as our Shepherd we shall not be in want anything that is really necessary and good for us. God will provide for us and at times that provision may come with struggles and difficulties but God will provide. God will provide for our needs; we are reminded of this in Matthew that if He takes care of the sparrow He will take care of us.

He makes me to lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul.

God is our comforter. Scripture tells us He is the, "Prince of Peace." The green pastures and the still waters make us think of nourishment and as we mentioned above God does provide for our physical needs but also our spiritual one's. Time with the Lord and His Word is like food to our soul. It does in fact restore our soul. When we are down it brings us up and when we need Truth, it provides it. The cares and difficulties of this world can at times leave us down and exhausted but as we depend on the Lord He provides refreshment and restoration.

He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Sheep have the tendency to go the wrong way. In fact, some have said if one sheep goes off a cliff the others may follow. The Lord though lead His "sheep" to the Truth. If we are following and listening our Shepherd He will never lead us wrong.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

No matter what comes our way, God will be with us. As believers we don't fear death. However, at times, like David was, we go through struggles and difficulties in our life. We can know that God comforts and guides us and we don't have to fear life, death or anything in between.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

God met David's physical needs. Though enemies hovered near, God fed him when he hungered and anointed him with oil when he needed healing. Like David, we must recognize that we have one source. There are many resources—many channels God may use to provide and care for your physical well being—but you have only one source. And God never runs dry. That's why David's cup overflowed.¹⁷

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

What an ending! No matter in life or death, as believers, we will dwell with God forever.

Take time to thank God for being the Good Shepherd and for His being faithful.

¹⁷ Tony Evans Bible Commentary, The: Advancing God's Kingdom Agenda

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