

Reading the Bible
through in a year.

Reflections by Michael Perry

Volume 4

DAYS 271-365

Isaiah	Amos	Haggai
Jeremiah	Obadiah	Zechariah
Lamentations	Jonah	Malachi
Ezekiel	Micah	
Daniel	Nahum	
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Galatians	Titus	III John
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Philippians	Hebrews	Revelation
Colossians	James	
I Thessalonians	I Peter	
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II Timothy	II John	

HUMILITY
VISIONS
COMPASSION
DISSENTION
DOOM
PRAISE
PERSERVERANCE
RESTORATION
TRUST
PROPHECIES
CORRUPTION
WISDOM
SACRIFICE
JUDGEMENT
HOPE
REBELLION
DESTRUCTION

This effort is dedicated to my wife Denise, the love of my life, who has been my constant morning companion in reading God's Word for 27 years.

To my assistant, Katie Witbeck, for transforming 365 blog entries into workable documents.

To Lynn Fischer, SpringHill Development Coordinator, along with my wife Denise, for their diligent and effective editing of 365 days of journal entries—thank you.

Special thanks to Mike Smith and his team at Designvox for their creative giftedness, encouragement and willingness to take on this project. Their work made the publication of these journal entries a reality and the life transformation of many more people possible.

Dear Friend,

You are rounding the final turn towards the finish line of reading the entire Bible. As you close in on your goal, take a moment and reflect on how you felt when you began this incredible journey. Can you see a change in your perspective about the Bible, your faith and your life? More importantly, has your knowledge and love of Christ grown? The impact these changes have had on your life most likely will be subtle, which is why it is so important to take a moment to consider where you were and where you are now. When you grasp the changes God has made in your life, your desire for Him and His Word will continue to grow.

As you move into the last quarter of both the Old and New Testaments, you will be able to contrast remarkable points in redemptive history. In the Old Testament, you will see the slow and painful demise of God's nation and His chosen people—Israel—through the eyes of many prophets. At times it can be painful to read how God's people easily walked away from Him and their covenant with Him. The consequences are, at points, almost too horrific to grasp. Yet, in the midst of "fire and brimstone", God provides His prophets glimpses into the New Covenant and a new understanding of God's Kingdom that will soon come with the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

It is in the final quarter of the New Testament that we see this Kingdom, now called the Church, grow and develop. As we continue to read Paul's letters and the letters of John and Peter, we begin to see that this Kingdom—though inaugurated with Christ's coming—is not fully realized. Instead, we are given the promise that one day we will see the full reality of this Kingdom here on earth. At the end of the New Testament we see clearly the tension between Kingdom today and Kingdom tomorrow. It is this tension we live with every day and is why we can easily relate to this part of the Bible.

So as you complete your journey through the Bible, my prayer continues to be that God's Word will change both your perspective and your life. As your perspective changes, I pray that God will use you to change the world He has placed you in.

By the transforming power of His Word,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Perry", with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Michael Perry, President
SpringHill Camps

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Relational accountability with God's people.

Isaiah receives the Lord's Word about Israel and the Jews, and also about the nations around Israel. God calls out each one for their ungodly behavior, their poor treatment of the Jews and for worshipping false gods. In it, we see the accountability that all people have for their relationship with God and how they treat other people, especially God's people. It reminds us that much of the bad and evil happening to people and nations is self-inflicted and caused by unfaithfulness to God.

Part of what the nations did not do was take care of those who were in need or who were oppressed. Paul tells the Galatians they are to be different and never give up on doing good for others; he tells them to "carry the burdens of others." We are to do the same because we know that Christ did it for us. Paul ends his letter by summarizing what he has already said—telling the Galatians, and us, to boast in nothing but "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (6:14), that being a "new creation" in Christ is what counts (6:15).

Isaiah's prophecies about Israel and Judah.

Isaiah continues his prophecies about the neighboring nations of Israel, and specifically, Judah. Two messages continue to be emphasized through Isaiah's words. First, is condemning those nations for oppressing people, especially God's people, because it will lead to their destruction. Secondly, even in the midst of their impending destruction and doom, God provides hope and a way out; they need to turn and worship Him as the true God and Lord of all the nations, and not just Israel.

This theme of turning to God through Jesus Christ begins Paul's message to the church in Ephesus. Paul is delighted by the Ephesians' commitment to God, through Christ, and their experience of living this faith out by their "love for all the saints" (1:15). Paul takes us quickly into deep theological waters as he explains our relationship to God through the work of Jesus Christ. These waters provide us security and assurance of God's love and the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross. This in turn gives the Ephesians, and us, confidence about our place in His Kingdom.

All nations will be accountable.

Isaiah continues his prophecies against the neighbors of Israel. One of the common themes in these prophecies, and among these nations, is their pride and the sense that the God of Israel cannot impact them. There is a sense that if God does not protect the Jews from their aggressors how can He bring justice to their injustice? Each prophecy ends with a reminder that the God of the Jews is also the God of the entire earth. He is not just the God of Israel, but of all nations and He will call all nations into account.

In Ephesians 2, Paul addresses a view of God's justice. As a result of God's righteousness and our own sin, we are all dead in our transgressions. However, God demonstrates not only His divine justice, but also His love by sending His Son, Jesus Christ into the world to die for us and rise again so we too can resurrect spiritually, and one day, physically. This new life is a gift from God that we receive through faith in Jesus Christ. In Christ, God's great justice and His unending love is given to those who trust in Him.





There are no exemptions for being God's chosen people.

Isaiah's prophecies do not stop with Israel's neighbors—they also include Israel, Judah, and in particular, Jerusalem which Isaiah calls the "Valley of Vision" (22:1, 5). The same standards of righteousness apply to Jerusalem, as well as their neighbors—there are no exemptions for being God's chosen people and God's chosen city.

This idea—God's people not being exempt from suffering as the consequence of sin—is central to Paul's understanding of his own suffering on behalf of Christ and His people. Paul never questions why he is suffering or complains about it, because he knows it is his special calling on behalf of the Gospel. What Paul understands is suffering for God's people leads to growth both in us individually and in His Kingdom on earth. As a matter of fact, Paul reminds us that even through suffering God is able "to do immeasurably more than all we could ask or imagine" (3:20). He can do so not just for our benefit, but for His glory and the glory of His Church.

God's sovereign rule.

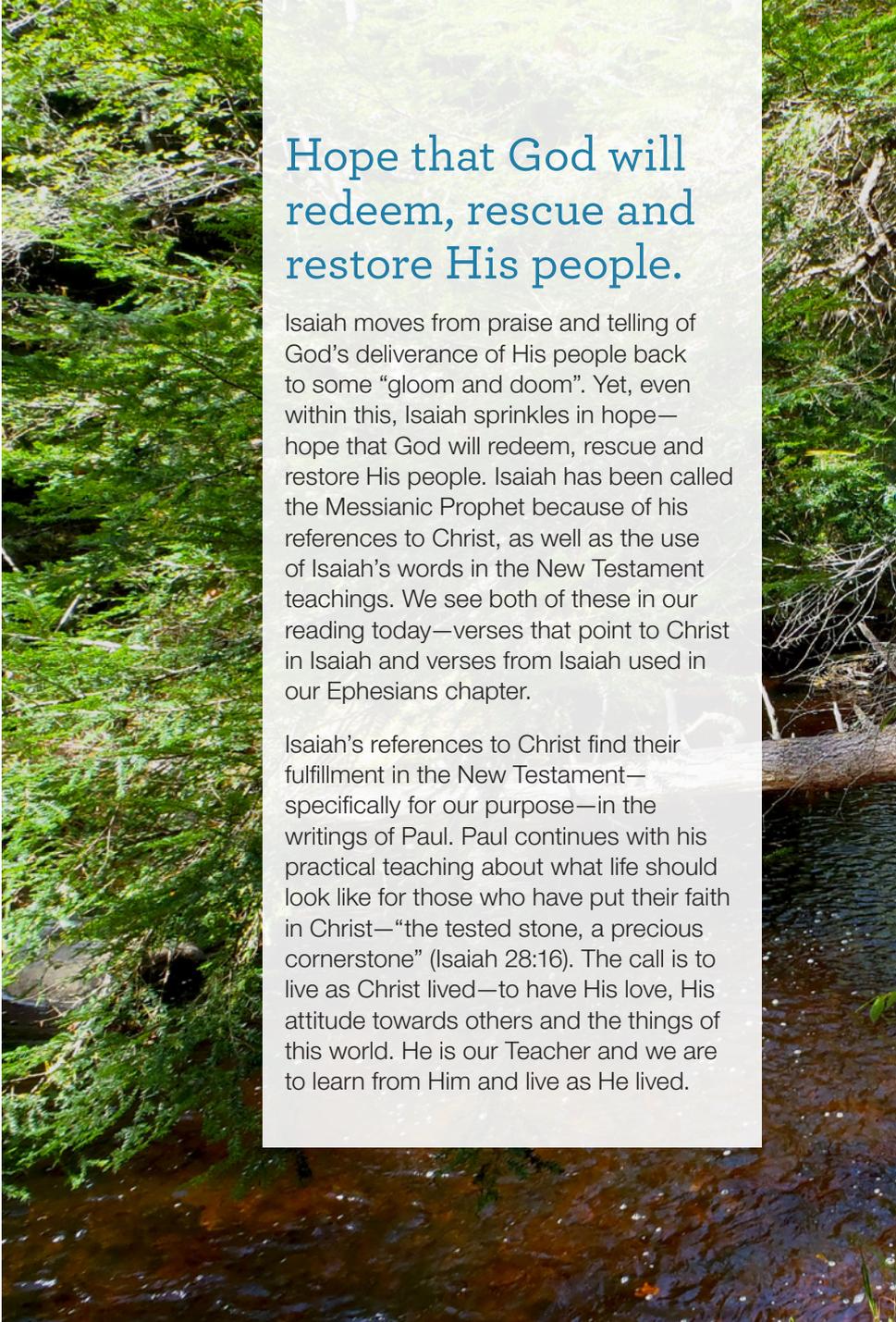
Isaiah turns to praises of God after chapters of prophecies of doom. Chapters 25 and 26 read similarly to the Psalms—where song and poetry come together to acknowledge the greatness of God in beautiful ways. Isaiah's perspective allows us to see God's goodness as it reflects on His work on behalf of His people. Thus, as we read these chapters, we are moved



to focus on God's sovereign rule even when the world seems to be out of control.

After some theological discussion and a “psalm” of his own, Paul moves the Ephesians to practical discussion about their

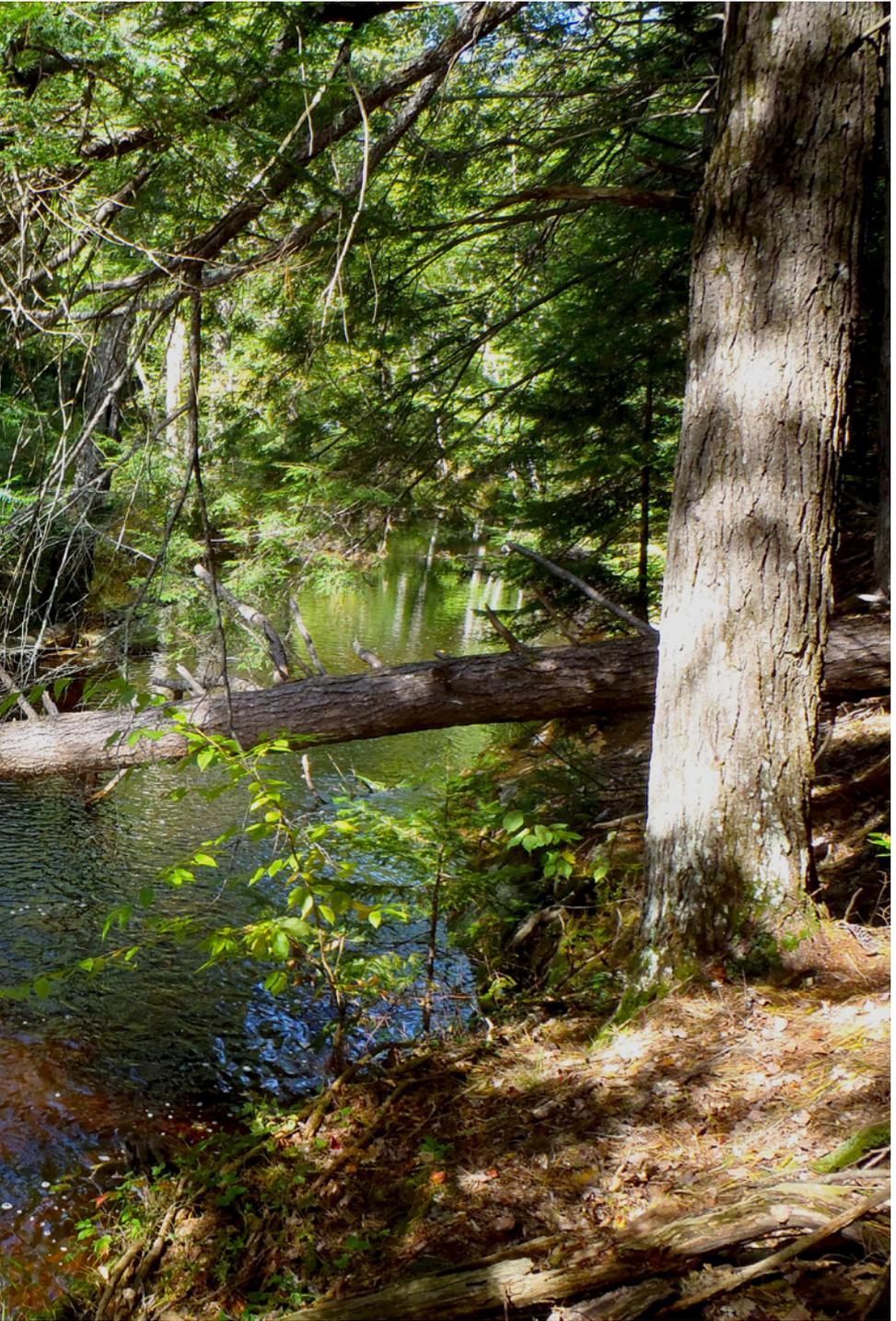
lives. Paul never remains at a theological level, but takes the theology he has taught and applies it to the specific situations faced by the people he is writing to. In this case, he challenges the Ephesians to unify within their church and to live a life consistent with the calling they have received from Christ to be His people.



Hope that God will redeem, rescue and restore His people.

Isaiah moves from praise and telling of God's deliverance of His people back to some "gloom and doom". Yet, even within this, Isaiah sprinkles in hope—hope that God will redeem, rescue and restore His people. Isaiah has been called the Messianic Prophet because of his references to Christ, as well as the use of Isaiah's words in the New Testament teachings. We see both of these in our reading today—verses that point to Christ in Isaiah and verses from Isaiah used in our Ephesians chapter.

Isaiah's references to Christ find their fulfillment in the New Testament—specifically for our purpose—in the writings of Paul. Paul continues with his practical teaching about what life should look like for those who have put their faith in Christ—"the tested stone, a precious cornerstone" (Isaiah 28:16). The call is to live as Christ lived—to have His love, His attitude towards others and the things of this world. He is our Teacher and we are to learn from Him and live as He lived.



The nature of God.

As we continue to read the Old Testament prophets, one suggestion that may help bring these writings alive is to search for words and phrases that describe the nature of God. For example, in chapter 29 God says He is the Potter (verse 16) and the Holy One of Israel (verse 19). In chapter 30, He is gracious, compassionate, a God of justice (verse 19) and our Healer (verse 26). We learn so much about the full nature of God as we absorb all the words that describe Him in both the Old and New Testaments.

This complete understanding of God allows Paul to provide a more practical, yet important, instruction to the Ephesians—and thus to us—concerning their relationships with one another. But, this understanding of God shows itself even more in Paul’s description of the spiritual battle we are all engaged in. Paul provides us an inspiring picture at the end of his letter, one that aligns perfectly with the revealed nature of God.

The danger of worldly securities.

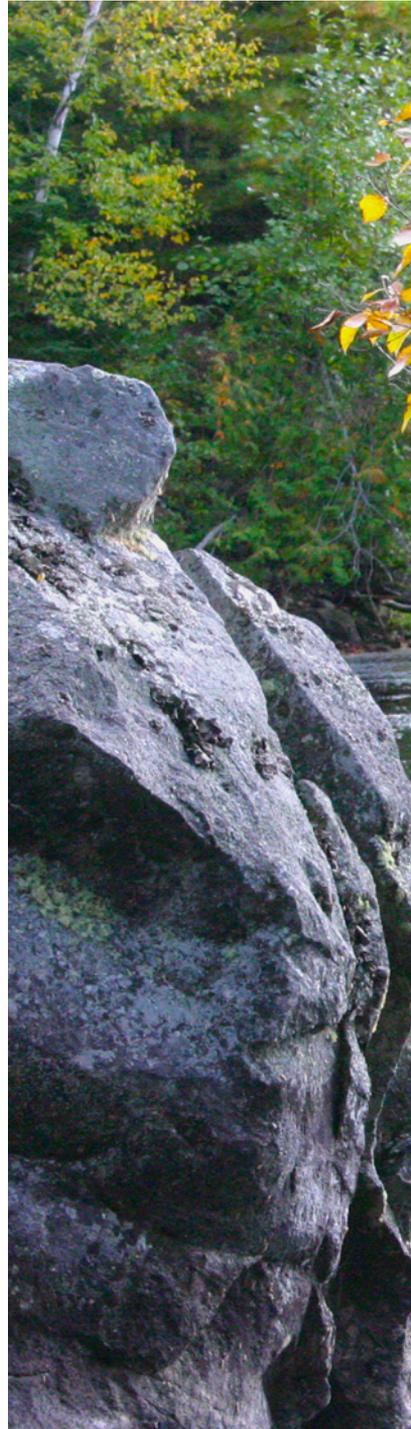
Isaiah reminds us of the dangers in putting our trust in people, or nations, and not in God. The danger lies in being persuaded that worldly securities—money, wealth, political or military powers—can ultimately protect us and advance our lives. It is, as Isaiah points out so clearly, in God we are to put our trust and dependence for our security and our future. He is the God who rules over and sustains even the most powerful nations and can make them a wasteland in a moment.

The faith that Isaiah is directing us towards can be seen in the life of Paul as he shares his situation with the Philippians. Paul is in prison under the power of earthly rulers, but he knows that his source of strength and his future days are ultimately in the hands of God. This is a perspective we should strive for—a faith we will need if we are to see the world in the appropriate light and live rightly in it.

Hope to those who have faith in God.

Placed between two chapters dealing with “doom and destruction”, Isaiah 35 provides a glimmer of hope to those who have faith in God. This chapter shows a place for those who trust in God and walk in His ways. It is a picture of restoration and renewal—populated with whom God has ransomed through the death of Christ—intended to experience the fullness of God and His world the way it is meant to be.

This same hope and sense of restoration is not just a future state, but one we can experience at some level now in Christ. If we experience today a taste of this future state, Paul calls us to live in such a way. Through this, others will see and desire to have the same hope and future we have and the blessings it brings to our lives. Isaiah’s future place for us can be a reality now and can provide an open door for others to join us in Christ’s Kingdom, and thus, making the reality of His Kingdom present in our world today.





There is nothing out of God's control.

Isaiah cites a story we have read in II Kings 18-20 and II Chronicles 32. It is repeated a third time because the significance of the events recorded are seen as a miraculous work of God in a seemingly helpless situation. This story reminds us that there is ultimately nothing out of God's control or anything that can derail His purposes. He is able to rescue and save us even out of the direst circumstances.

This trust in the fact that God can do what we are incapable of doing penetrates Paul's entire perspective about his own life. Paul tells the Philippians that he has no confidence in himself to be able to live aligned with God's purposes. His confidence is in Christ who resurrected from the dead. This same power that resurrected Christ is available to us, as it was to Paul through Christ, and enables us to live spiritually resurrected lives.



The coming of Christ.

Isaiah 40 is one of the most quoted and thus well-known chapters, not only in Isaiah, but in all of the Old Testament. It speaks directly to the coming of Christ and His purpose of saving His people by providing for them exactly what they (and we) need. It points us to the role of John the Baptist in preparing both Israel and the world for the coming of Christ. The entire message of this chapter provides us hope and encouragement in a God who loves us and will assure His plans for us become reality.

It is in this spirit that Paul lives his own life, dependent on God through the generosity of the churches he planted and serves. Paul challenges the Philippians to have this same perspective and to live as he did—Christ-focused and centered. Paul's call is practical and important; like him we are to rejoice always and not to be anxious about anything, but instead, be content in all circumstances. When we do this, we reflect the reality of Christ in our lives.



Isaiah promises that a Savior will appear.

Isaiah once again promises the Jews that a Savior will appear. In this case, Christ is called “my servant...my chosen one” (42:1) who will deliver Israel and bring justice to their cause. This Chosen One will become “a covenant for the people and a light to the Gentiles” (verse 6). We learn that the Messiah will not only come to Israel, but to all people and bring healing and restoration to the world along with freedom to all people who put their faith in Him.

We learn in the first chapter of Colossians that Jesus Christ is the Servant, the Chosen One of God. This is one of the most profound and beautiful texts in all of Scripture where Paul describes Christ. In Colossians 1:15-20, we see the parallels between Paul and Isaiah and their understanding of the Messiah. Both Paul and Isaiah are the Good News—the mystery which has been hidden but now is revealed to both the Jews and the Gentiles.

Israel pulls away from God.

God is the only God, there are none beside Him. God is the Savior of Israel and the Savior of the world. Yet, as we read through the Scriptures, Israel throughout its history continues to be unfaithful to Him. They have the reality of the one true God in their midst, but their human nature continues to pull them away. It is a sad reality, as you reflect on it, people who clearly saw God work on their behalf could be unfaithful to Him.

At the root of the Jews' issue with God was their human nature. A nature that has a tendency to move away from God and all that is His. Even self-discipline and human regulations cannot stop the momentum in the slide of all our natural self. Paul, knowing Israel's history as well as his own, challenges the Colossians to something greater and higher than simple rules. He challenges us to allow God to crucify our natural selves with Christ so we are able to live by the power of His resurrection. God enables us to live a life He has designed.



The Jews pending destruction and restoration.

Through Isaiah, God tells the Jews not only of their pending destruction as punishment for their unfaithfulness, but also of their eventual delivery and restoration from it. Isaiah is specific enough to name the leader who will begin the process of national restoration—Cyrus—a Persian, who returns the Jews back to Jerusalem in order to rebuild the temple. It is amazing to think that God revealed decades earlier the exact person to restore His people; it provides confidence and credibility in His Word.

After letting the Colossians know that rules will not lead to their spiritual growth, Paul lays out a better plan in the next chapter. Paul shows the key to living our lives in alignment with God, and His expressed will for us, centers around Jesus Christ. We are to clothe ourselves in Him and create our lives on His expressed Word—living these Words out through the power of Christ’s Spirit.



Consequences for turning your back on God.

Isaiah's writings continue to become more "visionary" and glorious in nature. His references to Israel's ultimate salvation and to the One who will bring it can be seen throughout these chapters. There is hope, not just for Israel, but for everyone who is part of His community of people. However, there continues to be warnings of the consequences for turning our backs on God and the way He is calling us to live. Hope and warning—two sides of the same coin we call the Good News.

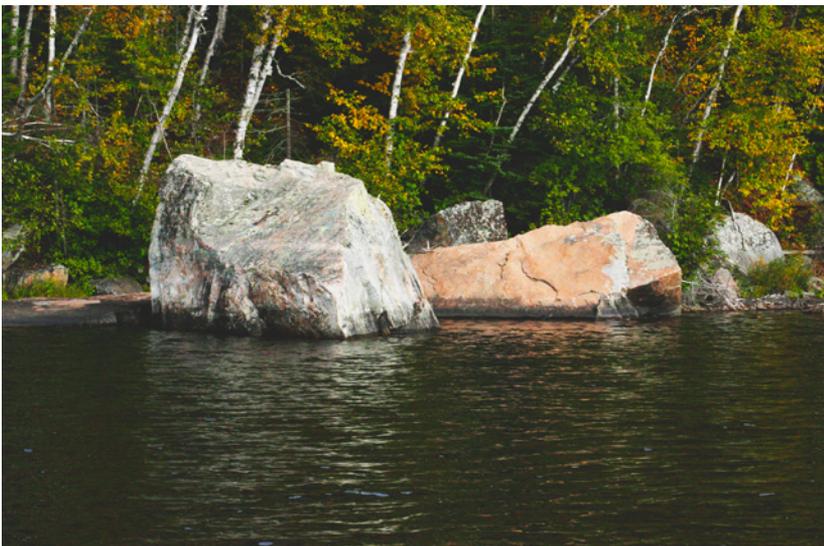
Paul finishes his letter to the Colossians with this same message of hope and warning, but at a more personal level. The hope is clearly the fact that the Colossians have been given the "mystery of Christ" (verse 3) which Paul calls "the hope of glory" in Colossians 1:27. But Paul also warns the Colossians to be "watchful", "wise to outsiders" and to "make the most of every opportunity" (4:5). We need the hope found in the "mystery of Christ" and the warning of what life looks like without Him.



A message of hope.

Isaiah continues to weave his message of hope as expressed in Israel's future salvation—faith in God who delivers on His promises and warnings to not fall away from God and the life He is calling us too. In the midst of these key qualities we receive from the Gospel, Isaiah also provides a glimpse of Jesus Christ. He is the Servant who perfectly obeys His Father's Will. He is the Servant who suffers on behalf of God and His people, but who overcomes His suffering to deliver everlasting salvation.

These same themes of hope and faith begin Paul's letter to the Thessalonians. He commends their faith even in light of their suffering. They show such great faith that it becomes known throughout the Roman Empire. This faith comes through the hope that is found in the Gospel, given to them by Paul. It is these words that the power of God's Spirit works through them giving hope, faith and love—to “work”, “labor” and “endure” (verse 3) for the sake of Christ.



The purpose of Christ's death and suffering.

There are no clearer chapters that point to Christ in all of the Old Testament than the ones we read today in Isaiah. In particular, chapter 53 provides a picture of the life, and more importantly, the purpose of Christ's death and suffering on our behalf. It is hard to read these words and not wonder if they were actually written after the death of Christ, instead of hundreds of years before He was born. But the truth God provided to the Jews was all the information they needed to identify the Messiah when He came to them. It is on this promise, and God's making good on it through Christ, that we have hope and faith.

It is hard to grasp how incredible the words of Isaiah are in light of the New Testament where we can see Christ so clearly. This vision of Christ drove Paul to share this Great News with people, such as the Thessalonians. It is also why he had so much joy in their acceptance of his words—their receiving of Christ and their commitment to live for Him. Christ “took up our infirmities”, “carried our sorrows” and was “pierced for our transgressions” (Isaiah 53:4-5) so we can have the life He created us for.

Salvation through Jesus Christ is for all people and nations.

Salvation does not belong exclusively to Israel as Isaiah points out in chapter 56. God's plan included salvation through Jesus Christ for all people and nations. The one exception lies with the judgment that the wicked will receive. God does not promise the wicked salvation, He only promises the consequences of their rebellion. Their wickedness and rebellion find its basis in a lack of faith in God—without God as our focus, the outcome of our life will be wickedness and rebellion.

It is in faith, as found in the Thessalonians, that the opposite of wickedness and rebellion become a reality in our lives. As Paul describes the Thessalonians, we begin to see a picture of what faithful lives can look like. Faithful people love others, have the ability to withstand temptations, persecution and suffering, and ultimately, can stand before God pure and blameless because of faith in the sacrificial work of Christ on the cross. Living a life like the Thessalonians should be our goal—a life built on faith in Christ and one that reflects this reality.



God's offer of salvation.

Isaiah continues to build on his theme of God's salvation by describing the response we should have to His offer of salvation. God calls us through Isaiah to acknowledge our sin and receive God's redemption. When we do, we will see God's Kingdom, referred to in chapter 60 as Zion, and become a part of it. Then we will enjoy the benefits of the Kingdom as described in chapter 61. Christ used the words of this chapter to describe and to proclaim Himself as Messiah in Luke 4.

It is in this same hope of restoration that Paul speaks about in I Thessalonians 4. Paul does not want the Thessalonians "to be ignorant" about the promise of full restoration when Christ returns. This restoration includes the resurrection of those who have died as Christians. When Christ returns, He will restore true Zion and consummate His Kingdom here on earth. Jesus Christ completely fulfills the hope Isaiah wrote about which we have been reading. This needs to be our hope and the place we look to for our lives today and into the future.

God rescues us from our sin.

Isaiah leads us into a beautiful response from the gracious God who loves, rescues and restores His people to their rightful place. For the Israelites, these words represent a physical reality—a true life situation. For us it is a picture of our God who, through Christ, because of His love for us, rescues us from our sin and restores us to our rightful relationship with Him.

The final rescue and restoration of God's people is described by Paul as he prepares the Thessalonians for Christ's second coming. God's final plan for the restoration of His people and for all His creation will come when Christ returns. It is Christ's purpose to restore all things to the place that God created them to be. Paul calls the Thessalonians, and us, to always be ready and prepared for that day. It will be the day when Christ returns that we will not be found lacking and can sing His praises like Isaiah.

A new heaven and a new earth.

As the book of Isaiah comes to an end, we are given a clearer picture of the hope we are called to throughout the book. Isaiah tells us that the future holds a “new heaven and a new earth” where “the former things will not be remembered” (65:17). Death, sadness and poverty will be no more. It is a message of complete restoration of the world back to its original state—before sin entered and corrupted it. This is the place our hearts have always desired to be.

It is also the place Paul looks forward to and points the early church toward. From a New Testament perspective, the picture becomes even clearer—Christ will usher in the “new heaven and new earth” when He is “revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels” (1:7). On that day, Christ will “be glorified in His holy people and to be marveled among all those who have believed.” (1:10). It will be a great day—a day when all of God’s promises will be completely and fully fulfilled.



The coming destruction of Judah and Jerusalem.

Jeremiah is a book about the coming destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. Jeremiah has been called the “weeping prophet” because of the gloom and doom of his message and his personal response to it. Yet, as we read the first two chapters, it is clear why he writes with such sadness. First, he has been called to be God’s voice during the end of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. Second, and more importantly, he is writing about the cause of this great destruction—the utter unfaithfulness and the spiritual adultery of God’s people.

The gloom continues in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians as he continues to educate them on the circumstances that will come before Christ’s return. He tells the Thessalonians, and us, that before Christ’s return, evil will continue to grow and spread throughout the world as represented by a person who will try to deceive both God’s people and the world in general. Evil’s goal once again, as it was in Jeremiah’s day, is to entice God’s people into unfaithfulness and spiritual adultery—a state Paul strongly warns us to be aware of and to avoid.

Judah's lack of faith.

Paul says in II Thessalonians 3:2, “for not everyone has faith.” This truth lies at the heart of Jeremiah’s writings today. What becomes obvious is that the lack of faith in God, by Judah, eventually leads to unfaithfulness and spiritual adultery. This spiritual adultery then blinds people to the reality in which they live. This blindness becomes a culture of injustice, a lack of concern for the needy, sexual immorality and greed. All of which became common occurrences in Judah during Jeremiah’s time.

In Paul and the Thessalonians’ cases, the lack of faith by people around them created an atmosphere of persecution. Paul calls these people “wicked and evil” (3:2) and points out the need to pray for God’s strength and protection. Unfortunately, we live in an age that looks much like ancient Judah and ancient Thessalonica requiring us to be prayerful as well as seek God’s strength and protection from an “evil and wicked” world in which we live.



Witnessing the destruction from within Jerusalem.

Jeremiah is witnessing the destruction from within Jerusalem, the center of both Jewish spiritual life and its politics. The destruction from within comes as a result of people who say “as surely as the Lord lives...” (5:6) yet speak falsely, promote and participate in violence, neglect the poor, commit adultery and other sexual sins on a regular basis, and so on. Duplicity—the act of saying one thing but living another way—becomes the worst of all Jerusalem’s evils.

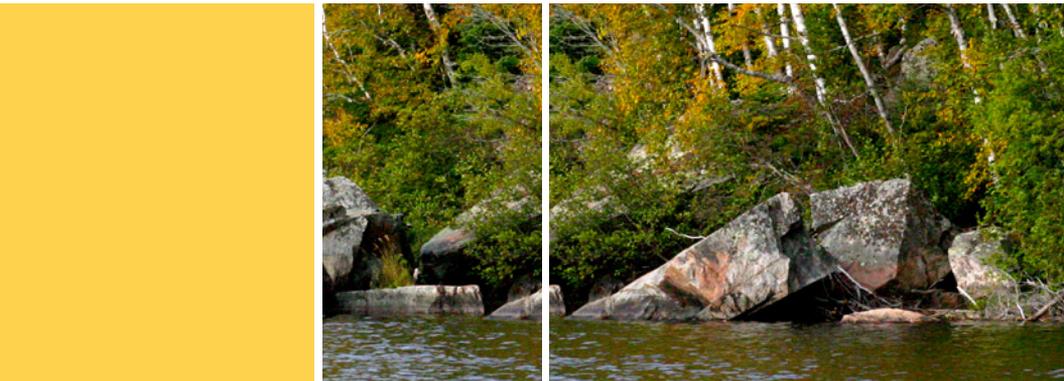
As we read the beginning of Paul’s letters to Timothy, we find a more direct description of people like the ones Jeremiah is addressing in his prophecies. Paul’s description highlights the purpose of the Law—it points out and condemns those who live outside of God’s Will. For this reason, both Jeremiah and Paul were confident to call these people out for their duplicity and evil living. Paul calls us to “love” with a “pure heart” and with a “clear conscious” having a “sincere faith” (1:6).



Living lives contrary to God's calling.

Jeremiah gets right down in the mud of Judah's life. Worshipping false gods, injustice, and the neglect of orphans and widows all become dominant in Judean culture. As a result, Jeremiah predicts great suffering and death of the Jews at the hands of the neighboring nations. Jeremiah sees this as appropriate punishment for their sinful ways. It is not so much God punishing them directly as much as the natural outcome of living their lives contrary to God's calling.

The idea of true worship and right living becomes the focus of Paul's letter to Timothy. In these verses, many commandments have created decades of discussion and debate among Christians. It is important that we approach such difficult texts with humility, in prayer and with openness of heart and mind. From this posture we need to be willing to search for the meaning of the text and then its application to our lives and situations today. When we follow this approach with difficult passages, we not only understand them better, but we understand God's bigger purposes.





Comparison of God to idols.

As Jeremiah finishes his writings about sin and its consequences, he moves to a comparison of God and idols. The comparison provides a vivid image of the worthlessness of idols and the incomparable greatness of God. The conclusion being that to worship idols when we can worship the true, living God would be complete foolishness. The consequences of either choice are clear, and the greatness of God demands it. Jeremiah ends chapter 10 with an appropriate prayer for his and Judah's situation.

Having idols and worshipping them was not just an issue in Jeremiah's day, or Paul's day, but in our day as well. Unfortunately, it is the natural inclination of our hearts. It is within this context that Paul defines the qualifications for church leadership. These qualifications help ensure a local church is not led by those whose hearts tend towards false idols, but instead, worship only the true God. A wayward heart, as reflected in how one lives their life, has many serious consequences including disqualifying one from spiritually leading others.

Lessons for the people of Judah.

Jeremiah uses physical objects to teach lessons from God to the people of Judah. First, there is the buried linen belt. Then, there are wine skins illustrating what God plans to do to the people of Judah. It is in these physical objects that Jeremiah creates memorable lessons and drives home the point of how desperate the situation was for their nation. This continuing unfaithfulness to God created conditions that eventually led to their exile and captivity.

Just as Jeremiah was the consummate teacher of God's truth, Paul continues his instruction to Timothy so that Timothy, in turn, can teach and lead his congregation. The instructions Paul gives are both practical and inspiring. He provides Timothy a road map for being an effective minister as well as a growing Christian. Paul's words to Timothy can and need to be applied to us as well. As Christians, we are all called to be "ministers" and to make a difference in the lives of others and in our world.



False prophets and teachers.

Disaster by draught, invading armies and then starvation become the central messages in Jeremiah to the Israelites. The reason for these disasters becomes clear—the spiritual adultery committed by the people and the lies told to them by false prophets and teachers. Their “back sliding is great” yet, the ones who are responsible to lead the people into faithfulness—the teachers and the prophets—do not speak truth to the people. Thus, failing at their primary responsibility of helping the Israelites live for God.

Fortunately, for the churches and people of the New Testament, Paul spoke truth in clear and understandable terms. Paul did this himself as well as through the mentoring of people like Timothy. Paul wants the churches to appropriately care for the members of their faith communities. Many of these directives fly in the face of the standards of that day, and thus, were truly counter-cultural. Much like our day and age, we will be counter-cultural if we follow Paul’s teachings and live by the truth he and Jeremiah spoke.



The blind pursuit of money and wealth.

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people eager for money have wandered from the faith and have pierced themselves with many griefs” (I Timothy 6:10). Paul succinctly describes the cause of so much ill in his, Jeremiah’s and our own time—the blind pursuit of money and wealth. In Jeremiah’s day, it causes people to work on the Sabbath, breaking one of the important commandments God gave the Israelites, one rooted in the creation itself. It created many “griefs” for the Israelites including, in the end, the downfall of their entire nation.

The reason “love of money” leads to so much evil is because wealth so easily replaces God in our lives. It provides a false but strong sense of security, strength and power. These are all things that God promises to provide us when we are faithful to Him through Christ Jesus. So when money and wealth replace God in our lives, we are practicing idolatry and worshipping other gods rather than the one true God. Paul provides a remedy for us—we are to “flee from it” and “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness” (verse 11).

Jeremiah confronts the leaders of Judah.

Our reading today provides a tale of two kinds of leaders. Jeremiah confronts the leaders of Judah at the height of their corruption when kings did not care for the poor, the orphans and widows. These are kings who are more concerned with their own personal comfort and wealth. These kings partnered with priests and prophets who told them what they wanted to hear, forsaking the truth that they needed to confront.

Contrast these kings as leaders and the young pastor, Timothy, to whom Paul writes about. Timothy is full of faith, a faith he has received from God as a gift through his godly family. In this faith, Timothy is able to live and serve his congregation in a way that is aligned with God's purpose. Paul encourages him to continue to grow in his faith, seek God's truth and share it with others—an approach to leadership that opposes the religious leaders of Jeremiah's day.



The coming of a King.

Following his messages of gloom and doom, Jeremiah looks ahead to the future and tells the Jews about the coming of a King—in the line of David—who will rule as God intended. This King, and future Messiah, becomes the hope Israel looks toward to restore their fortunes and bring back the glory of their nation.

This King is also the one Paul writes about. Instead of looking to the future to see only a cloudy haze. We have the advantage of seeing Him, by looking back in history to the person Jesus Christ. Christ did come, as Jeremiah prophesied, and delivered all the promises that God made to the Jews. These promises are now enjoyed by those who continue in the faith Timothy displayed in his life—the faith Paul calls us to.

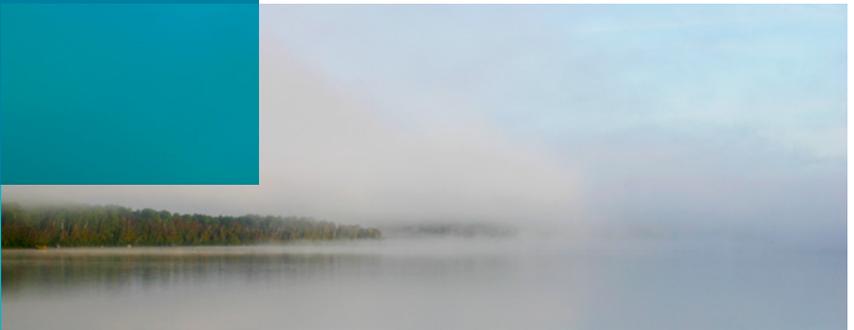
**“Remember Jesus Christ,
raised from the dead,
descended from David.”
II Timothy 2:8**

**“‘The days are coming’, declares
the Lord, ‘when I will raise up for
David a righteous Branch a King
who will reign wisely and do what
is just and right in the land.’”
Jeremiah 23:5**

Terrible times predicted in the last days.

“Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive...” (II Timothy 3:1-2). These words, written by Paul, could have applied directly to Jeremiah’s day. Jeremiah, like Paul, communicated clearly to the Jews that their nation was in its last days. Because of his truth-telling, Jeremiah has his life threatened with death; another affirmation of Judah being in its last days.

Paul’s description not only applies to Jeremiah’s day, but also to our own. Since Christ’s resurrection and ascension, we have been living in the “last days”, the days before Christ returns to restore all things. Mindful of the last days, Paul instructs Timothy on how to live. These instructions not only help Timothy personally, but as a pastor, helped Timothy lead his congregation.



A standoff between prophets.

**“For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will have a great number of teachers gather around them to say what their itching ears want to hear.”
II Timothy 4:3**

Paul describes perfectly the situation Jeremiah finds himself in. He ends up in a battle with the chief priest whose message to the people stands completely opposed to Jeremiah’s, but it is what the people want to hear. It is literally a standoff between prophets—one who speaks truth and the other who speaks falsehood.

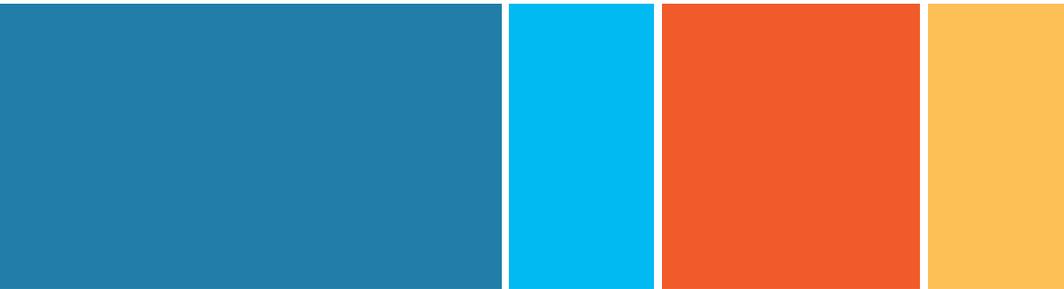
False teachers and prophets, both in Jeremiah’s day and ours, have a message that people want to hear. Their message builds up the prophet at the expense of the listeners. Instead of teaching what the people need, words that “correct, rebuke and encourage” (verse 2), they teach what will be welcoming and profitable to themselves. Paul’s encouragement to Timothy becomes a message to all of us—“keep your head”, “endure hardship” and “do the work of an evangelist”—if we can do these things, we will live well.



Leaders accuse Jeremiah of false ideas.

Jeremiah continues to speak God's Word to the people even after they have been exiled to Babylon. He gives words and instructions that fulfill God's purposes and take care of His people. Leaders continue to accuse him of teaching false ideas as they listen to prophets and teachers tell them what they want to hear. It is an easy place to find ourselves unless we, in humility, seek God's purposes and not our own.

Paul needs to battle false teachings just as Jeremiah did. In this case, Paul is instructing Titus who is dealing with false teachers and a difficult culture. The foundation of Titus and church leaders need to be built on integrity, humility, faithfulness, strong family and the fruit of the Spirit becoming a reality in their lives. When community leaders lead from this place, the whole community benefits and together they begin to transform the culture around them.



The new covenant.

Jeremiah provides the Jews with a glimpse into their future and what God's plan for them looks like. Verses 31:33-34 become significant scriptures because they outline the new covenant, which comes through Jesus Christ. It is a covenant built by the Spirit and not by the written law. It is not that the law changes or diminishes—it is where the law is written that changes. The Law, through Christ and mediated by the Spirit, is written on our hearts and not on stone. It becomes a part of who we are as God's people.

This is why Paul can confidently teach Titus to challenge his congregation to righteous living. Because the Law is now written on our hearts, we can respond to Godly instruction with the Spirit's enlightenment and power. Unlike the ancient Jews, we have this hope—we can live aligned with God and His purposes, not bound by the written law. We can now become servants of God's Spirit and slaves to righteousness in Jesus Christ.

Recabites commit to never living in houses or drinking alcohol.

Jeremiah focuses on the need to keep one's word and promises. In particular, he uses the example of an Israelite clan called the Recabites who committed to their father to never live in houses or drink alcohol. They would keep this promise right up until Jeremiah's day. Jeremiah points out their commitment to oaths as an example to follow. He tells us that God is the ultimate Promise Maker and Promise Keeper, and if we are to live as God has called, we will need the same commitment demonstrated by the Recabites to be promise keepers ourselves.

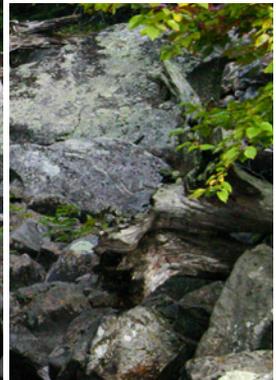


This same theme of living one's life with integrity runs through the last chapter of Titus. Paul calls Titus to a life of humility, obedience, peace and one without "foolish controversy" (verse 9). Paul then provides the hope needed to have this as a reality in our lives—it is found in the faith of Jesus. It is through Jesus Christ and His Spirit that we have new life, and with it, the hope of living with integrity as promise keepers like the Recabites.

Jeremiah is accused of being a traitor.

Two men of God are put into prison for their faithfulness to serve the Lord. Jeremiah ends up in prison because he is falsely accused of being a traitor. Some people believed that his prophecies about the coming destruction of Judah by the Babylonians were false and only spoken by Jeremiah as a way to set himself up for a position in Babylon. When Jeremiah begins to leave the city he is arrested on false charges.

Paul finds himself in prison as an “old man”. We are not sure of the details behind his imprisonment, but we do know it has to do with his commitment to Christ and his preaching. Even while in prison, Paul continues to follow his calling of preaching the Good News to others. In turn, he receives the care and blessings of other Christians while “in chains”. Paul’s integrity—like Jeremiah’s—sustains him. Both men continued to speak God’s Word even at the cost of their personal freedom.





Jeremiah faithfully shares God's Word.

God spoke through His prophets during the Old Testament times. Jeremiah was one of those prophets to whom God gave His Word and Jeremiah faithfully shared it. Unfortunately, the word Jeremiah shared was of destruction and disaster. As we read today, God's Word through Jeremiah becomes reality. Jerusalem is finally overthrown by the Babylonians. The king's sons and nobles are executed before him. The very last sight he would see before his eyes were gauged out—an incredibly sad day in the history of Israel.

In the New Testament times, the Hebrew writer tells us that God has spoken to us through His Son. Jesus does not merely speak God's Word, He is God's Word. He is the "radiance of God's glory" and the "exact representation of his being" and "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (verse 3). This puts Christ in a category not only higher than the Old Testament prophets, but even higher than God's angels—those whose purpose is to serve God's people and bring God's message to them.

Jeremiah challenges the people of Judah to pay attention to their commitments to God.

The Hebrew writer says, “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away” (2:1). This is the same message that Jeremiah gives to the remnant left in Judah who asked Jeremiah for a word from God. Jeremiah is forthright in telling them God’s plan and purpose. Then, he challenges them to “pay more careful attention” and to do as God says and to honor what they have committed. If they were faithful they would receive the blessings of safety, food and well-being.

The blessing we receive according to Hebrews is if we “pay more careful attention”, we become God’s children. This is possible because Christ Himself, though above the angels, became like one of us—He was made like us in “every way” so He could become our High Priest and atone for our sins. Our opportunity, like the ancient Jewish remnant, is to trust in God’s Word and obey completely by putting our faith in Christ for our salvation and for all the blessings promised through Scriptures.

Jeremiah warns the Jews not to go to Egypt.

Egypt and its place in Jewish history weave through our readings today. After warning the Jews in Judah not to go to Egypt, Jeremiah finds that no one has listened. The people ignore him, leaving Judah and taking Jeremiah with them to Egypt where God told them not to go. To make matters worse, they adopt the gods of Egypt and their neighbors' gods. It is hard to imagine God's people returning to the very place of their 400 years enslavement instead of trusting the God who delivered them from slavery.

This same picture becomes the illustration the Hebrew writer uses to encourage us to trust in God. The writer warns us not to harden our heart like the ancient Jews at the exodus and the Jews we read about in Jeremiah's time. This hardening of hearts keeps us from truly hearing God's Word, which in turn, leads us to not believe what we hear. This not only leads to security and prosperity we desire, but also to the slavery we are trying to avoid.



More judgments against Judah's neighbors.

Jeremiah's book moves to another round of judgment against Judah's neighbors. These nations stand judged before God because of their disobedience. Though they were not God's "nations" in the sense that Judah was, God still held them accountable. The standards should have been clearly seen because God reveals them through His creation as well as Israel. Yet, God promises restoration for those who trust in Him, as with the Jews, by being obedient to His Law.

The writer of Hebrews describes this promise of restoration as a "Sabbath rest". To receive this blessing of Sabbath rest, a person, people or nation needs to put their faith in God and His promises by living obediently to His Word. It is called a Sabbath rest because we rest in salvation, since we receive this through the work of Christ. Christ does our work, pays our price and provides us rest in Him. It is within this rest we become free to love and serve God by living as He has called.



Nations turn their back on God.

Jeremiah continues his prophecies against Judah's neighbors. Jeremiah points out how each nation has turned its back on God through its treatment of Judah and all of God's people, the Jews. These messages make it clear that God closely connects the treatment of others with worship and faithfulness to Him. Jeremiah's prophetic message ends with Babylon; the nation God uses to punish Judah for their faithlessness.

Ultimately, Jeremiah's writings clearly point out that the Jews, and all people, need a Savior. But who can stand before such a God? The writer of Hebrews points out that we have a true High Priest. He intercedes for us before God, who has offered the perfect sacrifice for our sins, provides for us the words we need to live and was called by God to do this work. We have Jesus Christ, our High Priest, in whom we put our faith and hope to stand before a holy and righteous God.

The fall of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah's book finishes with the final words about Babylon. Clearly God had intentions about both Babylon's use of Him as well as dealing with their unfaithfulness and their injustice to others—especially the Jews. The book ends with details about the fall of Jerusalem, the exile and the execution of its leading people. We have read about the rise of Jerusalem when it reached its peak of glory under Solomon, and now, we read of its destruction.

The Jews could have avoided this day if only they had remained faithful to God. This is the message the writer of Hebrews has for his readers and for us—do not fall away, stay focused on God and grow in faith so you can live a life worthy of Him. It is the promise of being God's children, His heirs, which should motivate us to not fall away, but instead, to grow in faith.

Jeremiah laments the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem.

This poetic book is believed to be written by Jeremiah who laments the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. It is heart breaking to read about this day in Israel's history. As you take in these chapters, imagine what these words are describing. Try to put yourself into this place where you witness the destruction of a city and nation that you have lived in and loved.

It is in this desperation (as the author of Lamentations finds himself) that the author of Hebrews provides a new hope. The writer of Hebrews lays out his case for Jesus being our High Priest—not in the Old Testament line of Levi and Aaron, but in a new line—in the order of Melchizedek. This new priesthood stands forever because Christ offers His sacrifice once and for all and sits at the right hand of God, in the true sanctuary—Heaven, continually interceding for His people. He is our hope beyond all hope.



A glimpse into individual devastation.

Lamentations continues with writing that becomes more personal. The book moves from a national perspective to an individual



perspective as we get a glimpse at the devastation from the fall. We see into the characteristics of a holy God, who though He is love, cannot tolerate sin and the resulting injustices in the world. It is a reminder that sin impacts not just the sinner, but all those around the sinner; when a society sins, it also impacts individual people.

This episode in Jewish history drives home the need Israel has for a new covenant with God—one that is not solely written on stone or paper, but one that is written on the heart of God's people. It is a covenant mediated by only one High Priest, Jesus Christ, it is a covenant of hope for restoration of our relationship with God, with each other and with His world. It is the covenant that will last forever bringing us to the place God intended from the beginning of time.

Ezekiel is called by God.

Ezekiel is called by God to bring God's message to His people whether they want to hear it or not. However, time and place make the two men and their messages different from each other. Isaiah writes from Jerusalem before the Babylonian exile and Ezekiel writes after Babylon overthrew Judah. Ezekiel's message and visions can be worldly in character, yet the themes continue to be the same as we have read previously in the Old Testament.

The writer of Hebrews lays the case for the earthly tabernacle as a temporary symbol of the true heavenly tabernacle. Thus, the expected destruction of this tabernacle did happen as we read about in Ezekiel. This same principle of temporary representation of something eternal also applies to the blood used in sacrifices. The blood of goats and lambs sacrificed in the temporary tabernacle had no power to cleanse us from sin, but pointed to the blood that could. The blood of Jesus Christ, spilled on the cross once and for all, cleansed people from their sin.



The siege of Jerusalem.

One of the first messages God has for Ezekiel is to share concerns about the siege of Jerusalem. In very graphic images, Ezekiel shows the intensity of this siege and the implications of the lives of those who live in Jerusalem. Ezekiel's message is not just spoken, he acts it out through his everyday life. The demonstration of God's Word provides an impactful message, one that needs to be heard.

As Ezekiel predicts the siege of Jerusalem, the writer of Hebrews provides hope that there is something more permanent than this temporary tabernacle. The writer boldly proclaims that it is found in the person of Jesus Christ, who is a priest in the line of Melchizedek, perfect without blemish and will become the one and final sacrifice for the sins of all people. It is in this eternal priest, who now sits in the true tabernacle, and His final sacrifice that we are to place our hope and faith in for restored life now and into eternity.

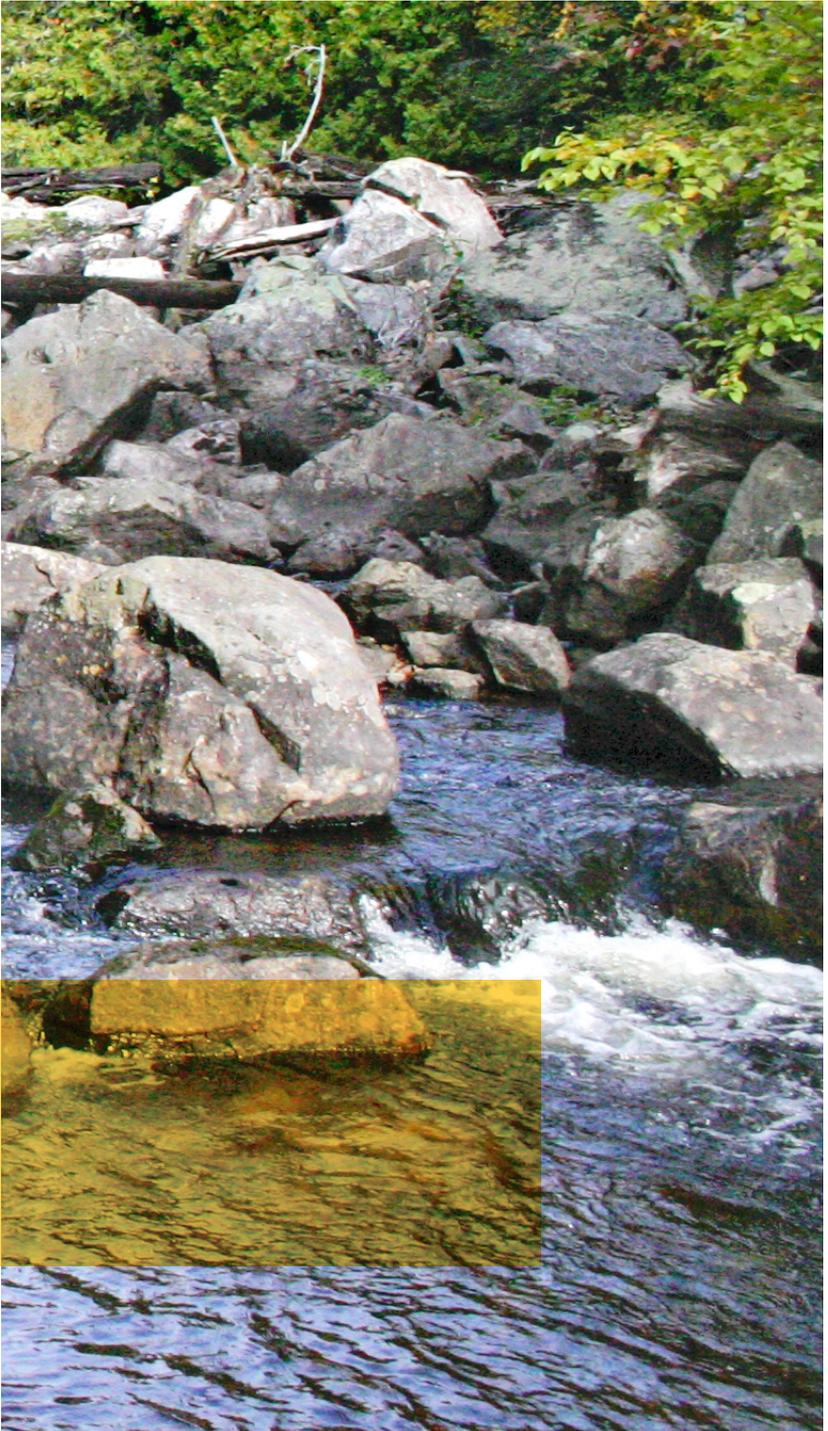


Judah's spiritual adultery.

The “Day of the Lord” becomes a theme in Ezekiel’s prophecies as it is with other Old Testament prophets. This day of wrath comes to the people of Israel because of their unfaithfulness to God. Ezekiel highlights this unfaithfulness in chapter 8 when he is given a sneak preview into the Temple. It is in this place that we see the extent of Judah’s spiritual adultery. They flaunted it before God—worshipping false gods right in the place where God resided among His people.

The writer of Hebrews echoes Ezekiel’s words when he writes, “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God” (10:31). He brings to justice the rebellion and sinfulness of His people. As we read, we see the “Day of the Lord” is not solely an Old Testament concept—it is a Biblical concept. The encouragement the writer gives us is to “not shrink back”, but instead, “have faith and thus be preserved” (10:39).





The coming wrath of God.

As a result of Judah's unfaithfulness, God shows Ezekiel His glory leaving the temple. It is as if God picked up His presence and moved it out of the place it had resided among the Jews for generations. God shows Ezekiel how He will judge the leaders of Israel, condemning them for leading the people astray. He tells Ezekiel that He will save some from the coming wrath and will give them a new heart to live by God's standards and obey His Law.

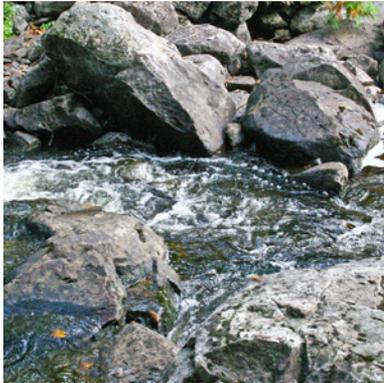
This new heart—one of flesh—becomes illustrated by the writer of Hebrews in Chapter 11 where we read what many have called the “roll call of faith”. The writer will walk through the great hero's of faith found in the Old Testament—almost all of whom we have read about up to this point in our readings. The writer reminds us that without this faith, which the Jews of Ezekiel's time so desperately needed, it is impossible to please God (11:6).



False prophets.

Ezekiel addresses two difficult, but related issues facing the Jewish people. The first issue dealt with false prophets. These prophets provided a word in exchange for pay. Because they received compensation, these prophets tended to say what the people wanted to hear and not what God had intended for them to say. The word that the Jews wanted to hear was “peace” and certainly not “judgment”. Linked to false prophecies was the Jews habit of “setting up idols in their hearts”. This idolatry, along with the false prophets, became a stumbling block to the Jews.

The writer of Hebrews provides a picture of ancient Jews who did not slide down into idolatry and listen to false prophets. These faithful ones risked and gave their lives on behalf of Christ and His Word. There were no idols or false prophets among this group. Even when faced with torture and death, they maintained their faith. The contrast between the people of Ezekiel and the people who made the “roll call of faith” provides inspiration for us to live faithfully.



The unfaithful Jerusalem.

Ezekiel describes in graphic detail the unfaithfulness of Jerusalem and its people as he compares the people of Jerusalem to a prostitute. The imagery drives home the point of how deeply the people had fallen away from God and pursued other gods and nations as their savior. What makes it so heartbreaking is to know that the Jews used the good gifts given to them by God to carry out their unfaithfulness.

Contrast this to the instruction given in Hebrews 12, we are told that we need to be faithful even in light of great temptation. God allows trials and temptations to build us up in our faith, not tear us down. It is this faithfulness that the Jews of Ezekiel's time lacked; instead, they were "weak-willed" (verse 30). Our prayer and desire should be to look at trials and temptations as an opportunity to grow in our faith and not to fall away.

Guilt and accountability.

Ezekiel has an interesting discussion concerning guilt and accountability. It is a different model as compared to other religions, where a scale is used to illustrate justice. Instead, God looks at where a person's heart is and gives them the opportunity to repent and turn from their sin. The same is true in reverse—if one turns from righteousness to sin, God will not remember the righteousness.

God's justice becomes evident in Christ Jesus who became the Sacrificial Lamb for the sin of all people. Because of His sacrifice, we are called to offer a "sacrifice of praise—the fruit of our lips that confesses His Name" (13:15). God is just and satisfies His justice in the most significant way—through His One and Only Son, an innocent man, who died on our behalf. As Ezekiel shows, trusting in this one and final sacrifice of Christ, God will no longer remember our sins and we will forever see the righteousness of Christ in our lives.



The Israelites' rebellion against God will be punished.

Suffering, judgment, perseverance and restoration are the main themes in today's readings. Ezekiel warns the Israelites that because of their rebellion against God (their sin) they will surely be punished. It would not be a punishment without purpose, but instead, would be for repentance and restoration to God. The key for Israel is whether they could understand their suffering was a means to greater good.

This message is at the foundation of the first chapter of James—God allows us to suffer and be tempted as a way to grow our character and to become mature people. Once again, as in Ezekiel, we see the possibility of good coming from suffering, but it requires us seeing how God can use it for His glory and our own good. We suffer because we are broken, fallen, sinful, and living in a broken world. Yet, God turns this brokenness into something that brings wholeness and healing to us and one day to the world.



Ezekiel confronts the sins of Jerusalem, Judah and Israel.

In what at some points can be graphic descriptions, Ezekiel confronts the sins of Jerusalem as well as both Judah and Israel. Ezekiel describes in detail both their sin and its consequences. Their sin includes a lack of social justice and a lack of personal and community righteousness. It seems that they had completely fallen away from God. Ezekiel is prompted to use sexually graphic terms to shake them from their cold hard hearts as described in chapter 23.

James writes in the same direct way as Ezekiel using metaphors to confront us with God's expectations for our lives. In particular, James challenges his readers (and us) to "live out our faith" by doing good works. In other words, we have a consistency between our confession and how we live. It is exactly what the people of Ezekiel's day lacked and exactly what we need today.



Prophecies against Israel's neighbors.

When Ezekiel's wife dies, God drives home the point to the Jewish people that they too will have significant personal loss. It is once again a graphic portrayal of God's message to His people. This portrayal is followed by a litany of prophecies against Israel's neighbors. Their crimes had to do with the gloating they did over the demise of Judah, and thus, their disrespect of God.

The sins of Judah's neighbors were sins of the "tongue". This was the exact issue James addresses in the third chapter of his letter. James addresses the need for control because of the tongue's tendency toward evil. James confronts the issue head-on by pointing out the true issues, which are not the tongue as a body part, but what is in our hearts and minds. Our words come from what is inside us. Thus, to control the tongue requires a transformation—not just of what we say—but more importantly, who we are as people.



The downfall of Tyre.

Ezekiel begins with a lament for Tyre, a city along the coast of the Mediterranean near Judah and a major trading port. In addition to being a large trading center, Tyre was known for its merchants and craftsmen who became famous for their brightly colored fabrics. It appears to have been a place of opulence and vibrancy. Yet, pride had crept into their world beginning with the King. This pride led to the city's eventual downfall where it was literally “no more.”

Tyre's warning becomes James' strongly stated message—submit to God, humble yourself as a person, as a church, as a community and as a nation. Acknowledge God's rule, His control of your life and the world and do not act independently of Him. When humility is gone and pride is in place, all sorts of issues arise: division, fights and arguments. But humility that sees itself under God's authority finds peace with others and with God allowing us to “draw closer to Him.”





Judah puts its faith in nations instead of God.

Ezekiel continues his prophecy and laments for significant nations who have relationships with Judah, all of which stand in the path of the coming Babylonian onslaught. In these chapters, Ezekiel addresses Egypt and Lebanon—two countries with a history of military power, political influence and economic significance. Yet, because of their internal sin, starting with pride, they slowly decreased in all three areas becoming vulnerable to other nations' ambition—in this case, Babylon. Judah's blunder was putting their faith in these nations, instead of in God for their protection and future.

Wealth can quickly become the source of pride for a person, family, or even a nation. Pride slowly erodes one's perceived need for God. This leads to subtle but real oppression of those who are not rich. On the other hand, if we are on the receiving end of such oppression, James provides us encouragement to be patient, stay strong and pray to God. He is full of compassion and care.



The job of a prophet.

An incredible job description of a prophet and leader is given in Ezekiel 33. The job as prophet is compared to a watchman on the wall of a city whose job is to look out for potential danger and then sound an alarm when trouble appears. Ezekiel's calling was to be a watchman for Israel, ready to speak God's Word at any moment, announcing the coming of pending danger. It is a difficult job but one that is necessary because it provides safety to all the people, if they heed the warning.

Peter acts as a watchman of the fledgling Church. This can clearly be seen as we read the first chapter of 1 Peter. He sends out a warning to us about the world and how we are to live in it. In particular, we are to be prepared to live as strangers in this world, as people set apart for something better. We are not called to avoid the world but to engage it—first and foremost, by loving our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The role of political leaders.

Ezekiel now moves from the place of prophets and other religious leaders into discussing the role of political leaders, in particular, the kings of Israel. Through Ezekiel, God calls these leaders “shepherds” and the people they lead “sheep”. Ezekiel describes what a shepherd does and their priorities in work. He then accuses the leaders of Israel of grand failure in their calling. God promises Israel a true shepherd, one like David, who would one day lead the people. This True Shepherd is of course, Jesus Christ.

In an incredibly beautiful bit of Scripture, which ends with the conclusion of Jesus as our Shepherd and us as His sheep, Peter tells us how we are to live as a holy nation, set apart for God. He takes us through some very practical reminders of how we are to live—knowing that our best witness to the world is a life well-lived. He finishes this section of his letter with verses about Christ, who as our Great Shepherd and the Overseer of our souls; He loves us and laid His life down for us, His sheep.

The story of the valley of bones.

In Ezekiel, we read one of the more well-known, but commonly misinterpreted stories in the entire Bible. The story describes a valley of dry bones with graphic imagery, and has been used in preaching, books and sermons to illustrate the new birth in Christ. As we read the story closely, we find that the dry bones do not represent spiritual death, but rather the Israelites who have lost hope after being removed from their country and homes. God gives them hope again by promising to bring them back from their graves to become one nation under one king.

Peter provides encouragement to live in a way that others may become curious about. This means our lives cannot look like dry bones, but instead, must be filled with life and the Spirit of God so that others will desire this living—the hope that comes from the Gospel of Christ. It is Christ that provides hope, brings meaning to life and removes the despair that can make a life appear as dry bones.

Ezekiel prepares Israel for its return as a nation from exile.

Gog, a country far to the north of Israel, becomes the center of Ezekiel's prophecy. Scholars have speculated exactly what nation Ezekiel is referring to in his prophecy. Yet, if we do not allow ourselves to get stuck in trying to solve this mystery and see the place Ezekiel is taking us, we can find the more important meaning of these chapters. Ezekiel is preparing Israel for its return as a nation from exile and the reestablishment of the temple worship. Israel, a valley of dry bones, receives hope for restoration through Ezekiel's word.

Many times in the Old Testament we see suffering as a consequence of disobedience. Yet, in the New Testament, as we read in I Peter we see suffering connected to obedience and faithfulness to Christ. Peter prepares us for the real possibility that we may suffer for Christ, and during these times we must turn to Him for strength and endurance.



Ezekiel's vision.

Twenty-five years into Ezekiel's exile he is given a vision that is described over the next three chapters. In this vision, Ezekiel has the opportunity to see in detail a new Temple. Ezekiel is asked to use a measuring rod to measure each room of the Temple complex. There has been plenty of speculation as to what temple is being described, but what can be agreed upon is that the vision provided the exiled Jews hope that their temple worship system would be reestablished.

With the coming of Christ, and the establishment of the Church, God completely changes our form of accessing Him. No longer do we need priests to mediate between us and God;

Christ fulfills the purpose of the Temple and sacrifices, becoming our mediator. This explains Peter's discussion about role of the Elders and why they no longer have the same responsibilities.

The requirement of sacrificing animals changes to become

offering our lives to God through the power of His Spirit. We become the Temple of God where His Spirit dwells and where we make our spiritual offerings.



Ezekiel's detailed vision of the Temple.

As Ezekiel's tour of this visionary Temple continues, he proceeds to measure each room and section of the Temple. It is an amazing vision providing great detail—enough detail to build the Temple. The detail provides a reminder to the Jews in exile that God's plan for worship is important. There is significance to every aspect of worship including the priests, Temple and people.

Peter addresses two important topics in the first chapter of his second letter. Each topic is foundational to our faith. The first, is the need of God's people to continue to grow in their faith. The second, is the importance and trustworthiness of Scriptures—God's Word provides what we need to grow in our faith. Peter understands the connection between our lives and God's Word. Our job is to take Peter's encouragement and make the connection a reality.

Israel will see their sin and be ashamed.

Ezekiel does not reveal which temple he is describing, but instead, why God is giving him this description to share with the Jews. He says in Ezekiel 43:10-1, through this detailed description, including the return of God's glory, Israel will see their sin and be ashamed. In their shame they will then become faithful both in the rebuilding of the temple and in their devotion to Him. God uses vivid pictures and visions of what life can be like to help inspire His people to live consistent with His desires.

While Ezekiel creates a vision of life in God's presence, Peter paints a picture of life without God. Ezekiel's vision promises freedom, fulfillment and quenching of all desires, while Peter paints a picture of darkness, slavery and the ultimate punishment—eternity without God. If Ezekiel's visions do not motivate us to follow Him, Peter's will. It is important that we see, believe and share with others both the realities of life *with* God and life *without* Him.





The Temple.

Ezekiel continues his description of the new Temple, the land around it and the worship performed in it. This description has caused many to wonder which temple is being described. There are two possibilities, the Temple built after the exiles' return, known as the Second Temple from the time of Christ, or the one from Revelation 21 on the new earth. There is no right answer, which leads us to believe that God did not intend for us to know which temple is being described.

Peter continues his description of life without God. Peter shares the vision of how God will deal with the unrighteous while showing that the righteous will dwell on the new earth. Peter encourages us to live righteously, through faith in Christ, as we patiently wait for Christ's return.



Visions of the new earth.

Ezekiel's vision moves from the Temple into the city by following a river that begins in the Temple. It is a freshwater river that provides life to both plants and animals, including trees that provide fruit for food and leaves for healing medicine. The image harkens back to the Garden of Eden before the fall. This particular vision continues to be expanded upon by John in Revelation 21. It is clearly a picture of the new earth where Christ will reign and His people will dwell.

John speaks of “eternal life” and “walking in the light of God”. These images align with Ezekiel's vision of the new earth where we will walk in God's ongoing light—when His glory will provide the earth all the light it needs. We will live in this new earth forever, but the key is to have the humility to admit we are sinners. Thus, we need forgiveness which comes through the blood of Christ shed on the cross. To deny our sin is to deny our need for Christ and our place in eternity.



Daniel shows incredible wisdom, humility and faith.

We begin a new book filled with some of the most well-known controversial prophecies in the Old Testament. This book begins with these great stories, and we read one today about a young man named Daniel. Daniel shows incredible wisdom, humility and faith, which is why he instantly becomes one of the heroes in this book. He also shows incredible tact in dealing with the politics of his day. His faith is expressed through prayer and commitment to God's Word.

John describes the life we are to live just as Daniel demonstrates. John calls us not to love this world—meaning not to participate in sinful, evil and corrupt ways—just as we see Daniel avoid entanglement in the corrupt ways of Babylon. John reminds us that faithfulness and loyalty to Christ are important, as Daniel demonstrates in his life.

Friends of Daniel refuse to bow down before any god but the true God.

The king of Babylon constructs a huge gold idol that all people are required to worship in an effort to exert control over his kingdom. Everyone obeys except three Jews who are officials in the king's court and friends of Daniel. These three men refuse to bow down before any god but the true God, trusting He will rescue them from any retribution that may exist.

Again, John describes the people we are to be—children of God, who obey His commandments which can be summarized into two statements. The first simply states that we are to obey Christ's commandments. The second is to love one another. By obeying the second we are obeying the first.



God rescues Daniel from death.

Daniel continues his role as advisor to the kings of Babylon, all while witnessing the end of the Babylonian kingdom and ushering in a new kingdom of the Medes and Persians. Not long after the new regime is in place—in spite of Daniel’s faithful and effective service—he is accused by his rivals of breaking the king’s law. Daniel humbly maintains his integrity to both God and to his earthly king. As a result, God rescues Daniel from death—as He rescued Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego.

John continues his description of what a true follower of Christ looks like—one similar to the life Daniel modeled. John says the love one has for God and others is the true mark of a faithful follower. This is possible because God first loved us and demonstrates this by sending His Son into the world to become the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

Daniel's vision of God's Kingdom.

Today we begin to read about the many visions Daniel receives during his time spent in the king's administration. Both visions in our reading today deal with the upcoming nations who will play significant roles in the life of the Jews. If you know ancient history, including the interpretation given, you will begin to see how the vision unfolds. One significant section deals with a Kingdom that will never end. It will be ruled by one who is "like the Son of God" and He will rule this Kingdom forever. We know this Kingdom is God's Kingdom and the King is Jesus Christ.

Those who belong, and will belong to this Kingdom, are those who love God and "obey His commands" (I John 5:2). We are to do this because John tells us God is trustworthy. When we trust and obey, we become His children; members of His family and subjects in His Kingdom. If we want assurance of our place in His Kingdom, John points out we need to live our lives for Christ.



Daniel's prayer for forgiveness.

After reading the Scriptures, Daniel prays to God for forgiveness, both for the Jews and for himself. This prayer is incredible; it is an example of humble confession which acknowledges the reality of God and the reality of sinful people before Him. He acknowledges that the dire circumstances came about because of their sinfulness and lack of faith. God responds to Daniel and gives him another vision showing the future of Israel.

John also addresses sin and falsehood. In both readings it is apparent that our ability to live before God begins with acknowledging our sin, to affirm God's truth through His Son and then to obey this truth. Yes, we are to love, but to love without truth is not enough. We are to love the truth and treat those who teach falsehoods and lies as if we have no common bond with them—which in reality we do not.

Daniel's vision before Christ returns.

We finish Daniel with one more vision. It takes us to the end, before Christ returns and establishes the new earth and Kingdom. Understanding of this and the other visions require knowledge of ancient history, while still leaving a lot of mystery for us. There is one thought we can take away from all of Daniel's visions—God will conquer through His Son, Jesus Christ, who will destroy all evil and rule among His people forever.

In John's third letter he addresses the issue of bitter rivalry and dissension within the Church. Even in the best of circumstances people can fall short of God's standards and live for themselves. Every time people live for themselves it creates issues in relationships. John points out that we are to love Christ and His truth first. As a result, we are to live this truth and make it a part of our being. When we do this we can be confident of our place before God.



A living analogy.

Hosea is a sad, yet graphic and powerful story that shows what unfaithfulness of God's people does to His heart and their relationship. Through his relationship with the prostitute, Gomer, Hosea becomes a living analogy of the relationship between God and His people. God rescues His people, and like Gomer, they eventually fall back to their old ways. As God does for Israel, Hosea buys Gomer and calls her to faithfulness—patiently and mercifully. It is a picture that should cause us to deeply examine our lives before Christ.

As Jude describes godless people, our minds go back to Gomer. Godless people live to satisfy their natural selves. Their instincts are more like animals than the instincts given by God's Spirit. Godless people not only become filled with sexual immorality, but can be boastful “grumblers and faultfinders” (verse 16). Jude ends with a beautiful praise, one we should look to adopt as part of our personal prayers.



Israel's spiritual waywardness continues.

Israel's unfaithfulness, like Gomer's, persists. Though the consequences are devastating, Israel's spiritual waywardness continues. Gomer continues in her cycle of sin—Israel continues similarly. It is through acknowledging the place of sin in their lives that Israel can turn to God for restoration. Healing will begin when we accept the love of God, as Gomer needed to accept the love of Hosea.

Today starts the last book of the Bible—Revelation. It is a book appropriately placed at the end of the Bible for two reasons. First, over 85% of the verses found in Revelation are either direct quotes or references to other verses found throughout the Bible. Secondly, Revelation often provides poetic descriptions of the last days of the world—ushering in the new days on the new earth. It is a beautiful and challenging ending to our journey through the Scriptures.

Faithfulness and the absence thereof.

The theme for today's reading focuses on faithfulness and the absence thereof. Hosea continues in his critique of Israel's unfaithfulness, describing it as an unfaithful wife who has fallen into prostitution. Even in the midst of these graphic illustrations of unfaithfulness, Hosea reminds Israel of God's love for them. Though He "punishes" them for their unfaithfulness He does not abandon them completely. God remains true to His covenant with the Israelites even when they are not true in return.

John writes letters to seven churches in Asia Minor. Faithfulness and its importance in our life is the theme woven throughout these letters. He encourages and celebrates their faithfulness when appropriate, warns them of potential unfaithfulness and challenges each church to become and remain faithful. Faithfulness is the foundation of our relationship with Christ. You should desire the day when He will say you are a "good and faithful servant."





Warnings to Israel.

Hosea finishes his prophecy with warnings to Israel. He uses the tribe of Ephraim as another name for Israel because its inheritance sits right in the middle of Israel. Shiloh, a historic place of worship, was also within its territory. This message is to all of Israel and to all of God's people. Hosea ends the final chapter with a call to repentance, which would lead to blessing and redemption. If we ask, God always leaves the door open for forgiveness and restoration through repentance.

John continues with his letters to the seven churches by finishing the final three. As you will notice, John uses symbolic and poetic language in each of them. These symbols relate directly to each church, helping them understand the message God had for them. John will use these literary devices of symbolic and poetic language throughout the rest of Revelation. It is important we keep this in mind as we work to understand exactly what John is saying.





Joel uses locusts to warn Israel.

As we continue our reading of the “Minor Prophets”—minor in that they are short books, not that they are insignificant—we continue to see the use of allegory in their messages from God. Joel uses locusts to warn Israel of the impending invasion of Israel, especially if they continue in their sin. Joel informs Israel that when that terrible day comes, they will be rescued and restored as God’s people in the end.

In one of the most powerful texts in the entire Bible, John is brought into Heaven and taken to the throne room of God. John sees a vision of God sitting on His throne surrounded by creatures and “Elders” praising Him without ceasing. Also included were the seven lamps from the previous chapters which represent the churches, or the Church—the number “7” represents perfection and completion. It is an awesome picture and one that piques our imagination as to what being in God’s presence might be like.

Amos speaks prophetic judgments against the Jews' neighbors.

Amos, a shepherd, becomes God's prophet to both Judah and Israel. In our reading today, he first speaks prophetic judgments against the Jews' neighbors—these neighbors include Damascus and Gaza, as well as the nations of Edom and Moab. Amos then moves to the more important nations of Judah and Israel. As prescribed in the Law, Amos takes a more in-depth approach to bringing “witnesses” against them.

We contrast the earthly descriptions of the nations and their sin to the heavenly vision of John. John sees the Father holding a small scroll no one is worthy to open or read. Upon seeing this, the One who is worthy to open the scroll comes into the vision. He is the Lamb that has been slain and the Lion from the tribe of Judah. This Lamb, Jesus Christ, now becomes the center of worship for all beings in Heaven—the angels, the Elders and the four living creatures.

Israel is shown to be stubborn, complacent and prideful.

Amos describes Israel's place before God—they are a stubborn, complacent and prideful people. Each of these qualities leaves Israel short of what God has called them to be. Stubbornness leads them from admitting their faults, complacency has them going through the motions of their religious practices. Finally, pride leads to trusting in their own strength and power, which in turn, protects them from the threats of other nations. Each quality Amos describes should bring about an awareness in our own life.

In more poetic terms, John's vision continues as the Lamb begins to open each of the seals on the scroll. Each part of this vision shows the consequences of people being stubborn, complacent and prideful. These images—four horsemen—reflect the reality of life today and in the future. Death by war, murder, sickness and famine as well as social and economic injustice and nations bent on conquest all reflect the realities we see in the world today. John gives us a glimpse of the day when Christ will return to change all this and make it right—this day is called, “the great day of their wrath.”



Israel's divine judgment.

Amos shares the divine judgment waiting for Israel after calling out Israel's stubbornness, complacency and pride. He describes Israel as a basket of ripened fruit ready for judgment. This judgment will be the destination of Israel and the exile of many of its people. It is an incredibly distressing outcome for the people God chose to be His own—among whom He dwelt while on earth. Amos does not end his book with doom, but tells Israel that when this happens, God will begin the process of restoration.

At the end of Revelation 6, the people of the earth will cry out “who can stand?” as on the Day of Judgment (6:17). Revelation 7 answers that question describing who will stand after the great Day of the Lord. The answer is once again written in poetic terms. These people will be the ones who remain faithful to Christ, even at the costs of their lives.

The Day of the Lord is near.

Obadiah is given a vision by God concerning the people of Edom. Edomites were descendents of Esau, the older brother of Jacob (see Genesis 25), and have been at odds with Israel since the days of the two brothers. Obadiah's warning to the Edomites included not gloating over their brothers' destruction and judgment. He warned them not to take advantage of their misfortune because God would once again restore their brothers to Israel. God reminds Edom and us that "the Day of the Lord is near for all nations" (verse 15).

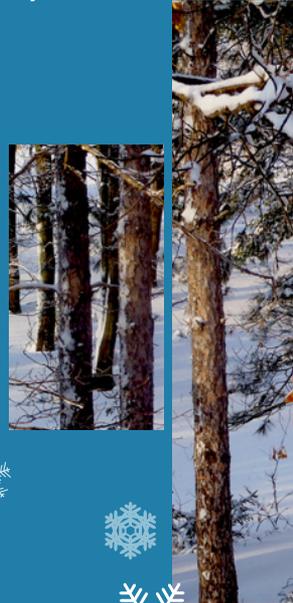
This "Day of the Lord" once again is described in John's vision as part of another series of seven announcements. This time, at the opening of the seventh seal, seven angels come forth with seven trumpets. At the sound of each trumpet a new scene in John's vision appears. These scenes describe the different disasters which come upon the earth. Notice that none of these disasters are complete or total, and thus, a reality we live with today.



Jonah runs away from God's Word.

Jonah is one of the best-known stories in the Bible. Children learn about his story early in Sunday school and adults remember it because of its memorable imagery—a man living in a fish for three days. Yet, Jonah is about much more than a large fish—it is about Jonah and a city confronting God's Word and responding to it. Jonah first hears God's Word and runs away before he ever obeys. The city of Nineveh hears God's Word and immediately obeys, avoiding disaster.

John's trumpets become more and more disastrous for the people of earth. They include the release of demons and plagues. God's judgment includes both a spiritual and a physical component. Unlike Nineveh, the people of John's letter, "still did not repent" (verse 20). Their hearts and their actions continue to defy God and the reality of His existence.



Micah promises God will not abandon His people.

Micah is called to prophesy against Judah and Israel as represented by their capitals, Jerusalem and Samaria. He speaks words against the nations, their leaders and prophets. He accuses them of falsehood—not assuring justice is given to all people and for their pride and arrogance. Yet, in the midst of these severe words, Micah also promises God will not abandon His people and would one day bring deliverance.

John is given new words to share as represented by eating a scroll. The scroll is sweet in his mouth yet sour in his stomach, reminding us that God's Word is good even if the message is not easy to swallow. God calls John, like Micah, to share His message to all people, nations, languages and kings (verse 11). God intended these words to be heard by all people because they concern the world which God created and sustains.



The community of God's people.

Micah's word becomes more hopeful and positive. He describes how the community of God's people will become the desired place for all the people and nations of the world to gather. This will be accomplished when a ruler from Bethlehem appears to lead God's people. This ruler will become leader not just of God's people (Israel and then the Church), but all nations and people of the world. He will provide security and protection to those under His rule. As we know, Micah's words point to Jesus Christ, the King of Israel, to whom the Church is given a Bride.

There is much speculation about who the two witnesses are that John sees in his vision. Since God did not tell us who they are, we accept that it is not important. Instead, what is important is the purpose these two witnesses play in the world. The Old Testament requires two witnesses to make a case and it appears that God has raised two witnesses (potentially representing the Law and the Prophets) to testify to Christ and announce the coming of His Kingdom.



The guilt and punishment of Israel.

Micah concludes his book by announcing the guilt and punishment of Israel in courtroom style. He then moves quickly to assure Israel that God would not forget them and that He will see them rise to a place of prominence. This “Resurrection” is accompanied by the final praise of God and a prayer asking Him to forgive Israel of their sins and restore them once again as His people.

In our reading today, John writes the most unusual and least spoken about version of the Christmas Story. We are given an eternal perspective of the birth of Christ and the implications in the heavenly and earthly realms. Fallen heavenly beings—demons—and the red dragon itself—Satan—are tossed out of Heaven far from the presence of God. As a result, the dragon turns its fury on God’s people on earth. Though the Church is protected (as represented by the woman), the Church’s offspring, the people who obey Christ’s commandments, will be at war with Satan and his fallen angels.

Insights into how God sees and deals with evil people.

The prophet Nahum writes a powerful word against the city of Nineveh, the same city that we read about in the book of Jonah. Nineveh is charged by Nahum with the worship of false gods and plotting evil against the Lord. This book is beautifully written and provides insights into how God sees and deals with people and nations who are not part of His called people.

False gods and false religion become the central theme in Revelation 13—one of the most debated chapters in all of Scriptures. But what everyone can agree on is simple—people and nations, spurred on by Satan, will arise (think Nineveh) and encourage people to reject God for false gods. False religion will then lead to evil living and evil societies. It is a pattern that has been repeated throughout history and will continue until Christ returns.

Habakkuk's prayers and complaints to God.

The book of Habakkuk has a unique format, different from the first Minor Prophets we have read previously. This book is based on Habakkuk's prayers and complaints to God and His responses to them. It is fascinating to read as we see the heart of a righteous person trying to understand the existence of evil. It is a common question among people throughout history. God's response provides the understanding of His "heart" towards evil and a glimpse into His plans to triumph over it. However, we are left with the question of why there is evil. It is a mystery we are asked to live with until Christ returns.

John confronts this same issue in Revelation 14. The only satisfaction we gain beyond Habakkuk's interaction with God is the strong and graphic words assuring us that God will ultimately defeat evil and its advancers. We can rest knowing God does no evil and will address the evil found in the world in a time and way that will satisfy His justice.



The wrath of God.

The prophet Zephaniah warns the nations of God's impending wrath. This wrath is what he and the other prophets call "the great Day of the Lord" (1:14). This great day is the Day of Judgment where God holds the people and nations accountable for their actions against Him and His people. Judah has included a list of nations to be judged. Yet, as with the other prophets we have read, Zephaniah ends with the hope of restoration for Judah and Jerusalem. God never fully abandons His people, but instead, brings them back into relationship with Him.

John's vision becomes increasingly graphic and intense. It seems to indicate that the evil in the world, either natural or instigated by people, will grow rather than decrease as history moves forward. John says that this growing presence of evil will reach a climax ending with good when Christ appears. He will resign over His Kingdom in a new Heaven and earth. Our hope continues to be found in Christ alone.

Haggai encourages and challenges the Jews to rebuild the Temple.

The prophet Haggai lived and served in Jerusalem after the Jews returned from the Babylonian Exile. The Jews' first assignment when they arrived was to rebuild the destroyed Temple. As we read about in the book of Ezra, the Jews became distracted and did not complete their work. Haggai's message encourages and challenges the Jews to complete the task and see that the Temple is rebuilt. This was an important assignment because the Temple was where God's glory dwelt on earth.

The earthly temple Haggai pushed to complete turns out to be a copy of the eternal Temple in Heaven. Revelation shows God directing seven angels to pour out seven bowls of wrath on the earth from His eternal Temple—Heaven. With each bowl of wrath, it appears that God's intent was for the people to turn away from their sin and rebellion. However, the people continue to harden their hearts and hold on to their godless ways. Clearly this portion of John's vision describes in part, the world we live in today.



Zechariah's prophecies point directly to Jesus Christ.



The symbolism within Zechariah's visions.

As we read Zechariah, we see the similarities found between Zechariah's vision and John's in Revelation. The symbols Zechariah uses to describe the Church, the Holy Spirit, wickedness and judgment provide us with insight into the meaning of each. Once again, we see symbols that point us to Christ, including chapter 6 where the picture of a combined office of king and high priest foreshadows the combined offices Christ holds.

John continues to use symbolism as he describes the fall of Babylon. Babylon is used symbolically, representing the world's fallen culture and society. The Jewish view of ancient Babylon was godless culture, government, commerce and social life. John's message shows that as the ancient city of Babylon falls, the godless cultures, government and societies will fall as well. For some, this fall will be a cause for weeping, but for God's saints it will be reason for praise.

The Jewish challenge is to live consistently with the spirit of God's Law.

Zechariah receives a word from the Lord that challenges the Jewish people to live consistently with the spirit of God's Law. This includes "administering justice, showing mercy, compassion and taking care of the widows and the fatherless" (7:8-10). Zechariah says these acts are more important than any religious act, including fasting. If God's people would live like this, God would bless them by restoring their lives to their proper place and mending their relationship with God. Then, God's people will become a blessing to others (8:13).

The celebration of the fall of "Babylon" commences in John's vision. It's a celebration that's held in Heaven where all the heavenly beings we read about in chapters 4 and 5 acknowledge the victory of God over the godless. Then we were given a glimpse of how this victory came about. We see a great rider arrive on a white horse to overthrow Babylon. This rider is Jesus Christ whose victory is sure for He is the "King of kings and Lord of lords" (verse 16).

Visions of the end of this world and the beginning of the new one.

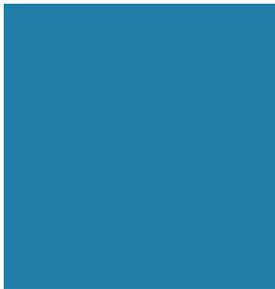
Both Zechariah and John begin to present visions of the end of this world and the beginning of the new one. Zechariah reminds the Jews of God's ultimate plan to care for them and the final destruction of their enemies. In the midst of these words we see a glimpse of Christ—the one “who's been pierced” (12:10-12) for our sins, and through His death, He washes away these sins.

John shows the final destruction of evil. We see the final destination for Satan and his followers will be a “lake of burning sulfur” (verse 10). This place seems to also be reserved for anyone whose name is not in the Book of Life. Part of God's final restoration of all things includes dealing with sin and evil—removing it from the earth forever. Then, God will create a new Heaven and new earth—the place where evil will not exist.

The New Jerusalem.

Zechariah ends with God reigning over all of the new earth from His throne in Jerusalem. As we read the description of what the New Jerusalem will look like, we are able to compare it with John's description in Revelation 21 and 22. Theologians talk about a concept called "progressive revelation," which means that God reveals more truth as the progression of Scriptures unfolds. We see a great example of progressive revelation moving from Zechariah (written hundreds of years before John's vision) to Revelation, where the picture of this new earth becomes clearer.

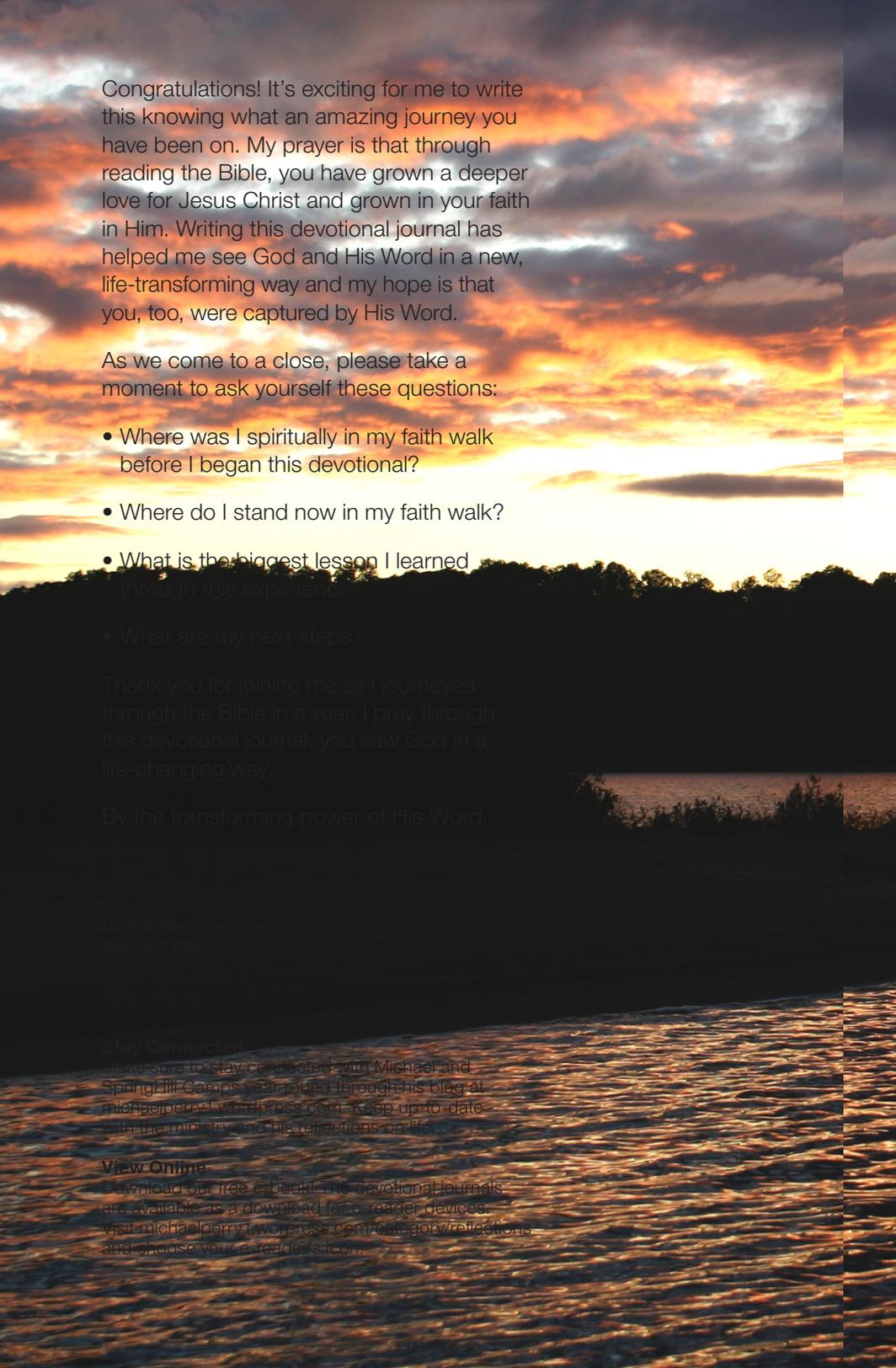
John provides in more detail what to expect from the new earth and the New Jerusalem. But progressive revelation does not mean that the Bible will give us a complete picture of eternity, the picture is only more clear. God leaves much unsaid about the place we will dwell with Him forever. He asks us to live by faith, trusting in Him and His Words. Our faith is not the result of the clarity and details of all things eternal, but in Him who promises these things.



Prophecies against Judah.

The final book of the Old Testament takes an engaging approach in pronouncing prophecies against Judah. The book is created with a series of short pronouncements against Judah followed by a defense by Judah in the form of a question, such as, “How have we done that?” Then God, through Malachi, follows their defense with a more thorough case proving Judah’s guilt. It is an interesting exchange that makes a point of how easy it can be to fall away from God and not know it has happened.

Today we read Revelation 22, the final chapter of the Bible. We are given a final description of the new earth. This is followed by the assurance that Jesus will return, maybe sooner than we think. It ends with a warning that we need to heed—“If anyone adds or takes away a single word of this prophecy they’ll experience plagues or have their name erased from the Book of Life” (verse 18-19). It reminds us of the importance of every word, not just in Revelation, but in the entire Bible. This is why we have spent the past year reading it together.



Congratulations! It's exciting for me to write this knowing what an amazing journey you have been on. My prayer is that through reading the Bible, you have grown a deeper love for Jesus Christ and grown in your faith in Him. Writing this devotional journal has helped me see God and His Word in a new, life-transforming way and my hope is that you, too, were captured by His Word.

As we come to a close, please take a moment to ask yourself these questions:

- Where was I spiritually in my faith walk before I began this devotional?
- Where do I stand now in my faith walk?
- What is the biggest lesson I learned through this experience?
- What are my next steps?

Thank you for joining me as I journeyed through the Bible in a year. I pray through this devotional journal, you saw God in a life-changing way.

By the transforming power of His Word,

Michael Perry
Spring Hill Camps

Stay Connected

Make sure to stay connected with Michael and Spring Hill Camps year-round through his blog at michaelperry1.wordpress.com. Keep up-to-date with the ministry and his reflections on life.

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About Michael Perry

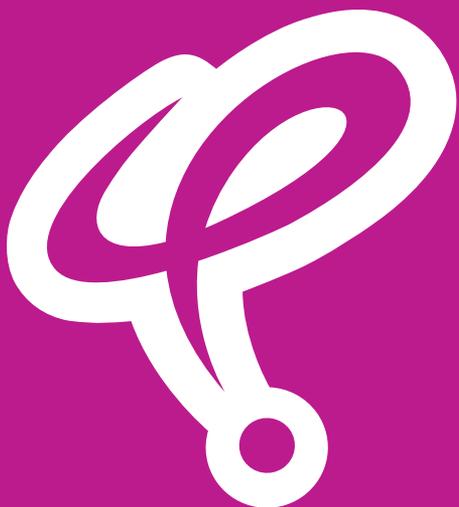
I'm married to Denise and we have four children, M.D., Christina, Mitch and Jonathan. I've worked for SpringHill Camps since 1998 and have been its President and CEO since 2001.

I graduated from Central Michigan University with a degree in Business Administration in 1984. I obtained my MA in Ministry Leadership at Grand Rapids Theological Seminary through Cornerstone University in May 2012.

Since my days at Central Michigan, I have made reading the Bible in its entirety a major commitment. This practice has made a significant personal difference in my life and I'm excited to help others live out this similar commitment.

Though I am not a Bible scholar or theologian, I have a deep love of the Scriptures and have taught it for over 15 years through adult Sunday school classes and retreat seminars. My goal is to inspire others to spend time in all of the Scriptures on a daily basis allowing the Scriptures to transform their lives and the world in which they live.

For additional copies, please contact the Development Department at 231.734.2616.



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Quotes sourced from New International Version, Zondervan 1984.

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