

WEEKS 27-39

Days 183-273

Series 2

Volume 3

# Reflections



Reading  
through  
the Bible  
in a year

Psalm  
Proverbs  
Ecclesiastes  
Songs of Solomon  
Isaiah  
Jeremiah  
Lamentations  
Ezekiel  
Daniel  
Hosea

Joel  
Amos  
Obadiah  
Jonah  
Micah  
Nahum  
Habakkuk  
Zephaniah  
Haggai  
Zechariah

Michael Perry  
Reflections



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 Bringold, 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,

In government class, my senior year of high school, we had a procession of guest speakers who addressed a wide range of current events and issues. One speaker, an 80-year-old preacher, came to speak on behalf of Bible reading and prayer in public schools.

The first thing he did as he stood in front of our class was hold up a huge, well-worn, red Bible and asked, "What color should your Bible be?" All the students looked around at each other wondering if this was a trick question.

Patiently, the preacher waited until one of my classmates got up the nerve and answered, "Red?"

With a big smile on his face the preacher responded, "Yes, that is correct." Then he opened up his Bible and holding it out to us he said, "Your Bible should be read."

It took us a moment before we got his little joke, but that joke made an impact on me. I walked away from that class thinking – "Yes, if I'm a Christian, one who follows Christ, my Bible needs to be read." So that night I started my daily practice of having a "read" Bible.

This is why we've published these Reflections. Our goal is to encourage you to make reading the Bible a daily part of your life.

So what color is your Bible?

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Perry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Michael Perry, President  
SpringHill Camps

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# Psalm 98-104

One of the purposes of a Psalm is to give expression to a person's or a community's praise and worship of God. In a number of our Psalms today, the writers encourage us in our adoration of the Lord. For example, we're called to "sing to the Lord a new song" 98:1, while the earth itself is to give praise demonstrated by the "sea roaring" 98:7, "the rivers clapping" 98:8, and "the hills singing" 98:9. In other Psalms, we're encouraged to "exalt the Lord" 99:5 and in 103:1-2 we're to "bless the Lord".

Why is this theme so predominate in the Psalms? Simply because God is God! He deserves nothing less from us and from all of His creation. As we read in Psalm 98, even if people do not acknowledge Him, His creation will do so. But as we know from Paul in Philippians 2:9-11, one day every knee in the entire universe will bow down and every tongue ever created will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord and King of all.

## □ Notes

## Psalm 105-107

One of the many ways the Psalms call the ancient Jews, and now us, to worship is through reminding them of their history. In particular, as we read in Psalm 105 and 106, the history of the Jewish captivity in Egypt, God's miraculous releasing of the Jews from bondage, the 40 years of wandering in the desert, and the conquering of the Promised Land. This story is so often repeated because it's the story of the birth of Israel as a nation. For that reason, it was and still is the most important piece of Jewish history.

This Jewish story has now become a metaphor of our life in Christ, in a sense, it has become a Christian story. The New Testament writers tell us that God's rescue of the Jews from Egypt is His rescuing us from our sin. The wandering in the desert for 40 years by the Jews is our life here on earth. And finally, the conquering and entering into of the Promised Land is our entering into eternity with God. As we read these Psalms, we can join the ancient Jews in their praise of our God for allowing us to be in His story.

### □ Notes

# Psalm 108-116

Psalm 110 is another of the Psalms that speaks to the coming of Jesus Christ. It's quoted often in the New Testament (Matthew, Mark, Luke, Hebrews, etc.). It provides us insight into Christ – His role, His purpose, and His place in the world. From this Psalm we know Christ is the King of the universe, ruling on behalf of His Father in heaven (vs. 1). And as King, He will rule on behalf of God's people, even in the midst of their enemies (vs. 2).

We also see that Jesus is our High Priest (vs. 4), not in the line of Aaron, or the priest of the Old Covenant, but in the line of the priest of Abraham (Genesis 14:18-20), in the line of Melchizedek, and will be our Priest forever. In these roles as King, High Priest, and Prophet, Jesus will bring judgment to the entire world (vs. 5-6), and will usher in His Father's Kingdom, redeeming and restoring all of His people. We see all of this in these seven brief and poetic verses, and in their use through the rest of Scripture, reminding us of God's eternal plan to bring about His will through His Son.

## □ Notes

## Psalm 117-118

“Steadfast”, “faithful”, and “love” all describe our Lord God in our reading today. Each of these words are found throughout the Psalms and in all of Scripture. Part of what these words say about God is that He is unchanging; thus, He can be trusted. He is more trustworthy than anything else in all of creation. He’s more trustworthy than any person, whether a prince or a princess (118:8-9).

When our lives are stretched and tested, when we’re being attacked, when we’re lost, or when we’re confused and feel in the dark, there’s only One who is solid, One who is unchanging, One who is completely trustworthy – it’s the Lord God. We can have His assured salvation through His Son, Jesus Christ, who proved His own trustworthiness on the cross. We can lean on Him in desperate times knowing there is no other in heaven or on earth that can save us.

### Notes

# Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible. As only God could purpose, the longest chapter's message is the absolute importance and priority that God's Word should have in our lives. The author sings the praises of his loyalty to God's Law for 176 verses.

The concept of Word or Scripture (sacred writings) is expressed throughout the Old Testament as God's Law. At this time in Jewish history, their only Scriptures were the first five books of today's Bible, called the Pentateuch, which contained the Law of God. As we read the term "God's Law" in the Old Testament we can substitute "Scriptures" or "God's Word", terms used in the New Testament, because they all represent God's message to His people. Finally, as you read through Psalm 119, notice the other terms used to express God's Word, such as commandment, precept, testimony, statute, and promises. Each term gives us a slightly different, and helpful, look and understanding of God's Holy Scriptures.

## □ Notes

## Psalm 120-135

All, but the last Psalm we read today, are called “Songs of Ascent”. The ancient Jews sang the Songs of Ascent on their annual pilgrimages to Jerusalem for their religious celebrations. Jerusalem was built on a hill known to the Jews as Mount Zion, and within the city walls, at the top of the mountain was the location of the Temple.

The themes of these Psalms are much like the themes of many of the other Psalms we’ve read over the past few weeks. The central focus is on God, but in particular you’ll notice the focus is on God as helper and strength, one who rescues us from the attacks of our enemies. These Psalms encourage us to turn our gaze to God, to seek Him first in all our troubles, for He’s the One who can deliver us. So as we “ascend” on the road of our life, let us too focus on Jesus, who went up before us.

Notes

# Psalm 136-142

Two themes are prevalent in our reading today. The first is simply thanks. The psalmist gives thanks to God for who He is and what He's done in the world and in their lives. In particular, Psalm 136 and 138 provide us with a list of reasons to give thanks to God. As you read them, make each of the reasons listed your own personal reasons and make these Psalms your own prayers of thanksgiving.

The second theme in our reading today is the author's desperation because of the difficult situations and places they find themselves in. They cry out to God for salvation, for protection, for revenge, and for rescue. For example, in Psalm 139 the author writes from exile in Babylon about the difficulty of being displaced from their home in Jerusalem. David writes a Psalm from a cave where he's hiding from those who want to kill him. Both can be symbolic of places and situations we find ourselves in and thus these Psalms can also become our prayers.

## □ Notes

## Psalm 143-150

All of these short songs and prayers are a fitting end to this collection we call the Psalms. Each one acknowledges God for who He is and what He's done for His people. The praises and adoration fill the pages acknowledging Him as Creator, King, Healer, our Rock and Fortress. These Psalms also sing praises to God for hearing our prayers, being faithful in word and deed, healing the broken-hearted and protecting His people. These Psalms remind us of the God whom we love and see.

In contrast, these Psalms also remind us of our own shortcomings and weaknesses as people. We're not to "trust in princes" or "in a son of man". Instead, we're all to acknowledge our place before God and trust in Him only for our salvation. For it's only in Him – and in no other place, person or god – that we will find ourselves, our life, and our salvation.

### □ Notes

# Proverbs 1-4

We begin a new book of wisdom called Proverbs. Unlike the Psalms, which are songs meant to be sung as part of the temple worship, Proverbs are short sayings about life intended to be memorized and quoted as part of everyday life. As you read through them, over the next week or so, you may find some proverbs that resonate with you and will find yourself memorizing them as well. They're meant to help us in our day-to-day life.

The foundation of all the Proverbs is wisdom, and it's wisdom that we're introduced to in these first chapters. One thing to keep in mind as you read that will help guide your interpretations of the Proverbs is this – they are generalized sayings about the way things are in the world and not predictions or promises of what will happen if we follow their wisdom. Instead, the Proverbs take a sweeping look at very practical ideas and wisdom concerning life. For example, the adage "If you work hard you'll be wealthy" isn't a promise, but a general observation about how life works.

## □ Notes

## Proverbs 5-8

These chapters challenge us to pursue wisdom while at the same time, in what the author treats as the opposite of wisdom, avoid adultery at all costs. We're to chase after wisdom and run from any opportunity to commit adultery. We're to run away from adultery because it leads ultimately to spiritual, emotional, and physical death. Yet, it's not a stretch to include as part of the definition of adultery any infidelity against God. Since God is Wisdom, we're to pursue Him. To pursue and give yourself over to anything else, other than God, is to commit "spiritual adultery".

These warnings about adultery can be descriptive and graphic. This is because the author understands that people are so easily tempted by the lies and deceit of "forbidden fruit". This, coupled with the devastating impact of giving into such a temptation, makes it necessary for all of us to be on our guard against the "seductive speech" and "smooth talk" (7:21) of the adulteress – making sure we do not follow "as an ox goes to slaughter" (7:22).

### □ Notes

## Proverbs 9-13

Chapter 9 concludes the introduction to the book of Proverbs with its challenge to “pursue wisdom” and to “avoid”, at all costs, “adultery and folly”. Chapter 10, and most of the rest of the book, is a collection of short proverbs, each one about a sentence long. Within many of these sentences there will be a contrast between what is right and wise and something that’s not. For example, 11:1 says, “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is His delight.” What makes a proverb so powerful is that it always uses practical everyday things and situations to make its point – not high and abstract concepts. Things such as balances (scales), speaking truth verses slander, being open to correction instead of ignoring it, being real, tangible and understandable. By creating these tangible contrasts through word pictures, the ability to remember these proverbs increases – making them even more transformative in our lives.

### □ Notes

## Proverbs 14-17

There are many kinds of people Proverbs either warns us against becoming influenced by or challenges us not to become. One of these groups of people is the prideful. These people have an overly elevated view of themselves and their place in the world. The authors warn us that “The Lord tears down the house of the proud, but maintains the widows boundaries” (15:25) and, in a well-known proverb quoted often today, “Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (16:18). In the first proverb, the observation is that God will protect and sustain the humble and the meek and their place in the world. The second proverb highlights the reality of emotional and spiritual gravity – what goes to high must eventually come tumbling down. The Proverbs are full of such warnings and encouragements about all kinds of people; people we’ll read more about in the days ahead.

### □ Notes

# Proverbs 18-21

Yesterday, we looked at the prideful. Today, we'll look at what the Proverbs call the sluggard. A sluggard is a person who is lazy, avoids work, wastes time and other precious resources. As we read today, and as we'll see throughout all of Proverbs, there are graphic descriptions and stern warnings against becoming a sluggard. For example 19:24 says, "The sluggard buries his hand in the dish and will not even bring it back to his mouth." This proverb creates a vivid and comical picture of how a sluggard eats. But the consequences of being a sluggard can be chilling, as seen in 20:4, "The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing." The reality of not doing the required work ahead of time in the fields leading to a poor harvest would have been a powerful message in an agrarian society like the one the original readers of Proverbs lived in. But the principle of planning, hard work and preparation applies as much to us today as it did when this proverb was originally written.

## □ Notes



## Proverbs 22-24

The third type of person the book of Proverbs warns us about is the greedy person. Greedy people are those who'll do whatever it takes, such as rob the poor (22:22), to make money. This is because greedy people tend to be envious of others and covet what they have.

For example, when meeting with a person greater in position and wealth than us, such as a ruler (23:1), "Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food. Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist. When your eyes light on it, it is gone, for suddenly it spouts wings, flying like an eagle toward heaven" (23:3-5). In these few verses we see greed, envy, and covetousness come together in a person whose entire life and purpose focuses on gaining wealth and material things. Yet, as the proverb so clearly warns, these things are fleeting. It's only wisdom – God's Word and the knowledge and faith in Christ – that is eternal and lasting. In these things, and these things only, we're to toil and pursue.

### □ Notes

# Proverbs 25-28

A fourth person, or maybe better said a fourth characteristic of a person Proverbs warns us against, is the person who's "speech causes hurt, destruction, and evil." It's the person who uses lies and deceit to get what they want and to destroy others. Or, it's the person who builds himself or herself up, who boasts about what they have, what they've earned, or what they deserve. In almost all cases, as many of the proverbs point out, the problem lies with the fact that the person just talks too much – not "controlling their tongue".

Yet, the Proverbs do tell us that our words spoken at the right place, at the right time, with the right tone, are as valuable as gold (25:11-14, 27:9, 28:23).

The deeper issue, as Jesus pointed out in Matthew 15:16-20, is that what comes out of our mouth reflects our own heart and soul's condition. If our speech is good and healthy it's because it comes from a healthy heart. If our speech is destructive and unhealthy, it's because it comes from an unhealthy heart.

## □ Notes

## Proverbs 29-31

The book of Proverbs offer a final warning of the type of person we're to avoid becoming. That type of person is the fool, or unlearned person, as compared to a person willing to learn and grow. All throughout Proverbs we're warned against being foolish by not taking correction (29:1) and not seeking truth (30:5-6) – especially the Truth of God. It's in their inability to learn from experience and through input and correction that makes one a fool. But the one who learns from experience, and takes note of feedback, is the person who flourishes and is righteous.

Ultimately, the standard to which the Proverbs calls us is to be modeled after the righteous woman from the last chapter. It's the person who seeks and becomes wise. A wise person is not prideful, but understands their place before God. They are not lazy, but works diligently to do what's right. They are not greedy, but have a healthy perspective of money and material things; and finally they are not fools, but instead grow and learn from others and from their experience. A wise person seeks after God and His Word because God is the beginning and source of all wisdom in life.

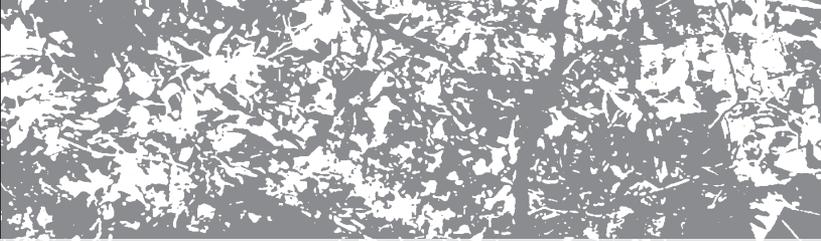
### □ Notes

# Ecclesiastes 1-6

Though tradition has it that King Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes, the Bible itself doesn't give us the name of the author. Yet, as we read this book, it's easy to imagine that it was King Solomon because of the author's description of his great wealth, possessions, and wisdom – which match up so well with what we know of Solomon.

There are many topics examined by the author including chasing after wealth, possessions, achievement, pleasure, and knowledge. The author ultimately understands each of these pursuits as “under the sun” activities – meaning from a worldly perspective verses a Godly perspective. This worldly perspective has many characteristics about it that prove these pursuits are not godly. They include describing these activities as “chasing after the wind”, “vanity”, and “wearisome”. If your life feels this way it may be a good time to ask yourself, “Am I living my life chasing worldly gain or am I pursuing those things that align with God's designs and purposes for my life?”

## □ Notes



# Ecclesiastes 7-12

As you've been reading Ecclesiastes, you may have noticed that much of it sounds like the book of Proverbs. There are many common themes and topics as well as a similar style in the writing. Yet, Ecclesiastes takes a little darker and cynical view of life than the book of Proverbs. Instead of the Proverbs short, neat quotes and formulas for life that can seem overly simple, Ecclesiastes takes a more earthy, complex, and nuanced perspective on life.

The author covers the familiar topics of wealth, love, and wisdom and we're left with this hopeless feeling of our inability to change our lives or the world around us. Yet, in the end, when the author has brought us to the lowest point of hope he closes the book with the clearest statement about what life is really about; "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (12:13).

## □ Notes

# Songs of Solomon 1-8

Today we read one of the more controversial books in the Bible. It's controversial because it's a romantic poem written about two lovers. Many over the centuries have questioned whether it should be included in the Bible as part of God's Word because of this content. But in the end, both the Church Fathers and history have affirmed it as truly God's Word and therefore worthy of being a part of our Bible.

So, as a result, there are two ways most scholars, and readers in general, have understood this unique book. The first way is to read it as celebrating love, including its physical aspects, within the context of marriage. For the ancient Jews, the physical aspect of love is an important element of the marriage covenant – as first expressed in the creation account in Genesis 2:23-25. The second way to interpret this book is to see it as symbolically representing the love between Christ, the Bridegroom, and the Church – His Bride. As you read through the Song of Solomon see if one or both of these interpretations help you better understand and appreciate this beautiful and unique book of the Bible.

## □ Notes



## Isaiah 1-4

With our reading today, we begin a new section of the Bible traditionally called “The Prophets”. It’s a section that finishes off the writing of the Old Testament. Isaiah is the first of a group of books commonly referred to as “the major prophets”. Major, not because these prophets were “major” prophets, but because of the length and the scope of time in history these books cover. In particular, Isaiah writes during the decline of Israel and Judah as they head towards their respective exiles.

We see the signs of this decline in the first four chapters of the book. The government and religious leaders, as well as the people in general, have slipped into practicing religion but not truly worshipping God. Isaiah knows this because true worship results in transformed people who live out their faith by serving the poor, administering justice, and taking care of the widows and the orphans. As we’ll see, Isaiah clearly views faith as the necessary link between believing, religious practice, and living out these beliefs and practices in very tangible ways.

### □ Notes

# Isaiah 5-8

Isaiah received his commissioning to the work of a prophet in 6:8-13. In it, there's a fascinating exchange between Isaiah and God. God asks, almost rhetorically, in verse 8, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" God's asking as if He didn't already know and had not already appointed Isaiah to this task. God wants willing hearts. He looks for people to choose Him even though He has already chosen them.

Isaiah responds with "Here I am, send me" (vs. 8), as if God didn't know where Isaiah was. But, Isaiah doesn't see the road ahead. He volunteers for the job not knowing what difficulties lay before him; accepting God's call in faith. Then God tells him what he should expect in his work. God says that though Isaiah will be speaking God's Word, the people of God will not listen to him. In other words, God was sending Isaiah out to do a job that appeared to be impossible to succeed at. But, as with our own lives, the goal isn't our success or the success of the organization we're a part of. No! The goal is obedience to God and trusting Him for the outcomes.

## □ Notes

## Isaiah 9-12

Isaiah is often referred to as the Christ prophet because he speaks so often and so clearly about the coming of the Messiah. Just within the four chapters we read today, there are two of the clearest and well-known prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus. The first one is found in 9:1-7, and is also quoted in the Gospels as affirmation that Jesus was the expected Messiah. These verses point us to the purpose for Christ's coming; salvation by freeing the physical and spiritually oppressed, bringing justice to the poor, and ruling His Kingdom forever.

The second Christ prophecy is found in chapter 11. It affirms that Jesus will be a descendent of David, the "son of Jesse", the rightful ruler of Israel. As His Kingdom becomes a reality, there will be such peace on earth that even animals who are natural enemies will live peacefully together.

Isaiah's prophecies of the inauguration of the Kingdom provide, both the original listeners and us, hope for the future peace on earth in the midst of terrible times.

### □ Notes

# Isaiah 13-16

Isaiah doesn't just speak to Israel, God also called Isaiah to speak to other nations – specifically those around Israel. He speaks to them about how they've ignored God and acted arrogantly by trusting in their wealth or military might. Isaiah also speaks against them for their mistreatment of God's people, Israel. These nations stand in judgment before God for their sins just as Israel stands in judgment before God for theirs.

The broader message is clear. God is the God, not just of Israel or the Church, but He's the God of the entire world. He rules over all people, all governments, and all nations. No one is outside of His rule, His authority, or His accountability. Israel's job, like that of the Church, was to be a shining light among the nations – salt that preserves and spreads a Godly culture. We should see governments, not as our enemies, but as institutions we're called to influence and steward.

## □ Notes

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## Isaiah 17-21

Damascus, Syria, Egypt, Assyria (Iran), and Babylon (Iraq) are all nations and cities that were “in the news” during Isaiah’s day – and, interestingly enough, often in the news today. These ancient nations and peoples have been part of the story of God’s people for over 2,600 years. It’s fascinating to grasp this long history and the depth of the rifts between these people even as they’re expressed in their contemporary versions.

God has dealt with these nations and continues to do so as the result of their rejection of God, their mistreatment of Israel, and their arrogance about their own existence. As we look at key points in history, we know that God brought about justice for their sins. Yet, at the same time, God offers hope and redemption to these people as well (see chapter 19). They too can be included in God’s community of people that today we call the Church, if only they repent and turn to His Son, Jesus, in faith.

### □ Notes

## Isaiah 22-25

Isaiah's oracle continues with messages from God to Jerusalem, Tyre, and Sidon (Lebanon) and an oracle against the entire earth. It's fascinating that Isaiah has messages for all of the nations around Israel, including Israel itself, and then ends this section with a strong judgment against the entire world. It's an appropriate conclusion because it drives home the point that sin and its consequences aren't related to certain people or nations but are a part of the entire human race and experience. As chapter 24 so graphically shows, no nation has lived righteously before God and can stand before His throne innocent.

But God isn't just the God of justice; He is also the God of mercy and redemption, which we see a glimpse of in Chapter 25. God will "swallow up" death, the great consequence of sin, and bring life to those who put their faith in Him. He will renew the entire earth and bring His everlasting peace to all His people.

### □ Notes

## Isaiah 26-28

Isaiah says, of those whose lives center and focus on God, He'll "keep him in perfect peace whose mind stays on you, because he trusts in you" therefore we're to "Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock" (26:3-4). These are encouraging words for us as well as the people of Israel who originally heard these words. In the midst of so many words of judgment, Isaiah always has words such as these that provide hope that things can and will be better for those who trust in God.

Isaiah's most encouraging words, the ones that provide the greatest hope found throughout his book, are the ones that point to the coming of Jesus Christ. For example, in 28:26 Isaiah says, "Behold, I am the one who has laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a trusted stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation." Jesus Christ is that precious cornerstone, the Foundation we can build our lives on.

### □ Notes

# Isaiah 29-31

During the slow decline of Jerusalem and Judah there was a miraculous episode that reminded the people of God's love and His protection of His people. It's found in II Kings 18-19, a book we read together a couple of months back. It's the story of the siege of Jerusalem by Assyria during the reign of King Hezekiah. If you remember, Assyria had been rolling through much of the Middle East, conquering the northern Jewish nation of Israel. When the Assyrians arrived at the gates of Jerusalem the situation looked hopeless. Yet, we know that Hezekiah's faithfulness turned the tide and Jerusalem was victorious. In the midst of this situation, the prophet Isaiah spoke the words we read today to Hezekiah and the people. They're a combination of both warning against turning to Egypt or false gods and encouragement to trust in the Lord. These words, no doubt, added to the faith and courage of Hezekiah resulting in Jerusalem's salvation.

## □ Notes

## Isaiah 32-35

Today's reading is a warning, but it's also full of hope. Warning against complacency, against not heeding God's Word, against unfaithfulness, and against the violence and bloodshed of innocent people so prevalent among the nations of that day (and today as well). These warnings are balanced by words of hope of God's mercy, His justice, and His salvation.

Isaiah says that the people of God will one day see "the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God" (35:2). Then Isaiah encourages God's people to "strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, Be strong, fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you" (35:3-4).

God brings these promises of hope and salvation to all who look to His Son in faith and trust Him with their lives.

### □ Notes

## Isaiah 36-38

The story of Assyria's attack on Jerusalem picks up again and follows closely the telling of this episode in II Kings 18-19. As you read this story again, notice a couple of things that reveal much about God and His character. First, God uses unfaithful and unbelieving people and nations to do His work. God used Assyria, though pagan, to punish Israel for their unfaithfulness. We see God using the pagan sons of the Assyrian king to bring justice for the king's sin, just as Isaiah said. Then we see God's rule over nations and nature by striking down 185,000 soldiers who surrounded Jerusalem, thus saving it from destruction. This story reminds us of another quality of God that in many ways, may be the most important – our God makes promises that He keeps. He fulfills His Word in all circumstances. This last quality is why we can put our faith in Him, trusting Him with our lives and our eternity.

### □ Notes



## Isaiah 39-42

Much of our reading today has a poetic feel to it, expressing the greatness of our God as He loves and protects of His people. Tucked away in these chapters is another clear reference to Jesus Christ. Notice in 42:1-9, the clear description of Jesus' life, and in particular, His death. God says of Jesus through Isaiah that:

- God will uphold Him, His chosen one (vs. 1)
- And put His Spirit on Him (vs. 2)
- That Jesus will bring justice to the nations (vs. 2)
- Even when He experiences injustice, He remains quiet (vs. 3)
- His life will not be snuffed out nor will His mission on earth fail (vs. 4-5)

It's these words, and so many like them in the Old Testament, that point us to Christ and remind us that God planned and prepared for the coming of His Son from the beginning of time.

### □ Notes

## Isaiah 43-47

“I am the Lord” is a common statement found in our reading today and throughout the writings of the Old Testament prophets. This statement is loaded with meaning and provides either a powerful introduction or conclusion to a statement God makes through a prophet.

What does “I am the Lord” mean exactly? It’s a statement of final authority by the One who is truly the final authority. There is no higher god or being, or one with more authority, in heaven or in creation. God is the Creator, Ruler, and Sustainer of all things. When we read this statement we should be assured that what is said, will come to pass. It’s as if God is giving us His word, His guarantee, that He is able and willing to make something a reality. And think about it, He is the only being in the entire universe capable of making such a guarantee and then being 100% capable of making it come to pass. There is no other creature or being that can do that. This is why we can put our faith in Him, trust Him for our salvation, and why we should give Him our lives.

### □ Notes

## Isaiah 48-51

Throughout the history of Israel, and throughout the history of people on earth, for that matter, God has faithfully been working towards a glorious return of His people from their fallen place. In Isaiah, Israel becomes the picture of this pursuit by God to restore His people.

Notice the words in our reading today that describe God's interaction with His people; "I have refined you" (48:10), "I will contend with those who contend with you, and I will save your children" (49:25), "For the Lord comforts Zion" (51:3). These are promises meant for Israel but they reflect God's love and pursuit of all His people, including us as the Church – the visible expression of God's people in the world today. But these promises come to us, as they did ancient Israel, when we turn to God through repentance; acknowledging our waywardness and turning back to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ.

### □ Notes

# Isaiah 52-56

In maybe one of the clearest allusions to Christ in Isaiah and the entire Old Testament, we read today about His sacrificial death on the cross. As you read 52:13-53:12 notice how these verses paint a clear picture, even in the details, of Christ's death. They're powerful words, even more powerful for us today than to the original hearers in Isaiah's day. When the original hearers heard these words they were about future events and a future unknown "servant". But we have the advantage of reading these moving words after being fulfilled, with the aid of the Gospels, which provides us the story of Christ's life and death. It's because of our perspective that Isaiah's words come alive and have so much meaning. As we read them, we can picture Christ before the religious leaders and before Pontius Pilate. We can see Him carrying the cross out of His beloved city to Golgotha; we can see in our mind's eye His obedience to His Father as He gave His life on a cross so that we may be saved from our inequities. This knowledge and the words of Isaiah should drive us to prayer and worship of Him who gave up all for our sake.

## □ Notes



## Isaiah 57-59

There were three things that the ancient Jews did which drew God's judgment and wrath. All three are temptations for us today, so we're wise to learn from ancient Israel's mistakes and heed Isaiah's warnings and connections.

The first evil the ancient Jews often fell into was worshiping false gods and idols. Notice what Isaiah has to say about these practices in chapter 57. Though we may not bow down to carved idols, we too easily can place things in our life before God.

The second and third evils are connected. The first is the half-hearted worship of God and the belief that it makes us righteous (chapter 58). But what makes this type of evil worse is practicing injustice and allowing sin to flourish around us. This may be the most grievous of the evils the ancient Jews practiced, and what we need to be on our guard against.

### □ Notes

## Isaiah 60-63

We've read and reviewed many of the passages foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ as Savior of God's people. This, of course, is a powerful theme in the book of Isaiah. But, there's another significant theme that tends to get overlooked because it's nearly always tucked away among the Jesus passages. It's the theme of God's people. Isaiah writes about God, through His Servant, not rescuing individuals per say, but bringing salvation to His community of people. The question then is: who are God's people?

Well, as we read the Old Testament, God's people are clearly the ancient Jews as expressed in the nation Israel. They're God's people as a result of God choosing them and establishing a covenant relationship with them. But with the coming of Jesus Christ, Isaiah's Servant, God offered all people a new covenant with Him that broadens God's community of people. No longer are God's people defined by race or human lineage; but instead God's people become defined by faith – faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ. So when we read of God's people in the Old Testament, we can read it in the context of this New Covenant and see the message is for us as well.

### □ Notes

## Isaiah 64-66

Ending the same way as the New Testament, this book concludes by clearly pointing us to Jesus Christ and the promise of a new heaven and new earth. This shouldn't surprise us since throughout Isaiah God promises salvation to those who trust and worship Him. But salvation is just the beginning of the story. God also promises to restore His people to their rightful place among the nations. Salvation and restoration go hand-in-hand in God's plan for His people.

In these last verses we discover that restoration isn't just returning to what was, but instead making things new – bringing everything to the place God intended them to be. What is true for God's people is also true for His creation which, as Paul says in Romans 8:20-21, has been subjected to a curse since the day sin entered the world. Isaiah's last words give us this promise – God will bring salvation and restore all things, including heaven and earth, by making them new again. This is the hope we shall have and the future we wait faithfully for.

### □ Notes

# Jeremiah 1-3

Today, we begin a new book written by a prophet named Jeremiah. Jeremiah came on the scene nearly 100 years after Isaiah, who wrote the prophecies we just finished reading. During those 100 years, the unfaithfulness of both Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and Judah (the Southern Kingdom) grew. It had grown to such an extent that Assyria conquered Israel and exiled many of its citizens to the far reaches of its empire.

Judah had periods in its history of spiritual revival and renewal, which allowed it to continue to exist even in the midst of threatening circumstances. But, by the time of Jeremiah's years of ministry, Judah too had sunk to its lowest point. It was during Jeremiah's life that Judah, like Israel, came to an end. Jerusalem and the Temple were destroyed by Babylon and its leading citizens were exiled to Babylonian cities. As we read Jeremiah, we'll see it's full of the wrath and judgment of God. Yet, we'll also catch glimpses of God's mercy and His desire for His people to repent of their unfaithfulness and return to Him in true love and worship.

## □ Notes

## Jeremiah 4-6

It doesn't take reading too many chapters to see why people call Jeremiah the "weeping prophet". As we read today, we see Jeremiah's world where Judah and Israel have become so corrupt, so full of evil, that it seems there is no hope for repentance – no hope of a turnaround. From Jeremiah's perspective, the situation is so bad that it seems nothing but pending disaster can come of it. What is the evil Jeremiah sees among the Jewish people?

It seems that when there's more danger in their midst the Jews turned to gods of metal and of wood. But, it's not just the idol worship that created such evil in Judah; this idol worship opened the door to injustice against the poor, the desolate, to widows and to children. And what made it even more evil was that good people stood by and did nothing to stop those people who were taking advantage of the vulnerable. It was because of this horrendous situation that Jeremiah cried out "My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh the walls of my heart!" (4:19).

### □ Notes

# Jeremiah 7-9

“For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice on one another, if you don’t oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever” (7:5-6).

These words powerfully summarize the covenant God made with the Israelites as they entered the Promised Land. It seems to be such a clear and simple agreement. If Israel would only do these things then God will do these other things for them. Unfortunately, as we’ve read and will continue to read in Jeremiah, Israel didn’t live up to their end of the covenant. It seems they couldn’t help themselves from becoming corrupt in how they treated each other and how they related to God. Yet, this covenant represents God’s expectations not just of Israel but of us as well – expectations that we need to live by if we’re to experience all of God’s promises and His blessings.

## □ Notes

## Jeremiah 10-12

With so much evil surrounding Jeremiah, and the impending doom of Judah facing the Jews, it's not a surprise that he's looking for an answer to why God's allowing this to happen. In particular, Jeremiah goes to God with his complaint – seeking an understanding of why the evil surrounding him and Judah appears to prosper while those faithful to God appear to suffer (12:1). It's a great question that haunts us even today. We see evil, selfish, violent people, people who disrespect God and His Church, grow rich and live in comfort while people faithful to God and generous to others suffer.

Like Jeremiah, we look at people and the world from a temporal perspective. We don't see the final outcomes of people's lives and the final judgment of God for what they've done or not done in this world. It's in these moments we need faith. We need a glimpse of eternity and a more Godly perspective to help us deal with the immediate injustices of life. This is how Jeremiah finds his answer and the assurance that all things will be right one day.

### □ Notes

## Jeremiah 13-15

At the root of Judah's sin was their pride. They believed that somehow they deserved to be saved and rescued from the coming disaster. It is pride, and not confidence or faith, to believe God would protect them in light of their unfaithfulness to Him and their mistreatment of each other. To drive this point home, God has Jeremiah take a new piece of clothing to the Euphrates River and bury it, returning days later to find it ruined. This piece of clothing represents the pride of the Jews and being buried near the Euphrates represents their exile, which will extinguish their pride.

It was pride that led the prophets to speak lies in the name of God, telling the people what they wanted to hear. Pride causes us to believe the flattering words of others even when reality clearly represents something different. The Jews believed they would be protected from their enemies even though it was obvious Judah would soon be conquered and its people exiled.

### □ Notes

## Jeremiah 16-18

We continue to see this tension between sin and salvation. Between the impending judgment for evil coming the Jews way and God's promise of restoration for His people. For example, just within a few verses we read "therefore I will hurl you out of this land into a land that neither you nor your fathers have known, and you shall serve other gods day and night, for I will show you no favor" (16:13). This judgment is followed in 16:15 "but, 'As the Lord lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the North Country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' For I will bring them back to their own land that I gave to their fathers."

It's this balance between these two realities that so clearly demonstrates the full character of God. He is both just, holy and thus abhors sin, as well as merciful and loving – ready to bring restoration to His people. We tread dangerous ground if we focus on one of these sides of God and ignore or minimize the other side; for God cannot be split, divided, or segmented.

### □ Notes

# Jeremiah 19-22

In one of the most disturbing pictures in the Bible, we read about Jeremiah's warning of the horrific conditions that will accompany the fall of Judah and Jerusalem. In what appears to be one final effort to deter the Jews off their path towards destruction, Jeremiah explains in an object lesson (broken flask) the horrors Jerusalem will experience when the Babylonians lay siege to it. During this siege, conditions will become so bad that as food runs out the people will resort to eating their own children to stay alive.

As hard as it is to imagine anything worse, the Jews responded to God's Word not with repentance, but instead by persecuting His messenger. Jeremiah is beaten by the chief priest and put into stocks. This grievous act does not stop God's Word from becoming reality; but instead, assures God's judgment will come upon the people and on Judah so that the people will go into exile and the nation will be no more.

## □ Notes

## Jeremiah 23-25

Though most of today's reading is full of judgment, doom, and God's wrath, in the beginning (23:1-8) Jeremiah provides the greatest hope of all. He tells the people that God will "raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as King and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land" (23:5). This branch is clearly Jesus Christ; in His human nature He is a descendant of David, becoming the final King of Israel and, more importantly, the true King over God's eternal Kingdom whose reign is everlasting.

This message is full of hope, hope that goes beyond the immediate judgment and disaster facing the Jews. Their nation sits on the edge of the abyss, their lives slipping away, yet God gives them this hope – one day there will be a new King and He will return and restore His Kingdom and do so with greater glory and splendor than they could ever imagine. This is what the ancient Jews were called to put their hope in, and what we're called to put our hope in as well.

### □ Notes

# Jeremiah 26-27

As Jeremiah continues to speak out God's words to the people of Judah, the opposition and persecution of Jeremiah grows. After a particularly scathing message, the prophets and the priests arrest Jeremiah and bring him before the king demanding that he be given the death penalty. It's a classic example of "shooting the messenger".

But, God protected Jeremiah – rescuing him through people who recognized that it was wrong to kill Jeremiah for speaking on behalf of God. Yet, as we'll see, as Judah's situation continues to deteriorate and Jeremiah continues to speak out, he'll continue to experience persecution by the hand of his countrymen. As we saw in our reading today, Jeremiah will not back down from the words he speaks accepting the possibility it will lead to his death. It's almost as if he's compelled to speak regardless of the consequences – trusting it's exactly what God requires of him.

## □ Notes

## Jeremiah 28-30

Jeremiah's already difficult job is made more difficult by the presence of false prophets. In particular, one false prophet named Hananiah makes a public statement that totally contradicts the message God gave Jeremiah to deliver to Judah. Hananiah takes the wooden yoke Jeremiah had been wearing to represent Judah's slavery to Babylon, and breaks it, stating that God would free Judah from Babylon's oppression within two years. Jeremiah had been sharing that God planned on the Babylon's rule to last 70 years.

Now, the reality is only one of these two prophets could be right. As it turns out, God gave Jeremiah a word that affirms Jeremiah's messages and discredits Hananiah's. As a result of Hananiah's false teaching, and to confirm God's message through Jeremiah, God said He would take Hananiah's life within a year. And that's exactly what happened.

This whole episode reminds us to recognize the temptation to believe good news when circumstances point to something different. Instead we're to face the "brutal facts" of God's justice and judgment for sin, rebellion, and deceit, even if we don't like to hear them.

### □ Notes

## Jeremiah 31-32

After so much judgment and news of the coming destruction, God gives Jeremiah some great news. First, God tells Jeremiah that He will bring His people back out of exile one day and re-settle them in the Promised Land. Next, and more importantly, God promises to establish a new covenant with His people – one “written on their hearts” (31:33). This new covenant will also have God’s law written on the people’s heart instead of on stone tablets. Of course we know that God fulfilled this promise of a new covenant through Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. We also have the fulfillment of all the Law – Jesus Christ living in our hearts.

Jeremiah was so confident of God’s willingness and ability to fulfill all these promises that he actually bought a plot of land at a time when it appeared all the land would be taken by the Babylonians. This act of faith powerfully reinforced Jeremiah’s hopeful message of restoration.

### □ Notes

## Jeremiah 33-35

The Lord speaks to Jeremiah a second time while Jeremiah is a prisoner of the Jewish leaders. God reiterates His promise that He will one day bring peace again to Jerusalem and Judah and that there will be a King in the line of David, “a branch”, who will “execute justice and righteousness in the land (33:15)”. We know this branch to be Jesus Christ, the last and final King of Jerusalem, Judah, and the entire earth.

Yet, this great hope and promise of peace and Godly leadership stands in stark contrast to the life of the Jews in Jeremiah’s day. Babylon continued its rampage through the Promised Land with two remaining fortified cities under siege. It’s in the midst of the destruction of their nation that God calls the Jews to both faith and obedience – trusting Him to restore all things again in the future. It’s the same hope we’re to have and obedience we’re to live even in the midst of our own fallen place in history.

### □ Notes

## Jeremiah 36-38

Even in the face of sure destruction, many of the king's leaders and the king himself didn't heed the Word of God given through Jeremiah. Jeremiah, by God's direction, even had his secretary take down all of God's Word and go to the Temple and read it to all who would listen. But when this same scroll was read before the king, the king cut it into pieces and burned it. Nowhere in all of the Scriptures is there any example of such disrespect and blatant defiance of God and His Word than by this king of Judah.

Because Jeremiah was faithful to God's Word, he continued to suffer at the hands of his own countrymen who didn't want to hear the truth. Despite the risk to his own life, Jeremiah continued to share God's truth – this truth had been given to him concerning the future of Jerusalem and its people, including the King, if they would only begin to obey God.

### □ Notes

## Jeremiah 39-41

After a siege of nearly a year and a half, the Babylonians finally break through the wall of Jerusalem and conquer the great City of David – the place where God chose to dwell among His people. It’s a terrible picture to contemplate, especially in light of the heights from which Jerusalem fell. If you have a little time, reflect back to the glory days of Jerusalem and Judah that we read about during the reigns of David and his son Solomon. Yet, this tragic fall shouldn’t have been a surprise. God, through His prophets and the Law, had warned His people of the dire consequences for not living as He had called them to do. 40:3 says, “The Lord has brought it about, and has done as He said. Because you sinned against the Lord and did not obey His voice, this thing has come upon you.” This statement reflects one of the fundamental truths about life and the world God created – that there are consequences for our decisions and behavior – whether immediate or far off; and we can’t escape them by just ignoring them or pretending they’re not there.

### □ Notes

## Jeremiah 42-44

It's one thing to not bother to seek God's direction in a major decision in your life, but it's another to intentionally seek it, hear God's direction clearly, and then choose to ignore it. The first one leads to trouble, the second one leads to disaster. And it's this second scenario that we see the Jewish leaders walk right into.

With the murder of the Babylonian-appointed governor of Judah, the Jewish leaders feared that the Babylonian king would punish them; so they turned to Jeremiah to hear a word from the Lord. And, of course, God's Word came back clearly "Stay where you are and God will protect you." But the leaders didn't like that answer. They kidnapped Jeremiah and took all the people to Egypt – the place they were not to go. Then they made a bad situation worse. They flagrantly worshipped the false god's of Egypt, believing it would be more helpful than worshiping and trusting the true God, the God of their fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Unfortunately, the disaster God promised these people, if they disobeyed His Word, was soon to come.

### □ Notes



## Jeremiah 45-48

Jeremiah begins a series of prophetic judgments against many of the nations who surround Judah. In each case, God issues a judgment based on their treatment of Judah as well as their worship of false gods. The themes that run through these prophecies include pride, lack of mercy, violence, robbery, and injustice. These judgments remind us of God's sovereign rule over all people, places, and nations. It's not only God's people who are called to live according to His standards, but all people.

The reason for this common judgment is because, as Paul says in Romans 1:18-20 "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them... so they are without excuse." No matter who we are, or where we come from, we live before God without any excuse – we're all called to live by the Law and standards of God. But it's only in Jesus Christ we're able to do so to God's standards and to His glory.

### □ Notes

## Jeremiah 49-50

Jeremiah's prophecies and judgments continue in these next two chapters. The nations and cities include Edom, Ammon, and Damascus. Then Jeremiah finishes with Babylon – the nation appointed by God to bring judgment on Judah. Their last prophecy is long and detailed. It provides a preview into Babylon's fall that we'll read about in the book of Daniel. Because of Babylon's pride, God brings them down as Jeremiah says in 50:32 "The proud one shall stumble and fall, with none to raise him up." It's a powerful reminder that people and organizations used by God can easily fall into pride, seeing their work or position as something earned or deserved and not as a gift from God. Later, as we read the book of Daniel, we'll gain even more insight and detail into Babylon's pride and its consequential fall and destruction.

### □ Notes

## Jeremiah 51-52

We come to the end of the book of Jeremiah which brings us to the end of Babylon and the end of Jerusalem. The ending of Babylon seems fitting as we reflect back over the different books we read that accounted Babylon's aggression against Judah and its total disrespect for God. But reading of the final fall of Jerusalem is harder. Jerusalem represented God's people. It was the place of God's Temple – His dwelling place on earth. To see it come to an end is sad. We read of the articles of the Temple, many of them created and placed there by King Solomon himself, being hauled off to ultimately reside in the treasuries of a pagan king.

Yet, the end of both of these nations reminds us of the temporal nature of the world, and the things of this world. Neither nations, buildings, or cities endure forever – only God's Word. Yet, God doesn't leave us with this hopeless reality. Instead, God promises us that one day everything, including the entire earth, will be made new and will stand for ever – becoming Jesus's dwelling place among us.

### □ Notes



# Lamentations 1-2

The book of Lamentations is the logical follow-up to the book of Jeremiah. It's a collection of five poems lamenting the fall and destruction of Jerusalem. Though the book itself doesn't say who the author is, it's very likely it was Jeremiah. As you read over the next two days, it will seem to you as if you're reading a eulogy from a funeral. Each poem is a sad reflection of the tragic end to this once great city.

There's honesty in each poem as they explore the incredible sadness of not just the fall of this city, but the loss of life and homes by its inhabitants. There's also a strong acknowledgment that all of this devastation was caused by the nation's sins over many generations. There's no complaint to God, only this overwhelming sense that the consequences match the crime and that God administered true justice – which only makes the pain greater.

## □ Notes

## Lamentations 3-5

In the midst of these prayers of lamentations, in the midst of utter destruction, the author reminds us of God's faithfulness. In 3:22-23 he writes, "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, His mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness." For this reason the author can say, "'The Lord is my portion' says my soul, 'therefore I will hope in Him'" (3:24).

It's this gift of faith that finds God in the midst of such horrible circumstances. It's a gift to believe that things will get better – in this life or in the next. It's faith that provides strength when strength is all but drained away. And it's faith to trust that God is in absolute control of all things and nothing happens outside of His knowledge or His will. That's why the author can also say, "The Lord is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him" (3:25). Waiting is the posture of faith.

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 1-4

The book of Ezekiel records the events and messages during the ministry of the priest Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a contemporary of Jeremiah and prophesied about many of the same events. The difference between the two was that Jeremiah did his ministry living in Jerusalem while Ezekiel lived among the first exiles to Babylon. Ezekiel's messages came from the perspective of sitting in a foreign country, far removed from the events of Jerusalem.

As we'll quickly see, God has Ezekiel use visual and tangible object lessons to communicate the messages he will deliver to the people in exile. Some of which, like cooking his food over burning human or cow dung, required great sacrifice by Ezekiel (notice he prepared and ate his meals like this for over a year). As you read about these visions and prophecies, take an extra moment to visualize what each must have looked, smelled, and tasted like. Put yourself in that place so you can experience the full impact of it – just like the people of Ezekiel's day.

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 5-8

There's nothing encouraging in these four chapters of Ezekiel. What we read is judgment and wrath. So, whenever you're tempted to believe God is only a God of love and not a God of justice you need only to re-read these chapters to be reminded of His holiness and the justice that it requires.

But why does God's wrath, judgment, fire and brimstone fill these pages? It's summarized so well in chapter 8 where Ezekiel, through a vision, is brought into the Temple to witness the flagrant idolatry and false worship by the Judah's leaders. After seeing this horrible situation, God says to Ezekiel in verse 17 "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too light a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations that they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence and provoke me still further to anger?" You see, it wasn't just the idolatry and the chasing after false gods that angers God; it was what false religion always leads to – violence, injustice, abuse of the defenseless, and the crumbling of the moral fiber of a society.

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 9-12

Ezekiel's vision becomes even more graphic with its description of God's judgment on the people of Israel. But, like the Exodus story of the Passover, God identifies those who are still faithful to Him and who abhor the sin around them. Dividing the faithful from those who are not reminds us that God's judgment is neither arbitrary nor unfair.

As we've seen so often in the Scriptures, this harsh judgment is followed by words of hope. Ezekiel, like Jeremiah, shares a glimpse into the New Covenant that we received through Christ in 11:19 "And I will give them one heart and a new spirit I will put within them. I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh." This promise becomes fulfilled in Christ, for by the Holy Spirit we receive this new heart where Christ Himself now dwells (Colossians 1:27).

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 13-15

Though God does not excuse the people of Judah for their unfaithfulness, we get a glimpse into the reasons why they've become this way. First, many of Judah's leading prophets gave false visions and taught lies about God's plans for Jerusalem and its people. For example, they prophesied peace when war was on the horizon. The prophets of ancient Israel parallel today's pastors and teachers, those people with the responsibility to teach and share God's Word.

Then we see the leaders of Judah, who represent today's political and civic leaders, practicing idolatry and chasing after false gods. Civic and political leaders are to be examples of how the people of a community and a nation are to live. But in Judah, at this time, they were leading God's people astray.

Understanding Judah during these years, before its destruction, helps us understand why so many of its people became blatantly unfaithful and lost their way. But in the end, God still provides the nation with faithful leaders and truthful prophets, like Jeremiah, who faithfully shared God's Word so the people and the entire nation are without excuse for their sin.

### □ Notes

# Ezekiel 16

After describing Judah as a “useless vine” in chapter 15, Ezekiel now turns to a more graphic and uncomfortable metaphor – an unfaithful bride. It’s a much more graphic description of the relationship between God and His people. Ezekiel uses strong and visual language that describes Judah’s unfaithfulness, calling her a whore, all of which makes reading it a bit uncomfortable.

But, what is fascinating about this description are the spiritual truths that tend to be overlooked when thinking about people’s relationships to God. First, when Judah begins to worship idols and false gods, they were actually worshipping the good gifts given to her by God. But worse, when she began to “chase after the other nations” she used these good gifts to bribe other nations to commit spiritual adultery with her. It was Judah, taking these good gifts, and using them for unfaithfulness, that created such a response by God.

## □ Notes



## Ezekiel 17-19

Chapter 18 is a fascinating chapter. It's a theological and philosophical exposition on sin, guilt, righteousness, innocence, and accountability. All of these concepts would have been at the forefront of the Jewish mind during this period of national upheaval. What could we and the ancient Jews learn from Ezekiel's discourse?

- First, a person is always found guilty for the sin they've committed.
- Second, a person is never guilty of sin that someone else has committed. It doesn't matter if there's a close relationship or not – there's no guilt by association.
- Third, these two principles apply in the other direction to righteousness and innocence before God – a person is accountable for their own righteousness but cannot be declared innocent because of someone else's righteousness. The only exception to this principle (which Ezekiel doesn't explore) is the innocence we can declare before God that we receive from and through Jesus Christ.
- Fourth, the consequences for both righteousness and sin reflect God's justice and we can't escape them.
- Finally, God finds no pleasure in the consequences required by justice for those guilty of sin. His desire is for all to be righteous to be declared innocent and live – which can happen only through Jesus.

### □ Notes

# Ezekiel 20-21

The judgments continue to flow from Ezekiel concerning Judah and the reasons continue to be the same – worship of false gods, breaking the Covenant Law, and injustice among the people. But in chapter 20, we’re introduced to a new violation of the Covenant – the “profaning of the Sabbath.” What does “profaning of the Sabbath” mean? It simply means not setting aside one’s work and activity for a day for the purpose of focusing on and worshipping God. Why was this an important article of the Jewish Law? Because, as 20:12 says, “I gave them my Sabbath, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them.”

The Sabbath set the Jews apart from the other nations and people. It demonstrated their faith in His provision and acknowledged that all good things come from God. It also had benefits for the people themselves – it provided needed rest and refreshment from daily responsibilities while focusing on God for a day. I’ve often wondered what the world might look like if Christians once again observed the Sabbath as both the ancient Jews and Christians had done?

## □ Notes

## Ezekiel 22-23

As part of Ezekiel's judgment against both Judah and Israel, he uses two sisters as a metaphor to describe their sin. First, he describes the unfaithfulness of the first sister, Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and this is followed by a graphic description of the unfaithfulness of Judah – the home of God's Temple, the priests and their work, and the line of David. Ezekiel says that, as bad as Israel's unfaithfulness was "Her sister Oholibah saw this, yet in her lust and prostitution she was more depraved than her sister." (23:11). This unfaithfulness included worshipping of false gods and worse – worshipping false gods in the Temple itself with violence, bloodshed, and finally child sacrifice. These acts demanded justice by God because of the blatant disrespect for God's Law and the covenant they had with Him.

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 24-26

Two tragic events occurred almost at the same time in Ezekiel's life. First, the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians began which would lead to the destruction of the city and the Temple. Then there's a more personal loss, the death of his wife. It was a sudden death and God instructed Ezekiel not to mourn. This lack of mourning became a sign to the people of the coming death of Jerusalem, the Temple, and the loss of family members left in Jerusalem. When all of this happens the exiles will react to the news the same way Ezekiel reacted to the death of his wife. The point being, that by the time the siege of Jerusalem ended the exiles with Ezekiel would be numb to the news, because they would have been expecting it for months, anticipating what the outcome would be. It's not unlike watching a person slowly die with a terminal illness, when death finally arrives it's easy to be numb to the news.

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 27-28

Starting in chapter 25, Ezekiel pronounces judgments on a long list of nations who are neighbors of Judah or who have some significant dealing with her. Each nation committed their version of sin against God and against Judah leading to God's judgment. The overall message, though, is that all people and nations are accountable to God for their behavior and their lives.

There is no excuse for sinful, evil behavior – including ignorance of God and His Law. Paul says in Romans 1:19-20 “For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible qualities, namely, his eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.” What Paul is saying is that no one can claim to have no knowledge of God because His evidence is so clearly seen in the world. Therefore, no one is free from accountability to God's Law and Will – including the nations around Judah.

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 29-31

Ezekiel finishes his prophecies and judgments against the neighboring nations of Israel with a long message about Egypt. The fact that this is one of the longer prophecies about Israel's neighbors makes sense considering both the significant role Egypt plays in Jewish history as well as its large size and power. At this time in history, Egypt had lost some of its power and prestige among the nations, though it was still a significant nation in a strategic place.

Egypt's long history included practicing false religions, worshipping false gods, instigating violence, and perpetrating injustice against its citizens and neighbors. The pinnacle of all of this sin was its pride, typified by its belief that Egypt created the Nile, the longest river in the world, and thus owned it. By placing itself as the creator of a natural wonder, Egypt was essentially declaring itself a deity – that alone is a significant affront to the real God who is the Creator of the earth and everything in it.

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 32-33

In today's readings we encounter Ezekiel's discussion about responsibility and accountability. First, God compares Ezekiel to a city's watchman whose responsibility it is to watch and then warn the city's inhabitants of approaching danger. The watchman is accountable for the timely warning of the people, but not for their response to the warning. Ezekiel's responsibility was to share God's Word and God held him accountable for doing so, but Ezekiel was not responsible, nor held accountable, for how the people responded. The people were responsible and held accountable for their own response.

This discussion then led Ezekiel to explore the responsibility and accountability of people who live righteously and those who live wickedly. Once people hear God's Word, they're accountable for how they respond and live their lives from that point forward. If we consider Ezekiel's ideas we realize that none of us are truly righteous and thus stand condemned before God. It's only through the righteousness of Christ and taking on His righteousness as ours, that we can be counted as righteous before God.

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 34-36

In our reading today, we see Ezekiel's thoughts and vision about the future that should give us a sense of purpose and hope. In chapter 34 we read about God's judgment of Israel's leaders – a judgment for their lack of leadership. It's followed by the promise of a leader who will come in the line of David, who will be God's leader of His people. And, of course, we know this leader is Jesus Christ – our Captain, our Shepherd, our Leader.

Then, after some brief words about another neighboring nation, Ezekiel turns from the leaders to the place the Israelites will once again dwell – the Promised Land and the promise of future peace and prosperity in this land. Ezekiel ends this progression of thought with the pinnacle of his thinking – after all of this happens, a new leader will come and there will be peace in the land, and God will place His Spirit in His people, not on His people. Then the Spirit will direct God's people to live according to His Laws. It's a promise of the coming Holy Spirit after Christ's resurrection and ascension into heaven. Ultimately, this entire line of thinking points us to Christ and the new life we can have in Him.

### □ Notes

## Ezekiel 37-38

In one of the most well-known visions in the entire Bible, Ezekiel sees a valley full of dry bones. God asks Ezekiel if the bones could once again have life and Ezekiel's answer is instructive – he says, "O Lord God, you know." You see, Ezekiel understood both physical and spiritual death's finality apart from God and the unlimited power of God to bring physically and spiritually dead people back to life if He chooses to.

So what happens next? God instructs Ezekiel to preach His Word to the dead bones and then God begins to bring them back to life. The Word of God is the avenue for God's Spirit to work in those who are spiritually dry or dead. Because ultimately, it's God who transforms lives, who resurrects the dead, and causes spiritual rebirth to happen in people and He does so through the power of His Word. If you're feeling spiritually dry or dead, turn to God, for He's the only One who can take dry bones and give them life again.

### □ Notes

# Ezekiel 39-40

After a lengthy prophecy about a mysterious person named Gog and a mysterious nation called Magog (most likely people from the land around the Black and Caspian Seas), Ezekiel begins describing an important vision he has received from God about the future rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem. The vision is important because, by this time, Solomon's Temple (the original Temple) was both looted and destroyed by the Babylonians. Beyond Jerusalem itself, the Temple was the most important place in Jewish life. It represented God's presence among His people. It was the place the Jews gathered to celebrate national holidays and significant religious festivals. The Temple was also the center of Jewish worship and the place where the Jews offered their prescribed sacrifices before God.

This is why the vision God gave Ezekiel is so important. It provided not only the blueprint for a new Temple, it gave the Jewish people hope that God would restore their nation and give them, once again, a place to worship Him.

## □ Notes

## Ezekiel 41-43

Ezekiel continues with his vision of the new Temple. As you read notice the detailed description of the Temple God provides Ezekiel. This description provided hope to the exiled Jews that their religious and national life would one day be reestablished.

In addition to the new Temple's description, there's one other important point in this vision that affirmed God's plan for the Jewish people. It's found in 43:1-8 where Ezekiel sees the glory of the Lord as he did in an earlier vision. But this time, instead of the glory of the Lord departing the Temple, it returns to the new Temple where God says, "This is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the people of Israel forever" (43:7). Learning that God planned not only to restore the Temple and its worship but also that God would once again make the Temple, Jerusalem, and Israel His home, would have been incredibly encouraging to people living in exile because their country, city, and Temple had been destroyed.

### □ Notes

# Ezekiel 44-45

Once Ezekiel completed his description of the new Temple, his vision moved to an even more important topic – the new leadership of Israel and the Temple – the “prince,” Israel’s political leader, the Levites and the priests.

In both cases, Ezekiel reminds us of the previous sins of Israel’s leadership and outlines the new standards of conduct that they were to follow. This focus on leadership was important because no matter how beautiful the new Temple would be, apart from Godly leadership, the Temple would remain just that – a beautiful building. It’s through Godly leadership that the people would use the Temple for its proper purpose – worshipping the Living God. But, without people committed to faithfully following God, the Temple and even the nation itself, meant nothing, and would lead to the same ending the first Temple came to – its destruction. At the end of the day, it always comes down to people and especially leaders committed faithfully to God.

## □ Notes

## Ezekiel 46-48

Ezekiel finishes his vision (and his book) with a look at what Israel's future life will look like when the Temple is rebuilt. The vision describes Israel's future leader, the daily sacrifices, the land, and its allotment to the tribes of Israel.

Notice the river flowing out from the Temple – creating a river with fruit bearing trees lining both sides of the river. It's an image that's nearly repeated in its exact form at the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation. Revelation provides an additional perspective about this future Temple and about Israel. What we can conclude is that the Temple described in Ezekiel is a future Temple, an unrealized and yet-to-come promise. It's not the Temple that was rebuilt with the return of the exiles from Babylon. Instead, it's the Temple present when Christ returns and establishes His rule over heaven and earth. It is a future event – one that we along with the ancient Jews should look forward to with anticipation. It's the place where Christ will dwell among His people forever.

### □ Notes

# Daniel 1-2

We begin the last book of what's called the "major prophets" – the book of Daniel. Daniel is a mere 12 chapters, divided into two parts. The first six chapters are historic and narrative in nature while the last half's filled with visions and prophecies. The first half is filled with stories often taught to children because they're filled with powerful lessons, admirable people, and memorable situations. The second half is familiar to people who've spent time trying to piece together the "end times" though, most likely, Daniel's visions are about events and people more contemporary to Daniel than to us.

Within the first two chapters we quickly learn that Daniel is a special person. He's wise beyond his years, he's courageous and willing to stand up for what's right, and most importantly he's full of faith. Daniel and his friends quickly become role models, not just for children, but also for all of us who want to live more faithfully in an increasingly secular world.

## □ Notes

## Daniel 3-4

“But if not...” Daniel 3:18 contains powerful words of faith spoken by the three friends of Daniel – Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. They remind us of the faith we’re to have in the face of unbelievable odds and regardless of the consequences. In this particular case God saves these three men, not because they deserve it or have earned it by their great faith, but because it was God’s choice to do so. Nowhere in this story do we read that God saved them because of what they did or because of their faith. The only credit given anywhere is to God whom even the pagan king Nebuchadnezzar says, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego” 3:28. It’s always God who saves, it’s always God who does the miraculous – it is our faith that puts us in a position to see it and to experience it. But our faith doesn’t cause it. Faith opens the door for God to work in our lives and not for us to do work in God’s life or in His world.

### □ Notes

## Daniel 5-6

Daniel has two qualities that propelled him to the top of the political systems in both Babylon and the Medo-Persia. Both of these qualities are on display in our reading today. First, as we've already seen, Daniel is wise and speaks truth clearly to others concerning complex situations. Daniel spoke truth to the last Babylonian king about the words God wrote on the king's walls.

Secondly, as we've seen already, Daniel maintains his integrity even at the risk of his own life. Daniel once again refuses to participate in any activity that stands opposed to God and His Law. When a law designed to turn Daniel's integrity into an opportunity to kill him is announced, Daniel maintains his integrity to God and prays to Him three times a day. When he's accused of breaking the law, and punished, God rescues him and in the process, God is glorified.

### □ Notes

## Daniel 7-8

This next section of Daniel is actually the second half, and is full of visions and dreams that God gave Daniel. Each one deals with the future and, in particular, countries and rulers that will have an impact on Israel and the known world. As you read these chapters, you'll notice that some of the visions and dreams come with interpretations and some do not. Even when a vision is accompanied by an interpretation, the interpretation can still be difficult to understand for readers who now live two millennia from the events addressed by the vision.

But before we decide to write off any of these visions as not helpful for us today because they deal with ancient people and ancient nations, we need to see what they tell us about God. First, we can see that God knows the future of events of the world. God is never surprised about events large or small. But, more importantly, these visions show us how God not only knows what's coming, He's actually directing them to His desired end. If nothing else, these visions should help our faith in God grow knowing He's in control of all things.

### □ Notes

## Daniel 9-10

In chapter 9 we read an incredible prayer by Daniel. It's a prayer of confession, full of praise and adoration for God, a prayer that includes requests for God's people. It's a beautiful prayer and one we can model our own prayers after.

But notice what inspired such a prayer. It was the time Daniel spent reading God's Word. In particular, Daniel was reading the book of Jeremiah, the prophet who lived and taught during the last days of Judah and Jerusalem before their destruction by Babylon. Based on our own experience reading through the Bible there should be no surprise that the Scriptures inspired such a posture and response by Daniel. You may have had your own moments of spontaneous prayers inspired by God's Word as well. The reason for such a response is simple as Hebrews 4:12 says, "For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

### □ Notes

# Daniel 11-12

Daniel's vision continues in chapter 11 and comes to a conclusion in chapter 12. To understand Daniel's vision, at this point, requires us to know a little about ancient history, including the career of Alexander the Great and his successors, including those who will rule in his place over the territory in and around Israel. The events describe the time that scholars call the "intertestamental period", the time between the final books of the Old Testament and the coming of Christ.

Daniel's vision gave the ancient Jews insight in to what the next period of history would look like for them and their nation as well as assured them that God would continue to direct the events that impacted their country. Some have thought that it would be impossible for Daniel to have written these prophecies because of their accuracy; believing that someone else wrote them "after the fact". But to take this position is to ignore the fact that the God, who directs all of history, also knows all of history and can share that with His servants and His people for their benefit and His glory.

## □ Notes



# Hosea 1-7

The book of Hosea marks the beginning of the last section of the Old Testament, traditionally called, the “Minor Prophets”. This title has been given, not because of the relative insignificance of these prophets’ ministries, but because of the relative short length of each book as compared to the longer books of the “Major Prophets”. As we’ll see, though these books have been categorized as “minor”, the truth they share and the spiritual insight provide are clearly “major”.

Hosea is the “death-bed prophet of Israel” because he is the last prophet to speak to Israel before its downfall at the hands of the Assyrians. The cause of their downfall, as we’ll learn reading Hosea, was their blatant unfaithfulness to God. Israel pursued false gods, using the good gifts of God as offerings to these false gods. To illustrate this horrible sin, God instructs Hosea to marry a prostitute who basically continues her profession once married, which highlights the depth of Israel’s unfaithfulness. It’s a condemning message with a powerful illustration for what turns out to be a dire moment in Israel’s history.

## □ Notes

## Hosea 8-14

The second half of Hosea moves away from Hosea's marriage to an unfaithful wife to direct prophecies about Israel. As you read these chapters, you'll notice the themes and tone are much like those of Isaiah and Jeremiah. God condemns Israel's unfaithfulness to Him. He calls the people out of worshipping false gods, and in particular, in false worship that even included human sacrifices. Israel had forgotten and turned its back on God, leading them to a horrific place. Even when bad things happen to them, things God promised would come if they were unfaithful, the Israelites turned even more to their false gods. It's not till the very end of the book that we see a glimpse of hope, of God restoring a repentant Israel to its proper place, both geographically and spiritually. Even Israel's worse sins could not thwart God's plans.

### □ Notes

## Joel 1-3

There's a lot we don't know about the author and prophet Joel and his writings. Yet, regardless of the lack of information about Joel's background, we can still learn much about God and His people. We see how God rules over all of the earth – over all nations and people. All people are accountable to God for the life they've lived. This accountability will come in, "The Day of the Lord." The "Day of the Lord" is the day the people of Israel looked forward to when God will judge all the nations and return Judah and Jerusalem to their former glory. But this "Day of the Lord" turned out to be a little different from what the Jews expected it to be. The first hint of the difference comes in verse 2:28, when God pours His Spirit out onto His people. This event, we now know, happened after Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven, on the day of Pentecost, assuring the beginning of God's Kingdom on earth. The final day of the Lord then will be when Christ returns to bring to fulfillment His Kingdom and judge all people.

### □ Notes



## Amos 1-5

The prophet Amos, as noted in 1:1, was a shepherd called by God to prophesy, that is, speak God's Word to both Judah and Israel. It's believed that the book of Amos is the earliest of the Old Testament prophetic writings. He prophesied during the reigns of Uzziah, the king of Judah, and Jeroboam, the king of Israel (1:1). As you might recall in our previous readings, it was during these periods in Judah and Israel's history that both experienced political stability and therefore economic prosperity.

Unfortunately, it appears that the economic prosperity led to a lapse in both moral and religious convictions. This led to the worship of false gods and widespread social injustice (which included neglecting orphans and widows). It was for these reasons that Amos spoke out against the nations and against the people. Once again, we see these twin themes of true worship of God and administering justice receiving equal importance in the eyes of God and His expectations for His people.

### □ Notes

# Amos 6-9, Obadiah

As we finish Amos, we read how he's accused, by the priests of the northern kingdom of Israel, of treachery against the king. The leaders ask Amos to leave his country, Israel, and go preach to Judah (7:12). Both the leadership and the people of Israel didn't want to hear God's Word; they wanted to remain in their comfortable positions – in their peace and prosperity. As a result, God would send a famine to the land, a natural disaster that would humble the people and remind them of the source of their peace and prosperity.

Obadiah is the shortest book in the Old Testament. It's a brief judgment against the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, the brother of the patriarch Isaac, and thus relatives of the Israelites. Edom was judged because the Edomites were unwilling to protect Israelites who were fleeing from the Babylonian invasion and, in some cases, they actually aided the Babylonians in their pursuit of the Israelites. God clearly saw this as a treacherous affront to their brothers, the Israelites, and to Him their God.

## □ Notes

## Jonah 1-4, Micah 1-2

The story of Jonah is well known by many. He runs away from God, is swallowed by a fish, and lives in its belly for three days before being spit up on the shore, so he can do the work God called him to. The lesson of Jonah is that when God calls us we'd better answer that call and not run away. God will find us and make sure His plans are fulfilled. This is an important lesson for all of us to learn, not just children in Sunday school. It's also important for us as adults to recognize that this story isn't just a fable but a real story about a historic person named Jonah. Jonah is mentioned in the Old Testament in 2 Kings 14:25 and his story is affirmed by Jesus in Matthew 12:39-41. When we move from seeing it as more than just a fable, the lessons in it, and the truths it communicates, become even more powerful and convicting. God calls us to a task, just as He called Jonah, and our responsibility is to answer that calling by being faithful in our fulfillment of it – regardless of the outcomes or circumstances.

### □ Notes

## Micah 3-7

Micah is one of those prophets who gave the ancient Jews, and us, insight into the promised coming Messiah. In particular, Micah tells us that the Messiah, the “One who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days” (5:2), will come from Bethlehem. It’s this verse that priests and scribes referred to when telling King Herod where they expected the Messiah to be born (Matthew 2:6). The promise of the Messiah provided hope to the ancient Jews because the Messiah would restore their nation and reestablish their covenant with God.

What does this covenant require? “To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8). It is this covenant that Jesus Christ perfectly fulfilled on our behalf, so that we may have fellowship with God and be included in His Kingdom. And this is the cornerstone of our hope in Jesus as well; that He did and does what we can’t do in our covenant with God – which is live righteously.

### □ Notes

# Nahum 1-3, Habakkuk 1-3

These two prophets, Nahum and Habakkuk, were possibly contemporaries. Nahum preached judgment against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Assyria was the country God used to punish Israel, the northern Jewish kingdom, for its sin. Though God used this godless nation to punish Israel because of its own sin, God would also punish Assyria using another pagan nation to accomplish His justice – Babylon. Nahum’s words would have brought hope to the Israelites oppressed by Assyria, that He would administer justice to all nations, not just Israel.

Habakkuk’s prophecies focused, instead, on Babylon – the country God used to punish both Assyria and Judah. Once again, the prophet is confronted with the paradox of God using a pagan nation to fulfill His purposes. Habakkuk doesn’t solve these dilemmas but says, “The righteous shall live by faith” (2:3). That is, we’re to trust God even when we don’t understand or see the full extent of God’s justice in the world or His purpose for events that happen.

## □ Notes

# Zephaniah 1-3, Haggai 1-2

Zephaniah ministered during a time of spiritual revival in Judah. The major theme of his message was the coming of the “Day of the Lord”. The Day of the Lord appears in many places in Scripture and has carried two different but intertwined meanings. The first meaning of the Day of the Lord is simply those judgments God makes on people and nations in response to their sin and rebellion. The second meaning is the day when Christ returns and brings all people into judgment as part of ushering in the new heaven and new earth. As we’ve already experienced, in reading the Bible so far, it takes wisdom to discern which day an author is referring to at any particular moment.

Haggai, on the other hand, comes on the scene significantly later, when the Jewish remnant returns to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple. Haggai’s teachings are not focused on some future day, but on encouraging the Jews to do the task at hand, which was rebuilding God’s Temple. He challenges the people to do this work before rebuilding their homes, businesses, and cities because God is the source of all of all of those other things.

## □ Notes

# Zechariah 1-6

Zechariah was a peer of Haggai and addressed some of the same issues Haggai addressed in his ministry. What we'll find unique about Zechariah's teaching is the powerful use of symbols to make his teaching points. These symbolic illustrations and object lessons make Zechariah's message both memorable and convicting.

There are two people that play a prominent role in Zechariah's teachings. The first, is a man named Joshua. He was the high priest in charge of rebuilding the Temple. He also was the spiritual leader of the Jews, so God called him to faithful living and leadership.

The second person is Zechariah. He directs his teaching to Zerubbabel, the Jewish governor of Judah who is also mentioned by Haggai. What's important to note is that Zerubbabel is not only the governor but also a direct descendent of David and therefore the rightful political leader of the Jewish people. He's also mentioned in Matthew 1:13 because he was an ancestor of Jesus Christ; showing God's fulfilled promise of a son of David always sitting on the ruling seat of Judah.

Together these two men held the sacred trust of leading God's people and thus received special words to encourage them to this end.

## □ Notes

# Zechariah 7-10

Zechariah's teachings move steadily, like any good story, to a historical climax – the coming of the Messiah and the full restoration of Israel. In today's readings, we see the first steps toward this climax. First we read, once again, the familiar theme taught in all the prophetic books – assure justice and mercy is given to those less fortunate. This is a prerequisite for a nation before they could experience peace and prosperity.

Secondly, Zechariah announces judgment against Israel's enemies, another reoccurring theme found throughout the prophets. These judgments correspond with God's promise of Israel's restoration, that peace and prosperity follows justice and mercy. This entire sequence, of God's dealing with His people and the nations, reminds us of God's sovereignty over all of history. He directs all things to His desired end and, along the way, deals with the people and nations consistently as God.

## □ Notes

# About SpringHill Camps



SpringHill Camps is a non-profit Christian camp and retreat ministry with locations in Michigan, Indiana, Illinois, Ohio and Wisconsin. Our mission is to glorify God by creating life-impacting experiences that enable young people to know and grow in their relationship with Jesus Christ. You and your kids will love Summer Camp with our extreme sports, high adventure activities and outdoor games because it's all integrated with life-changing, fun, faith-filled experiences. But that's not where it ends! We've also got Day Camps, Weekend Retreats, Men's and Women's Retreats, Family Camps, Corporate Retreats, Church Retreats, etc. Whether it's spring, summer, fall or winter, there's always something going on! Youth, teens, adults and families can truly live it up. And you, your church, your company or organization can even book our facilities and programs for your very own group retreats, conferences or outing.

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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.





# Reflections

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Quotes sourced from New International Version, Zondervan 1984.

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