

READING NOTES – JANUARY

The One Year Bible (ESV)

JANUARY 1

I've written the Reading Notes as a help and supplement to leaders leading discipleship cells. I am not suggesting that everyone read these, although that might be helpful. The main goal is to have everyone reading The One Year Bible each day. The Holy Spirit will work with that. For each person who desires to go deeper and to lead others, answering questions and adding perspective and detail to the Bible passages, the Reading Notes might be a help.

I'm doing this with discipleship in mind, meaning, I'm writing out thoughts that will keep discipleship and our growth as disciples applied to what we are reading. This would mean that if we were to meet in a cell on any given evening, we could discuss the Bible reading up to and including that day, regarding our walk as disciples. The important thing is that people are in the Word. The leader doesn't need to be a teacher. He just needs to see that people are in the Word, are interacting and then, when necessary, he can add some perspective or clarification.

When the year is done, I'm hoping, with your ideas and mine together, we will have a guide for discipleship to lead a group through one year of using The One Year Bible as a discipleship tool. Every year I read like this, I glean more from the reading. The Spirit uses our growth and our life situation to put His finger on words and thoughts that take on importance as we follow Christ. So, reading the Word each year will always be new because of our changing walk and the lives of the new people who will be in these groups.

In doing this, going through the Bible like this, we are modeling, for others, the importance of reading the Word and learning from the Lord. We are also equipping them and helping them become disciples who will feed themselves from the Word and be able to reproduce this in the lives of others. What a great privilege.

I'd encourage you to get The One Year Bible, ESV. I like to have a book in hand, old school, to mark up and make lines all over. If you don't have one or prefer something online, this link will take you to the day's reading, <http://www.esvbible.org/devotions/every-day-in-the-word>. If you prefer to have a hard copy of the Reading Notes (I do), you can find documents for each month at www.sites.google.com/site/dlkachikis.

Genesis 1-2:25

In reading the creation account, a disciple is faced with a challenge of faith and trust. How big will we allow God to be in our lives?

The creation account is very "matter of fact." God doesn't present Himself figuratively. The account is simple and descriptive. Nothing suggests that this account of creation is not literal. Our rationality or fear of seeming irrational sneaks in and says, "But God could have made all of this over millions of years and the seven days could be figurative." True. But is saying this really necessary to help God, or ourselves out? If God is God, could He have done things just this way? Can we put total trust in God even when things don't "appear" to follow what everyone says? How big will we allow God to be?

Some examples: The angels that came to Abraham later were in human form. They made the bodies from the spiritual, without effort. These were full, normal-looking human bodies, with teeth and tongues and fingerprints, made immediately, not requiring a billion-year process.

When Jesus raised the young man in Nain, or Lazarus, both men had decayed. Their bodies and every cell had died. They weren't somehow in suspended animation. They were dead and

decaying. For Jesus to have raised them, it not only meant calling back the spirit, but their bodies had to be made new and able to sustain life. To call the spirit into a decayed body couldn't work. For Jesus to have made the body new, it would have been on the level of a creation...a re-creation of the body. And it happened in a second and Jesus didn't break a sweat.

The point being, the spiritual is infinitely more powerful than the physical. God creates out of nothing, without exertion, instantly. Also, the fact that the sun, moon and stars were made on the 4th day does not hint to the fact that the "primitive" writers got mixed up, but simply that the almighty God called them into existence, in a moment, at the right time, in His planning.

This all-powerful, sovereign Creator is the Lord we follow. All things were made through Him and without Him was nothing made that was made. Surely there are reasons He doesn't answer every prayer the way we ask, but for the disciple, there is never a doubt to the greatness of our Lord and Savior, or His ability, at any time, to do what is amazing and to do far more abundantly than we can ask or think. We serve and follow with confidence in His power.

Genesis 1

V. 1 What a way to begin a book. If you were reading last year, this verse should sound familiar since it is just like Revelation 21:1.

V. 2 This is very different from Revelation 21. Some see the Spirit brooding in judgment here. It was probably more like an artist walking around a piece of marble, visualizing what it was to become.

Vs. 3-5 Day One-Light was given from God Himself. The darkness was already there.

Vs. 6-8 Day Two - The waters above and below have suggested that there was a thick layer of moisture in the atmosphere surrounding the entire earth, limiting the rays of the sun and giving the earth a uniform tropical atmosphere. This layer of water in the atmosphere would explain the waters of the flood and the changes that came after the flood. Actually, only God and His power can account for all of the changes.

Vs. 9-13 Day Three - This was a big day. Not only do you have dry land and seas separated, but God planted and grew everything. Again, if we have faith in the Lord, this shouldn't be any problem. We have plenty of examples of what God can do in an instant, but the most deciding thing is our faith. *And the Lord said, "If you had faith like a grain of mustard seed, you could say to this mulberry tree, 'Be uprooted and planted in the sea,' and it would obey you.* (Luke 17:6)

Vs. 14-19 Day Four - All of the days up to now are pretty straightforward, but there are some questions about this day. First, it comes after God made the plants. Second, it has a specific purpose, to separate and to be for signs and seasons and for days and years.

This would mean that the sun, moon, other planets and galaxies were made on the fourth day and they were made for us. Their purpose was to give a "natural" day and night and for counting time. Of course there were other reasons God made these, but these are the said reasons. We'll see in Revelation, that life can exist without them; in fact, it will. It seems that these things were made only for this time during the history of the earth.

Vs. 20-23 Day Five - One interesting thought here is that although the plants were fine before the sun was made to provide energy and heat, the animals needed the universe to be there even more than the plants. Birds and insects, (bees, for example) need the angle of the sun and the other "signs" for guidance. Probably all of the animals are much more instinctively aware of the sun, moon and stars than we know.

Vs. 24-31 Day Six - This is the creation of the animals first and then us as the finishing of God's work.

V. 26 Notice that this is the climax of creation. Nothing else has been created in the image of God. Man then is to rule over, guide and shepherd all that God had made. In so much of what we see with God, He always creates with a purpose and with a sense of giving purpose and responsibility. Being made in God's image, and being able to talk personally with God, would have given mankind purpose, fulfillment and responsibility. It would have been cool, and eventually we would have known and built and developed more than we have at present. Sin ruined a lot of things.

V. 27 This is a huge verse. Every person on this planet fails to thank God for His image. It is the thing we take for granted. It is the thing we twist so we can sin intelligently and deny His existence. Cool. When God pulled the "image" from Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel, chapter 4, he didn't think it was cool; in fact, he didn't think. Nebuchadnezzar just moed.

The second part of this verse is also to be respected and revered. God made them male and female. Men take the gifts of God and twist them to their own destruction. Read Mark 10:6-7 where this is quoted by Jesus. Jesus had no other view of marriage than a man and a woman, who, by the way, did not divorce.

Vs. 28-31 This is a fuller description of man's rule of the planet. This authority and power that Adam was given was lost to Satan when Adam sinned. Man came under the condemnation of sin and was no longer fit to rule the planet. Satan apparently went from being an assistant to mankind, to being a restricting guardian.

With all of these blessings, and before the Fall, it was a very good day.

Note that the real division between chapters 1 and 2 is between 2:3 and 2:4. This is a good time to learn or be reminded that the verse and chapter divisions were made by Stephen Langton in 1205. He did an amazing job, but the divisions are not inspired and many of them are not accurate. The general creation of chapter 1 is revisited in, and focused upon, in chapter 2, giving some specific detail to the creation of man and woman.

Regarding the creation of woman: As followers of Christ we know that our world and society is "sex" saturated. We also know that we, like King David (and countless Christians and ministers), can fall prey to sexually related malfunctions. What I'm about to say might not have applied to Paul or to 1% of the population, but I believe it applies to everyone else.

This account, true and literal, shows that "sex" is not the issue with "sex." The issue is completeness. There is a huge difference. Generally speaking, sexual urge is something we "think" we can harness, but the human need for completeness is an irresistible human need built into us from creation. Ignore it, and it will run you over. Deny it, and it will find a way of expression that will create dysfunction and pain. Completeness may be expressed as sexual, but the real driving power is the *spiritual* need to be complete as man and woman, as God made us. This is the reason God later grants a concession for remarriage. The need He built into us is a part of us. On this earth and especially with our spiritual sickness (sin) it will not be denied.

All this is to say that in the world of discipleship, this reality has to be faced. Many couples are ruined and many men maimed in their walk with Christ, because they don't take their need for being complete seriously. It becomes spiritualized or put in the category of scratching an itch. Sexually, they end up wounded and sidelined. Much more should be said on this subject in the context of discipleship, but suffice it to say that this passage is an important one every day in our world.

Genesis 2

Vs. 1-3 These verses really end the general description of creation from chapter 1.

V. 4 This verse is huge. In a sense, it is telling us that the Bible will be an account of the fallen history of man until this history is ended. Remember, God had Moses begin writing this well after the Fall. The purpose of the book is to record the redemptive history of God's working with man to save man. The conclusion of this book will be in Revelation when God does away with these heavens (sky, space, galaxies) and earth and creates the new heavens, new earth and the eternal world.

Vs. 5-9 Now, the account of creation will be retold with the focus on the creation of man.

Vs. 5-6 Notice how the order is given again, but relative to man. The earth was planted and God watered the earth from a mist that went up. Apparently there was no rain until the flood. This would have been complete, including the garden, before man would have something to eat. Just like a baby, once it's out of mom, it has to have air to breath and food to eat.

Vs. 7-9 The focus here is the garden and the provision. God planted the garden, but Adam would have been the landscape architect.

V. 9 Here are the two trees. What a solemn verse. Death and life were both present. *The tree of the knowledge of good and evil* was not magic. The decision made there would give that knowledge regardless of whether Adam and Eve had obeyed or disobeyed. The decision was a spiritual action, which would either break their relationship to God, or it would prove their love for Him. Had they made the right decision, God would have led them to *the tree of life*, where they would have received eternal life and their "innocent" nature would have been transformed into a mature, sinless "spiritual" nature. God could have then turned around and judged Satan and the entire sad tragedy never would have been.

Vs. 10-14 This geography shouldn't make too much sense to us. Moses and God are giving the people some general bearings. The creation of man and the garden was between these rivers. However, the earth changed after the flood. In those generations after the flood it is supposed that the continents drifted, creating the continents and thereby distributing mankind all over the place. Some of the continental drift theories make the Persian Gulf the center of a flower that spread out east and west. Also, there would have been people in Moses' day who would have still known about this event as history. (Remember, Moses was well educated, meaning that nations back then had recorded historical events.) Today it would be the same as telling children that Germany used to be divided. They'll find that hard to believe.

Vs. 15-17 Notice that "work" was not the curse. Adam would have been smart and energetic and creative. I'll bet he had all sorts of ideas on what to do. And then of course, the tree of the test. Imagine, Adam had hundreds of square miles and every imaginable tree to eat from. I'm sure that staying away from one tree couldn't have been that big of a deal, right?

Vs. 18-25 Notice that in the creation of Eve, God was very intentional. He made Adam feel his need. Notice that God made Adam so that even in a perfect environment, with all his needs met, with a sense of fulfillment in being able to make his mark on God's creation, and with being able to walk daily with God in the cool of the evening, according to God's plan, Adam was not complete without Eve.

V. 20 In naming the animals there wasn't just the idea of "lordship," but rather connection. Adam would have felt personally responsible for all of this creation that was given to him to protect and develop.

Adam eventually probably felt lonely.

V. 22 I wonder if Adam thought it was Christmas! God brought her. This was the first wedding and I'll bet it was God the Son who was officiating.

V. 23 What an amazing declaration. Again, the naming of woman is connection. She would now be under his care, figuratively speaking, casting his garment over her (Ruth 3:9 vs. Malachi 2:16) although they were both naked.

V. 24 Don't let the simplicity of this verse fool you. God is saying through Moses that this is what began that feeling in man, that force of nature, that event of life that is so close to us and is still so unexplainable. God did it and it will be an irresistible part of human history until the end. Our need is not sex; it is completion.

Also notice the order in this verse: a man leaves, joins to his *WIFE* (not girlfriend), and then the two become one flesh.

These were good days on the earth. Redemption was not yet needed, but tomorrow it will be a bad day and the beginning of all bad days on earth. It will show us why God has left us here as disciples to follow our Lord in the harvest.

Matthew 1-2:12

Now, the beginning of the redemptive work of our Lord.

Matthew 1

Vs. 1-17 Notice that Matthew not only uses the lineage of Joseph, but Matthew only records God speaking to Joseph, the son of David. Matthew is doing this for his very Jewish audience. In emphasizing David here, there is an emphasis on grace. It was God's grace that made the covenant with Abraham. It was God's grace that chose David and promised the Christ would be born in his lineage. Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ in its full revelation. Although ages changed and the object of saving faith was different for Abraham, for David under the law, and for the believer in Christ, it has always been by grace, through faith. Note later that Paul mentions both Christ and His resurrection and descent from David as a part of his gospel...grace and fulfillment. And in all of that grace, the salvation of man has been the goal. As disciples we have received grace, and it is now our mission to tell those around us that this grace is fulfilled in Christ.

V. 11 Notice that Jechoniah (also called Jehoiachin or Coniah) was part of Joseph's genealogy. God spoke through Jeremiah (Jere. 22:30) that Jehoiachin would never have a descendant who was king of Israel. This is why Jesus is a physical descendant of Mary, not Joseph. In terms of human lineage, Joseph was Jesus' legal father, but Jesus was Mary's physical son. Jesus' claim to the human throne of David is through Mary. In Luke 3:31 it says that Mary was descended from David through Nathan, Solomon's brother (1Chr. 3:5).

Vs. 18-25 Matthew is being led by the Spirit to focus on those events of Jesus' birth that fulfilled the predictions of the law and the prophets. Again, notice that everything is being directed through Joseph.

V. 18 In Luke we know that Mary was with Elizabeth, south in Judah, for three months, helping Elizabeth during the birth of John. When Mary returned home she was three months pregnant and showing, and I'm sure her explanation sounded great.

Vs. 20-25 I think this is kind and very encouraging of the angel to address Joseph as "son of David." Joe must have felt down, thinking Mary had been unfaithful. Notice that the angel tells Joseph to name the baby in v. 21 and v. 25. That would have been a great honor for Joseph knowing that this baby was the coming Savior in the line of David.

Vs. 22-23 This is Matthew's and the Spirit's commentary on this event. God was not just fulfilling Scripture; He was fulfilling His promises of redemption.

Vs. 24-25 Joe was quite a guy and a man of faith. He named Jesus. Oddly enough, what we find in Matthew regarding the times the angels spoke to Joseph is all we know of Joe. He served God in a very quiet, obscure way.

Matthew 2

Vs. 1-2 Notice that Matthew skips the shepherds and the manger. The wise men have no names. They came from the east, probably the area around Babylon. It is thought that the inspiration for their waiting and observing came from the influence of Daniel. We don't know how many wise men there were, only that they brought three gifts.

Vs. 3-4 Herod was evil and religious. What a combination. He believed enough to be very dangerous. He claimed to have some Jewish connection to Israel and to have the right to claim the throne, thus being a king. If the Messiah was to have been found, it would have been a major threat to Herod. Sin is pretty irrational.

Vs. 5-6 This is Micah 5:2. Again, Matthew is proving to the Jewish mind, that Jesus fulfills these prophecies.

Vs. 7-8 Wait until you see what comes of this. Herod was really an evil genius.

Vs. 9-12 It will be fun one day to meet these guys. I remember the first time I read this as a disciple of the Lord and realized that they found Jesus in a house, not the stable and manger. I just kept reading this, stunned. I'm happy to say I got over it.

Tomorrow, Joseph & family are really going to need those gifts. Stay tuned.

One of the benefits of reading The One Year Bible is to keep the perspective of what all this history is working toward. The OT is going to get hard to read, but in the Gospels and Acts, we stay focused on the unfolding of God's mission to reach a lost world. Having the New Testament along with the Old Testament will help us see the very wise and subtle way God uses those people in the OT to lay the foundation for our salvation.

Psalm 1

What a tremendous promise of the power of the Word in our lives. Yet, for the disciple, it begins with the *delight* in Christ and the saving plan of God. The appreciation of salvation, of His grace to us, draws us to His Word; and in these our lives are rooted. This is the strength of abiding in Christ as a disciple.

V. 1 The Lord wants us to be separated unto Him. This reminds me of John 17:17, *Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.*

V. 2 Does God really mean this? Every year I believe this more.

Vs. 3-4 This has nothing to do with outward success. It is the life of following Christ.

Vs. 5-6 The decisions we make now not only affect the kind of life we lead on earth, but they determine where we stand on the day of judgment when this tragic time on earth is concluded. Will we stand in the redemption that Jesus brings or will we stand under God's judgment?

It is easy to read this psalm and enjoy the imagery and say, "Amen!" But how many of us will really believe that we need to be in the Bible every single day, drawing our life from Him? If you believe that, do it. Make time and do it. No excuses. Just do it. It has been the best time of my life for the past 20 years and I don't know where I'd be without it.

Proverbs 1:1-6

It is always sad for me to begin Proverbs, knowing that the wisest man in the world stopped loving God, began to love everything else and died a bitter fool. If it could happen to him, are we any better, even with the Spirit? No, the strength of a disciple is to love and follow Christ and abide in His Word. The *wise and understanding* (Matt. 11:25) don't get to see what *little children* see if they simply and humbly hear God's Word and do it.

JANUARY 2

Genesis 3-4

The word "Genesis" means beginnings. Today there are all sorts of important beginnings. They are almost all tragic, but they are vital in understanding how mankind (you and I included) got so messed up. There is no end of observations in these two chapters and there are many connections between things that are said here and things that are "reversed" later in the Bible. For example, the temptation that led to the Fall and to Satan's dominance happened here in a garden. Jesus' temptation was in a wilderness. That's an interesting contrast. Also, the battle between the woman's offspring and Satan is mentioned here. If you read Revelation last year, that should sound like Revelation 12. Then, of course, there is the comparison/contrast of Adam and Jesus. There are many more connections, because all of the damage done here will someday be undone by God as He works to redeem mankind.

Genesis 3

V. 1 There is no explanation given for Satan. Here, he is assumed. Later, particularly in Job and Daniel we get more information. Then, in the Gospels and in Revelation, we get more information. To be noticed also is that Satan passes out of the story immediately after the curse, with only an allusion to his forces in Genesis 6:2. This is all to say that as major as Satan's opposition is in this life, for the disciple, apparent from the emphasis of the Bible itself, our focus, goal and what we are to do is to equip others to follow God. In following Christ in the harvest as disciples, Satan is defeated. *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.* (Rev. 12:11)

Vs. 2-7 There are a lot of things to observe here, but don't worry about thinking deeply about everything. As you read this year after year, the Spirit will bring different things to mind.

So, how would you summarize or describe Satan's strategy? It's the same one he uses now, getting us to doubt God.

V. 3 Assuming the information was correctly given to Eve by Adam, what do you think about her "adding" to what God said? There is a lot going on there. The religious people who killed Jesus added man-made rules to what God said and therefore lost sight of God.

V. 6 There is a lot here, such as the description of temptation once a person has doubted God. Jesus said that temptations "must" come. This event was necessary, but doubting God is what opened the door.

Some people suggest that Adam was standing next to Eve when this happened; in which case Adam was a dweeb and a moron. *With her* probably means that they were partners.

V. 7 Eve's eyes were already opened. Now both people were initiated. Note also that sin didn't become a permanent part of mankind until Adam ate. It says in 1 Timothy 2:14 that Eve was deceived, but not Adam. This means that Adam walked into this, ironically, with his eyes open. To make a long story short, whatever happened in Adam was spiritual and physical. He died spiritually; and that "magic" within him, that God had put there, to pass on life to another human,

became corrupted and rebellious to God. Conception is not simply physical. There is a soulish, spiritual kind of thing that is passed on in conception. From now on, that "thing" that would be passed on would be depraved and would be rebellious toward God.

Knowing they were naked meant that for the first time, they were embarrassed in their self awareness. There was a sense of negative judgment toward themselves and possibly toward each other. Oddly enough, they didn't have movie stars with which to compare themselves. It just happened within them. Isn't sin great?

Sin is a spiritual disease and is the most powerful, destructive force on the planet. Sin permeates everything. We don't grasp this and do not understand how truly lost we are without God. And it isn't just lost-ness, it is in the edge of our attitudes and in every disagreement and every gripe. A disciple needs to understand this illness, its incessant, ever-present power.

This is why we need the daily washing of the Word, or put another way, why we need to take our "meds" every day. I'm told that a person who is bi-polar doesn't fully acknowledge his condition until he submits to taking his meds daily. As believers, we think we are OK if we go a day or a week without being close to God in His Word, but we are kidding ourselves. Our condition is grave. We may throw up a few words to God as we multi-task and we know He is everywhere; but it is not until we are quiet in His presence, in His Word, that the Spirit can begin the cleansing, healing and guiding. He is present in that still, small voice; and we need to be still and quiet before Him, in His Word, to hear it.

Forgiveness allows God to come into our lives to break the power of sin by the regeneration (giving of spiritual life) by the Holy Spirit. The power of sin is broken, not removed. To the Christians in Rome, Paul wrote that the power is still there (ch. 7), but that the Holy Spirit helps us as we walk by the Spirit (ch. 8) and that the redemption of our bodies is the hope we live for, that is, the death of this body of death and being resurrected without a sinful nature. Amazingly, even with Christ, the sinful nature is incurable in this body. You know this theologically, but even more practically, every day. This world is under the power of sin, in each of us, incurable and pervasive; and only God has the cure...the resurrection in Christ. Dead as we were, we could not earn forgiveness. There had to be justice for our actions and payment for our sins. We couldn't pay for our sin. Yet even with forgiveness in place through Christ, we still need to agree with Him that we are incurable (by repentance) and welcome His cure (accept Christ). Then and only then, are we JUST before Him in Christ, and He can enter in and break the power of sin by the life of the Spirit.

As disciples we need a healthy respect for the sin that is in us. Jesus' words to His disciples, pointing to their ability to make disciples of others (Luke 6:39-42), explain that if we do not recognize and deal with the sin in us, we will pass it on to others, or at least lead them into a hole.

Vs. 8-13 This began our hiding from God and blaming others.

V. 13 Although Adam blamed Eve, taking no official responsibility, God didn't argue with Adam. He went right to Eve. This was the truth, but Adam would pay for what he had done.

Vs. 14-15 Notice that there is no question for Satan. God already understood the motivation. The curse on Satan apparently also affected the animal he possessed. This curse is literal and figurative. Some aspect of his service to mankind (dust) would be more hateful to him. Verse 15 is not only his defeat by Christ in the crucifixion and resurrection, but I think there is also a reference to Revelation 12.

V. 15 Notice that it was God who "put" enmity between Satan and mankind and between his followers and Christ's followers. This is spiritual. I'm scared of snakes too, but more is meant

here. I'm also afraid of bees, wasps, and all sorts of stuff. But here, there is a fear and division being put in place to keep mankind safe, in some sense, from Satan. I would think that this is sort of like God putting the fear of man in the animals after the flood.

Inherent in what God is saying here is that the "woman" would bear a savior. This begins the promise of redemption. Adam and Eve must have clung to the hope that Eve would bear a deliverer who might reverse what they had done. Although Satan "bruised" Jesus, Jesus has crushed Satan. The book of Revelation shows how it will end.

And now, we don't hear anything more about Satan's influence until chapter 6.

V. 16 This is a short verse with long-reaching results. Apparently there would have been little pain in childbirth. Imagine that.

The major impact is in her relationship with her husband. At first glance, this looks cool. She will *desire* her husband. What husband wouldn't want that? Notice that the words to the woman in her curse (3:16) are the same words to Cain (4:7). Give this a lot of thought. The Fall brought a sickness into the relationship between man and wife. Even in Romans 1:18ff, the sickness after perverting the knowledge of God led to the sickness between husband and wife. This battle ruined marriage and turned the need for "completeness" to sexual perversion. Some say that since we are redeemed in Christ, the effect of this curse is gone. Obviously this is promoted by those who want gender equality and do not notice that since we've trusted Christ, we still sin. Sin's power is still amazingly strong, and the curse is still working.

In those minutes and hours between Eve's sin and Adam's sin, she was superior, realizing (as all wives do) that he was an idiot. Because of what she had done, she would now seek to control and withhold respect. He would live in a defensive, ruling posture. Properly understood, the curse on the woman was that because of this bent she had developed toward Adam, he would suppress that bent by force, lacking understanding and gentleness. The gender wars were spawned, and it all rolled downhill from that moment, until the Spirit via Paul commanded regenerate men to love their wives as Christ loved the church and commanded women to respect their husbands (Eph. 5:22-33).

Vs. 17-19 Since the curse on Adam was longer than either Satan's or Eve's curse, you can see that God held Adam responsible. If you look at Romans 5, you can see that it was Adam's sin that brought the curse on all of mankind and on nature.

Sometimes you wonder what Adam could have done. Eve had sinned and had to be punished. The answer is really pretty easy. All he would have had to do was what the second Adam did. If Adam had taken Eve's punishment and died for her, being sinless himself, he would have been raised and this substitution would have brought forgiveness to Eve.

V. 19 By the way, we still live from the field, even in industrialized countries, where the only time we see farms is on the nature channel. Adam's curse was not work. He was already creatively working in the garden (2:15). His curse was that now he would have to work to live. Up to this point food was totally provided for Adam and Eve. Now, if they didn't work and toil, they would starve. That was huge. Work would now be to make ends meet.

Vs. 20-21 Adam gave his wife a good name. Verse 21 records the first death in the Bible. It was probably a sheep, killed to make skins for Adam and Eve to wear. In that sense, it was the first sacrifice.

Vs. 22-24 Adam and Eve were sent from God's presence and provision in the garden. The tree of life was guarded because they were not worthy to eat of it. Also, many think that had they eaten of it at that point, their nature would have been everlastingly bound to a resurrection (undying)

body. In essence they would have been permanently sinful and would have had to have been put in hell.

Genesis 4

Vs. 1-2 Adam and Eve believed the promise. If the hope of Adam and Eve was that one of their first two sons would be the promised one, it was crushed in what followed, both seeing, in full realization, what this spiritual sickness was that they had brought into the soul of man. You have to believe that the object of saving faith for them, and the godly line that followed, was that one of their sons, or some son of the future, would reverse the curse. Cain's lineage proved the spreading power of sin as they watched, I'll bet, with deep regret. I wonder if they thought it might be Seth. Eventually, it was through Seth, but many generations removed, to Jesus.

Vs. 3-7 At this point, we have no idea of what these sacrifices meant. It might have been offerings of gratefulness to God. Apparently there were some guidelines. It is interesting that Abel knew how to prepare an animal for offering. Maybe Abel learned this from Adam, who had been taught by God. Notice that the point with Cain is really his attitude, not his sacrifice of produce. Notice too, how freely God spoke with them. It wasn't that God was far off or hidden.

V. 7 The word *desire* is the same as Eve's desire for Adam. It was a desire to control and dominate. Cain was told to fight. Had he fought and asked for help, Cain might have won and done something that led to deliverance.

Vs. 8-16 This is the beginning of murder and hate. I was just reading where Jesus said that all the blood of all the prophets would be required of that generation in Jerusalem that killed Him, beginning with the blood of Abel.

V. 9 I'm always amazed at the unsurprised, openly arrogant way Cain talked to God. Back then, the relationship with God was so close and natural you could "dis" Him. We have grown further and further from God with each passing year.

Not only did God curse the ground even more, but He made Cain wander. I think that might have been to separate his influence from those people surrounding Adam and Eve. This must have been a heartache for Adam and Eve.

V. 14 Notice that this happened at a time when there were many people around.

V. 15 Note that God says that the vengeance would be seven times. That reminds me of Peter and Jesus in Matthew 18:21-22, *Then Peter came up and said to him, "Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times."*

Vs. 17-24 This shows the line of Cain, or the line of ungodly culture, growing in the world. There are a few things to note.

- First, obviously there was "incest." All you can say here is that it was watched over by God until the population grew large enough. But notice that Cain knew "his wife." It doesn't say he had sex with his sister. They were married. Nowhere does it say that fathers abused their daughters. We have no clue here how many years passed, how quickly the population grew and what "marriageable" age was. We just have to trust God. This would have been the case after the flood too. Interestingly enough, when God made rules for this in the Law of Moses, God forbid all incest and also outlawed the relationship that Abraham had to Sarah, half-brother and sister through one common parent.

- Second, in v. 21, this line made the first musical instruments. Therefore, some churches and groups do not use instruments in worship because they originated with the line of Cain.
- Third, the line of murder continued with the added idea of self-justification of sin and guilt. Notice that Lamech, in Cain's line, is the first to have multiple wives. They were still called wives, meaning there was a ceremony in the culture. Notice too, that Lamech mentioned seventy-seven. Apparently they could do math.

Vs. 25-26 Again we have no idea of the time involved in all of this, but this goes back to the time of Cain killing Abel. Adam and Eve may have had other children in between, but Seth is mentioned because Seth appears to be the new child of hope, who had faith in the promise of redemption. Now we begin to see the growth of the line of those who had hope in the promise.

It's funny to read this about the child of promise, and then to go to Matthew and read about the real child of promise. We who know the Lord become children of the promise, children of God, by spiritual birth. Now it is our turn to work in the plan of redemption. That's why God left us here, to keep (internalize) Christ's Word, follow Him into the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Matthew 2:13-3:6

Note how Matthew shows that Jesus fulfilled OT prophecy, even in the deeds of Herod.

Matthew 2:13-23

Vs. 13-15 Notice again that the Spirit is moving Matthew to talk only about how God spoke to Joseph, the son of David. And of course, notice how this flight to Egypt fulfilled Scripture (Hosea 11:1).

Vs. 16-18 If the people had had any hope because of the coming of the wise men, Herod put that to an end. I really believe that Herod was religiously evil; that is, he had an understanding of the spiritual and thought he could control it through his actions. In that sense, he had a satanic kind of irrationality.

Notice again, Scripture was fulfilled in the coming of the Savior. Actually, in Genesis Rachel, Jacob's wife, died in childbirth near Jerusalem. Here sorrow and grief in losing her child (actually Benjamin lived and she died but she lost him all the same) were used by Jeremiah to express the sorrow of the mothers and the nation in losing their children when Babylon came into that area to destroy Jerusalem.

Vs. 19-23 It is interesting that Joseph and Mary ended up back in Nazareth, from where they started. God made it their desire to return there. And oddly enough, this fulfilled Scripture in a funny way. Jesus was a Nazarene, meaning and showing that he was a prophet from Nazareth; but he was not a Nazirite, like John the Baptist, having taken an oath before God, neither cutting his hair, touching the dead and abstaining from wine. Actually, no OT prophet ever said that Jesus would be a "Nazarene" or that He would come from Nazareth.

There is a subtle wordplay taking place here. The Messiah was referred to as the Branch of Jesse, coming out of the house of David, that is, the Son of David. There are many words used to refer to this "branch" but one of the most important is in Isaiah 11:1. This word for branch is "netser" from which we get the word Nazareth. To hear the title "Jesus of Nazareth" was to hear "Jesus of branch" or "Jesus the branch." It is just like names we hear but don't actually think of, like, "George Bush" or in German, "Helmut Kohl (cabbage)." It was a very sly way for the Lord to open the ears and hearts of people who were spiritually perceptive. When Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, heard the commotion of a crowd going by, he asked who it was *And when he heard that*

it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" (Mark 10:47) Bartimaeus understood that Jesus was the branch of the root of Jesse.

This is funny in a way because in John 7:41-52 both the people and the Pharisees said that the Bible said no prophet was to arise from Galilee. They knew that Nazareth was in Galilee and they knew, like we would, what the word Nazareth meant. They knew, but didn't want to see.

Matthew 3:1-6

If you read last year, you just read about John in the final chapters of Malachi. Here he is.

Vs. 1-3 Many years had passed. Luke actually nails the time down very specifically. It is thought that John and Jesus both began their ministries at about 30 years of age. John was six months older than Jesus, as you can see in Luke. Again, John fulfilled a lot of Scripture regarding the Messiah's birth.

Vs. 4-6 In John, you see people drawn toward spiritual reality. Jesus later asks the crowds what they were seeking when they went out into the wilderness. John didn't know much about marketing or blending in with his focus group ... camel hair and locusts. Yuck. But the people needed a prophet to confront them with spiritual reality and they went to see him. This is what the world needs today, not simply believers, but disciples of Jesus who speak and live for Him.

Psalm 2

If you read Revelation and Zechariah last year (last month), this will remind you of how God will judge the nations when the Messiah comes.

Vs. 1-3 This is the expression of mankind and its nations refusing to accept God's rule. If it was David who wrote this, he probably understood that the promise of redemption was coming through the promise of Abraham and that all nations would eventually bow to God.

Vs. 4-6 Notice that the King is to reign in Zion and that God Himself is fighting for Zion. This is a major theme in the OT.

Vs. 7-9 Notice the references to the Messiah, the coming King. Verse 7 is quoted in Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5, regarding Jesus being the reigning King. Verse 9 is something we recently read in Revelation 19:15. This is a very redemptive and "end times" psalm. It shows that God was always pointing people to His plan of redemption and to the future.

Vs. 10-12 The options are pretty clear. In the harvest we are warning people of v. 10 and inviting them to vs. 11 and 12.

How interesting that Psalm 1 points to where a disciple grows and finds life, whereas Psalm 2 shows where our boldness and confidence for following comes from. Our God reigns. Disciples see God's power and control behind the scenes, and are humble on the outside, knowing that God is truly in charge, even as the ungodly sit on thrones. Paul's words in 1 Timothy 2 show us what we are to do as disciples: pray for those who rule, to allow us to fly under the radar and make disciples of the lost, for *it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

We need to ask the Lord to keep our eyes on the harvest as we follow Him. We just read Revelation, so we know how things will end. Nations will be controlled by sin, but more importantly, men and women and children will be sent to hell. We need to be in the harvest today. That's what Jesus wants.

Proverbs 1:7-9

Vs. 7-9 *The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.* We just read in Proverbs 31:30 that a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. Proverbs begins and ends with the fear of the Lord.

This fear is not just "respect," but as we all know, fearing the police or punishment will make you go the speed limit. Again, if we have a real understanding of sin and its power, it is not difficult as disciples to love God for issuing His stern warnings to us. He is a loving Father, wiser than we can imagine, and He gave us His Son.

JANUARY 3

Genesis 5-7

God is still having Moses write about "beginnings" in Genesis. There is a lot in these chapters, so enjoy reading and making notes of observations. Then write down your questions. If you're reading this for the first time, as these texts are read, a lot of questions will pop up that are hard to answer. The questions are valid and they are what the Lord will use to set your heart seeking for answers. It is how you begin to make this truth your own possession. And reading this is how you slowly begin to learn to know, and "internalize," who God is.

Genesis 5

Vs. 1-2 This is the summary of the creation of man and purpose statement for all the genealogies to follow. It is tracing only the godly line from Adam that kept the faith and hope of the promise made to Eve. This is tracing the plan of redemption in the very early days of mankind.

Notice that God blessed them. It is important to note that in every beginning, there was a special blessing to get things going. There were miracles and wonders and special provision in the beginning of the nation of Israel. It went from the ease of birth for the Jewish women, to the birth of Moses, to the manna in the wilderness, to the fact that the shoes and clothing of the people never wore out. There was blessing in big and little things. The same is true of the birth of the church in Acts. There were all sorts of miraculous workings and little wonders that brought the church quickly to growth and to organization. Here also there were blessings given to launch mankind. All of these blessings were for those beginnings.

Vs. 3-4 For example, in today's reading it doesn't mention the births of Abel or Cain, but Adam and Eve could have had many other daughters and sons, before and after the birth of Seth, numbering possibly into the hundreds. We can ask God when we get to heaven, but I'll bet that God made conception and birth very easy processes back then. I'm thinking their hormone levels were normal, fertility was high, and they didn't have TV, so what else did they have to do?

Notice that God is only interested in tracing the line of Seth, although it says that Adam and Eve had many other sons and daughters.

Vs. 4-31 As a fun sort of thing, try to figure out the actual time to the flood using the ages, the births and deaths of the line of Adam. The overlap of men up to the flood is interesting. If you do this right, you'll see that a very famous guy dies the year of the flood, and that all of the other godly guys were dead just before the flood. God does a good job of planning, even planning funerals.

Obviously, brothers and sisters married. Notice that they *married*. Cain knew his *wife*. That's a bit different than "had sex with his sister." Lamech, who had rage issues like his great grandpa Cain, also had 2 *wives*.

At the creation of Eve, Moses adds an explanation saying (my paraphrase), "so now you understand where this phenomena came from, this irresistible pattern engraved in the human race

that a man will leave his father and mother (one socially identifiable entity) and be joined (married into another socially identifiable union) and become one flesh (have sex!). This order seems to have been established from the beginning - leave, marry, become one flesh. God ingrained in them from the start, that the bond of marriage happened in an identifiable manner. The woman was socially identified as a *wife*, and the man, as a *husband*. Then, after that was established, they could become one flesh, as the Hebrew expresses it, "to know" one another. Under God, even from the beginning, there was no sex without marriage.

Later, God gives the law and forbids incest. But also, later, God put the fear of man in the animals. Later, after the flood, the ages of men began to shorten, drastically. Things changed, guided by God, to the situation we have today.

V. 32 Notice that Noah was 500 when he had these three sons. That doesn't mean these were the only sons he had, not to mention daughters. However, these are the only ones who followed the Lord. That makes for a very sad reality. The times must have been terrible and God's punishment had to come to that culture.

Genesis 6

The knowledge of God became more distant. When God spoke to Cain, Cain wasn't amazed. He was irritated. He 'knew' God. The progress of those generations shows the drifting from God to the day of Noah. Only the line of faith, those who looked for God's answer to the tragedy of the Fall, as promised to Adam and Eve, are mentioned. Notice that in Genesis 4:26 that *people began to call upon the name of the Lord*, but which Lord (God)? The fact that *the sons of God* (fallen angels) mixed with humanity (see Jude 1:6), speaks also to the openness and need of humanity to seek and receive spiritual input, but not from the right god. Noah lived and preached (2 Pet. 2:5) for 100 years and there were no "takers" apart from his own family. Imagine how bad he must have felt about his preaching ability.

As disciples we need to lead the way, thinking through this record of fallen reality to give good sincere answers to people who ask. We need to realize, following in Noah's sandals, that our job is to follow Christ and proclaim His Word, not to be "successful" in anyone's eyes but His. *Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.* (1 Tim. 4:16)

Vs. 1-4 If you do a search on *sons of God* it turns out they are angels. Job 1:6 and 2:1 show this. I have the same question as you do, and I don't know how they could do it. Apparently the angels who did were stopped and are mentioned in Jude 1:6.

V. 4 The Nephilim were giants, like Goliath.

Vs. 5-7 This is God's decision. He apparently locked up the angels that did this and prevented this from happening again. Then He had to cleanse mankind and begin again. Interestingly enough, this genetic line of the Nephilim must have continued through Noah's wife or one of the wives of his sons because the Nephilim are mentioned later. And if you add the sin nature to this genetic material they were bringing in to the post-flood world, it wasn't a completely clean start.

God was sorry, not in that He regretted His decision, but He was grieved at the evil He witnessed. We say "evil," but I'm sure it defied the imagination. We see what happens today. Back then it would have been as bad, if not worse.

Vs. 8-10 Noah is in the godly line from Adam, looking for the redemption of man through the promised child. Although Adam and Seth had died, there were many men around Noah who would have personally known Adam. Because we know that Noah was 500 when he had these

three sons, it was very probable that he had other sons and daughters, but the others had become part of the culture and had no interest in the promise or in heeding their father's message.

Vs. 11-22 Noah's Ark!

Don't miss v. 22.

Genesis 7

Vs. 1-5 Notice how often Noah does what God commands. God spoke to Noah and I'm sure there was a lot of encouragement along the way, especially when the animals began to show up. On the other hand, no one listened to Noah. He preached (2 Peter 2:5) for 100 years. Noah's only "success" was his obedience and the ark.

Vs. 6-10 Noah worked on the ark 100 years.

V. 7 You would have thought that with all of the offspring of the godly line, there would have been more people on the ark. Surely there were other kids of Adam and Enoch and others of the godly line who were still alive. Apparently sin was that bad. Also, there was a spiritual thing going on with the "sons of God" and the rise of powerful leaders. It is very possible that Noah had many other children who didn't follow God. The promise of redemption must have seemed as unnecessary as worshiping the true God. I think this shows how deep the evil was. Everyone but eight people was corrupted.

Vs. 11-16 This restatement shows that God was supernaturally taking care of man and animal. Notice the very exact time reference in v. 11. God had to have revealed this to Moses, especially since Moses was now using the new dating system God gave them after the Passover. It is also here in v. 11 that it is suggested that the protective layer of moisture in the atmosphere was dissolved and added to the general disaster. The final verse is interesting. God shut them in, protecting them, and shutting out all of the wicked.

Vs. 17-24 Notice the world *prevailed*. Apparently the flood not only rose, but it lasted this long without beginning to go down.

One of the questions is, "Why didn't God just kill everyone but Noah & Co. with some plague or just vaporize them?" Of course, because of the flood we have great sermon illustrations, children's stories, movies and action figures. But really, it had something to do with mercy, judgment and guilt. The fact that Noah built the ark for 100 years gave everyone the opportunity to come and inquire. The fact that no one came made the righteousness of the judgment obvious. Also, it shows that God is patient but means business. Jesus and Peter both referred to the days of Noah as being an illustration of coming, inevitable judgment, patiently marching forward. (Luke 17:26, Matt. 24:37 and 1 Peter 3:20)

It is the same for us working in the harvest following the Lord. We do what the Lord says, sharing His Word and making disciples. Chances are we won't do worse than Noah, and God will bless us for following and obeying. He'll take care of the rest.

Matthew 3:7-4:11

Matthew 3:7-17

Vs. 7-12 Talk about how not to "win friends and influence people." Note the contrast between the description of John (camel hair and locusts) and the Pharisees and Sadducees who were rich and well-dressed. John unloaded on them, but Luke 3:7 tells us John also addressed the multitudes of people who were there for baptism. John saw the P&S, then turned to the people and issued this blast. Here is the deciding factor in this very rough sermon. We don't know what the P&S did, but the people responded in Luke 3:10, saying, "*What then shall we do?*" The

Spirit led John to address the leaders and people like this. The people responded with open hearts. The reason the Spirit led John to be so harsh was to reveal and draw those who were spiritually hungry and thirsty. They kept listening.

As disciples we should be tactful, where appropriate, but never hiding the truth. John spoke like this and the people who were drawing near in faith did not run; they came closer, unlike the people in Noah's day. Is it OK to tell people about judgment and hell? Both John and Jesus did.

Vs. 13-17 Jesus' baptism is the first event that all four Gospels refer to with the same specific detail, the Spirit descending as a dove and remaining on Jesus. Properly understood, it was His anointing as King; and, just like David, there was/will be time between His anointing and His earthly throne. This anointing and presentation of the Messiah to Israel was the fulfilling of the ministry of John the Baptist as seen in the Gospel of John, chapters 1-3. This might be behind the words of Jesus. To fulfill all righteousness, here, was to have John fulfill his purpose in God's plan.

Matthew 4:1-11

Vs. 1-3 Dwight Pentecost mentions that one of the reasons for the 40 days might have been to make sure Jesus faced off with Satan. It took that long to smoke Satan out. Jesus, the real ruler of humanity, confronted the present ruler/guardian/rat. The Spirit was the aggressor. The temptation of man was in the garden. Afterward Satan turned the world into a wilderness. Jesus is challenging Satan in the wilderness. Another thought here regarding the wilderness is that Israel was in the wilderness being formed into the nation that was to reach the world; but as Paul says in that famous passage on temptation, 1 Corinthians 10:5-13, they failed.

Nevertheless, with most of them God was not pleased, for they were overthrown in the wilderness. Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play." We must not indulge in sexual immorality as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in a single day. We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.

V. 4 Notice that Jesus, unlike Eve, correctly quotes Scripture and uses it against Satan. Interestingly enough, all of the Scripture Jesus quotes to Satan comes out of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy was written at the end of the wilderness experience of the children of Israel.

Vs. 5-6 This temptation is in a different order between Matthew and Luke. Personally, I would go with Luke, but I understand the Spirit having both men place this in a different order. Matthew builds up to showing Jesus is the Messiah, the King. Luke was painstakingly chronological and shows that Jesus is God the Son and superior to Satan. In Luke you get the sense that Satan was frustrated with Jesus quoting Scripture so he tried to trick Jesus by quoting Scripture himself. Notice that Satan correctly quotes the verses, understanding their meaning, but incorrectly applies them to that situation. That tells me that we also need to know the heart of God and honor Him alone. That is why we are reading the Word, not to promote ourselves, but to know and serve Him.

Vs. 7-11 Note that Jesus does not dispute Satan's claim to rule. There is no room here for a long discussion, but just to say that the claim is legitimate and supported by Paul's *god of this world* (2 Cor. 4:4) and *the world rulers of this present darkness*. (Eph. 6:12, RSV)

Also, Jesus doesn't really have a discussion with Satan, He just quotes Scripture and ends it. Maybe there is a godly stance before aggressive unbelief that is simply silent, not giving dogs what is holy or throwing pearls before swine.

V. 10 Notice that worship equals service. If you don't serve you are not truly worshipping, because true worship leads to service. Jesus wasn't tricked by thinking you could have one without the other.

V. 11 I don't think Satan understood the full impact of this confrontation. When a demon possesses a person, it binds and dominates the human spirit. It could be that Satan assumed there was a separate human spirit in Jesus that was being dominated by the Spirit of God the Son, and he was trying to get that human spirit to rebel against God.

I think that Satan and his angels saw the man Jesus, but assumed it was the spirit of God the Son, merely dominating a human. That is how they work. In that case the human spirit would not have been free to choose to die for mankind. That possessed human would have been forced to do so. That would have made God's plan invalid. I think that Jesus, as incarnate God, fully man and fully God, was still veiled in mystery and hidden; for as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2:8, *None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

Psalm 3

Vs. 1-2 I hate to say this, but I don't think you can grow past a certain place as a disciple until you experience something like this. These are only words until you have contended for God and been taken out by unfriendly fire, whether from believers or unbelievers. Paul promised Timothy, *All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and imposters go from bad to worse, deceivers and deceived.* (2 Tim 3:12)

Vs. 3-4 This is where you learn to truly cry out as a disciple and where you truly realize that the Lord, and no one else, can save and satisfy. Selah!

Vs. 5-6 You get the idea that David learned to trust and rest in the Lord over time. He was in constant danger for years, yet he slept and rose and God was still protecting him.

Vs. 7-8 Punishment comes to the rebellious. That is certain and David could rest in that. Salvation comes from the Lord. That too was certain and worth waiting for.

Proverbs 1:10-19

I think the message of Solomon to his son is "Beware of shortcuts." I know none of us is going to sneak up on someone and mug them for their wallet. But there is a temptation, for the sake of God, to press the "easy" button in relationships, money and honesty.

Jesus told His disciples to make sure they were on the right way. How do you know which way is the right one? The gate is narrow, you are pressed getting through it, and the way is hard. It takes work and focus. Honest work, paying taxes, honoring city codes, telling the truth, honoring copyrights, being authentic are all work. If our faith costs us nothing, it could be that we are not following Christ in the harvest at all. We're just being good clean church people.

For the sake of the Kingdom we get tempted to take shortcuts. We are not to be in the company of, or enticed by, those who want to disobey God in order to "serve" God and "build" His kingdom. Many disciples have stumbled and many ministries have been destroyed by this

nonsense. Worst of all, Christ Himself and His church become held up to ridicule by the behavior of His own people.

JANUARY 4

Genesis 8-10

This is another day of big beginnings in Genesis. Remember to write out observations and questions and mark up your Bible when you find things that are interesting to you. The important thing that happens is that your natural interest becomes engaged so you begin to see connections and seek answers.

One resource you might want to check out if you have a question is the [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#) online at Google books. It is free and this commentary is easy reading and more in depth than these notes. The following chart is found at the end of this document.

[Chronology of the Flood](#), [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 39.

Genesis 8

Vs. 1-12 Noah and his family have taken a long cruise. The chart above shows you how long all of this lasted.

V. 2 It is supposed by some that conditions before and after the flood were incredibly different. There are questions as to where all that water came from and where it went. It is thought that the earth was surrounded by a wall of water vapor that filtered the rays of the sun and gave the earth a greenhouse climate. In the flood then, that water vapor layer was dissolved (windows of heaven). After the flood, with this layer missing, the earth had extreme temperatures allowing for the ice caps at the north and south and the freezing of that water. With a huge change in climate came clouds and rain, making a rainbow possible, and certain animals became extinct because of the harsher climate. Also, it is suggested, that because the sun was no longer filtered, it led to the drastic reduction in the span of life for everything, mankind included.

Regardless of how God did it, through natural or supernatural means, God changed things significantly.

V. 10 Since this was a new beginning for everything, I think it is safe to assume that God allowed everything to grow quickly, supernaturally. To have an olive tree with a leaf, after all plant life on land had been destroyed, would be a miracle. This same thing is true when we read of the resurrection of someone in the Bible. It seems easy to believe the spirit could just go back to the body, but the body first had to be totally re-created. In this case God was again creating plant life. And who knows what else He was doing during that time.

Vs. 13-19 I think that God's blessing was supernaturally on everything that left the ark. One interesting thought is wondering where Moses got all of these month and day references. The detail is very exact. It may be that Noah kept records, but these never would have made their way into Moses' hands. It must be that Moses wrote all of this during the 40 years in the wilderness, as he spent time with the Lord. That means that as God gave Moses all of this information to write down, all of the days would have been according to the calendar God had just given to His people. On that calendar, their first month was our March-April. Later that would be the Passover and the death and resurrection of the child of promise, Jesus.

Vs. 20-22 I wonder if 8:20 wouldn't have been a better place to begin chapter 9.

V. 20 It is interesting to think that Noah knew which animals were clean or unclean. Even if Moses was writing this with his understanding of God's requirements, how would Noah, back then, have known which animals were acceptable for worship? Apparently God told him.

V. 21 The sacrifice had more to do with God being pleased with devotion, obedience and man's understanding of his need to have his sin forgiven. That was pleasing to God. It was not that God likes the smell of brisket. I mean, He probably does. Who doesn't? But in other places God says that sacrifices will not please Him if the understanding and heart behind the sacrifices is false. You can see this in Isaiah 1.

God is pleased with the sacrifice and devotion of Noah and promises not to repeat the flood, though He states that the sickness of sin is still present. Noah & Co. brought it with them.

This is a new beginning of the human race, from scratch.

Genesis 9

Vs. 1-7 This is God's blessing of Man and the earth with a couple of interesting additions.

Along with the fear of man given to the animals, it seems that Noah & Co. could *now* eat meat. Here God gives them the prohibition against eating raw, un-drained meat, that is, with the blood still in it. This command is repeated in the Law of Moses and again in Acts. Since this command is given before the law, it is suggested that it is still in force. The reason for this command is given and becomes a very interesting statement both literally and figuratively looking toward the future and redemption, *its life, that is, its blood*. Again, the intent here is not to forbid eating uncooked meat, but not to drink or eat blood.

V. 5 Were you wondering where the command for capital punishment came from? Then comes the reasoning for the command against murder. Man is created in the image of God. It seems to me this is mentioned here because a year earlier the world had been ruled not by justice, but by who could kill whom. I think this law reflects back to life before the flood.

V. 7 This almost sounds like God sending all the animals into the world.

Vs. 8-17 This is a big section and shows that God is doing something very important.

Since this is the first rainbow, it means that this is the first time there were conditions that would make a rainbow possible. It should be noted that the word for *bow* means "bow" as in weapon. When we see a rainbow I guess it should remind us that God has promised to show mercy and to withhold total judgment.

Notice that although this is a covenant between God, man and all creation, God is the only responsible party. This then is an unconditional covenant or promise. Also, underline every instance of God saying "I." Think about the implications of what He is saying.

This promise to preserve or save is interesting when you see the rainbows in Revelation. Even there, as judgment is coming on the earth, God promises to preserve.

Vs. 18-19 These men and their wives were used to repopulate the earth. Notice that it was all one man and one woman. None of these men had multiple wives.

Notice that Ham is already being identified as *the father of Canaan* in v. 18 and again in v. 22 when he does what he does. So what did he do? Did he just look at his father, or something more? Part of this might be linked to the respect his other sons show Noah. It might also be displayed later in what was found in the religious worship of the land of Canaan.

Vs. 20-27 God never punishes Noah for getting drunk. Noah was a very righteous man. Some people who know more about fermentation than I do suggest that Noah might have been surprised by the change in the way the process worked after the flood. I don't know.

The real damage came as a result of Ham. When we get to heaven we'll have to find out what happened, but it was an attitude of disrespect and it must have had some element of perverted thought.

The curse is not toward Ham or his other children in general. The curse is fully on Canaan. Notice that other kids of Ham became notable people with notable cities. This curse was misused to support African slave trade. The curse is not on Ham nor was it on any of his descendants who may have populated Africa. The curse is only on one son, Canaan, who later becomes the people and land of Canaan, where Israel is today.

The land of Canaan has special interest because it was given to Abraham. That's why God and Moses are mentioning it here. As the children of Israel are hearing this read, God is supplying them with the explanation for why He used Israel to judge the land of Canaan. When Israel got there, they found that Canaanite worship was very sexually saturated. Most of what archeologists find from religious worship in that area is "X-rated."

Something was seen in Ham and became intensified in his son Canaan, and God promised judgment for it. It is enough to say that as disciples, we need to be careful to keep our lives open and cleanable before the Lord, so we don't spread unnecessary stuff to our families or to those we are trying to lead as disciples.

Vs. 25-27 Do you notice anything interesting about the curse and the blessings? Shem and Japheth, Noah's sons, are blessed. But Ham isn't blessed. He isn't even mentioned. But Noah's grandson, Canaan, was cursed.

Vs. 28-29 This is just some more trivia, right? Not at all. It may be that Abraham was alive the last 60 years of Noah's life. Depending on the dating either Noah and Abe overlapped, or Noah died just before Abraham was born. In any event, Shem would have been alive to give a firsthand accounting of life before and after the flood. You wonder if Noah or Shem influenced the faith of Abraham.

Genesis 10

V. 1 This is the new beginning of the human race and sounds like Genesis 5:1.

Vs. 2-5 These are the descendants of Japheth. Remember that Moses and God are writing this many years later for the Israelites. These peoples had spread out after Babel. Notable are Magog, a people associated with aggression toward Jerusalem in the end times. Also, the name Kittim sounds like a people associated with the Romans.

Vs. 6-20 These are the descendants of Ham. Notice that Nimrod, from his son Cush, was the founder of Babel and Assyria. He was the first great king. It's always interesting to see the little commentaries given to certain people.

Vs. 15-20 This is a special mention for Israel. The people who came from Canaan, the son of the curse, would be the people God would remove from the land, through Israel. Although, if you look at Sidon, you realize that this is the influence of Tyre and Sidon and also the influence of Jezebel on Ahab and the northern kingdom of Israel.

Baal worship would become a snare to Israel. The worship of Baal and his female counterpart, Ashtoreth, were associated with fertility and sexual worship, using prostitutes to aid the worshipers in their "worship experience." Along with this worship was Moloch worship where the unwanted babies were offered in worship/sacrifice. This sexual worship was deeply seated in Canaan. Although God warned Israel not to copy the Canaanites, Israel followed the attraction of Baal worship almost immediately. Samuel, Saul, and David did away with it, but it was reintroduced by Solomon as he and his wives participated in the worship of Ashtoreth. Then

Baal-Ashtoreth-Moloch worship became institutionalized in the northern kingdom when King Ahab married Jezebel, the princess of Sidon. And to think, this all began with Canaan, the son of Ham.

Vs. 21-32 This is the line of Shem, the line of faith. Jesus will be one of Shem's descendants.

V. 25 Notice the comment given to Peleg. It is thought that it was during the time of his birth that the continents began to drift. This would mean that the languages had already been confused, and the peoples drifted apart from one another finding those of like language. Then the land masses began to move. If that's how it worked, that would have been a cheaper solution than taking a cruise or renting a kayak to get to South or North America.

From here God will direct Moses to follow the line of those people who were led by faith in the promise of a child who would deliver mankind. It is pretty amazing that as disciples of Jesus, we continue that line of faith as we work in the harvest following our Lord. His commission to us is to make disciples, who make disciples until He comes. That's a cool privilege. But first, tomorrow, we'll have to read about the invention of that awful German language (Mark Twain's opinion).

Matthew 4:12-25

Now, you have seen that Matthew has a very specific purpose in mind, showing that Jesus is the promised Messiah. You've noticed that he didn't include the announcements of John the Baptist or Jesus, but we did get the wise men.

V. 12 Jesus' public ministry began at the arrest of John the Baptist, although Jesus had already been involved in ministry since His baptism. The arrest of John was an official starting point.

Now, just for your information, between vs. 12 and 13 there is a gap of time. It is here that you have John 1:35-4:54 and Luke 5:1-11. If you are interested, scan those portions to get a feel for how much Matthew is leaving out.

Vs. 13-17 After Jesus' rejection in Nazareth, Jesus chose Capernaum as His hometown. There were several reasons for this, but the reason Matthew wants us to see is that it fulfilled prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2.

Vs. 18-22 This is the official calling of Peter, Andrew, James and John. I remember reading this and being stunned by the fact that Jesus just walked up to these guys He had never met or barely knew and said, "follow me," and they immediately left everything. That seems so unbelievable because it was. The calling of Peter & Co. was a process. Matthew is being very selective about the information he is giving. He's driving home a point about Jesus as the Jewish Messiah so he has to leave some stuff out. Before Matthew 4:18 comes John 1:35-chapter 4 and then Luke 5:1-11. If you just lightly skim those portions, you'll see that Peter & Co. had spent lots of time with Jesus. So if we were making some principles, we might say we have to get to know people first, and they need to get to know us, before we call them as disciples. We need to give them time before we ask someone to commit.

V. 21 John was probably one of the two disciples of John mentioned in John 1:37. Poor Zebedee is left alone, and it would get worse. Not only do his sons leave here, but later we find that his wife, Salome (Mary's sister), becomes a follower of Jesus and also accompanies Him on His journeys. I'm guessing that Zeb became a believer too.

Matthew's point here is the one we need to heed. When Jesus, the Messiah, called, they left everything and followed Him.

Vs. 23-25 This is the growth of Jesus' public ministry. Jesus will now begin to experience increased popularity and opposition. The group of "disciples" will grow into a great crowd. It will still be several months before Jesus selects the Twelve. Discipleship with Jesus was a process.

Psalm 4

Like in the psalm yesterday, David is crying out to God. This will be a constant situation with David. God had Samuel anoint David to be king of Israel when David was a young teen. Now, years later, the promise hadn't been fulfilled and David will run and hide from King Saul for about 10 years. David learned to cry out, but he also learned that God's love, faithfulness and love were steadfast. He only learned that in hardship. That's how we learn as disciples in the harvest. There is no easy way to need the Lord desperately and to receive His saving help unless we are desperate and need to be saved.

V. 1 David was a pro at crying out to God. Notice what he asks for.

V. 2 I don't know how this sounded sung in worship, but the reality was that David had enemies in high places in Saul's palace.

V. 3 David knew this from his own anointing, but also from all of the history he knew from Genesis-Ruth. God was with those who walked in faith and trusted in His promises.

V. 4 Doesn't that sound like Paul in Ephesians 4:26, *be angry and do not sin?*

V. 5 In spite of persecution and hard times, David insisted that his men honor God and put their trust in Him and His provision. We'll see this in action in 1 Samuel.

V. 6 What do we really need? The light of God's face upon us.

V. 7 Even in his hardship David had joy, and it was probably a unique joy, because it was found in hardship.

Vs. 8 What do we need, to have peace and feel secure when everything is falling apart? David had peace and security, though humanly speaking, he was living in danger and uncertainty. God made the difference. That's why we're reading and soaking daily in His Word.

Proverbs 1:20-23

Notice how urgently God has *Wisdom* crying out to us.

As disciples, our growth has ups and downs. There is our love for Christ and our desire to make Him known and make disciples, but something that also has to grow is our willingness to be more and more submitted to Christ and to following the Spirit.

As Wisdom cries out in this proverb she says in v. 22, *How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple?*

Even as a disciple, I could say, "Hey, I've loved being stupid for years and I've still got a couple of areas I enjoy."

Jesus, as a very gentle "disciple-maker," works with us, waits for us, probably saying, "If you'd really give yourself totally to me and quit doing the stuff that you and I both know is unwise, you'd have more joy in your walk with me and see real fruit."

V. 23 What an awesome promise. This isn't just the baptism of the Spirit when we are saved. Paul often spoke of being filled as a command and exhortation. Jesus promised that if we would seek God and yield ourselves to Him, the Spirit would lead and strengthen us in joy. I need that more and more.

JANUARY 5

Genesis 11:1-13:4

There is a lot of information in this section, most of it flowing toward Abraham. God and Moses are not giving Israel a "history of the world," but to some degree, a history of their nation. I say "to some degree," because inherent in this history is the description to Israel of how this mess began, and how God is working with and through mankind to bring redemption. Israel will become God's messenger to the world that salvation and blessing are possible. Unfortunately, Israel will also become the symbol of mankind in rebellion to God. This "service" to humanity will cost them a lot, but there will be blessing at the end.

Genesis 11

Vs. 1-11 Whereas the problem in Genesis 6:1 may have involved man calling on "spirits" and those angels mixing with mankind in a way that produced almost absolute corruption, this initiative seems to come solely from man. Notice the term in v. 5 - *children of man*.

V. 4 It seems implied that the *tower* was for worship, possibly for worshipping or getting information from the stars. Ironically, this area is where the wise men eventually came from.

V. 6 That nothing would be impossible for man, I think, implies that mankind would have become as deeply corrupt as they were before the flood. God "nipped it in the bud."

Vs. 7-8 I have never understood that mankind had sinned in that they didn't scatter after the flood. How do you define *disperse*? The sin here was the tower and seeking to make themselves capable of finding answers without God. The giving of languages was brilliant on God's part. Interestingly today, English has become the common language of the world. Things are more connected today than ever before, and once again it seems we are capable of all sorts of things. What God did there held back this "unity and self-sufficiency" phenomenon for a long time.

Vs. 9-26 This is tracing the line of faith and of the promise of a child and deliverer. Almost all of these names appear in Jesus' genealogy in both Matthew and Luke.

Part of enjoying reading the OT is getting curious and making observations.

How many years were there between the end of the flood and Peleg and the end of the flood and Abe? Who is the last baby in the line of the promise that Noah would have bounced on his knee? You also have to look at yesterday's reading regarding Noah's age and how many years he lived after the flood. Have fun!

These years were a time of incredible change in history. Nimrod, thought to be the builder of Babel, and first "man of renown," was born right away. This would set the wheels in motion for the language confusion, the scattering of mankind and the grouping of languages, clans and tribes, and (in my opinion) the drifting of the continents in the days of Peleg, about __ years after the flood.

These days would also have been the days of Job. The climate would have been changing; animals that needed the pre-flood greenhouse climate to live would have been going extinct. Also, the age of men was decreasing drastically, some think, due to the different atmospheric conditions after the flood (that being the natural agent of God's working to bring the age of man down to about 100).

V. 26 There is a little bit of a problem with this verse. If you look at Gen 12:4, Abe was 75 when he left Haran. That doesn't work if Abe was born when Terah was 70 and didn't leave Haran until after Terah had died (Acts 7:4). It is best to understand this verse saying that after Terah was 70, he had three sons in the years that followed. Probably, Abraham is named first because he is the

most prominent of the three. Apparently Abraham was born when Terah was 130. The reason for the focus on these three sons is that they figure in the history to follow, but Abe is the focus of the story. Abraham is not only the beginning of the nation of Israel, but with Abraham, the promise of redemption becomes more defined. Another promise is given.

A guy once asked me why God was a Jew. As you see the story to this point, there isn't a Jew around. But there is God who is seeking to use the godly lineage, from Adam through Noah to Abraham and beyond, to bring about redemption. As disciples we have to believe that since the Fall, God has been involved in the redemption of mankind fulltime. As you see Him working with the godly line of mankind, He is saving and working through those who have faith in Him and hope in His promise. As redemption is His purpose, and was to be the purpose of Israel and was the purpose of Christ, it is to be our purpose as His disciples.

An interesting take on all of this history and the selection of Abraham/Israel is given in the ESV and Septuagint reading of Deuteronomy 32:8, *When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God* (my emphasis)." The Septuagint (Greek version of the OT written before Christ and after the Babylonian exile) says "angels of God." These "sons" or angels would be referring to those bad princes mentioned in Daniel 10. The implication being, that as God allowed Satan and his angels to follow through with the authority He had given them to watch over mankind and the nations of men, God kept one man for Himself, making a nation from him to use as His voice of redemption to the other nations, and then, to all humanity.

Vs. 27-32 This introduces Abraham's (Abram's) family and background. Some of the names mentioned here will be important during the lives of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

These verses are a summary. Apparently God called Abraham in Ur, a city on the Euphrates near the Persian Gulf. Terah accompanied Abraham toward Canaan and brought his family and stuff 600 miles north until they settled in a place they called Haran, which they named after his youngest son who had died in Ur. For some reason they stopped here. Some suggest that this was disobedience on Abe's part. More likely God had this planned. Haran would become an important place for Isaac and Jacob. It could be that the father, Terah, had a strong hold on Abraham. Who knows? But, according to Joshua 24:2, Terah was an idolater. Abraham was not. He was a fully devoted follower of God. God probably wanted Terah left behind. From here God spoke to Abraham again to separate himself from his family and go to Canaan.

Genesis 12

Vs. 1-3 According to Acts 7:2, God first called Abraham in Ur. Now in Haran, after the death of Terah, God renews the call and promise to Abraham.

The promise to Abraham is explained in the New Testament to be for the redemption of mankind. Jesus came from Abraham and fulfilled this promise; that is, in Jesus, the descendant of Abraham, all nations will be blessed. This promise is a monument in redemptive history.

The faith of Abraham is amazing. It is not only a lesson and model for us all (Romans 4), but it serves as a basis of understanding that even in the OT, before and after the giving of the law, salvation was based on faith. It could be that Abe just "had" this faith, but I think he was influenced by Noah. Depending on how you understand the dating, Abe would have either been 60 when Noah died or Abe would have been born two years after Noah's death. In any case Shem, the son of faith who believed the promise, lived for 500 years after the flood and died just 25 years before Abraham died. For Abraham, the story of redemption wouldn't have been some old story handed down from generation to generation. Abe knew of Noah and he might have

personally known Shem. If so, I'll bet God touched his heart with the need for salvation and redemption.

Vs. 4-9 This account shows Abraham's entrance into Canaan.

V. 4 Apparently Abraham felt responsible for Lot, his brother Haran's son. Note that Abe was 75 when he left Haran.

V. 5 When they left, Abe already had servants born into his household. When they traveled, it must have looked like a mass of people, wagons and great flocks. When they set up, they probably looked like a tent city. This was no small endeavor.

V. 7 Shechem would become a fairly well-known place. God confirmed His calling and promise to Abraham.

As the people of Israel heard this story as Moses wrote it and read it to them, they would be instructed in the faith and failings of Abraham and God's faithfulness to His promises.

Vs. 10-20 Now we come to something Abe did wrong. It was something that was to instruct Israel. As disciples, we are meant to learn from this as well.

Once given the promise, Abraham still panicked when the famine came. With the firmness and nature of the promise God had made to him, Abe should have known that God would protect him in all situations, and so, to seek God and rest in Him. That's easy to write, right? Going to Egypt, per se, wasn't wrong, but we have no evidence that he asked God about going to Egypt. I definitely don't think God helped him come up with the half lie regarding Sarah.

God saved Abe from the Egyptians, but He didn't save him from the consequences.

Genesis 13:1-4

What Abe gained in Egypt became a thorn in his side. His "ill gotten" wealth became a division between him and Lot. And then, they acquired Hagar, and she became a division between Abe and Sarah.

Even as disciples, "using our heads" and just doing what seems obvious can cause major problems or destroy the work that God is doing through us. We have to seek God and His way, even if we think the way before us seems obvious. We are no better than Abraham, and this story is here for us, *on whom the end of the ages has come*. ¹²*Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands, take heed lest he fall.* (1 Cor. 10:11-12)

We have seen a man like Noah who became an object of ridicule for his neighbors for 100 years as he built the ark. It was all because he followed God. Now we see Abraham and Sarah following God. They gave up everything they had in Ur and in Haran to live in tents for the rest of their lives. The nature of knowing the Lord is to follow. But it is the passion of every disciple to follow his Lord in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples.

Matthew 5:1-26

Although Matthew is being somewhat chronological here, his focus now, having established that Jesus is the Messiah and King of Israel, is to give a demonstration of His teaching. Matthew shows Jesus' authority over the law and how the people should live.

Let me put the sermon and the timeframe when Jesus said this in perspective. At this point, John, chapters 2-5 are finished. Jesus has been in public ministry for over a year. If you read Luke 6:1-19, you'll see what happened just before the sermon. The leaders now really want to kill Jesus. Jesus has just been up all night in prayer and this morning has just called the Twelve. He comes down the mountain with them to a level place. The huge crowds gather, and He goes back up a

bit to a place where He can sit and have His disciples come to Him. Luke 6:20 gives you the true audience of the sermon, *And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God."*

Vs. 3-12 The Sermon on the Mount is Jesus' orientation for His disciples. For your reading, imagine that all the "blesseds" are choices you make or don't make in following Christ as a disciple in reaching out to a lost world as Christ did. You can choose to be poor in spirit now, or not. You can choose to weep now, or not. This means you can opt to live a comfortable, non-focused life, making the decision to be burdened, or not burdened, by this calling. The burden leads to blessing.

Vs. 13-16 Notice that the call to follow Christ as a disciple means working in the harvest as *salt* and *light*. Everyone who knows Christ should be salt and light. This is why the Lord has left us on earth, and this is the way we are close to Him, following Him. Inherent in what Jesus is saying here is our option not to obey.

Vs. 17-20 Jesus begins to re-adjust the way the disciples have been taught to think about God and obedience. What He says here will give the explanation for what follows in *you have heard that it was said* (v. 21-48). When Jesus is referring to the law here, He means moral law, not the ceremonial laws and rituals, the sacrifices, cleansings, etc.

V. 20 would have blown the disciples away. These religious leaders were looked on to be the most righteous and heaven-worthy of all men in their society. Jesus is about to show them that true following is in the attitude of faith, obedience and love toward God.

Vs. 21-26 It is interesting that Jesus begins with this one. The new commandment that Jesus will give His followers later is to love one another. What He says here is really key to loving one another and loving our neighbor.

V. 21 Note that Jesus doesn't say, "It is written." He is referring to how the leaders taught this.

V. 22 Jesus is saying that if you have the attitude, you are guilty without committing the act. Notice that this applies to insults and calling someone *fool*. As disciples our hearts, our understanding of life, and our focus on Christ have to lift us above these attitudes. We are all guilty of this. In any election year you can hear Christians "murdering" politicians, hurting their own hearts and bringing shame to the name of Jesus. Disciples are not supposed to be doing this.

Vs. 23-24 Allow me to paraphrase this through the filter of some conflicts I have seen between believers in the church. What is interesting here is that the offended party didn't come to church. The offender is in church and everything is fine. The person who is not at the temple worshipping is probably at home calling the other "fool" in his heart and is the one who was harmed to the place of isolation. Now, it could be that the person doing the offering didn't mean to offend the guy who is not at the temple worshipping, but even knowing the other guy was offended meant he had some connection and needed to try to be reconciled to the other. Care for our brother is more important to God than offering or attending church in peace.

Vs. 25-26 Later, Jesus will use this same example to tell the multitudes to be reconciled to God. Here, the story seems to imply that if you don't reconcile quickly with someone you've offended, then the offence might become a permanent resentment that will always be there exacting some sort of harm to the relationship. If so, married people should take heed and reconcile quickly. Unfortunately, churches are full of this stuff too.

The bottom line is that rotten relationships can hurt disciples. The basis of loving one another in the work of the harvest is forgiveness and reconciliation. If we don't do it, it can keep us from being as fruitful as we could be.

Psalm 5

It is possible that David ran from Saul for about 10 years. In order for Saul to smooth this with the people, he and his leaders spread lies about David. You sense the injury these lies meant for David. It was through this pain and suffering that God led David to Him and His Word. This was David's education in becoming a man after God's own heart.

Vs. 1-3 David had lived the high life after Goliath. He was a hero, had a good bank account and was a son-in-law of the king. All he did turned to gold, until Saul's jealousy and hatred was directed toward him. Now David was homeless and in danger every day. David's focus went to God, his true King. David's life became simplified because the only hope he had was in God. That David sought God made him the great follower that he was.

Vs. 4-6 Israel was full of talk and lies about David. It seemed like no one would listen to the truth and David really couldn't defend himself, running as he was. Yet, David had to rest in the Lord. God doesn't tolerate wickedness. David had to learn to wait on the Lord. David waited a long time.

Vs. 7-8 This is what David learned and it becomes the testimony of David. God's *steadfast love* never failed him and David's heart sought the joy of simply being in the presence of God. Amen.

V. 8 is also expressed again in Psalm 27:11. David wanted God's very plain and certain leading every day.

Vs. 9-10 Note that Paul quotes v. 9 in Romans 3:13 regarding the incurable sickness of sin. Just as Jesus said, sin directed against those following Christ is ultimately directed against Jesus and against the Father. All sin is a rebellion against God.

Vs. 11-12 To me, these verses are the real challenge in following Christ. Understanding that we are safe in God and there is no need for despair or anxiousness, we should be joyful. Apparently before this joy, you have to learn the deep crying out of the first verses.

Remember that these psalms were sung in worship.

Proverbs 1:24-28

These words seem hard but they are just. God is not mocked. In the OT, we are about to see the amazing patience and love of the Lord. He will give Israel chance after chance, over hundreds of years. He will forgive and be patient beyond anything we could imagine. But when people have refused to the place where their guilt is overflowing, God will judge. That is the same in our world. We just don't see or perceive it.

V. 28 Compare this verse with Luke 13:23-28. It is sad but true, and God will be totally just in doing this. Jesus also expressed this in John 7:34 and 8:21. Both contexts are very sobering.

I think, in God's love, I've experienced and learned in this way of having ignored God and then suffered the results of my foolishness; but by God's grace, there has been restoration. God's grace knows no end for those who are willing to come to Him and heed His voice.

JANUARY 6

Just to keep things in perspective let me remind you that it is more important for you to read The One Year Bible than for you to read these notes. I'm writing to give some background to the text and hopefully some motivation.

At this point in the year it is important for you to find a time and a place to read. You need to develop the habit. They say that anything you do 19 times in a row begins a pattern. If you miss a day, make the adjustments and learn from it, but don't get discouraged. This is the time to begin

that pattern because everything we'll be reading for the next month is pretty interesting. Find ways to motivate yourself. I mark the pages at the top with a number for the year as I finish each page. Go out and celebrate a completed month. If you find a time to read that is best for you, don't compromise. Enjoy knowing that what you are reading is seeping into your heart through the Spirit, and God is pleased that you're taking the time to sit before Him.

Genesis 13:5-15:21

As far as beginnings go, this is another important section of Genesis. God is telling Israel where things came from and how certain things came to be. In this section, again, the history of God's work to save mankind takes a giant step forward.

Genesis 13:5-18

Vs. 1-7 The stuff they gained from the time in Egypt eventually caused a problem between Abe and Lot. Bigger is not always better and I'm sure there are many individuals, couples, businesses and churches that could say, "Things were better when things were simpler, before we got that house or building or became involved in that activity." As disciples following Christ, once we know what we are supposed to be doing, and what pleases and serves Christ in making disciples, we need to be careful about attractive things that distract us or consume us.

Notice in v. 7 that it says the Canaanites and Perizzites were in the land. That also meant that grazing land was not easy to find because others were laying claim to their own territories.

Vs. 8-13 This would be a tragic parting for Lot. Apparently the conflict was fueled by the herdsmen and neither Lot nor Abraham could control the direction their possessions were taking them. Finally, Abe stepped in to the conflict.

V. 8 Abraham showed his security in God by allowing Lot to make the first choice. He also showed meekness, that is, strength and authority that expresses itself in gentleness and patience. Abraham, as the elder man, could have told Lot what to do.

V. 13 Lot's choice eventually ruined him. It wasn't just that he was greedy for more pastureland, but he was drawn to the attraction of the city. Lot was a rich man. How cool is it to be rich in the wilderness? Your money is not liquid. You have to wait on caravans to buy stuff, and no one can tell you how cool you are. If being rich is important to us, we need people and goods and comfort to realize richness. Lot eventually moved from herding and living in tents, to living in a nice house in Sodom. It could be that he even became the mayor (or some official) in Sodom. Cool. He wasn't forced to move into or near Sodom; but, inch by inch, this little decision had a huge impact and he ended up in Sodom. He didn't save Sodom; in fact, they ruined him, although the root of this was already in his heart.

Abraham showed that true meekness is strength. Again, as disciples, where does our security come from? Are we content to allow our lives to be simple and simply shaped by God and following Christ in His harvest? Or is following Christ OK as long as we can be first in line, and have a voice and a reputation, and get the breaks we deserve or at least get our rights recognized?

Vs. 14-18 After they separated and Abraham gave up the choice for the "best" land, only then did God confirm Abraham. Sometimes you have to make the decision to accept what God has for you in following, before He confirms His will.

Notice that God took Abraham away from Lot to travel the land. The area around the oaks of Mamre will become an important place later for Abraham. Notice that when he settled there, *he built an altar* to honor God.

Genesis 14

Vs. 1-12 As we'll see in Scripture, God often allows a challenge or disaster to happen to lead us to blessing. That is what happens here. This event didn't directly affect Abe until v. 12.

Vs. 13-16 Abraham lived in tents his entire life in Canaan. Actually though, with all his livestock and servants, it was a small city. This was not "camping" and it definitely wasn't easy to move. If Abe took 318 men with him (born in his house) to save Lot, there were probably women and 2.5 children per couple too. They could have easily been 1000+ people. I'm sure Abraham was a scheduled stop by the merchant caravans that passed through. Eventually Abe & Co. became a known entity in Canaan, with Abe as the leader. He/they became known as *Hebrews*.

V. 14 This mention of *Dan* suggests that God had already given Moses some idea how the land would be allocated. The tribe of Dan had their land in northern Israel.

Abraham with his servants and his allies defeated a much bigger army and brought everything back. Now Abraham was a military force to be reckoned with.

Vs. 17-20 This is a small section, but huge in the plan of redemption.

As close as Abe's relationship with God was, he understood that Melchizedek was a priest of God and submitted to him. It appears, too, that Melchizedek taught Abraham something about God in the way he addressed God.

If you do a word search in the Bible on Melchizedek, you'll find some interesting stuff. Psalm 110 is written by David and is a prophetic description of the Messiah. The Messiah is said to be a priest of the order of Melchizedek. In Hebrews a lot of information is given about Melchizedek. Because Jesus is a priest of the order of Melchizedek, it means that although Jesus humanly couldn't be a priest because he wasn't from the tribe of Levi, He is a priest superior to the Levitical priesthood. Because of the way Melchizedek is spoken of, mysteriously and without origin, some people think that this Melchizedek that Abe is talking to is a manifestation of God the Son before He became incarnate as Jesus. Notice that he greeted Abe with bread and wine. Jesus would have done something like that.

I had a university professor go after me one time, because, in his thinking, some people didn't have a chance to learn about God. I said that God had His way of making sure people heard if they sought Him, and suddenly I thought of Melchizedek. I told him that unknown to us, suddenly this guy pops up in Genesis who has been telling all sorts of people about God. Also, later, you find a guy like Balaam (who is not a role model for your kids) but was known as a prophet of God. There may have been thousands of these guys who we don't know about, who traveled with the other language groups, scattered across the earth. We have to trust that God made sure people had a chance to know about Him and to respond to Him. Here we meet one of them and he's a priest of the *God Most High*.

Vs. 21-24 Abraham was open to Melchizedek, but was distant and resistant to the king of Sodom. If Abraham had taken anything from him, it would have signaled an obligation to Sodom. Sodom was a bad place. He refused to take any of the wealth of what had been recaptured. As disciples, it is important to know who to connect with and whose influence to avoid. That's not being legalistic, just realistic.

V. 22 Notice that Abraham pledges himself to God with the very words he just heard from Melchizedek.

Genesis 15

This is a great chapter in the Bible.

V. 1 So, why would God come to Abraham and tell him not to fear, that He would be Abe's shield and reward? The words in the ESV, *your reward shall be very great*, can mean, as in the KJV, NKJV and NIV, "your great reward;" that is, God Himself was Abraham's reward.

Abraham had now made a name for himself, but that's not always good. Those who wanted to raid Canaan now knew they would have to deal with Abraham. That meant that "Abe's town" had become a military target. Also, in the time that passed, maybe Abe regretted not having taken some of the booty. In any event, this is how you can understand God's words to him in the NIV, *I am your shield and your very great reward*. Apparently Abe needed a hug.

Vs. 2-3 It is hard to imagine how hard the waiting was for Abraham. God had promised; Abe had gone. God made him wait. Waiting is part of following as a disciple and doesn't mean you've missed God's will. What a great lesson. Abe would have more lessons on waiting and so will we. Becoming fruit-bearing disciples is not for the weak-of-heart or those who imagine instant success.

Yet notice here how deeply Abraham's desire and desperation had grown. The promise and the waiting intensified and tested his faith. Remember what God did to Adam before He made Eve. He gave Adam something to do that revealed his need and created a longing. We shouldn't be surprised when God does that with us.

Now comes a very important part of biblical and redemptive history. I'll hit the high points, but make as many observations as possible.

Vs. 4-6 Notice that God takes Abe beyond a single child to an uncountable multitude. Abraham's faith was incredible. In spite of the waiting and disappointment, when God restates the promise, telling Abe to look at the stars, Abe looks up and believes God...***and it was counted to him as righteousness (Rom. 4:3)***. This belief was based on his faith in God and His promise, but the actual "being right before God" was still future, waiting for Christ to make payment for sin and satisfy the justice of God. Faith saves, not works, and salvation by faith is built on the death and resurrection of Christ.

Vs. 7-11 Abraham's question in v. 8 launches this "cutting of the covenant." According to custom they were to kill the animals and cut them up, making a lane between the animal parts. Then both parties of the covenant were to walk through this lane, committing to the agreement, saying that if either one reneged on the contract, that they would end up like the animals. Something like that.

Vs. 12-21 First, God prophetically states what He will do for Abe's offspring in the near future. Then God makes the covenant, but the Abrahamic covenant is unique because only God makes it. In a way, it is more accurate to call it a promise, since a covenant usually had two parties. Abe never strolls the lane, only God. That means that the fulfillment of this covenant has nothing to do with the obedience of Abraham or Israel as a nation; it is solely God's responsibility to fulfill what He has promised. It is an unconditional covenant. This means that all of the promises to Abe and Israel will be fulfilled. None of it depends on Israel's obedience. God will make it work.

So, does the church replace Israel? Only if the Abrahamic Covenant is invalid, and that can only happen if God reneges on His promise. As Paul would say, "By no means!" In Romans 15:8-9, Paul says that the covenant with the patriarchs was confirmed (not fulfilled) in Christ. The fulfillment of Israel's destiny in God's plan is still future. The literal nation of Israel will fulfill God's purpose as a fulfillment, not of the Mosaic Covenant, but as promised to Abraham and then through the prophets.

V. 18 Notice that God tells Abe that He will give Israel the land up to the Euphrates. That has never happened...yet. It will happen during the Millennial Kingdom when Israel fulfills its destiny.

Another way to understand the unconditional quality of this promise, as confirming all redemptive history and promises, is to realize that it too is a part of another promise; that is, the seed of the woman would conquer the seed of the serpent. That promise was absolute, without any input from Adam, Eve, or any person. It became a basis of hope and faith for the believing, but the promise was never dependent upon them. That promise necessitated and incorporated other actions on God's part. The saving of Noah, the promise to Abraham, the establishment of Israel and the law and the promises, the promise to David, the coming of the Christ, His death and resurrection, and our redemption are all parts of that promise. The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. None of what God did was to be done "only if" we responded properly. While we were still weak, lost, dead and blind, Christ died for the ungodly. Our only "part" is to believe and receive.

Isn't that a great message to take into the harvest?

Matthew 5:27-48

For me, it is best to understand what Jesus is saying as instructions to His disciples. The supposed "intensification" of the law given here is not toward rigidity or legalism, but to honesty and realism following Christ on earth. Instead of playing fast and loose in matters of authentic honesty before God and getting by with "religion," we are to realize we are in a serious conflict, and so to live for Him and reach lost people.

Vs. 27-30 These are important for us as disciples especially today, with the ease of getting pornography. We are to have no mercy with things in our lives which cause us to sin. Jesus will use this same example later with the disciples, warning them about things that make them proud.

Vs. 31-32 We are not to treat marriage lightly. God meant for marriage to be permanent, so if a person is devoted to God, he needs to treat marriage the same way. That's hard to do when divorce is so commonplace in our culture. It would appear here that it is allowed to divorce a person for committing adultery because they have broken the marriage covenant. However, these verses are not saying that divorce is necessary.

Vs. 33-37 This matter of taking oaths or making grand declarations in the name of God was a religious thing. I think Jesus is saying to live quietly and humbly before God, obeying what He says.

Vs. 38-48 These verses are probably the purest test of our true understanding of our salvation in Christ. If we know what is happening in the world and understand the spiritual battle, we know what is at stake and how important our testimony is. Jesus Himself was the model for this. Isaiah 53:7-8 says, *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?*

For us and our salvation He willingly allowed Himself to be mistreated. I ask myself why this is so hard for me, but if I want to be His disciple, I have to become more like Him, or as Paul put it in Philippians 3:10, *share his sufferings, becoming like Him in His death*. These verses are the test of being like Him.

V. 42 Notice that this is a command to His disciples. It shows how bound we are to our money and stuff and whether we really believe God can provide. Always keep a few dollars in your pocket to give to someone who is begging.

V. 45 This should be the goal we are working toward.

Vs. 46-47 In a godly sense, we are told to seek these rewards. Probably the best way to keep this in perspective is to remember that we are really seeking to be like our Father and our Lord. That is reward enough. Hebrews 11:6 says, *And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.*

Psalm 6

Vs. 1-3 Although David knew that what he was feeling was because of his enemies, it is hard to be down and not feel like God is rebuking you. How bad do you have to feel to sense it in your bones?

Vs. 4-7 David's life was weak because of his enemies, but he appealed to God to save him based on God's *steadfast love*, not because of anything David had done. This all looks pretty desperate.

Vs. 8-10 David understood that God would accept him and help him.

Not to say that you can't find help in other places, but as disciples, we find that true mercy comes from the Lord; and true confidence comes from being heard by Him as we pour out our hearts. There is a lot of prayer-less ministry and networking that goes on in the name of God, asking only for His stamp of approval, often after the fact.

Proverbs 1:29-33

These are amazing words of warning, especially realizing that the guy who wrote them didn't heed them. The *fear of the Lord*, knowing that this could happen to any of us (and does happen to us), helps us not to treat God's love as something to be taken for granted. He warns us because He loves us. If He didn't spare Solomon or David, why should He spare us for disregarding His Word, His kindness and His love. On the other hand, as disciples working with people in the harvest, what a fantastic relationship to bring people into. If they will follow as disciples, in that process, He will bring order and peace to confused and tragic lives.

JANUARY 7

Genesis 16:1-18:19

Waiting for God is never easy, but it is something God requires of everyone who follows Him. Abraham's faith is amazing, and although he and Sarah will make a "mistake," if you can call it that, we shouldn't be quick to judge. They had been in Canaan now for about 10 years and she couldn't get pregnant. God kept confirming the promise, but there was no baby. Still, they held on to the promise.

Genesis 16

Vs. 1-3 Since Hagar was Egyptian, it would be a good guess that they obtained her when they went to Egypt and Abraham lied about Sarah. Regardless of the mistake being made here, this shows a lot of faith on Sarah's part. She and Abraham were both partners in pursuing the promise and following God. I understand from what happens here that God is extremely gracious, forgiving, kind and faithful.

The Spirit has given us the benefit of knowing that Abraham and Sarah never needed to do this. We understand they were driven by sadness and frustration. Those of us who are married know

the emotional pressure of trying to get pregnant and what it can bring into a relationship. It is hard to withstand the disappointment.

There is no evidence to suggest they prayed about this decision, but it does say, *Abram listened to the voice of Sarai*. Not that a husband shouldn't listen to his wife, obviously, but in this matter it involved a very clear promise of God and Abraham's personal experience with God. This promise was as good as gold, set in stone, unmovable. Look at Genesis 3:17, *And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife..."* Sometimes it is easier to be "strong" in faith by ourselves, but the test of faith is that we hold to it in the presence of others.

As disciples, we have been told certain things that we know are true. What God says about this world, the heart of man, and the coming judgment of mankind are things that we need to keep in mind. We know we need to be in the Word and that we are to love and follow Christ. These at least are constants, good as gold, set in stone, and unmovable. The Word provides guidance in all the important relationships of life. So, we shouldn't let anything or anyone remove our resolve to follow and obey each day.

Interestingly, in Romans 4:20 it says of Abraham, *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God*. His distrust was not in the promise. The problem was confusion and despair in waiting, not knowing the *means* of how God would fulfill that promise. In the end, what they always understood would be correct. Sarah would have a child.

Vs. 4-6 Imagine how life suddenly got complicated for Abe and Sarah. This kind of marriage was a legal thing to do in that culture. But in doing this, what they had understood as their "dream" (Abe and Sarah and baby) died. She gave her husband to another, younger woman, that pretty little thing they picked up in Egypt. And behold, Hagar became pregnant, meaning Sarah was the problem. Now, this young woman was flaunting it and Abe has grown emotionally connected (in love?) with her. O Weh!

What lessons do you find here about how we can complicate our lives by not waiting on God but seeking other solutions instead? Abe takes no leadership (guilty conscience?) and wimps out. Sarah gets mean. Hagar flees.

Vs. 7-14 God had a sub-plan here for a man named Ishmael, a descendant of Abraham. Also, once God gave His promise to Abraham, He made good on it. Every child born of Abraham became a people. Even in Abe's weakness in seeking the promise, God was still faithful and true to His promise. Note that Abe's motivation in doing this wasn't lust, like David, or power and lust, like Solomon.

Notice the *angel of the Lord* in v. 7, and notice in v. 10, He says what only God can say. There are many places in the OT where the angel of the Lord is God the Son in human form.

God is tender, though corrective to Hagar, in fulfillment of His promise to Abraham. Ishmael is to be a *wild donkey of a man*, meaning virile, strong, athletic, commanding. He was a guy who could put the soccer ball in the upper left corner of the net, by the post and crossbar, from mid-field; and if he got in the penalty box with the ball, you were finished.

You have to believe that Hagar related this all to Abraham (therefore we have the account) and that this calmed Sarah, who welcomed the returned and humbled Hagar.

Vs. 15-16 Note that Abe was 86 when Ishmael was born. In the next verse he is 99. It is good to pay attention to the dates or ages God gives. We know from Gen 12:4 that Abe was 75 when he left Haran and arrived in Canaan. You can figure out how long it was until the conception of Ishmael. This gives us an idea of time and the incredible struggle the waiting must have been for

Abe and Sarah. Can you imagine not getting an answer to your prayer for ten years? And even this answer wasn't the answer.

So what is happening here? God apparently used Ishmael as a small glimmer of hope as they waited, until the true fulfillment, 14 years later. God used this situation to create something in Abe and Sarah that would give them incredible joy when Sarah finally conceived and had her boy. And of course, there is something about God's glory and deep wisdom that is to be taken to heart.

Genesis 17

Vs. 1-14 In preparation for the fulfillment of His promise, God restates the covenant, changes Abe's name, and gives him the sign of the covenant - circumcision. Remember that the fulfillment of this covenant was unconditional since only God took part in the cutting of the covenant. Circumcision was a required act of obedience for the nation of Israel, but it still was an act of faith to those who believed in God's promise to Abraham whether they belong to Israel or the church.

In Romans Paul will show that circumcision didn't save anyone or make them a child of Abraham. Since Abe was saved by faith before he was circumcised, it was only a sign of faith. The true children of Abraham are those who believe in the promise.

Vs. 15-21 Abe was good with what God was saying up until now, but then God renamed Sarai to Sarah; and the dream, which they had always known was true, flamed to life again. Notice that Abe laughed. I think this was a laugh of joy and of revived, unbelievable hope. Abraham goes into this "testing of the waters" thing with God because he can't believe his ears. He had always known that the promise would be with Sarah. I'll bet he was a happy man.

Vs. 22-27 Notice that Abraham took immediate action regarding circumcision. This would become the national sign of the covenant in Israel, meaning they were under the promise of God. That was a redemptive promise showing that all nations would be blessed through Abraham. This was a sign of faith. The fact that Abraham acted so quickly and resolutely showed both his faith in God and his pursuit of the promise. It was a sign of the promise, cut into every man that would remind them daily of the promise. It is very interesting that God did something like this.

I have to laugh, because the real act of faith wasn't from Abraham; it was from the 300-500+? men in the camp who came out and listened to Abraham tell them of hearing God in the wilderness. Then he pulls out a knife and says, "line up and lift your robes." Whoa! And they obeyed. That's faith. I can't imagine (and don't want to) what that day looked like. No discipleship course that I know of asks for a commitment like that.

Genesis 18:1-19

This section of reading probably should have stopped at v. 16. God never doubted that Abraham would obey regarding the circumcision. Now it was time to visit Sarah.

Vs. 1-2 This could have been days or weeks later. Notice that Abe and Sarah are at *the oaks of Mamre*. Notice that the visitors sort of just appeared standing some distance away. It also looks like Abe was looking for them.

Vs. 3-8 On the one hand, this is ancient Middle Eastern hospitality. On the other hand, I think Abraham recognized the angel of the Lord, referred to here as "Lord." Abe had met Him before.

I always smile when I read this. It seems like Abe says, "Hey, let me whip together a little something for you to eat," and then he goes out and kills, guts, skins, prepares and cooks an animal. Whoa!

V. 8 Like a good host, he waited on his very honored guests. Can you imagine Jesus showing up with a couple of angels for supper? What would you do? Order a pizza? Pick up some Chinese take-out?

Understand too as a side note, they were not illusions. They all possessed real physical bodies with fingerprints. When they ate, the food went through teeth, into a mouth and down an esophagus, not into a vacuum in their bodies. It didn't take God millions of years to make those bodies. They, as spiritual beings, had no problem making a body in a second, with moving parts and all the latest upgrades. God did that at creation too.

Vs. 9-15 Sarah hears the promise firsthand. The traditional way of understanding the visitors is Christ, pre-incarnate, often described, but not always, as "the angel of the Lord," and two angels. Notice in vs. 10, 13, and 17, *the LORD said*.

Sarah listened at the key-hole as they talked and she laughed in wonder and joy, the same as Abraham. Interestingly, the name of the baby, Isaac, means laughter. We know that this laughter was in joy and wonder. Can you imagine hearing that the thing you have been praying for and waiting for, for 25 years, was going to happen? Apparently Sarah, who was now 89, was having a hard time thinking her body would respond both sexually and maternally. For God, this miracle would be a piece of cake. The Lord showed her kindness and understanding because her lie was told in embarrassment and wonder, not in deceit. For something similar to this, look at Luke 24:36-41.

Just as an interesting note here, think about this. When Jesus was in conflict with the Pharisees in John 8:37-59, He told them that they were responding differently than Abraham, whom they said was their father. Jesus said, *"If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did."* When Jesus told the Pharisees the truth, they didn't respond with faith the way Abraham did when Jesus, as the angel of the Lord, had talked to him here.

Vs. 16-19 This introduces the Lord's discussion with Abraham regarding the destruction of Sodom that will take place in chapter 19. Sodom was a city, but also a region. Abraham would now, tomorrow actually, see how just and gracious God is. And once again, Abe would be trying to save Lot.

As a disciple, what do you take away today, to help you follow Christ in the harvest with joy, faith, and focus? What an amazing and compassionate Lord we follow. He is patient and understanding. His plans have a depth of wisdom that is totally beyond our understanding. He is faithful to His promises and He is unwilling that any should perish. For us, His plan is that He has saved us and sent us into His harvest to reach the lost and make disciples, who make disciples.

Matthew 6:1-24

V. 1 Jesus is showing His disciples that the true power of our walk with Him is in secret. It is Christ in us when no one is looking. This is what shows who we really are in Christ. So much of our faith often revolves around Sunday morning and how the church meets our needs. The church is to be the group in the harvest reaching the world. Following begins with the individual disciple, living authentically with Christ. Jesus is not only dismantling the ideas of the religious routine they had been taught, but He is also encouraging them to seek the Father who will reward them for seeking Him sincerely in secret.

Vs. 2-4 This is giving to others. No one else needs to know that we give.

Vs. 5-6 Jesus first corrects what they have learned from the Pharisees. Prayer is personal, to our Father in secret.

Vs. 7-8 Apparently they knew something about how Gentiles prayed and so Jesus addressed this too.

Vs. 9-13 The Lord's Prayer is a way for a disciple to tune his heart to God as he prays. There is no magic in reciting this prayer in a church service. Since Jesus said the Father already knows what we need, in talking to God, this prayer helps us to keep reality in mind and to understand what is important to Him. The fact that this prayer tunes our attitudes is its brilliance. Jesus could not have given us anything shorter or more comprehensive to guide our thoughts as we pray to our Father. Take some time to think through every phrase.

Vs. 14-15 Jesus is still teaching His disciples about prayer. Just months before His death, Jesus reviewed "the Lord's Prayer," for His disciples in Luke 11:4. There, Jesus wove this message of forgiveness into the prayer. I understand this as a warning against an unforgiving attitude that hinders our prayers and keeps God from listening to us. As disciples working in the harvest in a lost and dying world, to withhold forgiveness, knowing that sin harms all of us, signals a lack of understanding and compassion. God will withhold the "daily cleansing" of our guilt and its consequences if we withhold forgiveness, understanding and compassion from other ruined sinners.

I have experienced and seen that when I harbor bad attitudes toward people who offend me, and do not show them the same forgiveness, understanding, mercy and grace, that my Father shows me, He holds me accountable for my guilt. Life seems dreary and my heart is heavy until I'm willing to forgive. God doesn't play games like this, even with His own children and those serving Him in the harvest. As a man sows, so shall he reap is still in force, regardless of who we are.

Vs. 16-18 If we fast, no one should see it or know about it, except our Father who sees in secret.

Vs. 19-21 Remember that mixed into what Jesus has been telling His disciples is the idea of reward. What is a person really seeking on earth? Where is their real treasure? Our value and reward is often in how we look to others. So, after the warnings of religion for the approval of the public, Jesus shows His disciples where this problem really comes from, seeking reward on earth, either from people or pleasure or money.

Vs. 22-23 To place our value here on earth is totally blind. The "eye" is our understanding or spiritual perception of the truth Jesus is giving us. I think the "body" is our life on earth. Not to be working with the love of Christ to free others, as we have been freed in Christ, is blind. To live now for treasure, pleasure or recognition (even in the church) on earth is darkness. If therefore our understanding and our perception of Christ doesn't allow us to value what God values, this "darkness" is deeper than we know.

V. 24 And Jesus is telling His disciples that this is the real problem. Not to be serving Christ as disciples following Him in the harvest means there is another master being served. Not all Christians are disciples, for this reason.

Discipleship is a choice to follow now, to be hungry now, to live now before our Father who sees in secret. God is patient with us, teaching us that true treasure is not to be found on earth and that we are blessed on earth as we follow our Lord in the harvest, bearing much fruit and so glorifying our Father.

Psalm 7

Very few of us have been in situations where we've needed to pray like this. Few of us have found this much opposition in our walk with Christ. Psalms like these made CS Lewis doubt their inspiration. Yet the Spirit inspired these words of David to show that God understands the crying of our hearts when we face injustice, hate and oppression. God is all for forgiveness and understanding, but even Jesus said there would be judgment and eternal punishment. What is written here shows something of how God feels toward those who harm others, and yet God shows His mercy until the end. As disciples who know the grace of God, we should be like our Father, showing kindness and mercy even to our enemies. And we should cry out to Him, as this psalm encourages.

Vs. 1-2 This threat seems to have gone to David's heart and the danger must have appeared to be very close to him.

Vs. 3-5 To me, this sounds like the application of what Jesus said in the Lord's Prayer, regarding forgiveness. David is saying that if he was guilty of the unkindness or unforgiveness, then it would be just for the penalty to fall on him.

Vs. 6-9 David knows that he is innocent and is asking mankind to be gathered to see God's justice. There is a sense here that David is talking about God's judgment over all people, all of mankind.

Vs. 10-11 David is not only expressing his hope in God, but he, through the Spirit, is expressing the hurt or offense God feels every day from every sin that mankind commits.

Vs. 12-16 Notice how this begins. *If a man does not repent*, God is more than willing to offer forgiveness and He provides a ton of patience. But, there is a day when there is judgment; and often that judgment is according to a person's own sin and behavior.

V. 17 Amen.

Proverbs 2:1-5

Didn't Jesus just tell His disciples about *treasure*? Notice the "if-then" proposition here. If this treasure is important to you and if you receive this word and call out, and seek, and search, then you will understand and find. Jesus said this to His disciples on more than one occasion.

In following Christ, this is what separates the "men from the boys and the women from the girls." Jesus is about to say just this in His sermon to His disciples.

Where is our treasure as disciples? Will our love for Jesus drive us to dig deeper?

JANUARY 8

Genesis 18:20-19:38

It would have been nice if verses 16-19 from yesterday were included here. You might want to go back and read those just to get the entire context. This entire discussion is an important part of Abe's education and it gives some deep insight into how the Lord works with us.

Genesis 18:20-33

Vs. 20-21 The Lord states the case against Sodom. It is interesting to think of what this outcry was. Was it some general sense of violation against God's righteousness or was there a satanic accuser? If the latter is so, it is ironic since Satan also delights in deceiving and corrupting mankind. It is worth noting that the angel of the Lord wasn't going to act from "hearsay." He was sending two angels to visit the situation. I wonder if He still does something similar today.

Vs. 22-25 Note again that this angel of the Lord is the Lord. Think of this: Abraham is standing with Jesus. That sure puts an interesting twist on Jesus' words in John 8:39-59 regarding Abraham believing what he was told. Unknown to the Pharisees, Jesus had had a meal and a fairly long conversation with Abraham. Abraham and Sarah had believed all the truth that Jesus had shared with them. Now Jesus had shared more truth and was letting Abraham respond in faith.

It is interesting to me that Abraham understood that God had to be righteous. Actually, all men do, even though they themselves are not completely righteous. Even Satan holds God to a righteous standard while his own righteousness is totally nonexistent.

Vs. 26-33 Abraham, as a disciple, was invited to chime in concerning the destruction of Sodom. For Abe the issue was not only saving Lot, but also understanding the Lord. What are your observations here regarding the Lord's answers? What do you learn about God through this whole interaction with Abraham? If you got to talk to the Lord, for coffee, who would be on your heart?

Genesis 19

Vs. 1-3 Since it mentions that *Lot was sitting in the gate*, it could be that Lot had some official title. The gates were where city officials sat and did business. Lot was rich so it could be that the lure to attract him to live in the city also came with a position. On the other hand, Lot may have just been sitting there, but the Lord knew he would be there. The angels tested Lot here by suggesting that they should sleep in the town square. Notice that Lot pressed them strongly, suggesting that beyond Middle Eastern hospitality, Lot was urged on, knowing the danger these guests would be facing.

Vs. 4-11 In Sodom, the angels were, obviously, never in danger. This was a testing of Lot and the people. Years later in Israel something just like this will happen. I will never understand why Lot was willing to throw his daughters out the door to this mob. But I guess it's better not to judge.

V. 5 *That we may know them* meant to have sex with them. They would have raped those guests had it been in their power to do so.

Vs. 12-26 In this sordid tale of woe, the effects of living in Sodom are evident in Lot and his family. Lot had no credibility with the people, and now his sons-in-law just laughed at him. However he might have rationalized his contact with the people in Sodom, thinking he was doing them good. He saved exactly no one; however, he and his family became infected by the godlessness.

V. 16 You have to wonder what was going on in Lot's thinking.

Vs. 17-23 This is a very lengthy talk by Lot and it amounted to nothing. In the verses that come we'll see that even though Zoar was saved because of Lot, the people still knew Lot was somehow tied into what happened in Sodom. Lot didn't stay in Zoar.

V. 26 Lot's wife was punished, and though we don't totally understand what happened, she must have rebelled inwardly. The Lord was saving them and must have had a reason for what He did to her.

Vs. 27-29 Isn't it interesting that it says that *God remembered Abraham* and therefore saved Lot.

Vs. 30-38 It just kept getting worse for Lot. The effect of living in Sodom and not knowing the Lord is shown here in Lot's daughters. Sodom was destroyed, but they brought the "stench" of Sodom with them. Notice that the children became nations, both of which became a problem to

Israel. One note to God's forgiveness and mercy is that there is one person from Moab in the family tree of Jesus. Ruth, the Moabitess, would become the great-grandmother of King David and would be in the line of Christ.

As disciples, if we live for Christ, with our treasure in heaven, those around us have a better chance of catching fire with true faith, than if we "blend in." Following as a disciple means doing the work of following and reaching out. To complain about a lost world, while at the same time enjoying the good things of a lost world, is not being a disciple. Farmers farm. Harvesters harvest. Disciples disciple. Disciples are not harmless and they don't gripe. They press on to make more disciples.

Matthew 6:25-7:14

Matthew 6:25-34

This lesson to His disciples is big. Jesus taught this again and again. When He sent out the Twelve and the 70, He didn't allow them to take any money or food with them. Their heavenly Father would meet their needs. In Jesus' training of His disciples, this was a crucial lesson on following in the harvest and living with a spiritual, eternal perspective. As disciples, this promise and confidence in God is to be our truest heart and attitude in working for and following Christ in this world. This world is not our home. We're not "just passing through." We are here on assignment. God is constantly with us. He will provide our food, clothing and lodging. Even the hairs of our heads are numbered. And the only way you learn this is to follow Christ as a disciple in the harvest. At this point Jesus and the Twelve had all given up their careers and were being sustained financially by the "coincidences" (e.g., people who got healed, who decided to help) that happened to them along the way. The Twelve hadn't been sent out yet; but living with Jesus, they saw it was possible to serve God in making disciples, and to rely on His care, and not lose weight. This is a big one for us to learn too and it takes years of living by faith to truly internalize it.

Matthew 7:1-14

As you read this section, and before you read my comments below, try to put these thoughts together into a flow of thought meant for you as a disciple. It seems like Matthew and the Spirit are leaving out some important bridges between thoughts. Maybe the reason the Spirit is doing this is the same reason Jesus spoke in parables; that is, so that those who are really interested and work to understand (those who have) will get the meaning, and will get more, while those who have not, and don't really care, or have more important things to do...but why finish the thought? And then there is that little word "seek," which means to...but again, why finish the thought? You can if you want to.

Vs. 1-2 Jesus teaches His disciples not to judge. As disciples we know we are in a world steeped and lost in sin. Like Jesus, we are to work impartially getting His Word out. His Word and how people respond to it is the only lasting and worthy judgment we should have any interest in. Disciples can't afford to take sides in trivial things in this life (2 Tim. 2:4). We live in a lost world. We were lost. As disciples making disciples, we are to be humble in the grace we've received and reach out to help others find Christ and follow Him.

Vs. 3-5 So, Jesus warns His disciples about not being humble and says they should be fully involved in removing logs from their own eyes. Jesus knew it would be a temptation to be focused on criticizing others. In Luke, Jesus mentions that a disciple is not above his teacher, meaning that if the disciple maker has logs, so will the disciple. That's a warning. A disciple can't help others grow in faith with a critical attitude, and can't help people come to the place of removing harmful things from their lives unless they themselves are willing to do the same.

I remember a line from a tape by Howard Hendricks, "So I'm sitting across from this guy with his deep seated alcoholism and I say to him, 'The Spirit would be happy to move in and help you take control,' but I can't control my time, I can't control my money, I can't control my appetite. Friend, I'm no better off than he is. We both need the same message." Where is your "log" that will destroy your credibility and lead you to make log-ridden disciples? And if you understand this properly, it isn't really an issue of any particular "log," rather the issue is following Christ in the harvest honestly, openly humble, growing and grateful.

But it is not as if Jesus is saying don't help others. He's saying to do it with humility and integrity, not as a critic and judge, but as a fellow disciple dealing with yourself before Christ. We are to be there to help others remove the speck.

V. 6 But not in all cases. There is a kind of unbelief where Jesus says, "Just walk away." This is good for a disciple to know. We are not to witness to everyone, because not everyone is ready. This is not a suggestion, but a command. This command and the understanding of "who art the dog" and "who art the schwein" is best understood by the humble, "non-judging," "log removing," "helping others" disciple. The self-righteous and self-absorbed see dogs and pigs everywhere. The naïve think everyone will listen.

Vs. 7-11 Jesus seems to be saying, that instead of a hard combative attitude, we, as disciples, are to be in a constant mode of asking, seeking and knocking regarding our work in the harvest. I apply these to reaching out and making disciples, not getting stuff for ourselves. Only God can open doors to people. This asking, seeking, and knocking might also apply to needs we have as we are following Christ; but I really think it is silly to assume that this command is just for our needs, as if our only purpose on this earth is to eat and wear clothes and stay alive. Jesus already addressed that issue. This command is meant to give us the confidence to follow in the harvest bearing fruit.

V. 12 So, knowing that the Lord has our back in reaching out, we are to be open and generous as we pour out our lives into the lives of others. Loving our neighbor sums up *the Law and the Prophets*. (Rom. 13:8-14, 15:2)

Vs. 13-14 Therefore as a disciple, make sure you are living a life that has the strain and difficulty of reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. If your walk as a believer is too easy you may be on the wrong road. All of us have the strains of life: fragile relationships, breaking cars, failing health, etc. Being a disciple on earth is about more than life maintenance; yet for many, that is all their faith helps them do, maintain life, and that is how Satan pins them down and keeps them out of the harvest. We have faith and strength for the harvest and in the harvest we find more faith, strength, and joy than we realized we'd have. Yet Jesus is saying here that following Him involves work, with lots of sweat and strain.

In World War II my dysfunctional relatives became functional because they were no longer living lost, self-absorbed, dysfunctional lives. They were involved in the battle, and the battle gave them health and purpose. The war was hard and they would never have chosen the war, but they were called to it. They became lost again when the war was over. I really think the Lord knows what He's doing with His disciples. The harvest is hard and disciple-making is a battle; but in following Christ, it brings health and purpose to His dysfunctional followers (disciples).

Psalm 8

Isn't it amazing to think that this awesome, amazing, infinitely powerful God loves us and invites us to work with Him to make His love known? What a thought that He would choose such foolish, weak, dysfunctional beings to love and honor.

Vs. 1-2 This is a contrast. God is glorious above the heavens yet the mouth of a baby can honor Him. This honoring is like the foolish bringing to nothing the wisdom of the wise.

Vs. 3-4 This is another contrast. God's power and creativity are utterly amazing, so why does He busy Himself with man?

V. 5 Satan certainly had a hard time with this reality, causing him to trip over his own beauty and pride. "What? Serve those ugly little things, when I'm so beautiful and worthy of worship myself?" So, Satan in pride rebelled against God.

Ironically, v. 5 is also quoted in Hebrews 2:7 & 9 regarding Jesus. So, once you've read this psalm through, as if it is written about us, then read it through as if it is written prophetically about Jesus. (You'll see at least one other verse that is written about Jesus in the NT.)

Vs. 6-8 That dominion still is in force and now that Jesus has redeemed mankind (the believing) that power rests again in the hand of a man. Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He.

V. 9 Amen.

Proverbs 2:6-15

Vs. 6-12 Notice that this person is submitted to the Lord, walking in His way.

Vs. 12-15 These might not be openly evil men, just men who don't submit to the Lord and who want to walk in their own way.

If you read this and then reflect back over the OT portion for today, you'll see why Abe was one way and Lot another, why one was blessed and why one ruined his life.

As disciples, we are being offered great blessing as we, if we, follow Christ. (John 15)

JANUARY 9

Genesis 20:1-22:24

So, we are nine days into the year. How are you doing? Remember: The Word is alive. These notes are not. Work to maintain your daily time reading the Word. If the notes are interesting to you, they will be here when you have time to read them. There are lots of lessons in these passages. As you read, what is the Spirit highlighting for you?

Genesis 20

V. 1 We are never told why Abe & Co. journeyed south. Whatever the reason was, there was no emergency. It seems that Abraham found himself being examined in the kingdom of Abimelech; and once questioned about Sarah, Abe felt threatened and lied. Then one thing led to another. It could be that there was an actual threat once Abraham was approached, because God never rebukes Abraham.

V. 2 Sarah was apparently still a "hot chick" at 90. Never give up!

Vs. 3-7 I'm always amazed at how easily God and Abimelech spoke together. This literally put the fear of God in Abimelech. It is interesting that God protected Sarah. God would have done this even without the lie.

Vs. 8-13 Abraham explains the situation behind the lie that he and Sarah told. Rightfully so, Abimelech is offended and is right in saying that Abe shouldn't have done this. Abe answers that he didn't sense from the people that there was a fear of the Lord in the land. There was fear now.

Vs. 14-18 Abimelech giving gifts to Abe and Sarah was a sign of his innocence and testimony to all the people to keep their hands off of Abraham. Abraham's prayer brought God's blessing back to Abimelech.

If you read between the lines here, I don't think Abimelech was such an innocent guy; and so God used this situation to cause Abimelech and his people to fear God and to respect Abraham.

On the other hand, God protected Abraham from himself. Even a man of faith like Abe had feet of clay. Apparently Abe was proud of his "little" trick, but what we see is that he had a huge area of fear and weakness. You wonder how someone who had seen so much from God could do this. He and Sarah were living in the very fulfillment they had longed for, so why would they fear man and doubt God. There is a root of deceit and trickery here in Abe and Sarah that sprouts in Isaac and blooms in Jacob. But I look at myself, knowing Christ, having the Spirit and the Word and a mission, and I can do the same kind of stuff. This passage is a warning to all who earnestly follow Christ to get the "logs" out of our eyes.

In a way, the "unbeliever" is really the hero here. He had a good, educational encounter with God that would prove useful later with Abraham and Isaac. The event was used by God for many purposes.

Genesis 21

Vs. 1-7 Isn't it interesting that when God told Abe that he and Sarah would have a child, Abe laughed. Then when Sarah heard it from the Lord, she laughed. Isaac means laughter. God understood that the result of what he put Abe and Sarah through would bring laughter of awe and joy when the baby was born. Because of the way God prepared their hearts, these are two parents who would never take the blessing of being parents for granted.

Vs. 6-7 When I read these words it makes me think what an incredibly unique woman Sarah must have been, and we know so little about her.

Vs. 8-13 Apparently Ishmael was mocking and making fun of Isaac. God allowed this situation to take place to move Abe and Sarah to this decision. God approved of sending Hagar and Ishmael away.

Note that God refers to Hagar as *your slave woman*, not "your other wife." Even in God's eyes, Abe only had one wife. Paul would pick up on this reference to the *slave woman* years later when he wrote Galatians.

V. 12 This truth is also used by Paul very powerfully in Romans 9:6ff.

We could go after Sarah for her attitude toward Hagar and Ishmael, but God doesn't. He tells Abe to go with it. Not all disharmony is outside of God's will, and like the thing that happened with Abimelech, He uses this within His working. As disciples working with unbelievers or in churches, things happen relationally beyond our control. People get into conflicts and things break in funny, unexpected ways when there is constant discord. Instead of losing our minds, we need to rest in the Lord and realize He might have a deeper purpose in the thing we're calling a failure or catastrophe.

Vs. 14-21 Notice that God was with Ishmael and blessed him. If you begin to underline the names of different peoples beginning in chapter 10, you see that there were already Egyptians, Canaanites and Philistines and many others. The place was crawling with people. I've heard people say that the major mistake that Abe and Sarah made here was the birth of Ishmael, whose people became the enemies of the Jews. However, later, the Edomites and Moabites and Ammonites were all enemies too, and none were related to Ishmael. It seems to me, from reading the text, the future enemies of the Jews were already in place and God is blessing Ishmael.

Vs. 22-34 Notice that Abimelech initiates this covenant with Abraham. He now knows about Abe and, with the strength of Abe's camp and the fact that God was with him, Abe was a threat to Abimelech.

Abraham is still the man of faith. The recording of this encounter will make sense of what happens to Isaac later. Abraham could have taken the land, or at least conquered Abimelech's kingdom. Abraham's camp probably had more people than Abimelech and Abe's men were proven in battle. Also, because of the size of his herds, Abe needed more territory. He could have "taken" this piece of the promised land without waiting. He endured inconvenience and discomfort to pursue God's promise in waiting. Doesn't that sound strange, to pursue something by waiting? You won't find that in a management book. What a great lesson for us as disciples, choosing to hunger and work in the harvest making disciples, when we could just enjoy "now" and make our own heaven on earth.

Genesis 22

Vs. 1-2 Notice that God *tested* Abe. He didn't tempt him to sin. Apparently it is to be expected that God will "test" us too, to see if what He has given us has become an idol, or if our hearts are wholly His.

Mt. Moriah apparently is where Jerusalem would be built. If you're like me, you wonder if all of what is about to happen took place where Jesus would one day be sacrificed. It could be.

Vs. 3-14 This story is pretty straightforward.

People often wonder if they would have the faith of Abraham, meaning, if God asked them to sacrifice their son if they could do it. Note that Isaac was a teenager. Knowing what teens are like, maybe this is why Abe seems so willing to do it. Bad joke.

Testing is "fitted" to us and our lives following God. To answer the above question, if you had all of Abe's experience with God, had all his faith to wait and believe, lived 25 years without hope and saw the promised child, left home only on the word of God, etc., etc., etc., then, yes, this test would have been meaningful to you and you would have done what Abe did. And, your name would also be Abraham.

Interestingly here, we are told in Hebrews that Abe knew God could raise Isaac from the dead. Yet with Abimelech, Abe had such fear for his own life. Maybe that is why this test was so great. Abe had to deal with his deepest fear, and, in light of all the Lord had done for him, Abe finally submitted his fear of death to the hand of God.

Vs. 15-19 This test is a high point in redemptive history. Adam was not able to pass a test like this. Now, at that point in history there was a man on earth, who out of love for God and trust in Him, was willing to sacrifice something more dear to him than his own life.

Notice that it was *the angel of the Lord*, Jesus Himself, who spoke. This would be the place where He, the Son, would be sacrificed by His Father for the sins of mankind. Also, Isaac would have heard all of this.

There are lots of lessons for a disciple here. God will test us even though it seems unfair, since we are straining to do what others are not. Fruit will endure and lead to more fruit if the branch is wholly connected to, and abiding in, the vine. Your love and devotion to your Savior is more important than making disciples, reaching the lost and all the "Christian" stuff you do. In Ephesus, they lost their first love, but loved the work, and Jesus wasn't pleased. He threatened to remove them. It is too easy to make an idol of ministry and God's blessing.

Vs. 20-24 This little genealogical note is to give us some info that will soon become important.

Matthew 7:15-29

These are Jesus' final instructions, warnings, and qualifications to His disciples in the sermon. Note that there were not just the Twelve or the 70, but possibly a couple hundred "would be" disciples present.

Vs. 15-20 Jesus is bracing His disciples for the reality of false disciples. He is also getting them to probe their own motives in following Him. In a few years Peter, John, and Paul would all be writing letters to churches warning them about false believers. Disciples are known by the disciples they produce. All disciples are to manifest the love of Christ in the desire to reach the lost and make disciples. Often we think that a person's mouth and words are "fruit." Jesus says we are to seek the glory of the one who sent us. (John 7:18)

Disciples are known by their fruit. Some people come to Christ for themselves, their needs, their name, their comfort, etc. If a person's faith is so private and fruitless as to be invisible, I think James would say, "Faith without works is dead." A disciple has to make sure he is discipling. Following isn't an invisible walk, for as Jesus says, a light is lit to be put on a stand and gives light to all who enter. Jesus doesn't seem to have a category for disciples who are allowed to hide it under a bushel. As disciple makers, we need to be putting it "out there" ourselves and leading others to do the same with their light. Fruit is necessary. Read John 15:1-8 to understand the importance of fruit. To see Jesus' definition of fruit, look at John 12:24.

Vs. 21-23 I'll bet when Jesus told this to His disciples, it took their breath away. It is possible to be involved in ministry and to be lost. Activity is not enough, even in the name of Jesus. Look at the list: they prophesied, they cast out demons, they did mighty works. Holy cow! How did they do that without knowing Christ? I don't know, but it is possible. Note that Jesus doesn't say, "I knew you once, but you got off track." He says, "*I never knew you.*" **Never!** They came to the light to fulfill their own needs, not because of love for Jesus. Look at Acts 8:18-24. Here is a guy who came to the light so he could do miracles.

We need to be very careful and discerning as disciples too, even if we do know and love Jesus. We need, like Abe above, to be very careful that the ministry and God's blessings do not become idols to us and remove us from loving Christ. It happens every day.

Vs. 24-27 The key to living as a disciple is so simple. He who *hears* His words and *does* them is a disciple. Hearing is more than reading, but you can't "hear" them if you don't read them. This is why we're in the Word and why we get people into the Word. But like the parable of the soil and so many of Jesus' parables, we all need to make the effort to attach value to His Words and to following Him. And all of this issues from our love and desire for Him. If we love Jesus, we will read and understand and believe and trust His Word. Responding to our Lord's love moves us to "do" His Word. The "doing" is not duty if you're grateful and in love. I know it's hard, but it shouldn't be a "duty" to tell the dying where we found life.

Vs. 28-29 And like us, the people *were astonished at His teaching.*

Psalm 9:1-12

As a disciple, note that the adoration and praise of God (vs. 1, 2, 9) are only possible because David was oppressed and driven for ten years for following God. Abraham and Sarah could laugh in wonder and joy because they waited for 25 years. We will have this kind of praise, if we pay the price of discipleship, following Christ, reaching the lost, making disciples, who make disciples. Living like this won't make everyone happy. We may have to endure and wait and cry out; but in the end, in order to protect us, the Lord will draw us to His side. That's a good place to be and it makes all of the hardship worth it.

Today we only have the first half of this psalm.

Vs. 1-2 Even though David was still under stress (v. 13), he had seen God deliver him so often that in coming with this new request for help, David had to praise the Lord for the past.

Vs. 3-4 David had seen enemies fall and circumstances change. He knew it wasn't simply because God loved him, but because God is righteous and maintains the cause of those who follow Him.

Vs. 5-8 As God *rebuked the nations*, they fell and were forgotten, but God has, and always will, continue to reign and give justice to the people.

Vs. 9-10 This is David's declaration of God's truth.

Vs. 11-12 This is the praise due God for the truth of those last verses.

Proverbs 2:16-22

Vs. 16-19 For the disciple, being wise, like the "wise man" who built the house above, keeps you from a lot of foolishness. One area of danger that Solomon is about to mention repeatedly is seeking sexual fulfillment in the wrong places. Apparently Solomon was writing this before it actually happened to him.

What would be more relevant to our culture? This world and individuals in it will be in chaos until the Lord returns, because we don't understand our need for completion and how powerful and controlling it is if it is not satisfied according to God's design specs. A lot of devoted disciples, men and women, are ruined here.

Note v. 17 and the mention of faithfulness to her husband and faithfulness to God. This is the same thing God mentions in Malachi 2:14, and is seen in Romans 1:18ff and in the Fall. Faithfulness to God and faithfulness to one's spouse are linked.

V. 19 Notice that those who go this way do not *regain the paths of life*. How many public preachers or people in full-time ministry do you know, who were caught in an affair, and have regained the place they were, either publicly or in their marriage, before they fell into sexual adventure? God is not mocked. He's given us the warning right here.

Vs. 20-22 Amen. David was just talking about righteous judgment. Those who walk with God, in friendship with Him, who love Him, cannot help but be righteous. They become like the Lord and He blesses them as friends.

JANUARY 10

In yesterday's reading when Abraham was going to offer Isaac, the angel of the Lord spoke to him. Now, what I'm going to say is meant to be an encouragement for you to take time and observe and get curious. If you missed this, that's OK. It is something to learn. Texts like these are what form our theology, literally "knowledge of God." You don't have to read theology or go to a seminary. All you have to do is take time with your Bible.

Who is the angel of the Lord? I mentioned a couple of days ago that He is often recognized as God in human form. How do you know? Read what He says to Abraham. These are not the words of a messenger, an angel. The speaker is saying what only God can say.

Why do people say this is God the Son before He became flesh? This is where just reading the entire Bible through over years helps. You know from Paul and Jesus and others, that no one has ever seen God, the Father. No one has ever seen the Spirit. But the Son has been seen. It makes sense, and the Son is the only candidate; but it only makes sense if you've read these texts and grappled with some of the "apparent" inconsistencies, i.e., "No one has ever seen God? But they

saw that angel and people saw Jesus and Jesus was God and.....Whoa, the angel of the Lord is God who can be seen, or God the Son in human form."

Genesis 23:1-24:51

Genesis 23

Notice that Sarah lived to be 127, that means she lived to see her son grow for __ years. That's like another lifetime. God blessed her last years in such a way that it removed the pain and longing of those barren years.

As disciples we need to be continually building for the future. What special thing could you do in your own life, if the Lord were to approve and grant you the time? What could you begin doing today, little by little, that would deepen your relationship with Him and make you a better maker of disciples? I'm 59 and I could die tomorrow, but God could also give me another 30 years. Thirty years is like another lifetime. The Lord has graciously given me two big projects to work on (and you're reading one of them) that I hope will deepen my love for Jesus, give glory to God in bearing fruit and help me present myself to Him and His work as an approved workman. What you could do in just one or two years would be incredible. Look to the Lord, ask and pray, and when He gives you the idea, just do it. Our years are to be lived with Christ, building into the lives of others, not sitting, amusing ourselves or mourning our aging bodies and coming deaths. Tomorrow, we'll see this "wasted time" with Isaac, who appears to have prepared for death long before he was buried. What a shame.

Vs. 1-20 This shows that Abraham was respected by the people of the land. Abe arrived when he was 75 and lived until he was 175. He wasn't just a man. He was like a small cultural entity in Canaan. Note the strength and humility of Abraham. He was strong, faithful and humble and a witness to his neighbors. He was honest and patient. This is the only piece of real estate Abe owned in the land that was to be his. What a guy.

Genesis 24

There are great lessons for you in this section and I won't say much. I remember having my quiet time one morning in a restaurant at the intersection of I-80 and I-35. It was the fall of 1987. My car broke down the Sunday evening before, and I missed presenting my missionary stuff at a church. Disappointing. So now my car was being fixed and I'd soon be on my way to GEM's headquarters in Illinois. When I read this portion, I was encouraged by God's sovereignty and His mercy to Abraham's servant. I was touched and it calmed my heart. Reading the Bible is to be valued. Spending time with your Father over a cup of coffee with His Word penetrating your heart is priceless.

So, if you read your Bible every year, you'd read this section and think back to last year and go, "I know about you!" But if you didn't you won't, because you can't. Next year, when you read this and you meet Rebekah and Laban again, remember what you learn about both of them in the next several chapters. It might add some "insight" to their actions here. Obviously, what I'll share with you is my take on things. There are very few, "squeaky clean," people in the Bible. Most were just normal sinners with some faith. As disciples we need to live in the Word so that their stories and God's working with them can make an impact on us. That's why He wrote it down for us.

Vs. 1-9 Notice that Abe didn't want Isaac to have a woman from Canaan. The people were pretty corrupt. Isaac and Rebekah would learn this the hard way. Also, Abe didn't want Isaac taken back to Haran. Years later, Jacob went there and almost didn't make it back.

V. 8 Abraham was willing to leave this all to the sovereignty of God.

Vs. 10-14 The guy I love here is Abe's servant, _____. You've already heard his name, but, if you remember, you'll see it next year (it took me a couple years to remember to look). What a great guy, and blessed to have this kind of faith and to see this kind of answer. He is a model of what it means to be a disciple (slave, servant, ambassador) of Jesus. I am always impressed at the depth of his faith and devotion.

I could be wrong, but I think this is the first time God's *steadfast love* is mentioned in the Bible, and it comes from this incredible disciple and man of God.

Vs. 15-28 You know, God doesn't always have to answer like this, but He always can. We always applaud God when He answers with a miracle like this; but if He can do this all the time, it should make us think when He doesn't answer like this. It doesn't mean He is sleeping on the job, or that we've made a mistake, but it does mean we need to be paying careful attention to what He wants from us. Just think, God could have made Sarah pregnant when she was 65, but He waited until she was 90.

V. 27 Thanks to Laura, I just noticed in my reading this year, that this is the first mention in the Bible of God's *steadfast love and faithfulness* being linked together (ESV, vs. 27 & 49). You may want to search for these the rest of the year as you read your Bible daily.

Vs. 29-51 Recounting the story of God's gracious provision should never get "old" for us. We will get to know both Rebekah and Laban in the stories that follow. They were two peas in a pod. Neither of them were close followers of the Lord. I'm almost surprised that Eliezer got out of there, but he knew the Lord and he was following God in deep passion and devotion.

Matthew 8:1-17

Matthew will begin to show Jesus' authority over sickness (which attracted crowds), over nature and over the spiritual world. Then Jesus will claim authority as the human king who will reign eternally over Israel and the entire earth. At this point, Jesus has been preaching and making disciples for a year. Now, as His ministry and popularity grow, He will use every event and confrontation to train the Twelve.

Vs. 1-4 Lepers were not cleansed every day; in fact, this is the first Israelite we know of who was ever healed of leprosy. Jesus commanded the leper to allow his healing to be a sign for Israel. Matthew's focus was to show the Messiah's power and authority. It is Luke who tells us that this guy didn't obey, and as a result, Jesus' ministry was hampered.

Vs. 5-13 Now this is a contrast. The last guy to be healed was a Jew. This miracle will be done for a Roman centurion's Gentile servant. It is hard to find a place where Jesus Himself marvels at anything. Here is a Gentile who has amazing faith and understanding. If this centurion hadn't been loved by the Jews, Jesus would have caught some flak for what He said in vs. 11-12. Matthew shows here that the Messiah's healing is extended to Gentiles. By the way, all of the centurions in the Bible are good guys.

Vs. 14-15 I always smile when I read this. I can see Jesus finding out that the mother-in-law was sick and that Peter was going to cook, and saying, "No, I've got a better idea." He healed her and she made supper. Jesus heals Pete's mother-in-law and then He becomes the ER ward for all of Capernaum. Matthew, very focused, gets to his point, that this healing ministry was the fulfillment of another prophecy of the Messiah. Your job is to find the passage Matthew is referring to, and read the entire chapter. As the teacher, so the disciple. We are to model and live for what our Savior did in that chapter.

Psalm 9:13-20

Vs. 13-14 Now David came to his request for help. One of the repeated lines of reasoning in Psalms is, "It would be good to save me because I can't praise you before men if I'm dead." (roughly paraphrased).

Vs. 15-16 God had done this again and again in human history, but David was living by faith in God's promise to judge the unrighteous.

Vs. 17-18 David learned that present injustice and suffering didn't mean God had gone away or was disapproving. David knew he could always count on God, but not knowing God's will and purpose meant that he needed to wait and cry out. And as a result, Israel got some great worship songs and we have these very deep psalms.

Vs. 19-20 This is David's plea for God to take action. Apparently David felt the threat was very near.

For us as disciples, rather than freaking out when "life" happens, we can train ourselves to pray that the Lord would use the experience to give us hearts of praise to express what the Lord has done to those who don't yet know Him and to those who are becoming disciples who are making disciples.

Proverbs 3:1-6

If you haven't memorized Proverbs 3:5-6, make that your meditation and assignment. These are two of the easiest verses in the Bible to memorize and two of the hardest to follow.

On the same day in our reading, we find another example of *steadfast love and faithfulness* being linked together.

JANUARY 11

Genesis 24:52-26:16

This section gives a lot of historical information in summary form, and it's not all in order. This history is meant to convey background and reasons for events that Israel in the wilderness would need to understand in becoming a nation and in fulfilling its ministry as God's ambassador. Note in all of this, that the promise, which is a promise of redemption, is still present; but its meaning is certainly being forgotten. That's just like what we do. We make churches and do programs, and somehow lose what the main goal of every disciple and church is on this planet: love Christ, reach the lost, make disciples, who make disciples.

Genesis 24:52-67

Vs. 52-61 Note the worshipful attitude of Abe's servant. Note also that as Rebekah's family blesses her, there may be a sense in which they knew something of the promise to Abraham. On the other hand, this could have been just the normal wedding blessing you gave a woman.

Vs. 62-67 Isaac was heir to this vast community that had grown up around Abraham. He wasn't just wandering around the countryside. He was probably visiting one of the places they were grazing livestock. All we have recorded is the meeting of Isaac and Rebekah and the account is very condensed. The account almost makes it look like he saw her, took her into a tent that was standing there and they consummated the relationship. Not so. He put her in Sarah's tent, not his. This was a place of privilege in the community. They would have a new leading lady. He "took her," that is, accepted the arrangement of being married to her. He could have refused. They would have been separated before they were married and there would have been a formal wedding. And apparently there was enough time in all of this for Isaac to fall in love.

V. 62 My German one-year Bible helped me here. Unless you have a great memory you will not remember that Beer-lahai-roi is from Genesis 16:14. That is where the angel of the Lord met Hagar when she ran from Sarah. The full name is "The Living God, who sees me." It is interesting to me that Isaac was here. Maybe he was seeking God. In Genesis 25:11, after Abraham's death, this will become home for Isaac.

Genesis 25

Vs. 1-6 There are a couple of names here that are notable, one in particular. Can you figure out which one? If you read year after year, this people will come up on your radar on a couple of important occasions as enemies of Israel. You can figure, if one of these men has his genealogy shared, it is because God/Moses wants the people to know where that particular nation came from. Moses hid in their land. His wife was one of these people, and this people figures big in the wilderness wanderings of Israel from Numbers 22-31. Gideon even hid from them.

Very realistically, Abraham's life and relationship to Sarah wasn't some romanticized fiction. When she died, Abe grieved, but still needed a wife to be complete.

Vs. 7-18 This section is narrative housekeeping in order to get to the continuation of the progress of the promise of redemption.

First, Abraham's death is recorded and he passes out of the narrative. So, reading his age, why is this interesting that you hear no more of Abraham? Obviously, you might say, because the story is no longer about him. But his age is an interesting factor and the absence of any mention of him is very strange.

Then, Ishmael's lineage is presented and he is gone.

Vs. 19-26 Look how old Isaac was when they were married. He was no spring chicken. Then, the Lord made it difficult for Rebekah to have children, thereby making their births and the progress of the promise more significant for them. How long did God make them wait? It's there in the text. Can you imagine waiting that long for a child and knowing that the continuation of the promise was dependent on having kids?

So, we are only this far in the Bible. You might conclude that "waiting" is not a strange thing in God's leading. God forges faith in waiting. So many people wash out as disciples for this reason alone.

Isaac prays and God hears. Immediately at their births, God overturns the normal process of blessing and inheritance by stating that the elder will serve the younger. Note that the Lord states this to Rebekah in answer to her seeking. She should have rested in this promise/prediction to her. Instead, she'll try to work God's plan in her own cleverness.

Living in the reality of the promise could have been constantly communicated because of how God had arranged things. From Abraham to Adam there are only three/four relationships. Abe might have known Noah and certainly could have known Seth. Seth knew many of the men behind him and almost all of those men had known Adam.

Given the age of Abraham, how old would the twins have been at his death? How long would Abe have known Rebekah before she had the kids? All of this is to say that Abraham, firsthand, would have passed on the importance of the promises to Rebekah and the two boys.

As disciples, our relationship to Christ, to reaching the lost, and to making disciples, who make disciples has to be firsthand. Jesus said that a disciple is not above his teacher. As Howard Hendricks used to say, "You cannot impart, what you do not possess." If we are distracted by life and not living the reality of being close to the Lord, in His Word, reaching out and making

disciples, then what hope do we have of passing that on? If it is theoretical to us, it will be theoretical to those we influence also.

Vs. 27-34 Losing the clear focus of what the promise meant might explain what was happening in the family and between the two boys. This fractured family was not healthy. It will get exponentially worse with Jacob.

This contest between the boys was the result of the parents. Jacob was a rat, but you might say at least he was a rat who had faith in the promise. And Esau was worse, despising the reality of the promise. God is simply gracious here, furthering His will and plan in spite of ungodly behavior. Later, Jacob, who at least had faith, will pay dearly for this. The fact that there is no "justice" here doesn't mean it won't come. As a friend of mine once told me, "God doesn't always pay on Friday."

As disciples, to presume on God's grace, to further our own agenda and desires, even if it is "for God," is a very dangerous thing. Jacob didn't escape and Solomon didn't escape. We have a Master and we have to reflect Him, submitting to His will, His way and His timing. I know I've hurt myself forgetting this. God is sovereign, and also, He's the boss. It's His work, to be done His way.

Ironically, the Lord has already told Rebekah that Jacob would be the receiver of the promise. In faith, all of this and what follows was unnecessary.

Genesis 26

Vs. 1-16 I'm assuming Abraham was dead by this time, otherwise Abimelech would have come to Abe as the head of the clan, especially since he already made a covenant with Abe.

Isaac receives confirmation of the promise directly from God, but like his father, he fears for his life in Gerar and does the "she's my sister" thing. Although for Isaac, this was a total, 100% lie. Treasure in earthen vessels?

Canaan was a large, long land, north to south; and since Abe and Isaac were herdsmen, they would always have been looking for fresh land to use for grazing. Overgrazing ruins the land, so they would have had to move from time to time. By this time, Abimelech may not have had dealings with Abe for years and didn't know Isaac. If Abe was dead here, you can figure out how many years ago it was that Abimelech probably made that covenant with Abraham. Apparently Abimelech was a much younger man at the time of that covenant, and although older now, still had an eye for good-looking women to add to his harem. So he looks out the window and sees this new guy with his sister, and they were doing what????

The ESV falls down in v. 8. I like the word the KJV uses, "sporting." Were they playing badminton? Throwing a football? The RSV is to the point, "fondling." There was no mistake that Isaac was doing that which only a husband ought to do; and the poor guy was so desperate, he was doing it in the open, maybe hidden, but not hidden enough.

V. 11 So again Abimelech warns his people to stay away from these pesky Hebrews. Both Abe and Isaac brought these people into jeopardy because of their lack of faith in God's promise and provision. As disciples, we can do the same. Everything we do following Jesus in the harvest is so much better if we will just trust.

Vs. 12-16 Isaac was rich, and everyone knew it was the Lord who had done this for him. They were jealous, but also afraid of him. Remember, this is that same thing that happened after Abraham's stay with Abimelech. By this time, Isaac's holdings might have necessitated a community of thousands, making him vaster, richer and more powerful than many of the

neighboring cities. This section should have really been included in tomorrow's reading. Abimelech will again make a covenant. This time he makes it with Isaac.

Matthew 8:18-34

It is hard to understand the method behind Matthew's writing here, but he is focused on showing that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah. Matthew didn't always include events chronologically. In this section, he was more focused on showing that only a heart of faith could understand that Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Vs. 18-22 As a result of His rising popularity and His miracles, many wanted to follow Jesus, but were not willing to pay the price of commitment. In these two examples of half-heartedness, what do you think kept these people from following Jesus? This is the same today. It is easy to go to church, but it is difficult to follow Christ. In following Christ in the harvest, issues of security and our true love and allegiance have to be set to rest. He is our security and our first and greatest love. He is the mission of each disciple and every church. This is the reason you don't recruit every warm body to become a part of a discipleship cell or project. Jesus Himself brought "would be" followers to the place of understanding the cost. Popularity attracts lots of warm bodies, but not always devoted followers of Christ.

Vs. 23-27 Luke lets us know that Jesus had just had a very long day of teaching and was exhausted. The Father and Spirit must have designed this little voyage on the lake. The disciples' words to Jesus are, first, an accusation, and second, a scream; that is, "Master, wake up, don't you care? Master, master, save, Lord, we're perishing." They were terrified of dying. They marveled, but Luke says they were now afraid of Him.

Just like Abe and Isaac and Rebekah above, if God says something, you can rest easy. Jesus told the disciples to go to the other side, with Him, the Creator of the universe, in the boat. He didn't say, "Let's go to the middle and die." As disciples we are no better. In order for Him to impress on our hearts His ability to help, to save and guide and care for us, He has to take us out on the sea, to the very brink of disaster. How else, like the psalmist, do we learn to trust and sing His praise for His power and deliverance? We are no better than the Twelve and we learn the same way.

So, Matthew shows that Jesus, as Messiah, was the Ruler over nature.

Vs. 28-34 Matthew now shows Jesus' rule over the spiritual world.

I imagine the poor disciples were relieved to finally be safe on land. Then they see these two naked, crazy guys start running at them from the tombs. The demons recognized Jesus as God the Son in a human body. Matthew's purpose here is only to show Jesus' authority over the spiritual realm. Isn't it interesting that the people's reaction was to beg Jesus to go away? In Luke, one of the two healed men desired to follow Jesus.

Psalm 10:1-15

V. 1 I wonder what this "song" would have sounded like. Was the first note a scream? In any case, the events behind David's writing must have been pretty distressing.

Vs. 2-4 In the time David ran from Saul, it must have seemed like Saul could do whatever he wanted with no result. Saul destroyed a family and city of priests and God did nothing. Even though Saul "believed" in God, his actions showed what he really felt about God's existence and presence.

Vs. 5-11 This section expresses how this "practical atheist's" actions are guided by his thought that God doesn't care or see. You can follow each thought by underlining *he* and *his*.

Vs. 12-15 David knew that God's justice would roll. He might not have understood God's waiting and he might have been pressured by the circumstances, but David knew that God would be true to His Word and call these men to account.

Understanding why God waits and does not apply instant justice in this world is something that a fully trained disciple should be able to deal with and explain. It doesn't feel good, but we know it is part of this history on earth. We see what happened to Jesus Himself, and the Father allowed it. We see what happened to different apostles in Acts, and God allowed it. The psalm itself shows that God is understanding and compassionate with our emotional distress and desperate wondering. He wants His followers to trust Him and patiently wait. We, of all people, should know that the earth is not a good place and that this is only a small, tragic portion of the whole of reality.

Here is a call for the endurance of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus. (Rev. 14:12)

Proverbs 3:7-8

Great words for us as disciples. If you "turn this around," it means that if you think you have it, if you only "so-so" *fear the Lord* and if you play fast and loose with things, your flesh will wither and your bones will get tired.

I think I've had days and months like that. It is time to get wise, as a disciple of Jesus.

JANUARY 12

So how is faith shown? Abraham showed great, visible faith, seen particularly in 25 years of waiting for God to give him and Sarah a child. If all we knew about Abe was condensed, we might only have a couple weeks of recorded action. Abraham was given a promise that required believing, obeying, moving to a strange land, and living completely in God's hands. That was great faith and I have to believe that Abraham knew that the promise he was living for was connected to the promise given to Adam and Eve, the promise that a deliverer would be born.

Then you have Isaac, who inherited everything, the promise, the cattle, and the wealth. He doesn't seem to do much. In a way, this might be a picture of many churches and believers today, who kind of grasp what we are living for and are supposed to do, but are lost in daily life in the land. They have been given their local church, but didn't have to strain to see it come into being. Even with Isaac, living a sort of drifting life, there is still faith and still a clinging to the importance of the promise. Things work best, of course, if we as disciples keep the focus sharp on our purpose here, following Jesus in the harvest.

Genesis 26:17-27:46

Genesis 26:17-35

We have two events that show that Isaac was a man of faith. It might have been faith with a fuzzy focus, but it was still tough faith.

Vs. 17-25 Isaac had a very large camp. He didn't have to be this meek, but it was his strength in faith. He had been promised the land, but he understood that God would lead him to a place of peace. He could have destroyed these other herdsmen, but in faith he waited for God's leading.

Vs. 26-33 Notice here that Abimelech and his advisors take the initiative to make this covenant. They realized with the abuse Isaac was taking, if he got mad, he could wage a war (especially with God's help) that would defeat Abimelech and take everything.

Isaac's faith is seen in his strength/meekness, waiting for God to fulfill the promise without taking the matter into his own hand and defeating the opposition that rose against him. The land was his by promise, but he would wait on God and suffer abuse until God Himself fulfilled the promise.

Vs. 34-35 Esau will appear as a tragic figure; but in all, I don't think he was any worse, as a person, than Jacob. Here, the mention is made of something he did to make life miserable for Isaac and Rebekah. It is setting up what comes later when Rebekah suggests sending Jacob to Laban. It is very probable that if Isaac had sat down with Esau and told him not to marry Canaanite women, he would have complied. Even at 40, Esau was a daddy's boy. This little scene might suggest the effect that living among the Canaanites was having on the family.

Just as an interesting memo here, can you figure out how old Isaac was at this point? This will add a lot of depth to the following events, especially when you see how old Isaac is when he dies. Sometimes people get old in their heads long before they die. Imagine a tombstone that read, "Died 1988 -- Buried 2068."

Genesis 27

Vs. 1-46 This story is pretty straightforward and is sad from one end to the other. Of note here for us as disciples is that none of this anxiousness and trickery was necessary. Ironically, it brought great and tragic results to Jacob. Even when Jacob and Esau meet again later, notice which one of them has the ulcer. A loving and sovereign God, having made His promises to us, can fulfill His will without us having to help with lies and deceit. God is utterly faithful and will fulfill His promises, but He is never mocked.

Isaac must have been having some poor health issues and thought that death was near. This might have happened shortly after Esau married the Canaanite cuties and therefore the time marker regarding Esau's marriages is given and is important to notice. Isaac was a young man of _____. Ironically, he would live another 80 years! How sad that he didn't talk to God more and have a better grasp of God's working. He was right in wanting to pass on the blessing, that is, the blessings of the promise of God to Abraham. As the firstborn, it was natural to have this go to Esau.

Vs. 18-26 The lying here numbs the mind.

V. 29 This is the actual part of the blessing that God gave to Abraham.

Vs. 34-40 Esau's grief does show some faith, though too late. He must have believed that he had truly lost something.

There is no perfection on earth and all families struggle, but if we have to struggle, we at least have to struggle well. Isaac and Rebekah do not appear to have made the promise a focus of their lives and family. The promise of redemption was lost in the dust of living life on earth. They don't appear to have tried to unite the boys in the specialness of what God was doing in the world and through their family. Reading this, I can't help but feel bad. I think they were, like so many Christians and would-be disciples, drifting, content with daily life, and lost on earth.

Vs. 41-46 Although we don't know a lot about Rebekah, we see that she was decisive and manipulative. Verse 46 is an example of her work. She is setting up Isaac to send Jacob away without telling him the real reason. When we meet Laban in the next chapters, we'll see that he was the Duke of "manipulative and cunning." Jacob would more than meet his match in Uncle Laban. Unknown to Rebekah, in doing this, she would never again see Jacob.

Bill Shakespeare said, "Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." True. But I like what Jesus said, *Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who*

loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him...If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:21-23)

Matthew 9:1-17

This is a great portion for disciples.

Vs. 1-8 In healing the paralytic, Jesus faced off against the religious "right" and made a bold claim. The claim was not only that He could forgive sins, but that He was the Son of Man. Jesus was saying He was the King who would reign eternally, from Daniel 7. Even under pressure, Jesus showed compassion to the paralytic and his friends. This event has an interesting link to what happens later in John 5. If you notice the words Jesus uses here, they are repeated by the Pharisees in John 5:12. There is great significance in the question the Pharisees ask the healed man, knowing that the healing of the paralytic happened just before the events of John 5.

As disciples, we have to speak the truth. Jesus did not change God's message to attract the masses or to please the religious establishment. His focus was pleasing the Father and doing His will. That makes you think about all the lying going on in the OT portion for today.

V. 9 I think this shows the cause-effect dynamic of disciple-making. If you are authentic and firm on the truth and are willing to accept all men in the love of Christ, people get brave and follow. So how did what happened in 9:1-8 make what happened down the street, a couple days later in 9:9, possible? What finally gave Matthew this resolve? Realize too, that Jesus had done other miracles and had taught in Capernaum, so Matthew's decision was a process. Matthew had already heard Jesus teach and had seen His miracles. Now, when Matthew saw Jesus was willing to stand against the religious leaders who had scorned men like Matthew, he knew he would be accepted. He immediately dropped everything and followed.

Vs. 10-13 Why did Matthew have this party? (Luke 5:29) What was he trying to accomplish? He was a new disciple, wanting to see his friends get saved and become disciples.

Notice that the Pharisees didn't go to Jesus. They tried to divide the disciples against Him. Verses 12-13 are a key statement to the Pharisees that Jesus will refer to again. I remember reading this after I began following Jesus, and catching the irony in v. 13. No one was righteous before God. The Pharisees were the sick ones because they couldn't see their own need.

So, Jesus is in trouble, first with the Pharisees, and then with John's disciples.

Vs. 14-17 I'm not sure, but I think this friction with John's disciples was helped along by the Pharisees. But notice that Jesus was very gentle in dealing with John's followers. If you look at the parallel passage in Luke 5, you will see that Jesus' first ever use of a parable was in gently trying to give an explanation to teach John's disciples. Unlike Andrew and that other guy (probably the apostle John), not all of John the Baptist's disciples followed Jesus. Jesus is smoothing this situation by using the illustration of the bridegroom that John himself had used with his disciples in John 3:26-36.

It's hard to say how deep this division went between Jesus' and John's disciples. As you can see reading the OT and Matthew, we don't always get a lot of information. Here is some interesting trivia. The last recorded use of tongues in Acts is in Acts 19:6. There, Paul finds a group of John's disciples who were still holding to John's message and didn't know about Jesus' resurrection or the coming of the Spirit. Tongues is always used as a sign to bring unity to the Jews, showing them that God was reaching out beyond them with the gospel. The gift was necessary to break down Jewish prejudice and to bring unity, as in Acts 11. It is significant that this gift was used with John's followers, all of whom would have been Jews.

V. 17 There is great wisdom in allowing the old wineskins to be filled with old wine only, because some "skins" (churches) prefer remaining as they have always been. Mature leaders should encourage the planting of new churches or give younger people their own service. I understand the issues, but Jesus gave this wisdom, not some church growth expert.

Psalm 10:16-18

These are great words in this psalm. It is almost a summary of the book of Revelation. And, Jacob and Rebekah would have benefited from holding this confidence in a quiet heart.

When this history is over, all the nations will be gone and the tyrants will be removed. All that will remain is the Lord, who will show steadfast love, faithfulness and kindness to those who love Him.

Proverbs 3:9-10

These are words to be held and heeded, but not abused by those following Christ. Your Father knows what you need and will reward you, though not always with gift cards and cash. Toward the end of His ministry, when Jesus was telling His disciples to ask, seek and knock, the reward He promised them was the Holy Spirit. Who of us is really wise enough to tell God what we need? But we always need the Spirit's peace, joy and guidance. I'll take those any day over an iPad, a new car or a full bank account.

JANUARY 13

Genesis 28:1-29:35

Genesis 28

Vs. 1-5 Apparently Isaac recognized that things had worked out as *God wanted them* and that the promise was to go to Jacob. You have to assume that Isaac had always known this, since Rebekah was told that the elder would serve the younger. It is worth considering what Isaac could have done to have worked with God. I suppose the parents could have talked with the boys as they were growing up and told them what God had said to Rebekah and Abraham, etc. Esau would still be a nation, as promised. I can't imagine that if they had really prayed and sought God, it would have turned out any worse than this.

I know that Jacob is the hero of the story and that Esau is the bad guy, but when they meet 20 years later, guess who looks well adjusted and guess who is a nervous wreck with a totally dysfunctional family.

As disciples, it is better to be honest. If God is sovereign and good, we can be open and communicate honestly. God is not mocked.

Vs. 6-9 This portion of the story always saddens me. I know Esau was a gnarly, snorting, burping guy who married women of that same inclination. I know he didn't respect the promise. I'm good there. But it seems here, that his parents had never fully communicated their desires. Or, they never thought through what they wanted for the kids. So, Esau messed up with his wives and now they want Jacob to do better. When Esau finally sees what his father desired, he tries to comply; but because of the animosity created here, he goes to another line of Abraham. I don't get the feeling he was a rebellious son. He wanted leadership and when he saw what Isaac really wanted, he did it. Communication in leadership, in family and disciple-making, is important. The other option is being awakened by the jolts and collisions in a drifting life.

Vs. 10-17 This was pure grace on God's part. Since Jacob was the son who esteemed the promise to Abraham, God renewed this promise with Jacob. Notice in v. 14 that the redemptive part of the promise is restated; that is, God's blessing of Abe/Isaac/Jacob would lead to blessing of all

the nations. This promise is still part of the first promise to Adam and Eve. Jacob would need faith in this promise to make it though the educational process God was going to take him through the next 20 years.

Vs. 18-22 I know there is a positive aspect of Jacob's response toward God, but I sense some conniving in this. Jacob seems to make a conditional promise to God, "If you do this, then I'll serve you." Abraham believed and obeyed. Notice too that in the conditions of v. 20, this sounds very much like Jesus' words in Matthew 6:25, "*Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.*" As disciples, instead of seeking those things, we are to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. Seeking to serve and please God was not foremost on Jacob's agenda.

Genesis 29

Vs. 1-12 Being blessed by God and having the promise confirmed did not spare Jacob from dysfunction, injury and justice. Notice that just like his dad, Jacob found his wife at a well.

Vs. 10-12 Obviously Jacob was overcome with emotion because he was running for his life and was meeting long lost relatives. But since Jacob was going to marry Rachel, the crying and kissing on the first meeting doesn't seem like the right "move" on his part. But maybe she said, "You had me when you moved the stone."

Vs. 13-14 I see this as being very ironic. Jacob explains what he did back home to Esau, and Laban says, *Surely you are my bone and my flesh*. They were both swindlers, but now Jacob had met his match.

Vs. 15-20 Jacob actually worked seven years for Rachel before the marriage. This means there was a lot of longing by Jacob and a lot of plotting by Laban.

Vs. 21-27 How much does someone have to drink not to know who he's having sex with? I don't want to know. This happened with Lot too. They must have had some potent wine back then.

Laban had been planning this for a long time. Notice Laban's words to Jacob in v. 26. This is a reference back to what Jacob did to Esau. Laban has gotten to know Jacob and apparently felt justice was due. It's hard to scream for justice when you have done the same thing to others. Jacob was "had" and Laban was just a bigger rat. God was allowing Jacob to feel what his brother had felt. And the fun wasn't over.

Jacob had to wait seven days, until after the honeymoon with Leah was over. I'll bet that was a pretty grim week for everyone. Jacob had never been on the receiving end of lying, plotting and deception.

Vs. 28-30 Then Jacob married Rachel, promising to work another seven years for her. Imagine the joy this created between sisters.

Vs. 31-35 I have a lot of questions here, but by the time I get to heaven to ask them, I probably won't want an answer. I imagine that Laban made sure that Jacob divided his time between the two women. Did they have separate tents? They must have and I'm sure they did later. Now you have the "baby wars" with God blessing Leah over Rachel. Later, not in this text, Jacob gets the maids too! Cool, right? I'll bet it was hell on earth. It must have made his relationship with Esau look like a Hallmark © moment. He was getting justice and, believe it or not, it would still get worse.

Notice the first round of Leah's sons ends with Judah. In spite of Jacob's favoritism (like his father's) and love for Joseph above his other sons, Judah, the son of the unloved wife, becomes the line of blessing. Notice too, that there is a difference with how Leah names the first three

boys and how she names Judah. The first three names seem to reflect something about her fighting to win Jacob's love. The naming of Judah seems to be her simple praise and gratitude to God.

That God chooses Judah to be the preeminent son will seem strange when we get to chapter 38. Quality-wise, you wonder why God chose Judah. He wasn't the firstborn and he doesn't receive the blessing. He was definitely a better man than his father in a couple of important ways, which you could hunt down now if you're interested. We'll talk about this when we get there.

Grace is seen in God's patience in working with Jacob. The family Jacob makes is not healthy. Then God takes the unloved wife and gives her children, until she no longer feels any of the hurt and she turns her heart to God and praises Him. That son of praise will have a quality of faith and sacrifice that God will bless with the line of the kings of Israel and the Savior of mankind.

Matthew 9:18-38

Vs. 18-26 Matthew is summarizing these events to show Jesus' power to heal and how the word about Jesus was getting out so that people knew God's power was in Him to heal.

In order for a ruler of the synagogue to come to Jesus, there would have been a desperate need, since Jesus didn't have the "right" credentials. Yet, he had heard enough about Jesus and His power to know he could approach Him.

V. 20 Likewise, this woman had heard much about Jesus and she literally reached out in desperation. From Mark and Luke we know that the ruler's daughter was at the point of death, but not yet dead. I always wonder how the father felt. Jesus was on His way and then this "stupid," unclean woman touched Him, and then Jesus had to waste time with her. It was during this time as Jesus was speaking with the woman that someone arrived and said the daughter was dead. (See Luke 8:49.) How could a loving God let this happen? How could Jesus be so distracted and calloused?

As disciples, we learn that waiting is the rule, not the exception, in following Christ. This was a divinely arranged malfunction. The result was that both Jesus and His Father received more glory; and the parents, the daughter, and the three disciples would never be the same. Was it "worth the wait?" God thought so, and then, after a short delay, so did they.

Vs. 27-31 This was great faith on the part of the blind men. How did they figure out to call Jesus with the messianic title, "Son of David?" They may have been blind, but they saw something that others were missing. Notice that their faith was genuine. Jesus prefaced His healing on what it was that they held in their hearts. We shouldn't be too hard on these guys for not obeying. Hardly anyone paid attention to Jesus' instructions to keep quiet. I always laugh at this one because Jesus says to the blind men, "*See that no one knows about it.*"

Vs. 32-34 This event is important because it is the first time you see this "explanation" of Jesus' healing power. The people thought it was obvious that God was with Jesus, so the authorities had to come up with an explanation that would lead the people away from Jesus. First we'll hear the Pharisees and scribes making this accusation. Later, it will be on the lips of the masses.

Vs. 35-38 You could preach a sermon on these verses. Note the reasons in vs. 35-36 that cause Jesus to say vs. 37-38. God in veiled glory was walking among those He created to be the object of His love and kindness. It is safe to say that you will not have vs. 37-38 be real in your life as a disciple, if you don't have vs. 35-36. The key is compassion for the lost. The more you are with the lost, trying to help them with the gospel, the more compassion you have. Without those two things, you don't passionately pray the prayer and seek to make disciples.

Notice that the prayer is not for the harvest, it is for harvesters; that is, disciples who will make disciples who will make disciples, living their lives in the fields, following Jesus. Not many people feel the desperate compassion for lost people to beg the Lord of the harvest to send more and more laborers into the fields.

Psalm 11:1-7

Vs. 1-3 I'm sure that many people must have threatened David. Many more must have mocked him and spoken down to him. He was a servant running from his master. But because his hope was in God, he knew that he didn't have to fear and that the foundation of his hope could never be touched or shaken.

Vs. 4-7 This is an interesting picture. The Lord tests men to see what they are, righteous or wicked, obedient or disobedient. In v. 7 it says that God Himself is righteous, so it is natural that those who share His heart will see His face.

What speaks to me out of this psalm is the play between vs. 3 & 4. The wicked are right. We have no hope if we have no foundation, but the Lord is real (just unseen) and is enthroned where nothing can shake the foundations of life and hope. This mindset is hard to hold on to when it seems like God is not present and things are spinning out of control. The disciple of Jesus is constantly being trained in the harvest to be steady and confident, because his hope is in the One who is unshakable.

Proverbs 3:11-12

I'm reminded of what the writer of Hebrews says, *It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does **not** discipline?* (Hebrews 12:7)

The Lord Himself is making us disciples, so we can reach and guide others. All of the waiting and learning and lessons of faith are for our benefit and theirs. Blessed is the disciple (man or woman) who, unlike Jacob, is a quick learner and close follower of the coming King.

It's interesting how all these readings complement one another. Tomorrow we continue to see God's discipline of Jacob.

JANUARY 14

Genesis 30:1-31:16

Genesis 30

Vs. 1-13 If this had been a comedy, Jacob would have been the comic hero, having women thrown at him. Actually this had to have been poison to the family and all of the relationships. Years later, after Rachel's death, Reuben will lose his firstborn right, by bedding Bilhah. Bilhah was Rachel's maid and the mother to Dan and Naphtali. She was also his father's wife. That act was one of ego and resentment, making a statement in the family regarding what he thought of these baby wars and whose branch was superior. Even then, years later, the unloved wife was still being fought for.

Vs. 14-21 The point of this story has to do with God taking a part in these wars on behalf of Leah. The mandrakes were supposed to have some power for pregnancy and were looked at as an aphrodisiac. Who knows how old Reuben was at this time. He could have been 9 or 10. This event was probably impressed on his mind. Anyway, Leah apparently hadn't been with Jacob for a while and the Lord blessed her with two more sons and a daughter. She should have been the wife of honor. And God did it. Incidentally, Leah will be the only one of these women who is buried in the family burial plot with Abraham and Sarah, and Isaac and Rebekah.

V. 18 This verse is a shocker. Not only were the emotions of Leah and Rachel damaged in having to share the same husband, but because of the "baby wars," they also damaged themselves by giving their maids to Jacob. Look at what Leah says as she names Issachar. God was making up for her loss and what she had endured. This is very sad.

Vs. 22-24 Rachel will only have two children, Joseph now, and Benjamin at her death. Joseph will be a much honored child and God will make him a blessing to Israel. Benjamin will be the line of Israel's first king.

You might wonder, as I do, how long all of this has taken and where we are in Jacob's life. If you look at chapter 31, vs. 38 and 41, you'll see the entire time breakdown. I'm thinking that Joseph's birth came at the 14-year point. Jacob would have fulfilled the years for his wives. The next verses will be a summary of those final six years.

Vs. 25-43 Since Jacob knew Laban well, he had to come up with some way to have his herds immediately identifiable. Had Laban been a good guy, he would have just given Jacob what he needed and sent him on his way. This entire episode reeks of dysfunction and conniving.

V. 34 I don't know much about sheep and goats, but apparently the speckled ones were rarer than the solid colored ones. Notice that Laban really expected he had the better end of the deal.

Vs. 35-36 Then crafty old Uncle Laban removed the striped, speckled, and spotted, three days away.

V. 37 God was helping Jacob. That would have been enough. If Jacob had sat down with his family and told them to watch how God would bless them, he would have taught the children faith and brought a spiritual element into the family. Instead, Jacob helped Jacob, too. The sticks had nothing to do with genetics. This was all God's work and it would have happened without Jacob's conniving. Jacob was teaching his family that while it might be true that God was there, God helps those who help themselves. And Jacob got a few ulcers for all of his trouble. Plus, his kids were learning not to trust the Lord.

Genesis 31

Vs. 1-2 Now these accusations from Laban's sons might have come anyway, but since Jacob was doing "stick tricks," these guys associated Jacob's growth with Jacob, not with God. In a way, Jacob stole the glory from God by being so involved in the process. I'm convinced God would have given him all of this without his effort, and everyone would have seen it was God. Jacob would have looked innocent.

V. 3 It was at this point of animosity and threat that God tells Jacob to return.

Vs. 4-16 This is Jacob's pep talk to his family to get the support of Leah and Rachel to leave.

V. 7 This is something we didn't see in the last chapter. Apparently Laban saw that things were going too well for Jacob. Laban knew that God was blessing Jacob (30:27), but in this war with Jacob, Laban thought his own skill at trickery could win the day.

Vs. 11-12 In all of this God revealed to Jacob that it was really His working to give Jacob the victory.

V. 13 This was the Lord's call to Jacob to return.

Vs. 14-16 If you have no other mission in life to unite you, nothing unites you better than a common enemy. Laban's treatment of Jacob united the girls against Dad. Notice that the words of Rachel and Leah are only bitter. Life in the present was all they could see. There is nothing regarding the promise. The plan of redemption is forgotten here.

Unfortunately, this reminds me of a lot of churches. They are concerned about the sin in the world and the democrats and abortion. They are united against a common enemy. But the love of Christ and the compassion for the lost are not what softens their hearts to follow Christ into the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. They sound OK and their services look Christian, but they, like Jacob's family, are lost on earth.

Matthew 10:1-25

This isn't really the calling of the Twelve. Matthew is simply telling us who they were as Jesus' sends them out to preach. Luke is more chronological. The selection of the Twelve was really just before the Sermon on the Mount.

Vs. 2-4 Jesus sent them out in twos. Notice the groupings. Jesus sent the brothers out together. In John 1:45, Philip called Nathan (Bartholomew) to come see Jesus, so they were good friends. Then you have two rag-tags, Thomas and Matthew. Next comes the father-son team. These guys are interesting because it appears that James was the brother of Matthew, whose father was also Alpheaus. Thaddeaus is called "Judas, the son of James," in Luke 6:16. It appears that Thaddeaus was the son of one of the two James who followed Jesus and the most likely candidate for his father would be James, the son of Alpheaus. It looks like Matthew's brother and nephew were part of the Twelve. Finally, comes Simon the zealot (patriot) and Judas the traitor.

Vs. 5-8 This mission was only directed toward Israel. Notice that they were to preach everywhere as they went, and look at what the message was. Imagine today if you just said to someone that God is coming and all men will have to give account for their lives. This is a basic message and "icebreaker." Finally, He reminded them that the power was from God and they shouldn't do anything for pay.

V. 9-10 The word *acquire* can mean they were to take nothing and they were to receive nothing. The money belts were to remain empty at all times. That is also seen in not taking a bag, an extra shirt or sandals. Notice that Jesus mentions they should take no staff and then says *the laborer deserves his food*. Since a walking staff wasn't necessary for a journey, the staff might have been "the staff of life," bread.

Jesus sends them out with nothing. Why? The focus is to be on the mission and looking to God. They needed to learn that God would provide. This is almost impossible to learn here, in the western world, where we have so much and can get a line of credit when we need it. We are so surrounded by all manner of distraction that you wonder how God ever teaches us this focus and dependence. Many never get it and never develop as disciples.

Vs. 11-15 Notice that Jesus doesn't teach them how to attract a crowd or craft the message for men's ears. To be fair, they had heard Jesus preach and do this enough, so that they had the basic pattern of what to do. Rather than focus them on technique, Jesus was getting them to see that God would go before them. Neither acceptance nor rejection was to be seen as their fault. Their only responsibility was to go and to preach that very simple message in full dependence on God. They would be used as God's tools to make men accept or reject Him.

Vs. 16-22 Welcome to following Jesus! Notice that God is in charge of all of this. It is not the result of poor preaching. In fact, it might be the result of good preaching.

V. 18 This is God's doing.

Vs. 19-20 This is the context of this verse. Many Sunday school teachers claim this verse to make up for poor class preparation. 😊

Vs. 21-22 I understand *the one who endures to the end will be saved*, as referring to being saved from the emotional damage and damage to one's faith that would occur if a person caved in,

denied Christ and hid to avoid pain. Even today, those who live a lukewarm Christianity often get hurt because they don't take seriously the danger involved in following Christ in this life. Their faith is uninformed and ineffectual; their marriages and families suffer, and there is no fruit. They live knowing that more is promised, but their only purpose is theoretical and centered on Sunday morning. They are the seed sown among the thorns. During times of persecution, that kind of faith will hurt you and the effect of caving in and hiding will damage you.

V. 23 This is a funny way for God to plan their itinerary, but if you look at Acts, this is exactly what happened to Paul.

Vs. 24-25 This is interesting. Jesus has already used this illustration with the disciples, showing them that if they were "log ridden" disciples, they would produce the same. Here, this illustration is used both to encourage them and to take the edge off of their pride and trust in technique. If Jesus Himself was not believed on or followed by all, they shouldn't expect to do any better than the Son of God, God Himself.

Is this really discipleship? Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:12, *all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*. A godly life involves living for the mission in the harvest, sharing the message with the lost, becoming and making disciples. This will automatically bring persecution (and reward). The fact that our lives are so quiet and peaceful on this planet of death is almost an indictment against us as disciples.

Psalm 12:1-8

David had been a trusted and famous soldier in King Saul's army. He had been a regular in the palace and had known many of the high officials. David was the king's son-in-law. Now he was on the run and living in caves. Those whom he knew were now lying about him to the people. The people he had saved in battle were betraying him to Saul. The entire city of priests, families and all, had been viciously slaughtered by Saul; and the people passively accepted it. David was still running.

V. 1 It could be that *the godly one* referred to here was the high priest who died along with his entire family and village. (1 Samuel 22:16-23)

Vs. 2-4 This would have been the actions and motives of those who served around King Saul. Every man was dishonest and lying and flattering and living as if God were either dead or absent. After all, God did nothing when this high priest and his family were killed.

Vs. 5-6 But David knew better. God is not mocked and injustice is never hidden from Him. God was already moving. But David's hope was in the sure Words of the Lord.

Vs. 7-8 In all of the confusion David knew that God would protect him.

David held on to the promise made to him by God and he drew close to the Word of God. David didn't give into despair but he hoped in the Word. That is what "saved" him from damage.

We usually don't sense the pressure of living in a world that is totally marinated in sin. It is a part of everything and is closer to us than our noses. To say this seems objectionable and like something the religious would say. But when you read in Romans 3:10-12, *None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one* - you realize this is reality. Our hearts and lives are fragile because of this. Only the love and grace of God, and His Spirit, sustain us. While wanting to stay true to God (understanding by His grace alone, what "true" is), as disciples, we need to have compassion on those who are lost and have no clue. They want us to be like them so they can feel better about themselves, not realizing they are really dead in their sin. God will

guard us, if we let Him, by hearing His Word and doing it. Only then can we reach out to help those who are lost.

Proverbs 3:13-15

Do we really believe that wisdom from God is something to strive after and that it is *more precious* than anything on this silly planet?

This sounds like Jesus talking about the hidden treasure and the pearl of great price, both of which are really claiming Him as Savior and Lord. Is He precious enough to us to forsake everything on this planet and follow Him in the harvest, without stuff, dependent on Him alone, totally focused on His mission for us on this dying planet? I think *wisdom* says, "Yes."

JANUARY 15

Genesis 31:17-32:12

This is an interesting story, but the drama was all unnecessary. Jacob had been told by God to return to Canaan and he knew of the promise to Abe, but being afraid and "helping God along" was just something Jacob did. Jacob could have prayed about this and could have sought God to "move" Laban's heart.

Genesis 31:17-55

Vs. 17-21 Road trip! Jacob "cleverly" waited until the right moment and grabbed everything and left. In this, both Rachel and Jacob were like Bonnie and Clyde. The word for *stole* in v. 19 and *tricked* in v. 20 is the same.

V. 19 The *household gods* had two purposes. First, they reminded you of a deity, like the old St. Christopher statues everyone used to have in their cars. This, of course, means they had idols. Jacob's kids will have them later.

Second, these statues were investments or heirlooms that were inherited. Rather than putting your extra savings in certificates or bonds, you made a statue of gold and put it up on the shelf for a rainy day. This is the real reason Laban was upset. Rachel's action was motivated by what she and Leah said yesterday, that their father had taken everything from them. It might also be her bitterness because of the famous "wedding night swap" Laban had pulled on her. In either case, this theft was "payback." Rachel's little trick to hide the thing in the saddlebag was a nice touch and she showed she was just like the "old man." If Laban had found out, he would have been proud...not.

Vs. 22-25 God saved the day by speaking to Laban, who, while not a spiritual man, was given the fear of God. Again, under more reasonable circumstances, God could have spoken to Laban back in Haran. It didn't have to be this way. God was allowing Jacob to be Jacob and Laban to be Laban, but made sure there was no injury.

Vs. 26-29 Although Laban wasn't a good guy, God could have made this work out to have been a celebration. Both men were responsible for their own ulcers. It is interesting that Laban relates the dream.

Vs. 30-35 Rachel outfoxed her dad.

Vs. 36-42 The indignation of the "false" claim launches Jacob into this very interesting summary of his 20 years of affliction.

Vs. 43-54 After Jacob's tirade in vs. 36-42, Laban answers in v. 43 with, "whatever." Notice that there are no apologies of any kind given by either side. As disciples, there is certainly a place to

be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves," but the level of dishonesty and fear in this family has nothing to do with closely following Christ.

V. 44 Apparently one reason that Laban suggested this covenant was because of not finding the "gods." It might have been that after the death of Laban, if Jacob would have returned to Haran with that "heirloom," he could have claimed a part of the homestead.

V. 50 This is a very interesting condition, given that multiple wives was allowed in that culture. Laban didn't see that as an option, although this situation was kind of strange already. At least it was "family."

V. 52 This condition seems to be the one that would forbid Jacob from coming back to stake a claim in Laban's household.

V. 53 This gives the idea that although the promise of redemption was waning in importance in the family, there was still a remembrance of the line of faith, believing in the one true God.

Vs. 54-55 A happy ending of sorts.

Genesis 32:1-12

Jacob's next ulcer has to do with Esau.

Vs. 1-2 So, why do you think God did this? Apparently these were like the angels who visited Abraham. He must have known they were angels. It doesn't say this was a dream and it appears they met and talked with him. This would have been a great encouragement. This might be what finally gave Jacob the courage to do something right.

Vs. 3-5 Jacob could have snuck into the land, but chose to make contact with Esau.

Vs. 6-12 God drove Jacob to his knees. With Esau on his way with 400 men, Jacob got religion. This is God putting the fear of God in Jacob. Notice how Jacob appeals to God's promise and to all the encouragement He had given him. This was a very notable, good thing. After all of these years, Jacob finally claimed and clung to the promise.

If you had had the history with Esau that Jacob did, what message would you have sent to Esau? I love the surprise that is coming.

As disciples, it is easy to "cry out" when disaster threatens us. Even without an actual crisis, God encourages us to understand that our need is always desperate. We should always be crying out, always be knocking, asking and seeking. There is nothing that keeps the reality of this world and the sense of desperation in focus like working to reach lost people in the harvest. Our mission keeps our "eye sound" and it keeps us at our Savior's feet. You learn to take very little for granted, which also gives you more joy in appreciating the smallest of the blessings the Lord grants us.

Matthew 10:26-11:6

As Jesus is sending out the Twelve, He is bracing them for the rejection of men and living securely in the Father's care.

Matthew 10:26-33

Vs. 26-27 This would be addressing the fear of lies, injustice and false accusation. God knows, and for a disciple that reality is the only one that counts. Interestingly, later, Jesus uses this same illustration to warn them about being hypocrites.

Vs. 28-31 Here, Jesus is addressing their fear of death. Some translations say "Father's will" in v. 29. It is implied in the context and it is an amazing thought. Jacob would have benefited from

that. But then, we know it and do we benefit from it? You wonder if Jesus smiled when He said they were *of more value than many sparrows*.

Vs. 32-33 Since God was sovereign and there was no cause to fear, there was also no cause to deny Jesus. The acknowledging and denying before the Father should be understood as Jesus interceding for that disciple in that hour of trial. If we acknowledge Him, He will give us what we need in the hour of need. If we deny Him to save ourselves from harm, we've helped ourselves and we don't need His help. And neither will we see His provision and glory as we would have, had we acknowledged Him.

Vs. 34-36 This is a severe correction of their perspective, and ours too. The faithful expression of the truth will bring opposition.

Vs. 37-39 The cost of discipleship is everything. Jesus must be our first love. This is the flipside of what Jesus says in Luke 14:26 about a disciple having to hate his father and mother. The issue is who has the first and true love. The cross in v. 38 means the willingness to die, to give everything. In the Roman world, if you saw someone walking with a cross on their shoulder, they were walking to their death. That Jesus is talking about the willingness to give one's life in v. 38 is underscored by v. 39.

Vs. 40-42 This is true today and it will be very important in the Tribulation when the earth will be judged for how it treats God's people. Notice that there is no emphasis put on the skill of the disciple. They were just to say that the kingdom of God was coming and that people needed to turn to God. The receiving of that message was wholly on the hearers. Those who received the disciples would be rewarded.

This was Jesus' pep talk to the Twelve as He sent them out. What does the Lord want you to learn from this? What gives you confidence or courage? The very fact that Jesus is saying this means He knows He is going to send us into some tough, sometimes dangerous, situations. The hard part for us is realizing He might choose to use us and graduate us to heaven in the same instance we are speaking for Him, like He did with Stephen in Acts. Stephen died, but what we don't see is that a minute later he was getting "high fives" in heaven and was totally fulfilled and OK and finally on vacation from this mess.

Matthew 11: 1-6

V. 1 This should really end chapter 10. Notice that after Jesus oriented the Twelve and sent them out, He also went on teaching. This doesn't mean Jesus was alone. The group of disciples might have been 100 or more.

Vs. 2-6 It may be that John spent more time in jail than he did in ministry. His disciples told him everything, and it appears that John was suffering in the waiting. Not only this, it could be that John was being fed misinformation. In those dark days in the dungeon, I'm sure some temptation to doubt was present, to be embarrassed or offended at what he "heard" Jesus had done. When you read Psalm 13 and David's sorrow below, you'll probably have an idea of how John must have felt.

Jesus' answer was sufficient for John. These were things foretold that the Messiah would do. Verse 6 is clearly a warning to John to hold on in faith.

As disciples we can get down regarding our church or the lack of fruit we are seeing. Nothing cheers the heart like babies, that is, seeing new believers. Get out and find a place where life is happening. If you can't drive or fly there, get online and find out where it's happening and what the stories are. God is working and lives are being saved and changed, so look beyond your church or dungeon, and keep focused on our mission as disciples following Jesus in the harvest.

Personally, draw close to Him. Keep on making every effort He'll let you make, and don't give up.

Knowing Jesus means following Him in His harvest making disciples. But this all has to remain very simple. It all rests on our love for Jesus, the joy of our salvation and sharing what we've received, so that others can receive it too.

Psalm 13:1-6

And having said that, isn't this a great psalm? Now, imagine that the thing you are totally longing for is to see Jesus' name lifted up and people saved and made disciples, and you want Him to do it through you. If you can desire all this, with the kind of longing expressed in this psalm, God will answer; and the forces working against you, spiritual and human, will be defeated.

Vs. 1-3 This psalm reflects a very dark night of the soul for David. Having received God's promise, it seems like God has turned His back on him. David couldn't understand the hardship he was facing, running for his life, living in total uncertainty, dwelling in caves.

Notice the three things David is hurting about, prefaced by the question *how long*. David was struggling not only with adversity, but with waiting.

Vs. 3-4 David needed an answer, some response from God that would re-ignite his hope. His fear is shown in v. 4. This reminds me of Paul's confidence in Philippians 1:20, *as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.*

Vs. 5-6 We have the benefit of seeing all the things God was doing during the time David was suffering. In particular God was teaching David the truth of these two verses.

Proverbs 3:16-18

This is a great expression of what it means to seek and hold on to wisdom. So practically, as disciples, where do we seek this wisdom?

He (God) is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made (that is, Jesus is) our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. (1 Cor. 1:30, RSV - Parenthetical notes are mine.)

Disciples seek and abide in Christ, following Him in the harvest.

JANUARY 16

Genesis 32:13-34:31

Genesis 32:13-32

Vs. 13-21 Jacob sends Esau that day's equivalent to the "12 Days of Christmas." It's interesting to see how Jacob, a veteran herdsman, grouped these droves, even in terms of female to male ratios. I wonder why there were no male camels mentioned.

V. 20 There is certainly a cultural dance taking place here, but more importantly, Jacob is trying to appease Esau. I'm more impressed by what is missing. Any wife will tell you that "nothing says you're sorry, like saying you're sorry." The gifts were an interesting token, but the words never came. People secure in Christ should have boldness using that word.

Vs. 22-32 For us as disciples, the only lesson I can see here is that the Lord tests our tenacity. Faith is more often seen in persistence and endurance, than in genius and success. Apparently there was a folk legend of something like this. If you held the "spirit" until the light of dawn, it would grant your wish. I guess the Irish weren't too far off. Anyway, if so, God was using it and

making a point with Jacob. This *man* would be the pre-incarnate Son of God. For Jesus I'm sure this was more like playing, trying to wrestle a sock away from a Jack Russell Terrier; but He wanted to see how persistent Jacob would be in pursuing God's blessing.

V. 28 This is the birth of the name *Israel*. What a name and how true it has been. And Israel has been striving with men and God ever since. Jacob's striving with God was in "taking" the blessing rather than waiting on God and receiving it in obedience. (Think about this when you read about the kingdom suffering violence below.) The prevailing is seen in his perseverance. He outlasted man, and even in his disobedience there was a faith in the promise that stayed alive. Isn't it interesting that the name came out of strife and contention, and it will be this way until Christ returns? Israel has been and will be a focus of fighting in the world, and it has been and will be the focus of spiritual aggression against God. But as the name suggests, with God's help, they will prevail.

God gave Jacob a constant reminder of this day and the blessing pronounced on him. What an interesting "reminder" to give to a scoundrel. This limp would be a permanent, lifelong disability. With every limp, Jacob would be reminded of his wrestling and contending with God and man and the words of blessing from the angel. This promise of blessing on Jacob would not end his woes. Oddly, the hip disorder was going to slow him down to make him less "tricky," and it would be a reminder to depend on God. Whether Jacob actually becomes more "spiritual" is doubtful.

You've got to laugh at God's timing. On the day when Esau is coming with 400 men, running the hundred in 13 seconds would be a handy skill; but Jacob is now disabled, though blessed, by God.

Genesis 33

Vs. 1-17 I'm sad every year when I read this. Here comes Esau, like a big, friendly, drooling St. Bernard, running up to Jacob, hugging him, and crying on him. Then there is Jacob, blessed, yet with ulcers and a bad conscience. And Jacob has a totally unfriendly, suspicious and "stiff-arming" manner.

It was actually the Lord who soothed Esau. His blessing Esau had allowed Esau to forgive. Also, it doesn't seem that Esau had a complicated and conniving nature, so he might not have been disposed to holding on to grudges.

Jacob never says he's sorry or that what he did was wrong. (Keep this in mind when you read the next few dysfunctional family adventures. The kids were like Dad, except for one notable exception.) Jacob's entire demeanor and desire is to be "accepted" and then left alone. This was all about him. The gifts were only manipulative. Since Jacob thought he had to forcefully get God's blessing, he turned into this kind of a man. Esau looks good and honest. No ulcer there. But Jacob has masterminded his own little tragic life - rich, blessed, and miserable. And it will get worse.

Forcing the gifts on Esau was important to show socially that there was some sort of "good" relationship between the two parties. This is why Abraham refused the stuff from the king of Sodom. He didn't want to be shown as "bonded" to, or in agreement with, him. This is why both Pharaoh and Abimelech gave lavish gifts to Abe after Abe tricked them, to show that things had been smoothed. By taking these gifts, Esau was being forced by Jacob to show that all was well between them. Esau's greeting and actions show that all was already forgiven long before he saw the gifts. This looks like manipulation to me, and if so, Esau must have just smiled and thought, "Same old Jacob, poor guy."

Vs. 18-20 Now it is true that Jacob, like Abraham and Isaac before him, needed a large area where he could graze his herds. I'm surprised that Jacob settled near Shechem because his father Isaac was still alive, probably 75 miles south in Beersheba. Who knows what was going through his mind and why he didn't see his father. Did he still have a guilty conscience? I think Jacob was blessed by God, but cursed by his own deceitful nature. Jacob buying the land near Shechem meant that he needed it for grazing and that he would stay there. It would also allow him to trade with the people in Shechem. This is probably the acreage referred to in John 4.

Genesis 34

There must be a passage of time here. Just guessing, when Jacob returned, his oldest son Reuben would only have been about 13. If you look at the numbers mentioned previously, you can figure this out. Dinah might have been about 8 and Joseph would have been 6 when they entered the land. There must be about 10 years that have gone by, especially considering what Simeon and Levi were capable of.

Vs. 1-7 I've heard preachers "wax elephants" regarding Dinah meeting with the women of the land as being something wrong. I can't see it. Prince Shechem was obviously wrong, and he seems somewhat repentant and wants to do the right thing. We don't know enough to understand what Jacob keeping *his peace* meant. Jacob would have been there with all of his wives, so I'm sure Dinah was comforted and they talked about the situation.

V. 7 The sons were not just *very angry*. They felt that war had been declared.

Vs. 8-12 Two wrongs don't make a right, but it does seem like Hamor and Shechem were sincere.

Vs. 13-17 If not for the word *deceitfully* in v. 13, we wouldn't know that anything was wrong here. I think they knew that father, son, and the entire city would agree with their proposal. I don't agree with some who say the sons were surprised that Shechem agreed to this. I think this was premeditation and careful planning. These were the sons of Jacob, the trickster. They had grown up with the conflict and trickery between their mothers and the conflict and trickery between Jacob and Laban. They knew how to use conflict and trickery. As often happens, the sins of the fathers are magnified in the children.

Vs. 18-24 These people had no idea what was going to happen.

Vs. 25-31 Jacob took no real leadership to bring the situation to a conclusion. In that leadership vacuum, Simeon and Levi, "chips off the old block," took over; but as it often is when sin is out of control, they went way beyond Dad. After Simeon and Levi killed all the men (Jacob mentions later that in their murderous rage they also crippled the animals), the other brothers were lined up and ready with their shopping carts at the city gate. They entered the city and did "supermarket sweep," looting the dead bodies, houses and markets. The neighbors would learn that this was "No Ordinary Family."

V. 30 Notice in Jacob's words, there is no regard for God. Jacob is worried about himself. Notice how often he says *me*, *my*, and *I*.

V. 31 Their words to Jacob, after he rebukes them, lacks an "I'm sorry." This was just like Jacob, who was no better with apologies. Jacob's woes aren't through. Now this dysfunctional family has two unrepentant murderers.

Matthew 11:7-30

Jesus is very pointed in this section. John the Baptist ended an era, so to speak. In v. 13 Jesus says, *all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John*. As disciples, we are living "at the end of the age" and have a very important role and place in God's continuing work.

Vs. 7-11 Although the people went to see John for various reasons, John the Baptist was the final prophet of the Old Testament period. He fulfilled both Malachi 3:1 and Isaiah 40:3. Then Jesus goes on to say that John the Baptist was the greatest of all men ever born before the new covenant. If you think that over, that is a pretty huge declaration. There were great men who lived before John, but John had the greatest task and honor of all men before him. He was the messenger sent to introduce to Israel, the Messiah -the seed of Abraham and the promised son of the woman. In the Apostle John's description of Jesus and John the Baptist's ministry in John 1, you can see that John the Baptist wasn't just introducing the Jewish Messiah. He was introducing the Savior of mankind.

And then in a very brief way, Jesus says that all who are born of the Spirit by faith in Jesus are greater than John. Spiritual birth trumps physical birth. It is an amazing privilege to be born of the Son to follow Him in the harvest.

Vs. 12-15 I think this expresses the conflict between worshiping God by the law and rituals, and worshiping God in Spirit and in truth. Jesus introduced the latter. John concluded the former. Elijah was the prophet used by God to try to turn the northern kingdom of Israel back to God before their punishment. John the Baptist was used to attempt the same in his generation. Jesus said that the blood of all the prophets shed from the foundation of the earth would be required of that particular generation of Jews that would kill both John and Him. That punishment was finalized in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and the temple.

Vs. 16-17 That generation was treating the messages of both men in a trivial, childish way, insisting that both John and Jesus should conform to what the people expected and wanted. It was really a matter of life and death. The people should have been alert and ready to respond.

Vs. 18-19 John was criticized because he was very strict. Jesus was criticized because he ate rich food, drank wine and associated with tax collectors and sinners. Apparently these were "reasons" John and Jesus were not taken seriously. John didn't join in the excesses of the culture and Jesus didn't join in shunning people. He mixed freely with them. (Note on v. 18 - Luke 7:33 adds to John the Baptist's description and says, *eating no bread and drinking no wine*. Jesus was the opposite of John.)

Yet as much as people could reject John and Jesus for not dancing to their tune, they knew inwardly that both of these men were acting from God. In particular, the works Jesus was doing from the Father couldn't be denied.

Vs. 20-24 This is pretty straightforward. We've just read about Sodom. Can you imagine that?

Vs. 25-26 God intentionally blinds those who are *wise and understanding* in their own eyes. This happens even among His own children.

V. 27 On the one hand, this will make you a good Calvinist; but on the other, if you read John 6, Jesus says the same things but seems to imply that there is a response of faith. If a person welcomes the Word of the Son, the Father reveals the Son and the Son in turn reveals the Father. If that acceptance and welcoming faith is not present, no amount of hovering around Jesus brings a person closer. The Father doesn't grant access to the Son.

Vs. 28-30 The rest is the promise of rest in the battle. Notice the order: *Come to me*, then *take my yoke*, then *learn from me* and then *I will give you rest*. I heard this preached by Tony Evans once

and it was amazing. If you don't have the devotion and relationship, learning is just effort and feeds only the mind. You have to **come to Him** and want **Him** and be submitted to **Him** in devotion, taking **His** yoke. If this isn't first, learning just makes you hard and proud. And then, you have to learn **from Him**. You have to submit to **His** Word and **His** way. As Evans said, you don't go asking Him to do things your way or bless your way. He'll tell you that your way doesn't work and it hasn't been working. No, you've got to do things His way. You learn from Him. Then, and only then, do you get the rest. And this rest comes in a chaotic world. The world doesn't change, we do.

As we've seen in Genesis and in The Psalms, the real rest of God works even when there is no safety or security. That rest is in Jesus Himself because we belong to Him, following Him in the harvest, looking forward to His return.

Psalm 14

Vs. 1-4 Paul uses the words of this psalm in Romans 3 to show that all men, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin. Only God can break that power, but for all men, including disciples, that power is still there. The answer is that now in Christ, for us, there is forgiveness; and the power of sin is broken by the indwelling Holy Spirit. The true cure comes when our bodies are "redeemed," in being resurrected.

Vs. 5-7 But in spite of all the hardship, David was confident that God would deliver and the people would once again rejoice.

Proverbs 3:19-20

Isn't it interesting to have this proverb, following the psalm that says, *the fool says in his heart, 'there is no God.'*? If I found a pencil lying on a desk and tried to convince people the pencil "just got there, that it just "happened" after 80 zillion years of evolution and earthly events," they would say **I** was a fool. Rational people would tell me the pencil needed an engineer to design it because it's really two halves glued together around that fabricated graphite core. Then it gets 12 coats of paint, etc. And then, someone had to put it on the desk.

No, the pencil is evidence of a designer, an engineer and a manufacturer. But those same people would say the world just happened. It is our sin that makes us fools. It is that desire to rebel against God regardless of the cost that is sin. Sin is the most powerful and deadly force on this planet. Why don't we have a world "Sin" day and put little black ribbons on all our products to remind us that we're fighting against sin? It is hard to fight against something you don't believe in.

JANUARY 17

Genesis 35-36

Genesis 35

Vs. 1-8 I suppose it makes sense to think about God's timing. Today we see God lead Jacob to a place of commitment, formally renaming him and reaffirming the covenant He made with Abraham. But why now? They had been in the land some years already. If God had done this earlier, maybe the massacre at Shechem could have been avoided. On the other hand, with God leading Jacob this way now, after Shechem, it certainly isn't a reward for Jacob's seeking and devotion to Him. Whatever the lesson here, it gives some insight into God's mercy and patience in dealing with fallen humanity.

My sense is this. Before we are willing to follow God, we have to be made to be willing. Sometimes He just makes things happen to move us, or, more often than not, He allows life to

bring us to a place of readiness. That readiness could be anything from boredom to joy to utter desperation. Looking at Jacob's life, he has a new start in Canaan and everything is fresh. Yet, he doesn't seem very devoted to God at all and appears to be showing no leadership to his family. But life was good up until now.

V. 1 Notice that God took the initiative. Remember the vow that Jacob had made to God in Genesis 28:22? Jacob had called Bethel *God's house* and vowed to return there to offer God a tenth of all he had. Jacob had now been in the land 10 years and had never fulfilled that vow.

V. 2 Note that they all had idols. Rachel actually left Haran with idols. They were becoming like the people around them. And then, there is the dysfunctional family life they have lived. The point being, they already knew how to truly worship God, but had no need because they were sufficient and were happy the way they were.

The events leading up to this time were not "caused" by God. This was just "life on earth" taking its normal, fallen course. God simply allowed them to have their way, to let them see their need. How else do you realize that life without God is futile and that He is the only real security on earth?

But even in this disaster, I don't see Jacob and his family turning to God. They really are in danger because of what the houses of Simeon and Levi did. So God takes the initiative to save them, and to give them an opportunity to get serious with Him. This might have been a "teachable" moment.

V. 4 Burying the idols would have meant leaving money behind. Usually the idols were made from precious metals. I wonder why he didn't destroy their gods/idols. This might indicate a lack of devotion on Jacob's part since they could come back to these.

V. 5 This could have had two purposes. As protection, God put the fear of them into the hearts of the neighbors. This would have not only saved Israel (Jacob & Co.) from attack, but they also would have been totally ostracized from everyone, possibly keeping the influence of Canaan from entering deeper into their clan.

Vs. 6-7 Can you figure out how many years earlier Jacob had slept here? He finally fulfills the vow.

V. 8 Since it mentions that his mother's nurse was with Jacob, he must have had some communication with his father. This woman would have been with Rebekah since she left her father's house to join Isaac. In mentioning the nurse's death, and later, the death of Isaac, it is safe to assume that Rebekah was already dead, probably before Jacob returned from Laban. If so, it means that Rebekah and Jacob never saw each other again after their trickery with Isaac. Self-inflicted punishment?

Vs. 9-15 Once Jacob fulfilled his vow (at God's urging), God faithfully confirms the covenant of Abraham. Again, there are no conditions mentioned. God's working to save mankind, by fulfilling the promise to Adam and Eve, to Noah and to Abraham, are firmly set on His faithfulness, not Jacob's or ours. There are some pretty notable people of faith in that line, but His **working** to save us is not dependent on our faith. As Paul & the Spirit say to Timothy, *If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself*. Jacob certainly had faith in the promise, but there is no reflection of God elsewhere in his life that I can see. The fact that Jacob is named Israel does, however, denote his tenacity and endurance in pursuing the promise. He might have created a little "hell on earth" for himself due to his lack of following God personally, but he still had faith and he still fought. And so he was named Israel.

V. 13 It looks like the Lord met with Jacob in bodily form, as He had at the wrestling match.

Vs. 16-29 After the "mountain top," life comes crashing in again on Israel.

Get a Bible map and find Bethel, where the sacrifice took place, and then find where Rachel dies near Bethlehem. Because they had so much livestock, this wouldn't have been a day trip.

Notice that Jacob changes the baby's name. As Rachel died she wanted to call the boy *Ben-oni*, "son of my sorrow," but as she was dying Jacob told her he would call the boy *Benjamin*, "son of my right hand." It was a name and place of honor.

Notice also, that Rachel is buried along the way, not in the family grave. Her burial place will later be where the shepherds were told of Jesus' birth, and it is the region where Herod killed all the children.

V. 22 This is a very sad story with huge ramifications.

First, Reuben, the firstborn of the unloved wife, sleeping with the maid of the loved wife (who incidentally was the mother of two of his brothers, Dan and Naphtali) was a dominant and aggressive act. I don't think they fell into "forbidden love," like you see in the movies. Bilhah was still his father's wife. This was the Alpha dog telling the other dogs he was the boss. Rape is a strong word, but I think Reuben forced himself on her. That is my take on this event. Imagine the animosity this would have created in the family between the Leah and Rachel sides.

Second, Jacob "hears" about it, but apparently does nothing. There should have been immediate justice of some kind. Imagine the effect in the family of doing nothing.

Third, Reuben, as the firstborn, has just lost his birthright. Jacob reveals this later at the end of Genesis when he dies. Of his first three sons, Jacob now has a "???" (whatever you want to call Reuben) and two murderers. Nice family. This will mean that the birthright will now skip past Reuben, Simeon and Levi to _____. And we get a whole chapter devoted to him later. For Jacob, it will still get worse.

Vs. 23-26 With the completion of the twelve sons, and therefore, the twelve tribes of Israel, a summary is given here of who they were.

Vs. 27-29 Isaac dies and this creates a few questions and a cause/effect event into the next chapter.

I find it interesting that Isaac lives longer than Abraham, and still, we have very little information on him.

Jacob apparently didn't spend much time with Isaac. It seems this was the first time they saw each other. Was it because they both had huge amounts of animals or was it because of the bad air between them, or both? Who knows, but it is interesting. Although blind, Isaac would have been able to meet all the children before he died.

With Isaac's death, all that he owned, the animals, the workers, the money, the whole shebang, would now go to Jacob. As we'll see, I think that Jacob split this with Esau.

Genesis 36

God had promised Rebekah that she had two nations in her. The parents should have taught the boys all about the promise to Abraham and what He had promised at their births. This is the fulfilling of God's promise to make Esau a nation.

Vs. 6-8 The fact that both Esau and Jacob were now "super rich," and could no longer live in the land together gives me the idea that Jacob must have shared some of the inheritance with Esau. Again, I'm impressed with Esau. He gently takes the initiative and moves, leaving green Canaan for a less green area around Mount Seir.

The wrapping up of Esau's history means, among other things, that the history in Genesis is about to focus on Israel becoming a nation.

Matthew 12:1-21

Matthew is showing the increased opposition Jesus encountered from the religious leaders. Jesus left the Passover in Jerusalem under deep scrutiny. He had claimed to be God's Son. Apparently a contingent of Pharisees, returning from the Passover, went with Jesus. They were probably all returning to Galilee. If you read John 5, you'll see what happened there.

Vs. 1-2 It was considered work to "grind" or "husk" grain to make it edible, even if you did it with your fingers. So eating raw, husked grain was forbidden on the Sabbath. This was not a rule God made, but one of hundreds the Pharisees and scribes had forced on the people to make them obey the Sabbath. Notice how excited the Pharisees were.

Vs. 3-4 David was their hero, and in his hour of need, God allowed David to violate the law. In David's case the actual law, not a man-made rule, was violated, and yet God showed mercy.

Vs. 5-6 And then on the Sabbath, God commanded the priests to work and violate the Sabbath. The priest could have said, "Well, that is because that's the temple." But Jesus told them what they could not see. Something greater than the temple was there.

Vs. 7-8 These verses show that some of these Pharisees were in Capernaum when Jesus had healed the paralytic and had attended Matthew's party. These were the Pharisees Jesus had challenged with this statement. Not only could they not grasp God's heart of mercy in interpreting the law, they were missing something awesome that was right in front of them. Jesus was *the Son of Man*, the eternal King and Son of God. He was *lord of the Sabbath*.

You may be awed by this, but it only made the Pharisees mad.

Vs. 9-14 It is amazing to see how often Jesus ventured into harm's way. Even when the Pharisees wanted to kill Him, He still took their invitations to dine. When they blasphemed His character and His Spirit, He called them to come together and talked about it. Here it says that He went into the *synagogue* of these very Pharisees. You can say that Jesus had "guts," but He was probably showing them mercy, giving them a chance to understand.

V. 10 The man with the *withered hand* was probably a "set up."

Vs. 12-13 Between these two verses, Mark says, *And he said to them, "Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?" But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand."* (Mark 3:4-5) To my knowledge this is the first time it says that Jesus was angry.

V. 14 Matthew is showing the official point where the Pharisees said, "We really need to kill Him." In John 5, John explains this need to kill Jesus in a more complete way.

Vs. 15-21 When you read the prophecy that Jesus fulfilled, you wonder, as disciples, imitators and slaves of Jesus, how we think we have the right to be the opposite of Jesus. He never bashed the government. He was gentle and quiet, bringing a message of hope to lost and desperate people. Just like with Jesus, those who listen to us will be saved and those who reject the message are God's concern. We don't need to judge sin. We follow our Lord in the harvest, making disciples and bringing the lost His message of life and hope.

Psalm 15

Vs. 1 The question is, "God, who do You let get close to You and dwell in the safety of Your care?"

Vs. 2-5 The answer can be boiled down to "Those how hallow Your name and obey Your Word."

Jacob was invited to connect with God, but had other interests. For us as disciples, the answer to v. 1 is not living an "outwardly righteous" life. This is where we get fooled and think that if we are not "bad" people, we must be "good" people. Nothing could be further from the truth. Jesus says that this person who gets close to God is the one who hears His words and does them. That person is the true follower. The focus is living with Jesus, and that itself will clean up the behavior, but cleaning up the behavior does not mean living with Jesus. Jesus isn't fooled. Many Christians are simply outwardly righteous people who live by a list and don't rob banks, kill people or get pregnant out of wedlock. They have some faith, like church, listen to music and get religiously emotional. But Jesus' commands are commands like the Great Commission. They are commands of discipleship, following Jesus in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, "Lord, how is it that you will manifest yourself to us, and not to the world?" Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. (John 14:21-23)

Proverbs 3:21-26

These are great words, but for us as disciples, there is something else to *not lose sight of*. God's redemptive plan, His mission to us, frames this life and this world and all our reality. What Christ has done for us makes us someone in Christ: an ambassador, a disciple, a witness, a missionary. Life for us is not about being "wise" and staying out of trouble. Security and confidence for us means abandoning ourselves to His care as we follow Him in the harvest. Life for us is being "wise" in the wisdom of Christ and the reality of this world we are called to reach.

JANUARY 18

Genesis 37-38

Genesis 37

Jesus commanded His disciples to "see the log" in their own eyes because of the consequences that personal blindness has in making disciples. In a family that's important too. Today we find Jacob repeating behavior in his family, that his parents, Isaac and Rebekah, were also guilty of: favoritism. This story might also shed some light on Reuben's dark behavior.

Vs. 1-4 Notice Joseph's age. He would have been a baby, maybe less than one, when they entered Canaan. Now 17 years have passed. This would put Reuben's age between 28 and 30.

Notice also that Joseph is with the sons of the maids, not the sons of Leah.

Here is little Joseph, the snitch. He is openly honored and favored by Jacob, who let it be known that he loved Joe more than the others. Joe was probably protected, given a cool robe, and now, after 17 years of this, there is huge animosity toward him. What a neat place to grow up. What a nurturing environment. The stage is set for a disaster.

Vs. 5-11 Into this "accident waiting to happen," God interjects two dreams, the second one actually gets Jacob mad. Notice that Jacob refers to *your mother*, meaning Leah. Rachel had died by this time. Leah was the leading lady, and Jacob later says that she was buried in the family burial site, a place of honor.

Vs. 8 and 11 show that God used the poor family dynamics to His advantage. God's plan was to put Joe in Egypt, and in doing so He revealed and catalyzed the evil of the brothers. There are a lot of things going on here, from which God will bring good, but it will be a long process. Later, God will use all their hatred to convict them.

Vs. 12-24 So what was Jacob thinking by sending Joe to check up on the brothers? Jacob was "out to lunch" when it came to understanding his family.

V. 18 It's amazing that the brothers had no hesitation to want to kill Joseph. While this might reflect the hell on earth Jacob allowed his life and family to become, these were adult sons who could have forged their own relationships with God.

V. 19 This gives me the sense that the dreams had recently occurred, so their anger and jealousy were still hot.

V. 22 Reuben has a secret plot to free Joseph, but leaves to do something. Notice that Reuben's plan is through trickery. He was Jacob's son.

Vs. 25-28 Once they had Joe in the hole, they were so happy, that they had lunch. Probably if Joe yelled too loud they threw the occasional rock in the hole.

Vs. 26-27 It is good to pay attention to Judah's words. He is being less than noble here, but he is honest. He saves Joseph and he saves his brothers from murder and bloodguilt. This is the only good thing we've seen any of Jacob's children do so far. In doing this, Judah shows them how they can get some "cash for the trash." The brothers probably all bought iPads from the Midianite traders.

One note of interest is the mention of these Midianites (from one of Abe's sons) being Ishmaelites (Abe's first son). It could be that Jacob's sons referred to all of Abe's other descendants as Ishmaelites, or it could be that the descendants of Ishmael and Midian began mixing together. In the history of Israel there is very little mention of Ishmael's descendants, but the Midianites play a major role in many events.

Vs. 29-30 First, Reuben's "trick" backfired. As the firstborn, Reuben should have openly stood against his brothers. They showed him who was boss.

Vs. 31-35 How amazingly sad this is. Jacob the trickster is wounded by his sons. And what an evil trick. They held this secret for years, watching their father suffer under their lie. And we don't know it yet, but holding the lie was rotting their souls. Later when Jacob learns Joe is alive, it says that Jacob's spirit revived. That means that here his "spirit" "died."

The result and judgment of Jacob's trickery is complete, but it has permeated the entire family. And don't think that Joseph was free from this influence in his heart. I have a feeling that the next 13 years will be hard, "cleansing" years for Joe.

Certain aspects of this story are suggestive of Jesus, being rejected by his brethren, being sold, becoming their salvation. It is interesting that it was Judah who did this. Jesus comes from his lineage. Judah will also play a role later in this story. We'll see that Jacob rejects Reuben's offer to help, but accepts Judah's offer. There is something good about Judah, that in the midst of this dysfunction, we don't see yet.

As disciples, there is something about this story that is important to see regarding God's sovereignty and man's sin. This complete family catastrophe was not God's doing, but He used it in all its complexities and misunderstandings. God often uses disharmony and malfunction to help us. We look at this story and understand that God was going to use Joseph to save the family and eventually grow the nation in Egypt, but do we see that God was protecting and

preparing Joseph? Joseph was also a problem and a chip off the old “Jacob” block. God had to get Joseph out of that family to mold him through the trials of captivity and injustice. I don’t think there was a plan “B” in making Joseph the man he became, and he might not have been that man any other way. Also, it is usually recognized that being sold into slavery saved Joseph from the effects of Canaan’s sexually saturated culture and idolatry.

A couple years after one ministry malfunction I had in Germany, I realized that one of the “blessings” of this malfunction was that it created distance between our kids and a potentially devastating influence in the church. Not all relational malfunctions are bad, even if we don’t understand them at the time. We have to trust God’s wisdom.

This is all to say that when we see what happens in our lives or the lives of others, we shouldn’t automatically feel defeat if there is failure or disharmony, or if hard events intervene. Just as in Romans 8:28, our confidence as disciples making disciples is that God uses everything in our lives as we love Him, even our deaths, for His good and His glory.

Genesis 38: The Adventures of Judah

So, why is this chapter here? We don’t yet know that Judah will be anyone important, but he gets a whole chapter. Some suggest that this chapter shows the sexually saturated culture and influence that Joseph was “saved” from. Possibly. The chapter definitely shows God’s sovereignty in preparing the line of Christ. If you put all of the time together of all these events, this is happening at the same time and during all of the years of Joseph’s servitude, imprisonment and rise to power (20+ years). It could be that this event with Tamar and the birth of the babies happened shortly before Judah and the others went to Egypt to buy grain. Perez had to have been born before they all went to Egypt. I say this because the chapter begins after Joseph is sold and this event occurs after Shelah was grown and able to enter into a sexual relationship (16-19 years old?) with Tamar to bear children for his brother Er. Then you have the birth of the babies. So, this chapter must encompass at least 20 years if not more.

Vs. 1-11 This sets the stage for what is about to happen.

V. 7 It is interesting that God took the initiative on this. The wonder is that He doesn’t do this more often. Since all of us are guilty before Him, He could use His right to punish us quickly like this at any time. In Romans He says it is because of His mercy and wisdom, using even the rebellious for His purpose and glory.

Notice that the social “law,” regarding continuing the lineage of the dead man, was already in place before the giving of the law. Created in the image of God, man creates order, imitating the order of the Creator.

Vs. 8-9 Remember why Onan does this here when we get to the story of Ruth. It will help you understand why the near kinsman will not take Ruth. Boaz gets Ruth.

Judah was either a bad dad, or the power of the culture ruined the boys, or both. His first two sons were evil and God put them to death. Tamar became the “black widow” in Judah’s mind and so he holds back giving her his last son. Obviously there is not a sense in any of this of anyone going to God and asking Him for advice. Everyone was just doing what seemed right in their own eyes.

V. 11 Now, Tamar’s action was interesting. At this point in Jacob’s family, the promise to Abraham has been lost from view. There is no sense of anyone pursuing it. At least Jacob had pursued it. It may have been that Tamar realized Judah was next in line to receive the blessing of the firstborn. I don’t know. It might also have been that the promise was why Judah didn’t want to give Shelah, his last son, to “the black widow.”

All we know is that the line of the promise continues through Judah, and this story is somehow important. My guess is that the promise, somehow, figures into the actions of both Judah and Tamar.

Vs. 12-23 This was a very dangerous thing for Tamar to do. In a roundabout way this was legal and right, because Judah should have made provision for the continuance of his son's family and for children for the widow. That Tamar did this means she was pursuing what was right, even though it was wrong. And to think that God will use this.

Vs. 24-26 So, what do you see in Judah that makes him a better man than his brothers? In v. 26 you see two things. First, Judah admits guilt and declares he was wrong and she was right. Have you seen that anywhere in Jacob's family? Jacob never did it. Reuben, Simeon and Levi never said they were wrong. Judah publicly testifies to his wrong and clears Tamar. Second, Judah never has sex with her again, which was another way of acknowledging his sin and respecting the relationship before the Lord. This doesn't look like much, but it is the first glimmer of anything from this dysfunctional family. In a few chapters Judah will shine.

Vs. 27-30 How do you know this is the line of the promise? Because something weird is happening regarding the conception and birth. At least that has been the case so far. In Genesis 46:12, the sons are not listed as Er's; they are Judah's. This is the line of the promise that flows to David and then to Jesus via Perez.

For us as disciples there is a lot here and for me it boils down to pursuing the promise and trusting God. The world may look random and out of control around us, but God is working. As for us, we are to stay in the Word, loving and following our Lord in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. And sometimes we get to see how God uses all the chaos for His own glory.

Matthew 12:22-45

This is a major confrontation and shows what the religious leaders finally came up with to "explain" and discredit Jesus. Although the situation looks like any other conflict Jesus had with the religious leaders, this lie about Jesus' power would begin to infect many of the people in Israel.

Vs. 22-24 The scribes (lawyers who decided the meaning of the law and laid out rules for obeying the law) were also a part of this. In Mark 3:22 they went on record as saying Jesus was possessed by Beelzebul.

Vs. 25-32 This is actually a very serious talk that Jesus gives them.

For us as disciples, what I find interesting is that Jesus was very relaxed in dealing with this accusation. Mark 3:23 says that when Jesus heard this, He called them to Him and tried to show them the silliness of their logic. We disciples need to have that same relaxed sense of hearing what is being said, and then seeking to give the other side of the story, firmly, with meekness, humility and a smile. In 2000 years, Christianity has not crumbled in the face of "facts" and "accusation." We need to be confident in God.

I tend to define the sin against the Holy Spirit very narrowly. You actually had to be there, hear Jesus, see Jesus do a miracle, and then say, "He is possessed, because that miracle was of the devil," to have committed the unpardonable sin. I don't think we can commit this sin today.

Vs. 33-37 This was a challenge and an accusation aimed at the religious leaders, who put on a "front" of being good, but were really evil within. The real challenge here is that God is keeping track of what we say and, if needed, will prove by our words that He is just.

Vs. 38-42 Apparently the desire to see a sign was not honest. Jesus' words are, accordingly, hard.

Vs. 43-45 The description of the unclean spirit, I think, is real. Jesus is telling us something that happens in reality. However, the real point of the story is that if you just clean up morally, but don't put something in place of the evil that was there, the evil returns worse than before.

Jesus' presence drove back the spiritual forces, and many people were cured. Nationally it was a good time. But the warning was, "if nothing takes the place of what went out;" that is, if they didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah, "what happens next will be worse." The evil of that generation would return with a vengeance once Jesus was gone.

Notice that by bringing with it other, more evil, spirits, it was making sure it couldn't be driven out again.

As disciples, we don't offer people restored marriages or personal order, etc., as important as those things might be. We offer people the ability to be forgiven and have God enter their lives. He saves them and breaks the power of sin and leads them. Anything less is just cleaning the house, not filling it with the Savior.

Psalm 16

David wrote most of the psalms after running from Saul and being in constant danger. As disciples, it may not be until we are put down for trying to live for Christ and making disciples, that we will appreciate what David and the Spirit have written here.

Vs. 1-2 David had been poor and then successful and rich; and now he was desperate, poor and living on the land. It takes a lot to finally bring a person to the reality of v. 2. This is easy to say, but to mean it is priceless.

Vs. 3-4 Here is a contrast. David had come to appreciate those who loved the Lord, simple and poor though they might be. David had had friends in high places, who were all against him now. As David saw them living in darkness and rebelling against God, he understood that they were really deepening the sorrow of their own lives. David had probably worshiped with these people. Now he understood their hearts and knew their devotion was false.

Vs. 5-6 These verses take on a deeper meaning if David wrote them in the wilderness. This reminds me of Paul's words in Philippians 4:12-13, *I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.* I think this is why the Lord often leads His disciples into the wilderness in the harvest. That is where we learn this.

Vs. 7-8 Imagine David living day-to-day leading 400 men and their families in the wilderness of Judah and southern Israel. What a place to learn the amazing guidance of the Lord and to find His security in insecurity.

Vs. 9-10 What a place to find gladness, joy and security. Verse 10 is quoted by Peter in Acts 2:27 in his Pentecost sermon. Jesus is risen! That is the basis of our security and hope as followers of our Lord.

V. 11 The Lord drove David into exile. There (like Joseph) He made David learn and know the path of life, the joy of God's presence and what true pleasures are. Amen.

For me, vs. 2 and 5 have the deepest meaning. As disciples, what do we really want? In John 4:34, Jesus said, *My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work.* All of what I really want in this life, or want to see before I leave this place, is in Christ, "to do the will

of Him who sent (I'd substitute "saved" for "sent") me, and to accomplish His work." It all boils down to Jesus, following Him in the harvest and being blessed to see the salvation of the lost and to see people made disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Proverbs 3:27-32

Vs. 27-28 Two years ago the Lord really hit me with these verses, to give aid to people immediately. So, for this reason, I always carry cash to give out if I sense someone needs it.

Vs. 29-30...especially when driving or talking to someone in lower management who didn't make the decision we're mad about.

Vs. 31-32 As disciples we often envy the "decisive person of action," but God can use all kinds. None of Jacob's cleverness really helped him. We don't have to take assertiveness training to be better disciples. We need to fall deeper in love with Jesus and dare to share His story and make disciples.

It was a scared Sunday school teacher who finally overcame his fear and walked into a shoe store and shared the gospel with a shoe salesman who had been attending his class. That salesman was saved and he walked away from shoes to save souls. D. L. Moody's life was changed forever, and the Lord used him to change countless other people. All because of a timid Sunday school teacher. God uses all kinds, so we don't need to envy anyone. We just need to follow Jesus as disciples.

JANUARY 19

Genesis 39:1-41:16

There is nothing like adversity to focus you on the Lord. Now, adversity doesn't always have a positive effect on everyone, but to the right people, the kind of loneliness and hardship Joseph experienced brings them closer to God. I don't think Jacob responded well to adversity. He just fought back. But what happened to Joseph seems to have caused a positive change, as God engineered this hardship to shape him.

Genesis 39

V. 1 Joseph was bought and sold by "Midianites" who are referred to as Ishmaelites. Midian was one of Abraham's sons born to his wife, Keturah, after Sarah's death. (Gen. 25:1-4) In those 100+ years, the tribe had grown and mixed (as Esau did) with Ishmael's clan. As a nation, the Midianites will be a problem to Israel in a couple of important places. It might be that Jacob's sons regarded all of the other seven sons of Abraham, and their descendants, as Ishmaelites.

Vs. 2-10 It was apparent to Joseph and to Potiphar that the blessing was from God. Joseph didn't have to be grateful to God and allow that to determine his behavior and heart, but he did. Mixed with his pain and sorrow, God's blessing drew Joseph's heart to God. Jacob was blessed by God with Laban but didn't express his gratitude. Most people really don't. But Joseph was grateful. So when Potiphar's wife went for him, Joseph realized that he would ultimately be throwing away his relationship with God, not repaying God in kind for the mercy and blessing he had received.

These are great discipleship lessons, but they have to be lived. Without the hardship endured in following Christ in the harvest, most of us never learn to focus on God. Without the blessing of seeing Him use us in the harvest, most of us never truly appreciate our salvation and His grace and mercy to us.

Vs. 11-20 Joseph wasn't wearing much if she could pull off his robe and see that he was uncircumcised. I guess they dressed differently back then, like the Scots in kilts. Abraham and Isaac grew an enormous community in Canaan that had now dwelt there many years. You can

figure it out from the text. If Abe was 75 when he entered Canaan and Isaac was born when Abe was 100 and Isaac lived to be 180, then this community had been a part of Canaan for over 200 years. This group was known to the nations and was a stop on the caravan routes. They were large and wealthy herders and Bedouin, known as Hebrews, living in tents. And they had this one particularity, the men were circumcised. Over the 200 years, the Egyptians, especially the merchants, had heard of the Hebrews. Remember too, we'll find out in a couple of chapters, that the Egyptians despised shepherds as crass, dirty, bottom dwellers. Now, with her anger and resentment focused on Joseph, she sees he is obviously a Hebrew. Yuk!

I once messed up in a Sunday school class, saying that Potiphar probably knew his wife was a flirt and had to save face and didn't want to do this to Joseph. The teacher wisely corrected me by pointing out, in the text, that it says that when Potiphar heard the story from his wife, *his anger was kindled*. Pot got hot, and Joe went to jail. Paul says we should study to be approved workmen. You've got to know the text before you teach and before you venture out on a limb. That embarrassment taught me a good lesson, and, as you can see, I still remember that magic moment of correction.

Vs. 21-23 Notice that even in the bitterness of being wrongfully accused, without appeal, God immediately began to give Joseph favor and to bless everything he touched. This was the Lord's confirmation and help to Joseph, but then, Joseph had to be in the right frame of heart to see this. Joe was still in prison. As disciples, we too have to be looking for where the Lord is working. He is always with us. We need to be alert, even when things don't "go our way." And in this, Joseph is humbled again, and lifted up by God again. Guess where Joseph's hope and gratitude were being focused. Did you notice the reference to God's *steadfast love*?

How much time is passing in Joseph's life? There will be clues, and you've already been given a big one. You know how old Joseph was when his brothers sold him. These sorts of little details make you skilled in understanding and applying the story. I still shake my head when I see pictures of Daniel in the lion's den, depicted as a young man. It's what happens when you don't pay attention to the context or the text. No wonder few people know how important Daniel 6 is, and sadly, it is all there in the book. Disciples need to read with curiosity and pay attention to what God is saying.

The same applies here. We need to pay attention to the passage of time. Joseph wasn't "automatically" godly. God didn't change Joseph overnight, and He won't do it with us either. If you pay attention to the text, not only will you be blessed by God's wisdom, you won't preach or teach superficial baloney.

Genesis 40

V. 1 *Some time after this* is hard to understand now, but it will make sense tomorrow, unless you are really curious and figure it out today. And if you figure it out, figure out too, how old Joseph is when he reveals himself to his brothers. But one caution: If you go to some Bible study guide or search online and let someone else do the work for you, you'll miss the joy of discovery. Finding the answer someone else figured out doesn't do the same thing for your heart and growth as finding it yourself.

Vs. 2-22 I'm not sure if Joseph had understanding of all dreams, but the Spirit definitely nudged him here and showed Joe what these two dreams meant.

V. 23 This chapter is a bridge to what is to come. For us as disciples, it is important to see how God used this event to form Joseph. We can go to the next chapter in a second, but Joseph couldn't. Joseph was forgotten and never knew that the cupbearer would eventually remember. Amazing. All Joseph knows at this point, and for the next two years, is to live every day for God,

to forget his family, and to forget that one weird moment when he interpreted those dreams, when it seemed that something might work out for him. In that daily life and disappointment, God was molding his heart for chapter 41.

Genesis 41:1-16

Vs. 1-8 Two years later. In tomorrow's reading you'll learn how old Joseph was when this happened, and therefore, how long he was captive in Egypt and even how old he was when he interpreted the dream of the cupbearer. And not just 2 years, but 2 whole years.

Vs. 9-13 The cupbearer finally made good on his promise.

Vs. 14-16 In case we think that Joseph had it good in jail as the assistant to the warden, notice what the jail was called. The pit!

Notice the work of God in Joseph's words. Obviously Joseph is a great man, but God made him that way. But who would want to go through what God led Joseph through? I think a disciple should be willing to enroll in that course, being pruned by the Father to bear more fruit in the harvest.

Matthew 12:46-13:23

Matthew 12:46-50

This section should have been placed with the text from yesterday.

Having heard that Jesus was "beside himself" and that He was possessed by the devil, the family freaked and came to get Him. The sword that Simeon said would pierce Mary's heart was beginning to cut its way through, as she, herself, was beginning to doubt her son and all the events around His birth. Among the brothers were probably James and Jude, both writers of letters in the New Testament. I always imagine that the plan was that Mary should distract Jesus. Then two of the brothers would come in high and put the grain sack over Jesus' head and around his arms, and then the other two would come in low with the ropes. Once tied, they would carry Jesus home like a sack of potatoes.

Anyway, Jesus was not falling for this one; in fact, Jesus is absolutely focused. He points to His disciples and (quoting Luke) gives the simple message of discipleship, *But He answered and said to them, "My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it."* (Luke 8:21) Amen.

Matthew 13:1-23

What I think is important for us as disciples, in this section, is the emphasis on "wanting to hear and understand." This is very much the same as *seek and you will find*, etc.

Vs. 1-2 Jesus was out there a long time teaching and told several parables. Matthew is keeping the parables and their explanations together.

Vs. 3-9 Have fun!

Vs. 10-17 If you put the other gospels together, when they get in the house the disciples ask Jesus two questions. They wanted to know what this parable meant, and then they wanted to know why Jesus spoke to the people in this fashion, using parables.

Jesus told parables, not to hide the truth, but to reveal who was interested in understanding. It was a test of the hearts of the people. The promises to those who "ask and seek and knock" are absolute. The faith promise here for the disciple (that is, it is only a promise if you believe it and do it) is that the more you give Him in seeking to understand (time in the Bible, praying, doing),

the more you will get back. This will, itself, be a motivation for some people; yet others will just say, "Whatever, I'm good with what I've got."

V. 14 The prophecy in Isaiah is a judgment saying the people didn't want to understand. If they really wanted to understand, there was enough that was clear that they could strain a little with the result of turning to God and being healed and saved. When we read the parable, it doesn't seem all that hard. But the tendency for people is to hear what they desire and what fits their thinking. Most believers don't really pay attention to this parable.

Your observations here are more important than anything I have to say, but if you are interested, I made some entries dealing with this parable.

December 14, 2010 <http://fencerail.blogspot.com/2010/12/hearing-and-sharing-in-harvest-and-ch-2.html>

December 1, 2010 <http://fencerail.blogspot.com/2010/12/hearing-in-harvest.html>

Psalm 17

If you have never felt pursued, this might not do much for you. I used to speed read The Psalms, until I got "run over" in ministry. Now I can't read them fast. Don't they read like posts to God? And imagine the compassion and understanding of a God who would inspire them.

As you read this, remember that David was trained, like Joseph, through long years of hardship. Notice the references to God's steadfast love and to seeking refuge in Him.

Vs. 1-5 In 1 Samuel 24:5 you find one of the occasions when David showed his integrity by sparing the life of King Saul. David was tested, proven innocent and yet he was still in danger. He was still lied about by Saul and his men and they still pursued him. David is not only asking God to look on that, but he is also recognizing that God put him through that test.

Vs. 6-9 David's hope wasn't in the help of his men or opportune circumstances. He knew that God was watching over him in His *steadfast love*.

V. 8 I never understood the expression *apple of your eye* and how the English-speaking world misunderstands this, until I learned German. In German, the word for "eyeball" is, literally, "eye apple." Turned around, what is being said here is that God will protect us like any of us would protect our own eyeball. Not only do you cover your eye, but if anyone threatens to poke out your "eye apple," you tend to get angry and aggressive. We get this image of God having found a nice, juicy, ripe, red, shiny apple; and if you try to take a bite out of it, boy, will He get mad. No. The apple is an eye-apple, or for us English speakers, an eyeball.

When I read v. 8, I always think of Elizabeth Elliot's book, *The Shadow of the Almighty*.

Vs. 10-12 This is how David felt about the people who were pursuing him. It couldn't have been very pleasant.

Vs. 13-14 The second half of v. 14 seems confusing. I think the NIV has the right sense. *O LORD, by your hand save me from such men, from men of this world whose reward is in this life. You still the hunger of those you cherish; their sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children.* (Psalm 17:14)

V. 15 In spite of everything and regardless of what others did, David loved the Lord and was satisfied with and confident in His care. That's what made him a good leader and a man after God's own heart.

Proverbs 3:33-35

Don't these verses seem like what we've been reading about in Genesis, in the family of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? In a way, you see the contrast between Jacob and Joseph. Both faced hardship, but one received humbling before God and drew close to Him.

JANUARY 20

Genesis 41:17-42:17

Genesis 41:17-57

Vs. 17-33 Knowing that the dream came from God makes it a very interesting dream. What stands out to me is the length. Fourteen years is a long time.

Vs. 34-36 Joseph was a "full-service" dream revealer. I'm sure this was part of God's working too.

Vs. 37-45 Talk about "rags to riches!" This deal included power, authority and a wife. Isn't it interesting that God had this planned all the time and never told Joseph? God was making Joseph a certain kind of man that He could trust with this kind of power and responsibility. Joseph never knew what was coming and he could have given up; but then, God kept just enough favor and blessing coming, to keep Joseph encouraged through his trials. And He can do this with us. His wisdom and working are beyond our comprehension, or as Paul said in Romans 11:33-36, *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Vs. 46-57 In this summary of the fulfilling of the dreams and the success of Joseph's work, there is some very interesting information.

V. 46 Notice how old Joseph was when he entered into service. He was sold when he was 17 and now he is 30. He was a slave for 13 years. The years with Potiphar and in the prison taught Jacob skills. He learned the language, the customs, the business of buying and selling, and he learned the laws. But he was still a slave and still suffered under the injustice of what his brothers had done to him. And then, there was the injustice of what Potiphar's wife did to him. I'll bet that was a long 13 years.

Vs. 50-52 What does the naming of his children tell you? We make Joseph out to be a superhero, and he was, sort of. Still, I'm not getting the idea that he knew yet what God was up to. The names show that Joe was still grieving and healing, and this, many years later. The year before the famine means that Joe was now 36 and hadn't seen his family for 19 years, over half of his life.

V. 57 All the "world" in that area of the world knew there was grain in Egypt. Egypt would have been a hopping place.

Genesis 42:1-17

Time has passed. To see how many years it was now since Joseph had seen his brothers, peek ahead at Genesis 45:6.

Vs. 1-5 After all these years, we finally hear something about Jacob and the family. Actually, the adventures of Judah (chapter 38) have taken exactly as long. What does v. 4 suggest to you? In Jacob's thinking, Benjamin was the only remaining son of the Rachel side of the family. By now all of the other men had their own wives, families, tents, servants and herds.

Vs. 6-17 This is Joseph meeting his brothers.

V. 9 What is the importance of this verse? What does this tell you about Joseph and his thinking the past ___ years? It does not seem to me that Joseph anticipated seeing his brothers or had given the significance of his past dreams any thought until now.

Why do you think Joseph is treating them so roughly? I don't think it has anything to do with revenge. The last time Joe saw them, they were murderous, merciless men.

We'll put more of this together tomorrow. It is enough to say that, as disciples, God doesn't do everything in our lives at once. We often look back and say that we should have known or understood something at a certain time in our lives, or we wish we had. The Father is a good teacher. His plan is vast and He teaches us in His time. He opens our eyes according to His timing and plan. In the meantime, even in our struggles, we trust Him and follow in the harvest.

Matthew 13:24-46

It would be a good exercise to think of how all of these parables fit together. The parable of the sower comes first, then the wheat and the weeds, then the mustard seed, then the ditty on parables, then the explanation of the wheat and weeds, then the hidden treasure and finally the pearl of great price. I think I have it figured out, but your exercise will benefit you more than my ideas, and don't try to Google and find someone else's explanation. Do it yourself.

Vs. 24-30 The wheat and the weeds. Jesus gives the parable here and then the explanation later. This parable is similar to the parable of the net and the fish later, but this story has the twist of there being an enemy. So, what do you think the role of the enemy is here? The weeds don't keep the wheat from being harvested, but they do make the growth of the wheat more difficult and it makes the harvest more work. Ultimately all the wheat will get into the barn and all the weeds will be burnt. It seems like the impact of weeds is the difficulty during the present time regarding the growth of the wheat and the kingdom.

Vs. 31-32 In Jesus saying that the mustard seed is *the smallest of all seeds*, I don't believe He is trying to make a scientific statement. In the experience of the people listening, the mustard seed was a very small seed, probably the smallest they had to deal with. What do you think Jesus is teaching about the kingdom in this parable? It seems like the point is that of a small beginning being contrasted with the huge result. I've heard some people suggest that the birds are evil, but I don't see that. In other places a king's sovereignty and power is expressed in his ability to provide shelter to the birds and animals.

V. 33 Again, this is a positive expression of the kingdom being small in its beginning and size, but permeating everything though unseen.

Vs. 35-36 As Matthew has done before, he is showing that Jesus was fulfilling the words of the OT prophets. It is interesting to see who this prophet was. Look at Psalm 78:2.

Vs. 36-43 This is pretty straightforward, dealing with the end of the Tribulation and the second coming of Christ. Still, notice that the time of the impact of the parable is now and the difficulty the weeds present to the growing wheat and the growing kingdom. The angels won't break into a sweat doing their part. Notice in v. 43 what happens to the children of the kingdom once the weeds are removed. I think that helps show the point of the parable.

V. 44 This is pretty easy to understand. Is knowing Christ worth everything? Paul thought so in Philippians 3:8.

Vs. 45-46 Ditto. Isn't it interesting that the dream to Pharaoh was repeated twice using different figures? Here we are given something similar. That it is said twice means that it is certain and true, *fixed by God*. (Genesis 41:32)

Given the importance of understanding what Jesus is saying, as disciples we can ask ourselves if we are giving enough of ourselves to growing in Jesus and serving Him in the harvest. Is knowing Christ the most important thing in our lives, visible in all we say and do and spend our time on? The hidden treasure and the pearl are an invitation to a willing heart. I've been following for 35 years, and although I agree with the "give everything" teaching, I still catch myself holding back from really giving everything. These parables are a constant invitation and exhortation to give everything and follow our Lord in the harvest. That's what disciples do. Or as someone has said, "To give all that you are for all that He is; this is the gospel according to Jesus."

Psalm 18:1-15

Vs. 1-6 As with most of the psalms so far, the first six verses are great encouragement and will resonate with those who have been in the press and have desperately needed the Lord to rescue them.

Vs. 7-15 These images are of God coming to David's rescue. What do you see in the images that follow, that is interesting to you? To me this was figurative of how God vindicated and brought David to the throne, but it looks literal with regard to the events in Revelation before the Son comes to His throne.

Proverbs 4:1-6

These verses seem autobiographical. Solomon is recounting David sitting down with him and talking.

It seems to me that Solomon wrote this during a period when he was close to the Lord, but he drifted later in life. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, did not heed this advice. The inspiration of the Spirit and the truth of God's words remain, even though the messenger didn't heed his own message. Here's what Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16, *Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching*. (RSV "and your teaching") *Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers*.

It makes sense, doesn't it, and it really applies to us as disciples making disciples.

The other thing that hits me and applies to us as disciples is v. 6, *love her, and she will guard you*. Apparently in Solomon's later years, he loved something else.

For us as disciples, for our entire lives following Christ, there is no more secure place on the planet than abiding in and loving our Lord, staying in His Word, working in His harvest. Life situations change. Our ages change. Our Savior, His love and His salvation remain the same. It is our love for Him and our hope in Him that keeps us.

JANUARY 21

Genesis 42:18-43:34

This portion of text isn't complete until Joseph reveals himself to his brothers. The question you need to be asking yourself is why Joseph is doing this. We always use Joseph as an example of "instant" forgiveness without realizing there was a process involved in him forgiving his brothers. God was working and there was a plan in progress. When people push a "just forgive" commandment on others and use Joe as an example, it shows they haven't *really* read or understood what is happening here.

Genesis 42:18-38

Vs. 18-20 So, why do you think Joseph wanted them to bring Benjamin? Was it just because he wanted to see his brother?

Vs. 21-24 These are amazing verses. What does it say to you about the power of what they had done and how it affected their lives over the past 22 years?

I always laugh at Joseph putting Simeon in prison and then seeing that Jacob isn't really in a hurry to rescue him. I wonder if Joseph chose Simeon for this reason, knowing that there would be no real pressure to come and get him. Remember, Simeon was the eldest of the two brothers who murdered the men at Shechem.

Vs. 25-28 What do you think putting their money back in their sacks was meant to accomplish? What was the reaction of the brothers? Joseph wasn't interested in generosity. He wanted them to feel something, and it worked. Notice that they understood this as judgment from God. They were living under the sense of guilt and judgment for what they had done to Joe.

Vs. 29-36 What is notable in this section to me is Jacob's words to his sons at the end. He is a bitter sad man who cannot trust his sons. Somewhere in this Jacob is still being punished by his own trickery and his inability to say that he was wrong.

Vs. 37-38 This is the offer of Reuben to protect Benjamin. There will be another offer in the next chapter and it is good to think of the difference between these offers. Reuben had already sinned against his father and family without any apology. If you look at the offer itself, there is no guarantee that Ben would come home. The option of killing Reuben's two sons sounds strange and unimaginable.

Genesis 43

Vs. 1-10 Eventually the food was running out and they had to return. Now comes the offer of Judah to protect Benjamin. Did Jacob finally accept this offer because they were out of food? When we get to chapter 49, Jacob blesses Judah above all of his brothers and predicts that the Messiah will come from Judah. There is something here that is sacrificial and like Jesus. He offered to take Benjamin's place, to be his substitute. That would ensure that Ben would return and that if payment needed to be made in Egypt, on the spot, Judah would make it with his own life. I think this is what made Judah a better man, and his offer points to the heart of our Savior. This should be the heart of a disciple.

Vs. 11-14 On the one hand this is good and polite. On the other hand this is Jacob being Jacob, making sure they have what they need to win the favor of this Egyptian tyrant. Yet in this moment of challenge, Jacob decides it is time to pray and bring God into the matter.

Vs. 15-25 When the guys arrived, Joseph prepared a meal. I always wonder how long that would have taken, like when the Lord and the angels visited Abe and Sarah... "Hey, can you guys stay to eat? Good!" Then to the servant, "Hey go kill an animal and prepare it." If it was me, I'd have said, "Do you like Chinese?" and then ordered out.

Notice that the brothers thought this was a trap because of the money that had been put back in their sacks. Apparently Joseph had briefed his steward, who went along with this test. Keep in mind that Joseph is testing his brothers to discover something about them. Now the brothers are at ease.

Vs. 26-34 It must have been a great meal.

Notice that Joe is melting down emotionally.

V. 32 Notice that the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews. That will become important later.

V. 33 Notice that Joe is still messing with their heads.

V. 34 Now their hearts were merry. All was well. But the big test is about to come. Soon we'll see what Joseph wants to discover about his brothers.

Matthew 13:47-14:12

These look like disjointed events, but it will be good exercise to try to see how things are presented.

Matthew 13:47-58

Vs. 47-50 The parable of the fish is similar to the parable of the wheat and the weeds except there is no enemy here. Remember what Joseph told Pharaoh regarding seeing the dream twice? The repeating meant it was certain to happen. God will judge all men. Judgment is coming. People need to be told that and they need to hear the good news.

Vs. 51-52 In trying to bring the Word of God to people, the disciples were being taught to use the old and the new. I think that means Jesus was using the parable to show them how to use the truth of scripture (the old) and make it new with illustrations of today's world. I think the Lord wants us to do the same. We need to be aware of what is happening in our world to use its examples as ways to illustrate the reality of the Word.

Vs. 53-58 This is the second time Jesus has returned to Nazareth. The first time was a very solemn event where Jesus declared He was fulfilling Isaiah 61:1-2. The people should have celebrated, but instead they tried to kill Him. Now, a year later, Jesus was famous. He was a phenomenon in Israel and everybody loved Him. Look at how they "explained" Jesus away, into insignificance.

V. 58 Notice what the result was. It was not that Jesus' power was dependent on their faith, but if they disregarded Jesus, they wouldn't come to Him to be healed. He couldn't do much because they wouldn't come to Him. It's the same today.

Matthew 14:1-12

Vs. 1-12 This is the death of John the Baptist.

Vs. 1-2 Jesus was famous, but they didn't understand who He was. Herod was not only motivated by unbelief, but also by his bad conscience. Just like Joseph's brothers, Herod was interpreting everything in terms of his guilt in putting John to death.

Vs. 3-12 I remember the first time I read this account of John's death, how I was impressed by Herod having to save face. Because of his vows and his guests, he allowed himself to be pressured into doing what he knew was wrong. He was a king, but just a small, lost man. And to boot, he really was a bad guy.

So, you have the parables, that is, truth given in a story form. If people wanted to understand the Word and draw close to God they could, but there would be some effort. Then you have the people in Nazareth rejecting the living Word of God. Finally there is Herod. Mark says that Herod would often summon John and listen to him until he worked up a lather of guilt and conviction. Then he would send him away and later hear him again. But Herod never changed. The Word had no effect on him. Both Herod and the people of Nazareth were like people in the parables who didn't comprehend and didn't even try.

Psalm 18:16-36

Vs. 16-19 I always imagine that David wrote this after he was made king, looking back at running from Saul, hiding in caves and despairing of ever being blessed by God.

Vs. 20-24 Among all of the ways God protected David, He kept David from avenging himself three times. That is what David is referring to regarding staying righteous and being rewarded.

Vs. 25-27 When you look at what happened to Saul, Nabal, and others who lied and tried to hurt David, God paid them back according to their own ways. You see this with Jacob. God judged Jacob's trickery by putting him under someone who was more devious, Laban.

Vs. 28-36 What a great declaration to God's help. Amen. It may require waiting, as it did for David and Joseph, but the message is true. God will train and equip us and lead us on for His purpose and glory.

Proverbs 4:7-10

Proverbs 1:7 says that the beginning of knowledge is the fear of the Lord. Here it says that the *beginning of wisdom* is to set your heart to get wisdom. I think it means that first you find Christ, and then you seek His Kingdom and ask and seek and knock.

A disciple keeps on pressing to know Christ, just like Paul said in Philippians 3:12, *Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* Disciples keep on pressing, abiding, seeking, asking, knocking... following the Lord they love in the harvest.

JANUARY 22

Genesis 44-45

Genesis 44

Vs. 1-13 As you see this adventure unfold, you can guess what is coming. The important thing to figure out in all of Joseph's actions since meeting his brothers is what he wanted to "test" or find out. Making his brothers suffer was not his intent. He had to see what was in them. Their sign of grief in v. 13 is important. They could have all gone home without Ben. This shows a change in them. At one time they turned their backs on Joseph. Now, they were willing to go back to Egypt and face possible imprisonment for the sake of Benjamin. This is hypothetical because it never happened, but I'll bet if the brothers had still had their former murderous attitudes, this would not be a story of forgiveness and reconciliation. This is what Joseph had to know before he could reveal himself to his brothers and before there could be complete forgiveness and reconciliation. Their actions and attitudes were as good as saying, "We're sorry."

Vs. 14-17 Notice how this portion begins and who becomes the representative of Israel, *Judah and his brothers*. Verse 16 seems to be a confession of sorts. Again, they are offered the opportunity to turn their backs on Benjamin and go home.

Vs. 18-34 This is the offer of Judah to take the place of Benjamin. Except in the case of Eliezer, Abraham's servant, it is hard to think of a longer block of dialogue from any one person. Judah is showing his heart here.

Vs. 27-28 Jacob's heart still held Rachel as his main wife. God had a different view. Jacob's favor of Joe and Ben was not a balanced part of his family, but that was Jacob.

Vs. 32-33 In essence, this is what Jesus, the "Lion of the Tribe of Judah," has done for us.

Forgiveness is one thing, and the process of restoring trust in a relationship is another. I have known Christians who demand forgiveness to get the monkey of guilt off their backs (not to correct the wrong they did), and then demand the relationship should be instantly renewed. Then they point to this story. Without the process of confession of wrong and repentance, even God does not forgive. Repentance can begin the process of restoration, rebuilding and proving trust, but rebuilding trust is also a process. When we as Christians explain forgiveness as "just forgive and forget," people think we're crazy. If we point to the story of Joseph and say "forgive and forget like Joseph did," we confirm that we are crazy and we haven't read or understood the story. If Joseph's brothers had been arrogant or dishonest here, with no real sense of guilt or repentance, it would have been a much different story. Joseph and God made them prove themselves.

Genesis 45

Vs. 1-3 They had been in such awe of Joseph as the Egyptian tyrant, you can imagine their utter shock and dismay, especially if his eye makeup started running. (Egyptians in the movies always wear a lot of eye makeup.)

Vs. 4-15 When Joseph calls them near, some people suggest that he showed his brothers he was a Hebrew. An Egyptian wouldn't have been circumcised.

V. 5 This has to be one of the greatest verses in the OT. It is in this sense that Joseph is a type or illustration of Christ. In the same way that the brothers sold Joe, mankind "sold" Jesus. Yet in both of these situations, in spite of the sin of the perpetrators, God used what they did to bring salvation.

I don't think Joseph always understood why the Lord had sent him to Egypt. I'll bet it wasn't until he saw his brothers bow down, and he remembered the dream, that the process began. But, the process began in a heart that was fully humbled and yielded to God. I don't think Joseph had any super power of spiritual insight. His heart was close to the Lord, and therefore, he was very teachable. If "close to the Lord and teachable" is a superpower, you can have that one too. Being in the Word daily helps you get there, just like you're doing.

V. 6 Notice the time marker here. Joseph was sold when he was 17 and came to power when he was 30. After those 13 years of servitude came the seven years of plenty and now two years of famine had gone by. Joseph was now 39 and hadn't seen his family for 22 years.

V. 15 I'd love to know what the brothers said to Joseph. Hopefully they apologized and asked for forgiveness.

Vs. 16-20 God just kept pouring on blessing. The Pharaoh himself invites Israel to live in Egypt and to possess the best land. Joseph didn't even have to ask.

Vs. 21-28 I always smile when I read v. 24. I'm sure Joseph expected them to look back and blame one another for the idea to kill or sell Joseph. I could imagine Reuben saying, "Didn't I tell you?" And then someone else saying, "I was planning on sneaking back and letting him go too. Hey, whose idea was it to sell him anyway?" It was all lost now in forgiveness and God's saving purpose.

V. 27 I wonder what was going through Jacob's mind when he saw this vast caravan, with moving trucks, pulling up to his tent.

Notice also that Jacob's spirit comes alive again. It is evident that Jacob had been heartsick for 22 years. That is a long time to suffer like this with a dead heart. I'm not saying anyone deserves this, but God really did not cut Jacob much "slack" in dealing with Jacob's own sins against Esau. And we've still never heard Jacob say he was sorry for anything he did to Esau. God is not

mocked. As a man sows, so shall he reap. That is true even if you are a child of God. For us as disciples, we cannot think that because we love the Lord and work in the harvest, He will let us get away with what He knows is wrong. We can persist and disobey, but look what it did for Jacob.

Matthew 14:13-36

Vs. 13-21 The Lord has ways of teaching many things at one time. In what Jesus did here, He was showing the masses that He was the Messiah. The full impact of this event is seen in John 6 where Jesus calls Himself *the bread of life*. But more than that, you can look at this entire event as a training lesson for the Twelve.

Jesus will refer to this feeding again to show the disciples they didn't need to be anxious about their lives. But one not so obvious lesson here is that Jesus showed the disciples what to do with 5000 people. You wonder how the disciples were prepared for the 3000 people who came to Christ on Pentecost in Acts 2. Here is how they learned. You break them into groups of 50 or 100 like Jesus did.

Vs. 22-23 The Twelve also learned to expect problems after success. Or maybe they learned not to trust "success" at all, but rather God. The reason I'm saying this, unknown to us here, but revealed in John 6, is that after the feeding of the 5000 Jesus' popularity began to disintegrate; in fact, many disciples left him. Jesus sent the disciples away because the crowds were going to come and make Him king by force. In another couple of days, that same crowd will reject Jesus' claim that He was the bread that came down from heaven. Many of his disciples would never follow Him again.

Vs. 24-33 This was a very important event. Jesus wasn't showing off. In fact, Jesus wasn't planning on the Twelve even seeing Him at all; but when they saw Him and cried out, Jesus knew the Father had other plans and He went with it. Seeing Jesus (and Peter) walking on water would come in handy in John 6 as the crowds and disciples were leaving. At that point Jesus asks the Twelve if they too will leave, and Peter spontaneously blurts out, *Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life, and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God.* (John 6:68-69) It is interesting that Peter didn't say, "Who else can walk on water?" They learned something in the boat and they worshiped Him. God used that crisis on the sea to strengthen the faith of their hearts for the crisis of faith in John 6. Just as with God's working in Joseph and his brothers, there are no accidents in God's planning and preparation.

Vs. 34-36 After they landed at Gennesaret, Jesus walked to Capernaum with the boys. He was instantly recognized, and everywhere He went, they brought sick people on pallets and laid them in the market places so they could touch the fringe of His robes. It is after this that the people who just ate the loaves on the other side of the sea would find him in Capernaum for the showdown in John 6.

Psalm 18:37-50

Vs. 37-43 We haven't yet read the entire life of David, but you will read this psalm again after we've seen what David went through. This psalm is a summary of his hardship. These verses recount the victory and glory that God brought to David after those long years.

Vs. 44-45 Even the troops that came against David from Syria and as far as Assyria were defeated by David.

Vs. 46-48 David not only realized that God had done this to fulfill the promise God had made to him...

V. 49 ...but I think David also understood that the promise of redemption from Adam through Abraham was operating here. Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:9 having to do with the plan of God to save the Gentiles.

V. 50 This is a reference to the promise God made to David that one of his offspring would reign over Israel forever. That would be Jesus.

Proverbs 4:11-13

These words are true. If there is really any qualification here, it has to do with what our goal in life is. If our goal is to walk or run on our own way, pursuing what we want, or pursuing what we think God should want, we may stumble. But if our goal is to follow in the harvest, waiting on the Lord, knowing that God is sovereign, then there is no way to fail or fall. In some respect, what we are reading in the OT proves this. Men messed stuff up, but God's plan and purpose was still accomplished. God could have done the same things without Jacob's trickery and without the brothers having to sell Joseph. Their plans caused the stumbling. Following the Lord in His way is easier than it looks. Our expectations and desires and plans are what hamper us. The Lord trains us to follow Him, to abide, to hold to His Word, to wait. The world can be chaotic, but we can still have peace and security following Christ, reaching the lost and making disciples, because we are keeping hold of Him. Or in our case, we are being held by Him.

JANUARY 23

Genesis 46-47

Genesis 46

Vs. 1-4 This is an important event. Israel would not return to the land for 400 years. God is particularly tender to Jacob. Jacob had believed in the promise, and now God was not only confirming the promise but giving Jacob additional information to pass on to his heirs. It doesn't appear that God spoke to people often, but we see God speaking to Jacob here (who, by the way, hadn't left the promised land, even in the famine) at a time when it was important to encourage Jacob. God confirms the promise, showing His faithfulness to His plan of redemption. There is little to suggest that there was ongoing devotion to God and seeking Him on the part of Jacob. This is one of the few times we hear of Jacob offering sacrifices. Yet, God remained faithful and tender.

Beersheba was a special place in the lives of Abe, Isaac and Jacob. This is where Jacob stole the blessing and ran to Haran to enjoy life with Laban.

As Moses is writing this, he is surrounded by the millions of Israelites who were brought out of Egypt to return to the land. God was and is faithful to His Word.

Vs. 5-27 The math summarized here is an editorial on how many *descendants of Israel* went in to Egypt. What is being counted are those who belonged to Jacob by blood. Later in Numbers we'll see how many descendants of Israel came out. Remember too, that Jacob took all his servants and livestock. That would have been a small city. The little comments made about the number of men Abe took to rescue Lot, and the fact that the holdings of Jacob and Esau were so large that the land couldn't hold both of them, are important to remember and think about to give you a 3D view of what is happening. They would have been a large company.

Vs. 28-34 Notice that Jacob sent Judah ahead, showing again, the prominence of Judah. There have been a lot of tears shed in this story, but thanks to the Lord, there is now a happy ending.

It's interesting how the Lord often blesses through bad things. The Egyptians hated shepherds, forcing Israel to locate in Goshen, which was a well watered delta paradise, even in the time of

famine. The Lord knows what He's doing and even uses the sin of man to accomplish His purpose of redemption.

Genesis 47

Vs. 1-12 This shows the meeting with Pharaoh and the settling of Israel in Goshen. Verse 9 gets me every year. Jacob was 130 years old and he summarizes his years as *few and evil*. And we know it is no exaggeration. What a sad statement, and to think, Jacob, the man who believed in the blessing, was himself responsible for much of his own personal tragedy.

When the results of what we have done (and the chain reactions thereof) are complicated, tangled, and out of control, we feel trapped and feel we have no control. But the solution is simple. When you come to your senses and commit yourself to following God, in the next thing you do, honor the Lord. At that point, no matter how complicated you have made life or what is being demanded of you, dare to honor God. Being in the Word gives us confidence in God's love and faithfulness, and His Word tells us what to do. The Gordian knot is simple to deal with. You don't unravel it, you cut it. But it takes using the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. And it takes a person who is surrendered to the love and heart of Christ to make this happen. Yet, it is so simple as to be profound. The next thing you do, honor the Lord. He leads to truth and peace.

Vs. 13-26 So, why do you think that Moses and the Spirit want us to have this particular information? Here is something to think about. Israel grew as a nation inside of Egypt for 400 years. The Egyptians remembered what Joseph had done for them as a nation for 2-3 hundred years. That is an incredible legacy. The US has gone 200 years as a nation and we still (sort of) respect the founders of the country. As we see new generations arise and people tinker with, and misunderstand, the intent of the founders, we could figure that in another 100 years we will forget to respect and honor them. We already have begun imagining ourselves to be geniuses who could have done a better job, without their education and faith, and without paying the price they paid. The Egyptians are grateful for Joseph saving their lives. Joseph was a hero and patriot. But that will be forgotten.

This section is probably here to show us the actions that made Joseph a national hero whose respect lasted hundreds of years, until a pharaoh came who didn't know Joseph, and made Israel slaves.

Vs. 27-28 God gave Jacob 17 good years with Joseph, not to mention peace and honesty in his life and family. If Joe had his sons during the first seven years of plenty, it means that Jacob got to see Joseph's sons enter their 20s.

Vs. 29-31 This section actually introduces Jacob's final blessings. Jacob wanted to be buried in the family grave, in the land of promise. This was in anticipation of God's promise to lead the nation back into Canaan and to give it to them as an inheritance.

In all the details of this story, God never lost sight of working toward the redemption of man and the coming of Christ. We are now a part of that plan and story. We have seen what happens when people lose sight of God's plan, but we have been saved by Christ and commissioned by Him. We are to follow Him into the harvest to bring the news of this salvation and promise to the lost. Our commission is to make disciples, who make disciples. We need to make sure we're not the ones who bring the chaos into our lives through trickery, ambition and impatience. Still, there will always be resistance and hardship for those who follow Christ. The Spirit's power isn't seen in His keeping us out of trouble, but rather in His creating peace and joy in us as we follow Christ through the trouble.

Matthew 15:1-28

Vs. 1-9 These Pharisees and scribes (lawyers of the law) got more than they bargained for with this criticism. The scribes had created so many laws and traditions in addition to what God had written, that people were no longer following what God said. As a result, it was very hard for a person to find God. This is what is behind Jesus' rebuke.

Honoring father and mother meant providing for them in their old age. The scribes figured that if a son wanted to commit to supporting the temple with his money, he would be exempt from helping his parents. Jesus didn't see it that way.

Vs. 7-9 Jesus' quote of Isaiah 29:13 is really a description of the power of sin. Rather than serving God, we create a god and laws to appease our conscience and allow us to serve ourselves.

Vs. 10-20 After Jesus contradicted the leaders publicly, the disciples came to Jesus privately and received the explanation of His teaching.

V. 12 The Pharisees already wanted to kill Jesus. Apparently Jesus' public rebuke regarding "unwashed hands" put them in an especially murderous mood.

Vs. 13-14 The disciples still feared the scribes and the Pharisees. I think one of the reasons Jesus interfaced with these leaders so often was to teach His disciples that God was bigger than they were and that the Word had to be expressed, without Jesus' disciples fearing these types of men.

Vs. 21-28 Jesus left Judah because the Jewish leaders were so mad, and eventually He began to take His message to the Gentiles. In essence, He had already been rejected by the nation and its leaders. They would make that official later. Now, you can see Jesus expanding His ministry to the Gentiles.

Jesus tried to keep His visit here "low key," but the Father had other plans.

V. 22 Notice that there is a very evident and extraordinary faith in the Canaanite woman. For her to call Jesus the *Son of David* was not normal. She knew something and Jesus picked up on it. It will explain why Jesus could challenge her faith and use her as an example to the disciples.

Jesus was shifting His ministry to the Gentiles and toward the birth of the church. Israel had all but officially rejected Him, and the cross was looming ahead. The disciples were true blue Jews and they hated Gentiles. We will see God work with the disciples and other Jewish Christians in a mighty way to help them overcome their prejudice and hatred. This is a first step. They will see a faith in this Gentile woman that they have seen only rarely in Israel.

V. 23 Jesus ignored the woman in order to show the disciples the depth of her faith. I always find this amusing that she was begging Jesus for her daughter and now the Twelve are begging Him to get rid of her.

Vs. 26-28 So, who was being tested and who was being given a lesson here? I know the words about throwing the children's bread to the dogs seems hard, but it looks to me that Jesus knew her faith in the Son of David would win the day. I think it is the disciples who are getting the test and the lesson. It was the Jews who viewed the Gentiles as dogs. In spite of Jesus' words, her need and her faith in Jesus drove her forward. Faith persists and God is merciful. The woman grasped that and persisted until Jesus blessed her and freed her daughter. Jesus praised her faith and the disciples received a lesson in how Gentiles could follow Christ.

Isn't it interesting that the people who claimed to be following God were Jesus' worst enemies. Their rigid, self-made laws made Jesus their enemy. They determined what God should be like and what He should say, and so they couldn't accept Jesus. Yet when Jesus went to those who

knew they were lost, to the Gentiles, He found sincere faith and openness. That should tell us something about working in the harvest. We are to work in the harvest and with those believers who have a willingness to follow Christ into the harvest. Unfortunately, many disciples ruin themselves trying to work with churches that are not interested in the harvest. These churches live to hold the "rules." It is sad to say this, but I have been in churches where Jesus couldn't have been an elder. I'm sure if He had shown up, they wouldn't have liked Him. In the harvest we find the Lord and we find the freshness of new faith. That is where we are to make disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 19

When I read a psalm like this, I picture two periods of David's life, both of which were simpler, less busy and complicated than when he became king of the entire nation.

Vs. 1-6 First, all those years as a shepherd, looking out on God's creation created a deep devotion to God in David. It takes time and quiet for this to happen.

Vs. 7-14 Second, in those seven years in Hebron as King of Judah, David also learned. I believe it was in those years, reflecting on God's saving him from Saul, that he transcribed the first five books of the Bible, as Deuteronomy says a king should do. It was probably during that time when David wrote Psalm 119. His devotion to the Word of God grew during this time of quiet.

In this psalm, you have both the declaration of creation to the glory of God, and the Word of God declaring the glory of God.

What always hits me is that when David had time or took the time, his heart was wholly the Lord's, and God's glory flowed from his life. But when this same man became busy, distracted, and engaged in the press of life, he failed. He drifted from God and brought deep pain into his life and family.

What the Lord wants us to see in the life of David, besides enjoying this great psalm, is that a disciple should follow Christ simply in this life, abiding in Him, taking time with Him, working in the harvest. That is the life that declares the glory of God. A life full of things and activities and multitasking doesn't do that for God. At best it makes for a very superficial disciple. At worst, it makes for a life that looks like Jacob's or David's.

Proverbs 4:14-19

Many of the proverbs have a contrast, and this one does too in vs. 18 and 19. Following Christ, His way, brings clarity, hope, stability and growing light. It is interesting that the lives of Jacob, David and Solomon became darker as they became busier. They became shrewder, more political, more complicated. These men became less focused on God and more focused on themselves. Life is busy, but the focus has to remain uncomplicated, simple and cleansed daily by the Word. We are to honor God by following and abiding in Christ and His love, in the harvest.

JANUARY 24

Genesis 48-49

In the story about Jacob and Esau, there were two incidents we read about where Jacob unrightfully took something from Esau. The first thing Jacob took from Esau was his birthright; that is, the firstborn was entitled to inherit everything from the father. The second thing Jacob stole was the blessing. Now, while the birthright was cultural and legal, the blessing seems to be specific to this family in that God had promised a spiritual blessing to them through Abraham. It could be that the thought of spiritual blessing went back to the promise to Adam and Eve.

Abraham could have known Noah or Shem and Shem could have known Seth, Adam's son. This lineage (Adam to Noah to Abraham) was the connection of people God was using to carry the promise of a coming redeemer into the future and to all mankind.

Genesis 48

This story is very straightforward. I only have a few comments.

Jacob "adopts" the two sons of Joseph to be number one and two in Israel. God apparently led Jacob to do this, but it wouldn't really turn out quite like Jacob thought. Putting Manasseh and Ephraim into the equation here would not have made anyone mad. It would be 400 years until the Exodus and when Jacob blesses his sons in the next chapter, these young men, not boys, are not mentioned. In essence, Joseph gets two tribes, though it is hard to see any positive impact by these tribes.

What is interesting here is that Ephraim seems to get both the birthright and the blessing. We'll see that the blessing to Ephraim will have an interesting "moment" during the 40 years in the wilderness. Other than that moment, it is hard to say that the tribe of Ephraim had any notable contribution in Israel's later history. In the next chapter, God makes His choice for the lineage of the blessing, in another way.

As disciples, we obey the Lord, now, as He directs. We don't need to worry if God makes other choices tomorrow that seem to indicate that what we did yesterday was meaningless. Too often we see a decision the Lord makes and then we "write the story" of how that decision or event is going to work out for His glory. Then, our "story," or what we have told everyone was "absolutely God's plan or will," dissolves. The problem is not with the Lord, it is with us assuming that the "leading," or "event," or "healing" of today will be something other than what it obviously is, "the leading for today." Our expectations can hurt us. A disciple follows. We are servants, workers in His harvest; but He is God, our Lord, and we follow whether it makes sense to us or not. If He tells us to dig a hole today and it gets filled in tomorrow, that is His business. (Those of us who were in the military already understand this as standard operating procedure. ☺) We are servants of God and followers of Christ and workers in the harvest.

Genesis 49

Now, most of these blessings are cryptic. Other than God, no one really knows what they all mean. Glean from these blessings what you can from what is obvious. And one other thing, in Bible study methods there is a thing called "the law of proportion." That means, in making observations, look for the length of the blessings. Two blessings stand out as having a larger proportion of text, and therefore, of Jacob's attention and blessing.

Vs. 1-2 It is hard to know if this event was something all families did or whether it was expected. This was more than standing around someone's death bed. Given the importance of what had happened between Isaac, Jacob, and Esau, all of the sons might have known that a moment like this was coming and I'm sure they expected the blessing to be given to Joseph.

Vs. 3-4 Reuben is both preeminent and unstable. He doesn't get a blessing.

Vs. 5-7 The brothers murderous do not get a blessing.

Vs. 8-12 These are very important verses. As we read these it makes us wonder what it was about Judah that made Jacob elevate him. I've been pointing to this as we've read, so some of the guess work is taken out. If you look at all the symbols you'll see that Judah will have victory like a lion; he will rule forever and he will have prosperity and blessing. All of this becomes more visible in David and it is all fulfilled in Jesus, the eternal King, the promised child and the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5).

V. 13 This is interesting because Jacob is actually saying what Zebulun's land allotment would be about 490 years before Joshua divided the land. For Moses and the people this would be somewhat interesting.

Vs. 14-15 This "blessing" on Issachar hardly seems complimentary. It may be that we don't understand the figures of speech and this was saying that Issachar would be strong and enjoy serving.

Vs. 16-18 I always wonder about this "blessing." Dan was the first of the tribes to fall into idolatry. Is that in here somewhere? Only the Lord knows. Notice the number of verses here compared to the next three sons.

V. 19 I suppose this blessing on Gad can be seen as complimentary.

V. 20 It looks like the best cooks of Israel will come from Asher.

V. 21 Naphtali would apparently give Israel beautiful children. The area of Naphtali was around the Sea of Galilee.

Vs. 22-26 You can see that Judah and Joseph receive the largest blessings.

V. 27 This may be showing us that those of the tribe of Benjamin would become skillful fighters. Also, the only left-handed people we know of in the Bible were warriors from the tribe of Benjamin. (Judges 3:15 and 20:16)

Vs. 28-33 This is the final instruction of Jacob and his death.

V. 31 Call me sentimental, but I think it is "sweet" that God chose Leah to be buried in the family tomb with Sarah and Rebekah, the women of the promise. Leah was unloved, yet was blessed by God and bore more children than any of the other women. And through Leah came the Christ.

Matthew 15:29-16:12

As Jesus returned to Galilee from Tyre and Sidon, He went through a region called the Decapolis or Ten Cities. These cities had large Gentile populations.

Matthew 15:29-39

Vs. 29-31 Jesus' "attractional" ministry had the effect of gathering a crowd for Him to teach. Jesus' miracles were acts of mercy and were evidence that the Father was in Jesus and had sent Him. Faith and welcoming Christ as Savior and Lord were always the main point of the miracles He did. The effect of feeding the 5000 (read John 6) was to expose the crass need fulfillment of the people. The people who ate were the people who later rejected Jesus. This is why disciples should never be fooled by numbers. People (and Christians are people) use churches. Good leaders and disciples, who make disciples focus people on the necessity of living faith, following Christ into the harvest, as disciples making disciples in the harvest. Church is never ever about a crowd or primarily about our needs. Church is about strengthening and encouraging the disciples in the harvest. Nothing should distract us from the mission.

V. 31 Notice that they glorified the "God of Israel." Many of these people would have been Gentiles.

Vs. 32-39 This "feeding" had several purposes. It gave the disciples more training in handling a large group, and it gave them confirmation that they could depend on God. The people were mostly Gentiles, showing both the people and the disciples, that Jesus and His offer would be going to the Gentiles. And it set them up for what was about to happen with the Pharisees.

Notice that there were 4000 men besides women and children. This means you can take the number for this feeding (and the previous feeding) and triple it. This was a very large crowd.

Matthew 16:1-12

Vs. 1-4 Jesus had already rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees regarding seeking signs, but He added a new "picture" here. Jesus points them to their ability to look at the sky and understand the weather. So then, why couldn't they figure out what was happening at that time with Him in Israel? The miracles, healings, and feedings were hard things to ignore. Jesus is telling them that they were suppressing truth by purposely missing the obvious. The real issue was sin. They didn't want to believe, regardless of the evidence.

Vs. 5-12 So what is the *leaven of the Pharisees*? In Luke 12:1 Jesus tells the disciples that it is hypocrisy. It is teaching that gives lip service to the truth, allowing people to say they are obeying when they are actually disregarding the obvious truth. Since Jesus is warning His disciples, it means they could do that too. The tragedy of saying one thing and living another is all too common in the church.

We laugh at the disciples in the boat, acting like the 12 stooges, "Hey, did you bring bread? No, I didn't. I thought it was your turn. Nuts, I think Jesus wants bread. Holy cow, we're in trouble." I'm sure this was a moment when Jesus just shook His head.

This is a very interesting lesson. They missed what Jesus was saying because they were anxious for their daily needs. How often do we not hear the Lord because of the cares of this life? Jesus has already taught them the importance of not worrying or being anxious about food or clothing or anything else. This then is one of the reasons disciples need to live in complete trust in His care. If not, we get embroiled in life and fail to hear His voice.

Psalm 20

Vs. 1-5 These read like a benediction pronounced on others by David. Notice the repetition of *may*.

Vs. 6-9 David can give this pronouncement of blessing because of his experience with the Lord. God's promises and steadfast love never failed.

Proverbs 4:20-27

Imagine that this is the Father speaking to you and that the "word" is not simply these proverbs, but the entire Word of God. His Word is for the heart of faith that sees through the eyes of faith that God deeply loves us and is trying to help us in this world of death. That pleading that Solomon is doing is really the Spirit pleading with you. Notice the commands or exhortations in these verses. The strength, joy and desire of a disciple is to follow Christ into the harvest, abiding in Him and His Word, bearing fruit to the glory of the Father. That is the path we are to ponder.

JANUARY 25

Genesis 50

Congratulations! You are about to finish your first book of the Bible this year. Sixty-five to go!

Vs. 1-14 So, what are your impressions, observations, and feelings reading this section? The one thing that is interesting to me is that there were times that both Isaac and Jacob had conflicts with the locals regarding their wells and their bought land. They had now been out of the land for 17 years. It could have been that the Canaanites thought to repossess the burial land that Abe bought, but seeing this procession of Egyptians with an armed escort would have made the Canaanites think twice.

Vs. 15-21 I wonder if Jacob really told them to say this to Joseph. Joseph's statement, *you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good*, is famous. If you've been following these reading notes, you understand a little more of the process God used to bring Joseph to this point of maturity and understanding. If you see this process, and hadn't seen it before this year, then praise God. That kind of spiritual growth in understanding is what this is all about. God uses His Word to form our hearts so that as we enter situations, or when events happen to us, these truths, observations and confirmations from the Spirit give us perspective and hope. As these truths enter our hearts we make a decision here, or we are patient there, where we wouldn't have been before. This is the Spirit working to mature us in the Word. Without the Spirit and the Word, we'd be sunk. With the Spirit working in the Word, though we are slow in learning and we keep on falling, He lifts us up, shows us the way, and leads us on in hope. This is what makes being a disciple a joy, and the only way to fly.

Vs. 22-26 Joseph's life had a happy end...just like a Disney movie. Joe was 17 when sold to the Midianites, 30 when he was brought out of prison and set over Egypt, 39 when he was reunited with his father, 56 when Jacob died and 110 when he died. All of that is in the text and easy to figure out. What is more important is for you to be able to see this and how God worked with him during different periods in his life. His life looks much different than Jacob's. Following the Lord, being Jesus' disciple, hearing and doing His Word makes the difference in a life. Circumstances do not dictate our joy, wisdom, and peace. Our closeness to the Lord does.

V. 25 Joseph knew the Exodus was coming and reminded Israel that God would fulfill His promise. In all, from the moment Jacob set foot in Egypt, Israel would be there 430 years to the day. At Joe's death, Israel had been in Egypt for 54 years.

Exodus 1:1-2:10

As you'll see, this is a very interesting book. It begins like an action movie and ends with God laying the foundation of a nation. We'll have the plagues of Egypt at the beginning and the Ten Commandments and the building of the tabernacle at the end. A lot takes place in Exodus.

Exodus 1

Vs. 1-7 Actually, the Hebrew name for Exodus is "Names." This is a summary of the growth of Israel in Egypt.

Vs. 8-22 These verses contain two acts that seem to have occurred at the same time. First, the people of Israel were made slaves and forced into hard labor. Second, at the same time, the Egyptians tried to stop the growth of Israel by killing the male infants. It appears that this happened shortly before Moses was born since the parents seemed to be under no threat when Aaron, Moses' older brother (three years), was born. It must have been in the next three years that parents were required to kill or throw their male sons into the Nile. If the slavery began, say, 20 years before his birth and Moses led Israel out of Egypt when he was 80, they would have been forced into slavery the last 100 years of their 430-year stay.

God used the slavery. What a funny way to prepare Israel to build a new nation. When you read what they went through, think about what that might have "positively" built into the people. Also, the slavery gave them the "need to leave" Egypt, which for some people had been heaven on earth. As disciples, we need to understand that God can use all sorts of things in our lives and in the lives of those we are reaching out to or leading as disciples. It might be uncomfortable, but we need to be slow to judge God's allowance of difficulties in our lives. Not only was God preparing a nation, but we'll see 80 years of preparation in Moses' life, 40 of which were lived in defeat in the wilderness.

The hardest thing for a very energetic disciple is waiting on the Lord when He is slowly preparing things, and most often us, for the work He has in mind.

V. 19 There must have been truth to what these women said. Pharaoh didn't punish them.

Exodus 2:1-10

There is a lot to observe and think about here.

Vs. 1-2 I wonder if Moses "glowed" or something. Apparently God did something in the hearts of the parents to move them to dare to break the law. There was something about that baby. I'm glad I wasn't born then. I don't think I glowed. I wonder if I would have gotten thrown in? Just a random thought.

Vs. 3-10 You see all of this human planning, but you know that the only reason this worked was God, totally. Actually though, I think if the princess had opened the basket and seen me in it she would have saved me too. She would have handed me over to a servant and said, "Give it a banana and take it to the zoo."

Matthew 16:13-17:9

Matthew 16:13-28

These are very important verses in following Christ. Jesus has watched the progress of the Twelve and knew that the coming year would lead to His sacrifice. Now He needed to prepare them further, but were they ready?

Your observations here are more important than anything I have to say. Imagine that Jesus is talking to you. Where do you need to be more focused on Him and live more sacrificially?

Vs. 13-20 This confession by Peter was not just verbal acknowledgment. The Twelve had been with Jesus through some pretty hard battles. Now, they were still with Him as the people were beginning to drift away from Jesus and as the aggression from the scribes and Pharisees was increasing.

V. 17 This confirms what Jesus told the Pharisees and His doubting followers in John 6:44, *No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.* The recognition of Jesus' identity was granted by the Father based on some microscopic response of faith and submission. The Father only allowed those with true faith and submission to know the Son.

V. 18 This church is built on what Peter just said, not on Peter the little stone. The Rock is Christ, the Son of the Living God.

The *gates of hell*, or Hades, could mean a couple of things. The gates were where the rulers of a city sat and conducted business and made judgments. If so this would mean the "government of hell" shall not prevail against the church. On the other hand, Hades was the place of death and the gate of Hades was like a mouth that swallowed up mankind. In this case *the gates of hell* meant, "the power and fear of death."

I know it is more dramatic and adventurous to think of the demonic government of hell. That also preaches good. But, hell has no government. Hell has no social life. The devil doesn't rule there or in Hades, and he never will. Biblically, the final enemy is not the devil. The enemy of mankind, given power by sin, is death. Death will be the final enemy defeated by Christ. *The last enemy to be destroyed is death.* (1 Cor. 15:26)

The church and the saints of the Tribulation will defeat the devil because they will work in the harvest without fear of death. *And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.* (Rev. 12:11)

V. 19 The church has authority and Jesus will spell this out in another place. It will be specific to the harvest.

V. 20 So why do you think Jesus commanded this?

Vs. 21-23 Here Peter goes from "hero" to "zero" in nothing flat. First, notice the progression. Verse 21 shows you that until this point, having known Jesus for over two years, He hadn't told them about the crucifixion. Why do you think Jesus waited until now to reveal this?

Second, although Peter was just trying to help the "poor depressed Messiah" to see the glass as "half full," Jesus rebukes "the stone," who does not yet have the maturity to see the plan according to God's wisdom. We disciples get in trouble on this one all the time, assuming we know God's plan as if we were God, and then we try to get Him to approve our plan as His. We can actually hinder, not help, the work of God.

Notice that the word "Satan" means adversary. Jesus wasn't saying Peter was Satan or that Satan was there, but it was a very hard rebuke. Also, the issue here was not a satanic plan, but a human plan and the furtherance of the things of man. Humanly speaking, the plan of man was that Jesus should have "shot to the top" and instantly become king. That's what everyone wanted. The plan of God was to provide a sacrifice and substitute for sinful man.

One interesting note of trivia here is that when Jesus rebukes Peter, He turns away from him. The rebuke wasn't given face to face. I'm not sure if that was cultural, but it was far less aggressive than how we do it, face to face, nose to nose, bad breath to bad breath. Notice in Luke 9:55 that Jesus rebukes James and John the same way. There is something to learn here.

Vs. 24-28 The charge to His disciples was to give everything in following Him. We spiritualize and devotionalize taking up one's cross, but in that culture it only meant one thing. If a person was carrying a cross, they were walking to their death. That is fairly ultimate and supersedes bearing the scars of an abusive background. It is the willingness to follow Christ to death. That path to death defines what it means to "deny" oneself. It is denying the desire to live and to fulfill our expectations and desires. Following Christ in the harvest, to the death, to bring the testimony of Christ and His offer of salvation to a dying world becomes our ultimate desire.

V. 25 This is said to the disciples who believe. To the lost this means that to gain eternal life, they have to be willing to give up their "life" for belief in Jesus as their Savior. For a believer, and this is the main context, it is the rule of investment and protection walking on this planet. If we give Him little, we get little. If we try to forge a nice life for ourselves here, ignoring Him, chances are that our faith, our hearts, and our lives will be damaged. To be fully protected by His care, we need to be fully submitted to Him. Paul taught "salvation" from damage in his letters (i.e., 1 Tim. 4:16). Look around at believers who follow half-heartedly, and you will see the results of damage on earth.

V. 26 One note of trivia is that the Greek word for *soul* in this verse and the word for *life* in the previous verse is the same word. It can mean "life" or "soul."

V. 27 Jesus' teaching on discipleship has introduced the concept of "salvation from damage" on earth as a believer. And now He is introducing the idea of rewards in following.

V. 28 This took place literally in the next chapter as Jesus' glory was revealed. And if that wasn't the event Jesus was referring to, the apostle John would see and tell of this event in Revelation.

Needless to say, Jesus hasn't come yet and taken an earthly throne in His kingdom. That is still to come.

Matthew 17:1-9

Jesus only takes the three with Him. He apparently discerned in them, a deeper faith, commitment and understanding. They all became key leaders in the early church in Jerusalem.

Notice that Jesus took Peter in spite of Peter's mistake six days earlier. Jesus didn't shun his disciples when they made mistakes. He was a Good Shepherd and Teacher and kept nurturing their faith.

Psalm 21

I think for us as followers, vs. 5-7 say it all. This is a great psalm. Highlight or underline all the occurrences of *you*, *your* and *Lord*.

Vs. 1-7 This psalm was apparently written after all of David's running from Saul, and after he was the king of the entire nation. He had a lot of years and tears to look back over. Because he says *forever*, it seems that God had already made the promise to David that one of his children would sit on the throne of Israel forever.

Vs. 8-12 In the ten years David ran from Saul, many men expressed their arrogance against both David and God's plan for David to be king. Then came the seven years of civil war and again men opposed God's plan and vented their anger at David. Now David was the king and those men were gone.

V. 13 David knew that God, and only God, had done all of this.

Proverbs 5:1-6

Just speaking to the guys here, if God has thought to address this issue, it must be a big one. None of us are "supermen" and it would be better, if you know you can't handle it, to have somewhat distant and awkward relationships with women than be stupid and think you can be the friend of all. Many men in ministry have messed around here and gone down. Obviously, the women in church are not these women, you'd hope; but this is really saying more about the weakness of the man and his temptability. This is very tricky, especially if you realize that both David and Solomon (the guy writing this) became victims. So, you should pay attention. Those great men slipped and were never the same again. I'm sure that we're no better.

For most men following Christ, the problem will not be physical adultery, but visual adultery. Jesus says visual adultery is basically the same thing, and it will kill your heart. It never delivers what it promises and it messes up your relationship with your Lord and your wife.

The answer? Turn the TV off, turn in early, and focus everything on "the wife of your youth." God's advice. Remember, like in Genesis, the true desire and need, deeper than anything sexual, is completeness and connection. You can't charge a battery by only connecting it for 10 minutes. It usually takes 40 minutes to an hour to charge a battery properly. Anything less, and the things don't fill up properly and they run out quickly. The man has to lead in this. God made it that way, so quit complaining. If you don't think your wife takes enough interest, blame God, not her. That's how He made her so that you would have to initiate, develop warmth and lead. God's way is always the best way.

For women, I would just say to "try" to understand that your husband is probably 90% OK, but always vulnerable. Never forget that. All the stuff of life beats on him so that even the best and most godly get down and fatigued and sink into themselves. This, more than lust, draws them to escape and pornography.

A man likes to know that if he really were in trouble emotionally, and on the verge of "death" emotionally, someone would be interested in reaching in and saving him. I know it's self-piteous and silly, but you just have to go with it. Men need respect and attention, not some wild woman that Hollywood tells them they need, who, incidentally, is mentioned in this proverb. Mostly, godly men following Christ are solid; but where they fall is in thinking, rightly or wrongly, in stress and emotional fatigue, that they are really alone. Know your husband, because he probably won't tell you. In his weakness, he'll quietly test you to confirm that he really is alone. What he needs is the safety and security of being home and accepted and complete.

JANUARY 26

The value of reading The One Year Bible is about to be displayed. In about 20 chapters in Exodus we will, figuratively speaking, enter the wilderness. Most people begin to lose interest after Exodus 20 when God begins giving Israel all the cultural/ceremonial laws that will build them into the nation of God. Thankfully, you'll also be reading a Gospel and The Psalms and Proverbs during your wilderness wandering in the OT. Not only that, since we're doing this together, the comments and "togetherness" of this will help you get through to the action of Joshua and beyond. Enduring the wilderness of Exodus-Leviticus-Numbers-Deuteronomy will do you a lot of good. Not only will you be fit, but having gone through it, you'll see some things you've never seen before.

Exodus 2:11-3:22

Exodus 2:11-25

Vs. 11-15 Note the passage of time here. We find out later (Acts 7:23-30) that Moses is 40 when he does this. I guess he was sort of *grown up*. Note also that between vs. 20-23, another 40 years go by.

You find people saying that miracles happened in the Bible all the time, one right after the other. Then they say that the reason they don't happen now, like they did in the Bible, is that we don't ask the Spirit. We have put God in a "box." Apparently they don't pay attention to the Bible itself and the passage of time. And also, God's actions here were not dependent on the faith of a person or any group of people. He acted according to His purposes in His time.

V. 11 Note that Moses had the right idea. He knew the details of his birth and felt God was with him and that God might use him to deliver the people. He saw them as his people. Good perception. Then Moses acts without consulting God, serving God from the gut, and the result is a disaster. God uses the disaster, but it is wrong all the same. Moses will now get 40 years in the wilderness for his actions. Ironically, later the entire nation will get 40 years in the wilderness for their rebellion against God.

V. 14 Neither Moses nor the people were ready. Moses' idealism got an overhaul when he thought people would appreciate what he had done for them. It takes you a long time to realize that your service, as a disciple, is to Jesus and not dependent on recognition from people. To serve for recognition always leads to a bad result.

V. 15 Moses fled about 200 miles straight east.

Vs. 16-25 I can imagine that with the loss of his dreams, Moses (Charlton Heston?) didn't look like someone you'd want to mess with, especially if he was wearing a lot of eye make-up like Egyptians in the movies.

V. 22 Just like Joseph, Moses names his son in terms of his disappointment with life.

V. 23 What God was waiting for was the readiness of the people to be saved. The most unthankful thing you can do is to try to save people who "don't want it or need it." This crying out to God was apparently from every person and at a great intensity of need. It wasn't God who was now ready. It was the people.

As disciples, in praying and asking God for things, His "waiting" is really His waiting on us to be at the point of personal need and investment, so that if He gives us what we're asking for, we'll really want it and appreciate it. Few people really know how to pursue God in desperation and crying out. If we're hungry, we go to the refrigerator, or we pull out a piece of plastic at the store or drive-thru and meet our needs. We don't wait on the Lord, desperately seeking His answer. He waits to see if we mean it. Most often we don't.

Exodus 3

Vs. 1-6 So now Moses is 80. Not exactly the time when you think you'll finally be "useful."

Vs. 2-6 So, who is *the angel of the Lord*? His words give Him away. Note also that Jesus quotes these words in Mark 12:26. In a sense He is quoting Moses, but He is really quoting Himself. If the Sadducees had only understood the full weight of what they were hearing Jesus say.

V. 6 Note also that the promise has picked up a "Phrase of Authenticity." *The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob* is shorthand for "the God of the Promise."

Vs. 7-22 There is a lot to observe here.

V. 7 Notice here and through this entire section that God refers to Israel as *my people*.

V. 11 Throughout this section I think Moses is feeling sorry for himself because of his blown attempt back when his biceps didn't sag. We'll see that self pity more tomorrow, but it begins to shine through here.

V. 14 This is a great verse in the Bible. The name of God is first mentioned here. While the other names are descriptive, (El Shaddai= God Almighty or God of Power), *I am* means "to be" or "is." Here is some trivia. The Hebrew consonants are YHWH. The Germans who did the linguistic work that went over to the English pronounced those letters as JHVH. The Jews didn't want to pronounce the name of God, so they substituted the word "Lord" or Adoni. Someone took the consonants JHVH and put them together with the vowels of "Adoni" and a new word appeared in English "JaHoViH," which became the word "Jehovah," which actually is no name at all, but came to signify the name of God. The Hebrew name was probably pronounced "Yahweh."

Vs. 19-22 Finally, God gives Moses a short summary of what will happen. The most important parts are Pharaoh's opposition and then the exodus of the people. If God can tell Moses that he'll win, then all should be well, right? Wrong. Moses still has some problems.

Matthew 17:10-27

Vs. 10-13 I always wonder how they knew one of those guys was Moses and the other Elijah. The question of Elijah came up because it was prophesied that Elijah would come before the Christ. Jesus had already said that John the Baptist was Elijah in a figurative sense. John came in the spirit and power of Elijah and his assignment was very similar, trying to turn the people to God before the coming judgment on the nation. Jesus uses this opportunity to say that just like John the Baptist, He too will suffer at the hands of men.

Vs. 14-21 The thing that strikes me here is that the disciples must have given up trying to heal the child. Faced with difficulty and the on-looking crowd, they gave up.

V. 15 Notice that while the boy had epilepsy, we see in v. 18 that it was caused by a demon.

V. 17 Jesus' rebuke of the *faithless generation* probably includes the crowd and the disciples. His words to the disciples indicate that if they'd had faith, it would have worked. Elsewhere Jesus says that that kind of demon only came out with prayer (and fasting, KJV). Apparently, they were looking for "quick and easy" and with the pressure of the crowd and being criticized by the scribes they didn't persist and cry out to God.

Vs. 19-21 In Mark 9:29 Jesus tells them that this kind of demon would only come out through prayer. Putting Matthew and Mark together would read like this, "This kind will come out only through prayer because of your little faith...."

Vs. 22-23 As the crowds stood there marveling at what Jesus had done, Jesus hit the disciples with this very contradictory message. How could someone with this power be put to death? But the question wasn't "how," but "why." They wouldn't grasp why He had to die until after His resurrection.

Vs. 24-27 It is good to ask why certain stories are included by the writer. What you're looking for is a logical connection. So here, standing alone, you have this little story of Peter fishing and finding money in a fish's mouth. Cool. Interestingly, the story only involves Peter, not the other guys. Also, Peter, the future leader, is being confronted by the IRS. So why this event?

I don't know. I wasn't there. But I think the answer has to do with vs. 22-23 and Peter. When Jesus told the disciples He was going to die, they were all *greatly distressed*. The emphasis here is on *greatly*. It was hitting them that He was going to die and now they are afraid and depressed.

So, it looks to me like Jesus decides to pull the lead disciple out of the pits by showing him that Jesus still has everything under control and can provide. Then Peter had to go fishing, like he did before when he let down the nets. When he obeyed, he received confirmation that "following" is necessary to see God provide. He also gained confidence in following, even though he didn't understand everything that Jesus was saying to him. After this I'll bet Peter helped rally the troops.

Psalm 22:1-18

This is the first half of a great messianic psalm. This song of David not only shows us David's experience following God in deep distress, but mirrors prophetically in David's experience what Jesus would go through. How many points of connection can you find to Jesus? Many of these verses not only express David's feeling, but also what Jesus felt. How many verses do you recognize having to do with His crucifixion?

Vs. 1-5 Jesus says v. 1 on the cross just before He dies (Matt. 27:46). Somehow this experience of David's paralleled what the Lord felt during these hard days and as He was dying.

V. 5 Notice the need to cry out. This is just like in Exodus. Here too, the Lord was not put to shame in trusting Himself to the Father.

Vs. 6-8 Apparently Saul and his men said this of David. This is exactly what the leaders said to Jesus in Matthew 27:43 as He hung on the cross, dying for our sins.

Vs. 9-11 Like our Lord, David understood that he had been chosen from his mother's womb to be the king of Israel.

Vs. 12-13 What a contrast then to the danger that was around him.

Vs. 14-15 And what a contrast to the emotions he was feeling.

Vs. 16-18 It seems too, that it went beyond feeling for David. As he had to flee his life in the palace of Saul, David had to leave everything behind. Apparently there were people who took

the opportunity to take what they wanted from David's possessions. This is exactly what happened to the Lord on the cross. (John 19:23)

Proverbs 5:7-14

These verses are a continuation of what Solomon is telling his son about adultery. Here, Solomon is talking about the life changing effects and how his son will hate himself if he falls into it, sees his life unravel and later understands what a fool he was. Obviously, this is written for us too. In spite of what the media shows us or says, sexuality outside of God's design (in or outside of marriage) hurts people. With the right precautions, a fire is a wonderful thing in your fireplace. It's not so good in the middle of your living room, regardless of precautions. The Word is given to instruct and help us. God wants to keep us from harm and He wants us to know His blessing.

JANUARY 27

Exodus 4:1-5:21

Exodus 4

I wasn't there, but my feeling from this whole exchange is that Moses is trying to get out of following God due to self pity. He was ready when he was 40, but now he's an old man and just throwing up excuses. God is merciful and patient with him, but even God gets ticked off.

Vs. 1-9 When you look at these two signs, what point do you think God was trying to make? It seems to me that both things were feared. Moses ran from the snake and leprosy was a visible, incurable disease. God had control over these.

The water turning into blood would actually be the first of the plagues. Water becoming blood would also be the second and third bowls of judgment in the final plagues in Revelation 16:3-7. If you see why God does it there, you will understand why God does it here.

Vs. 10-17 Moses was a highly educated man and had been groomed to be the Pharaoh of Egypt. I think this is a little self pity and poor self esteem shining through here.

V. 11 This is a very famous and very provocative verse. The Lord actually takes the responsibility for disabilities and birth defects. It is interesting that we have the book of Job so that we can grapple with this. I think of Paul's disability. Even if a disability can be traced to natural causes, it is still allowed by the Lord. And then there are Jesus' words to His disciples in John 9:1-3, *As he passed by, he saw a man blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."*

Vs. 13-14 Moses objects and God gets mad.

Vs. 15-17 Aaron was not "plan B." Aaron was already on his way to meet Moses. Apparently they knew each other even though Moses was raised in the palace. It appears that it was always God's plan to bring them together and have them face the Pharaoh together. For Moses' sake, God would let Aaron do the talking, but that really didn't last long. As we'll see later, it wasn't that God was mad at Moses for his fears or feelings of inferiority, but rather for his rebellion and resistance to God's plan. I think Moses is still feeling that God should have gone with his plan back when he was 40.

As disciples we talk ourselves out of working in the harvest because of our fears or sense of inadequacy. We knock on a door and hope no one is home. We drive out to the place where we're doing our work, looking for excuses to get out of making contacts. I hate it when I do that. I recognize it for what it is and go back and knock on a few doors just to spite myself.

Vs. 18-20 It is probably good to have a map of the area to get an idea of what is happening here. If you are interested, look at this link.

http://www.bible-history.com/maps/route_exodus.html

When Moses ran from Egypt, he traveled east-south-east, completely across the Sinai Peninsula, east of the northern point of the Gulf of Aqaba into the land of Midian. No wonder the Egyptians never found him. God is speaking to Moses at Mt. Sinai (Mt. Horeb, same place). After talking to God, Moses leaves Mt. Sinai and goes back north along the gulf and then east into Midian. There he says good-bye to his father-in-law. He gathers his wife and sons and heads back to Mt. Sinai. Jethro is a nice guy. We'll see him again.

V. 19 Notice how gentle and encouraging God is being with Moses. Do some of the words here ring a bell? Read Matthew 2:20.

Vs. 21-23 Isn't it interesting that God keeps encouraging Moses, telling him what is going to happen and that in the end He will win? This was to keep Moses going when it began to get rough. Isn't this exactly what the Lord does for us if we live close to Him in His Word? It shouldn't be news to us that there is opposition and that things will keep getting worse in the world. But we know that working in the harvest and following Jesus is going to pay off and that God is going to win.

God has already spoken to Aaron, and he is on the way to meet Moses at Sinai.

Vs. 24-26 Back at the motel there is this strange thing going on. My take on it is that Moses told Zipporah that Gershom had to be circumcised. She put her foot down and said no son of hers would be turned into a "girlie-man." Moses didn't press the issue until he got a deep and hard sickness in the inn. It was obvious to both Moses and Zipporah that God was doing this to Moses and that it was because of the circumcision issue. In God's ironic sense of humor, Moses is now too sick to do the cutting, so this very, very mad mother grabs the knife and goes after Gershom, who has never seen his mother this crazy, with a knife in her hand, made out of sharp stone. How sharp does stone get? I can't imagine it gets sharp enough for this purpose. She doesn't care. She'd use a car key if she had one. Anyway, she finishes and expresses words of adoration to Moses as she wipes the bloody foreskin against his feet. Although the operation had nothing to do with his vocal chords, Gershom is unable to speak for weeks. (I wasn't there so some of this might not be completely accurate.)

By the way, how old do you think Gershom was? At any age no one would want anyone to do this to them, especially not your mother. Moses fled Egypt when he was 40 and probably met Zipporah and married in the next year. Now, Moses is 80. Gershom is somewhere in his mid to late 30s. Poor guy.

Interestingly, Gershom's age may be a clue that the Levites were exempt from God's punishment later, when He had all the men of Israel over 20 die in the wilderness. The Levites were not included in the spies and it isn't mentioned that any Levites, or Gershom, died because of the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea.

Vs. 27-31 The meeting with Aaron and Moses seems to indicate that they had had a close relationship before Moses left Egypt. In a very abbreviated form, their meeting with the elders of Israel is mentioned and for now all was well. It is interesting that we see them worshipping God here and thanking God for His answer to their prayer. That will be short lived. This should teach us something.

Exodus 5:1-21

Vs. 1-5 This is Moses' initial meeting with Pharaoh. Moses would have been known in the palace, even after a 40-year absence. Notice that Pharaoh already has a hard heart. This isn't God's doing. It is Pharaoh's natural arrogance. They had plenty of gods in Egypt.

Vs. 6-19 Pharaoh knocked the worship right out of the people.

Vs. 20-21 There is nothing worshipful about this.

There are lots of interesting things in these verses, but for me vs. 20-21 are important for us as disciples. Following Jesus in the harvest means going against the flow. Leading people to trust Christ or to live as disciples will create opposition. A disciple is not better than his master. If men persecuted Jesus, they will persecute us too. When opposition comes and life gets hard, it tests our devotion to Christ, simply to follow and trust His working and care. That is exactly what is happening here. Even with the signs they had seen from Moses, their hardship stripped away their faith. They would rather be silent and live like slaves, although they are God's people, than deal with the wrath of unbelieving men.

A disciple is devoted to Jesus. Jesus' salvation and love and grace overwhelm our vision and our desire for life on earth. His truth frees our hearts to give our lives as He did, to make disciples in a lost, dying world.

Matthew 18:1-22

One note in this entire section is that you see Jesus using two illustrations that He has used or will use in a different context. This adds a fuller sense of Jesus as a teacher. As Jesus taught, He preached the same sermons from town to town and He probably had some stories or illustrations that He used again and again. Here, for the second time in Matthew, He uses the "eye-hand" illustration in a slightly different way. Also, He uses the lost sheep story in this context.

So, how do you connect these paragraphs? Don't give yourself a headache, but do try to make sense of how these four paragraphs flow together in Jesus' thought.

There is a jumble of thoughts in the context that might help thinking about the paragraphs: the truth-suppressing teaching of the Pharisees, the thought that one disciple is better than another (comparison and degrees of worth), humility, pride, etc.

Vs. 1-4 Notice what launches Jesus into this lesson to His disciples. In using the child as an example, He told the disciples that they would need to turn (change, repent) and become like a child in terms of humility.

Vs. 5-9 The statement of vs. 5-6 moves Jesus to give the caution of vs. 7-9. For their mission in the harvest, the disciples could not tolerate pride. They had to extend God's love and respect to the lowest of the low. If anything kept them proud, they were to get rid of it. The work in the harvest, taking Jesus' love and work to the lost is that important. And, if we are proud, we'll make proud disciples.

Vs. 10-14 This definitely puts a priority on reaching children.

Jesus is saying that humility and simplicity of faith are the goal. Anything that complicates us, our motives, our focus, our purpose in life, gets in the way of faith. Faith in following Christ must be first. Age, intelligence and education are not factors if a person has true faith. So, what is the warning all about? What causes one of these little ones to stumble or sin? Pharisaic expectations applied to faith? Unbiblical religious requirements? These beliefs hamstrung the faith of a lot of people in Israel. And the same happens today. Some groups call a lot of things "sin" that are not sin and make obtaining God's love something that is based on our performance.

But loose or liberal teaching does the same thing. God does care if we follow His Word and obedience really does have an effect on our lives. Look at the life of Jacob. Then there is very loose theology that says you'd have to be a fool to think that God created the world in six 24-hour days or that He did it all without evolution.

These are all crazy arguments on both the conservative and the liberal sides, and those with very simple faith stumble when all of this is laid on them as "truth."

Earlier, the "eye-hand" warning was applied to doing something we like, that is doing us harm. It was personal. Here, it has something to do with our influence, or modeling, or leadership toward others. In the New Testament letters you find the writers fighting against two extremes that cause stumbling: traditionalism (Galatians and Hebrews) and liberty (1 Corinthians and Romans 14). In both cases, faith in following Christ in the harvest is destroyed. Paul had the right approach in 1 Corinthians 9:19ff. Jesus says that if what you are doing causes someone to stumble in their faith or growth in Christ as a disciple, get rid of it.

Funny how Jesus brings this section back to the focus on salvation. In the immediate context you would have to say that it is important to God that we work to save children, whereas most ministry is focused on adults. It is still true that most people come to Christ between ages 5-16. Go Child Evangelism Fellowship (CEF)!

Vs. 15-20 Jesus has mentioned "sinning" and "offense," so it is logical that He would answer the question, "What do we do if we find a brother doing stuff that is wrong?" Having given a warning about making others sin or stumble, Jesus is now going to give a warning about how to confront sin.

V. 15 This process is for personal offense between individuals. For an offense against a group, the confrontation should begin with representatives of that group.

Vs. 16-17 Notice that this is a command. We should use this order. Obviously, as with anything, there are exceptions to the rule; for example, a rape victim is not required to have a personal meeting with her attacker before calling the cops.

Vs. 18-20 The church has spiritual authority. The offending person might not agree with this spiritual authority and just leave to go to another church, but Jesus is saying that this particular group of believers has the authority to make a judgment and God will consider it binding. Look at 1 Corinthians 5.

Vs. 21-22 This question by Peter will be completely answered tomorrow in the parable that Jesus tells. What Jesus is saying here is a command. I'd add this qualifier. First, repentance is necessary in what Jesus is saying. Second, although we are to forgive 70x7 when they ask for forgiveness, if someone has sexually abused a child, or stolen \$10,000 from you, forgiving doesn't mean entrusting them with the care of children or giving them another \$10,000. There is a difference between forgiveness, and restitution, rebuilding trust and restoring a relationship. I've learned to be cautious around people who try to push forgiveness too far too quickly. In that case, it is usually for them to save face. It is not meant to take away the burden they have placed on someone else by sinning against them.

Psalm 22:19-31

Vs. 19-24 David had already been saved from danger. Even as he was calling out here, he anticipated deliverance and giving praise to God for saving him.

Vs. 25-26 God is the source of praise and satisfaction. I find the word *forever* very interesting. I wonder if David knew that those who sought the Lord would be with Him forever.

Vs. 27-28 David surely had the promise to Abraham in mind. All the nations would be blessed by the child of promise.

Vs. 29-31 Not only would all people bow to worship God, but David knew that this worship would also continue into future generations.

There's a lot of "salvation" and declaration going on in this portion of the psalm. What a great way to end a psalm that begins with the foreshadowing of the afflictions that Jesus suffered. From those afflictions came deliverance and the declaration to the world that the Lord is to be sought and praised.

In a sense it is the same for us as disciples. When we value our salvation, and when we see how He saves us from danger as we work in the harvest, it moves us to give greater and more confident declaration of salvation and praise of God to others.

Proverbs 5:15-21

Ok, who says obeying God is all work!?

There is a lot of wisdom here and safety for the married man. Do this with the intensity of vs. 18 and 19, and the other verses of warning will be just that, warnings. How else do you say it? Men should make their relationship with their wife their greatest passion and hobby. If men will lead and take the time necessary, there is a satisfaction here for both that goes to the soul and makes that thing that happens at the end seem trivial and anticlimactic. But that's all I'll say or I'll lose my PG-13 rating.

But here too, Solomon, like us, got distracted with all his work and hobbies, and became attracted to sensuality in other women, many of them, I'm sure, putting on a wild show so they could become part of his city of wives. But that one woman who really loved him, with whom the need of his soul would be satisfied, the one he wrote about in Song of Solomon, got lost...and so did he. Obeying God is the way to life and health.

JANUARY 28

Exodus 5:22-7:24

Exodus 5:22-23

If you think about it, Moses was getting a crash course on who God is and how He works. Most of us have far more information about God than Moses did. We have the entire record in the Bible of who He is and what He does. And even so, if we had been in Moses' sandals, we'd have been freaking out worse than he was.

One of the challenges we have as disciples is telling and showing people from God's Word, what they are to do, and then listening to them and watching them endure hardship for their actions. We encourage them from the Word to tell the truth. So, they don't lie at work and get fired. We tell them to pray, but it seems like things get worse. We tell them to live for Christ, and they get laughed at by their spouses or friends. Learning through patience and hardship is not the exception; it is the rule. This is why many people give up as disciples. Jesus did not say the way was easy. He said being yoked to Him made it easier. Following Jesus is the key. His love being poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit is what gives us hope to endure and persevere.

Moses has over a million people mad at him and this turn of events is killing him. This was supposed to lead to an easy victory with no stops in between. In Moses' thinking, every play would be a touchdown or at least a first down. He never thought they'd lose yards or get hit at the line of scrimmage.

Moses was learning, as all true disciples must, that when you are following, there has to be absolute, strong, patient confidence in the Lord. You never assume you know the path He will take. You just follow. You learn that God uses all the malfunctions of men and of happenstance to accomplish His will. You learn that sometimes the blown play or the "sack" is setting you up for the touchdown. As the bumper sticker says, "With Christ, the only way to fail is to quit." And even here, He might let you get to the place of quitting, to lift you up and renew your heart in a way that makes you stronger in Christ than you ever would have been if you hadn't been defeated.

Here, Israel has doubted God and Moses. Pharaoh has grown super arrogant, and Moses has grown humbler than ever. The stage is set.

Exodus 6

Vs. 1-9 This is part of the educational process for Moses and the people.

V. 1 Notice that God says, *Now*. It seems that Pharaoh's actions and the peoples' response were a part of God's plan.

Vs. 2-8 Take time to look through what God says here. This is a great declaration by the Lord. Notice how often He says *I*, and what is attached to it.

V. 3 God is doing something new and special here that He has never done with any who have followed Him. This was not to be taken lightly.

God confirmed the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, pointed to the land promised, and the absolute certainty of redeeming the people out of slavery. These promises were not *contingent* on their faith but would have been the *content* of their faith in God. Within that coming year God would give them the sacrificial system to show them the reality of sin and their need for forgiveness, but the prime object of faith would always be the covenant-keeping God. Salvation would be through faith in His promises. These people had the account of history, even as Moses is writing it here, which goes back to the promise of redemption at the Fall, the saving of Noah and the promise to Abraham. Since they had this history, the person of faith would understand that the God of the covenant had a greater plan than just giving a couple million people a homestead.

I say all of this because the unfolding of the plan of redemption was progressive. They didn't know about Jesus, but there was Yahweh who chose them and made promises of redemption. Here and there, there is a hint at the future, for example, the dying words Jacob spoke to Judah; but it would take faith to see beyond those vague references to the redemption God was working for all of mankind. What kind of faith was necessary? Faith focused on Yahweh, who promises and keeps covenants. With that faith they would sense the scope of God's work. The heart of flesh would only understand their needs as immediate, and the promises as nationalistic.

V. 9 I'm sure Moses was encouraged as he spoke to the people, but this heartbroken people rejected him and his message. Maybe God gave Moses that strong encouragement to help him withstand the rejection of this bitter people. For a disciple, God's encouragement doesn't always signal success, but perhaps rather, that God is preparing us to endure what's coming. Encouraging thought, huh?

Vs. 10-13 God is now telling the discouraged Moses what to do in command form. Moses' words in v. 12 are explained by what happened in v. 9. God charges, commands and orders Moses and Aaron to "just do it."

Vs. 14-27 This partial genealogy begins with Reuben in order to show the tribe of Levi in its proper place in the sons of Jacob. The genealogy of Levi is the only real focus here and therefore

doesn't go beyond Levi. The purpose is to show where Moses and Aaron came from. This is like a formal introduction, I suppose.

In this list there is a cast of characters who will have the stage for bad and for good in the next two books. The greatest of these is Phinehas, who is referred to as a hero throughout all of Israel's history and is alluded to in the last OT book, Malachi. Cool dude.

By the way, this last thought about Phinehas comes from reading the Bible every year and making little connections year after year until, like doing a puzzle, you slowly see the picture. For me, this is another thing that makes it fun to read through the Bible every year.

Vs. 28-29 This is one of those places where they put the chapter break in the wrong place. In the original Hebrew and Greek there are no chapter designations or verse designations. That was all done years later, and the chapter / verse divisions we have are from Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1220.

It is interesting to see that Moses is still objecting to God using him for this. Once Moses gets his mojo going, Aaron never speaks for him again.

Exodus 7:1-24

Vs. 1-7 Notice that God reaffirms what is going to happen. It won't be easy, but they will win.

Notice the ages given for Moses and Aaron. Most people wouldn't go back and re-read the story of Moses, but with his age in mind, you will begin reading next year and see what he does when he is 40 and you'll read the next sections, understanding that Moses was prepared by God for 40 years in the wilderness. This will help you understand Moses and God in a deeper way.

One note of trivia here is the three-year difference between Aaron and Moses. It gives you the idea that the policy of having the baby boys killed might have been instituted between the births of Aaron and Moses.

I don't want to say much about the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. We've seen that Pharaoh already had a hard heart without God's help. As you read, make a note in your Bible when Pharaoh hardens his own heart and when it says God hardens Pharaoh's heart. There might be a lesson in that. Also, since we know the Lord would never reject a sincere, seeking heart, I doubt that Pharaoh ever had that. It might be that there was a time when Pharaoh would have given in through bitterness and compliance, but not through faith. At the end we'll see this happen, and in bitterness Pharaoh releases the people; but since it wasn't done willingly or in faith, Pharaoh "repents" of his decision and goes out to kill the people. God would not have kept Pharaoh from true faith and repentance.

Vs. 8-13 The battle begins.

Note that Pharaoh's boys were good at magic... tapping into Satan's power. This should blow your mind, but not scare you. For all the power of the unseen spiritual forces, God doesn't draw our attention to them that often, meaning that God thinks we know enough. If we know they're there and we follow Christ in the Spirit and in the Word, we'll be OK. The effect was that these signs by his magicians hardened Pharaoh's heart, even though the magicians had to go out and get new sticks. God did not harden Pharaoh's heart.

Vs. 14-24 This is the first official plague. Your observations are better than anything I have to say. Just a couple of notes. The "ministry" of Moses and Aaron here is what the "ministry" of the two witnesses in Revelation 11:3 will look like. When they declare a judgment on earth, a seal is broken in heaven, and all "hell" breaks loose on the hard of heart.

The Nile was thought to be a god. That Moses and Aaron had power to do this should have shown something to Pharaoh. But again, the magicians duplicated this plague, maybe by turning a bowl of water into blood. Who knows? But notice, God didn't harden Pharaoh's heart. I think the real reason God turned the Nile into blood was Pharaoh's command (Ex. 1:22) to throw the male Hebrew boys into the Nile. Again, look at Revelation 16:3-7.

V. 23 Pharaoh didn't take this to heart, but some of the people did. Pharaoh wasn't the guy who had to go and fish or find drinkable water. The people were beginning to suffer for Pharaoh's stubborn heart.

Also, since it is mentioned later that those plagues didn't affect Goshen, where the Israelites lived, I assume that some of the delta area of the Nile was also turned to blood. This wouldn't have been to punish Israel, but to encourage them by showing them what God was doing down yonder at Casa de Pharaoh.

Matthew 18:23-19:12

Matthew 18:23-35

This story is an answer to Peter's question from yesterday regarding forgiveness.

For the disciple, true biblical forgiveness rests in, and is empowered by, our own forgiveness from God. The ability to forgive others springs from a heart that has received mercy. It is a heart that is grounded in a biblical/spiritual perspective of reality. We all are dead; we all are hopeless debtors. This is the reality of our salvation and the context of the grace given to us on this planet. It allows a disciple to live an "other worldly" life, full of understanding of what is happening on earth and in heaven. Why Matthew 5:39-48 seems so unreachable to people is because we are grasping a view of life that is false. Life on earth is not good. We are all sinners. We are all in trouble.

As disciples we are commanded to forgive others, based on the forgiveness we have received from God. Life is complicated. This doesn't say we need to trust others, or accept their version of reality, or go on vacation with them. Forgiveness in this context means showing mercy as we've received mercy. It is placing the right to demand justice or payment in God's hands.

In my experience, any person and even a disciple, who arrogantly withholds forgiveness of this kind and cannot do good for an enemy, will not be released from the penalty and punishment for his own *ongoing* sins. God takes even his disciples to task in those areas of failure we walk through on a daily basis, until we learn to forgive from the heart as He forgives us. This kind of situation always has more to do with God and us, than some other person and us. Christ loves us too much, to let us get away with this misunderstanding of His sacrifice and grace.

Matthew 19:1-12

Vs. 1-9 The test here involved two different rabbis teaching two very different views of divorce in Israel. One view was very liberal, allowing for divorce under any circumstances, and the other view was conservative, saying divorce was only allowed because of adultery. The attempt was to get Jesus to agree with one or the other rabbi. Jesus avoided this by summarizing God's intent in marriage and how God works with the hardness of man's sin in the meantime.

Vs. 4-6 are very clear teachings on marriage. It is a marital union first, and then a sexual *one flesh* union. It is between a man and his wife. *Male and female* is the only way to be *one flesh* in God's eyes. Man and wife is the only way to enter this union in a way that is pleasing to Him. It is how God created us and it is what God wants.

All other variations are wrong. God is not open to discussion, but will forgive the variations if people will agree to His way and repent. Sex outside of marriage is sin. Adultery is sin. Homosexuality is sin. And it is God who says so and He loves us and will forgive and restore us if there is agreement with Him and if we repent. He is not going to change this order of creation anymore than He'll change the direction of the rotation of the earth because we demand it of Him. He is the Creator. He knows what is best for us, and yet, He will forgive us.

V. 6 Jesus is teaching that God never intended people to divorce. God joins together and means it to be forever. That's a pretty heavy thought. It is a spiritual union whether we agree with Him or not.

Vs. 7-9 The Pharisees caught this. Jesus was saying something different than both of the conflicting views in Israel. Both allowed for divorce. Jesus' answer showed that God allowed divorce and remarriage because of our unwillingness to listen to Him, just like Pharaoh. He has built the need for completeness so deeply in us, as the essence of us, that it is irresistible to us. We may not understand it and just relegate it to hormones and sexual behavior, but "oneness" is a very deep spiritual need and will drive us whether we understand it or not.

In adultery the "covenant" is broken. This is inevitable in divorce and remarriage. Somehow, in all of this dysfunctional humanity, God allows for restoration and forgiveness and order and renewal, but it always has a price. Grace can overcome the effects.

Vs. 10-12 The disciples are shocked because marriages back then always had an escape clause, just like today. To think of marriage being "permanent" was scary to them.

Jesus says that for the sake of the kingdom, some people make the decision (and Paul calls it a gift) to live without marriage for the purpose of serving God. They are figurative, not literal, eunuchs. I have only met a couple of people in my life who have this gift. It is the exception, not the rule. It is the grace of God to them, either for a life-time or for a period of time, as they are totally focused on serving Christ as a disciple in the harvest, that the need for completion is satisfied, or held in check, without marriage and oneness. For most of us, a few hours is all we can stand. That is not the gift. In fact, some of us don't understand this "gift" as a "gift." Sorry, Paul.

Notice that this teaching is for the one who can receive it. Obviously then not everyone will "hear" or be able to do this. Of all the things certain groups have enforced on their clergy, abstinence from marriage has been one of the most damaging and the most unbiblical. And they've used these verses to enforce or prove their teaching. In 1 Timothy 4:1-3 Paul says that forbidding marriage comes from lies and the doctrines of demons. Satan knows we need marriage too, and saying we shouldn't do it is a good way to warp us.

Psalm 23

Enjoy!

Vs. 1-3 As a kid I understood v. 1 to declare how sinful we were. Here was Jesus, such a great Lord and wouldn't you know it - WE don't WANT Him. Now I finally get it.

Isn't it interesting that when the Lord leads us, He leads us to stillness and restoration. We still think complicated and stressful is better.

V. 4 Here it is again. Even in the harvest, in danger, following the Lord leads to being comforted by the Lord to maintain a still heart.

Vs. 5-6 Even in opposition there is joy without indigestion. Of course, David allowed his life to get busy and out of control and so did Solomon. And they lost that peace of being led by the

Lord. Following the Lord leads us to peace even in the trials of working in the harvest. We need to remember to simply follow, simply abiding in Christ and His presence.

Proverbs 5:22-23

These verses conclude the warnings about sexual adventure and the command to be completely absorbed in passion for your spouse. Specific to this teaching is a studied obedience to keep our passions and relationships in control.

But generally speaking, in all areas, a lack of discipline will always catch us, as disciples, in the keester. God's warnings and instructions are given for us to heed and to follow. It means we need to marshal our energy and alertness and do what He says. That involves some discipline and effort.

Especially where sin is involved, we need discipline, and we need to allow God to use events and people and responsibilities to help us as He prunes us to make us fulfilled and fruitful in the harvest. Read Hebrews 12:1-13 for some motivation on this point.

JANUARY 29

Exodus 7:25-9:35

On p. 110 of the BKC it mentions that the time frame of the plagues was probably from July to April.

Exodus 7:25 Just for reference we are told the plague of blood in the Nile lasted for seven days. You can imagine that after each plague, there would have been lots of clean up from the devastation.

Exodus 8

Vs. 1-15 This second plague brought frogs over all of Egypt. How harmful could this be? Along with this the Egyptians had a god with a frog's head and it was against the law to kill frogs.

V. 7 Notice that the magicians did the same thing, but they didn't make them go away, so Pharaoh had to ask for Moses' help.

V. 15 Notice that Pharaoh hardened his own heart. He must have thought this was a cute trick, to lie and get a reprieve. What we don't see in this is that God was slowly destroying the economy of Egypt and weakening the nation.

Vs. 16-19 The third plague was the production of swarms of gnats. These were probably the biting kind.

Some say that the reason the magicians couldn't imitate this miracle was that Satan's power does not extend to the creation of life. I'm not sure that the frog "event" just involved rounding up all the already existent frogs, but I can see that. To take dust, and turn it into living things is definitely a "class A" miracle, and I guess it shows us something about the spiritual world.

Note the repeated phrase regarding Pharaoh's hardness, *as the Lord had said*. God was encouraging Moses and Aaron in this conflict by already telling them what would happen, and thereby, to expect this and to be strong and go forward. For us as disciples, this is why it is important to live in the Word. God tells us stuff like this all the time. A case in point is what Jesus tells His disciples in John 13-17. We are to expect opposition; God says so. But in opposition, we also can expect God's presence and working to bear fruit.

Vs. 20-32 This is the fourth plague, biting flies.

Notice that with the fourth plague, God makes a division between the people of Israel and the people of Egypt. This means that Israel had also experienced the other stuff. God is a good teacher. Why do you think God let them experience the first three and now will keep them separate? In a way He does the same with us. He allows us to experience tough times, so we'll appreciate His blessing and the privilege of being able to follow Him as disciples in the harvest. I know I can take a lot for granted, unless He teaches me to value it.

Isn't it interesting that God could "ruin the land" by something as simple as frogs, gnats and flies? We have all this technology and think we're so strong, and God can humble us with things we don't even think about. I'll bet the Egyptian FEMA was completely unprepared.

V. 32 Notice who hardened Pharaoh's heart.

Exodus 9

Vs. 1-7 This fifth plague brought death to all the livestock in Egypt, except in Goshen where Israel lived.

So, pausing at the fifth plague, overlooking the fields of dead animals, what do you think "Joe" Egyptian was thinking? Does it seem to you that things are escalating? It seems interesting that we don't hear anything of the Egyptians themselves crying out to God. FYI, in Revelation, when similar things are happening, people don't cry out to God either; they just keep getting madder at Him and kill His people.

After the shock of losing all their animals, they noticed that the animals in Goshen were living. I'm sure Pharaoh thought he was clever going up there and taking the livestock.

Vs. 8-12 This is the sixth plague: boils. Goshen was spared, but even the magicians couldn't be clever now.

Finally God hardens Pharaoh's heart. I'll throw out something here we'll see later with others, especially King Ahab, that when people have their hearts set to be stubborn or disobedient or stupid, God intensifies their bent. That means, they would naturally have done it anyway, and so God intensifies their stubbornness to the point that their sin is visible to everyone. I don't think Pharaoh would have changed his mind here and that God forced him to resist. I think God intensified his hardness to the degree that it had no semblance of rationality. The effect will be that Pharaoh's own people will start yelling at him.

Vs. 13-35 This is the seventh plague, killer hail. Note that God gave fair warning. There were Egyptians who feared the Lord; and, as we will read later, many Egyptians went with the people of Israel when they left Egypt.

Vs. 14-17 This is a very powerful passage that Paul quotes in Romans 9:17. It gives us an explanation of why God doesn't remove the wicked who He knows will not repent. He uses them for His glory.

V. 27 So how do you view this admission? The land was ruined by now and I'm sure many officials were doubting Pharaoh's divinity and his sanity. I don't think there is sincere repentance here. I think this is like a drunk driver who wrecks his car and goes back to drinking. The sorrow is for a moment.

V. 35 Pharaoh hardens his own heart.

Notice that we are reminded that it was all going as God said it would. As disciples we need to remember, too, that Jesus has promised both joy and opposition as we work to bear fruit in the harvest. In our work, as we're seeing here with Moses, God will win.

Matthew 19:13-30

Vs. 13-15 The disciples were repeat offenders regarding stiff-arming children. Children have a God-given ability to believe and trust. Anyone who has worked with children knows, that properly taught, kids can make a valid, strong, saving commitment to Christ at a very young age. To ignore this openness allows sin to grow in their lives, and allows their hearts to become distrustful and complicated like this next guy.

Vs. 16-22 This guy was a nice guy and Mark says that Jesus loved him. Loving him meant extending the offer to follow, but, in love, Jesus had to put His finger on the idol in this person's life. If you look at this challenge Jesus gave him, you can see a couple different areas where there would have been conflict; but the real answer was in really believing in Jesus and wanting to follow Him. Jesus told the Twelve they couldn't serve two masters. Here was proof.

So many of the verses dealing with following Christ end with the idea that He must be our passion, our Lord, and the most important thing/person in our life. If this is so, following is natural. If this isn't the case, following becomes doing religious things, like going to church and giving money, to convince ourselves and others that we are followers.

Vs. 23-30 Lots of good stuff here, so just a few notes.

Almost all who live in the western world are rich according to biblical standards. How hard is it to depend on Christ and follow Him when we can buy comfort and convenience? I think we fool ourselves thinking it is easy to follow Christ in the land of milk and honey. We end up living lives that are only shadows of what it means to follow Christ in this dying world. I'm challenging myself on this one all the time.

Lots of people "wax elephants" regarding the "eye of the needle." Just to simplify, Luke, the doctor, uses the word for "surgical" or "sewing" needle. No kneeling camel would have gotten through there.

V. 25 The disciples understood what Jesus was saying and were *greatly astonished*. We go, "null problemo." And therefore, our lives as disciples have lots of problemoes. We need to take this seriously. I don't think Jesus was saying that if they had mansions and Mercedes and billions, they would have a hard time giving that up to get into heaven. The apostles would have understood that. I think what blew them away was that Jesus meant that if they had more than what was currently in their possession, it would keep them from being fully dependent on Him. Any desire for possessions was enough to keep a lost person lost. The desire for stuff hurts us. *And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.* (Luke 8:14, RSV)

Vs. 27-30 Once again Jesus confirms that there are rewards in following Him. The Twelve would receive something that no other believers would receive because of their sacrificial following. The rewards are meant to encourage us and we are encouraged and commanded to seek them.

The crux of the matter in following Christ in the harvest, bearing fruit, making disciples, who make disciples, is what we are willing to give up and sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed and we are to follow Him in this. But we are scared silly thinking of what we'll have to give up. I'm amazed, given the deadly gravity of the situation on earth and the dying people around us, that God decides to give us anything. God could just command it without any mention of reward. I watched "Band of Brothers" and "The Pacific." When you see what these guys had to endure in battle, not only the conditions of heat or cold but the maggoty rice, you think that God could expect the same from us. But instead He *richly bestows on us everything to enjoy*. The real

paradox here, and what separates the men from the boys, is that true closeness to Jesus and the true riches of His blessings and joy are found in the middle of the harvest field. Those who dwell on the outskirts only know the blessings of the outskirts.

Psalm 24

Once again a beautiful psalm. When we read psalms like this we need to appreciate that God wrote this in David's heart through hardship and longing. But look what came out. The Lord does this with us too.

Vs. 1-2 Notice that the testimony of the Lord is available for all men everywhere to see, because it is in all the world.

Vs. 3-6 David understood that salvation would be extended to all men and all nations. The question of "who" is answered in seeking the Lord. Even if man would not seek God on his own, God puts so much testimony before us that the heart is encouraged to seek.

Note that vs. 7-10 were used by Handel in the "Messiah." In fact, one of my favorite German Christmas songs comes from these verses.

Proverbs 6:1-5

The thing to look at here, which will come up again, is the warning about being deeply connected to others who have different values. Many preachers will use these verses to say that God is against co-signing for a loan for your kids or a relative. There might be some wisdom even there, but still, I think the force here is against making yourself responsible or liable for someone with very different values. This would be along the lines of what God says via Paul about being unequally yoked to unbelievers. Actually, I've met some believers I wouldn't go into business with. The principle and warning is here. We need to bring this before the Lord before we make a tight connection with anyone.

As disciples, we need to be understanding, and ask God about everything. In our desire to help the lost and needy, we don't need to be God for them. God will take care of people without us having to take out a second mortgage on the house. In the same way, when we hook up with other Christians in the harvest, who are different enough to keep us from doing God's work, it can also lead to malfunctions. There is a good reason for different churches and different confessions. Sadly, if we all had to work together, we'd probably never get anything done.

JANUARY 30

What's great about doing this reading with other people, like in a discipleship cell, is that you can discuss and hear other observations and try out some of your own and have people tell you that you might have overlooked something. For example, I was talking about this stuff with my wife, who told me that the comment I made about the magicians not being able to "create life" had a problem because they were able to turn their sticks into snakes. I objected because I don't consider snakes a valid life form, just like I don't consider cauliflower a valid food unless you smother it in a cheese sauce, whereas I still wouldn't like snakes even in cheese sauce. Anyway, where was I, oh yeah, she made a good point. Talking this stuff out in a group makes it fun and the Spirit leads you to other insights.

One other thing. This morning I read my German one-year Bible. In the German, the word they use for "fly," means "biting fly." That kind of puts a different curve on the curse of flies. Being a city boy, I automatically think of the common housefly, or in Latin, "buzzio obnoxious." If it was, in fact, a biting fly, that adds, as the Germans would say, a little "music" to that plague.

Exodus 10:1-12:13

Exodus 10

Vs. 1-20 Note that God does a great job of “coaching” Moses through all of this. He encourages Moses and lets him know what’s going to happen, even up to Pharaoh’s negative reaction. When we read this, it is very “one dimensional.” We don’t feel the emotion or see what was happening. Moses had to have been under tremendous pressure. Imagine walking into the White House or the capital of Tehran and delivering this message. God is being very good to Moses and Aaron in this very pressurized and deadly situation.

Also, this is the second time the Lord hardened Pharaoh’s heart. That’s 2 out of 8, meaning that Pharaoh is winning in the “who can harden my heart more times” contest.

Egypt is now totally ruined economically. If something like this happened to the USA, it would knock us out of “superpower” standing and the country would be laid waste. What we don’t see, regardless of what country we call home, is that nationally and personally, we owe God a lot more than we think.

Egypt would never return to its former glory or strength, economically or militarily; and, interestingly, in this “superpower” vacuum, Israel would be able to grow, unhindered, as a nation. I guess God knew what He was doing.

Vs. 21-29 Obviously it must have been a supernatural darkness, if lamps wouldn’t work.

God hardens Pharaoh’s heart (3 out of 9) and Pharaoh, rather than being repentant and open, is angry and bitter. This is sort of like getting into a fight and you know you should have stopped but you didn’t and now the other guy has inflicted such damage on you that your pride won’t let you stop even though you know you should.

V. 28 Although Pharaoh and Moses would meet again, it would have nothing to do with the conflict and petition we have seen. To “see his face,” probably meant to petition him to let Israel leave. The next time they see each other, Pharaoh will plead with Moses to leave.

Exodus 11

Vs. 1-10 Apparently, before Moses left Pharaoh, he warned him of what was to come; and, since Pharaoh wouldn’t listen, Moses left angry with his hardness of heart. When Jesus healed the man with the withered hand, the same thing happened. Jesus asked the Pharisees a question, and they wouldn’t answer. Mark 3:5 says, *And he (Jesus) looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.* Interesting parallel.

Exodus 12

Vs. 1-13 There is a lot to see here.

First, if you don’t know already, figure out what month this “first month” of their year is on our calendar.

Second, God is laying in place a national/cultural/personal tradition that will prepare them for the coming of the Christ. Talk about long-range planning. Think about the different parts of this preparation that connect to Jesus, salvation, and our redemption.

As disciples, our life and our call to follow Christ into the harvest, to reach out to dying people, begins with our appreciation and love for Him saving us. The Passover is a great picture of all of this.

When I read that they were to eat the meal fully ready to leave, it makes me think of how we, as disciples, are supposed to live on this planet. We are to be ready to work, to help, to share with others, to encourage and make disciples. Down here, we are always in the harvest.

Matthew 20:1-28

The connection of these two stories is in the last sentence from our reading yesterday about the first being last and the last being first. Jesus will now explain what that means. It will have a meaning regarding time, God's grace and purpose, and how a person views himself and his service.

Vs. 1-16 It looks like the time factor and the kindness of the master are at question here. Unfortunately, I probably would have been one of the guys complaining at the end of the story. So, what was the proper mindset?

First, each servant should have appreciation for even getting hired (saved). I find it easy to take my salvation for granted and think that I deserve it. The wonder of Him saving me is something that I should never "get over."

Second, a focus on the harvest. In Germany, we had a yard with two cherry trees. Since it was rainy in Germany, the cherries would get ripe and then you'd have to "mach schnell" to get everything off the trees before the birds ate them or the cherries rotted. They'd rot right before your eyes. Everyone was busy with other things, and I was busy, too; but I remember being out there alone, working as quickly as I could, wishing anyone would help. I think, with an eye on the harvest, we don't care who comes in the last hour and how much they are paid if we have a heart like our Savior, not wanting any to perish.

Vs. 17-19 I don't know if it's just me, but doesn't it seem like Jesus is "coaching" His disciples just like God was "coaching" Moses? He's telling them, again, what is going to happen so that when it happens they can remain strong, not panic too badly, and hold on to their faith.

With regard to the "first and last" teaching, the direction they were going in following Jesus didn't look too glorious. This "vineyard" looked different than the vineyard in the story Jesus told.

Vs. 20-28 I'm not sure of all that was going on in the head of James and John's mother, Salome. (Salome was Jesus' aunt, that is, His mother Mary's sister. This means too, that James and John were Jesus' cousins.) Did she believe Jesus was about to die? Did she think there would be a showdown in Jerusalem, with the boys emerging victorious? We'll have to ask her.

Jesus was related to James and John and maybe they thought they would be given positions of honor because of their connection. Jesus would tell them that those places were only given by the Father, and then, they would be given according to service and suffering.

Vs. 26-27 These words not only helped defuse the anger of the other disciples, but they brought the discussion back to the "first and last" teaching Jesus had given. I'm sure they had as hard a time understanding this as we do. So who really is the "first?" Only God knows. We know that God's goal for us is to be servants of all as we serve in the harvest, uninterested in that position.

There is a lot of amazing stuff here for us as disciples. Are we willing to drink the cup? Are we willing to die as He died for the sake of saving lost people? Are we willing to be the servants of all? Read 1 Corinthians 9:19ff. Let this section sink into you.

V. 28 is worth a million dollars if we could ever internalize it and live it. As disciples of Jesus, we are to do the same thing He did and live the same way He lived in the harvest.

Psalm 25:1-15

I just can't read these psalms of David, without my own heart being pulled at because of some of the terrain the Lord has taken me through. And, I believe, I hope, I'm closer and more useful to the Lord as a result of it.

Vs. 1-3 Notice the call to waiting. Verse 3 is quoted by Paul in Romans 9 and 10. Paul was not ashamed of the gospel.

Vs. 4-5 As we wait on the Lord, we need to learn of Him and understand Him. Understanding God and what is happening on this planet often helps us keep our heads in the midst of difficult circumstances. The best way to learn is to read the Word every day.

Vs. 6-10 David calls upon God to remember His *steadfast love*, and he expresses his desire to be taught and to know the ways of the Lord. David valued friendship with the Lord and He had learned enough to know that God's love was steadfast and faithful.

Vs. 11-15 It is interesting that David had a heart like this, always seeking God. It is what made him a man after God's own heart. In spite of his difficulties, dangers, and sins, David always turned to God and sought Him.

We get the second half of this psalm tomorrow. I wonder what it sounded like as a song.

Proverbs 6:6-11

Ok, grasshopper, look at the ant. (an old "kung-fu" joke)

For me, two thoughts help this "parable" apply to me.

First, this illustration has to do with anything that requires preparation, not simply getting ready for winter.

This could be anything from training for a career to preparing to meet God. The winter part intensifies the need; that is, "if you don't do it now, you'll die later." I often think this is what made the northern Europeans a very organized and serious people. If you didn't prepare, you died. And thanks to that, we have IKEA!

Second, I qualify as this fool. And don't be so smug, you do too. We all do at some point, in some area of our lives. And as if the deadening power of our own sin weren't bad enough, we have Satan telling us to sit back, relax, and not sweat, God is in control, "hey, flip over to that channel," or "hey, go and see what's on YouTube."

Especially in the western world, our lives become overwhelmed with distraction and drifting, personally and in our churches. As disciples, God gives us purpose and focus in Christ and in the harvest, and it rounds out our lives with love and family and meaning. We have Jesus as a model, who came to seek and to save that which is lost. Like David says above, we need to cry out and learn His ways and seek His friendship. And then you have Jesus saying that to follow Him you have to lose your life. But then you receive it back again in Him.

What God is asking us, as disciples, to do here, now, on earth, in the middle of this desperate tragedy, requires focus and work and sacrifice. What we get in return is secondary (although great). But, it is still work. We're yoked to Jesus, but it is still work. But, love gives you wings.

A quote I like from Oswald Sanders' Spiritual Leadership is, "The heights by great men, reached and kept, were not attained by sudden flight, but they, while their companions slept, were toiling upward in the night."

Great disciples are great leaders/servants, reaching out and making disciples; because they make and take the time now, to get closer to their Lord, instead of getting lulled to sleep by distraction.

JANUARY 31

If you have been reading with us for the month of January, congratulations are in order! You've read through Genesis and you're into Exodus; you've almost finished Matthew; you've read 24 of The Psalms and you're six chapters wiser than...well, I don't know, a door knob. For some of you, this is a major achievement and it will only get better. You'll discover a lot of great things about the mind and heart of God. Most importantly, you'll grow in your love for Jesus and your commitment as a disciple in the harvest. And next year, if you do this, you'll be surprised how much you've remembered and how much more you'll see as the Spirit weaves His Word into your life and heart as a disciple.

Exodus 12:14-13:16

Exodus 12:14-51

Vs. 14-20 Oddly enough, in Matthew, Jesus is entering the Passover week. He won't be cleaning out the leaven, but maybe cleansing the temple was dealing with a kind of "leaven" that had permeated the people and their minds. Jesus' ministry spanned four Passover feasts and culminates at a Passover. Anyway, back to the OT.

First, the Passover is the major identity symbol, festival, event of the nation of Israel from this point on. Sure, there were other things, the land, the temple, circumcision, the Sabbath; but this was now the beginning of their year and God built a memorial of redemption into the beginning of the year. What is interesting is that it points to their spiritual identity born out of redemption. Circumcision and the Sabbath show that the people are separated (holy) for God, but the Passover shows that they were saved by God.

From this point on God is making a nation and giving them ceremonial and cultural laws, many of which will only apply to Israel as God's nation. This will be important to remember, since some of these laws are very binding on them and very narrow. The laws are meant to highlight God's holiness, the reality of sin and their need for forgiveness/being close to God. For now, this is just to say that while the laws and rituals were binding on them, they are not binding on us. Yet there is something, some aspect of understanding God and His plan or His holiness, which we can learn from. The following law on leaven is a case in point.

Note that if anyone violated this law to have no leaven in the house or to eat what was leavened, they would be expelled from the nation. That's pretty hard. It applied to them and not to us; but the question is, "What was the point, and what can we understand about God?" Also, remember that no one had to remain in Israel. If they didn't like the Lord or His laws, they could have just left and moved back to Egypt or gone to Paris or someplace. But if they wanted to stay, they had to live there God's way.

In the NT, leaven is sometimes referred to as something bad, which slowly works its way into a church or teaching or a person and eventually dominates them. In one instance, leaven is used positively regarding the "invisible," growing kingdom of God in this world. So, this custom regarding leaven is an "object lesson" that God uses to teach us, and it would be woven into the culture and ceremony of Israel as a warning.

In the immediate context, the lack of leaven has something to do with their being ready for action, and putting aside comfort in order to obey God. Think about this, because I think this really applies to us as disciples. We are not often ready for action and it hurts us. We might enjoy "leaven" too much.

Because of haste, the women were to make bread without taking the time to knead in yeast. This fits with the people eating the lamb, while being fully clothed for travel, with their knapsacks on

their backs. The unleavened bread dough was to be taken with them, wrapped into the shawl on a woman's shoulder. The point of all of this was the real-time need for them to be ready to roll.

I've seen reenactments of Passover feasts, but I've never seen one where everyone was standing, eating in a state of readiness, clothed for action and ready for an emergency. I guess we missed that part. The next notable time you see the Passover in the OT is in another state of emergency as Joshua is ready to go into the land. The last two times you see the Passover in the OT (and two of the best), the southern kingdom is in desperate need of redemption. When Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples and redefined it to symbolize the new covenant in His blood, it was a night of emergency and readiness and redemption.

Redemption and readiness is the context of the Passover and that is all in the larger context of emergency. There is an emergency going on right now, bigger than AIDS, bigger than the climate, bigger than terrorism, bigger than getting "supersized" at McDonalds. God's people are to be ready, and for this time of redemption and grace, we need to be willing to do away with "leaven," to be willing to live wholly for God and even put away some comforts and exercise restraint, to be focused and ready to work in the harvest, reaching the lost, making disciples, who make disciples.

Vs. 21-28 How humbling and moving...*when I see the blood, I will pass over you* (12:13), and they worshiped and obeyed. We need to do likewise and to obey, meaning serving Christ in the harvest. Never be ashamed to say, "The blood of Christ." Explain it, but don't be ashamed to say it. On account of the blood of the Lamb of God, we are saved.

By ignoring God, the Egyptians, though not all the Egyptians, came under God's judgment. All humans are under His judgment. Later, when Israel is about to enter the land I'll mention something about God's right to judge and bring death. Now is probably a good time to think about this too. God is loving, yet thousands of children died on this night. The most natural place for a person to stand would be before God. That is what we were made for, a relationship with Him. We are separated from Him because of sin, and that separation is spiritual death. Death is separation. Because of sin and spiritual death, our bodies are frail and our spirits eventually separate from the body. This is physical death. When our spirit separates from the body we stand before God, entering His presence. That shouldn't be a bad thing, but it is if we are also separated from God spiritually. God has the right to call any of us into His presence at anytime. We should be ready. For those who know God, that is the beginning of blessing. For those who have ignored God, that is the beginning of judgment.

In my understanding here, the children who were under the age of accountability were brought into God's presence and blessed. Those firstborn who were older and could have followed and accepted the God of the Hebrews, but didn't, were called into God's presence and judged. Death, for now, is how we enter God's presence. It doesn't have to mean judgment and doesn't have to scare those redeemed by Christ. Without sin, there would be no separation. With Christ, there is no judgment and only blessing.

Vs. 29-39 Moses said Pharaoh would never see his face again. Here, either it was just a message sent, or Pharaoh, being in mourning, never looked up or unveiled his face.

A lot of the stuff they were given by the Egyptians was jewelry, used later, unfortunately, for the golden calf, and then to make the tabernacle and the priests' clothing. Remember, they were slaves with no credit cards or other resources.

Vs. 40-42 This is an historical summary, recapping and adding to some of what was said to Moses before the Passover. Notice that from the time Jacob stepped into Egypt until now was exactly 430 years to the day.

Vs. 43-51 Note that future Passovers could be celebrated by any foreigner with one stipulation: those males had to be circumcised. The male represents the head of his family, so the women and children were covered.

V. 46 No bone was to be broken on the Passover lamb/goat. *For these things took place that the Scripture might be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken."* (John 19:36)

Circumcision was the symbol of being separated to the promise to Abraham, of making a nation through which all the nations would be blessed. Again, for the heart of faith, circumcision was linked to the plan of redemption.

You've noted that many Egyptians moved out with Israel in the Exodus. It might have been that the men were required to be circumcised first. For an Egyptian to be circumcised would have been a big deal, hopefully symbolizing their faith in the redeeming God of the Hebrews. Again, no one was being forced to live in Israel and keep these laws. I hear the south of France is pretty.

Exodus 13:1-16

It could very well be that as the people were gathering for their Exodus out of Egypt, God had Moses give this information to the elders and people. Moses left Egypt with over a million people. The logistics of this would not have been easy. There must have been some structure for gathering and there must have been some responsibility by the elders and tribes/families to hang together and direct themselves.

V. 1 This law of the firstborn is mentioned here because the Passover lamb had to be a firstborn. God, again, as a good educator, is establishing some cultural and ceremonial things into the life of Israel that He will use later referring to Christ. Luke refers to this law when Joseph and Mary take Jesus into the temple and meet Simeon.

V. 8 mentions something we'll see a lot more of in Deuteronomy. The people were to teach these things to their children. Just like us, the kids would naturally say, "Hey, how come we have such strange customs?" The parents' answers would all be linked to redemption and God's mercy and power and love. In Deuteronomy, God says that parents should always be talking to their kids about the Lord and what He has done. It should be as natural as air, weaving it into all kinds of things. After quoting Deuteronomy 6:7, *You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise*, Howard Hendricks would say, "So, when else do you live?"

Vs. 9 & 16 were taken literally and perverted by Israel in the phylacteries. Properly understood, what God had done was, figuratively, to be on their hand, controlling all they did, and as frontlets on their eyes (like horses,) focusing their vision, all of this keeping their redemption and mission as a nation controlling their hearts and lives.

Again, I can still hear Hendricks' Philadelphia brogue after reading Deuteronomy 6:8-9, *You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.* "This was to control all that you did and all that you thought, the doorpost of your house being the most intimate areas of your life, to the city gates being the most social areas of your life."

God is a great teacher. As disciples in the harvest, investing in the lives of others, this teaching is definitely for us. God's love and redemption is to be the topic of our passion, controlling all we do, see, and think, from the intimacy of our homes...to our presence in our communities.

Tomorrow we'll be back to the real-time adventure. Pharaoh gets mad and the Lord intensifies his hardness which makes Pharaoh really, really irrational, with a cherry on top.

Matthew 20:29-21:22

Matthew 20:29-34

A couple of notes:

There were two cities of Jericho, an old one and a new one. To leave one Jericho was to enter the other. A road filled with beggars and merchants went between the two. Matthew says, “leaving,” and Luke says, “entering,” and this is the explanation. Also, Matthew says there were two beggars, but Luke only names the spokesman, Bartimaeus.

It is significant that they were told it was Jesus (Lk., *Jesus of Nazareth*) but they cry out *Son of David*. Remember, the widow in Sidon said the same to Jesus. Again, the emphasis here is on the “promised one,” signifying that these blind men saw something in the reports that those with sight were blind to.

Very cool that they kept crying out when everyone told them to shut up. They knew their chance was passing and they had to act now. What faith! I wish more lost people were this “blind.”

Just for trivia, the story of Zacchaeus takes place here in Luke 19. I wonder why Matthew, the former tax collector, left out the story of another tax collector coming to faith in Christ. I'll have to ask him when I see him.

Matthew 21:1-22

Vs. 1-11 This is a very sad portion of Scripture for me. Luke says Jesus weeps here. They are visited by their Maker, the Author of life, their King and their Redeemer, and even with all the religiousness of their response at His entrance, in a couple of days they will be yelling to crucify Him. The power of sin is beyond comprehension. They missed the day of their visitation.

V. 9 Many of the people in this crowd would be shouting for Jesus' crucifixion in a few days. Emotion doesn't mean knowing Christ.

V. 11 Notice that unlike the blind men, the crowds are calling Him Jesus, the prophet *from Nazareth of Galilee*. Remember, Nazareth meant branch. Those who were perceptive could have made the connection.

Vs. 12-13 Jesus cleansed the temple on the first Passover during His ministry (Jn. 2:13) and when confronted, foretold His death. This time, Jesus will die.

Vs. 14-16 So who do you really identify here as *the blind and the lame*?

Vs. 17-22 Obviously the lesson was not to show His disciples how to show off power. The tree symbolized “faithless” and “fruitless” Israel. The curse was made as they passed it, going into Jerusalem for the day, and they saw the effect when they were on their way back to Jerusalem the next morning. *At once* means that, though not cut down, it was totally withered when they returned. That didn't normally happen to a tree.

So, is the lesson here on the power of faith to make things wither or fly into the ocean, or the power of faith to bring life and fruitfulness? In another place Jesus uses this same illustration to tell about the power of prayer; but here, since the tree represents a faithless, fruitless generation, it might also signify that even a small amount of faith can bring life and the blessing of God.

On the other hand, Jesus has told His disciples that they will have authority on earth in the harvest. They will be able to bind and to loose, which probably involves judging and releasing. This authority would be dependent on their faith.

Psalm 25:16-22

Vs. 16-18 This is a continuation from yesterday. Notice that in the beauty of this expression, David really was afflicted and distressed. But this is what drove him to God and gave the beauty to his words. It is interesting to me that David also asked God to forgive his sin. Jesus often mentioned prayer and the need to be forgiven in the same teaching. *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.* (Mark 11:25)

Vs. 19-22 Notice the cries for help, the waiting on God, and the desire not to be put to shame. Amen!

Proverbs 6:12-15

Interesting here that God is warning us that “secret” communication is a sign of insincerity, dishonesty and a bad heart. Since reading this, I’m careful about what is *going on in my heart* when I “wink” at someone behind another person’s back. Is it for non-verbal affirmation in a tough situation, or am I being a dipstick? People who are not honest will eventually be dealt with by the Lord.

Chronology of the Flood

	Event	Date	Reference
Waiting in the ark 7 days (7:7, 10)	1. Noah entered the ark	Month 2, day 10	7:7-9
	2. 7 days later: Rain began falling	Month 2, day 17*	7:10-11
Water continued for 150 days (7:24)	3. 40 days later: Heavy rains stopped	Month 3, day 27	7:12
	4. 110 days later: Prevailing waters receded and the ark rested on an Ararat mountain	Month 7, day 17*	7:24; 8:4
Water receded in 150 days (8:3)	5. 74 days later: Tops of mountains visible	Month 10, day 1*	8:5
	6. 40 days later: Raven sent out, and a dove sent out and returned	Month 11, day 11*	8:6-9
	7. 7 days later: Dove sent out again and returned with a leaf	Month 11, day 18*	8:10
	8. 7 days later: Dove sent out a third time and did not return	Month 11, day 25	8:12
	9. 22 days later: Water receded	Month 12, day 17	8:3
Earth dried in 70 days	10. Noah saw dry land	Month 1, day 1*	8:13
	11. Land completely dry, and Noah exited the ark	Month 2, day 27*	8:14-19

377 days

1 year and 17 days
in the ark

*Dates specified in the Scriptures; other dates are implied.