

READING NOTES – APRIL

The One Year Bible (ESV)

APRIL 1

Deuteronomy 18-20

For many reasons, it looks like the reading today has drifted into randomness, but I think Moses and God are driving forward with a very strongly connected theme of keeping the land pure before the Lord and keeping its people strong in the Lord.

Deuteronomy 18

Vs. 1-8 So the king was to devote himself to the law under the guidance of the priests and Levites. Now God restates the provision for the Levites who live among the people, guiding the nation into the knowledge of God. The fact that this has been restated so often means that it was important, and that the people might have the tendency not to respect or value the importance of the Levites living among them. To see this importance read Deuteronomy 33:10 and 2 Chronicles 17:8-9. The people would desperately need the Levites.

V. 3 What were the *cheeks*, the rump? And I guess the *stomach* means the abdominal muscles. If not, I wouldn't have fought you for it at the table.

Vs. 9-14 It would be the Levites, by teaching and helping the people, who would keep the law before them. The Levites would supply guidance from God by teaching the people His Word. In contrast to the Levites, false prophets would rise among the people. That was a given.

V. 10 Notice that Moloch worship, the sacrificing of unwanted babies, was mentioned first. This worship took care of a social/personal need that came as a result of Baal worship.

V. 14 The next mention also took care of a social/personal need: ways to contact the spirit world to get guidance. God, through the Word and the ministry of the Levites, would supply that guidance.

Vs. 15-22 God said He would bring another prophet to guide Israel. Now God brought lots of prophets to Israel and Israel had lots of leaders and prophets; but this guy must have had a special meaning in the minds of the Jews, a meaning they understood even back then. Later, the Jews would come to John the Baptist and ask him if he was "the prophet." Jesus was that prophet. It apparently meant one man, like Moses, who would lead the entire nation before God. So, from this text you understand that God will send prophets to guide the people. From later texts (Isaiah, for example) and the NT, we understand that God is promising to one day send "The Prophet." And we know Him.

In the context of this message to Israel, Moses is telling the people that even in hard times and chaos, He will provide a leader for them.

Notice that they are told two ways to understand if a prophet were true. If he spoke for other gods, he was false. And if he made a prediction that didn't come true, he was false. Also remember, in really tough cases, they had local Levites and they could always go to the priest at the tabernacle who had the Urim and Thummim.

Deuteronomy 19

Vs. 1-13 Just as idolatry would contaminate the land and defile the nation, so would the shedding of blood of the innocent. Again, King Manasseh led his people to irrevocable judgment, first spiritually, and then by the guilt of all the innocent blood he spilled. Oddly enough, he reigned longer than any other king.

Along with the cities of the Levites, Moses had already given them three special levitical cities of refuge in Deuteronomy 4:41. Those cities were on the east side of the Jordan in the inheritance of Reuben, Gad and ½ Manasseh. These cities of refuge would be on the west side of the Jordan and they will be named in Joshua 20. Also, just by the fact these cities were present, they were a visual reminder that the people were to make sure the innocent were protected and the laws were followed. In all questions like these, the people were to go to the Levites to protect the land and their blessing before God.

V. 8 Notice that Moses uses the words here that Jabez will later use in his prayer in 1 Chronicles 4:10. I think that Jabez was in this assembly listening to Moses.

V. 9 Notice too, that IF the people really obeyed, and God was able to give them all the land He had promised to Abraham, God would have added three more cities. This never happened.

Vs. 14-21 The other way to contaminate the land and to defile the nation was through injustice and theft. Notice that the first four of the Ten Commandments are in respect to living with God. The next six commandments are how to honor God in living with one another. Later in Israel's history, God and the prophets will lament that most of the people only dealt unjustly with one another.

Notice that the priests got involved in this too. Cases would go to the local officials. If those lying were too good and they didn't have enough proof of a thing, they went to the tabernacle. The high priest had the means for determining the truth of a matter. Too bad they really didn't use the Urim and Thummim. It was a long way to Jerusalem, and why bother when you could flip a coin or throw some sticks on the ground to get guidance?

Vs. 19-21 If Israel had done this, the report would have gone out and the good people would have had confidence in the Lord. The bad ones would have feared to do anything to their neighbor. It would have been a public testimony that would have kept the people and the land pure.

Deuteronomy 20

Vs. 1-9 God had made provisions to keep them secure in the land. Those same provisions would guide them in warfare.

V. 1 Notice that their confidence was in remembering how God had saved them and brought them out of Egypt.

Vs. 2-4 The priest was to be the primary motivator for the people. He would direct their thoughts to God.

Vs. 5-9 In looking at this list of who was to be excluded from battle, it sort of boils down to all those who were not fully focused and confident in the Lord. The issue was faith and dependence, not courage. Also, those who would breed fear or bitterness were not necessary. This was the lesson they had learned of how a few could have an adverse effect on the nation.

Vs. 10-15 Notice that these verses have to do with nations outside of Canaan. This would be in the far future for Israel. David received tribute from some nations and had some control of Damascus. Had the nation actually obeyed God, they would have had the borders promised to Abraham.

It seems to me here, too, the main point isn't war, but compassion. However, if I were a non-Israelite male and knew our army had been defeated on the field and now Israel was marching on our city and I'd be fighting Israel and knew about these laws, I'd relocate. For a city that decided to fight Israel, everyone was spared, but the guys. For a surrendering city, everyone was spared and was put to forced labor in Israel. This is what will happen to the Gibeonites after they trick

Joshua, and it works out well for them. They worked with the Levites, close to the tabernacle, and they all became believing.

Vs. 16-18 Just for perspective on the law being given here, it's important to notice that the only land Israel was told to war against was Canaan, and there they were to take no prisoners for the reason mentioned in v. 18. This was God's punishment on the sickness of the people who lived there. In order for Israel to become involved in any other conflict, the other cities and nations were the aggressors who attacked first. Most often, after Israel was attacked and defeated the army of the aggressor on the field, they went after the city the army came from.

Except for God's judgment on Canaan, Israel was never told to fight against anyone who didn't attack them first. Sihon and Og and the Midianites were examples of people who Israel tried to avoid and had no quarrel with, but who attacked Israel first. These lands became the possession of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh.

Vs. 19-20 I guess this fits into the compassion scenario. No wanton destruction was allowed. I think of Levi and Simeon when they destroyed Shechem. Even at the end of his life, Jacob condemned their uncontrolled, arrogant wrath and cruelty in wantonly laming the livestock in that city.

Luke 9:28-50

Vs. 28-36 Mark mentions that it was six days after Peter's confession of Jesus' identity (and Jesus' rebuke of Peter) when Jesus invites the guys up the mountain to pray. Then according to Luke, it was eight days after those events, while Jesus was praying that He was transfigured. Matthew and Mark mention this event too, but Luke is the only one who says what Jesus was doing when He began to glow. Kind of cool, huh?

Vs. 32 Apparently this must have happened near the evening, which would account for Peter and the boys being so tired.

As Jesus had predicted in 9:27, some standing there would see the glory of the Son before death.

Vs. 37-42 On the next day when they came down from the mountain, Luke mentions the story of healing the man's son. Now we see divine glory contrasted with human unbelief.

Vs. 43-45 In contrast to the glory of the transfiguration and to the majesty of Christ shown in healing the boy, Jesus strongly reminds them that things are not going to go the way the disciples think. This Son of Man would be rejected and killed. God's plan of redemption would lead Jesus to "defeat" and "disappointment," at least from the standpoint of the disciples' expectations. Isn't it funny that even the best of us, serving God in the harvest, still battle with our expectations in contrast to God's actions? We learn, too slowly, that He is wise beyond all of our thinking and does what is best for His purpose and plan. We simply follow, sometimes with no clue of what He's doing.

Vs. 46-48 As Jesus taught them of His coming death and resurrection, the only thing the disciples could grasp was the coming of the kingdom. They sort of had the right idea, but their motivation and expectations were all wrong. They would sit on thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel, but greatness was a matter of humility and service. Jesus used the example of a child and then said that the greatest was the one who was least among them.

Vs. 49-50 When Jesus said, *among you* (v. 48), John thought about someone they had seen when they went out preaching. They rebuked this other disciple because he was not "among" them. Jesus cautioned them. In the future they would be happy to see many new disciples of Jesus, even some who ate pork chops.

Psalm 73

This is an amazing psalm. Take your time here.

Vs. 1-3 Notice the conflict the writer has in all of what he humanly sees, feels and understands. Notice what it was doing to him personally, emotionally and spiritually.

Vs. 4-12 This block of verses is held together by the two “therefores.” Verse 6 talks about why they are so proud. Verse 10 talks about why people follow them. Apparently God allows them to prosper to test the hearts of men.

Vs. 13-15 This was the test to Asaph. What do you do when experience seems to contradict the Word of God?

Vs. 16-17 It is the seeking of God in this kind of situation, going to God, going to the Word, that saves the day. Notice that it wasn't until he went into the presence of God, in that quietness and closure, that he gained perspective on all of life and on all of the world. As disciples, this time and closure alone with the Lord is absolutely vital for us. We need to get alone with Him and the Word, and in that quietness we need time to pray and listen. Multitasking is not a spiritual discipline or virtue.

Vs. 18-22 It seems that Asaph is reflecting. Now that he knows the truth, he looks back at himself and how he almost gave up.

Vs. 23-24 But God continually held him even in this trial.

Vs. 25-26 are worth memorizing.

Vs. 27-28 Verse 27 is how he understands God will deal with the wicked. Notice that they are far from God. The contrast is in v. 28, and you are doing it now by drawing close to God in His Word. Even with His Spirit within us, finding His closeness in His Word is the only thing that truly helps and shields us from despair in this world.

Proverbs 12:10

Sounds like what we were talking about at the end of Deuteronomy 20, above. And I'll bet that they were even gentle with vegetation, for as J.R.R.R.R.R.R. Tolkien points out that only an orc wantonly cuts down trees.

APRIL 2

This is just a word of encouragement to keep up in reading your one-year Bible. It is only April in the States and we are already into the dog-days of summer. It's hot and the air is full of pollen; my scale is being very peevish and making things up. I feel like I missed winter, skipped spring and now I'm in summer. Thankfully the Lord remains the same and in spite of how I feel, I feel better when I am sitting quietly with Him, reading His Word and praying every day. Don't worry about the Reading Notes. They are not the Word. And, they will be online until the web is shut down and they are for you to use, or not use, as you please. Keeping up with God in His Word is your life and health as a disciple every day.

Deuteronomy 21-22

Some of the laws given from here on seem random and unconnected. They are interesting as they stand, especially when you think that God thought them up. The laws show something about Him and they make you think of what the point was behind these laws. Even if the laws were only binding for Israel, and then, only for Israel as they were ruled by God (for example, under Roman law the Jews couldn't kill people for adultery or not keeping the Sabbath), there was still a lesson involved in God thinking up that particular law. With some of these laws it could also be there is something going on culturally that we don't get because we weren't there.

One thing you notice is that every now and then, there is a purpose statement given which explains the reason behind the law, or maybe it is a block summary for many laws that have been given to that point. In our reading today, the end of Deuteronomy 21:23 is one of those purpose statements. This is why v. 23 was chosen as a good place for a chapter division. These laws gave order and a sense of respectability and propriety to the customs of the people so that they wouldn't defile the land. (If God were making a nation today; for example, I don't think He would allow people to leave their shopping carts out in the middle of the parking lot, that being a sign of the decay of Western civilization.) They emphasize the reality that the nation is set apart wholly and holy for God.

There might be a connection between the order of these laws and it's fun to try to find it, but even that can be overdone. We'll just have to ask God in heaven why they were given like this. I have a feeling that when we get to heaven we won't care anymore. It is important to remember that these laws were not meant to answer every question and contingency, but rather to give a general rule or judgment from which other rules and judgments could be made for situations not mentioned.

Deuteronomy 21

Vs. 1-9 This was in the days before "CSI" and "Bones." Notice v. 9. The issue of *innocent blood* was/is no small thing with God. Notice that the priest was involved in this, and since he had the Urim and Thummim, the issue probably could have been solved. We have no proof that this was ever done in Israel. Once we are in Judges we'll see why.

Vs. 10-14 This was definitely a different time and a different culture. Note that this was future oriented, because none of the women in Canaan would have qualified for this. This woman did not have to be a virgin. The occasion would have been after the conquest of Canaan. Some nation would have picked a fight with Israel, been defeated by Israel on the field, and then Israel would have pursued them to their land and taken their cities.

Even though this might seem kind of barbaric to our cultured sensitivities, there was order here. There was no raping and pillaging. This event was totally legislated. They had to be married, man and wife, before anything could happen. The act of the woman having to shave her head and trim her nails sounds similar to the Levites having to cut their hair almost as if to enter their new life/service as newborns. In a way, this was also a "cooling" down period for the man. It could be in those 30 days he decided it was a bad idea. Notice also, there was no sexual relationship until the month had passed. The man went into her as her husband, meaning the social customs had been acknowledged and fulfilled and they were legally married.

There is a sense, too, in which there is mercy in this custom. Worse things could happen to a person, and actually, this could be a very good thing. Becoming a part of Israel worked out pretty good for Ruth. But Ruth wasn't taken in war. She came with Naomi. However, there is another example of a foreign woman who was taken in war and married one of the soldiers, Rahab, from Jericho. It turned out pretty good for Rahab. Her husband Salmon was from a leading family of Judah, and some think Salmon might have been one of the spies who went into Jericho. Rahab gets some good press in Hebrews and in James, but her biggest claim to fame, along with Ruth, is in Matthew 1:5. Rahab shouldn't have been saved because she was a Canaanite, but in God's mercy she was not only saved and not only married a cool dude, but she became the great^{29th power} grandmother of Jesus.

Vs. 15-17 It is interesting here that God never commanded that a man should only have one wife. God could have nipped it in the bud right here. The model of creation is one man and one woman, and the best marriages you find in the Bible are just one man and one woman. When God says, "the two become one flesh," it's apparent that that is His model. Why He even allowed

polygamy to exist is beyond me. He not only allowed it, but when David messed up, God implied that He would have given David more wives (2 Sam. 12:8). It's clear that monogamy was the rule and having more than one wife was the exception. By Roman times the Jews were totally monogamous, and Christianity never made a provision for more than one wife.

V. 17 It is also interesting that God says the firstborn son is the *firstfruits of his* (the man's) *strength*.

Even though God chose to go around this with Esau and Jacob and with Manasseh and Ephraim, for society, this rule kept things fair and in order.

Vs. 18-21 The Swedes (no spankings) would have freaked out about this one. Obviously this is referring to an older teen. The main issue was his rebelliousness, which probably would have shown up in his gluttony and drunkenness. Also, this was done in court; therefore, the elders and the gates of the city are mentioned. It was a very public matter. This wasn't shooting him behind the barn.

So what about the rebellious daughter? Probably the same held true.

Notice the purpose statement at the end of v. 21. Later we will see what happens when there is no punishment or enforcement for these violations. The people became disheartened by the lawlessness and gave up following God's order. A case in point is in 1 Samuel 2:22-36. Because Eli didn't have his sons put to death, as they deserved, people gave up on worshiping or following God.

Vs. 22-23 Death by hanging was usually for public warning. Joshua will do this to the kings of Canaan, to alert the other kings in Canaan and to encourage Israel that God is with them. Also, David will do this to allay a curse brought on Israel for King Saul's extermination of the Gibeonites. In that case the bodies were a public demonstration of payment and restitution for violating a covenant. The most notable case of hanging is referred to by Paul in Galatians 3:13, where he is talking about Jesus being cursed by God for us. God hung His own son as a testimony that payment for sin was made for mankind.

Deuteronomy 22

Vs. 1-4 This is not for the animal; it is for the neighbor. I did this today walking. This huge dog ran up to me. Thankfully I was wearing so many layers that the dog couldn't smell the fear that I'm sure was pouring out of me. But it was just a big fierce looking, slobbery, shedding, loving dog. Yet it kept following me, so I was in a pickle. If I had kept walking, it would have followed me over a busy road. And besides, Rover didn't look intelligent enough to find its way home. So there I stood, until about five minutes later someone missed him. A woman, about half the size of the dog, walked out on the sidewalk, down the block, in her pjs. The last I saw, the dog ran down to her, (picked her up in his mouth and took her into the house, for breakfast, I think. JUST KIDDING!!!!) Anyway, I guess I fulfilled this command today. How funny.

V. 5 This is not Halloween. This is real cross-dressing. God doesn't think it's funny. He considers it to be perverted sexuality.

Vs. 6-7 I guess you could call this a law of propriety or forced wisdom. For the sake of preserving God's blessing, the people were to curb their desires, act wisely, and to think of the future of the land. Again, from a little case like this, you could probably apply the principle to many other situations where similar wisdom and self control were necessary.

V. 8 Even accidental death because of carelessness was to be avoided by acting wisely. I'm sure this was applied to a lot of other situations, like open wells, for example.

Vs. 9-11 Now these might have had some tie to the culture and to superstition. Even if this was just something that had to do with order and keeping things separate, it would have created a mindset for doing things orderly.

Notice v. 10. Paul quotes this in 2 Corinthians 6:14, *Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?*

V. 12 refers to the tassels God commanded to be sown on all of their garments in Numbers 15:37-41. The reason was to make them remember always to obey the Lord. How could you forget what those conspicuous little, dangly things meant? They weren't jewelry. They also would have started some conversations with foreigners.

Vs. 13-21 Note that this law is to keep a man from unjustly getting rid of his wife by insisting she was sexually impure before they were married. This law is a protection for the woman. That is the focus. If the husband was dishonest, he was trying to get back the 50 shekels of silver he gave for the bride price.

Premarital sexual purity was to have been the expected norm. Parents were to testify to their daughter's virginity, and a man expected to marry a virgin. The proof the parents were to bring was the sheet from the wedding night that showed that as the girl had intercourse for the first time, she bled.

On the other hand, if the girl had been a prostitute or the girl and her parents had used prostitution to increase the family income, or if she/they had been involved in Baal worship, these would have all had serious consequences.

The only way the father could have gotten 50 shekels of silver for his daughter in marriage was that she was a virgin. I'm sure the finances of this tempted people to lie. I'm sure there were allowances and the appropriate disclosures for accidents or even rape. The important thing is that the father couldn't say she was a virgin if she wasn't.

Looking at the punishment for the man or the woman, this law would have made premarital sex a very serious and dangerous event. In v. 28, rape meant forced marriage without provision for divorce. In Exodus 22:16 there is a variation of this for seduction, where the girl's father could refuse to have his daughter marry that man. The end result was that premarital sex was not acceptable.

Vs. 22-29 From all of these laws you understand that adultery was punishable by death. An engaged woman was legally married, just not yet married.

V. 24 Note that a woman had to cry for help. The guy couldn't say, "If you yell, I'll kill you," because if she didn't yell she'd die anyway.

All of these laws set a standard by which other situations could be evaluated. In our day, you know that if adultery meant death, fewer people would be willing to do it and it wouldn't be glamorized on TV. And if premarital sex meant a forced marriage, I wonder if people wouldn't take things more seriously. We understand what is allowed in society, and we know that God forgives and gives grace and love; but still, here we see what God's opinion on all this stuff is. And actually, it comes out of His love for us, wanting the best for us.

V. 30 God is simply saying that a son shouldn't marry his stepmother, even if his father dies. That is not only propriety, but it is God's command. Interestingly enough, Paul mentions that someone in Corinth was doing this very thing and that the church approved of it. O Weh!

Luke 9:51-10:12

Luke 9:51-62

Vs. 51-56 This wasn't Jesus' final trip to Jerusalem, but the reality of His death and the rejection of His offer to the Jews added more definition to His training of the Twelve and to His agenda. Actually, Jesus was going up to the Feast of the Tabernacles in John 7; in fact, John 7:2-10 would come right before this.

Before, Jesus had been willing to spend time with the Samaritans. Now, He was given direction via the Spirit, to get to Jerusalem for this very important showdown.

V. 54 It appears that only this Samaritan village reacted this way. This is one time we see James and John earning the nickname Jesus gave them, *The Sons of Thunder*. There were probably lots of other examples. Notice that when Jesus rebuked them, He turned from them. Jesus did this with Peter also. The next village responded better.

Vs. 57-62 How do you categorize these three men? Try to put these objections in your own words.

Vs. 57-58 This was a scribe, a Pharisee who was well studied in the law. These were usually rich, well-to-do people. Apparently the lack of security and proper accommodations were too much for him.

Vs. 59-60 Notice that Jesus initiated this. He must have noticed one disciple who had potential and had gone up to him and told him to follow Him. Particularly in this case where Jesus selected the man, the man's love for father and family won the day. Jesus said that a person had to "hate father and mother" to follow Him. Notice too that Jesus wasn't put off by this man's objection, but commanded him to *go and proclaim the kingdom of God*.

Vs. 61-62 This guy declared his willingness but wasn't ready. So why did he say this? For others? To be recognized by Jesus? Interestingly, Jesus says that the person would not be *fit*. In the Greek that word actually can mean, "to fit" to something. This kind of commitment doesn't fit to the life and call of a disciple in the harvest.

(Just for your information, you can insert John 7-10:21 here.)

Luke 10:1-12

After the massive rejection Jesus received in John 7-10:21, He was stepping up His discipleship training and also preparing His itinerary for visiting towns on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. If they found towns that were open, Jesus would visit the town, if not, too bad. Much of this looks similar to sending out the Twelve. Jesus still had a lot of disciples. One interesting thought is that the guy who took Judas' place, to fill up the "twelve" in Acts, must have been part of the 70.

Psalm 74

The family of Asaph were singers in the temple from the reign of David to the restoration of the temple after the exile under Ezra and Nehemiah. It looks like this writer wrote after the people returned to Israel following the Babylonian exile.

Vs. 1-3 You notice the appeal for God to remember His promises. Even after Israel returned under Zerubbabel, the people experienced great opposition in rebuilding the temple. It seems that the psalmist is lamenting this.

Vs. 4-8 It seems that the writer is asking God to look at the wanton devastation and to remember their acts of violence.

Vs. 9-11 This is interesting that they are asking for God to reveal His hand by giving them a prophet. God would send both Haggai and Zechariah to motivate the people to continue building the temple. I wonder if this is the outpouring of heart, repeated and sung in their worship that motivated God to send those two men.

Vs. 12-17 This declaration of God as creator is the source of their faith and strength. They might not see God's hand in what was happening in Jerusalem, but in all of the created world they could still draw strength from the fact that God was both there, and able to help them.

Vs. 18-21 God is asked to remember Israel, the dove. And He is asked to remember the covenant with Abraham and the poor and needy.

Vs. 22-23 What cause should God defend? I would think it might be more than Israel. His cause is the redemption of mankind.

Proverbs 12:11

What if *works his land* simply meant "worthwhile, God-honoring pursuits?" What would happen here if *bread* meant "nourishment for your spiritual life as a disciple?" Since most people are not farmers, some thinking about the sense of the proverb helps. Also, we know from Deuteronomy that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word which proceeds from the mouth of God. The abundance of our hearts as followers of Christ comes from our diligence in working the soil of our hearts with His Word.

APRIL 3

Deuteronomy 23-25

Deuteronomy 23

V. 1 Somehow this just seems like a discouraging way to begin today's reading. ☺ Just to put this into perspective, it could very well have been that both Daniel and Nehemiah were eunuchs. I know. I hate that thought too. These were two men who are heroes in God's eyes; and Daniel, if you look at what God says about him, is in God's list of top men of all time.

Vs. 2-6 This is a hard command to understand, but linked to v. 3 it makes sense. *A forbidden union* was something abhorrent, like incest. These people could live in Israel, but were not welcome in the courts of the tabernacle or temple until the 10th generation of living in Israel, following Yahweh. In v. 3 you have two children and peoples conceived out of incest, Ammon and Moab, the sons of Lot and his daughters. For these two people, notice, even *to the 10th generation* they can't enter the assembly of the Lord. Now, this would assume that someone from these peoples wanted to give up their gods, join themselves to Israel and worship the only God, Yahweh. I don't know how often that happened. Usually, Israel was the one defecting.

To balance this out, Rahab and Ruth are both examples that God showed mercy and grace to any individuals who came to Him. Rahab was from Canaan and Ruth was from Moab, and both became part of the community of faith. Both are related to Jesus.

Vs. 4-5 Notice the bad press that Balaam gets.

Vs. 7-8 The Edomites are from Esau, the brother of Jacob, son of Isaac and the grandson of Abe. The Edomites eventually became absorbed into Israel. The Egyptians have a special place and it is foretold that in the Millennial Kingdom, they will serve and worship Jesus (Isaiah 19:19-25).

Vs. 9-14 The camp was to remain couth during war because God was among them. Living in the presence of God was something they were to remember at all times.

Vs. 15-16 I take this to mean a slave escaped from another country. This happened to David in 1 Samuel 30:15 with an Egyptian slave they found. Israel was to be a safe haven.

Vs. 17-18 The ends do not justify the means. This covered every kind of prostitution, religious and non-religious. The word for a male prostitute (usually Baal worship) was "dog." Money earned from sinfulness was not to justify the existence of sin, even if the money was given to the tabernacle. I don't think casinos will fare well in the Millennium, even if people say they do bring in revenue.

Vs. 19-20 This may have had something to do with the poor, but it was a general rule also. They couldn't exact interest from their own people. In our movies the poor are always preyed upon by loan sharks. Not so in Israel.

Vs. 21-23 Notice that v. 21 is used by Jesus as He taught His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5:33. It was not a sin not to make a vow. Jesus said not to do it.

Vs. 24-25 was a provision of mercy for the needy. These were crops that were planted in abundance and this provision was for those who needed daily bread. Just think, this is how the entire nation would have been during the Sabbatical year, that is, every seventh year. I'm sure if you were not destitute and had a morning ritual of going into your neighbor's yard and helping yourself to a handful of his raspberries, the city fathers would have had words with you.

Deuteronomy 24

Vs. 1-4 Divorce is also mentioned in the Sermon on the Mount. Although this is where we get some teaching on divorce and remarriage in the Scriptures, the force of this is directed to prohibit a man from remarrying a wife due to sexual defilement. This is a law of propriety and order, for the people of Israel. God was making the point that if a man divorced his wife, he defiled himself and her in the process. Today, it would be looked on as a good thing if a divorced couple, even after years and marriages between, came to Christ and were able to renew their vows in marriage.

V. 5 The marriage year is a great thing. Can you imagine this? The Lord gave Laura and me two of these.

From v. 6 to the end of this chapter, everything seems to fit together in terms of poorness and payments and pledges made for loans.

Vs. 6-7 You couldn't take a person's means of survival as collateral or payment for a loan. And you couldn't sell him to get what you wanted from him.

Vs. 8-9 It could have been that people thought of using leprous people to work or requiring some labor from them for mercy shown to them in providing food.

Vs. 10-13 You couldn't take a poor man's cloak to make sure he paid you back. The poor only had the clothes on their backs and they needed the cloak as a blanket at night. By the way, this helps define a poor person in the OT. You were not poor if you had more than one change of clothes.

Vs. 14-15 Another defining feature of the poor was that they had no money and no food, but for that day. So they needed to be paid that day.

V. 16 In this context this command could have something to do with the debt or crime of a young adult. You couldn't make the parents responsible for the crime.

Vs. 17-18 These verses restate what has been said in the context of poorness; and they state the underlying heart of mercy. The people were always to remember that they were slaves and were redeemed by the mercy of God.

Vs. 19-22 I wonder how often people in Israel actually did this. Notice that God's sovereignty also played a role in this. If they "forgot" a *sheaf* in the field they couldn't go back. Sometimes God makes you forget.

V. 22 is the key to them having a heart of mercy. If you think about it, this is also the reason we are to have a heart of mercy to reach out to the lost. We too were lost and without hope. By God's mercy we have received grace and forgiveness and life. Now, it is simply right that we share this with others who are lost. Ironically, the giving back we do is following our Lord into the harvest to bear fruit for the Father.

Deuteronomy 25

I think this entire chapter is held together by the same thoughts of mercy, justice, and compassion.

Vs. 1-3 Maybe the dispute had something to do with an issue of cheating a widow or the poor. The guilty person was to be punished, but with mercy, so as not to be *degraded* in the sight of others.

V. 4 Even a beast of burden was to be honored as it served. How much more so a man. This verse is applied to people in full-time ministry in the NT by Paul in 1 Corinthians 9 and 1 Timothy 5. Paul says that the application was always for how one treated their servants.

Vs. 5-10 This too was an act of mercy. This figures into the story of Boaz and Ruth. For a modern-day version of this practice, check out the Hallmark film, "Loving Leah." It's Hallmark and it's a "chick flick," but it is very good.

Vs. 11-12 What I get from this is the same as in vs. 1-3. Even in defeating a person in a fight, you were to do it respectfully. This is the only time in the Bible a person was to be "maimed" for an action. If a woman needed to defend her man, she was to do it with a stick or a frying pan.

Vs. 13-16 Notice how this is linked to them staying in the land they were about to enter. God hates dishonesty, and dishonesty damages us and brings God's punishment upon us. This trick was also played on the poor. In a way, it was like making the poor pay more at convenience stores, because they didn't have the means or the money to get to a real store. Like loan sharking, it was another way to prey on the poor.

Vs. 17-19 I think the point here was that in this fight, Amalek played dirty by attacking the poor and the weak and the defenseless. God isn't into terrorism. Attacking someone who is defenseless shows a lack of fear of God. It took hundreds of years (700?) before this took place. And as suggested in the cases of Rahab and Ruth, if an individual Amalekite would have turned to Yahweh in faith, he or she would have been welcomed and saved.

Luke 10:13-37

It seems like a good place to mention that some of what Jesus said, He said on more than one occasion. Like any good traveling preacher, He used the same messages and illustrations and used them in different situations giving the message or application a slightly different twist from the last time He used it. In this case, if you do a search on *Chorazin*, you'll see Jesus pronouncing this punishment on two different occasions.

Vs. 13-16 These verses continue the "shaking the dust" discourse from yesterday. Jesus denounced these cities on a couple different occasions. Matthew 11:20 gives you the reason Jesus used these examples. Notice the warning and the truth of v. 16. That gives some perspective to our work in the harvest. Ultimately it is not our message or delivery that gets rejected. He speaks through us.

Vs. 17-24 When these guys returned they were very joyful and motivated.

V. 18 Satan hasn't gotten tossed out of heaven yet. That will come during the Tribulation. Satan's power was challenged and broken. The same must have taken place at the resurrection and coming of the Spirit to birth the church.

V. 19 The authority Jesus gave them was very verbal and literal. If you don't hear Him telling you that you have this power, don't test God by thinking you have it.

V. 20 This is our true source of joy in any and every situation in this life, on this earth, in this harvest.

Vs. 21-22 Notice Luke's mention of the Holy Spirit and joy. You can tell Luke was a missionary and rubbed shoulders with Paul. This also is an assurance we have, working in the harvest. Those who are open, hear. The Son reveals the Father, not us. I think it is amazing how God makes sure He can be found by a searching heart regardless of education, status or privilege. In fact, those *who think* they are wise and understanding can't find Him.

Vs. 23-24 This was said privately to the disciples, probably the Twelve. Jesus was repeating this to the Twelve, having said it to them before in Matthew 13:16 when He told them the reason for the parables.

Vs. 25-37 You know this story and it is only recorded in Luke.

Vs. 25-28 The entire context of the story is that this lawyer/scribe wanted to put Jesus on the spot. Jesus answered the question by asking the scribe a question. The very intelligent scribe was only too happy to show everyone how smart he was. It seems that when Jesus told him to go and do what he had just said, the scribe felt he needed to get Jesus to talk more to get Him to say something wrong. He might have felt he needed to show the people that Jesus was a fraud and that he was smarter than Jesus. So far it hadn't worked well.

Vs. 29-37 Since we have read Leviticus and know what God has said about touching dead things, we can understand some of what is going on in this story. Just remember though, this guy was still alive, and if a priest or Levite became unclean, there were ways of being restored.

V. 31 I think it is funny that Jesus says, *Now by chance....*

Both the priest and the Levite failed to show compassion to their fellow Jew.

Vs. 33-34 Look at how Jesus described this lavish attention and compassion.

V. 35 A denarius was a day's pay at minimum wage. What if every state had a minimum wage of \$10.00 per hour? For an eight-hour day that would be \$80.00. This guy left twice that, so about \$160.00. Now that might not seem like much money in the West, but in some countries, \$160.00 will feed someone for months. The point is that this despised Samaritan was very generous.

Vs. 36-37 This story has a special meaning for us as disciples. We are left here to go back into the harvest and show compassion on those who are still lost as we once were. It is amazing to me that people who are saved can forget the mercy they were shown.

As disciples, we can't afford to ever forget the grace, by which we are saved. His love and grace is the only thing we need to be known by. His Word and our following in the harvest keep this fresh for us.

Psalm 75

V. 1 In keeping with the story of the Good Samaritan and our need to go back into the harvest and show the mercy shown to us, look at this verse. We are to recount the wonderful deeds of the Lord. And those deeds begin with the love and grace we were shown in Jesus. He died for us while we were still enemies.

Vs. 2-8 It is out of mercy and love that people need to be warned that judgment will come, but we have something to offer that allows people to escape that judgment.

Vs. 9-10 God's love and His Savior are hidden from the wise and understanding. The horns are a symbol for pride and power. And for the righteous, *Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.* (1 Cor. 1:31)

Proverbs 12:12-14

V. 12 Fruit comes from a heart set on God, looking to Him. The wicked emulate the wicked and covet.

V. 13 Living free of trouble comes from a heart secure in God. The wicked are enamored with their word skills.

V. 14 What we do returns to us, so we seek that which satisfies our Lord. You reap what you sow.

APRIL 4

Deuteronomy 26-27

Deuteronomy 26

What we have in this chapter is something totally unique. The only thing I can think of like this for the believer is baptism. Because this was also to have been accompanied by an outpouring of rejoicing and generosity, in principle, it sort of trumps baptism. The real question is: Did anyone ever do this?

Vs. 1-4 The first event seems to be something everyone in Israel was supposed to do as an individual and not as part of a regular feast. This could be what is mentioned in Deuteronomy 14:22-29, but this seems like a special one-time event. At the time of their very first harvest, each person was supposed to bring a basket of the firstfruits of their harvest to the tabernacle.

V. 3 Then they made this declaration. Notice that it is a reference to the promise to Abraham. Again, people were saved by faith in God's promise to Abraham, not adherence to the law.

V. 4 Then the priest responded by taking those very firstfruits and setting them before the altar.

Vs. 5-11 Then each person was supposed to make this declaration. I have been at baptisms where nothing this heartfelt was said. This is amazing. This is the story of their deliverance attached to the promise to the patriarchs and concluded by worshiping God and celebrating with those you brought with you from your home town.

Vs. 12-15 This also looks similar to Deuteronomy 14:22-29, but here there is also a declaration. This pronouncement is impressive if a person really loved God and obeyed. Look at the different things this person said to God. I wonder if anyone ever did this. If I thought of anyone who might have done this, it would be Boaz in the book of Ruth.

Vs. 16-19 I am so impressed when I read this. I think that if they had only grasped the wonder of their salvation and God's grace and love to them, they would have been an incredible people. And then I think that I wish more churches and disciples could grasp this too. What a difference it would make serving with one mind, side by side in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Deuteronomy 27

Vs. 1-8 In preparation for going into the land and the initial dedication of the people before God, God commanded that the entire book of Deuteronomy would be written on *stones*. Possibly all five books, but certainly Deuteronomy would have been written out. *Stones* probably gives the

wrong impression. It is possible that they built something like Stonehenge in England. The Egyptians and other cultures did this. The technique was known and there was no lack of stone and plaster. It might have looked like a long wall or it might have been a circular series of blocks, but it would have been like a memorial monument. Remember, the fathers of these people built Egyptian cities, pyramids and monuments. They had the skill and know-how. This would be a remembrance of the people "becoming" God's people. Interestingly enough, it would be built on the mountain of the curse, as seen below.

The fact that they were to build an altar suggests that this would be a kind of memorial park, possibly with the altar in the middle and the stones surrounding it.

Vs. 9-10 This was a moment of recommitment to the Lord.

Vs. 11-26 This ceremony was commanded earlier, but restated here with more clarity. It would take place in Joshua 8:33. With the stones and the altar and 2 million people standing on opposite sides of the valley, this must have been an awesome and memorable event. Here we get just a summary of what the curses would sound like. I get the feeling that chapter 28 gives a fuller idea of what the blessings and curses might have actually been.

The examples that Moses gives here are taken from Leviticus and Numbers, giving me the idea that this ceremony would have taken hours to perform, and it took hours of preparation by the priests to locate all the commands and make them blessings and curses.

Although this is just a "taste" of what would be said at the ceremony, it is obvious that the Spirit made sure these examples were given. What kinds of things come to your mind regarding God when you read these curses? I'm glad we don't have an equivalent of this in knowing Christ. The curse is gone and the Spirit dwells within.

Luke 10:38-11:13

Luke 10:38-42

This is a great story that only Luke has. So, what was the one necessary thing? Isn't it great that it's ok if we live at Jesus' feet. We can take that time even when the world is on fire. God can handle things without us for a while. In fact, we must take that time to be at His feet. If you need some extra Bible work to do, hunt down all the people who ended up at Jesus' feet. That's the one thing that is necessary.

Here we are first introduced to Martha and her sister. Now if you want some interesting trivia about this story, think about when this happened. Jesus had just duked it out with the Jews in Jerusalem during the Feast of the Tabernacles in John 8-10:21. That was the October before Jesus died. The rest of John 10 happened in December. That means this probably took place in November, just 5 months before Jesus died. I wonder if this was when Jesus met Martha, Mary and Lazarus. In any event, this is when we are introduced to them.

Luke 11:1-13

This is absolutely indispensable discipleship stuff. If we were in a group together, we might need to do these passages on a retreat.

What you get out of these verses is very important. I'll just give you some leading thoughts.

The entire section is a response to the disciples' question on how to pray. It is praying in three parts, but it is one complete lesson and one complete answer to their request, *Teach us to pray*. Luke introduces this section telling us that Jesus Himself was praying and His prayer life led into this occasion.

Vs. 1-4 Jesus must have taught often about prayer using the Lord's Prayer as His basic lesson. This event is at least a year and a half after His giving of the Lord's Prayer when He selected the Twelve and gave all of His disciples their disciple orientation in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus had already taught them how to pray, but now the Twelve are desperately feeling the need.

The occasion for them asking how to pray now is their fear and seeing that public opinion has turned against them. The Jewish leaders want to kill Jesus. To make matters worse, Jesus keeps uttering "suicidal" thoughts about crucifixion or something. They are in need. Before, the Lord's Prayer just sounded like interesting information. Now they are ready to learn. Jesus gives them the "street" version of the Lord's Prayer, but the disciples have heard it before and can fill in the blanks.

The Lord's Prayer is for them to tune their hearts to God in prayer.

Vs. 5-8 Jesus' second lesson is on persistence. This is unique to Luke. Jesus is saying that their insistence and need should be bothersome to God. They shouldn't give up.

Vs. 9-10 This is an application to vs. 5-8 and a bridge to vs. 11-13. This was also in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7:7.

Vs. 11-13 Lesson three is on expectance. This was also given in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 7, but Jesus changed it a little.

Notice in v. 13 that the Father gives the Holy Spirit; whereas in Matthew, He gives all good gifts. How do you put these two different answers together and figure this out? You can work it out yourself by looking at what Paul says about the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 2:9-16.

I think there comes a point in following Christ in the harvest when you don't know what specific things to ask for. You know God is working and more than anything you want His will. You trust His wisdom, knowing He will do those things that are needed. You need to accept His leading, and to receive His mercy and patience. You don't need a certain thing; you need the leading and the working of the Spirit. I think Jesus intentionally changed this here so the disciples would see that they didn't need their expectations met. What the Father was doing was beyond their wisdom. They needed the peace and discernment of the Spirit as they followed.

Psalm 76

So which son of Asaph wrote this psalm, and when? Since a great victory has just been won and the enemy has sunk into sleep (v. 5), I'm going to suggest this was written during Hezekiah's reign when the Assyrians threatened Zion and spoke against Yahweh. The situation was totally impossible, but men prayed and God acted; and the next morning the Assyrian army found that 185,000 of their men had died in their sleep. This is in 2 Kings 19:32-35.

Vs. 1-6 If this is the event, God protected Zion and showed His glory and majesty. This humbling of Assyria became an important event for other nations too. Everyone was talking about Israel's God.

Vs. 7-9 The contrast between the strength and arrogance of the Assyrians and the humility of Jerusalem was pretty apparent. God's judgment made everyone in every nation see that God was to be feared.

Vs. 10-12 The wrath of man was seen in the violence of the Assyrian army and in the words of Rabshakeh. Yet God used all of this for His glory. In a sense God lured Assyria to stand before Zion in its arrogance. In destroying that army, God sent a message to all nations.

God's glory and majesty will be victorious and those who resist Him will be broken. As disciples, this is good to remember.

Proverbs 12:15-17

I think vs. 15 and 16 are a process that most young people, even Christians, go through. It takes a long time to listen to advice and to be patient when our expectations or plans are not fulfilled. God is a good teacher if we're willing to learn. And we become better, humbler followers of Christ, walking more in the Spirit than in the strength of our ideas or expectations.

V. 17 But what if we say nothing. That is testimony too, right? But it is not in keeping with the grace we have been given so freely in Christ. We are made to bear testimony and to bear fruit in the harvest.

APRIL 5

Deuteronomy 28

Notice the proportion of verses given for the blessing and the proportion given for the curse. What does that tell you? Zig Ziglar said, "The fear of loss is greater than the desire for gain." It seems that God might believe that too. It is also interesting in the NT that hell and judgment are spoken of quite a bit. If this is what they said out loud in the ceremony of the blessings and the curses, I'll bet it ended with a sense of shock.

Look for key verses for why God will bring the curse on them.

Vs. 1-14 The blessing.

Vs. 1-6 This is the personal blessing to the nation and individuals.

Vs. 7-14 This is their blessing in relationship to the nations. Even though much of this is a benefit to the people, it will be viewed by the nations. Israel will be the witness to the world of the benefits of serving and worshiping Yahweh. During the Millennium, this will be fulfilled.

V. 14 This is a verse of warning, and the key to the blessing and curses is given. There is no neutrality in life. All mankind, even atheists, are always worshiping something. Worshiping other gods would unleash God's wrath.

Vs. 15-68 The curse.

Vs. 15-19 This is the general, personal curse. This section is parallel to vs. 1-6. Now it gets worse.

Vs. 20-24 This looks like an explanation of how God will make their personal lives loathsome, by cursing the ground and their health. It almost looks like the curse on Adam.

Vs. 25-35 This is their curse in relationship to the nations. What I find interesting is that vs. 28 and 34 describe how God will allow their misfortunes to drive them mad with despair.

Another interesting note is that Isaiah refers to this section (actually God does it) in Isaiah 55. The references to nations that are not known in vs. 33 and 36 are used by Isaiah to describe the blessing of what will happen when Israel follows the Lord in the future.

Vs. 36-44 This seems also to amplify how God will show the nations that Israel is under God's curse.

Vs. 45-51 Israel hasn't even entered the land, and God is already telling them of foreign domination and the coming of Babylon to take Israel into exile.

Vs. 45-47 These verses summarize the reason God will remove them. Isn't it interesting that it kind of boils down to the people not serving the Lord with joy and gladness.

Vs. 52-57 We will read of this happening when Samaria is besieged (2 Kings 6:24-7:20). Although this happened in Jerusalem too, we have no similar eyewitness account, but then, Jeremiah was, thankfully, in prison; or the people might have eaten him too.

Vs. 58-63 Now God is revisiting their history of salvation from Egypt. God will curse them as He cursed Egypt.

Vs. 64-68 The key here is the last verse. Even if they were to go back to Egypt, Egypt wouldn't want them. Oddly enough, there will be a group of people who escape to Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. In a way, they bring the curse with them and God sends Babylon into Egypt to destroy that country and punish the Jewish exiles.

Both the blessing and the curse are the active work of God. I have met some people against whom, it has appeared to me, God's hand was set not to let them get up. I discussed this with one of these people, because I had never known the Lord to be this hard. My concern was that he had done something awful, and the Lord wasn't letting him get up until he repented, confessed and in all ways possible, made peace with God. The stuff that tumbled out on the table was interesting, and it explained why all the money that had been given to this person to help him make a new start had accomplished nothing. Interestingly, it wasn't one event, but rather, a heart that constantly would not trust God. I still don't know about the other case. God showed favor and kindness to the worst people in the Bible when they repented and humbled themselves before Him. That's the key.

These curses seem very hard and very theoretical until you read the pages ahead, from Judges to the end of Malachi. We will see God constantly trying to help Israel, and the people will constantly resist and rebel. God's judgment always seems harsher in the theoretical, as it did to Jeremiah, but when you are working in the harvest with the future recipients of that judgment, you understand that God's judgment is just, as Jeremiah did.

Luke 11:14-36

In the reading for yesterday, did you notice what Jesus was doing just prior to the disciples asking Him how to pray? Apparently Jesus took time every day to get away from the disciples, a stone's throw, and do it Himself.

Luke 11:14-26

You might think we've read this before in Matthew 12:24 and in Mark 3:22, but this is different. In the second year of Jesus' ministry the scribes and the Pharisees had come up with an explanation for Jesus' power and signs. Now, months before His death, the sickness the Jews (Jewish leaders) spread is being expressed by the people themselves. What we have here is coming out of the mouth of the people.

I'm sure that Jesus gave this message to others in different settings. Although what Jesus says here is very close to Matthew 12, there are some interesting differences.

Vs. 14-23 This is very similar to what Jesus had said to the Pharisees and scribes in Matthew 12 and in Mark 3. What is missing here is the mention of the unforgivable sin.

V. 22 The telling of this parable is a little different. Jesus adds to this by including the mention of armor. Since the figures of speech mirror reality, I wonder what the *armor in which he trusted* was?

Vs. 24-26 When Jesus told this earlier, it seemed like He was applying it to the entire generation. In any case, this seems to be a description of reality in the spiritual world. Even among the demons, having rebelled against God's purpose for them, it could be that they can't be completely

free of human connection since they were made, back when they were angels, to serve God by serving us.

Vs. 27-28 I wonder if this outburst was to change the subject since Jesus was talking about something "nasty." This expression of religious sentimentality created a nice bridge into talking about the importance of hearing and doing Jesus' words.

Vs. 29-32 Jesus was asked several times to show a sign specifically to prove He was the Messiah. Here it had come from the crowd, but He gave the people His standard answer. Notice that in one example, the hearing of the Word is emphasized; and in the other example, the response to the Word is the main point.

V. 33 When Jesus has used this before, it has been with the disciples and the focus has been for them to spread the Word. Here with the people, the focus is that they themselves should use the light. There still is the aspect of the light being for others.

Vs. 34-36 When Jesus used this before with His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount, it had to do with their perception of value. Here, for the people, it seems that the focus is on them understanding Him, His Word and the times. If they get this right, there is light. If they warp their perception of Him, they will not only be blind, but will also be full of darkness.

This last warning was directed toward the people and the religious leaders. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:23), Jesus used this same illustration to warn His disciples that it could also happen to them. There's no better way to keep your eye clear than following Him in the harvest and using the truth for what the truth was meant to be used, for reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 77

This is a good psalm for strength in waiting on the Lord. Since I'm in a time of waiting, this really lets me know that these feelings are normal and understood by God and that I need to wait well, in hope, knowing that my heart is being strengthened in the waiting. God says to keep on crying out, not to be comforted by anything other than God's answer. The psalmist looked to an example of God being gracious and kind to the most undeserving, and showing favor to stubborn people. The idea is, "If He did it for them, He'll do it for me too." In that example, God used His power and shook the elements for these people. Isn't it funny that the people and the event that the psalmist took comfort in is the same stuff we're reading in the OT? Note v. 20.

Vs. 1-3 It doesn't matter who you look at, Job, Abraham, Moses, David, Jesus, or anyone in between; this is how we are to pray. God seems to specifically move those who are following Him in His plan into situations where they learn to cry out. In Luke, Jesus doesn't just teach the words by which to tune our hearts in prayer; He gives us two very important stories of persistence in crying out to God. I feel more and more comfortable being in places like this in following Christ, because this is normal and it means that the Lord has led us to this very spot of crying out.

Vs. 4-9 It seems that Asaph realized that God would give him no rest or easy solution. So in v. 5, Asaph turns his heart and mind to the Lord. What gave him strength was remembering that character of God as revealed in Scripture. His steadfast love never ends. His promise to Abraham will never fail. God doesn't know how to hold back His grace and His compassion.

V. 10 This is Asaph's breakthrough. The right hand refers both to power and righteousness.

Vs. 11-15 This is why the Word is so important to us. It is the basis of our remembering the love, power and holiness of God. In v. 13, God is the only God and the holy God. In v. 14, He is the God who is mighty beyond everything and who reveals Himself. In v. 15, He is the promise-keeping God who redeems. By the way, this would preach well.

Notice the mention of Jacob and Joseph. This tips you off that what Asaph is remembering is what happened to Israel being led out of Egypt. Isn't it interesting that in Deuteronomy, God is telling Israel they should never forget these very same things. His holiness, His power, His promises, and their salvation should always be upon their hearts. Is that any different for us?

Vs. 16-20 And here are the acts in Egypt and the Exodus that Asaph is remembering.

Proverbs 12:18

It takes confidence and personal depth in God's love to have the steadfastness and gentleness to speak the truth in love. Anybody can wound. I think I'm getting there, but some days, I'm still the other guy.

APRIL 6

Deuteronomy 29-30

We are at the end of the sermon and almost at the end of the books of Moses. These five books are some of the hardest for people to read, but they are incredibly important to understanding the flow of God's plan through the Bible and the fulfillment of His plan in Jesus. Even though I'm living thousands of years since these were written, as I read Deuteronomy my heart responds to God's love and promises. I feel what God wants to do with these people. I understand the blessing of it because I've experienced the spirit of this blessing in Christ. The difference is that I've been set free from the bondage of sin. I also have the complete Word of God, and I have the Spirit living in me to help me. Even then I struggle. These people didn't have that advantage. But they did have some advantages. They saw miracles daily. They were receiving the same Word. And we'll see today, that they were saved by faith and told how to express it. Some of these men and women will be standing with us in the kingdom. I'll want to ask them, "What was it like?"

Deuteronomy 29

Vs. 1-9 This is a summary of the miracle of their lives for 40 years. Every day was a miracle, not only in what happened (the manna) but in what didn't happen (sickness and clothes and shoes wearing out). But did they understand what was happening and what God was doing?

V. 4 This is a key verse. Even though God had done amazing things for Israel, they didn't have a heart of understanding. The blame is somehow on God. He didn't give it to them. It is not that God should have taken away their free will and "made them understand," but that God did not subject them to the full rigors of a program that would have led them to real understanding. They learned a lot in the wilderness in 40 years, but to lead them to real understanding would take thousands of years. Israel is still in process. God will not magically induce sudden obedience and understanding, but the weight of their history, their coming desperation, and the way things will fall into place in the last days will create a sense of seeking God that Israel has never possessed.

This is how God works with us too. He doesn't put us in a spiritual trance and override our wills, but rather molds our hearts and minds as we follow and as we suffer. Some of us actually get tired of banging our heads on the wall and hurting ourselves and say, "You know, I think I'm seeing that God does have a couple of good ideas."

V. 9 In the absence of understanding (taking to heart) all that God had done for them, and understanding all God was doing in the plan of redemption for mankind, they were told just to obey. I may not understand the mechanics of how a circuit board works and I may not understand all the implications of events, but I can obey, so that if the red light goes on, I obey and push that button. That's what Israel was supposed to do.

Vs. 10-15 This entire sermon is for the renewal of the covenant, but here the purpose is stated. The mention of the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is not an historical reference. It is the

power behind what is happening there. This is the object of their faith. In a few verses we'll see that this is really driven by faith.

Vs. 14-15 If you want to see an interesting connection, look at vs. 5 and 6 in our psalm for today. Actually today's entire installment of Psalm 78 (4 in all) has to do with the history we are reading about.

Vs. 16-29 Notice in vs. 18 and 19 there are two *bewares*, addressed to two different kinds of people, one religious, and one unreligious. Notice that these two people become one person, referred to now by a singular pronoun. This one person becomes responsible for vs. 22-29. The concept is that one person can lead to the downfall of the entire nation if they do not beware and obey the Lord.

V. 22 Notice how important the next generation is. This is exactly what Asaph says, and laments, in the psalm.

Notice that God's truth will still be acknowledged by the nations, even in Israel's ruin in vs. 24-28. The nations will understand that Israel's downfall was caused by their lack of faith and obedience.

Vs. 26-27 Notice that the evidence of their disobedience will be idol worship. For our modern, western minds idol worship seems utterly crazy, but we have just learned to hide and disguise our idols. The *therefore* in v. 27 is important.

V. 29 seems to be saying, "Don't try to figure out God. Just respond to what you know, what He has done, and obey Him."

Deuteronomy 30

Vs. 1-10 What I find interesting here is that God already knows they will fail. God will be using them to show all of mankind the absolute power of sin without God's intervention. But God will honor Israel for using them like this and He will fulfill all the promises. Not only that, all of their history and God's working in all their generations will lead them to understand. Look at v. 6. This hasn't happened yet, but in the Tribulation Israel will finally submit its heart to God and become God's loving, testifying people for the next 1007 years.

Do you notice recurring phrases? Notice how often it says, *the Lord (Yahweh) your God*.

Vs. 11-14 To understand what Moses and God are saying here, you need to read this in Romans 10:1-10. Salvation, then and now, is by faith. Salvation for them, and for us, is a very simple deal. It happens by believing God's promise and responding in love to Him. Our sin complicates this, exponentially. It's a good thing God doesn't give up.

Vs. 15-20 This is the climatic end of the message. Wow! Notice how often love is mentioned. I don't think you can find a message from God more caring and loving. And to think, as this message was given, there was a pillar of cloud over the tabernacle, and they had eaten manna that morning.

What this all inspires in me is the understanding that I need to live in absolute trust of God and His plan. There is much I don't understand, but I know His love in Christ and how I've been saved by grace from this tragedy of lost humanity. I need to cry out and not complain, understanding that He meets my needs and hears my voice as I follow Him in the harvest. I need to understand His love and His plan and even when I don't understand, I need to follow and obey. He is loving, and Jesus did much more than He will ever ask of me. What an easy life it would be if I really understood all that and followed. The central point of all of this obedience and following, even for us as disciples, is not perfection, but the love of God. We acknowledge His great love and acts of kindness, and then we feebly try to show our gratitude and love by

following our Savior in the harvest to let others know what He has done for us. Disciples are made, fruit is borne, the Father is glorified and we are shown to be Jesus' disciples. And it's all out of love.

Luke 11:37-12:7

Time wise, this is still the November before Jesus' sacrifice for us.

Luke 11:37-54

Vs. 37-41 I find it interesting that Jesus was willing to accept an invitation to a Pharisee's house, knowing what kind of confrontation would arise.

So, why did Jesus react like this? It seems that Jesus is starting the fight. Didn't He know how to blend with people? I only say this because we put so much emphasis on meeting people halfway and never saying anything that would offend anyone. These people were in a special category, leaders of the people, and Jesus had tried to show them a lot of love and patience, like in John 5.

I think Jesus' words here are a response to the deadly influence of the leaders. In the first 36 verses of this chapter Jesus was confronted by the people, not the leaders, regarding the origin of His power and His failure to show a sign of His Messiah-ship. Where had the people learned to explain away Jesus and the signs He did? The leaders had taught them. They had given the people a lie to hinder them from entering the kingdom of God, and it was working. Jesus now, understandably, has words for the leaders.

Vs. 42-44 If you want to underline something, look at the "woes." Actually, the Pharisees get off kind of easy. Their main sin was hypocrisy. In light of all we've read in Leviticus, v. 44 is interesting. A person became unclean before the Lord and unable to worship before the Lord by walking on graves. Jesus is saying that even by accidental contact with the Pharisees or their teaching, people became unable to come before God. That was a huge charge against them, but remember that Jesus is God the Son. Who better to utter this judgment?

Vs. 45-52 The reason this scribe butted in was that, aside from their personal hypocrisy, the Pharisees were only following what they, the scribes/lawyers, had laid out as an interpretation of the law. This guy should have kept his mouth shut.

V. 46 The scribes were also hypocrites. They thought the people were "sinners" and damaged goods. The scribes and Pharisees were OK before God. But they had to make the laws harsh for the "cattle," of which they were not a part.

Vs. 47-51 This was not just a "bomb," it was a nuclear strike. Can you imagine hearing that all of the sins of rebellion to God's Word of all previous generations would come upon your generation because of YOU. That is what Jesus is telling them, Jesus the Son of God, God the Son, the Son of Man. This judgment would come when the temple would be destroyed, in 70 A.D. This is what Paul was referring to in 1 Corinthians 7:29.

V. 49 One interesting note here is that Jesus says, "*Therefore also the Wisdom of God said...*" There is a line of thinking that when it talks about the wisdom of God creating in Proverbs 3:19 and 8:22ff, it is actually referring to Jesus. In John 1:3, it says that Jesus was the creator in terms of design and command. Anyway, it is interesting here that Jesus personifies *the Wisdom of God* in condemning the scribes. On Wednesday before He dies, Jesus will pronounce these same woes on the scribes and Pharisees again in Matthew 23, but when He gets to this pronouncement in v. 34, Jesus says, "*Therefore I send you prophets and wise men....*" Pretty interesting, I think.

Luke 12:1-7

V. 1 So, how do you think these two paragraphs are connected to what just happened? Oddly enough, this section seems kind of reflected in the Proverb for today.

Vs. 2-3 What is the link between vs. 1 and 2? It seems to be that the leaven of the Pharisees involved concealing the truth. Jesus is also telling His disciples to avoid hypocrisy at all costs. God will always actively bring truth to light, even among His own children. Many men in ministry haven't taken this warning seriously.

Vs. 4-7 Jesus launches into another training session for His disciples. Much of this has been said before in the Sermon on the Mount, but that was 18 months ago. Now the disciples were entering a tunnel with Jesus and they would emerge, figuratively speaking, in a stadium for a contest to the death. They would now become, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4:9, *like men sentenced to death...a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.*

The reality was that the Pharisees would win, temporarily. And in every generation of those working in the harvest, there are times when the wicked win and the followers of Christ are like sheep for the slaughter. God is in control of that too, for His good purpose.

Vs. 6-7 If you read this in the Sermon on the Mount, you'll see the slight difference in the sparrows. It's interesting that the references to the *sparrows* and the *hairs of your head* (proving that God can subtract, in my case) are meant to give us confidence to proclaim the truth in the face of opposition. The song, "His Eye is on the Sparrow," is a comforting song, and I'm sure it's ok to apply the *sparrows* to comfort in knowing God always sees us and that He knows us intimately. Not trying to be pushy, but the context of the *sparrows* here in Luke is comfort in the crisis of trying to reach the lost with the truth of the gospel in a dying, resistant world. It is easy for us to remove "mission" and the "compelling love of Christ," and to see the whole point of God's comfort and love only as it is directed toward us to help us in our loneliness and need. I don't think that directing all of our prayer and worship to our personal need makes God happy. Christianity can easily become all about our needs and not about reaching a dying world. To get the power of what Jesus is saying here, you have to be in the harvest with your life on the line to reach the lost and make disciples.

As disciples, we will never be free of fear. Not only are we tempted to focus on what others think about us, but we think that our skill in the delivery of the truth is vital. We concentrate so much on ourselves that we lose the compassion that compels us to follow Christ into the harvest. In truth, we really fear people and persecution. I don't think we'll ever get over it. Even Paul had to remind Timothy to be willing to suffer for the gospel (2 Tim. 1:8, 2:3, 4:5) and Paul himself pleaded with the Ephesians to pray for him that he would have courage to proclaim the message boldly (Eph. 6:19-20). But love casts out all fear, and guess whose love that would be.

Jesus' discipleship sermon continues tomorrow.

Psalm 78:1-31

This psalm will be spread over the next four days. This song sounds a little like the sermon of Stephen that got him killed, the punch line being, *You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit.* (Acts 7:51) But here the message is a little more positive with a double-pronged agenda.

First: The psalmist is saying to Israel, "Obey God. Don't rebel like Israel did when He did amazing things and led them out of Egypt."

Second: He is saying to them, "Obey God and submit to David (or the house thereof). God decided not to choose Ephraim, but to choose Judah, and has done amazing things by delivering us and giving us peace through the leadership of David."

I'm explaining all of this, only because it will be easy to get lost in this psalm over the next few days and forget the point of its message. And, since the point of the psalm is revealed at the end, it would be helpful to know what's going on at the beginning.

It's hard to know when this was written, but it might have been during the hand off of the kingdom from David to Solomon, or it might have been written after the civil war with Absalom when there was a danger that the northern 10 tribes would break away.

Vs. 1-4 Note vs. 2 and 3. Matthew quotes this in Matthew 13:35, as one of the reasons Jesus used parables. At this point it seems that God is saying that the history of Israel leading up to the throne of David was a long determined plan of God. David was revealing some aspect of the mystery of God's plan.

Vs. 5-8 Notice the references to teaching children. These verses sound like Moses in Deuteronomy.

Vs. 9-16 The reference to the Ephraimites in v. 9 will make sense when you get to vs. 67-72. Remember in Genesis that Jacob gave the firstborn right to Ephraim over his other sons, but even in Jacob's blessing of his sons, God moved him to give Judah preeminence. Later, in Numbers, we see Judah being the largest tribe. Of all the men of fighting age who went into Canaan to spy it out, only two men, one from Ephraim and one from Judah, were faithful to God. When it came to God's decision, He chose Judah to lead Israel, not Ephraim. David was chosen and God made a covenant with him and the Christ was to come from the line of David.

Here, the psalmist is showing that Ephraim didn't lead the people to obedience to God during the time in the wilderness. But that is what David (a son of Judah) is doing now.

Vs. 17-31 You recognize this as the event recorded in Numbers 11.

The rest of this psalm should be very familiar to you. Notice the alternating of blessing and disobedience. God is making a case for His steadfast love and amazing mercy.

For us as disciples, I would say the message is, "Obey God, be amazed at what He has done and submit to what He is doing." I've wasted too much time complaining about what God has done that I haven't liked, to the point of, really, forgetting God and missing His love.

Proverbs 12:19-20

The moral of the story is "tell the truth and plan for peace." Notice too that there is the thought of longevity of life and influence in all of this. The more you think about these verses, the deeper they lead your thoughts.

APRIL 7

Deuteronomy 31:1-32:27

One of the things that happens when you read your Bible year after year, even if you have a brain like mine that only works intermittently, is that you make connections. You read something here, and later in another OT book or in the NT, you find the same, or similar, thing. It helps make all of this reading a lot of fun, especially knowing the Spirit is showing you stuff. You can always do a word search, but this is different. There is nothing like making natural connections to spark your curiosity. Below, I'll mention some things about the "sons of God." I didn't get that out of a seminary class or someone's book. It just happened after reading the Bible through for a few years. Suddenly all these puzzle pieces that I'd been viewing, year after year, came together. After preaching and studying for years, I know the difference between things that the Lord has led me to find naturally in my time together with Him, and things I dig up for a sermon. The stuff I read or find for a sermon is either forgotten or stored up with other information in my head. What the Lord shows me becomes a part of my heart and conviction in following Him in the harvest. I think this will be the same for you.

Deuteronomy 31

Notice the recurring words, *strong and courageous*. We'll be seeing them again.

Vs. 1-6 This is the conclusion of Moses' sermon, but not the end of his words in the book. This was probably one of the longest and greatest sermons ever preached. Even though we'll see that Israel, as a nation, didn't obey what God said through Moses, this particular generation did.

V. 2 I read a comment that Moses was saying here that he was too old to lead Israel in the conquest of Canaan. That is not the point. In a couple of chapters we'll hear that Moses was fit until the day he died. If Joshua and Caleb were about the same age, they were scrappy 80 year-olds. Moses could have done it but God said, "No."

V. 4 The victories against Sihon and Og were important motivational events that God had designed.

V. 6 *Leave you or forsake you* is quoted by the writer of Hebrews in 13:5. Take note of these words because we'll see them again and something like this is echoed today in Luke.

Vs. 7-8 There has already been a ceremony giving Joshua the leadership. As a good leader, Moses is charging Joshua again in front of the people. You may recognize *strong and courageous* from the famous verse in Joshua 1:9. Joshua 1:8 is also a famous verse but we'll talk about that when we get there. Both here in Deuteronomy and there in Joshua, these two words are said several times. *Leave you or forsake you* is repeated again also.

V. 8 is quoted again to Joshua, and later in the NT in Hebrews 13:5.

Vs. 9-13 Notice the importance of the Feast of Booths. Although all the men had to be present at the tabernacle every year for this event, every seventh year everyone had to come to the tabernacle. On that occasion, the scroll of Deuteronomy would be read. God built the feasts to influence the men, who would influence the nation. And then these special events would aid families in teaching their children. And then we read in Nehemiah 8:17 that Israel never kept the Feast of Booths after Joshua.

Vs. 14-15 This was God's commissioning of Joshua. I wonder if the people were impressed that the pillar of cloud appeared over the tabernacle. God would do more to elevate Joshua.

I know the minute Moses died and was standing with God, getting a big hug, he thought, "Why didn't I do this sooner?" Yet as I read this it makes me feel like moving out of a house, going room to room to make sure it's in order and then finally you turn out the light and shut the door. It's kind of funky and sad. But again, the minute he was in heaven, looking out over the golf course and seeing the club house, I'll bet Moses said, "Yes!"

Vs. 16-18 This appears to have taken place as Moses and Joshua were standing before the tabernacle. Maybe when Moses heard this he was happy to be going. Notice that their sin will be idolatry. It will be a very personal affront to God since He is the Only God and has saved them. Notice how the word *forsake* is used of the people and of God. It is cause and effect. We'll see this in the NT today.

V. 18 This defines a lot of God's judgment. As we do to God, He does to us. But beyond that, we see over and over again that He acts in mercy and grace, when we don't deserve these things and He is restlessly seeking to save and guide mankind. It isn't that there isn't grace in the OT. There is plenty of it. But His grace is seen in all of its clarity after all of the OT history, and then as it is defined in the coming and sacrifice of our Lord.

Vs. 19-22 Moses preached a sermon, and now he was writing a song.

V. 23 I don't know if anyone else heard this, but Joshua had a heart of faith and you couldn't want any more confirmation than this.

Vs. 24-30 The book of Deuteronomy was placed next to the ark of the covenant. The Ten Commandments were inside. Now Moses must have written the song and was getting everyone together to hear it. This was a lot of work for Moses. Again, it reminds me of moving.

Deuteronomy 32:1-27

So actually, God wrote this song. I'll bet it had a catchy tune. Now, after preaching and writing this song, Moses gets to sing.

Vs. 1-3 This song was to permeate the minds of the people like dew. Catchy tunes do this to us. Once you get it in your mind, it is hard to get it out. This is calling all creation to testify to the truth. The greatness of God will be seen in the contrast of His goodness and grace to them and their rebellion toward Him. Israel will be seen as the example of what happens when man is shown mercy by God, but the power of sin remains unbroken.

Vs. 4-7 This is the summary of the charge against Israel. Notice v. 6. There are very few references in the OT where God is referred to as *father*. That makes this unique.

Vs. 8-9 These are very important verses. There is good evidence for this reading *sons of God*. It refers to angels to whom God gave the guardianship of the nations. You find *sons of God* also in Job 1:6 where they are definitely angels with responsibility to watch over the earth. In Job, Satan seems to be the head of these angels. Again, in Genesis 6:2 as a contributing cause of the wickedness in mankind, these sons of God are very likely angels. In Daniel 10 you see these *sons of God*, among whom the nations were divided, as the prince of Persia and the prince of Greece and you realize they are demons. Link this together with what Satan tells Jesus in the temptation and what Paul says about the principalities and powers, and you get a picture of God having given Satan a kind of guiding responsibility over the mankind and the nations that would arise. God never revoked that responsibility from Satan after the fall of Satan or the fall of man. It seems that with the fall of mankind, Satan's guidance over mankind and the nations went from a servant's role to that of a ruling guardian's authority, because of our sin. Yet, within this system that God Himself set up, He chose one man and one nation for Himself to be a witness to the world, and through which His plan of redemption would go forward.

Satan thought that He had crippled God's plan in getting Israel to deny God and follow idols, and then especially in getting Israel to crucify its Messiah; but God's plan for Israel will be fulfilled during the time of "Jacob's Trouble," (the Tribulation) and then in the Millennium. Also, after Christ's resurrection, a new nation sprang into being, over which Satan has no authority. This temporary nation has no geographical boundaries, no common language, no unique ethnicity. This nation without earthly definition has only one common link: The Blood of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God. Today it is the Church that God is using to work in the harvest and to win the day and hold back the night. Soon, Israel will take up the torch.

1 Corinthians 2:7-8 *But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

Vs. 10-14 This is God loving and establishing Israel. It is pure grace.

Vs. 15-18 This, unfortunately, will be Israel's response after they get into the land.

V. 17 This is reminiscent of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 10:20, *No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons.*

Vs. 19-22 We'll see this throughout all of Israel's history from Judges to Malachi. What is interesting here is the prophetic reach of these verses. In Romans 10 Paul and the Spirit will tell us that that foolish nation is the church.

V. 21 Paul quotes the second half of this verse in Romans 10:19, referring to the church taking over Israel's responsibility to be a witness to the nations and thus making Israel jealous enough, eventually, to get saved. Reading the first half of the verse explains a lot of things and helps to understand the verse in Romans better.

Vs. 23-27 are interesting. This sounds like what Moses said to God, that if He destroyed them in the wilderness, the nations would think ill of God. In this case, the nations would think they were responsible for the demise of Israel, maybe by cursing them like Balak tried to do. It adds something to this verse when you think of vs. 8 and 9 and the spiritual dimension of what God is doing. In spite of Israel's sin and rebellion, and regardless of the spiritual opposition they have and will face, God will bring Israel to a place of honor, fulfilling their mission and destiny.

Luke 12:8-34

Vs. 8-12 Jesus continues (from yesterday) His talk to His disciples concerning the leaven of the Pharisees and fearing to speak the truth. Paul must have known this saying of Jesus when he shares this with Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:11-13, *The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.*

Since all of the Twelve, except for Judas, were believers who couldn't lose their salvation, how do you account for all of what Jesus is saying here? I think this is a general statement about the persecution they will face. Some of it is a warning to them and some is an assurance of justice in the battle.

Vs. 8-9 These are for the disciples. They are being left on earth to give testimony. They will be acknowledged before the angels in that they will receive help. But if a person decides to hide and not testify of Christ and not acknowledge Him, what help do they need since they are really trying to help themselves. In this sense, although they really do need help but are helping themselves, Jesus will "deny" His own help by not sending angelic assistance. That is my take on this. It all goes back to "I will never leave you or forsake you." But if we choose to leave and forsake our testimony of Him, He withholds His help. I think that makes sense.

Vs. 10-12 This is justice to the unbelieving. In their current situation, some were blasting Jesus, but some were calling Jesus demon-possessed. God was keeping track of all of that. There would be justice. The concern of the disciples was to be willing to speak in persecution and allow the Spirit to speak through them.

V. 12 is not meant to be the verse of assurance for the unprepared Sunday school teacher. It only works if you're being persecuted in the harvest.

Vs. 13-34 The fear of death and persecution isn't the only thing that keeps us from following in the harvest. The other destructive force to following Christ as disciples is the desire for stuff and the anxiousness for our basic needs.

Some of these sayings are new, and some of them were said earlier in His ministry to the disciples after He selected the Twelve and gave the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7, Luke 6). Like a good teacher, Jesus didn't say something just once. In this case, the needs of the disciples are different and they have a much more mature idea of what it means to follow Jesus. Now, that old message has new meaning. As Paul said to the Philippians in Philippians 3:1, *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you is no trouble to me, and is safe for you.*

Jesus' method of training His disciples was to orient them (all the time up to and including the Sermon on the Mount), involve them in ministry with Him, and as they grew, as the occasions presented themselves, He taught them as they lived together. Since this portion, occurring here in Jesus' training of His disciples, is unique to Luke, as you read it, think of what it might have meant to the disciples now. They had seen the crowds leave Jesus and they've seen the Pharisees unite with the Herodians to destroy Jesus. They had seen Jesus' power in ways that assured them that He was the Son of God and crowds still followed Him, but Jesus was talking more and more about His death and resurrection.

Vs. 13-21 The point here is that there was no need for anxiousness or security. The ground brought forth from God every year. A disciple's security is that his treasure and provider is in heaven.

Vs. 22-31 This was said in the Sermon on the Mount. Notice the impact of vs. 25 and 26. This is a slight addition to the Sermon. I like the translation of a "cubit." If you can't add 18 inches to the length of your life, why worry about the rest? For all of our health consciousness, there is nothing we can do to add 18 inches. Wow! And God has already determined, like with Moses, when it is time to turn off the lights and shut the door.

Vs. 32-34 This first verse is unique to Luke and I'm very challenged here. Since it is the Father's good pleasure, understanding the absolute desire of our Father to bless us in the harvest, we should have this heart. It doesn't mean God is asking all of us to give everything away (to some He did and does), but we should have this joy of heart. We should know this so that if He said it, we'd do it. If we can't do it, we don't really understand the impact and joy of what Jesus just said and it may be that we, as disciples, have a case of the "idols." We are not that far removed from what we are reading in Deuteronomy. Notice in v. 15 that Jesus uses a very strong repeated caution. This is extremely dangerous for us as followers. The desire for other things than Christ on this earth is a "lamer" of disciples and a killer of fruit.

So much of what we are reading points to the need to have the power of sin broken and for mankind to be redeemed. Through Israel, God has shown mankind that sin is the most powerful destructive force in reality. Through Israel God has shown mankind and the angelic world that His grace and love have no end. But now through Christ, we see God's infinite wisdom in all He has done. Through a "defeat" on the cross has come victory, and now the weak and foolish and low and despised have been gathered into a "nation" of the redeemed, bonded together in the blood, life and love of Christ to enter the harvest following Him. And when our work is done, Israel will recall who their "rock" is, call His name and finish the work God has given them to do.

Psalm 78:32-55

Isn't it weird that we're reading the end of Deuteronomy and the song of Moses and then also reading this psalm that addresses the same things?

Vs. 32-35 These verses seem to be referring to Kadesh-barnea and the death of that generation. Look at Deuteronomy 32:4, 15 and 18 and Psalm 78:35. Pretty cool, huh? This is one of the reasons that reading The One Year Bible "rocks."

Vs. 36-41 Now the psalmist is showing how they put God to the test in the wilderness. The rebellion of Korah, the crying of the people for meat and for water, and Baal-Peor would have been a part of this.

Vs. 42-55 This is the summary of their salvation. It was God's love for Israel shown in freeing them from Egypt and giving them the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Underline in your Bible what **God did** and what **they did**.

We don't want to imitate Israel. What "story" is our claim to fame (redemption) and what should that mean for us as we follow Jesus in the harvest? See Luke above.

Proverbs 12:21-23

Now, going backwards, I understand that a prudent person judges situations and weighs and watches his words. I understand that God delights in us when we act faithfully.

So, how do you understand that *no ill befalls the righteous*? The meaning must be hinted at in the second part of v. 21. A wicked person is full of trouble, anxiousness and inner conflict. That must be the "ill" that befalls him; that is, being full of stress, full of conflict and having a bad conscience.

All sorts of bad things happen to righteous people, but the permanent "ill" of having a sick heart, mind, and conscience, and living in inner conflict and stress, doesn't happen to someone whose heart is being massaged daily by the Spirit in the Word. Knowing God and His love and forgiveness in Christ defines us and determines our actions and thoughts. God in us and with us continually protects and heals us, as we follow Him.

Didn't Jesus just say something like this in Luke?

APRIL 8

Deuteronomy 32:28-52

Vs. 28-33 Notice how God refers to Himself as Israel's "Rock" throughout the entire song. This is in contrast to the "rock" Israel would choose to follow. The whole point in this section is that if they were wise, they would have understood that only Yahweh could have made them able to do what has been done. This is very much like what Paul said in Romans 1:22, *claiming to be wise they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images...* Then, as Jesus said, they bore evil fruit.

Vs. 34-38 You were wondering where the verse, "vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord," came from? God is saying that although He would allow the nations to punish Israel, He will punish the nations and vindicate Israel. God will teach Israel through punishment that they chose the wrong rock.

Vs. 39-42 God declares His ownership of reality and that all who make themselves His enemy will be judged. Some of this sounds a lot like John 5. Jesus will be the one bringing this judgment.

V. 43 This sounds like the book of Revelation. It is obvious that the fulfillment of much of what is written here will take place in the Tribulation and in the Millennium.

Vs. 44-47 It looks like Joshua had a part in the "singing" of this song.

Vs. 46-47 are very powerful words and apply to each of us, too. As Christians, we still have the tendency to underplay the daily importance of the Word in our lives. As followers of Christ in the harvest, the Word, like the circulation of blood through our bodies, has to be constantly circulating through our hearts and minds. The wreckage we see in the lives of believers is directly connected to this.

V. 48 I wonder how I would feel if I knew that when I finished my sermon, I would die? That might be a reason to preach a really long sermon. But on the other hand, what does it mean to die? We show what we really think of God and heaven when we become overwhelmed by fear when we think of death. For those who work in the harvest, I think we all end up with the heart expressed by Paul in Philippians 1, "I'd rather go, but if it will do some good now in the harvest, well OK, I'll stay."

Luke 12:35-59

Vs. 35-40 Verse 35 is said with the same enthusiasm and for the same reason as v. 33, *Sell your possessions*. If our treasure is in heaven, then we are free to live with joyful abandon toward God. Here, the emphasis is on doing the work of God in the harvest until He returns. There is that sense in which we should work with joy and expectation of our Lord's return.

V. 37 Notice that this reward is only for those servants who were awake.

V. 40 Jesus will talk to His disciples a couple more times about the coming of the Son of Man. That "day" is the 7-year Tribulation. Its beginning will be totally without warning. For each of us as disciples, the day of our death, and the circumstances thereof, can come without warning too. We need to be faithfully doing His work and living in expectation of seeing Him at all times.

Vs. 41-48 The answer to Peter's question seems to be "all believers." You wouldn't call an unbeliever a "servant." We see plenty of believers lost on earth. Some people get drawn into the cultural comfort of worshipping worship and stuff, eating, drinking, being merry. Some really conservative, righteously right people miss the entire harvest by holding a loveless, military view of protecting the truth in a bunker, beating the servants. Satan is much wiser than we are and knows a million ways to get us off track and to neutralize us.

Vs. 46-47 *Cut him in pieces* is a euphemism for a beating. Unbelievers don't get a beating. My sense is that those Christians who fell asleep in the light will be saved, but only as through fire. That "fire" of judgment for the unfaithful believer will have some aspect of punishment that will be awful like fire, but not like the fire of eternal condemnation. Some of us know what we should be doing and will get punished severely for our disobedience. Some believers don't quite get it, and will still be punished, but not like those of us who really have a clear vision of what's going on.

V. 48 The privilege and the requirement. This is addressed to the disciples then who walked with Jesus and saw who He was. It also applies to us who have been gifted for the harvest.

Vs. 49-53 The meaning couldn't be clearer. Jesus came for the harvest. This life will mean great blessing from God, as we follow Him into the conflict of bearing fruit in a dying, rebellious world. How can we desire to be anything different than our Savior? How can we expect to live a life that refuses to embrace what He embraced? How can we not follow Him into the harvest?

Vs. 54-59 Now this was addressed to the unbelieving masses. They needed to see what was going on and make a decision. They, like the whole world, were walking to judgment. Now was the time to settle with God. Once before the judge there would be no chance for mercy.

I wonder what this sleeping servant looks like. I wonder if he's more common than we think.

Psalm 78:56-64

This sounds like the period of the judges before Samuel became their main judge and freed Israel from the dominance of the Philistines. To get a better idea of what is said here, read 1 Samuel 4.

Vs. 56-58 True to the behavior of their rebellious fathers in the wilderness, once in the land, they also put God to the test.

Vs. 59-64 This event sounds like the capturing of the ark of the covenant, followed by the deaths of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, then the death of Eli and finally the death of Phinehas' wife in childbirth.

Proverbs 12:24

Well, I know which guy I want to be. The word *rule* may not mean to be a governor, but in contrast to the slothful, the diligent will remain free to live his life without slavery.

APRIL 9

Believe it or not, this is our last full day in Deuteronomy. If you open your Bible and hold Genesis to Deuteronomy together, that is a hunk of Bible. The same goes for what you've read in The Psalms and the Gospels. You've actually read about a third of the Bible since you'll be reading The Psalms twice. Tomorrow we meet Rahab, a woman of incredible faith.

Deuteronomy 33

This is sort of like Jacob's blessing of his sons at the end of Genesis. What things stand out to you? I only have a few of my own observations.

Vs. 1-5 Moses begins this blessing with God's coming to Sinai with His angels to show great love to His people Israel.

V. 6 Reuben is mentioned first as Jacob's firstborn, but interestingly, Moses says his men would be few. It may be that the penalty for his incest was still there and had some influence in the tribe.

V. 7 Judah is mentioned here because he is the son/tribe who really received the birthright. As it will say today in Psalm 78, the blessing went to Judah. Can you remember why?

Interestingly, Simeon isn't mentioned although he was the second son. This tribe was eventually absorbed into Judah.

Vs. 8-11 Notice the space given to the Levites. Of all the things that God gave this tribe, Moses mentions the Thummim and Urim. These were incredible gifts to the nation. I still don't understand why the nation didn't avail itself of this blessing, except that to get this answer you had to come to the tabernacle.

V. 10 Notice what the Levites were supposed to do. They were to be the teachers of Israel.

V. 12 Benjamin is mentioned with Joseph since both were sons of the loved wife, Rachel.

Vs. 13-17 This is a lot of text and blessing for Joseph. Israel was to remember that God used Joseph to save them. Compare this to v. 67 in today's psalm. Everyone looked to Joseph and Ephraim, but God chose Judah. In v. 17 Ephraim is mentioned first. Also note the "ten thousand - thousand" comparison. This must have been a motto in the culture. This saying will play a funny role when we get to King Saul and David.

Vs. 18-25 I find it interesting that so much text is given to the tribe of Gad. Maybe this had something to do with the choice of the 2.5 tribes to settle on the east side of the Jordan.

V. 22 Apparently there is a possible wordplay here, because "Bashan" can mean or sound like "serpent." This could mean something like, "strong like a lion, but afraid of snakes." When Jacob blessed Dan in Genesis 49:17, he called him a snake on the road. All of this is interesting because Dan becomes the first tribe to completely defect into idolatry and they are not a part of the 144,000 in Revelation.

V. 23 The lake of Naphtali is the Sea of Galilee.

Vs. 24-25 A lot is said about Asher and I wonder why.

Vs. 26-29 This is the finale of the blessing on Israel (Jeshurun= the upright one).

V. 27 This sounds like Psalm 90. If you really want to get the rest of Moses' last words, you should read Psalm 90, which he must have written around this time. As Laura observed, the Song of Moses in the previous chapter should really be called the Song of God. Psalm 90 is the real Song of Moses.

V. 29 This could be applied to the church too, *"Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord..."* Now we need to get the word out in the harvest, following our Lord to reach the lost and make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

In reading v. 26 and the imagery of God coming on the clouds to help Israel, I have to think of the Lord coming at the end of the Tribulation. Jesus spent 40 days after His resurrection teaching His disciples. He gave them the Great Commission and told them to wait for the Spirit to have the power to perform their mission. Then He was taken into heaven. The angels said He would return the same way, but it will be different. Only a few saw Him leave, but everyone will see Him return. He left silently, but He will come back with might and power to save Israel and all those who believe in Him. He is Risen, and returning. Let's be willing to sell all we have, gird ourselves for our work in the harvest and wait expectantly with joy for His return.

Luke 13:1-21

Jesus had been teaching the disciples and then addressed the multitude. His word to them was that they were living like hypocrites. They knew the weather, but refused to understand His presence among them. Jesus told them they needed to make peace quickly with God.

Vs. 1-5 Apparently when Jesus finished saying this, somebody spoke up, probably trying to say something that would get some respect or acknowledgment from Jesus. Jesus turned the point and kept teaching the crowd. There are always people who want to point to a disaster and make a one-to-one connection to that event and sin. What's interesting is that Jesus doesn't deny the connection, but points the situation to the people who were talking. It is almost to say, "Don't worry about that, but worry about yourselves." Notice that Jesus says that all of them need to repent.

The reality is that sometimes there is a correlation between events and God's hand of judgment. In all things, God is free to allow something to happen in order to make others wake up. Ultimately, all souls appear before the throne of God. That's where we'll all wind up. The question is, are we ready, and if we are ready, in light of this coming event, we need to be moved with compassion, not judgment, and help others find Christ.

Vs. 6-9 As Jesus tells this story, He is really building on something that John the Baptist said earlier in Luke 3:8-9. If you look back there you'll find repentance, trees and fruit, too. Jesus uses the previous question of God's judgment in situations to point to God's mercy. Every person on this planet is in trouble. God's patience is incredible. Instead of judging quickly, God is kind and shows mercy. This is His daily posture as He works that none should perish. Many will perish, but it won't be because He didn't provide opportunities to hear the truth and respond.

Repentance is a "turning" from our sin to God. It is a decision of heart and soul, and need not be accompanied by doing anything. But the point of true repentance is that once a person has repented and turned to God, it should begin to become evident. The evidence is the fruit.

Vs. 10-17 So here is a case in point of religious fruitlessness. This woman had been bound by Satan 18 years. It doesn't say it was because of sin. The implication, like the man born blind in the Gospel of John, is that God allowed this for His glory. God works as He chooses so that we have opportunities to believe, follow Him and tell others.

V. 12 Notice that as soon as Jesus saw her, He called her and healed her. He knew it was of the Father and He had no regard for the fact that it was in a synagogue or on the Sabbath.

Vs. 13-14 Notice the contrast. She glorified God, and the ruler of the synagogue had a fit.

Vs. 15-16 Jesus had used this kind of example before. It is interesting to me that it is similar, yet different from the others. For me it makes Jesus' teaching more personal and understandable.

Verse 16 was a homerun.

V. 17 You wonder why Jesus was willing to continually face conflict. Here is the reason. It was to give the people a chance to respond to the truth.

Vs. 18-21 Jesus has used the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven earlier in His ministry and we've read this in Matthew 13 in a completely different context. This telling of those parables is almost verbatim with that earlier occasion. Commentators are tempted to put a negative spin on both tellings of these parables because of the presence of the ruler of the synagogue and because of the conflict, but it seems that since these renditions are verbatim, the meaning is the same. Jesus could have used different wording to suggest negative influence. It seems to me that the message was to the disciples. The kingdom is seen by faith. It will begin small and will grow great, and it is hidden, but is among them. In spite of the resistance, the kingdom will not be stopped.

Psalm 78:65-72

So, after all of the disaster in the history of Israel, God rises confidently without inhibition and brings victory, order, and peace through David. I think this is the main point of the psalm. Instead of rebelling as Israel has in the past, they are to submit to the order God has made, submitting to the rule of David. After Joshua, 400 years would pass in trouble and insecurity. The reign of David would be the next time the nation was secure. It was the visible blessing and working of God.

Proverbs 12:25

Encouragement is an incredible need. Yet, the Lord lets us walk without it at times to see where our real treasure is and where it is that we find our ultimate security. It is amazing how often Jesus told His disciples not to be anxious or to fear. It is what we are to learn as we follow, but I still pray for encouragement every day.

APRIL 10

Deuteronomy 34

It is obvious reading this that the writer was probably Joshua.

Vs. 1-4 The Lord showed Moses the land. He couldn't have seen all of this territory from Mt. Nebo, even on a clear day. The fact that God promised it to Abraham is an assurance to Moses that even after he is gone, God will continue to lead Israel into the land.

Vs. 5-8 One question here is why God hid the gravesite. The standard, and probably correct, answer is that if Israel would have known where the body was, they would have brought it with them and made a shrine to Moses, possibly a place of worship.

V. 7 Apparently God kept Moses from wearing out, meaning on the other hand, that when we wear out, it is because God lets us. I think of Isaac losing his sight so early in his life, thinking he was going to die and then living another 40 years. If I had my choice, I'd go like Moses, but I don't think God will consult me and His choice will be for His glory, not mine. I'd still like to go out with my boots on.

V. 9 I find it interesting that Joshua is described as being full of the Spirit. It says spirit of wisdom, but we can guess it was Holy Spirit enabled wisdom. In the OT it doesn't mean Joshua was permanently indwelt by the Spirit (that couldn't happen until Christ), but the Holy Spirit was close to him, guiding him. Also, what is the spirit of wisdom? God gave wisdom to the men who built the tabernacle. It was that same sense of order and creativity and insight that was with God as He created the universe.

Vs. 10-12 It is also interesting that the miracles are mentioned as *deeds of terror*. That is our language struggling to express the Hebrew. The signs created a sense of amazement and fear and awe. As awesome as that was, sin trumps wonders. All the people older than nineteen who saw those miracles, and followed Moses out of the land, were overthrown in the wilderness by their sin.

Jesus is the prophet "like Moses" who has come to lead Israel and all of mankind. In Jesus' short time on earth he did more wonders. Moses knew God like a friend, but Jesus knows God as Father. As for the "deeds of terror," wait until the Lamb begins to open the seals on that book. Moses was used to show Egypt the fear of God for a few months. Jesus will introduce a seven-year "sound and light" show on earth that will get everyone's notice. And those who follow Jesus will be led in the Spirit to the Father and true rest.

Joshua 1-2

Joshua 1

Vs. 1-9 This is a great section of Scripture - God's first address to Joshua after Moses' death.

V. 2 Wouldn't you freak out if God told you to get two million people to do anything? This is that spirit of wisdom working in Joshua. In Joshua's head, thanks to the Spirit, this was a piece of cake.

V. 4 God would begin to give this land to Israel. In Joshua we'll see God break the military power of Canaan. After that, it would have been easy for the people to go to God and then take more and more of the land. That means that the second phase of the conquest would have been easy, but contingent on their obedience. And there is the rub. They didn't obey or seek God. The full ownership of the land will come during the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

Note how often God tells Joshua to be *strong and courageous*.

If you have never memorized v. 8, now would be a great time. Instead of memorizing only v. 8, memorize 5-9.

V. 8 Should we be any different? Joshua was to read Deuteronomy daily, meditating on it *day and night*. But do you see that he was supposed to speak of it? In order to speak of it, he had to be totally submerged in God's heart and thoughts.

Vs. 10-18 I get inspired reading what the Reubenites, Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh said to Joshua. Why do you think they close their message to him with, *Only be strong and courageous*? This strength and courage were to have come from Joshua's own faith and confidence in God. I was reading about Jesus teaching His disciples, saying that a disciple is not above his teacher. It makes me think that those who lead others don't need to be perfect, but they should be strong and courageous in the couple of things we really need to be doing as we follow Christ in the harvest. Faith is contagious. So is doubt and hypocrisy.

Joshua 2

Vs. 1-7 It is interesting that there is no mention of a conversation with God regarding the spies. Joshua only sent out two spies. Tradition has it that one of these spies is the guy who married Rahab, Salmon (or Salma). In that case we know Salmon's father was Nahshon. This would have made Salmon one of the prominent, godly leaders of Judah. I'll bet the other spy was from the tribe of Ephraim.

That the spies went to a prostitute almost gives the idea that they were like sailors finally hitting land and looking for a good time. Rahab was certainly a prostitute, but most likely she also ran an inn. They were looking for a place to stay. These guys would have been close to the Lord. The

fact is that God is very insistent on telling us that she was a prostitute. Even back then, God was in the business of saving tax collectors and sinners.

Vs. 2-5 The entire city was on "red" alert for Israel. This is evident from the king's search for the spies and Rahab's words in v. 9.

V. 6 So why would Rahab risk her life like this?

Vs. 8-14 Now, what about the faith of Rahab? This is a little complicated, at least in our thinking; because she was a prostitute, a Canaanite woman who should have been killed, and she lies like a trooper (whatever that means). There is some tension in all of this. God not only shows her incredible mercy, but she marries Salmon (some think he's one of the spies), and through Rahab comes the entire Davidic line of kings and, eventually, the Messiah.

In my thinking, real faith has three parts: Information, Acceptance/Trust, and Doing.

Notice the information that Rahab had. It dates all the way back to the Red Sea, 40 years earlier. This means that on hearsay, she believed the entire story about Egypt and she was aware of Israel in the wilderness for the past 38 years.

She certainly believed and trusted this information. She mentions in that she and everyone else were shaking in their sandals. Rahab goes on to make the connection of all that Israel had done to the supremacy of their God. Look at v. 11. Wow!

What is interesting to me is that, to this point, everyone in Jericho went this far with what they believed. Rahab says that everyone knew this information and that they believed the information. So why was she saved?

Rahab risked her life to save the spies. She *did* something. Doing is what completes real faith. The demons believe in God and tremble (James 2:19). The demons had the right information, and really knew that God was there; but they made the wrong response. So did the people in Jericho. Rahab made the response of faith, honoring God. She may have lied, but she was also risking her life for God and these men who followed Him. Ends do not justify the means. She was an immature believer, but she was a believer.

The response of Jericho's city fathers was to pursue the spies to kill them..bad choice. This showed their hearts. If they had approached Joshua with terms of peace, they would have been told there could be no peace and they would have had to move before Israel got there. If they really believed the stories, they would have moved and saved their lives. They should have known they didn't have a chance.

This is why Rahab was saved. She had real, amazing faith. Everyone knew about the Red Sea, and Egypt and Sihon and Og and believed the truth of those stories. Everyone understood that Israel had an awesome God. Rahab personalized that information, and when given an unexpected opportunity by God, she did something. She honored God. And in spite of her past and fear and weakness, God honored her right back, hundredfold.

Vs. 15-21 It is also notable that the spies were close enough to the Lord to be able to make this kind of a deal with her. It showed something of their faith, too.

Notice that if her house was built into the city wall, God must have protected this part of the wall.

Vs. 22-24 These two spies, like two other spies 38 years ago, came back with a good honest report. Notice that even in this, God gave them an adventure and a story. I'll bet Joshua and the other leaders were sitting on the edge of, of, well, whatever they were sitting on, as the spies told this story. They would have been utterly convinced that the Lord was in this. That's cool of God to encourage us through these types of adventures. In the harvest you get lots of these.

Luke 13:22-14:6

Luke 13:22-35

Vs. 22-30 Since it doesn't say that one of the disciples asked Jesus this question, it could have been someone from the crowd that followed Him. The answer suggests that Jesus was answering someone who was not yet saved. This answer is very similar to what He said in Luke 12:57-59, which was also to the unbelieving crowd.

V. 24 The word *strive* means to agonize, to fight, scratch and struggle. The crowds treated Jesus like their good buddy; but the danger of judgment was always present, and believing in Jesus was no trifling matter. And, it isn't as easy as unbelieving people think it is. We know that it is only a prayer away, but in reality, there is a struggle of heart against one's own sin that takes place. Without God's help, none of us would have made it. If a person was on a sinking ship, they would be crazy not to struggle to get to a lifeboat. And if God threw them a rope and made a way and they were too "relaxed" about taking the help, they would only have themselves to blame.

V. 30 This is definitely to the disciples and Jesus will talk about this later.

Vs. 31-35 Can you imagine the surprise these Pharisees received when they died and immediately found Jesus sitting on a throne? Shocking.

Jesus is trying to help the people, and these guys are trying to scare Him away. Jesus' route to Jerusalem was not very direct. You could say that He was making a final tour of Israel, sometimes actually heading away from Jerusalem, but the destination was where He was to offer Himself to God for mankind.

He weeps over Jerusalem here, though He is miles away. He will do this in Luke 19:41 as He views Jerusalem from across the valley. Notice the words Jesus uses here. How can people actually say that Jesus didn't think He was God?

Luke 14:1-6

When I read this, all I can say is that Jesus was strong and courageous. Jesus was invited again to eat with a Pharisee and He went, but He knew the Father was leading Him into a place of testimony, teaching and conflict. And this is only a small part of what happened at the Pharisee's house. There will be more tomorrow.

I think for us as disciples, a part of "abiding in Christ" is seen in how Jesus abided in the Father. Jesus expected the Father to lead Him every minute of every day. Jesus was always in the presence of the Father and understood every situation as being a part of the Father's working. Jesus always knew that He had the resources of the Spirit and Jesus always knew that He was completely secure in the Father's care. I think if we abide in Christ as we follow Him in the harvest, this same security we see in Jesus will be ours too.

Psalm 79

This looks like it was written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Verse 11 talks about prisoners. By this time, there was a well established and protected Jewish community in exile in Babylon and the synagogue system was being developed. A descendant of Asaph, apparently, got inspired.

Vs. 1-4 The only time this happened in Jerusalem in the Old Testament is when the Babylonians broke in at the end of Zedekiah's reign. Notice that Asaph is appealing to God on the basis of the destroyed temple and city and the scorn brought to God's name. It is interesting that we read in the song of Moses that when God let that happen, the nations would know that God allowed it because of Israel's idolatry.

Now, there may also be a prophetic element to this that looks ahead to the Tribulation. What happens to the Jews and all other believers in Christ during the final 3.5 years of the Tribulation will make all other persecutions pale in comparison.

Vs. 5-7 Using Jacob's name is probably a way of appealing to God to remember His promise to Abraham. Notably, the Tribulation is called the time of Jacob's trouble. Notice that v. 5 is echoed by the martyrs in Revelation 6:10, *They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*

Vs. 8-10 Since the people in Jerusalem during the siege were mostly ungodly (there were exceptions) these verses seem to look to the future when those who follow Christ will be viciously persecuted during the Tribulation. This sounds like something the martyrs in Revelation ask of God.

Vs. 11-13 The retribution asked for here came upon Babylon and will come upon the nations in Revelation. Verse 13 is said from a heart of faith, and this will be true of those who stand with Christ in His kingdom.

Since this psalm is inspired by the Spirit of God, the thoughts of this psalm are also God's thoughts. That's something for us to think about when we try to understand God. Look at what Jesus said regarding the narrow gate. He is not just about inclusion and warmth and love and tenderness. There is also judgment and punishment. These are also part of the good news, and this is why the Lord has left us here and sent us into His harvest.

Proverbs 12:26

We do have a responsibility to those around us, including the guy next door. To whom much is given, will much be required. It's a matter of compassion and love. We've been shown love, and now as disciples of Jesus in the harvest, we need to try to help others find what we have found.

APRIL 11

Joshua 3-4

Joshua 3

Vs. 1-6 There is something in this I've never seen before. According to the [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#), Joshua moved the entire nation seven miles and they camped out near the Jordan. They moved those seven miles, with no clue as to how they were going to cross the Jordan. It was March, just before the Passover, and apparently the snow from Mt. Hermon in the north was melting and the river was overflowing its banks. This shows how much the people had changed and what God had been doing in them for 40 years. This generation of Israelites might have been the godliest generation that ever represented the nation. They didn't complain and make problems when faced with "impossible" circumstances. They simply followed and waited. Now they waited three days, getting organized, but waiting for God's provision.

As disciples, following isn't easy, and that's why many don't follow in the harvest. What if God doesn't do His part? Why get so "uncomfortable" for nothing? God will love us anyway. But it is only in sacrifice, following, depending and waiting in this harvest, that we really get close to God. It is in the impossible that we see His power and bear fruit for God. But it all comes down to faith and following, absolutely convinced that even a "dead end" has meaning and will lead somewhere. It didn't make sense that God led 2 million + people to the edge of a swollen river. But He did. It doesn't make sense for us to follow from day to day without security, for the sake of the Kingdom and for the harvest and the Lord. But we do. And if we have a very big God, we don't have to complain.

Philippians 2:13-16 *for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.*

V. 4 Notice that the people had to keep a distance from the ark. It symbolized the presence of God, and although all they could see were the priests carrying something draped in ornate skins, they knew to respect it.

Vs. 7-13 All of these people had only known Moses' leadership and many had never seen what happened at the Red Sea. They would all enter the land of promise with a unique sign that would show them the certainty of God's presence and the authority of Joshua.

Vs. 14-17 There were a couple of miracles here. Not only did the water gather far north, but the river bed dried up quickly. If the Levites holding the ark were in the middle of the river, and the people had to keep a distance of 3000 feet, it must have been a crossing that took place for miles on each side of the ark. It might also have been a miracle for the priests to have stood there with those poles digging into their shoulders, waiting for 2 million people to go across the Jordan.

This was not only a big day for Joshua, but also for the priests representing God and leading the people.

Joshua 4

There are a lot of things that can feed your heart in this passage. How incredible that God fulfilled this incredible promise. They were in the land.

Vs. 1-10 Notice the monuments for remembrance that God had the people make. One was in the middle of the Jordan and the other was where they camped on that first night in the land. I don't think God is into "scrapbooking," but He does go for remembrance and education of the next generation. What items of remembrance do you have at home, in your family, in your office, that remind you of God's faithfulness? It is something that disciple makers/ leaders do for a group as you work together in the harvest making disciples, who make disciples. I have a couple of "stones of remembrance" in my office right now that remind me of God doing great things when it seemed like the doors were shut.

By the way, those stones that Israel moved were big stones. Those guys must have been strong, or were made strong in a way they didn't realize. I have carried natural stones for landscaping that were about two ft long and one ft high and one ft thick and they were *herniatingly* heavy. A pile of 12 of those wouldn't have made much of a monument. I think that God must have given these guys superhuman strength. Also, If Joshua set up 12 stones that could be seen when the river was still flooded, how big were those stones?

Vs. 11-14 The 2.5 tribes went first, fully armed and looking ready for a rumble. If the Canaanites had planned a surprise party, the river going dry and the appearance of these guys would have given them second thoughts. By the way, you can bet there were people somewhere watching this happen. This gave the new generation a sense of awe, both of God and of Joshua.

Vs. 15-18 What an awesome moment. After all those years since Jacob left Canaan for Egypt, Israel is finally, completely, back in the land.

Vs. 19-24 are really great verses and 23-24 explain something important in our own lives. God leads us through tough times, so that when He delivers us, He can use His work in our lives as an example to others. He strengthens our faith in following and shows others that He is mighty so that we might fear and love the Lord forever.

Luke 14:7-35

I don't think Jesus was picking a fight here. I believe He might have received an impulse from the Spirit as He observed how vain and petty these important people were.

Vs. 7-11 It appears that when Jesus was invited to a party by a Pharisee, He was a real party-pooper. Talk about having guts. Anyway, these lessons were for the Twelve, and for us as His disciples. If you live your life to receive the recognition of men, you cannot be a disciple. In another conflict with the Pharisees, Jesus said to them in John 5:44, *How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?* I think that verse puts this section together pretty well. They looked to each other for recognition, but in the parable, when invited by God, well, they were busy.

Vs. 12-14 And He had a special lesson for the host. Apparently his goal in inviting some of these people was to receive from them.

In both of these parables, Jesus is teaching His disciples something He has explained before; that is, if your treasure is in heaven, you can live and serve down here with reckless abandon, without anxiousness and without the need to win approval from others.

Vs. 15-24 This looks like someone tried to change the subject or get Jesus to say the "amen" to his statement. Verse 16 shows that Jesus was rebutting what this man said. Apparently it was assumed in what this guy said, that they would all get to heaven. So, why should Jesus take all of this so seriously? This fits together with what Jesus said yesterday about striving to get into heaven now, while the opportunity presented itself. These people who were invited took this all too casually. This earth is about life and death.

Vs. 25-35 It almost seems to me that Jesus was walking later and thinking of all that had happened. He realized that most of the people following Him had no clue how humanly difficult it was to come to Him.

Vs. 26-27 To follow Jesus would require such an allegiance to Him that it would take total priority over every other relationship. Following Jesus would mean willingly going to your death.

Vs. 28-32 I think these stories are given to get people to want to follow Him, and to do it with a serious understanding. Even today, people become believers and remain at a place in their lives of casual commitment. They love church and worship and pot-lucks. They'll even become missionary tourists and paint a building in Haiti. That is not the same as living a disciplined life of death and denial on earth every day to follow Christ, to reach the lost and to make disciples, who make disciples.

V. 33 This is the point of all that Jesus has said. I think "all" means "all."

Vs. 34-35 A disciple is supposed to be different and make a difference.

Psalm 80

This looks like another post-exile psalm. This psalm echoes what Moses/God said would happen. The people would be removed from the land because of their sin. The appeal made to God is to His faithfulness and His glory, to remember His promise to their fathers.

This psalm breaks down nicely into three parts, each concluded by the appeal and refrain of the psalm.

Vs. 1-3 God saved Israel from death by sending Joseph into slavery in Egypt. Remember how Benjamin played a part in this story. When God raised up Joseph, He gave Joe two sons who became tribes in Israel. Then comes the refrain.

Vs. 4-7 But now after their disobedience and exile, God seems to be ignoring them and their enemies laugh at them. Then comes the refrain.

Vs. 8-19 God brought them out of Egypt and planted them like a vineyard with a wall. In v. 12 God broke down their walls, because of the sin of Israel, and allowed wild animals to ravage the vineyard. In v. 17 the psalmist asks for *the son of man* to come and help them and lead them to restoration. I think that is prophetic, looking ahead to Jesus. When they call on Jesus in those final days, the glory of His face will shine upon them.

It is interesting to find portions of Scripture that inspired songs. I missed mentioning one in Matthew 9:28, when Jesus asked the two blind men if they thought He could heal them. They said to Him, *Yes, Lord*. You know what song that's in, right? Psalm 80 is sung almost verbatim by a group called The Sons of Korah and is very good. And on that note, in the NT we read Jesus' warning for the would-be disciple to "Consider the Cost," which is a great song by Steve Camp.

Proverbs 12:27-28

I prefer and agree with the other reading of v. 27 given below in the margin of The One Year Bible, "but diligence is precious wealth." Diligence is the reward that makes a man rich. And to make the connection to v. 28, the righteous are diligent to live following the Spirit, following Christ, in His Word, in His harvest, making disciples, who make disciples.

APRIL 12

It finally hit me today reading about Israel crossing into the land, that the waters of the Jordan didn't recede until the priests' feet were in the water. Talk about making your faith work to the last possible second. God could have started lowering the level as the priests approached, but no, they had to trust Him to the point of doubt, getting their feet wet. It makes me think of Jesus telling Peter to put out into the deep and let down the nets for a catch. Peter says they couldn't catch a fish all night long, but at His word Peter obeyed. And then it says, *And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.* (Luke 5:6) In both situations, the priests and Peter, it wasn't until they had **done it**, that the miracle kicked in. As disciples following Jesus in the harvest, this ought to tell us something.

Joshua 5:1-7:15

Joshua 5

V. 1 So, if the kings of the land had melting heart syndrome, they must also have had "stiff-necked and not very smart" syndrome. If Israel's God could do all that they knew He did in Egypt or at the Jordan, what chance did they think they had? There should have been "for sale" signs going up all over Canaan.

It was also a good thing they were in no mood for a fight, because Israel's soldiers were not in any shape to fight back.

Vs. 2-9 Keep this place, Gilgal, in mind for later. This is where the stone monument would have been set up. It will be important in Judges 3.

This entire section shows us what we might have guessed at, but didn't fully realize. When Israel rebelled at Kadesh-barnea, God broke off the Mosaic Covenant with them. His promise to Abraham was still guiding things toward this moment, but some things were stopped. Since Kadesh-barnea none of their male children had been circumcised. This wasn't neglect on the part of the people or Moses. Moses of all people should have known how important circumcision was since he almost died by not circumcising his son. This must have been a directive by God. God was looking ahead to this moment when He would lead a new generation into Canaan.

Circumcision will mean something to these people. It was the symbol of the promise to Abraham. By going through this, every man would know he was participating in that covenant. This generation of Israel is probably the most godly group of people who ever followed the Lord.

Vs. 8-9 This is God's explanation to them. In Egypt, the people were forbidden to circumcise their children. Apparently only people high in society could be circumcised as a sign of their position. The Hebrews were slaves, and reproached as such, and therefore forbidden to be circumcised. ([Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 337)

V. 10 Here is another surprise. An uncircumcised man could not participate in the Passover. They had not celebrated a Passover since Kadesh-barnea. This means that this is only the third Passover that Israel has held. They had the original Passover, they had a Passover at Mt. Sinai, and the next would have been held in Canaan if they had obeyed. Many people in this generation have only heard of the Passover.

Vs. 11-12 It is interesting that on the day after the Passover, the manna stopped. The Feast of Unleavened Bread followed the Passover and for this feast they gleaned grain from the fields. Some of these people didn't know anything but the manna. I wonder if they felt bad that this had ended and years later reminisced about the wonder of it. It sort of makes you wonder which miracles and provisions of this time on earth are being overlooked and taken for granted. When this darkness is all over, we might appreciate what a wonder it was that we were indwelt with the Spirit and had the Word as a daily resource. Maybe we'll wonder, too, why we didn't take more advantage of these very special and amazing privileges.

Vs. 13-15 Joshua must have had guts. He apparently recognized the "man" as an angel, but didn't know what kind (good or bad) he was. So, he challenged him anyway. What a guy.

Since Joshua was by Jericho, he probably went to look at the challenge of how Israel, without materials or experience taking a fortified city, could wage war here. With those thoughts in his mind this angel appeared. Joshua realized that this person was in command of the battle for Jericho, not him. Joshua was the servant.

By the way, who was that angel? Hint: You're not allowed to worship angels. *And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are the true words of God." Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God." For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.* (Revelation 19:9-10)

I wonder what Jesus thought, years later, walking through the city He Himself had led Israel to conquer.

Joshua 6

So, what things do you notice here and what speaks to you as a disciple?

The biggest lesson for me is that God demands faith, and thereby strengthens our faith. I've heard people go overboard trying to explain why they went around the city seven times, trying to find significance in "7." There might be something there. I don't know. But I do know that the entire process was "out there." It wasn't normal. It didn't make sense. There was nothing externally smart or wise or crafty or military about what they did. But it was wise to listen to God, and they did. We get so used to only doing the "smart" thing that we forget to walk by faith. If faith is included in the equation, then the smart thing might look stupid in the eyes of the world. As disciples, we know God and understand life and reality in a way that is different than everyone around us. It will make us look like fools. As Jim Elliot said, "He is no fool who gives what he

cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose." In 1956, in Ecuador, Jim Elliot and four other guys gave their lives to follow Christ into the harvest.

Vs. 1-14 One thing about the way God did it was that the people couldn't take any of the credit for this. A city like Jericho could have withstood a siege for months. God's way only took a week.

Vs. 15-21 It seems that Joshua gave these instructions just before the men yelled. Notice that special care is given to protect Rahab. Notice too that all the people of Jericho were called to stand before God for judgment. That meant they would all have to be separated from the body to stand in His presence. The killing of the animals might have had some religious significance, but probably it was for Israel and the other nations to understand that God's judgment was total. Also, all of the precious metals were to go into the treasury, almost as a memorial to this first victory. This kind of total ban on taking anything would only happen here, so if the men were patient, they would get stuff at other cities.

Vs. 22-25 Again, these are special instructions about Rahab and her family. They would have to be taken outside of the camp until they were cleansed and the men circumcised, and then they would become part of the community of faith. Her faith was already evident. This was an exception to God's rule of not including any of the Canaanites. But God's mercy always extends to faith in action and we'll see another exception in chapter 9.

Vs. 26-27 We can assume it was the Spirit speaking through Joshua to pronounce this curse. Believe it or not the most evil of the kings of Israel, the northern kingdom, will rebuild Jericho and this curse will be fulfilled.

Joshua 7

Vs. 1-15 It's too bad they didn't include the entire chapter for today.

There are a few things that stand out to me.

First, Achan becomes the symbol of how one man's sin has an impact on others. Perhaps it was good that something like this happened right away. It became a permanent lesson to that generation of people. Phinehas will mention this again at the end of Joshua. Notice in v. 5 that 36 men died as a result of what Achan did. That was tragic. Families suffered and children lost their fathers. On the other hand, good does come out of this. The guys were safe with God in heaven and chillin', and this becomes a tremendous example to the nation. After this, you can bet they were holding one another responsible to obey the Lord.

You very seldom hear anyone say that our individual walk with the Lord is important to the work we are doing together in the harvest. It is.

Second, in the next conquest, God is going to allow them to collect plunder. Achan should have just waited.

Third, God will use this entire situation for good. Not only do the people get a great lesson, but the nations surrounding Israel will now get arrogant. This arrogance will actually help Israel make quick work of the main strength of the opposition. In everything, God works for good with those who love Him. God will turn this small defeat into a military strategy to defeat Ai.

Luke 15

This section is rich with lessons for us as disciples. So, why do you think Jesus makes the same point with three different stories? What is the same in each? How does the image get enlarged in each?

I do want to mention one thing before I begin here. These three parables do not stand alone. This section of teaching will continue to Luke 17:10. Because we are reading smaller sections, it is hard to see the continuity, so as you go from one section to the next, look for the flow of the teaching and how it all holds together.

Vs. 1-2 This is the occasion and reason for Jesus teaching on the lost sheep, lost coin and lost son. Now, if you look at Luke 17:1-4, you will see the conclusion of all of this teaching and all of these parables. To deny anyone forgiveness was a sin.

Vs. 3-7 Notice that He doesn't love the lost sheep more than the others, but there is an outpouring of mercy, compelled because of the need. Notice too that the neighbors and friends are invited to rejoice. And of course, there is rejoicing in heaven. That happens now too.

Vs. 8-10 Here, even the angels of God rejoice. The other ones, not so much.

Vs. 11-16 There are good lessons here on how the Father allows us to have our way. Love cannot be compelled. It should be a warning to us when God allows us to prosper in our sin.

Vs. 17-24 Notice that it was hardship that caused the son to come to himself. Neither the father nor anyone else bailed him out. And he knew the door was open to return to his father. There is true repentance here.

V. 21 Although the father cut him off and didn't let him finish, he heard enough and knew there was genuine repentance. His words are so interesting, *he was dead and is alive again*. (v. 24)

Vs. 25-32 Enter the older brother, with whom I can identify unfortunately. Notice what his concern was. It was the *fattened calf*. He never got one. The father pointed him to the spiritual reality. It wasn't about stuff; it was about life and salvation.

And to think, as we work in the harvest we meet these prodigal sons and can tell them the Father is waiting if they are ready to turn to Him. And when we help them come to the Father, there is joy. It is pretty cool to think that there was rejoicing and joy in heaven the day you gave your life to Christ. This is a way that we create joy and celebration in heaven, by working in the harvest, making disciples.

Psalm 81

Because you have read the books of Moses, you will understand this psalm so much better. Most commentators think this psalm is recording the celebration of the Feast of Booths. If so, that pinpoints it to Nehemiah 8:14-18. This son of Asaph was writing after the exile, celebrating the first Feast of Booths since the death of Joshua.

Vs. 1-3 This is to be a joyous celebration because God is their strength.

Vs. 4-10 God made this feast a statute, so Israel would always remember how God sustained them in the wilderness living in tents. He freed them from slavery and did the impossible by keeping them alive. Just think, they were supposed to have celebrated this every year for the past 800 years and never did it.

There is a lot of wilderness history here.

Vs. 11-16 Once in the land, the people didn't listen to God. Ironically, not holding the Feast of Booths was a case in point. God was the one who freed them, but once free they didn't need Him.

Notice how there is an exhortation here that if people will listen to Him, He will forgive and bless them. This portion reads a lot like Isaiah 55.

Proverbs 13:1

Does the *father's instruction* also contain *rebuke*? It looks that way from the parallelism. Rebuke sounds negative to us, but God commands it.

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. (2 Timothy 4:1-2)

APRIL 13

Yesterday, after Israel took (was given) Jericho, Joshua (6:26) cursed anyone who attempted to rebuild Jericho. You don't have to go looking for it now, but as you read through the OT this year, you will unexpectedly find the guy who ordered the rebuilding of Jericho and what happened to the builder who did the work. This is why reading through the Bible is fun. You find stuff, and the Spirit makes all sorts of connections for you. It is always better when you find something on your own and get that "kick" of excitement. That's the kind of joy and motivation that stays with you and it energizes your teaching and your sharing. The truth actually becomes a part of you.

Yesterday we witnessed a national disaster for Israel. In Joshua 7:5 it says that all of the people were disheartened by the defeat and loss of men at Ai. In contrast to how Israel was before, you don't see everyone at their tent doors weeping and ready to stone Joshua.

Joshua prayed and cried out to God, but God sort of says to him, "What are you doing? Get up off your face. Obviously the people sinned." The people and Joshua were to learn an important lesson. If they were defeated, it was because of sin. It meant there was something wrong with them, not God.

Joshua 7:16-9:2

Joshua 7:16-26

V. 16 When it says that Judah was taken, I'm guessing a tribal leader stood before the priest, and the priest rolled the Urim and the Thummim. The result showed if a man was to be selected or not.

You can imagine Achan standing there watching his nightmare come true as the people were whittled down to his tribe, his clan, his family, his household, and finally he's standing nose to nose with Joshua, who I think was a rather imposing dude.

Vs. 24 and 25 are pretty fearful verses. The innocent were immediately with God and enjoying it. The hard reality is, even today, that the sins of the fathers (and mothers) harm the children, even in Christian homes.

V. 26 God's anger was satisfied. Now imagine that this is what happened to Jesus. God just kept heaping it on until He was totally punished in our place. When Jesus had paid every last penalty for us, you could quote part of v. 26 in that, *the Lord (God) turned away from His burning anger toward all who are covered by the blood of the Lamb.*

One more thought from yesterday. God told Joshua that as long as the *devoted* thing was among the people of Israel, He couldn't be among the people of Israel. It just makes me wonder how many things I've let into my life that have distracted me from loving Jesus and following Him in the harvest. He never leaves us, but as long as we have something besides Him, it weakens His ability to speak to us and it keeps us from fully abiding and loving Him. More about that in Luke.

Joshua 8

Vs. 1-2 God totally affirmed that He would give Joshua victory at Ai. Joshua is one of the few guys in the Bible who has no mark against him. Moses and David were both murderers. Not that I'm looking for something bad, but this is the first time I've seen that although Joshua didn't do anything bad, he didn't always ask God first before he did stuff. There was no mention of him asking God before he sent the spies to Jericho.

That worked out fine. He never consulted God before the defeat at Ai. That would have been a good idea. Apparently, like us, Joshua had things to learn, even in his 80s.

Notice that God allowed them to take the plunder. Achan should have waited.

Vs. 3-23 I find it interesting that God turned the entire situation around so that it made Israel's defeat look like a clever ploy to get the city to empty out, leaving it defenseless from the rear.

Vs. 24-29 This is Joshua and his leadership. Notice that like Moses holding the staff back when Joshua fought, Joshua wouldn't put down his javelin. He was devoted to the Lord and to his men.

Notice in v. 29 that Joshua made an example of the king of Ai. He will do this to other kings, but what he does here is interesting. In Deuteronomy 21:23 it says, *for a hanged man is cursed by God*.

This curse of hanging a man before God is what the Father did to His Son for us.

Vs. 30-35 Now that Israel had taken the two fortress cities that guarded the road from the valley of the Jordan into the hill country, it was time to fulfill what God had commanded them to do. They themselves had already experienced the emotions of blessing and curse and knew the terrible effects of the curse. I'll bet their experience with Achan, when God left them for that battle, made this event much more intense and real.

This is the ceremony that the Lord commanded Israel to carry out: the blessings and the curses. The way this was organized with the ark in the middle was really cool.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 347, adds that Joshua had to move the nation 30 miles to get to the place God said this ceremony was to take place.

I've never seen before that Joshua wrote on the stones and that he copied it from his own copy that he himself had written. Joshua was not a king, but fulfilled one of the requirements of a king by making his own copy of the law and reading it every day. The BKC mentions that they have found other monuments where documents three times longer than Deuteronomy were inscribed.

This was a long event that could have gone days and weeks. Notice v. 35. Everyone was present to hear the law. Joshua's strength was in fulfilling the law and all that was commanded him.

Joshua 9:1-2

While Israel was on its pilgrimage, devoting its heart to the spiritual rather than the military, apparently all the kings of the land thought it was a good time to mount an offensive against the worshiping nation. But not everyone was spiritually irrational and wanted to fight, as we'll see tomorrow. Those who seek, find.

Luke 16:1-18

Vs. 1- 9 So, imagine there is a connection between this chapter and the past chapter. What would it be?

I'll make a suggestion. Jesus was in conflict with the Pharisees over the question of reaching out to sinners. When Jesus told the parables of the lost sheep, coin and son, He was really teaching His disciples, because the Pharisees weren't open anyway. All three of the parables involve

things of value, but spiritual value rather than earthly value. You see this particularly in the father talking with the elder brother. The Pharisees were rich. It was one of the ways you joined the club. And actually, the disciples were rich by biblical standards, since they had food for several days and had several changes of clothes. But they were also rich in something else, and that needed to be shared.

Now if we put what Jesus is saying here, together with what He said elsewhere about seeking the kingdom first and selling everything and having treasure in heaven, you understand Jesus is telling them to use all of their resources for the kingdom. What I find interesting here is that the steward got everyone squared up with the master and decreased their debt so it was paid up. So you have two elements to how the steward used his last days of influence: People paid up their debts and they were in good standing with the master. I guess, applying it to us, we should be using our resources so people can trust Christ (who paid their debt) so they can be forgiven and in good standing with God.

Jesus is not telling the disciples to be generous if they have a lot to be generous with. He is telling them to use all of the resources God gives them shrewdly to help people come to Him. As we'll see later, the disciples were poor and getting poorer, but they were beginning to understand what real spiritual values and riches looked like. In this case, it meant paying a price to be with tax collectors and sinners.

Vs. 10-13 Here is a clear application. It didn't matter how much they had or gave, it was their faithfulness with a very little that counted. Notice the promises in vs. 11 and 12.

We've seen v. 13 before in the Sermon on the Mount. I think it was a standard part of Jesus' teaching to His disciples. I still don't think I take this as seriously as Jesus meant it.

Vs. 14-15 The Pharisees who objected to Jesus' association with tax collectors and sinners were still present. As Jesus was telling His disciples that God does measure our faith by our faithfulness to Him in using the resources we've been given, the Pharisees must have been scoffing audibly. When He told the disciples they couldn't possibly serve God and money, the Pharisees were convinced that it was not only possible, but that they were doing it. The Pharisees were justifying themselves; because, generally speaking, they were generous in tithing, although they did it publicly for their own appearance and recognition. Remember, the idea of riches is about what a person values.

Vs. 16-18 Jesus changed the direction of the discussion and got the Pharisees on a point where they couldn't deny they were at fault. They felt they were teachers of the people and the compliance officers of the law. They "forced their way" into the kingdom, trying to make the law conform to them, stretching truths to make themselves acceptable. But Jesus said that not even the punctuation of the law could be perverted. It would always stay the same regardless of how they reinterpreted it for themselves.

Then Jesus got the Pharisees on adultery. They had engineered the law to allow divorce for burned toast, pretty much like today. Divorce was so commonplace in those days that later when Jesus told another group of Pharisees that God was against divorce, even Jesus' disciples were "amazed and greatly astonished," and said, *If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is better not to marry.* (Matt. 19:10) The implication here is that since the Pharisees had money, they were manipulating the system to get the women they wanted. If they wanted a new wife better suited for their needs, they could divorce their own wife and entice a poorer woman to divorce her husband. Who wouldn't want an address on "easy street" for a while? In fact, they could afford to make a poorer, dissatisfied man an offer he couldn't refuse to get his wife, and the system was "legal."

In Jewish society it was a man's world. If a wife was out of place, it was easy to divorce her. This is how the Pharisees were using their wealth and position to give them treasure on earth. Their riches and values had to do with manipulating the law for their own gain. You'll see this in the parable tomorrow of the rich man and Lazarus. Again, this ties back to the issue of tax collectors and sinners, Lazarus being that needy, but rejected, person. Anyway, the Pharisees probably weren't making audible noises now.

Psalm 82

So, what's going on here? It looks like God could be referring to the angelic hosts, but looking at the rest of the psalm shows you that God is talking primarily to the leaders of Israel. Yet, even in the two references we have to Satan and his fall (Isa. 14:12, Ezek. 28:12), his description is taken from the description of the king of Babylon and king of Tyre, and given such language that makes it obvious to us that God has now begun to talk about the fallen angel, whose arrogance was similar to the human judges being described. It could be that the references to *sons of the most high* and *prince* could be shadows, in a secondary sense, of angelic authorities, since *sons of God* (in Job 2:1) and *prince of Persia* (in Daniel 10:20) are both titles that refer to angels. If, in fact, the angels had a guardianship to serve and guide mankind, they perverted it and did not guide anyone to honor God by giving justice and protection.

Vs. 1-5 The main meaning is to the leaders of Israel. The people needed godly leadership, but the leaders then, like the Pharisees in Jesus' day, misled the people and served themselves.

Vs. 6-8 They had a privilege to serve and guide the people. Think of men like Moses and the elders he appointed under him who were given a portion of his spirit (spiritual enabling) to serve before the people and give them justice. The fact that these judges and leaders had the Word of God made them like gods. They were given the truth and "power" to direct people in God's way. That is why God can refer to them figuratively as *gods*, mighty ones. Jesus refers to v. 6 in John 10:34. Even Jesus' usage there has a twist to it, because in referring to this psalm, He is standing before leaders of the people who have led the people astray. Jesus' point was that if they who had been given the Word were called *gods*, how could they say He was blaspheming when the Father had consecrated Him and sent Him into the world?

As reflected in this psalm, as Israel settled into the land, they strayed from God and were led by many who did not honor God. The prophets brought God's judgments upon the leaders who misled the people. As we go on through the year, we'll find many portions of Scripture like this in the OT. One that I'll use here is a good one that eventually promises the Messiah.

"Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for your evil deeds, declares the LORD. Then I will gather the remnant of my flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and I will bring them back to their fold, and they shall be fruitful and multiply. I will set shepherds over them who will care for them, and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be missing, declares the LORD.

"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land. In his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely. And this is the name by which he will be called: 'The LORD is our righteousness.'" (Jeremiah 23:1-6)

Proverbs 13:2-3

V. 2 A man's mouth is seen in contrast to the person who is treacherous. A treacherous person uses his mouth to trick or mislead people, but in relating to people in that way his inner life is full of turmoil and violence. The good man eats what is good because he uses his mouth to encourage and enrich others honestly.

V. 3 This is the obvious corollary and a good reason to honor the Lord with our mouths.

APRIL 14

Joshua 9:3-10:43

Joshua 9:3-27

This is a great portion of Scripture, not because Joshua & Co. were tricked by the Gibeonites, but because it shows something of the faith the Gibeonites and the understanding that all of the nations in Canaan had of the people of Israel and what God was doing with them.

Vs. 3-15 Now it says the Gibeonites acted with cunning, but there was faith in something that motivated all of this. Not everyone responded like they did.

Notice in vs. 9-10 that they knew of what God had done 40 years earlier in Egypt and believed it. They also mention Og and Sihon, but notice that no mention is made of Jericho or Ai. These guys were pretty clever.

V. 14 This is the only negative thing there is in the Bible against Joshua, and God doesn't make a big deal about it. I'll bet they never failed to ask the Lord again. We've noticed that Joshua had failed to ask God about a couple of things. Learning to ask God in practical matters was something that he was growing in, even in his 80's. He had intense faith in God, as we'll see today, but had areas where he thought he could understand a situation without needing God's guidance. This is true of all of us. I'm sure this lesson is here for us as disciples.

To Joshua's credit, this decision turned out good for Israel and for the Gibeonites. In Nehemiah, there are Gibeonites in Jerusalem helping to rebuild the wall.

Vs. 16-21 Three days later when Israel marched on Gibeon they realized they had been hoodwinked. Notice that Gibeon was the main fortress that protected three other cities.

Notice in v. 18 that when the people of Israel found out what their leaders had done, they were upset. Why? Because they had internalized the message that if one person sinned, the entire nation suffered. They knew they were not to make peace. God took care of this situation for Israel and covered this oversight of the leaders, bringing something good out of it. Later, after Joshua and these leaders are gone, the people will use this incident as precedence to disobey God and form alliances with people in the land. That will be sin, since they are not tricked, and it is what will launch them into the tragedy that is the book of Judges.

Vs. 22-27 The Gibeonites, the people, the leaders, the entire city had amazing faith. Remember that Abraham & Sons © had lived in Canaan for generations long before this; and it is possible, besides the information the Gibeonites had of Egypt, that they also understood something of the history of Abraham and the promise. That's speculation, I know, but it makes you wonder. Somehow they knew of what God had said to Moses in Deuteronomy about bringing all of the inhabitants of the land to judgment. Were there spies in the crowd as Moses preached? They knew what God had said. In 10:2 it says that this was *a great city* with real fighters, yet they had the faith to try to make peace. God rewarded them for this.

Faith is information, trust in that information and obeying that information. This is why these people received God's mercy. All of the other kings in Canaan knew exactly what the Gibeonites knew and chose not to believe or even run. It is the irrationality of sin.

Joshua 10

Vs. 1-5 It is interesting that God used this event with Gibeon to draw all of these kings into the open field for battle. Imagine how long this would have taken going one city at a time. These are basically the kings that held military power in the southern part of Canaan.

Vs. 6-11 Notice that God assured Joshua of victory. And then you see Joshua, the man of faith, building his strategy on God's assurance. This is the balance of hearing God and then using our passion and creativity in following God. Both God and Joshua get their licks in, during this battle. Joshua drove his tired army by night to a place where the attack would be unexpected. Then God did His thing. First He got some confusion going and then He *threw down large stones*. God made sure Israel knew that He was involved and that they weren't just winning by their own strength. In light of Joshua's request, this must have been a passing, isolated thunderstorm, since the sky was clear enough to see the sun. I can imagine the guys running from Joshua, saying, "Is it me, or does it seem to you that that cloud is following us? Ouch!"

Vs. 12-14 These verses are amazing not only because of what happened, but because of Joshua. How did Joshua know that he could do this? There must be a link between this and what Jesus told the disciples about what would be possible if they had faith as a mustard seed. Inspired by the Spirit, yet as a man fully immersed in this moment with God, Joshua called on the day to stand still. Before we get lost in the physics of the situation, think about the faith that was inspired in Joshua. I think of how Jesus knew to heal one man and yet pass by another. And how Peter and John one day walked past a guy Jesus had walked past many times, and knew it was time to heal him. It makes me think about the harvest and where those intersections of faith and mustard seed occur.

It was a good thing Joshua didn't know a lot about physics or natural law or anything, because if he had, he would never have asked this because it is "impossible." It wasn't that the day slowed down; it was that it stood still; the sun and the moon remaining in the same place means the earth stopped spinning. Apparently God isn't impressed with physics either, because He did it. Just think about what had to happen for the earth to stop moving. Those hours on earth, everywhere on earth, would have been strange hours. God's power is beyond physics. Physics exist for His purposes but are not necessary. He is absolute. He creates. He stops. He resumes. Physics and natural "laws" work because He makes them work, and life can and will exist (someday) without the sun.

It is interesting on this point that Luther tried to teach science with this section and called Copernicus a fool to say that the earth revolved around the sun because Joshua clearly asked that the sun stand still. Obviously God knew what Joshua meant, and in the same way, we still call it "sunrise" and a "sunset," even in scientific journals, even though we know better.

Again, all of these nations knew what the Gibeonites knew. They could have fled; they could have repented and asked God for mercy. The same is true for the people we are sent to reach in the harvest. They need to hear the message, but responding by faith is between them and God.

Luke 16:19-17:10

Luke 16:19-31

Since Jesus was just talking to the Pharisees, this story would have been aimed at them and also would have been good teaching for the disciples.

The story of the rich man and Lazarus falls into a different category than Jesus' parables. The parables are normally faceless, nameless object lessons. They are examples of "that woman" or a "certain man." No names of historical people are ever used. Names of known people throw the meaning of the story into an historical or fictional framework. For example, if Jesus had told the story of the prodigal son, and Abraham had been the father, we would have immediately asked the question of the story being real or being something Jesus just made up using the historical figure. If the story didn't jibe with what we knew was historical, it would open the question of what, in fact, is historical in the Bible. That would be a nasty can of worms. BUT, that didn't happen. When Jesus told a parable, he used no names and didn't use historical figures.

So, what's going on here? The obvious implication is that this is an historical event. Jesus was not only the man, the Spirit indwelt Son of God, but He was also God the Son. He not only had earthly illustrations to draw upon, but as God, having seen the dramas on earth and how they were concluded when men left the earth, He knew what happened to these people when they finally entered the next life. Jesus, as God the Son, had witnessed every person who had ever lived enter the presence of God. Actually, it is a place of waiting. The waiting was for the time when the justice and righteousness of God would be fulfilled by Jesus living the perfect life and making payment for sin. The question, "Could God really provide salvation for sinners righteously, according to His own rules," was answered in Jesus' sacrifice, payment and resurrection. Until that event, there was a place of waiting, which was divided into two parts: A place of punishment and a place of comfort in the presence of God. If you read the book of Revelation, people being resurrected to judgment and being thrown into the lake of fire (hell) is still future (Revelation 20). The new heavens and new earth (heaven) is also still future (Revelation 21). So for now, even on the spiritual side of life, things are temporary until the final judgments and new creations are finished.

As a real event, this story provides us with real learning about what happens immediately after death, what it looks like and what the awareness of life is like after leaving this part of life. So, for my part, I treat this story as an historical event.

Notice that the two parts have names: *Hades* being the place of punishment and *Abraham's side* being the good place. Why *Abraham's side*? I can only guess that God's redemptive purpose was tied into the promise to Abraham. Though the promise of redemption goes back to the Fall, it is at God's call to Abraham that the plan of redemption is mentioned in detail. The promise to Abraham was the object of faith in God for many generations of Israel's history. Today the object of faith is the gospel of Christ. Anyway, God calls the good place, Abraham's bosom, or *Abraham's side*.

Notice that Abraham knows about the Law of Moses and the prophets. You wonder by that if Abe was able to hear or view some of that history.

Notice that the response of the man in Hades is concern for his brothers. We often feel very uncomfortable talking about Christ and commitment to God when an unbeliever has lost an equally unsaved loved one. I get that, and there should be concern and tact. But in reality, that lost person who has just stepped into reality, and that being the place of punishment, is consumed with begging that someone will go to that other person on this side of life and tell them about Christ. What shocking reality! Not only is heaven cheering us on to share the gospel of Christ, but hell is rooting for us, too, and maybe with more emotion and desperation.

Notice that if a person will not accept the Word, they will not be impressed by miracles. Think about what we've read in Deuteronomy. So much of that was true and inspiring for us as believers. What Moses said there was the essence of following God in faith for any generation of people on this earth. The Pharisees put their hope in Moses, but as Jesus told them in John 5:45-47, *Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on*

whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?

The same goes for miracles. I remember saying, "If God shows me something, then I'll believe." Not so. The preaching of the Word is sufficient and goes to the heart and soul. If people will not believe what God has said, they will not be moved by miracles. We've seen that the miracles of God bringing Israel out of Egypt and the miracles of His daily provision didn't do much for them.

Luke 17:1-4

Jesus was still thinking about the pride of the Pharisees, how they were like the rich man and made faith and acceptance very difficult for the needy, like Lazarus, tax collectors and sinners. These *little ones* are those in need of redemption like the tax collectors and sinners who had been drawing near to Jesus to hear the Word. The word for sin, means "to stumble." I was reading Romans 14 and 15 this morning, and not making people stumble was a big part of what the Spirit said through Paul. And when you get to the end of Romans, it says in Romans 16:17-18, *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.* The word *obstacles* means a stumbling block.

Jesus was warning the disciples about this problem and Paul was fighting against it in churches.

V. 3 seems to be Jesus warning His disciples not to be like the Pharisees, holding prejudices and grudges that make it hard for people to come to God and find His acceptance. Jesus tells the disciples that they are to forgive and thereby not give people cause to stumble in their steps with or toward God. Notice what Paul says to Timothy and how that sounds like this: 2 Timothy 2:24 *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

This gentle spirit, willing to forgive and be patient with the aggressive, sinning and frustrating, was something that Jesus was trying to ingrain in His disciples, and something Paul knew Timothy needed. And, hey, I need it too.

Notice that if the conditions are met, Jesus commands, *"you must forgive him."* I take it that the rejection of this person would cause the stumbling.

Vs. 5-10 It seems that with this command, Jesus pushed the disciples to realize He was asking something of them that was impossible for them to do emotionally. In fact, it was beyond their faith. So they asked Him for the faith to trust Him in order to do what He commanded.

In this context, where Jesus has just talked about forgiving in a complicated situation, it is interesting that He uses the illustration of a *mulberry tree*. As I understand it, they make a very dense and complicated network of roots. I know from living in Texas, that if you had clay or cast iron sewer piping, and you had a mulberry tree in the yard, the pipes were full of roots.

Jesus is saying that even the tiniest amount of faith would cause, in this image, the tree to rise up and this complicated root system to release and unravel. Of course, if you do this, remember that in cities there is often restricted airspace around international airports so be careful of how high you throw the tree through the air into the sea. Just a helpful suggestion. ☺ So the promise of faith is that the most impossible thing and the most complicated relationships can be overcome with faith.

Vs. 7-10 Now comes the faith itself, and how simple. Faith is increased simply by obeying with gratefulness, without questioning or thought as to what we deserve. We think our service for God is above and beyond the call of duty, but it's not. I struggle with this all the time, but I'm inspired by this example. In light of all that we've been given as disciples, our salvation, the Spirit, and eternity with Christ, our work in the harvest is nothing and we are unworthy servants and have only done what was required of us.

I know that it might be hard to see this, but this actually ends this section of teaching that began with tax collectors and sinners coming to hear Jesus in Luke 15:1. The harvest is important to Jesus and a disciple needs to be able to extend the grace and forgiveness of Christ, not as a conceptual message, but as his living experience and passion in knowing his Lord.

Psalm 83

Vs. 1-8 It's hard to know when this was written. At the destruction of Jerusalem, many of the neighboring nations were happy and were judged by God for their acts during that time. I have the sense this might have been when the Assyrians were threatening Jerusalem and the surrounding nations were hoping that Judah would be taken captive.

Notice the references to chapters 4-8 in the book of Judges. That period of time was a time when the neighboring nations made frequent "shopping trips" to Israel.

Vs. 9-18 The psalmist cries out to God to save them like He did during the days of the judges.

Notice the crying out. Earlier in the year, most of The Psalms were the "crying out" kind. You might conclude that by the mere frequency of those kinds of psalms, that should be our normal state before God: asking, seeking, and knocking.

V. 18 The desire is that the nations would know the Lord. If this psalm was written regarding the Assyrian threat to Jerusalem, God decimated the Assyrian army. The world was stunned and every nation knew there was a God in Jerusalem.

Proverbs 13:4

What occurs to me reading this is the difference between knowing God's will and doing it. We may need to question what His direction for us is, but we don't need to ask what our sense of interest and energy should be once we know. Diligence is a response of faith and love.

APRIL 15

Joshua 11-12

Believe it or not, today we finish up the conquest of the land. In terms of discipleship, there is a phrase that does point to something interesting. It is Joshua's claim to fame. It is one of those things that doesn't require a lot of skill or genius or talent. God kind of leveled the playing field when He called us to His side to work with Him in the harvest. The essential quality of a disciple is to hear the Word of God and to do it. That's what Jesus said. As you read, look for and underline where it says that Joshua obeyed. We can all love and obey the Lord, as we follow Him in the harvest.

Joshua 11

Vs. 1-5 The kings of northern Canaan come against Joshua and the Lord. Again, this is the irrationality of sin. These people knew what God had done, but still chose to fight. That's what makes us human I guess.

Vs. 6-9 Here again we see God promising Joshua victory and Joshua warps into high gear. Joshua took the fight to the kings. It is interesting to see God command that all of the war horses were to be maimed and military gear was to be destroyed. If we have the Lord, we don't need the

enemies' resources. You think of all the time and money Solomon invested in horses and chariots and understand what a show and waste that was. God was showing Israel and the nations that He was more than enough.

Vs. 10-15 Here are a couple of other things about Joshua. First, he destroyed the royal city, the symbol of might, and let the other cities stand. That was good strategy. Next, he regarded Moses as the servant of the Lord and honored Moses' work. Finally, Joshua totally obeyed. It will be an honor to meet Joshua someday.

Vs. 16-20 These victories were God's judgment on Canaan. We've mentioned before that He had shown hundreds of years of patience and had men like Melchizedek and Abraham live as witnesses among them. We know that there is a personal aspect to a person hardening their heart to God and then God encouraging the further hardening of heart. In both Rahab and the Gibeonites, we see that people were open to turn to God if they desired to turn to Him. In reality, God called these people into His presence to give account. God's presence is a place of ultimate blessing and privilege, unless you don't like God.

Vs. 21-23 It is kind of an interesting note that when Joshua broke the military might of Canaan, he also destroyed most of the giants. Remember, it was the presence of the Anakim that the 10 spies used to frighten the people. You notice the city of Gath. That will be the city that Goliath comes from.

As God said earlier, He doesn't remove every point of resistance. If He did, the land would waste away and wild animals would take over. It will take time for Israel to move into their inheritance. But what happened yesterday, and is happening today, is the breaking of military power in the land. From this point on, all that is left are small towns and cities that *could* easily be taken by each tribe. The "could" will be a sad commentary on Israel. Israel will remain true to the Lord during the life of Joshua and the elders; but after their influence is gone, Israel will sin, and some of these towns and cities that could easily have been removed will remain. Without God's blessing, even the smallest influence will overwhelm them, because like us, our strength is in the Lord. If the Lord is not present and we are not close to Him, we cannot fulfill the purpose for our lives or our mission on earth. Regarding our work in the harvest, Jesus said, "Without me, you can do nothing." If we "do nothing" it is because we have lost touch with Him and are living without Him.

Joshua 12

Vs. 1-6 This is a summary of the victories under Moses' leadership.

Vs. 7-24 These are the victories under Joshua's leadership.

Luke 17:11-37

Vs. 11-19 This is kind of funny to read because Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem, but heading east and He'll eventually cross the Jordan. Jerusalem was straight south. The shortest distance between two points is always God's way. There are some great lessons in all of this. Only Luke has this story, and it is the second time he has reported the cleansing of lepers. This story has a twist.

Vs. 13-14 Notice that they had faith. For them to yell this to Jesus showed they were aware of Jesus' power. The fact that they went when He told them also shows faith.

Vs. 15-16 This guy was overcome with thanks and went all worshipful. He couldn't help himself. So, how did they know he was a Samaritan? Did they wear name tags? But now you see why Luke included this story.

Vs. 16-19 Being overcome with gratitude and worship doesn't have to be commanded. The others obeyed Jesus, but this man showed overwhelming love.

Luke was a Gentile, and a companion and personal physician to the apostle Paul. I'm sure Luke had experienced the conflicts Paul was constantly facing from the Jews and Jewish Christians (many of whom were former Pharisees who had been saved) who wanted the Gentile believers to take on Jewish custom and practice. Luke is showing his Gentile readers that the Lord Himself honored the outcasts who worshiped with simple faith and devotion.

Vs. 20-21 Now in contrast, we see the Pharisees. Jesus had already said that the kingdom would be invisible like that mustard seed or like yeast in flour. That the kingdom was in the midst of them was Jesus Himself. The import of this episode is that the Pharisees sought to challenge Jesus, and once they heard His cryptic answer, they left, shaking their heads.

V. 22 I think as the Pharisees left, Jesus knew His followers would face deep persecution because of the kind of unbelief expressed by men like these. In light of that kind of persecution and scorn, there would come a time when the disciples would desire to see one day of God's vindication, one day of what it would look like when the Son of Man comes in judgment. But, that time is for the end and they will have to take it by faith that it will be a judgment on mankind that will account for all harm done by the powers of unbelief.

Notice the plural *days*. The *days of the Son of Man* are the entire seven-year period of the Tribulation.

Vs. 23-25 During those days, many will claim "Jesus sightings," or claim to be the Messiah. The disciples are to ignore these claims. *In His day* is the actual day of His bodily return. This sign is for His disciples at that point in history, letting them know that they won't have to go anywhere to find Jesus. They don't have to go running to find the false Messiahs that will crop up. Every person on the planet will see Him. The event won't be hidden and it won't look like normal lightning and they won't have to tune into CNN to figure it out. Also, they are not to be lured out into the open. The advent of false Messiahs might also mean that many people living through the Tribulation, even unbelieving people, will have a religious, although warped, understanding of the Tribulation. But in the end, only having a relationship with Jesus will count. The elect will live by obedience to this command.

Vs. 26-29 Using both the flood of Noah, and Lot and the destruction of Sodom, Jesus shows there was a time factor from the sudden beginning of the event to the destruction. Once Noah entered the ark and the rain began to fall, life as they knew it ended. Once the angels arrived in Sodom and Lot left the city, nothing was ever the same. Once the destruction begins during the Tribulation, although seven years will pass before Christ's return, normal life will have ended. If you read Revelation you'll see that the disasters of the first 3.5 years will break down the entire network and technology of the world. The entire planet will become "third world," and that might be more advanced than things will actually be.

Vs. 30-33 These verses seem to parallel what Jesus says later regarding the middle of the Tribulation and the desecration of the temple. That will begin a time of unparalleled persecution of the Jews and Christians over the entire earth.

On the other hand, since there is no reference here to the antichrist, it could be that Jesus is applying this to the entire time of the Tribulation. Those who think to save anything during that time will end up losing everything. Notice in v. 30 that it talks about a particular "day." On that day the Son of Man is revealed. This could be talking about the beginning of the Tribulation. It will be through the entire Tribulation, as the Lord opens those seals, that He is revealed and makes His judgment of the earth manifest.

Interestingly, in v. 33, Jesus uses a phrase that He's used before regarding the cost of discipleship. I find this pretty interesting, to think He used the same images with slightly different meanings in different contexts.

Vs. 34-37 At first glance, this summary note by Jesus could be talking about the time of persecution of the Jews and Christians. The implication would be that they should have obeyed what Jesus has just said and should have run for the hills. In that case, it wouldn't seem that these verses could apply to the rapture.

On the other hand, when Jesus was talking about His return, the three points He consistently emphasized and repeated were that the time was unknown, that the time would come suddenly and that the sign of His appearing would be in the sky. The reference to the eagles (*vultures*) is in answer to where these people would be taken. Since a corpse is mentioned it seems that there is judgment in view. Yet if you look at the next reference to the "eagles" in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24:28 (two days before His death) it is clear that the only thing Jesus is using the eagles for is to tell the disciples where to look, that is, up. The sign of His coming will be in the sky. If you were wondering where a corpse was, you would look in the sky to see where the vultures were. The sign was in the sky. Close to the time of Jesus' coming, there will be many impersonators and people will be deceived into looking for Jesus in many places. In both Matthew 24:28 and here, the only place to look will be "up." From this, I would say that Jesus is saying these will be taken into the air.

Since these are the final words of this teaching and a parable is about to follow, I think Jesus is referring to the beginning of the "day" of His coming, that is, the beginning of the Tribulation and what Paul is referring to in 1 Corinthians 15:50-52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. However, if you read Revelation 19:11-21 you will find the Lord arriving at the battle with His people (the ones taken?) who have been instantly gathered from all the nations. These believers will not be resurrected or changed, but will follow Christ into the battle at Armageddon, where He will feed His enemies to the birds (vultures). These same believers will follow Christ into the Millennial Kingdom. I mention this only to say that there is some leeway here for another interpretation.

Notice that there is no v. 36. Apparently some copyist added it later to parallel the Olivet Discourse in Matthew. We have so many manuscripts of the NT that these are easy to find.

As disciples, we need to be careful to submit our lives and expectations to the Lord and His Word. These events are coming and the Democrats and Republicans in the USA will have nothing to do with it. Our passion has to be to keep our hearts free of civilian affairs so we can please the One who enlisted us. We follow Him in His harvest to reach those for whom He shed His blood as the storm clouds gather.

Psalm 84

According to the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 855, this is a "pilgrim" psalm, meaning it was sung by the processions of people being led into Jerusalem for the feasts. It was a song that helped the people tune their hearts to worship. Though these songs were written by the sons of Korah, they may have been influenced by David. One of David's passions was organizing Israel around the worship of God. As soon as he could, David brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem because it signified the presence of God. David's longing, particularly after the long years of running, was to dwell with God. We've seen these recurring themes in David's songs: dwelling with the Lord, finding strength in God, pleading that God would hear our prayer.

Vs. 1-4 It is interesting to me that God made us to dwell with Him in the garden. Whether it was David or Paul, as they grew in their faith they desired more and more to be in God's presence.

Vs. 5-7 What an interesting way to express strength. All the ways of our hearts lead to God's presence. It takes a while to learn this, but when God is our only desire, instead of living from bump to bump, we go from strength to strength as our hearts "appear" before Him.

Vs. 8-9 This is the only "crying out" in this psalm. It is the constant affirmation of those on this earth who recognize this separation from God because of sin, and desire this day to be over.

Vs. 10-12 Why wouldn't we be content to serve at the door if it meant being in His presence? In that service all of our needs are met with favor, light and safety. Just reading this challenges my heart.

Proverbs 13:5-6

What strikes me is the connection in v. 5 of falsehood, shame and disgrace. The latter two are a good reason to be truthful. Our deceptions find us out. Jesus warned the disciples to count on it.

V. 6 Righteousness is not a practical means to an end. It is living to please God. In gratefulness we desire to live in a way that expresses our gratitude to God and reflect His goodness. The fact that righteousness protects us is just collateral blessing.

APRIL 16

Joshua 11:18 says that the war went on a long time. It seems, for us, that it's been quick, since we just started reading about it this week and now it's almost over. Obviously the Lord has given us an abbreviated version. Today we'll find out how long the fighting lasted from crossing the Jordan to the point of dividing the land. Even there, the Lord will tell us that there were still a lot of peoples and cities to fight against.

God hardened the kings so they would fight against Israel, but there were some examples of mercy and grace to balance the hardening. I don't believe these kings wanted to make peace, but I think the hardening is that God made them confident in their madness. Even the giants couldn't stand against God. With God at your side, big guys make big targets. Big problems often lead to huge opportunities.

Joshua 13-14

Joshua 13

Vs. 1-7 This summary mentions that even though the military might of Canaan was broken, there were still people and cities to be removed. Even after great victories in our lives, God still keeps things in our lives that make us live by faith, still needing to depend on God. The introduction to the book of Judges explains this too.

Joshua was an older man and the fact that God told him that he was an older man indicates that his days of fighting were over. He had done what God wanted; the military might of Canaan was smashed, and now the next great task would be assigning the people the land. It could be that Joshua was in his 90's as he entered the land and was at or beyond 100 at this point.

Remember, too, that this is an incredible moment in the plan of God and the life of the nation. They are about to be given a piece of the Promised Land that had been promised to Abraham. Also, as boring as these sections might seem, the fact that they are recorded in the Bible made them official real estate documents.

Vs. 8-33 The description of dividing the land begins with what Moses had already done.

Vs. 8-14 This is a summary of all that Moses did.

V. 13 At this point, this is just a report of peoples who were left in that part of the land. Actually, in a way, that was no problem since that side of the Jordan was not Canaan. These people were

not under God's judgment. If they threatened the tribes, Israel could deal with them by trusting God.

Notice in this chapter how often it's mentioned that the Levites had no inheritance. Their privilege was from God and the people needed to remember that. Also, their privilege was given in contrast to their lack of territorial inheritance.

Vs. 15-23 These are the legal boundaries of the land given to Reuben. Notice the mention of Balaam. He becomes a symbol of someone close to the truth, leading those in the truth into ruin. Reuben's land was in the south, going up the east side of the Dead Sea and a little north along the Jordan River.

Vs. 24-28 Gad's land went further north to the bottom of the Sea of Galilee.

Vs. 29-31 Finally, this is the land on the east side of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus did a lot of ministry there and in His day the population of that area was predominantly Gentile.

Vs. 32-33 Notice that the Levites are mentioned again. What is also interesting is that Moses is the main person in all of this. So much of what we read here is about Israel's obedience to God through His servant Moses. At this point, the people obeyed God and obeyed Moses. It is interesting that years later, the Pharisees who revered Moses tried to use Moses against Jesus.

Joshua 14

Vs. 1-5 This is the summary of how the land in Canaan would be divided. Notice that Joshua, Eleazar, and the elders were involved in this process. No one had the authority of Moses so the authority was spread around. According to the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 356, this selection by lots was apparently done by taking a name out of an urn and then taking a land parcel out of another urn. God was the one who really decided. Also, we were told earlier, under Moses, that a large tribe should get more than a smaller tribe.

Vs. 6-12 Apparently, as the word was communicated to the tribes that the land would now be divided, Caleb came forward to address an issue. He not only represented Judah, but God had made some promises to him that needed to be attended to. Before the lots were cast, Caleb reminded Joshua of the promise.

It is inspiring listening to this man of faith. And think too, that although Caleb didn't die and was rewarded for his faith, he still had to wait the 38 years in the wilderness as God prepared the next generation. I wonder if Caleb played a role in passing on his faith among the people of Judah. What a model for following Christ through all the turmoil of life and church and everything else. Caleb was focused on the promise of God.

Notice that this section gives us a time marker. By what Caleb says here, we know now how long Israel has been at war (chapters 1-12). Caleb was 40 when he went out as a spy. At that point, Israel had already been in the wilderness for a year and a half, being ordered as a nation. Then they wandered for 38 ½ years. So, Caleb would have been 78 when they crossed the Jordan. Since Caleb is now 85, this means that they have been at war for 7 years.

V. 12 Apparently Caleb wasn't afraid of giants. You know, big guys make big targets.

Vs. 13-15 Joshua blessed his old comrade-in-arms. There was no lot cast, because Judah's land would have to encompass the land promised to Caleb. Hebron would become the city that King David would live in for seven years as the king of Judah, as Israel fought a civil war with the tribes still following the family of King Saul.

It seems that Caleb went right to work. Notice that before Caleb named the city Hebron, it was named for its ruler who was a giant among the giants, and apparently an even easier target to hit. When this guy was put down, again, the land had rest from war.

Luke 18:1-17

V. 1 So, Jesus has just told His disciples that things will get bad for them, and that things will really get bad for His followers during the Tribulation. I guess that discussion was not so motivational for the disciples. Now He tells them to pray, instead of losing heart. Again, it is interesting that the Spirit moved Luke to include this. Luke was a missionary companion of Paul and knew adversity and persecution from the Gentiles, the Jews and the Jewish factions in the church.

Vs. 2-8 Notice that although the overall meaning of the story is for perseverance and pestering God in prayer, the object of the parable is begging for justice, vindication and deliverance. Verse 7 points to the focus of this crying out, and v. 8 refers, again, to the Tribulation and the second coming of Christ.

Notice that the idea of praying, not giving up and not being disheartened, kind of sounds like God's words / command to Joshua, *be strong and courageous* (Josh. 1:6). Just as God promised victory to Joshua, Jesus is promising victory to His followers in the harvest.

Vs. 7-8 Jesus promised a quick response from God. This has to be understood during the time of the Tribulation. During that judgment on the earth, there will be an almost one-to-one correspondence between the persecutions of the believing and God's terrifying acts of judgment toward the nations. As God brings judgment, instead of the masses of people repenting and coming to God, they will rail against Him and go after His people. But the more they go after the elect, the more God judges them. You'll see all of this when we get to Revelation at the end of the year. If you're interested now, reading Revelation 9-17 should give you a sense of this.

But even for us now in the harvest, we are to be crying out to God day and night. If it takes great disaster to make us cry out to God, and we're not crying out now, we really don't see life as it is. The believers in the Tribulation will be living and testifying for Christ as the world gets darker and darker. Is our world really any different? We may not be visually losing massive numbers of people to "natural" disasters, but each day we are losing incredible numbers of people to death, blinded by the enemy, dying in their sins and going to hell. I'd say that should be a cause for some emotional distress on our part.

Notice Jesus' question in v. 8. Faith continues to cry out. Faith knows that the only deliverance is from God. Faith understands that the only one who can help is God. In a land, and during a time, when we have so many resources, is it any wonder why we don't cry out? It is easy for our lives to become focused on us and not on those who don't yet know Christ. We have everything we need, so we don't need to cry out. But if we are laboring in the harvest, we see the loss and we see that we will always need Him and His help. Will the Son of Man find faith when He returns to the earth or will He just find religious belief? Not all religious belief is faith, even in our camp. If our love for Christ and our passion to follow Him isn't directed to the harvest and the making of disciples, who make disciples, we might only have a comfortable collection of beliefs.

Vs. 9-14 Verse 9 gives you the guide to understanding what He's about to say. These people who were to be cautioned by this parable were most likely disciples. The fact that a Pharisee was used in the parable is like Jesus saying, "Don't be a Pharisee." Also, think back to the beginning of chapter 15 when the tax collectors and sinners were coming to Jesus and the Pharisees began complaining. Jesus ended that entire lesson telling the disciples that they had to put aside their feelings and extend forgiveness to all who sought it. Jesus didn't want His followers to become the next group of Pharisees.

Just like the *unworthy servants* who had only done what was required of them, even though we know and serve Christ, our prayer is to be like this tax collector, *God, be merciful to me, a sinner*. We carry the body of death until we leave this place, or if we are still around when Jesus

comes and are changed. As disciples in the harvest, the minute we lose our perspective on our own lives, our own sin, the miracle of our own salvation, we lose compassion for the perishing. The grace we've received is what should move us to tell others, or as Paul says, *For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.* (2 Corinthians 5:13-15)

Vs. 15-17 And here is a case in point regarding the perspective of the disciples. The disciples' problem with letting children be brought to Jesus for blessing was not theological, but a matter of their own standard of "importance" and "worth." Jesus told them that they needed to look to those who have faith. A child, or a sinner, who has just understood grace and forgiveness, responds with humility and gratefulness and excitement. This is a good lesson for us as disciples in the harvest. Who has faith to believe? Like the victim in the story of the Good Samaritan, it is often the person in need who looks humble, dirty, outcast and beaten up. Sometimes, the people we should be working with in the harvest are not the good-looking people on our "A" list.

Psalm 85

It is interesting to speculate a little, thinking about when some of these psalms were written. As I read this I can imagine David trying to form Israel around the worship of God. David inherited a country that had crumbled in neglect, and he not only needed to create unity, but Israel was being preyed upon by all of its neighbors. The things that had happened to Israel showed that God was judging the people for their disobedience and neglect.

Vs. 1-3 This sounds to me like an appeal to God to remember how He took Jacob from Egypt, through all the rebellion in the wilderness.

Vs. 4-9 Having read so many of David's psalms, this sounds so much like his heart. Notice the mention of God's steadfast love and the desire that God's glory would dwell in the land.

Vs. 10-13 What an interesting way to express God's blessing of unity and revival in the land.

It is interesting how often a prayer for the future is based on what God has done in the past. Knowing what God has done in the past gives us hope for the future. Reading through the Bible like this will be a great benefit to your praying and your faith. You'll become more familiar with how God's love and faithfulness in the past gave, and still gives, His present followers hope in following His plan of redemption into the future.

Proverbs 13:7-8

V. 7 appears to say that if riches are what you want, they will twist you and warp you whether you have them or not. Real richness is a matter of the heart being rich in God. 1 Timothy 6:9-10 talks about the "wonderful" effects of the desire to have money. The poor (and righteous and content) may not have the resources, but they also don't have the trouble and the twisting.

APRIL 17

Joshua 15

Vs. 1-12 This is a long chapter having to do with the land given to Judah. Judah is basically given the southern half of the country, from Jerusalem in the north to Kadesh-barnea in the south, and from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean Sea. That land portion was so huge that three other tribes would be given pieces of it, but eventually Simeon and Benjamin were absorbed into Judah, and Dan went rogue and took land in the north. This was a royal share of the land, which later allowed Judah to become a kingdom unto itself.

Vs. 13-19 And then there were those pesky giants. This story having to do with Caleb is conspicuous by its presence. Caleb's daughter was given the southern desert (thanks, Dad!) and needed the water rights. The real impact of this story is that this is the first time we find the name of Othniel. He is a fearsome dude and unafraid of giants. He is also the first judge in the book of Judges.

Vs. 20-63 There are a lot of names of cities here, but be encouraged. After you have read through your one-year Bible a few years, some of these will begin to stand out. One of the things that hit me reading this year is the number of enemy cities "given" to Judah. It would be like receiving the gift of Baghdad or Tehran. Many of these cities would be grave enemies of Israel for the next 400 years.

V. 31 Just for trivia and because I never saw this before, notice the town of Ziklag. When David finally got tired of being chased by King Saul, he headed to live among the Philistines in Ziklag. King Achish gave Ziklag to David. How funny, because this town was originally supposed to belong to Judah. It won't be until the reign of David that the power of the Philistines is broken and these cities are under the rule of Israel.

V. 33 Notice the names of these cities. When you get to the story of Samson, you'll see these cities because all of the adventures of Samson (tribe of Dan) really take place in the land of Judah.

Vs. 45-47 These are the cities of the Philistines which will loom large until David is on the throne. It is sad to think that if the people had kept following the Lord, God would have given them victory over these awesome enemies. The people were not to rest until the job was done. By deciding not to press forward, they fell backward. Instead of commanding the land and doing God's work, Judah would be ruled by the Philistines.

V. 63 There are many mentions of the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem. It wouldn't be until David was king that Jerusalem would belong to Israel and become the city of David. They actually taunted David, from the wall, that he wouldn't be able to take the city. Bad choice. Of course the Jebusites had about 350 years (Judges to David being king) of experience seeing Israel flounder around in the land and fail. They hadn't been confronted by a man who was following God and who really wanted that city. Caleb apparently never personally tried to take the city, and Othniel lived south of Jerusalem in the desert.

In my thinking, the parallel to us as disciples is that we have been left here to work. Rest is coming. If we rest now and settle into life on earth, it overwhelms and defeats us. All of the blessing and strength the Lord promises us is in bearing our cross, following Him in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. When we stop doing that and try to turn our calling into a comfortable Christianity, we become weak and at the mercy of our own sin, the enemy's influence and the culture's attractions. Worst of all, we are no longer following our Lord in the harvest, drawing on the strength and closeness He promises. For Israel and us, living in Canaan, without moving forward, means defeat.

Luke 18:18-43

Vs. 18-30 Many of the last illustrations Jesus has used have to do with the Pharisees or rich people (the Pharisees were rich too). We know this guy as the rich young ruler. The designation of "ruler" means he was probably a ruler of a synagogue.

V. 22 I don't think that the young man would have "gained" treasure in heaven by selling everything, but it would have shown that his true treasures were already in heaven. It would have made his true treasure clearly identifiable. Notice too that Jesus wanted him to give the money to the poor. This kind of action also shows your attitudes toward the poor. The Pharisees actually despised the poor, thinking their sin and laziness were their real problems. I think we do that too.

V. 25 The word for needle that Luke uses is a surgical or sewing needle. If being rich makes being saved almost impossible, I wonder what being fully supplied and sufficient does for us as disciples? Just a thought.

V. 26 If you put Matthew, Mark and Luke together on this story, you get a different impression. The Twelve are completely shocked and overwhelmed at what Jesus said. The impact of the story is that having anything that qualifies as “riches” can make salvation impossible. Their shock was very deep. Again, it makes me wonder how we can play with being rich and still think we can be fully engaged in the harvest. We might be fooling ourselves.

V. 27 God apparently has an antidote. I’ll bet it doesn’t taste good.

Vs. 28-30 This is a short version of Jesus telling them to “seek ye first.” God will more than make up for what we “give up” in following Jesus in the harvest. This is a very strong promise, and I know very few people in the western world who could live like this. But this is what Peter and the rest realized that Jesus was calling them to. Again, putting Matthew, Mark and Luke together gives you a fuller picture.

Vs. 31-34 Jesus had been heading toward Jerusalem in a round-about way. At this point, His GPS is no longer saying, “recalculating.” Interestingly, Jesus had been in the region of Judah that extended (at that time) to the east side of the Jordan. He had now crossed over the Jordan and was going “up” toward Jerusalem. All roads led “up” to Jerusalem. His first stop was Jericho. This sort of sounds like Joshua.

Mark 10:32 says that Jesus was walking on ahead and they were all terrified. This talk that Jesus is having with His disciples is very serious, but they don't get it. I have a feeling that if we had been there, we wouldn't have understood either. Maybe the disciples thought, “With all Jesus was able to do, and knowing how true and good He was, how could anything like this possibly happen to Him? How could God allow it?” Sometimes you just follow without “getting it.”

Vs. 35-43 I always enjoy this story. The crowd tells the blind man, *Jesus of Nazareth is passing by*, but Bartimaeus cries out, *Son of David*. Everyone who ever referred to Jesus as the Son of David in the Bible was neither “blind” nor wrong. What guts he had to keep crying out. In v. 43 Bartimaeus is following Jesus and glorifying God. And, the crowd that was following *Jesus of Nazareth* is now praising God.

It excites me to think that in any crowd, there might be a “Bartimaeus” sitting there, hidden in poverty or something else, waiting to be called to follow Jesus in the harvest.

Psalm 86

Vs. 1-7 This is the heart of David. All of the things God had taught David through years of struggles seem to be reflected in what he says here. God gave David many deliverances that nurtured his faith, but it was a long time before God fully delivered David. As a result of God leading David through trials, David had developed this heart and we are now blessed with this testimony.

Vs. 8-10 David understood that God was not only in control, but that all the nations would praise Him.

Vs. 11-13 This is what David needed in his current trials. He needed to be taught in God’s Word and to fear His name. David needed a heart of thanks, and he needed the comfort of God’s *steadfast love*. I could use all of those right now; in fact, that might be what the Spirit wants to tell me as I read this.

Vs. 14-15 This is the contrast between those who are pressing David and the security David knows he has in the Lord.

Vs. 16-17 I can really identify with this request. What do I specifically need? I don't know, but I really need God's presence, His grace, His strength and His help. It would be great for the Lord to bless with the kind of encouragement and visual acknowledgement that would let people who are questioning and doubting know that we are truly following Him. That would be more than enough, and that can only come from Him, not us.

As disciples, we "rejoice and exult" in our trials according to Romans 5. That is because the Holy Spirit is in us pouring the love of God our Father into our hearts. This is the love shown in what our Lord has done for us. The Spirit turns what once were deadly and dangerous circumstances for our souls, into steps of growth and victory: proof that we belong to Him and are under His care.

Proverbs 13:9-10

We often think of the wise man in terms of someone we seek who has deep, balanced, experienced insights into life and the actions of people. We don't usually think of the wise man as one who has learned to take advice.

APRIL 18

Joshua 16-18

At the end of this document there is a map from the [Bible Knowledge Commentary OT](#), p. 358, showing where the tribes were placed in the land.

It says in Joshua and Judges that the people obeyed until the last of the elders who served with Joshua had died. This means that the two references you will find saying that the Canaanites were not driven out, but put into forced labor were written later as historical notes, possibly by Samuel, the last of the judges.

Joshua 16

Vs. 1-4 Next came the tribes of Joseph. In Genesis 48 it seems that Jacob gives the blessing of Abraham and firstborn blessing to Ephraim. Yet, God decided that Judah was the honored tribe. You'd think that everyone would have been jealous of the huge amount of land given to Judah, but some of it was the worst land. The south was desert and wilderness and there were very fierce enemies. God gave the hardest territory to the tribe with the godliest leader. In a manner of speaking, I think He still does that today. Opposition is given to those who can bring it before God, fight in prayer and perseverance, and still prosper in the harvest.

Vs. 5-10 This is the territory given to Ephraim. Notice v. 10. Now, it does say in 15:63 that the tribe of Judah wasn't able to drive out the Jebusites in Jerusalem. I think God had a purpose in that and Jerusalem was a fortified city. Actually, we'll see that Jerusalem was also in the territory of Benjamin (18:28). The big difference between that comment about Judah and this one about Ephraim is obvious. Ephraim had the opportunity to win, but instead of sending these people into God's presence, they put them to forced labor. Ephraim wasn't tricked into making a covenant with the Canaanites; they just disobeyed, using the situation with the Gibeonites as a precedent. This was for their own convenience and economic prosperity. I'm sure there were also soft-hearted, humanitarian arguments.

Joshua 17

Vs. 1-2 Now we get to Joseph's other son, Manasseh.

Vs. 3-6 This shows the fulfillment of the situation with the daughters of Zelophehad. This is the fourth time these women and this situation has been mentioned. It will be mentioned one more time in 1 Chronicles 7. It seems to me that God is making a point of what happened here. Not

only did God protect the inheritance of Zelophehad, but He laid out the precedent of extending these rights to women. Based on what happened here, thousands of other situations could be determined. God's heart was known and it was written in Israel's law. That's kind of nice of God to do that.

Vs. 7-13 This is the land division for Manasseh. You notice v. 13. Again, this was added later, after the fact. This is absolutely tragic and it is exactly what God told the people not to do. We are getting ready for the darkness that is the book of Judges.

Vs. 14-18 This story is also very foreboding. I don't know if there is an intentional contrast to Judah and Caleb, but there is a definite difference in the tone of this request and Caleb's request. There is no faith visible in the people of Joseph, only whining. In vs. 15 and 17, Joshua tells them they were able to do this from the standpoint of power, but they didn't have the faith.

Notice that the people are already making excuses for not driving the people out. It is almost as if God has done the big work through Joshua, and now "the disciples" have to live by their own faith. Tragic as it is, left to their own faith and their own initiative to seek after God, they failed; not because God failed, but left to themselves, they really had no faith, or, to use one of Jesus' parables, they had no root in themselves.

Joshua 18

V. 1 In the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, pp. 360-361, Donald Campbell links the tone of the people of Joseph to the move Joshua makes here to establish the tabernacle in Shiloh. The people were worn out and becoming fearful. They would now have to follow and obey by faith and there were already signs that they were beginning to fail. This is the first mention of Shiloh. Apparently they set up camp there, and that is where the tabernacle was for about 300 years, until the ark was lost to the Philistines during the lifetime of Samuel.

Vs. 2-10 This is pretty interesting how they decided to divvy up the rest of the land. You can sense again in v. 3 that there was a reluctance of the people to joyfully strike out and take the land that God had already shown He would give them. You wonder too, if the other tribes felt bad because so much was given to Judah, Manasseh and Ephraim. Notice that it is mentioned again that the Levites were given no inheritance of land. The land divisions were made by these roving surveyors, but the seven areas that they made were allotted to each tribe by God at Shiloh. The lots being cast were probably the Urim and Thummim.

Vs. 11-28 This is the land given to Benjamin, on the northern boundary of Judah. Eventually, Judah and Benjamin would become the southern kingdom. Though Simeon is given land, like a bubble, in the middle of Judah, they will move to fertile lands up north. When the kingdom splits, the northern kingdom will be ten tribes and Judah will actually be Judah and Benjamin.

Of note here is the mention of Jerusalem also belonging to Benjamin (and apparently also to Judah). Also, notice Gibeah in v. 28. This city is the center of a tragic story at the end of Judges. It is the first city of Israel to go "Sodom," and in the civil war that follows, the entire tribe of Benjamin will be reduced to 600 men.

Luke 19:1-27

I've never noticed this before, but it seems that all of this takes place at Zacchaeus' house. Jesus had told His disciples that you had to receive the kingdom like a child. So in Jericho we've met Bartimaeus, crying out and, once healed, bounding around Jesus, following Him. Now we'll see a contrast to the rich, young ruler. We'll see a rich man who is saved, and again, acts like a kid.

Vs. 1-10 It is interesting that just recently, God brought Jesus into contact with the rich young ruler. Here, you have a tax collector. He was rich and he hadn't been a completely honest guy (since he had people to pay back), but he was repentant and willing to give everything away for

the sake of knowing Jesus. Funny how the religious young ruler backed away from Jesus, but the sinner was ready to follow.

Vs. 4-6 Again, you have childlike faith to the point of climbing trees and bounding around in joy. Notice that this is the second story in a row of someone willing to "seek" Jesus and to endure shame for doing it. Zacchaeus, like the blind man, wasn't blind to who Jesus was.

V. 7 I'll bet you don't have to guess who "they" were.

Notice, too, that over half of the story has to do with Zacchaeus seeking Jesus. The remainder of the story is the proof of his sincerity and salvation. Jesus didn't have to ask Zacchaeus to give anything because he was already ready to do so.

V. 9 Zacchaeus wasn't saved by doing what he did, but like the test to the rich young ruler, the willingness to give stuff away proved that his treasure was in heaven and that money didn't own his heart like it did the rich young ruler's.

V. 10 I read today, "A disciple is not above his teacher...it is enough that a disciple is like his teacher..." If this was why Jesus came and it expresses His passion, we too should be living to seek and to save what is lost.

Vs. 11-27 Luke tells us why Jesus is telling this parable here. This story is similar, but not the same as the parable of the talents that Jesus will tell in Jerusalem the Wednesday before He dies. You probably have a note telling you how much a "mina" was. That would be a hefty amount.

In light of the purpose of the story, what was Jesus trying to get across to the Twelve and to the others who were following Him? Everyone was hoping He was about to overthrow the Roman government and bring the religious corruption to an end (everyone knew the chief priests were no good).

For us as disciples, there is an application. We are entrusted with something. There also seems to be variable rewards based on fruit. Fruit is relative and all fruit is rewarded. Fruitlessness is not celebrated here. It seems that the lack of trying was the real issue. Is it fair to say that if someone has been "given" forgiveness and grace, they will see it as their mission to see that forgiveness and grace is "invested" in the lives of others who have not found it?

V. 26 This saying has been used by Jesus often, particularly in training His disciples. It is almost like He's saying, "use it or lose it." It might be like saying that a truly believing person will strive to understand and bear testimony to Christ, whereas a "professing" but lost person will not strive or be passionate about making their life count for Christ.

V. 27 These are the general masses who didn't want this man to rule over them. It seems that the servant who didn't engage in business for his master could be one of those who didn't really want his master to return. I find it hard to accept Jesus applying the words, *wicked* and *condemn* to a disciple in v. 22. On the other hand, if this parable is being applied to unbelievers, I can't see Jesus entrusting them with His truth, if that's what the mina means. We know from 1 Corinthians 3:15 that there will be a "test by fire" for disciples to see what they have built on the foundation of their faith and God's truth. My view here is that the *wicked* servant is a real believer who will be tested by fire and will find that everything he built in this life got burned away. That person in 1 Corinthians will enter heaven and live eternally, but he will enter heaven with shame as he meets the Lord he has let down and sees that his life for Christ was a sham.

The point for me here is, *Engage in business until I come*. Amen.

Psalm 87

This is a very interesting psalm. Basically it says that Zion (Jerusalem) is not only God's city, but will someday be the great city of the world.

Rahab stands for Egypt and Babylon is Iraq, both places where God led Israel. These two nations hosted Israel and will apparently be blessed for that, and with these other nations mentioned here, will someday be adopted and included in Israel's worship as part of Israel. It will be said that they were born in Zion. Verse 6 says the same thing. The Lord will include them in the register of those who have been "born in Zion," belonging to the blessing of that kingdom. This all sounds like a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed through him. Also, since this event has never happened to this point in history, I'd say it is referring to the Millennial Kingdom, where Jesus will rule the world from Jerusalem for 1000 years.

Notice that v. 3 gave birth to a song, a hymn, "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken, Zion, City of our God." Imagine my surprise when we moved to Germany and, watching a soccer game, discovered the melody of that hymn is the melody of Germany's national anthem.

V. 7 In the future, all joy will spring from that city, its river of healing and its King.

Proverbs 13:11

I guess the stories we have of lottery winners being ruined by their quick wealth bears this out. The real virtue here is steady diligence in work, rather than chasing after wealth, fame or success. I think this also goes for working in the harvest, growing disciples and building churches that labor in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

APRIL 19

Believe it or not, we're going to finish Joshua this week. It's time to get ready to celebrate. I know that the past few chapters of Joshua have been less than interesting, but some of what has been said is hinting ahead to Judges. Judges will be packed full of action, but what will keep you awake will be the shock of seeing those people, as compared to what we've heard in Deuteronomy and seen in Joshua.

Joshua 19-20

Joshua 19

When reading repetitive stuff, it is interesting to take note of the editorial comments or names of cities that seem familiar. There are a few interesting comments in this section and some notable cities.

Vs. 1-9 Simeon's inheritance was in the middle of Judah's land. You'll notice that it says Ziklag belonged to Simeon, but it really belonged to Judah too. Eventually Simeon's land became absorbed into Judah, and the tribe of Simeon moved north. The same thing happened to the land belonging to the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin actually "owned" Jerusalem, but you never think of it as belonging to anyone other than the tribe of Judah.

Vs. 10-16 This is the inheritance of Zebulun. There isn't much to note here except that this "Bethlehem" is not the Bethlehem in Judah near Jerusalem where Jesus was born. Zebulun was included in the prophecy of Isaiah 9:1-2 regarding the coming of Jesus and the people who sat in darkness seeing a great light. Gabriel came to Mary in the city of Nazareth in the territory of Zebulun.

Vs. 17-23 This is the tribe of Issachar. If you read your one-year Bible year after year, the name Jezreel will seem to have a familiar ring. This is where Elijah became terrified for his life and fled from Jezebel. It is also where Naboth died, and where a group of dogs got indigestion. They ate something (somebody) bad.

Vs. 24-31 This is the tribe of Asher. You don't hear much of these people. Mt. Carmel should sound familiar, and at the dedication of the baby Jesus in Luke, the prophetess Anna, of the tribe of Asher, is on the scene.

Vs. 32-39 The territory of the tribe of Naphtali should sound familiar. Naphtali is also in the prophecy in Isaiah 9:1-2; and its cities, like Capernaum, figure prominently in Jesus' ministry around the Sea of Galilee.

Vs. 40-48 The territory of Dan figures tragically in the stories to follow. Verse 47 summarizes this history, but we'll get the rest of the story in Judges. Some of the cities mentioned here actually were in the list of those belonging to Judah. Dan never really settled in the land they were given. In Judges you'll see why they were driven from their inheritance.

Vs. 49-50 By command of the Lord, Israel gave Joshua his own city which he rebuilt. Old people need hobbies when they retire. That command was the same one that God gave concerning Caleb, that both men would have land where they had walked as spies. It is interesting that while Caleb was the first to be given his inheritance, Joshua waited to the very end. The leader was the last to be served.

Joshua 20

Vs. 1-6 These are the cities of refuge. The purpose of these cities was to insure there would be justice for accidental killing, so that the nation would not be guilty of spilling innocent blood. The fact that this law and these cities are mentioned so often should make us think of the importance God put on innocent blood. This goes back to God's curse on Cain for killing Abel. Killing innocent unborn babies may be plausible in our culture, but it is not missed or dismissed by God.

Vs. 7-9 It is interesting that all of these cities will be mentioned tomorrow in another "grouping" of cities. Notable in this list are Hebron and Ramoth Gilead. Hebron will become the city where David reigns over Judah while directing the seven-year civil war against the loyalists of the house of King Saul. Ramoth Gilead is the city that King Ahab will try to win back from the Syrians with King Jehoshaphat's help. That event is where we will meet the prophet Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:15, in an episode that will make your hair stand on end.

Luke 19:28-48

Vs. 28-40 We've read of the Lord's entrance into Jerusalem before. Note that the people who owned the colt either knew of Jesus and the Scriptures surrounding this event, or God gave them some supernatural flexibility to let some guys just walk up and take the colt. I get the feeling that the people were anticipating this event.

Vs. 39-40 Apparently the Pharisees were not expecting the people to be proclaiming Jesus to be the Messiah. It is so ironic that the Pharisees thought that Jesus should have had the decency to correct the crowd. Can you imagine having missed this moment, standing next to Jesus, correcting Him? They know the truth now.

Except for the fact that there will be no condemnation in heaven, I wonder if we met an old-time saint in heaven and told him when we lived and what we have in Christ, if he'd say, "Wait. You had that, and that and that? And all you did with it was THAT?" Every generation takes for granted what it has been given.

Vs. 41-44 Jesus wept over Jerusalem and gave a near and far description of what would happen to Jerusalem. In the near future, that generation of Israel would be judged and Jerusalem would be destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans. In the distant future, the city and the people will be nearly destroyed again during the Tribulation. Knowing what is happening here, it is eerie to have Jesus tell them that they missed the time of their visitation.

Vs. 45-46 This is the second time Jesus has cleansed the temple. The first time is recorded in John 2.

Vs. 47-48 I find it interesting that the leaders were afraid to arrest Jesus, because people listened to Him so intently. The irrationality of sin permeated the thinking and actions of these leaders. That irrationality is still operating today, even among God's people. Sin is still alive and well, if we don't take advantage of the Word and the Spirit. That's why we need our meds every day; that is, we need to be washed in the Word, keeping our hearts before the Lord, submitting our lives to Him, and following Him in the harvest.

Psalm 88

What is so gripping about this psalm is that there is no "up side." I've never seen a psalm end so darkly. I would say it is inspired by God who tells us to keep seeking Him, even, when emotionally, there is no end in sight. It sounds like this guy is praying out of raw faith, with the sickness of heart mentioned in Proverbs 13:12.

It could be that this psalm is connected to the psalm for tomorrow. Psalm 89 might give the positive side of what is being expressed today.

According to 1 Chronicles 6:31, this writer might be one of the singers who David appointed to lead worship after the ark was brought to Jerusalem. Judging from some of the themes in this psalm, it seems like this guy might have put King David's personal sorrow to music. If this psalm was written by or in conjunction with David during his life, it could be that the situation being reflected here has to do with Absalom's rebellion.

Vs. 1-2 This crying out sounds like David.

Vs. 3-7 As David left Jerusalem with his followers, he was in total humiliation and in great danger. When you read the account, David would have been killed that night if Absalom had followed Ahithophel's advice in 2 Samuel 17:1.

Vs. 8-9 If that rebellion was the cause of this psalm, only David's most loyal followers stayed with him, yet he was stunned that some of his trusted friends left him. David actually lost the entire country, and his own son was trying to kill him.

Vs. 10-12 One of the constant promises David made to God was to proclaim His love and deliverance. You can understand David's logic here. If he were dead, how could he do that? I'm sure God wasn't sitting in heaven listening to this and then said, "You know, Gabriel, he has a point. If I kill him, then what?" In a backwards way, David is promising to proclaim God's grace if God will spare him.

Vs. 13-18 Although this is many years after David's actions with Bathsheba and her husband Uriah, Absalom's rebellion and the betrayal of his friends goes back to that event. God was still punishing David as He had foretold. David knew he was still reaping what he had sown. Appealing to God's mercy was his only hope.

Proverbs 13:12-14

It seems to me that what makes this trio of verses work is the middle verse about revering the Word and following the commandment. That middle verse's wisdom shapes our desires and expectations, and it shapes our concern and counsel to others. The Word is constantly telling us that our hope needs to be in the Lord, not in our expectations of what we think He should do. He is holy and sovereign and we are His servants. I think that when we become wise and teach others, that middle verse is what we will tell those following the Lord and it will keep them from falling into snares.

APRIL 20

I had a little mini insight in today's reading. It didn't come because I'm smart, but because I've been reading like this for so many years and the bell finally went off. I'm saying all this because if you read The One Year Bible year after year, the Spirit will do the same thing for you.

I mentioned yesterday that one of the cities the Levites were given is a city of refuge: Ramoth in Gilead. I mentioned that there is a place in the Bible where the three words are spelled as one: Ramoth-gilead. This is the scene of a very spooky portion of Scripture. Actually, a lot of things happen there. You see Ahab (not from Moby Dick, but similar) getting set up to fall into God's judgment and you see a godly king, Jehoshaphat, making a devastating mistake. Then you witness Michaiah, a lone, starved prophet, open a window to let us see what actually takes place spiritually before the throne of God in heaven as He uses the demonic to judge the disobedient and rebellious on earth. The entire event is in 2 Chronicles 18, but look particularly at vs. 18-22. You can get some real insight out of this. I have always been intrigued by this story, but I never realized that what Ahab was using to lure Jehoshaphat into fighting with him had once been a spiritual city, a city of the Levites, a city of refuge. What a noble cause to use to entice Jehoshaphat into bonding with him and his evil. You can imagine Jehoshaphat thinking, "Of course God will bless us if we try to recapture this city from Syria, that had once been a godly and holy city of Israel." This makes sense to me why a good man like Jehoshaphat was fooled. I think that's pretty cool and very instructive. And it is only because of reading The One Year Bible, year after year.

Joshua 21:1-22:20

Joshua 21

Vs. 1-45 This is the final act of establishing the people in the land. The Levites were given cities to live in, with land to plow and keep their animals. God spread the Levites throughout Israel. Since they no longer needed to pack up the tabernacle, they would be organized to minister at the tabernacle in shifts. In the meantime, they were to have a teaching ministry among the people. So, rather than gathering the Levites around the tabernacle in Shiloh, they were spread out. According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary, "someone has estimated that no one in Israel lived more than 10 miles from one of the 48 Levite towns." (p. 364)

V. 11 We have heard of this city before. It is Hebron, but when Caleb conquered it, it was the city of a giant among giants. I don't think Caleb had a problem giving this city to the Levites. The Levites were to be a good influence in Israel.

V. 17 I never noticed this before, but the city of Gibeon, where the guys tricked Joshua and made a covenant with him, became a city of Levites.

V. 18 This is the future city of the priests and the hometown of the prophet Jeremiah.

V. 38 This is Ramoth-gilead.

Vs. 43-45 This states the completion of the administration of Joshua and the essential conquest and division of the land. If only the people would have continued to follow the Lord.

This summary didn't mean that the fighting was over, and it didn't signal the completion of the Abrahamic covenant. Everything here is still partial, but the doors are open for the people to take the land by following God in faith.

Joshua 22:1-20

This is an interesting event. It hints to future problems, but at this point, it shows Israel's very solid focus on obeying the Lord.

Vs. 1-6 Notice what Joshua says in v. 5, and see how many individual commands you can get out of this. If you have trouble, find the infinitives introduced by the word "to." This verse would not only make a great sermon or devotional, but it also describes the life of a disciple. And what is all this about love? I thought we didn't hear about loving God in the Old Testament.

Vs. 7-9 As Joshua sent them back, he commanded them to share with those who had been left behind to protect their families and property and to begin farming the land. God and Moses had already laid the groundwork for this.

Vs. 10-20 Tomorrow we'll read the answer of the 2.5 tribes as to why they built the altar. That these people built an altar is interesting. They could have built a Mt. Rushmore of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses. This altar showed that they regarded the worship of God at the tabernacle to be the unifying symbol of Israel. It was still a bad idea.

Notice that the people are totally unified in their response in vs. 11-12 and 16.

V. 13 Notice that they sent Phinehas to lead the people in understanding what had happened.

Notice the references to how the sins of a few hurt the *whole congregation* in 17, 18 and 20.

V. 19 They offered the solution of letting the 2.5 tribes join them on the west side of the Jordan.

Since there is no mention of Joshua, it seems that Joshua has retired and that the new guys like Phinehas were leading the people. More on this story tomorrow.

Regarding discipleship, the thing I see in this account is the necessity to be constantly training the next generation of leaders. Phinehas had good family connections, but we also see him in action as a man who had a heart for God. When he mentions the fiasco at Baal-Peor in v. 17, it was because he himself took the lead in that situation when everyone else was paralyzed. It is interesting for me that the priests had an up-and-coming leader in Phinehas, but the nation had no one to follow in Joshua's footsteps. The next leader we will see is Othniel, who was close to Caleb and who was probably influenced by Caleb. In the case of the rest of the judges, no one looks like they were "discipled" for leadership.

Since our focus in this life is to be constantly making more and better disciples, it shouldn't be rare to find leaders who have come up in a group to assume leadership from the past generation and groom leaders for the next generation. In working in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples, we should be pros at developing men and women who have hearts for God, and who are convinced that their mission in life is to follow Christ in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. It is hard to break that chain of generational preparation if we embrace our mission as makers of disciples from and for the harvest.

Luke 20:1-26

We have read these events before in Matthew and Mark. Jesus is close to His crucifixion, and here, He's in the pressure cooker of controversy and conflict.

Vs. 1-8 So, as a disciple advising other disciples, what principle would you pull from this event that would arm people in your group to give a good answer in this kind of conflict?

Vs. 9-19 I don't know about this one. Would you advise your guys to be this pointed? It kind of cuts against our cultural sense of being "politically correct."

V. 16 One note here is that Luke records the Pharisees saying, *Surely not*. In Romans, Paul (a former Pharisee) uses this all the time. In Romans 3:6 it is *by no means*.

Vs. 20-26 I'm always amazed when I read this. I wish I could teach myself to come up with these kinds of answers. As a "near" application, I think it is fair to tell the people we are helping become disciples, not to complain about government and to do the work of a disciple in the

harvest, bearing much fruit, glorifying the Father and so proving to be disciples of our Lord. Jesus said that if we seek His kingdom first, He'll take care of the rest.

Psalm 89:1-13

Ok, so this is interesting. This guy, Ethan, is the brother to the guy who wrote the psalm yesterday, Heman. Names are hard to track down, especially since the names vary in spelling over years and books. Some guys even had more than one name. Also, it is hard to know when they lived because sometimes the head of the clan is named and then only the "famous sons" are mentioned with names skipped in between. But check this out, look at 1 Kings 4:13 and then at 1 Chronicles 2:6. You find the same names together. These men were known to be wise, and so it's mentioned that Solomon was more of a wise guy than both of them put together. It means that they probably lived before Solomon and during the time of David.

Now, it says that they were together (if it's the same guys) when David brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem in 1 Chronicles 15:15-19.

This psalm will be spread over today, tomorrow and the next day. If both men were with David during the time he fled from Absalom, I wonder if (and this is just pure speculation) these psalms were meant to complement each other somehow. In the betrayal of Absalom and the civil war that took place, Psalm 88 seems to capture the extreme darkness of the days of running and uncertainty, and Psalm 89 seems to remember the glorious establishment of David by cries to God to restore David again.

(In v. 51, which we will read on April 22, it sounds like the verbal abuse David took at the hands of Shimei in 2 Samuel 16:5-9. I'm saying this now to suggest that that event might be the framework of this psalm.)

All of this is a bit harder when a psalm is spread out over so many days. Then on the 23rd we get two psalms because they were both written by Moses. Go figure.

Vs. 1-4 Notice how God's *steadfast love* and *faithfulness* are linked to God's sworn promise to David. Implied in what is said here is that God should be praised as a result of all of this. This sounds very much like David.

Vs. 5-7 The heavens praising the Lord here are the angelic realms where God is ruling and served.

Vs. 8-10 Even the dangerous forces of nature are subject to God. Their subjection to His power is seen as His faithfulness to mankind.

Vs. 11-13 Even the majesty of creation praises the name and sovereign power of God.

Tune in tomorrow for the rest of the story.

Proverbs 13:15-16

Amen!

APRIL 21

Joshua 22:21-23:16

Joshua 22:21-34

One point of interest I saw today as I was reading my German Bible was the place where the altar was built. In 22:10, it says *the region of the Jordan*, in the English versions; but in the German it says, *The Stone Circles*.

The Septuagint (the Greek version of the OT) says "Gilgal (which means circle)." This is the place where Israel had crossed over the Jordan seven years earlier. The nation had lived there for some time as it began to fight against Jericho and other cities. More importantly, if this place was Gilgal, it is where they set up a circular monument made of "stones" that they brought up out of the waterless bed of the Jordan as the people had passed across the dry river bed.

When the two and a half tribes came to this place after seven years of absence from their families, and after all the battles and campaigns, the sight of this "literally monumental" place must have stirred them. It might have been that the events in the wilderness, as well as the crossing of the Jordan, all seemed so long ago. Now they realized it was possible that the other tribes would forget that they were all related.

Vs. 21-23 This is a very heartfelt and motivated rebuttal of the accusations. What they did here might have not made sense to me, but they had very sincere motives.

Vs. 24-28 Notice how often their children or descendants are mentioned here. In a perfect world this wouldn't have been a problem, because they would have begun gathering at the tabernacle for the feasts three times a year; and so, there would have been a means of gathering and communication. After Joshua's death, few obeyed the Lord.

V. 29 It is notable that they affirm that the tabernacle was the only place to worship God through offerings.

Vs. 30-31 Phinehas is the spokesman and says that through this potential crisis, they have seen that the Lord was in their midst.

Vs. 32-34 What I find interesting is all the unity: the unity of the nation to find out why the altar had been built, the unity of the 2.5 tribes, and then the unity of the entire nation regarding the resolution. The people had learned lessons in the wilderness, and up to this point, everyone was following God. This unity was a sign of God's blessing.

Joshua 23:1-16

This is the first half of Joshua's final address to Israel. Today the message is to the leaders (v. 2). Tomorrow the message will be to the people and the book will come to an end. Get ready to celebrate with a McCanaan and a Milk&Honey shake.

Vs. 1-4 This is the second time now that we have seen a leader of Israel hang up his sandals. If you were leading a group of disciples, what would your final address be?

Joshua seems to be telling them that he is about to change his residence to God's zip code, and he briefly recounts how God had used him to give the people their land and to destroy their enemies before them.

Vs. 5-13 It seems here that Joshua is exhorting them to follow deeply the promises of the Lord. Based on what God had promised, they could be strong and courageous, following the Lord and taking the initiative as God led. Obeying the Lord and loving Him would be the key.

Vs. 14-16 All of what God promised had come true and they could have had total victory. It is sad to think that all of what Joshua warned them of would come true in Judges. Notice how Joshua says that just as God fulfilled the promise of giving them the land, if they disobey, He will just as certainly fulfill the promise to remove them.

There are three things that stand out to me in what Joshua says.

First, he directs the people to understand that God had blessed them and fought for them. They were to be grateful and focused on God.

Second, in v. 11, Joshua focuses them on God's love. Following as disciples, too, has to originate out of His amazing love for us.

Third, Joshua warns them of the danger of leaving the Lord by not obeying. As disciples, there is a lot of distraction in life and in the church. Our mission has always remained very simple for each individual and for every church. But life on earth blurs our vision, and the body of sin wears us down. Daily refocusing is necessary. That is why disciples need to be in the Word daily. And that is why Jesus showed us the model of being with a group of disciples, reaching out and making disciples. We need to keep one another encouraged and sharp in Christ.

Luke 20:27-47

We've had these same events before. God is giving us this repetition for a reason.

Vs. 27-38 While the question about taxes was designed to get Jesus in trouble either with the Romans or with the Jews, depending on His answer, this issue was meant to make Jesus look foolish. The Sadducees had probably used this on many Pharisees and had great success with it. Instead, Jesus turned this into a very simple, but powerful, moment of teaching. Actually, I still find what Jesus says in vs. 37 and 38 profound.

Vs. 39-40 Even the enemy, *the scribes*, were pushed to sincerity and silence by the truth, honesty and insight of what Jesus had just said.

Vs. 41-44 But rather than Jesus schmoozing up to the scribes, He pressed the point. Jesus gives them another one of those simple, obvious, and extremely profound insights. Again, Jesus isn't doing this to prove any point or further the conflict. He is fishing in the harvest. I guess that's what you call a "mexed mitiphor."

Vs. 45-47 Jesus had said this earlier to the Pharisees, but *the scribes* (lawyers) were a branch of the Pharisees. This is not the worst thing Jesus has said about *the scribes*, but in this situation, it was like throwing gas on a fire. The judgment of God would come on Israel because of their leaders, so Jesus' condemnation was more than just. At the same time, we noticed that when Jesus honestly stood against these leaders, others like Matthew the tax collector understood that the way to God stood open through Jesus. I think that is why Jesus is being so bold and so open in what He is saying. There are people standing by whom He is hoping to reach.

I was reading this morning Jesus telling His disciples, "*even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*" (Matt. 20:28) Even under pressure, near His death and in the face of His enemies, Jesus was still honest and caring and reaching out to anyone who would hear. As His disciples, we are to abide in Him and do the same in our particular part of the harvest.

Psalms 89:14-37

This part of the psalm is like reminding God how He has blessed David and promised him a perpetual reign.

Vs. 14-18 Because they rest and hide in God's righteousness, faithfulness, and love, and because they exalt in Him, He is their strength and shield. This is a way of saying they have made themselves dependent on God. God is their only help.

Vs. 19-26 When we first meet David, he will be a young teen who is surprisingly anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel. He was God's choice and God had promised. And then we will watch God exalt David's faith. And then we will watch David run for his life for a decade. It is during this waiting and running and crying out that David became "a man after God's own heart." (1 Sam. 13:14) And in all of that, God proved over and over, that David was His man and confirmed His steadfast love and faithfulness to him. Why do we think we should expect any

other treatment if God loves us as much as He loved David? We are servants and slaves of our Savior.

Vs. 27-37 In light of what Scripture says about a future bodily reign of David on earth under the Messiah, this promise to David was very profound. David, for all of his faults, became a model of the Messiah. We have already seen that Jesus was both the Son of David and the Lord of David.

Even though this is a great and exalted promise, notice what is said in vs. 30-33. Even though a son of David may stumble in his walk with God, God would still regard the promise to David. Solomon would be the first and real threat to this covenant, but I think the occasion for the writing of this psalm was Absalom's rebellion. If so, the psalmist, with David sitting in, is asking God not to allow the rebellion of David's son to make Him forget the kindness He has promised to David. Punishment was promised, but so was covenantal love and loyalty.

In reading these last verses I am amazed at the promise of God. And to think, that as disciples, we have something that makes the promise to David look like a two-year-old's Sunday school drawing. Our Savior has promised amazing things to us eternally and also as we follow Him into the harvest making disciples, who make disciples.

Proverbs 13:17-19

As a disciple, v. 19 hits me. To do what we need to do at this time in this harvest, we need to be able to say, "No," to our desires, not just when they are evil, but also when they are a silly use of time. For us as followers, the biggest temptation is to fritter away time with little endeavors that are not evil. These things come under our radar and they occupy our time and blur our focus. "No longer being a fool," to me, means to stop following the rabbit trails that, while not evil, lead me away from abiding in Christ, His love, His passion and His mission.

APRIL 22

In a way, we're all going to miss Joshua. He is one of the most "sterling" followers of God in the Old Testament. Of course God has only given us a little information about Joshua, so he looks a little one-dimensional, but we will have all eternity to get to know him. This chapter will show us something of his heart. This morning I was reading about Jesus saying, *whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave* (Matt. 20:26-27). So...Joshua 24:29 says that Joshua was a great man.

Another reason we will miss Joshua is that Judges introduces us to the power of sin in Israel.

Joshua 24

Vs. 1-5 The focus here is on the covenant to Abraham and how it flowed through Abe to Isaac and to Esau and Jacob. Moses became the continuation of the promise to Abraham.

V. 1 This location had a lot of significance. Shechem was where God met with Abraham and promised his descendants the land. If you do a word search, you'll find this place mentioned often. Now, neither you nor I would know this, if not for helps like the [Bible Knowledge Commentary](#), but Shechem is between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim, from Joshua 8:30-35. This is where Joshua set up the stones upon which he wrote the law. The people were on the mountains opposite each other pronouncing the blessing and the curses involved with obeying or disobeying God's law. So, this is a pretty important place.

Note also that it says they presented themselves before God. This was to be a renewal of the covenant.

V. 2 It is interesting that Joshua speaks in the 1st person as God, or it is God speaking through him.

Note that God refers back to Abraham's father, Terah, that those men served other gods. Noah was still alive during this time. Noah didn't serve other gods, but sin in man creates an incredible impulse in man to stray from God. Rebellion in us because of the power of sin is almost irresistible. I think Abe was chosen because he learned from Noah (Abe might have known Noah or Noah's son Shem). We wonder why Abraham was different than his father and his culture. I'd bet it was because of his association with a man like Noah or Shem who didn't worship other gods, but rather the true God. It's interesting to think of that possible connection between Noah, Shem and Abe in terms of discipleship. The mission of redemption was kept alive in the heart of this one disciple.

Vs. 6-13 All of these references to God's protection also reflect the inability of the false gods to stand against God. These peoples, particularly Egypt, were known for their gods. Balaam's inability to work against Israel, again, shows that Israel's God is the only God, and He's for them.

In giving Israel what it didn't build or plant, there is not only a reference to blessing, but also a reference to God's judgment of the Canaanites. Their worship before God was sick and their culture was terminal. The Canaanites lost everything because of their sin. Now it belonged to Israel. Notice v. 22 in today's reading of Proverbs.

Vs. 14-15 This seems pretty strong and you notice that Joshua is pushing them to a point of commitment. It seems to me, that Israel was already straying and he knew it. The last part of v. 15 would make a good wall plaque and song.

Vs. 16-18 Notice the interaction between Joshua and the people. The people seem committed and emotional in their acknowledgement of God's help and power in all they have experienced. They declare that they too will *serve the Lord*.

Vs. 19-20 Joshua was not to be swayed by their emotion. We read that God is a jealous God, but we cannot emotionally enter into the idea of Him being jealous. Jealousy is an awesome emotion that brings everything to a standstill. Just as "a little unfaithfulness" would destroy most marriages, God's blessing would halt if they were unfaithful. In fact, God would work to take away the good He had given them. In our day and age, we don't think this applies to us in the church, but I think we will have a rude awakening when the Lord helps us understand the influence our culture and society has had on His church and His followers.

Vs. 21-22 It is interesting that the people are insistent and call their own words to witness against themselves.

V. 23 I think both Joshua and God are telling the people to investigate their lives closer. Apparently there were already idols among them. Whatever it was, it must have been semi-secret or revolved around some gray area. The people had no problem moving against 2.5 tribes when the issues seemed clear-cut. And, Joshua doesn't seem like the kind of guy to sit still if there was open, blatant idolatry. But something was going on and the root of infection and destruction was already there.

V. 24 And the people were not able to grasp what he was saying. Maybe they were in denial. In any case they are saying they are true to the Lord.

Vs. 25-28 The *covenant* in v. 25 is followed very strongly by Joshua setting up a monument and writing out the details of this meeting and covenant. Sadly, Joshua was right.

We never think of idols and worshipping falsely today, especially in the church. Paul accused the Corinthians of idolatry in 1 Corinthians 10, and Paul redefined covetousness as idolatry in Ephesians 5. Israel gathered pretty looking stuff, some of which was used in foreign worship

before they acquired it. Maybe they kept the precious figurines saying there was no God but Yahweh. It was simply art of value. I wonder if that stuff began to entice them. I wonder if the stuff that we have has taken such importance in our lives, that without realizing it, we are no longer devoted to Christ.

I was reading this morning where Jesus says, *whoever loves father and mother, ...son or daughter more than Me, is not worthy of Me*. I wonder if we have lost our affection for Him and we don't realize it.

Vs. 29-33 The book of Joshua ends with three burials. Sounds like a movie, "A Covenant and Three Burials." It is interesting that they mention the burial of the bones of Joseph. The land was Israel's so now it was time to bury them. I wonder, since they were buried at Shechem, if Joshua did this at the end of that ceremony.

V. 29 Notice that Joshua is called *the servant of the Lord*, and in v. 31 his legacy is that *Israel served the Lord*. Joshua's influence was great. This sounds like what the Lord has asked us to do. We become disciples of Jesus whose legacy is that we make disciples who follow Jesus and make disciples.

Luke 21:1-28

Vs. 1-4 There is an interesting connection between this event and what Jesus has been saying. Jesus has just condemned the rich scribes and now He is contrasting them to this simple, but fully devout, woman. The fact that Luke was a missionary who traveled with Paul adds to the impact of this story. Jesus' disciples were told to give everything in order to work in the harvest.

Vs. 5-10 Up to v. 10 the two signs given, false Messiahs and wars, will come before the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in 70 A.D. and before Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation. Interestingly, in talking about the Tribulation alone, it never talks about that temple being destroyed. Since there is no temple today in Jerusalem it means it would have to be rebuilt, but that could happen easily during the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation when there is a peace treaty with Israel. The temple needs no electricity, plumbing or windows, and the foundation is already there. I'll bet "Extreme Makeover: Temple Edition" could put it up in a week.

Vs. 11-19 These verses seem to be more focused on the future Tribulation of Israel. Much of what is said here, the disciples have heard before when Jesus sent out the Twelve. The same things will be true for His future disciples during those seven years on earth.

Vs. 13-15 Jesus is telling them to expect that God will use His sovereignty to put His followers into positions where they will give testimony. The Spirit will speak through them. Then, some might remain on earth, but probably most will appear in the presence of God, honored and safe.

V. 18 To understand this, read what Paul says just before his death in 2 Timothy 4:18. Paul speaks of rescue, meaning the rescue of leaving his body and appearing before the Lord in heaven.

V. 19 The call for *endurance*, in my thinking, means "salvation" from the fear and emotional terror of those times. See 1 Timothy 4:16.

Vs. 20-24 This description was as valid for the past onslaught of the Romans on the temple and Jerusalem, as it is valid for the future persecution of the Jews at the midway point of the Tribulation.

Vs. 25-28 Of course this time won't be all fun and games and killing God's people.

V. 25 This seems to describe the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation. The universe will be out of whack and it will show on the earth, especially in the oceans. These disasters will create mass terror and fear (and probably ruin a lot of good vacation spots), but not for those who understand

that it is all exactly as God has planned. In essence, the planet will become much more primitive as the world tries to deal with unprecedented natural disasters. This will make it easier for God's people and followers to hide during the second half of the Tribulation. There will still be destruction in the final 3.5 years of the Tribulation, but most of the destruction in the first 3.5 years will be called down on the earth by the two witnesses who will be like Moses and Aaron in Egypt.

V. 27 However this is to happen, it will be a world event and visible to all. Everyone will be commenting on that sign in the heavens and everyone around Jerusalem will be talking about those strange clouds.

V. 28 Those followers of Christ will be weighed down, working undercover and praying. But like Jesus in those last challenges by the Pharisees, these disciples will have boldness to risk everything to bring one more disciple into the kingdom. For us in the harvest, now is the time to cut loose and go for it.

Psalm 89:38-52

The psalmist is asking God to look down and have mercy on David.

Vs. 38-45 Notice the word *You*. For a time, David had to leave Jerusalem. He and his kingdom were in ruins. God was letting this happen to David as punishment for his taking of Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah.

Vs. 46-48 David's sin had been years earlier. The guilt and the sin still hounded David. David's family had been ruined; his conscience was damaged; and now Absalom was dishonoring his father's wives and throne.

Vs. 49-52 Once again, God's *steadfast love* and *faithfulness* are appealed to. Verse 51 could be referring to how David was mocked and humiliated by Shimei when He fled from Jerusalem. If you're interested, read 2 Samuel 16:5-23 and you'll get the sense of what is being said here.

Proverbs 13:20-23

For the first three verses I'd just say, "Amen, amen and amen!" But, then you have v. 23. Maybe it is somehow saying that the byproduct of having the righteous in the land is that they protect the poor from injustice. In a land of righteous people, the poor would have plenty.

APRIL 23

I'm including a few charts/maps that may help you to orient yourself to what is being written about Israel. Since the action is taking place in different parts of the country, this should give you an orientation. The following are located at the end of this document.

"Chart of the Judges," [The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 375.

"Canaan in the Days of the Judges," [The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 377.

"The Judges and the Oppressors," [The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 385.

Judges 1:1-2:9

The introduction of Judges in the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), pp. 373-374, provides some good information. Apparently, Judges was probably written by Samuel sometime after Saul was made King of Israel, but before David became king. Samuel is the final judge of Israel. Though he isn't mentioned in Judges, he is thought to have been a judge during the same period of time as Samson. The period of time involved in Judges is a whopping 410-450 years. The US hasn't been a nation that long; in fact, 400 years ago the pilgrims still hadn't landed here (1620). We will cross that long span of time in this book.

Judges 1

Vs. 1-21 The leadership of Judah. This section describes what God did through Judah, both before and after Joshua's death. We have heard of some of these adventures in Joshua while Joshua was still living.

V. 1 According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, pp. 376-377, it is better to understand, *After the death of Joshua*, as a heading for the history that Samuel was about to summarize. Joshua's final words and death will be mentioned in 2:6-9.

Vs. 2-7 It doesn't say it here, but when the people inquired in v. 1, it was probably the priest using the Urim and Thummim. The center of Israel was the tabernacle at Shiloh. Notice how Judah became a model of one tribe bonding with another tribe to fight together. This was a great victory.

Vs. 6-7 This is similar to what Joshua did in having his captains put their feet on the necks of their enemies and then hanging them. Here, apparently they knew the reports of this king and God used them to punish him as he had punished others. FYI, a man without thumbs couldn't hold a weapon, and without big toes, you don't fight or stand as well.

Vs. 8-10 This is the first time we hear of Judah going after Jerusalem, but we've heard of them winning at Hebron. Notice that Judah did conquer Jerusalem, possibly after Joshua's death. It just wasn't a capital city for them, and they were told to give it to Benjamin. We'll see that Benjamin couldn't hold it.

The three names in Hebron may be the sons / clans related to the king of Hebron mentioned in v. 20.

Vs. 11-15 We have heard this story before and how Othniel wins the city and Caleb's daughter.

Vs. 16-21 As a testimony to how well Judah did its fighting and securing of the land, the Midianite (Kenite) part of Moses' family came to dwell in Judah's land.

V. 18 Judah conquered this area but as time went on they couldn't hold it. Caleb and Othniel broke the power of those people but it would take faith to occupy those lands.

V. 20 I think these three sons are mentioned in v. 10.

V. 21 Judah defeated the city, but the people of Benjamin couldn't hold it.

Vs. 22-26 The other honored tribe of Israel, Ephraim, had one major, notable victory. Notice that this man and his family were spared but chose to live in Syria. All of the Canaanites could have moved.

Vs. 27-36 Now begins the subtle beginning of the end. The people didn't obey. It started with tolerance and peace agreements now, and ended up with Israel losing its identity and becoming involved in full-blown idolatry later.

Vs. 27-29 This is a summary of the tribes of Joseph. The tribe of Manasseh rationalized their sin by putting the Canaanites to forced labor. Ephraim just allowed the Canaanites to live among them.

Notice that all of the tribes that had land in Canaan sinned in making peace agreements with the people. It should make us think about the importance of obedience and influence.

The tribe of Dan has a little more mentioned about their situation. At the end of Judges we get a dysfunctional little story involving Dan. Apparently they had the honor of being the first complete tribe to fall into idolatry.

Judges 2:1-9

Notice *the angel of the Lord* and the way He speaks. This points to His identity as God.

Notice that the Lord goes up from Gilgal. Important things have happened there. No one is sure where Bochim was. Since this section has a parallel with Joshua's final addresses to Israel, it could be that Bochim is near Shechem. Joshua made part of his final address at Gilgal and his final words were spoken at Shechem. In any event, this must have been a gathering place, but it wasn't Shiloh where the tabernacle was.

V. 4 Notice that the people weep, but they don't seek the Lord to find out how to correct their wrong. Years later the people in Ezra's day will do something similar, and when they seek counsel from Ezra, they actually do what he tells them. The people crying is not the same as the people repenting.

V. 5 How does this make sense? The only place they were supposed to sacrifice was at the tabernacle. By the end of Judges we will see some very wrong religious thinking. It looks like their worship was becoming a matter of the "heart," rather than obedience to the Word.

Vs. 6-9 With these verses, it is as if Samuel has finished one summary of the time after Joshua, and is beginning a new train of thought. This summary of Joshua dismissing the people is a review of the end of the book of Joshua and the faithfulness of that generation. As time went on and men like Joshua and Caleb were gone, the people drifted from God.

In a very real sense, God allowed this to happen to test the people in that He didn't appoint a national leader. At first the people sought a leader, but that didn't last long. God often leads a person to a particular place and then draws back and is silent, to reveal what is in that person's heart. This is God's way to see if we will honor Him and follow, or if He needs to show us that we will still very easily drift from Him. Tomorrow we'll be given a very clear rationale for why God allows adversity into our lives.

Luke 21:29-22:13

Luke 21:29-38

Vs. 29-33 Two groups of people are being addressed here. First are the people in Jesus' generation who would be present and watching things come together for the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Then there are those who will be present in the future when the temple is desecrated at the midway point of the Tribulation. Both of these generations will witness completion of those events within their lifetimes.

Vs. 34-36 Very clearly this is referring to the Tribulation and those believers who will be tempted to lose focus and give in to the sadness of those times. Just as it will be possible to miss the beginning of the Tribulation, it will be easy in the Tribulation to miss the signs of the Lord's coming. Again, I think the "he who endures to the end will be saved" message is not referring to losing salvation, but salvation from the effects of bitterness and persecution. The way to be "saved" is to remain strong and focused on what is taking place, knowing that it is God's working. This is much the same with us today.

This is a good word for us as disciples. We are surrounded by the wreckage of Christians who have forgotten why we are here. They are simply living among the "natives" to be liked by them and they have been ruined by becoming like them. We'll see this happen to Israel, but we are no different. We are here in the harvest as our Savior was, to seek the lost and introduce them to Him. If we are just here to live life and go to church until we die, we get lost and bitter and careless. The way to remain undamaged is to *stay awake at all times, praying that you may have strength to escape*. But we often think we're here on vacation during this time in history. The danger around us and the need to stay awake is just as grave.

Vs. 37-38 And we see Jesus, facing a violent death, yet teaching right up to the end. A disciple is not above his Master. We are to work in the harvest following our Lord until the end.

Luke 22:1-13

Interesting that you have four persons preparing for the Passover: Satan and Jesus, and over all God the Father and the Spirit. You see what Satan is doing, and you see what Jesus is doing, and in everything (even Satan's madness), God is working all things together for good. This would be a good point to remember what Paul and the Spirit wrote 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.*

Vs. 1-6 It seems like the occasion for Judas doing this came on Thursday morning. The night before, Mary of Bethany had anointed Jesus' feet and Judas had raised a ruckus. Feeling snubbed, the next morning Judas prepared to do Satan's business, while Peter and John were doing Jesus' business and making the preparations for the Passover.

Vs. 7-13 Apparently there were two days to eat the Passover lamb. This was probably because of the crowds and the large numbers of sheep to be killed. Jerusalem didn't have a lot of rooms to rent for this day and the next week of feasting. Jesus and His disciples used the earlier day. That means that the day Jesus was killed was actually the normal day for killing the Passover lamb.

With the thousands of people in Jerusalem, waiting until the last minute like Jesus did to seek a room, it was a miracle that they found a place. But I think that is the point. Tradition points to this room belonging to the family of John Mark, the writer of the Gospel of Mark and Barnabas' nephew. This is also the room they think the disciples were in when the Spirit came on Pentecost.

Psalms 90-91

Both of these psalms are written by Moses.

Psalm 90

As you read Psalm 90, imagine that Moses is writing this as the nation is under God's punishment after Kadesh-barnea. They endured a very long 38 years in the wilderness, as they waited for the rebellious generation of adults to die. All psalms are inspired, but when you read this, you can sense the depth of Moses' person and his maturity with God. It's like every word is gold. Somewhere on our lists of "what to memorize," Psalm 90 should appear.

Vs. 1-2 Notice v. 1 referring to a *dwelling place*. We've seen references to dwelling with God in a lot of The Psalms. Here, Moses is referring to the fact that though they constantly moved around the wilderness without a home or destination for those long 38 years, God Himself was their dwelling place.

Vs. 3-11 Look at the way Moses describes our mortality and our frailty under God's judgment. It is interesting to think that although we are saved in Christ, our bodies are still under the penalty of sin and the judgment of the fall. And as if that were not enough, God knows our hearts. We know that without the righteousness of our Lord, we would all be subject to judgment, rejection and a trip to hell. Moses lived in the reality of this for 38 years.

V. 12 This is something we should all do, given the disaster happening on this planet. No nation had a better view of the temporary nature of life than Israel did during those 38 years. The reality of this life on earth and the urgency of the harvest are vitally connected to our relationship with Jesus. How can we be saved and not number our days as we work in the harvest?

Vs. 13-16 This is Moses and God telling us that our true joy and fulfillment come from God. The heart of wisdom from v. 12 is what should make a person simplify and focus their life to be filled with God.

V. 17 This is something I pray. Only the Lord can *establish the work of our hands*. The question is, as a disciple, what do you want Him to establish? Joshua served God, and as a result, an entire generation served the Lord. I think for disciples, the work we want God to prosper is the making of disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

It is interesting to me that as Moses was ending his ministry to Israel, hoping the people would go beyond him and serve God, God told him they would fail. We've begun to see this failure today in Judges. The failure comes quickly. Yet someday, the Lord will establish the work of Moses' hands as the nation succeeds in the Tribulation and is honored during the Millennium.

Psalm 91

This psalm has a more victorious and confident tone. If Moses was the author, I would guess He wrote this for the next generation going into the land. The writer wanted the people to be confident in the Lord.

Vs. 1-2 Notice the idea of dwelling in God. Verse 2 is probably where Elizabeth Elliot got the title for her book, [The Shadow of the Almighty](#).

Vs. 3-8 This is the victory promised to Israel, but it is really a description of God's love and faithfulness to them.

Vs. 9-16 Notice how this section has two parts, each introduced with the cause for God's blessing, signaled by the word *because*.

Vs. 11-12 Satan quoted these verses to Jesus to entice Him to jump off the pinnacle of the temple. It amazes me that Satan saw these verses and knew that they referred to the Jew's Messiah. I don't think we would have known that any other way. Like it or not, as a spiritual being, Satan's knowledge of the Bible is better than ours. Having the Spirit and a regenerated spiritual life that is drawn to God in love and obedience makes all the difference and gives us the victory. Love and obedience are greater than knowledge.

Vs. 14-16 These verses make me think of Jabez entering the land, and of Jesus in Isaiah 53, making Himself a sacrifice for us and then being honored by God.

Proverbs 13:24-25

It seems that the parent's discipline of the child in v. 24 leads the child to a life of contentment and gratitude to God as seen in v. 25. Disciplining a child does more than keep him out of trouble; it creates a godly perspective of our life on earth.

APRIL 24

Judges 2:10-3:31

Judges 2:10-23

There is a lot of great stuff to observe in this chapter. Have fun. I have a few things.

V. 10 It isn't that their children, the next generation, didn't know about the Lord, but they didn't acknowledge Him as their God. They became like the people around them, "recognizing" many gods and traditions. It could have been that the parents didn't teach the children, but I doubt that. Part of the reason might be that parents talked about the Lord, but were very busy and consumed getting their lives together in the land. Maybe the children watched the parents and saw that living closely with the Lord was not a vital part of their parents' lives. The parents' personal

relationship with the Lord and their love for Him should have been more important than building their houses. On the other hand, the generation that doesn't have to fight for something doesn't appreciate what it has. Each generation, regardless of their parents, needs to seek the Lord.

Vs. 11-15 For the people to have worshipped any God but Yahweh was bad enough. Baal and Ashtaroah were very sexually focused fertility religions where both men and women gave themselves over to sexual intercourse and perversion in worship. In 1 Kings 19:18 where God says He will keep 7000 men for Himself who have not bowed the knee to Baal or kissed him, this is referring to becoming sexually defiled in that worship.

Vs. 16-23 These verses describe the cycle that will go through the book. Each time, however, the cycle goes deeper and the people become more degraded, ignorant and distant from God until we end up with the final two events in this book. This will continue for over 300 years of Israel's history. It makes you feel bad for God.

V. 17 They both literally and figuratively whored after these gods.

Vs. 22-23 This will recur in today's reading. God broke the back of the military powers under Joshua, but He purposefully left nations there to test Israel's obedience. Through following God, this generation would have had its own experiences of faith in seeing the miraculous ways that God saved them.

Judges 3

Vs. 1-6 These verses begin to explain the reason for what happens over the next 300 years. Notice the references to testing. Notice too in v. 2, that the nations were left to teach Israel war. The new generation was just handed the land and didn't appreciate it. They didn't fight for it or have to earn it. God makes sure in every generation that there is opposition that makes us uncomfortable, so that we have to live on our knees and contend for our faith. I think God is doing this today regarding His people and the harvest.

Vs. 7-11 This illustrates what has been said about the cycle of the judges. Othniel was a transitional figure from the time of Joshua. He was not one of the elders who administered with Joshua, but He was a part of that generation that entered the land. As Joshua mentioned in his final address, the people were already drifting. Within Othniel's lifetime the people had given themselves sexually to Baal and were being punished by God. Othniel may have been the godliest of all the judges in Judges.

V. 8 Notice who gave Cushan-rishathaim power over Israel.

Vs. 12-30 Notice who does the strengthening in v. 12. Eglon ruled in the land of Reuben, but his power extended over the Jordan. The city of palms is Jericho. It wasn't rebuilt, but Israel apparently lived there.

Ehud was a messenger bringing tribute to this king of Moab. Many of the tribe of Benjamin were left-handed. The word for left-handed means there was something wrong with their right hand. But in Benjamin, it made them very unique warriors; in fact, many of them were lethal with both hands. Notice where Paul (also a Benjaminite) says in 2 Corinthians 6:7, *by truthful speech, and the power of God; with the weapons of righteousness for the right hand and for the left*. This unconventional warfare was what Paul was referring to. No one expected weapons used by a left-hander. So if Ehud was patted down, it was for a right-hander; that's why he hid the blade on his right thigh. I guess a right-handed person would have put it on the left.

Notice where Ehud turns back, at Gilgal. That is where the nation came across the Jordan, where the stones of memorial were and where, very possibly, the 2.5 tribes built the altar. That these were referred to as idols probably means that the people made this a holy place, burning incense and offering sacrifices, which, even if sincere, were a violation of God's commands. Most likely,

Gilgal had been converted into a place of idolatry. Yet, even here, the remembrance of the grace and faithfulness of God might have been the thing that gave Ehud the resolve to turn back and carry out this plan.

Vs. 20-25 You've got to admit. It was a good plan. Just so it's clear, they were waiting on Eglon, because they didn't want to disturb him going to the bathroom.

V. 30 This was the longest time of peace brought by any one judge during the period of the judges.

V. 31 This guy was probably a contemporary with Ehud. That is assumed because it doesn't give the length of time he delivered Israel. The period of time is marked by Ehud's judgeship. Later, Samson and Samuel were also protecting Israel at the same time too.

Also, this might not seem like much from Shamgar, but Samson was the same kind of guy. His strength, and a couple of good days of action, subdued the Philistines for years. It was probably the fear of Shamgar (or the sound of his name) that kept the Philistines in control. Imagine a guy who was so powerful, fast, and agile that he outnumbered 600 men. Later Samson will lay to rest 1000 Philistine soldiers with the jawbone of a donkey.

For us as disciples, I don't think there are too many lessons to be gained from left-handed assassins. There is a huge lesson for us regarding the obstacles God leaves in our way to prove our gratefulness for Christ's love and our willingness to bear our cross and follow Him into the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Luke 22:14-34

Vs. 14-22 It is clear from Luke's account that Judas was there for the inauguration of the Lord's Supper. Notice that this is a summary of the entire Lord's Supper. Verse 20 shows that part of the Lord's Supper actually happened after dinner, or as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:25, *after supper*. At the beginning of their time Jesus took a cup, blessed it and passed it around. From this cup they all poured a little wine into empty cups they each had. During the supper Jesus broke the bread to symbolize His body. As they were still eating and at the end of the supper, Jesus dipped a piece of bread and gave it to Judas (John 13:27). Satan immediately entered Judas and Judas immediately went out. Then, after Judas left and the supper was finished, Jesus took the cup of the new covenant. So actually, Judas was there for the bread, but not for the actual consecration of the new covenant in the blood of Christ.

Vs. 23-27 The dispute mentioned in v. 24 is where Jesus would have washed their feet in John 13. Judas would have left after Jesus had washed their feet and explained what He had done for them.

Vs. 28-30 Jesus has already mentioned that they will sit on 12 thrones judging (ruling) the 12 tribes. This would be a good promise for them to keep in mind as this night, and the next day, unfolded.

Vs. 31-34 Luke is the only one who mentions Satan's demand to sift or test the disciples here. Jesus' prayer was for Peter personally, that his faith wouldn't fail. Either it was because Peter was their leader or because, as Jesus will explain, Peter's testing would be the most severe of all. The good news here is that even before Peter denies Jesus, Jesus tells Peter that he'll be restored and will be called to serve his fellow disciples.

Psalms 92-93

These are great, joyous, celebratory psalms.

Psalm 92

Vs. 1-4 It says that this was written for the Sabbath. Verses 1 and 2 give me the idea that it might have been written by David, as he was focusing all of Israel on worshiping the Lord in unity in Jerusalem. Notice the references to giving thanks to the Lord and declaring His *steadfast love* and *faithfulness*. These are David's hallmarks.

Vs. 5-9 Realizing that if this were written by David, you can understand that the Sabbath probably had not been held regularly in Israel for over 300 years. It could be that the wicked are those who disregard the Sabbath as a day to consider God's work and give Him thanks.

Vs. 10-11 This is the victory that God has given David. God gave David power. He exalted David and God let David see his victory over his enemies.

Vs. 12-15 This is what David learned. If a person follows God, God will bless him.

Psalm 93

Vs. 1-2 God's strength and majesty are seen in Him establishing the world, but superior to the world is the throne of God. It is everlasting and totally unmovable.

Vs. 3-4 The sea and forces of nature are seen as being powerful and chaotic, but God is mightier than His creation. Jesus showed He could tame the wind and waves.

V. 5 I guess if God is this great and has control over all things, we should trust His Word, and in faith, dwell in His house and attend His days of celebration.

Proverbs 14:1-2

Being wise and upright in fearing the Lord makes whatever you build in life good. But those who live by their own deviousness eventually end up destroying their own work and lives.

APRIL 25

Judges 4-5

One of the hardest things is to get a sense for the passage of time. I like knowing when things happened. According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 388 (BKC-OT), about 200 years have gone by since the Exodus. I guess if you take the 40 years of wandering + 7 years of war + 10 years of settling into the land up until Joshua's death + 8 years of oppression + 40 years of peace with Othniel + 18 years of oppression under Eglon + 80 years of peace with Ehud, you get about 203 years. Isn't this amazing how time is ticking away?

Judges 4

Vs. 1-3 So now we add another 20 years of oppression under King Jabin and his general, Sisera. It is interesting that these chariots kept Israel at bay. It shows that God wasn't helping them, because when He did help, He made those chariots a liability.

Vs. 4-10 It is interesting that during these 20 years, Deborah (means "honey-bee") was a prophetess. She was a judge, in that people came to her to hear a word from the Lord or to get a decision. I wonder what the Levites were up to during this time.

V. 6 Apparently the cries of Israel reached a certain level of intensity and God sent Deborah a command. Notice that God not only promised victory, but He said He would lure Sisera to come out with his chariots.

V. 9 I don't think it was wrong for Barak to want Deborah to go with him, but it is cast in a negative light. We will see other men who hear the Word of God from a prophet and simply

obey. Barak didn't do that, but he is still honored in Hebrews 11 as a man of faith. Gideon will also ask for a sign of confirmation.

V. 11 This little note is a piece of the puzzle God is putting in place.

Vs. 12-16 We don't understand what happened here until we read the song in the next chapter. According to the song in 5:19-21, there must have been a supernaturally inspired torrent of rain that made the chariots ineffective. Sisera wouldn't have brought his "toys" out on a rainy day. Apparently there was no warning.

Vs. 17-22 Jael must have been there without her husband, who was probably a shepherd and out with the sheep. According to the BKC-OT, p. 389, it was usually the women who pitched the tents.

Vs. 23-24 Apparently, it was a huge battle and King Jabin was also wiped out.

Judges 5

Vs. 1-3 This is the introduction to the song calling the nations to see and hear what God had done. Verse 2 has always seemed like the miracle to me: The leaders led. You realize in any war, if it goes bad, the leaders are the ones who are targeted. Here, the leaders came forward and were willing to take responsibility.

Vs. 4-5 She mentioned that God showed His dominance and greatness at Mt. Sinai.

Vs. 6-9 Apparently the problems began after Shamgar and in the days that Jael and her husband left the south part of Israel and went north. Because of King Jabin, using the normal roads had to be abandoned. This continued until Deborah came. Verse 8 tells the root of the problem. Israel chose new gods and therefore couldn't fight the oppression. Verse 9 again celebrates the faith and courage of the men who were willing to lead the people. This looks like the real miracle.

Vs. 10-11 This is saying the word should get out to everyone, from the rich on their donkeys down to the people at the watering places. The people would be talking about the victory the Lord provided.

Vs. 12-18 You notice in this description of who helped that not everyone who was called responded.

Vs. 19-22 This is the description of the battle. If the people had followed the Lord, He would have given Israel more victories like this that would have strengthened their faith. They themselves would have regularly experienced the acts that God would have done for them to show His glory and to defeat their enemies.

Vs. 23-27 Verse 23 is apparently a town that didn't respond to the call to war. On the other hand, one woman was more courageous than they were. Jael's actions are described in slow motion. Apparently this was meant to be funny or ironic.

Vs. 28-30 Still expressing irony, those waiting for Sisera to return as he usually did, with the booty of those he conquered, waited and were disappointed.

V. 31 Amen, and there was peace for forty years.

Luke 22:35-53

To understand some of what Jesus is saying here, you need to look at v. 53, *But this is your hour, and the power of darkness*. That hour was a bad hour.

Vs. 35-38 Jesus tells the disciples to expect the worst, to care for themselves and to be prepared to defend themselves in the immediate aftermath (hour) of His arrest. When He sent out the Twelve, Jesus told them they could depend on God moving in people's hearts to provide for

them. Now Jesus tells them the opposite. I believe it is because of this special hour on the earth. Except for the fall of man, this would probably be the second worst hour on earth and there probably won't be another like it until during the Tribulation.

Vs. 39-46 Jesus tells the disciples twice what they should be praying for. Even here, Jesus is interested in His disciples. Notice that Luke mentions the appearance of the angel and that the angel came sometime before Jesus had finished praying. I always thought it was at the end of His praying.

Jesus was on the edge, humanly speaking, during this prayer. *Being in an agony* describes the depth of the human and emotional weight He was under. Submission and prayer, humanly speaking, got Him through. What a great model He is, and to think, nothing we can face will even come close to what He endured.

Vs. 47-53 Good old Dr. Luke tells us it was the right ear, and that Jesus healed it. I get the feeling reading this, that the words of Jesus were a distraction of sorts to get the mob focused on Him and to give the disciples a chance to run.

Psalm 94

There is no note as to the author of this psalm. Since v. 16 mentions persecution, I could imagine this was written by David as he was still waiting on the Lord to deliver him from Saul, observing how Israel was falling into more and more disorder.

Vs. 1-7 This is the psalmist's lament over the growing lawlessness in Israel.

Vs. 8-11 This is a warning to the people who are taking advantage of the lack of justice. Justice would come and God was keeping track of who was doing what.

Vs. 12-15 The writer is affirming that the discipline of the Lord makes you seek Him, waiting for God's sure and faithful justice.

Vs. 16-19 This sounds like David.

Vs. 20-23 Since it is impossible for God to tolerate the wicked, their judgment is simply a matter of time. On the other hand, v. 22 says, and as David has often said, the Lord is the writer's stronghold and rock.

I think as disciples, it gives us security to know and remember that God has all things under control, even if it doesn't seem that way. As we work in the harvest we are not responsible for judgment. We are to work in the harvest, praying for leaders and authorities so that the Lord would give us the freedom to reach those who are ready to hear.

Proverbs 14:3-4

So, why did they put both of these verses together? I'll hazard a guess.

Foolishness hurts and destroys itself. Keeping your manger clean by not having an ox is foolish. A man should be willing to do the work of upkeep. Sitting and avoiding the toil that will bring others closer to the Lord gives you more time to enjoy life. But if you do the work, you'll enjoy life more, and you'll have the blessing of God, along with an abundance of hope, having seen God work. The wise man welcomes the mess.

APRIL 26

I can tell we are all entering into the "dog days" of reading. Hang in there and as Paul said to Timothy, "*as for you, always be steady...*" (2 Tim. 4:5, RSV). The Lord has a way of blessing you with something you've read when you least expect it. And you're getting to know the Lord,

seeking Him. He will definitely reward that. And again, as Paul said in Philippians, *I press on to make it my own because Christ Jesus has made me His own.* (Phil. 3:12) Happy pressing.

Judges 6

Vs. 1-6 Notice that it was the hand of the Lord that moved first and gave Israel into the *hand of Midian*. Remember that both Moses and Joshua promised the people that if they forgot the Lord and fell into idolatry, they would have to watch others take what they worked for. The Midianites made Israel look like a Walmart © parking lot.

V. 6 Notice that the people had to be brought very low before their crying out was genuine and unified. We've seen this in David and we'll see it at the end of Judges. Sometimes God allows "bad" to get worse, so that our asking goes to the depth of dependence on God.

Vs. 7-10 It seems to me that the Lord might have sent this prophet first to see if the people would respond with remorse and obedience to a human messenger. If they had said, "Who is he? He's just a guy like us," I think God would have let them sit a while longer. Apparently the people were humble.

Vs. 11-18 It is interesting that it is *the angel of the Lord* who came. Note also, that Gideon had heard the stories of God's working in delivering Israel from Egypt and was struggling with God's inactivity. He knew the stories, but not the Lord. Of course, if Gideon had understood enough of the stories, he would have known exactly why they were in such a bad situation. We know that the people didn't know the law and they were not hearing Deuteronomy read. Knowing the stories doesn't make you a follower. It is the intersection of the words of God, the listening heart and the Holy Spirit that brings life and change.

Vs. 16-18 Faith seems to have been a rare thing. Although the Lord promised Gideon victory, Gideon didn't exactly believe, but he didn't exactly disbelieve. He was asking for a test to make sure this was all true.

Vs. 19-24 There are many interesting things here. It appears as if God was not holding the people to worship at the tabernacle during this period of disobedience. Normally, sacrificing anywhere but the tabernacle was forbidden. God was looking for faith and devotion to His commands as He was giving direction. Notice that after the angel of the Lord left Gideon in shock, the Lord spoke to Gideon and calmed him. Having seen the Lord and now hearing this voice, Gideon knew it was the Lord who was invisibly with him, speaking to him. From this account and what we find later, Gideon was a fearful follower who needed lots of encouragement and direction. But, the Lord is OK with that. That's something to give us hope as we follow Christ in the harvest. We don't have to fit into the mold of any hero of the faith or into some preconceived notion of spiritual boldness.

Vs. 25-27 God gave Gideon very specific instructions. Although Gideon was afraid of the people, so that he obeyed God at night, he still did it. The altar was probably big, like a monument, so Gideon enlisted 10 men who helped him and then, apparently, informed the authorities. Again, the Lord worked with Gideon in all of this.

Vs. 28-32 I love the response of Gideon's father. I wouldn't have liked a nickname like that. At least it wasn't a tattoo.

Vs. 33-40 Verse 34 is interesting. It says the Spirit *clothed Gideon*, which is literal from the Hebrew.

One thing you see with Gideon in the case of the altar, and now in facing Midian, Gideon sought the help of others.

V. 36 I think that when a person has the right heart, the Lord doesn't mind someone asking for confirmation of His will. It might depend too, on what the Lord has already done in our lives up to that point. If He has already shown us great acts of kindness and guidance, we might not need to ask for confirmation in continuing to do what He has already shown us. In this case with Gideon, there hadn't been a sign of the Lord's working for some time. And again, the Lord showed him a lot of understanding. I think He shows us a lot of understanding too.

Notice too that before Gideon asked for this confirmation he had already sounded the alarm and begun gathering Israel. He had already acted in faith and gone forward as a leader.

Luke 22:54-23:12

Luke 22:54-71

Vs. 54-62 What is notable about this account of Peter's denial is that Luke mentions that when the cock crowed the last time, Jesus heard it and turned; and across the distance, He met eyes with Peter.

Vs. 63-65 Jesus' self-control, for our sakes, is amazing. Jesus was the only person present who was in control of Himself, and He allowed these little evil men to harm Him.

Vs. 66-71 The trial of Jesus had been illegal. They had to wait until daybreak to re-try Him with the full Sanhedrin. Notice that Jesus does some talking here. When He said that He was the Son of Man, it led to the question of being God's Son. This was a very clear statement. Verse 70 could be translated, "You have said it. I am." The *you say* is a Greek idiom meaning "yes." So what Jesus is saying is "Yes, I am."

Luke 23:1-12

Vs. 1-5 This is a hearing that looks similar to what we have seen in Matthew and Mark.

Vs. 6-12 This is only found in Luke. Jesus frustrated the entire situation by just saying nothing. It is interesting that Pilate and Herod became friends after this. That gives you a view of Pilate that makes you feel less sympathetic toward him, even if he was forced to hand over Jesus to the Jews. Apparently Pilate's remorse passed quickly.

To me, it is interesting that Jesus held to what He taught His disciples. He didn't cast pearls before swine. Herod interrogated Him at length. I'm sure it wasn't easy for Jesus to be mocked and taunted for as long as He was. This all makes me think that as a disciple, I have to be willing to be taunted and mocked; but I can stand with the security and knowledge that I am working in the harvest as Jesus was, and for the same purpose.

Psalms 95-96

Psalm 95

I don't know if this was written in conjunction with David, but I can imagine him urging this to be put to music, so the people coming to Jerusalem would put their minds on God and open their hearts.

Vs. 1-5 This is a call to come to worship their Savior King. David knew this King and His salvation very personally.

Vs. 6-7 This is a call to come and worship their Maker Shepherd. Especially in these two terms being put together, there is the urging to submit to His leading.

Vs. 8-11 This may seem like a less than happy way to end the psalm/song, but the warning is appropriate. Israel in the wilderness was blessed and still resisted God's loving leadership. God was using David to bring the people out of 400 years of wandering and despair. They needed to embrace the blessing of David's kingship with obedience to God.

Psalm 96

Vs. 1-6 This psalm seems to be a call to the people of the world. The one Creator created all men and nations. He is the only God and He has one majesty and splendor that should be worshiped by all.

Vs. 7-9 These are strong cries to worship God. If Israel did this, the next verse would be easy.

V. 10 With the heart of conviction expressed in the last verses, this would have been an easy testimony to give to the nations. This is very much like what we hear David say so often. God's blessing and salvation are to be shared with others.

Vs. 11-13 The creation will rejoice at God's coming. These parts of creation have nothing to fear of judgment, nor will the righteous. This is a call for all men to be ready to meet God.

This is why we have been left here, to praise God in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

Proverbs 14:5-6

With the pairing here, it is almost as if you could read that a lying, false witness will always seek wisdom in vain, but a person who tells the truth will find it easy to gain understanding. He is already on the same wavelength as God's wisdom.

APRIL 27

Judges 7:1-8:17

Judges 7

This chapter has one of the more well-known stories of the OT. It also gets used for management and discipleship pointers all the time.

Vs. 2-8 Notice how often you find the words, *the Lord said to Gideon*. God was very involved in this action and in guiding this fearful follower.

V. 3 Isn't it interesting that God told Gideon to let the fainthearted go home? The last sentence where it says, *Then 22,000...*, the RSV and Luther say first that "Gideon tested them and then 22,000 returned home." Gideon did as God said and the people left. Humanly speaking, this says something for Gideon's faith in accepting God's way of doing things, considering he was facing a huge army. Later we will see King Saul break faith with God when the people begin leaving him as he is getting ready to face the Philistines. Waiting for Samuel to arrive and sacrifice to the Lord was too hard for Saul. Seeing these 22,000 men leave was just as much a test for Gideon.

I've heard people discuss why the "lappers" were chosen over the "kneelers," and my conclusion is that it had nothing to do with one group being better fighters than the others. God simply wanted the smaller group.

Vs. 9-25 Notice that it was God who told Gideon to go and listen to the dream (nightmare) being explained. The Lord's encouragement of Gideon was very gracious. This was good timing too.

V. 18 When Gideon had the men yell out, *For the Lord and for Gideon*, I think he included himself because of what he heard in the explanation of the dream. The enemy army knew Gideon's name.

Notice that once the victory was given, Gideon engaged the help of the other tribes. Gideon, in a good sense, always seemed to be thinking of doing what he did with others.

Since God was doing this, He didn't need the numbers. Actually, God could have fought this war completely without Gideon. So, why did God need anyone at all? There are some good things for

us as disciples here. One thing that stands out to me is that every generation needs to follow God and allow Him to give them their own experiences of grace and deliverance. This event became a testimony to the people, showing them, among a thousand other things, that the Lord loved them and could deliver them if they followed Him. We have the Word that tells us to follow and trust God, but God gives us our individual testimony and stories of His love and power as we trust and follow.

Judges 8:1-17

Vs. 1-3 This is a strange event and we'll see this kind of situation again, but not with a happy ending. The tribe of Ephraim seems to have an awful, aggressive spirit. The issue was not that they wanted to help, but they wanted the booty, the goods, materials, money, weapons and livestock they would obtain from the plunder. Gideon is the model of diplomacy. And, in fact, Ephraim was called and they were raking it in. They were saying they wanted to have been called to the initial battle to have obtained the plunder of the Midianite camp. In a few pages, Ephraim will pull this stunt again with a guy who has just "lost" his daughter. Jephthah won't think it is funny and he won't back down.

Vs. 4-9 These Israelite towns guessed wrong. Since Gideon already had the Midianites on the run, these people should have trusted God and helped him. This lack of faith and disloyalty to God and to Gideon would prove fatal for them. If Gideon was known to the Midianites, he was certainly known to his own people. Not to help was the same as refusing to follow the Lord. It might have been that these towns had seen how many Midianites had retreated, and were now looking at how few men Gideon had. They may have been good at mathematics, but it is always better to side with the Lord and let Him make the final accounting.

Vs. 10-12 Here is where we get the numbers. The enemy began with 137,000 and were reduced now to only 15,000. Gideon personally only had 300 men with him and they were about to clean house. Obviously the victory was from the Lord, in fulfillment of what He had spoken to Moses in the blessings and curses. If Israel obeyed, one man would be able to put a thousand of the enemy to flight. It was God who fought. The people were merely representative and there for clean-up.

Vs. 13-17 Gideon, as a judge, also judged and gave order to Israel.

I guess my thoughts for us as disciples are what I shared above. The stories of others may encourage or inspire us, but what God wants for us is more. As we follow His Word, trusting and obeying Him in the harvest, He gives us our own stories as we see Him do that which only He can do. So many of our stories today come from popular writers and the experiences of the saints of yesteryear. God wants to do things with us in our part of the harvest that testify to His presence with us and His power to transform people. We need to follow as disciples, reaching the lost and making disciples. He will show us it is not by our power, but His. He will receive the glory as we tell others what we have seen Him do.

Luke 23:13-43

Vs. 13-25 Luke makes it clear that Pilate really did try to release Jesus, including a massive "pre-crucifixion" beating to make the Jews feel sorry for Him, feeling that justice had been delivered. The number of beatings Jesus received are, humanly speaking, why He needed help carrying His cross and why He died so soon. The reality is, that if any of us had received those beatings, we would have never been the same and might have died from the wounds. It might have been years before we could have done anything public. We would have never been normal. Here and in John's account, you sense that Pilate was slowly understanding the deep, irrational, spiritual hatred that was flowing through that place.

As disciples we would be wise to remember that this same supernatural, spiritual resistance and hatred are always at work, sometimes even among the saved. Our praying and serving need to be on a supernatural level. Reading books on conflict resolution and honing our communication skills are great ideas, but thinking that we have the wisdom and skill always to succeed is foolish. We will never equal Jesus and Paul, and both Jesus and Paul said that our conflict is spiritual, both in dealing with the world rulers of this present darkness, and with dealing with the spiritually rebellious and depraved nature of men. Jesus was rejected and Paul was hounded by pharisaical believers. Our work in the harvest is no "cake walk," and any advances should be regarded as occasions to worship God for His grace.

Vs. 26-31 Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention Simon of Cyrene. What is significant here is that as Luke wrote Acts, the influence from Cyrene was seen. The men of Cyrene were some of the first gospel preachers to the Gentiles. And I wonder, like you do, if Simon had some hand in what happened in the spread of the gospel in Acts.

V. 27 This apparently took place when they were putting the cross on Simon. Luke is the only one who records Jesus' words to the women. It seems that His words to them foreshadow the coming destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in 70 A.D. The destruction among the Jews would be so severe, that the only women who wouldn't lose a child would be the childless.

Vs. 32-43 In keeping with Luke's interest in God's grace and the gospel, Luke records the salvation of one of the two thieves who were crucified with Jesus. The other writers mention that they both verbally abused Jesus at first, just like all the others did. But in those hours on the cross, as the leaders paraded before Jesus expressing their irrational hatred, it must have dawned on one of these men what was happening. All that he had heard about Jesus came to mind, and even on the cross, as he witnessed Jesus and the hatred directed toward Him, he believed Jesus was the Messiah. This guy actually understood and believed that Jesus would be coming into His kingdom.

To think, that among Jesus' final words on the cross, there were words of confirming the salvation of a lost person. Even in His death, Jesus was alert to what the Father was doing around Him. This is something for us as disciples to think about as we live and die for Christ in the harvest. Jesus did not wrangle or cry aloud, but His Father used His heart, His silence, obedience and gentleness, even in His death, to convict others.

Psalms 97-98

We don't know who wrote these psalms, but I would think they were written sometime just after David became king, as he was organizing the nation around coming to Jerusalem, to Zion, and to worship. David appointed singers, some of whom had been with him during those long years of running from Saul. They would have known David's heart and spiritual influence and they would have been able to express these influences in worship. Since David was Israel's sweet singer, David may have had a direct hand in writing these psalms.

Psalm 97

Vs. 1-5 The earth recognizes that God reigns and it responds. The earth knows how to respond to God when He comes in judgment. Apparently men should do the same.

Vs. 6-7 This sounds like Romans 1:18ff. Interestingly, the heavens (angelic world) proclaim God's righteousness while God's followers witness His glory. Those who worship idols have the IQ of soup, and the demons behind idol worship are subject to God's power.

Vs. 8-9 God's choice to be worshiped in Zion, then and in the Millennium, shows that He is above all creation.

Vs. 10-12 seem to be for His servants and how we, as disciples, are supposed to respond to the Lord. It is interesting here to see the love of the Lord spoken of; but then, it is said that if we really love Him, it will be seen in keeping ourselves from things He hates, and hating them too. Our joy is to be in His deliverance, His light (His Word and the Spirit's leading) and His joy as we follow Him.

Psalm 98

Vs. 1-3 This song of joy is for the coming of God in salvation and judgment. Notice how often salvation is mentioned here. And look how often the nations are referred to. This reminds me of Romans 16:26, *but (the gospel) has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith.*

Vs. 4-6 The power of this joy is in proportion to our grasp of the greatness of the Lord and His salvation.

Vs. 7-9 The perspective is clearly that of being completely in love with the Lord. Judgment is only mentioned as being equitable, and His judgment is not to be feared by those who love Him. The real focus is that He will come, and when He does, everything will be complete and everything will rejoice at His arrival. This is a good thing to remember as we work in the harvest and live in a sad, tragic, dying world.

Romans 15:13 *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

There is that joy again and it should be present with us in the harvest.

Proverbs 14:7-8

V. 7 seems to complement 8b, in that the wise man seeks God in all the events of life to understand God's way and will for Him. For a wise man, there is nothing that helps him find God's will in the presence of a fool.

Apparently, a fool's own folly looks like the right way for him.

APRIL 28

Judges 8:18-9:21

Judges 8:18-35

Vs. 18-21 Apparently there is something going on here. Normally Gideon would have had these kings killed anyway, but his words indicate that these two kings were responsible for killing his brothers in time of peace. Gideon is taking the responsibility as the blood avenger as he does this.

I have never understood why Gideon did this to his young son. I'm sure there was some cultural meaning, but every year I think what a bad idea this was.

Vs. 22-28 This was an understandable gesture by the people, wanting Gideon to be their king. I wonder why Gideon didn't ask the Lord and I wonder where the Levites were. Since Gideon asked for help in other places, why didn't he ask for guidance from the priests? But I think we will see why Gideon didn't seek the priests.

Gideon was very firm on the idea that God ruled Israel. Of course, this only worked if the Levites were in place and the people obeyed God. If they did their parts, then Israel was untouchable.

Apparently during the fighting Gideon did more leading, than collecting of treasure, so for the main part of his pay, he asked the people to donate an earring. This way Gideon would be blameless if any accusations were brought against him, saying he took the biggest share. Up to here, this is all good thinking by Gideon.

V. 27 This is the only negative that God mentions against Gideon. Remember, this is Samuel writing about Gideon years later, so there is an historical perspective here too. If the only understanding of ephod we have is used here, it is the apron worn by the high priest in worship in which the Urim and the Thummim were held. Why would you want this unless you wanted to represent yourself before God and obtain answers without using the tribe that God had designated for this? The land was full of corruption and I have a feeling that Gideon had no respect for the Levites. I think this explains why there were no Levites present. Why go to them? Later, King Uzziah will be stricken with leprosy for disrespecting the priests and Levites and trying to represent himself before God.

V. 28 This will be the last time we will read of the land having rest in the book of Judges. The next rest will come during the judgeship of Samuel. The next true rest will come during the reign of David.

Vs. 29-35 This report about Gideon isn't written in a negative way, but, in my heart, it indicates that not all was well with Gideon. His wealth allowed him to live in extravagance. We will see another judge with lots of sons who rode on lots of donkeys. It is another way of saying that he had lots of money. You notice that when the people wanted Gideon to be their king, they mention him having a small family. In the years that passed, apparently, Gideon was a busy guy. All that Gideon built without God will come to ruin.

It seems to me that what you learn from Gideon, as a disciple, is that he had no lasting influence. When the battle was done, he lived for himself, not the Lord, and not for building the future generations of Israel. If the future of Israel had meant anything to him, he would have gotten the Levites involved and he would have been a godly influence to make the Levites prominent again in Israel. Gideon's first response to the angel of the Lord revealed his ignorance of the Word. His ignorance of the Word caught up with him. He needed the Levites.

The test of a disciple is living for Christ, before, during, and after the "battle." The harvest goes on. People are still lost, needing to know Christ, and disciples need to keep being made and equipped for the next generation. In spite of all this need, we still need to be in the Word and personally close to Christ, abiding in Him and following Him His way. We can't be too busy for Him and His Word, and we can't disrespect the church. Regardless of the critics of the church, the church is still the bride of Christ and entrusted with the harvest. We need to stop criticizing other churches and just do our work. As disciples of our Lord in the harvest, we need to make disciples, building the church to be a disciple-making community in the harvest.

Notice what happened to Gideon when there was no goal to strive for or no battle to fight. It is the same thing that happens to us. We might not have an army of spouses (what madman would want that?), but our cars and TVs and phones and apps and computers and everything else make us flabby, fat and unfocused as the storm approaches the harvest.

Judges 9:1-21

Vs. 1-3 Gideon's concubine in Shechem is mentioned in 8:31. This "wife" and her son lived with her parents in Shechem and not with the other wives and sons. Gideon would have visited on occasion.

In Genesis, Shechem is a notable place, for good and bad. And in Joshua, Shechem is the place, between Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal, between the blessing and the curse, where Joshua renewed the covenant with Israel before he died.

Abimelech (melech is a form of the word king) is not only using the need for a king to push his proposal, but also the resentment he has toward being rejected from his father's family. This looks like a bad episode from a TV show.

V. 5 The mention of killing all of Gideon's sons on one stone suggests a public execution.

V. 6 Notice that it wasn't until Abimelech had done this, that the men of Shechem made him king.

Vs. 7-21 This is a long story by Jotham, but you get the point. If this was a fictional event, you would have placed Jotham over on Mt. Ebal, the mount of the curse; but in reality, he needed to be on Gerizim to make his escape.

Jotham was predicting the events to follow. Whatever happened here with the family of Gideon, Israel would never be the same and they wouldn't see rest. Verses 16-19 are a charge, not only against the people of Shechem, but against all of Israel. Notice that there is no outcry from the other tribes when they learned that Gideon's family was slaughtered like this. The people, all the tribes, should have risen up as one man to seek justice, but nearly everyone was corrupt and serving idols. How different this is from the end of Joshua, when the tribes gathered together because they thought something was done wrong in building that altar. There will be justice here, but justice isn't always "instant." In the first verse of tomorrow's reading you'll see how long Jotham had to wait to see God finally move in and judge Abimelech and the people of Shechem.

Luke 23:44-24:12

Luke 23:44- 56

Vs. 44-49 It was dark from noon to 3 p.m. It was a supernatural darkness. It doesn't mention a storm or a solar eclipse. The curtain in the temple, hiding the Holy of Holies, was torn, but not as the result of an earthquake. Luke doesn't mention the earthquake. The people who came for the "spectacle" left disappointed, beating their chests in sorrow (of not seeing a sign, not because Jesus died). At this point, those who loved Jesus were watching from a distance.

Vs. 50-56 We don't hear of Joseph until now. He, like Nicodemus, was a member of the Sanhedrin, the group that plotted Jesus' death. Nick and Joe were against what had happened and were probably not invited to the meeting. The grave was Joseph's and apparently Pilate and Joe knew each other, so the request was granted. Being in Joe's tomb fulfilled Isaiah 53:9.

Luke 24:1-12

V. 4 If you add up all of the angels, there were probably at least five present at the resurrection, two in the tomb, one on the stone and these two sneaking up on these women and scaring the soldiers.

V. 11 is interesting. Even though they knew these women well, and even though the women were pretty excited, *these words seemed to them an idle tale, and they did not believe them*. The great heroes of Christianity responded like duds. Someone promoting themselves would never write a fable like this. Obviously, this is true and these men were no heroes, yet.

V. 12 We know that Peter and John took off for the tomb. Why Luke only mentioned Peter might be because Peter would have been better known by his readers.

Psalm 99

This psalm is focused on worshiping the Lord in Jerusalem, in the temple (where He rests His feet), before the ark of the covenant, which is the mercy seat and the throne of God. With this imagery in mind, see if you can find all of this. Since it mentions *all the peoples*, it is another indication that Israel was mindful of its part in the plan of redemption, leading all peoples to

God. That is still to come. Again, I think this psalm was part of David's desire to unify the people by bringing Israel together to worship in Jerusalem.

Vs. 1-5 It is interesting that there are two prominent ideas here. First, that Zion is the place where the Lord exercises His authority, and second, that the nations should both tremble and praise Him. This is exactly what will happen during the Millennium.

Vs. 6-7 The psalmist mentions that three prominent priests called upon God and God spoke to them. This was to motivate the people to come and allow the priests to lead them in worship, instead of doing their own thing like Gideon did. During the judges and during Saul's reign, people worshiped as they desired, but not as God had told them. This was written to correct that.

V. 8 This is both a motivation and a warning.

V. 9 Here is the point of this psalm.

Proverbs 14:9-10

What an interesting couplet. In v. 10 it suggests that a heart that is locked up by a lack of confession remains closed and isolated. The fool in v. 9 doesn't realize the freedom that having an open and cleansed conscience gives. The wise person openly confesses his guilt before God in worship and receives God's acceptance. The wise person knows submission before God and he knows the joy of having a cleansed and open heart. These few words could keep a disciple from developing heart problems.

APRIL 29

So, we are at a landmark. With today's reading, you have made it a third of a year. You have read 100 psalms and you have finished Luke, the last of the synoptic Gospels (summary, parallel accounts), plus you've read the first six books of the Bible. Even if you're behind and your "regular reading" muscles are not yet toned and strong, you've probably done better than you did last year. More importantly, you've given the Spirit lots to work with. You've already had insights and grown stronger in the Lord. But even with some of what you've read (that you think has gone in one eye and out the other), when you don't expect it, a word will come to you or a story will come to mind and you'll see the Spirit giving you insight or leading you in the situation you are in. That's what being a child of God and a disciple in the harvest is all about: growing in Him. All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. And He leads us through His Word and the Spirit.

Judges 9:22-10:18

Judges 9:22-57

Vs. 22-25 There is an expression, "God doesn't always pay on Friday," meaning that He doesn't always pass judgment according to our sense of timing. I wonder what it was like for Jotham to have to wait three years to see God finally work things around like this.

V. 23 We will see this a couple more times in 1 Samuel 16:14 and again in 1 Kings 22:19-23. God judges those who rebel against Him by allowing demonic forces to give them what they want. I'm sure God is doing the same today.

V. 24 God didn't forget what had happened and He included those who supported Abimelech. Since God knows the heart, you can still be guilty without pulling the trigger. It's good to keep your heart cleansed from this kind of guilt.

With all of this betrayal going on, it is interesting that Abimelech seems ignorant of it. He doesn't do anything until he is incited to action by the anger of Zebul (the city's mayor) in v. 30.

Vs. 26-41 This section is ironic in that Abimelech won everything back, but his pride got the best of him. If he had stopped here, he would have had peace, but God knew he would push things to literally bring destruction upon his own head.

V. 38 Zebul (one guy with a funny name) goads Gaal (another guy with a funny name) to take the fight to the open fields. This was a bad move for Gaal.

Vs. 42-57 In the deaths of his brothers, Abimelech had been guilty of irrational violence and arrogance. Now those character qualities will lead him to judgment.

V. 49 Like medieval castles, in the center of the grounds of the castle they had a tower for refuge and defense. It sounds like they started a fire at the base of the tower, or on the roof of the tower or both; and everyone died from the smoke.

Vs. 50-57 The same trick didn't work at Thebez. In God's justice, He guided a woman to throw a small millstone, about the size of a brick, on the troops and she beamed Abimelech. God's justice was complete.

Abimelech was never called a judge. He ruled a part of Israel and by his presence he kept other enemies at bay, but he never brought peace. This story shows the awful condition of the nation. No other tribe sought to correct the murderous injustice Abimelech and the men of Shechem committed on the family of Gideon. This is what being free of God and His Word can do for you. It frees you up to be corrupt.

Judges 10:1-18

Vs. 1-5 The only things I see with these two judges is that Tola was on the west side of the Jordan and Jair was on the east side of the Jordan. Tola probably kept the Philistines at bay until the arrival of Samson. Jair may have kept order until Jephthah arrived. It seems that they were sort of like local heroes to be reckoned with, though it never says who they fought against. Jair was a rich man, like Gideon, with lots of sons and donkeys. I wonder if they had donkey races, and if so, I'll bet they looked funny.

Notice that although these men were judges, it doesn't say that there was a period of peace. You get the feeling that these men were very local and gave peace to the area where they lived. They still accounted for 45 years of bringing a good influence to the land.

Vs. 6-9 The two peoples mentioned here will be the focus of the next two judges. Jephthah will go after the Ammonites and Samson will go after the Philistines; although in Samson's case, it's hard to say he went after anything but Philistine women. He was a judge by arrogance and intimidation only.

Vs. 10-16 Eighteen years is a long time. The people here are finally crying out and they repented. It seems that this time, they understood, as a people, that they were really in trouble and knew that their trouble was because of idolatry. Notice that they willingly put away their foreign gods/idols. Where were the Levites and what, if anything, was happening at the tabernacle in Shiloh?

I wonder how this conversation with the Lord took place. I wonder if the people gathered together at the tabernacle in Shiloh.

Vs. 13-14 God gave the people what they deserved.

Vs. 15-16 The people were genuinely ready to follow God. Now, too, God was quick to move.

One of the benefits of being close to God in His Word and following Him is that we don't need God to use hard times to push us to repentance, obedience and the putting away of idols. We respond to challenges in an entirely different way, understanding that the Lord is moving things

in the harvest to open up opportunities or to work some purpose we don't understand. But we don't have to worry that we goofed.

Vs. 17-18 It's interesting that these verses are included today since they really apply to tomorrow. They were looking for someone to lead them You'll be surprised to see that they find a guy like Abimelech, only much truer to God. Jephthah is another of these judges who knows the stories, but doesn't know the Lord through His Word.

Luke 24:13-53

Vs. 13-35 I don't know who isn't inspired in some way by the story of the guys going to Emmaus. I would have loved to have been there. There is a lot to observe in this account. Have fun.

V. 27 That would have been a great talk to hear. These guys became totally engaged and v. 32 expresses what they were feeling. That still happens if we abide in our Lord's Word.

V. 34 On Easter, many Christians in all countries have a greeting and response when they see each other on Easter morning. One says, "He is risen!" and the other person says, "He is risen indeed." That response is taken from this verse.

We have no record of what happened when Jesus met Peter. We hear about it here and in 1 Corinthians 15, but the details are missing. Apparently Jesus had some very private words with Peter to keep him from giving up after having denied Him.

V. 35 This is a great sentence and I'm sure it has launched many sermons.

Vs. 36-43 This is Luke's "proof" that Jesus was risen and that the disciples were not just having a mass mirage of some kind.

This is the meeting that Thomas missed. I wonder if when Jesus put the fish in His mouth, if the disciples looked to see if it went through Him and hit the floor.

Vs. 44-49 The Holy Spirit had not been given yet, and for the next 40 days, they would need to understand the Word. So Jesus opened their minds. This is exactly what the Spirit does for us. We do not understand the Word for any other reason than that He helps us. Jesus' word to His disciples, to seek and find, apply to our understanding of the Word and God's will. *Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.* (2 Tim. 2:7) Do we really press on to understand until the Lord shows us?

Vs. 50-53 When I read this quick summary, I get the feeling that Luke might not have had the writing of Acts in mind. If he had, I think he would have made a smoother transition between books. The first part of Acts covers this section in much greater detail.

I wonder if Theophilus got this book and said, "Luke, this is great, but you can't stop here. Here, I'll stake you a couple hundred thousand drachma to write the continuing story."

Even beyond the book of Acts, we are the continuing story, following those who have gone before us, following Christ in the harvest while it is still day.

Psalms 100

This is a short, beautiful psalm that has launched a thousand songs.

Vs. 1-2 Notice that all the earth is to praise God, serve Him and come into His presence with singing. It is good for us to remember that sin isn't just what you do, it is also what you don't do. For moral, noble, lost people not to treat God as God is still sin. To give thanks isn't a command as much as it should be an involuntary reaction to Him.

V. 3 This expands on v. 1. He is God our Creator and God our Shepherd. And, we belong to Him. That is not slavery. It is an amazing and liberating life.

V. 4 This expands on v. 2. We are to come to God. Adam sinned and hid. The response of the saved is longing to be in His presence. Does He really get our time? Do we just sit before Him and enjoy Him?

V. 5 It is because of that *steadfast love* and that *faithfulness*, that Christ sought us and died for us while we were yet sinners and enemies of the cross. I'd say that defines God as pretty good.

Proverbs 14:11-12

I wonder if the *way that seems right* is the one that convinces you to make heaven here and live in houses, as opposed to realizing that we should choose to live in tents here and work in the harvest, until the Master calls us in from the fields.

Without the Word of God we are lost and will conjure up our own opinion of God's will or the "right" way. We need our "meds" daily. Without the daily input of the Word in our lives, all of us would stray from His love and His purpose for us in this harvest.

APRIL 30

Some of what is written here in Judges isn't so much "the history of the nation," as it is biographical sketches of how being lost on earth damages the soul. There is a price tag associated with living far from God, whether you are a believer or an unbeliever. Our sickness is so grave and deep that to think we can live a day without God, connected intravenously to His Word, listening every moment to His Spirit to be led by the Spirit, is just crass foolishness and unbelief. It shows what we really think - that all this Jesus stuff is good, but not really vitally necessary. We could easily end up like the men we will be reading about, not realizing that God put their stories here, publicly, in plain view, so that we could learn the lessons and avoid their tragic mistakes.

Notice, too, that almost nothing is said about Israel as a unified nation. The further you go, the more provincial things become. Rather than tribes banding together to help one another, they are a nation in name only. So where was that unity supposed to be if they didn't have a king? They were to be unified around their common worship at one place where all the men of Israel were to gather three times a year: at the tabernacle. Once they lost their worship, they lost their unity. The same thing happens to us, but we are smarter in our disobedience. They worshiped idols, visibly, and neglected the only true worship that united the nation and people. We worship Sundays, often singing the same songs that everyone else is singing. But our worship isn't supposed to be around a building or a service; it is around our Savior and His mission, the Great Commission.

Israel's worship was daily, in the offerings for sin, reminding them of the kindness of God and the depth of their need. Their worship on the feast days was in remembrance of their history of deliverance.

Our worship and following Jesus in the Great Commission does all of this for us. As we go out we are reminded of grace and His kindness in our salvation. In this recognition, we bring the message of the work of our Savior, the power of which brings fruit and redemption. To worship on Sunday, and not worship in going forth in the harvest, might mean there are other things more important to us that fill our needs and desires and you can guess what the Bible calls those things. And so we end up in the same place as the people we're reading about. They knew the stories, but they didn't know the Word or the God who wrote it. We need to constantly fight against that happening to us.

Judges 11-12

Judges 11

Vs. 1-11 Notice that Jephthah's life history seems similar to Abimelech's, and that he also surrounded himself with worthless company. That he *went out* means he and his merry men robbed people and towns outside of Israel. He gained a reputation, and part of his résumé said he was good at fighting and leading men.

Notice, too, that more is said about Jephthah and what he knew, or didn't know, than about his battle. The battle against the Ammonites is only vs. 32-33.

Vs. 4-11 You don't read anywhere here that the elders of Gilead sought God regarding their decision. Apparently Jephthah was ceremonially made the leader of the people of Gilead at Mizpah and Jephthah spoke to the Lord there. The only thing noteworthy about this place was the covenant Laban and Jacob made there.

Vs. 12-28 Notice that Jephthah sought a peaceful solution first. His understanding of events and time (300 years) is pretty accurate. If you sense that he knew his history well, then take note of what follows. Jephthah didn't know the Lord well at all. Again, we'll see that knowing "about" the stories is not a substitute for being in the Word and knowing the Lord through His Word.

V. 24 In a way, it seems like Jephthah makes this a duel of the gods. This reasoning would have worked well if Israel had been obedient. If they were ignoring God, God would ignore them and it would make it look like the other gods are bigger. Just a caution here, notice that you could understand that Jephthah really believed that Chemosh had given the Ammonites their land. He doesn't call Chemosh a false god.

Vs. 29-40 It is hard to find any verses in Scripture, next to each other, which are so stunning and frightening, than vs. 29-31. The Spirit came upon Jephthah. That's good. Jephthah makes a vow to God to offer the first person that comes out of his house as a burnt offering to God. How can that be? It shows that religious sincerity can be totally wrong and ignorant of God, even in the service of God. We see this even today among Christians, and we still do not grasp the power of sin and the need for each of us to be in God's Word. Listening to a sermon and stories about God or singing about God doesn't do the same thing as sitting together with Him, looking at what He has said. It is the difference between looking at a pill and actually taking it.

Vs. 34-40 I have done all the gymnastics with these verses trying to get Jephthah off the hook, imagining that there was a group of people dedicated to God, like Samuel, who served at the temple for life as virgins, like nuns, but these people didn't exist. Also, vows could be broken that were in violation of the law. The solution would have been simple. According to the law, Jephthah could have bought or redeemed her with money so that she didn't have to fulfill this vow. If he had only known the Bible. The most simple and obvious reading of the text is that Jephthah had a simple, sincere, second-hand understanding of God and he had mixed the paganism of his culture into it. The worship at the tabernacle had failed and the Levites were not doing their jobs. Jephthah was a sincere victim of extreme ignorance in his worship and understanding of God.

I say this is all tragic, in light of guys like Jephthah and Samson, being in Hebrews 11:32 in the "Hall of Faith." Their faith made them acceptable and pleasing to God, and they did amazing things, but their ignorance and sin utterly ruined their lives.

I think God is trying to make a strong point here and in the three stories that follow. People can call upon God sincerely and follow Him sincerely, yet His own people can still be ignorant of Him. The same Corinthians who had the spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14 were the same people worshiping demons in chapter 10. When Jesus says that we need to hear His words and

do them, He is commanding us with profound simplicity. We need to know His words. The Bible is meant to teach us about God, about our Lord, to know His heart and mind and plan and will. Then, we need to do what He says. The reality is that many believers don't know His Word, but they know something about it, so they assume they know Him and His will. This "feeling" about God actually becomes an extension of their own wills and desires and plans. Being a disciple means having one Lord, one Word, one Spirit and one command to follow.

Judges 12

Vs. 1-7 Do you remember the Ephraimites who came after Gideon to make trouble? Their concern in v. 1 is that they wanted a share in the plunder. This time they picked on the wrong guy.

V. 6 Can you imagine losing 42,000 people in a single battle? At the end of Numbers, over 300 years before, the Ephraimites numbered about 32,000. Who knows how the tribe might have grown in this time, but it probably means that losing 42,000 men reduced the tribe to near extinction.

V. 7 just seems sad to me.

Vs. 8-15 These guys are all localized even though it says they judged Israel. Notice that two of these men were rich with children and donkeys, meaning they were also very rich with stuff.

Notice that Abdon was buried in the hill country of the Amalekites. The Amalekites would not have been there, if Israel had followed God.

Today's reading is why, as disciples, we need to follow Jesus in the harvest making disciples, who make disciples. Discipleship is growth in Christ in His Word. Jesus summed it up like this in John 15:7-8, *"If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples."*

Without loving the Lord and following Him in the Word and obedience, we are really only following our own desires and making our own god. Even believers get lost on earth, forget who their Lord is, and they forget there is a harvest.

John 1:1-28

This is one of the most amazing chapters of the Bible.

Vs. 1-5 The Jehovah's Witnesses insert an "a" in "...and the Word was *a* God." It is totally wrong, but they use it to support their view that Jesus was once Michael the Archangel who was turned into a god.

Notice that Jesus was the maker of all things. And He is life. And knowing Him gives all men *light*.

I was reading this morning that the Pharisees told Jesus to rebuke His disciples, and Jesus told them that if the disciples were silent, the very stones would cry out. God the Son, the maker of all things and the life and light of men was entering Jerusalem and they couldn't see it. How sad.

Vs. 6-8 A big point that John makes involves the witness of John the Baptist. John was the fulfillment of not only Old Testament prophecies, but He was also the final OT prophet.

Vs. 9-13 If you understand this, you see that there is no room for Islam or any other religion. The one Creator came to His creation. Because of the power of sin in us, mankind couldn't see He was the Creator, and Jesus' own family and nation rejected Him. But salvation became open to all who would receive Him. Verse 13 shows that being born again is a creation by God and has nothing to do with us, other than receiving Him.

Vs. 14-18 John never recovered from this amazing visitation. Neither should we. The wonder of these verses needs to live in us.

Notice in v. 15 that John and the Spirit are making a point that John the Baptist said that Jesus was the Christ.

Vs. 19-28 This event would have happened at least 40 days after Jesus was baptized. After the temptation in the wilderness, Jesus returned to John, victorious. John had become such a phenomenon that this was an official delegation sent to question him. He not only said he wasn't the Messiah, he said he was the herald who went before the Messiah.

V. 26 Jesus was already back from the wilderness. John knew He was there.

V. 28 This Bethany was on the east side of the Jordan.

We are not finished with the witness of John the Baptist. Just like John the Baptist, our only reason for being here now is to give praise and testimony to our Lord in the harvest.

Psalm 101

This psalm begins sunny, but ends darkly in judgment, or does it? I think this was written by David after he was the king.

Vs. 1-3 David is committing his life to following the Lord in the influences of heart and his conduct in his house.

Vs. 4-5 He also declares that he will not have close associates who do not follow the Lord. He would also be a judge for the innocent, helping them against the arrogant and proud. Too bad he didn't keep to this. We'll see that the more political David became, the more compromised his heart became.

V. 6 David is promising to show God's kindness to these people in obedience to the Word.

Vs. 7-8 David might be overstating his devotion to keeping Israel worshiping God and keeping the people holy.

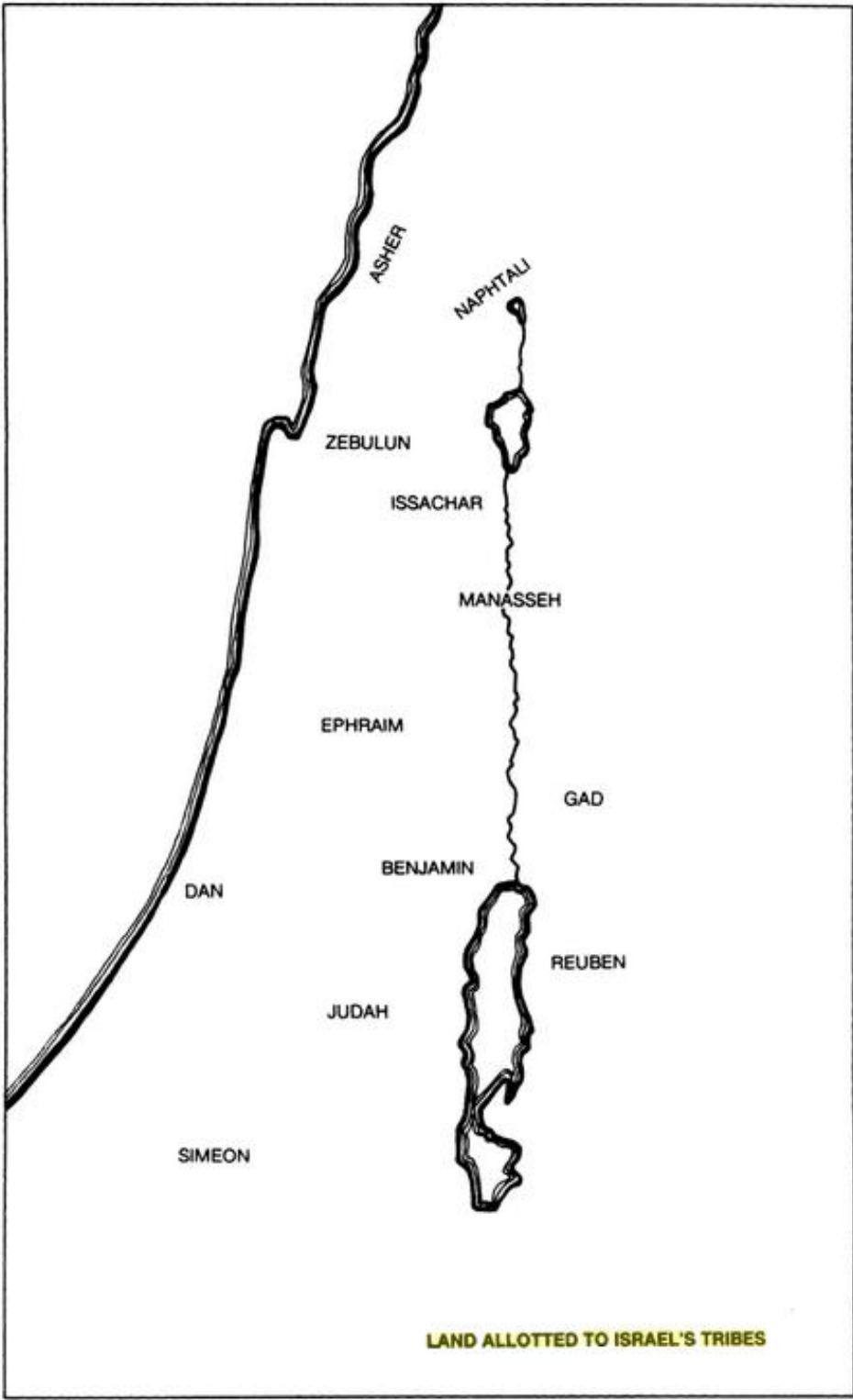
We tolerate wickedness in our lives, and out of necessity, in our towns, cities and world. But shouldn't there be a desire to see wickedness done away with? That may not be our heart, but it is the heart of God to judge all wickedness. Here is something that Jesus said regarding this judgment, and you'll see that the result is kind of unexpected. It is unexpected in that none of us realizes the dampening power that sin and wickedness actually have on a person, a family, a town, city, country or on the world in general.

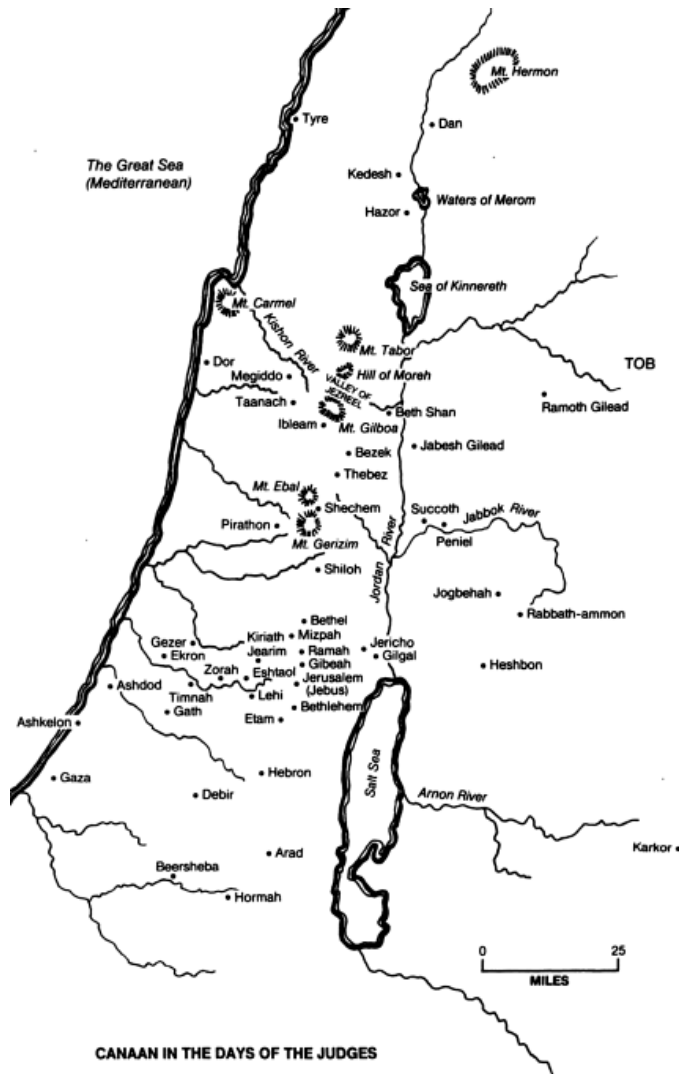
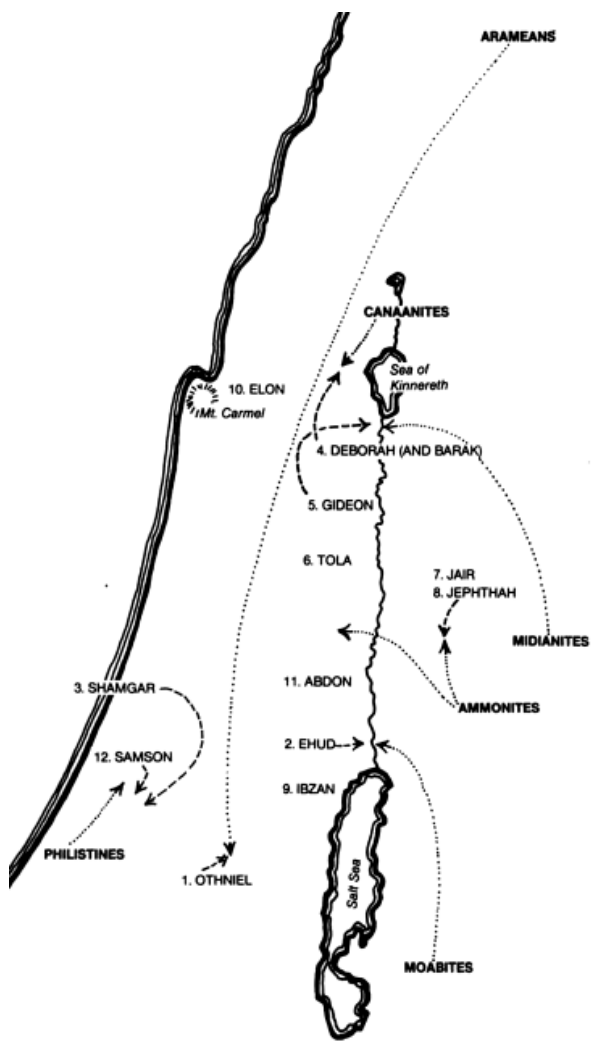
The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:41-43)

Removing the wicked allows the righteous to shine like the sun.

Proverbs 14:13-14

When I read this, I think of what Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks." We can fool others, but God knows what is in our hearts. By reading through the Bible like this, learning more about God and His heart, the Spirit is changing you and giving you a different treasure in your heart, out of which you learn to speak and live. Again, it is all about hearing and doing.





THE JUDGES AND THE OPPRESSORS

CANAAN IN THE DAYS OF THE JUDGES

The Judges of Israel

Oppressors	Years of Oppression	Judges	Years of Judging	References
Arameans	8	1. Othniel	40	Judges 3:7-11
Moabites	18	2. Ehud	80	Judges 3:12-30
Philistines	?	3. Shamgar	?	Judges 3:31
Canaanites	20	4. Deborah	40	Judges 4-5
Midianites	7	5. Gideon*	40	Judges 6-8
?	?	6. Tola	23	Judges 10:1-2
?	?	7. Jair	22	Judges 10:3-5
Ammonites	18	8. Jephthah	6	Judges 10:6-12:7
?	?	9. Ibzan	7	Judges 12:8-10
?	?	10. Elon	10	Judges 12:11-12
?	?	11. Abdon	8	Judges 12:13-15
Philistines	40	12. Samson	20	Judges 13-16

*Abimelech, Gideon's son (Jud. 9), though often considered a judge, is not included here because he usurped authority over Shechem and God did not appoint him as judge.