

READING NOTES – NOVEMBER

The One Year Bible (ESV)

NOVEMBER 1

Ezekiel 1-3:15

I remember hearing Howard Hendricks talk about his early days reading the Bible. Hendricks taught *Bible Study Methods* at DTS and, I think, was without a rival in teaching that course. Anyway, I expected him to say that he took to the Bible like a duck to water. He did, too, a dead duck. He started in Ezekiel and his Bible became a paper weight for a long time thereafter. After charging through Isaiah and Jeremiah, I hate to tell you that you'll probably need to gird up the loins of your mind to get through Ezekiel. Daniel will be fun to look forward to, and thankfully there is lighter fare in Hebrews and the other epistles. This is the benefit of reading a one-year Bible. If you are in a group with others who are also reading along, that makes it that much easier.

If you're getting tired, you are understanding why many people don't read through the Bible. Yet, you've got to get to this place of difficulty and get to the end so that you can inspire others to finish. Hendricks used to tell us that reading the Bible was like mining. Anyone can find the occasional nugget lying on the surface, but to find the richest ore, and the true heart of God (and that's the point, isn't it) you have to go deep. Digging is work, but that's when the treasures are found. The more you read, the easier it gets and the rewards drive you on. We are in pursuit of a deeper understanding and love for God. In order to follow the Word made flesh, you have to know His Word.

So, before we begin, I'll give you a little background on Ezekiel and offer a few suggestions to make the journey more active for you.

If you're asking me, Daniel and Ezekiel have similar purposes. In Daniel you see God preparing the nations for the return of Israel to its land and for the coming kingdom. In Ezekiel you see God preparing the people for their return to their land and preparing Israel for the coming kingdom. Ezekiel will also fill in some of the detail on the people we have just read about in Jeremiah. The first part of Ezekiel will show why God had to judge the people who remained in Jerusalem. The people living with Ezekiel in Babylon are the remnant. Those who were left in Jerusalem with Jeremiah were to be judged. Everyone was rooting for the folks back in the city, but the Lord would show the exiles that a corrupt culture must be judged. They, too, needed to change their hearts if they expected to go back to the land.

One of the important phrases to look for and underline in Ezekiel is, *Then they will (you shall) know that I am the Lord*. That is a very powerful statement. There are other phrases and statements. If toward the end of Ezekiel you notice something and think, "I wonder if I've missed this earlier in the book," just make a note to yourself at the beginning of Ezekiel and look for it next year. It keeps you alert. In fact, when you find *they will know*, not only underline it; but number it and see how many you find.

The counting of years in Ezekiel began when Ezekiel, along with about 12,000 others and King Jehoiachin, was taken into exile. Ezekiel began his ministry when he was 30, in what was probably the 15th year of exile, which began when Daniel was taken. That would make Daniel and Ezekiel, probably, the same age. Thirty was the age a priest began his ministry. The last we hear from Ezekiel, he is 52 years old. The life of a prophet, as we've seen with Jeremiah, was not really glorious. Ezekiel saw amazing things, but he paid an awesome price for it. As protection from the people and as a sign to them, Ezekiel was unable to speak for several years. Shortly before Jerusalem was destroyed, God told him that his wife would die and he was forbidden to

mourn her death. Finally, when a messenger came from Judah and told them that the city had been destroyed, God allowed him to speak freely. In between, Ezekiel was commanded to act out many zany things in public, which I'm sure made him face tremendous ridicule. And of course, as he saw what God thought of the people, it also brought sorrow and weight to Ezekiel's heart as he ministered to Israel. On the other hand, the Lord used Ezekiel to begin the process of healing the hearts of these very corrupt people. And to strengthen Ezekiel and give him joy and hope, God showed him things that were rivaled only by the visions the Apostle John saw in Revelation.

Today we'll see Ezekiel's commissioning as a prophet.

Ezekiel 1

Vs. 1-3 We've already mentioned some of this. Ezekiel was 30, the normal age to begin serving as a priest. Jesus also began His ministry at 30. Chebar was located just above the city of Babylon where the Euphrates and Tigris are close together. Nebuchadnezzar used the Jews to widen a river to create the "Grand Canal." I don't know if they had gondola rides like in Venice, but if they did I'll bet they were just as expensive.

Vs. 4-28 We have had vague descriptions of the glory of the Lord earlier in the Bible. We saw the glory of the Lord appear to protect Israel as they left Egypt as a pillar of fire and a pillar of cloud. We saw the glory of the Lord fill the tabernacle and fill Solomon's temple. Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord in the temple as he was commissioned for service as a prophet. There, it was fire and smoke. Here, Ezekiel (and all of us) for the first time ever see the detail of God's royal presence: His throne and the angels that go with Him.

Vs. 4-14 These *living creatures* are referred to as cherubim in Ezekiel 10. Since they are "different" from anything we have ever seen in Scripture, it shouldn't be surprising that other angels called cherubim in other places in the Bible look a little different. We'll have to ask God to clarify the differences once we get to heaven. It seems to me that the look of these creatures is symbolic in some sense, since all of it relates to creatures of earth. I'm content to let others try to figure out why one side of their head looks like an ox and another like a lion or an eagle.

Vs. 15-21 These are the *wheels* and the direction of the Spirit. Again, this is something God wants Ezekiel to see and be awed by. God doesn't need this elaborate moving throne to move.

Vs. 22-25 This *expanse* would be like the ceiling of a throne room, but this one is the supernatural version.

Vs. 26-28 And now we see Him who sits on the throne. Since God the Father is unable to be seen, this is probably the Son of God taking human appearance as He has before in the OT.

Notice that vs. 22 and 26 lead up to seeing God on His throne. Still, all of this is vague. Ezekiel sees a *likeness*. It is still true that no one has seen God.

V. 28 And to think, all of this display was simply to get Ezekiel's attention. When Ezekiel bowed, he heard the voice. Just like when God presented Himself to Elijah, the real point of all the other stuff was to get Elijah tuned to hearing the voice of the Lord. (1 Kings 19:12)

Ezekiel 2

Vs. 1-7 This is God commissioning Ezekiel to go to the rebels of the house of Israel. That is basically everyone who is in exile with him. One of the things to note here is the word *rebellious*. In my German Bible it says they are the "house of contradiction." That adds an interesting twist to the thought of their rebellion, as if it is sort of passive-aggressive. Sin makes all of us living contradictions. We think it's cute. God calls it rebellion. Thank the Lord for grace.

Vs. 8-10 This is where Ezekiel accepts God's commission to him. He takes the Word and he fully consumes it. That's what you're in the process of doing now, reading The One Year Bible. It is no

accident that God has used people, regardless of nation or education, who have consumed the Word.

Ezekiel 3:1-15

Vs. 1-3 This looks to have been a very realistic vision, so I wonder what it was like eating that scroll. Was it like a wrap? It is interesting that here, the scroll was sweet with no after effects. In Revelation 10:10, it had a bitter after effect.

Vs. 4-11 As with every commission, there is the command to go. How many times do you find *go* in this section? God mentions here that He would give Ezekiel a supernatural hardness and determination. God would also protect Ezekiel in other ways and make him a very notable, living sign among his people.

Vs. 12-15 I don't know what Ezekiel was like before this event and commissioning; but now, seeing the people's sin and need as God does, he is bitter and upset and overwhelmed.

Now the fun begins.

We all hate to be embarrassed when we go out on the limb for God in the harvest; but as we'll see in Ezekiel, when God puts us in one of those situations, it is not to shame us. It is to make something memorable for someone else. Their response to that memorable moment can help them or be a source of judgment. It reveals the heart. We think we always have to be clear and smooth in the harvest, and we should aim for those things as we present the gospel and work with others. Yet, sometimes God prefers foggy, stilted, embarrassing and unforgettable.

Hebrews 3

One tension in Hebrews is understanding the warnings. What will really be lost if the people slip back into adherence to the law? Will they lose their salvation, or will they lose the effect of the grace of God in them in a dying world? This question has kept people very busy. My take on things is that you cannot lose your salvation, since it is a spiritual birth and a new creation. These can't be undone. But Jesus Himself warned His disciples several times that we are meant to be salt; but if the salt loses its saltiness, it is only good to be thrown out and trampled underfoot. And you remember too, in 2 Timothy 2:20, there are vessels for ignoble use. Those vessels are still in the house, but all the master can use them for is degrading kinds of things. I think the warnings in Hebrews are about losing saltiness, becoming unusable and trading away the power of grace for the false peace that comes from compromise and hiding.

V. 1 Notice that the writer is not assuming that he is speaking to a mixed crowd. Here they are *holy brothers*; and in v. 12, they are still brothers. Notice they are to look at Jesus, who has been said to be God, the Son, the Savior, and a high priest who knew suffering and can intercede for us.

Vs. 2-6 As much as they revered Moses, Jesus is so much greater.

V. 6 Notice that holding *fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope*, is the measure of being *God's house*. If that confidence and boasting is lost, it sounds like the losing of saltiness. It isn't saying a loss of salvation, but there is a sense of no longer being that city on a hill giving light to the lost.

Vs. 7-11 To prove this, the writer quotes Psalm 95.

V. 11 Although that generation never entered Canaan, this is not saying that everyone remained unsaved and never came to God. Some people may have repented, yet because of their rebellion, they just never made it into the land. Even Moses and Aaron didn't make it into the land and they were definitely saved.

In 1 Corinthians 9:19ff, Paul talks about his sacrifice so that he could share in the blessings of the gospel. He was already saved. It gives me the idea that one can be saved and have an eternal home in heaven, but as a result of choices made on earth, never experience the power of grace and the blessings of the gospel in this life. The continued following of Christ in the harvest is vital for growth and experiencing God's blessings. We lose a lot when we are neither salt nor light for Christ.

Vs. 12-14 The mention of "*today*" reminds me of John 9, where Jesus heals the man born blind and tells His disciples, *We must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day*. So what if a Christian rebels and decides it's not worth the trouble? He never sees the grace he would have seen.

V. 14 *Share* is the same as in 3:1 and there is actually a "the" before Christ. I think this is the same thought that began chapter 3, *sharing in a heavenly calling*. You can still be saved and deny the calling or commission of the church, because you'd rather do something else or you don't like discomfort. To walk with Christ is to be with Him in the harvest. To hide is to deny Jesus.

Vs. 15-19 But if a person does deny and does not participate in this calling; that is, this companionship with Christ as a witness to humanity, it is really the *deceitfulness of sin* (v. 13) and *rebellion*. To hide is to deny Jesus.

In Philippians, Paul mentions that we are called to share the sufferings of Christ. Sharing or being a companion to Christ in suffering was Paul's own goal. Following Christ in the harvest means sharing what He endured for us, for His sake and for others. *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake*. (Phil. 1:29)

We serve in His house as servants in the harvest, but only if we want to. We can have a great life on earth and miss all that, but also miss His rewards and fellowship and rest/peace. He leaves us the choice of picking up the cross daily. Following is up to us. But some of us would rather work in the harvest following Him, and as a result, know Him even deeper.

Psalm 104:1-23

Vs. 1-4 This is an interesting way to begin this majestic psalm. Look at v. 2 and then look over at Ezekiel 1:22-28. Also, doesn't v. 4 sound like Hebrews 1:7? God is majestic beyond all of our imagination.

Vs. 5-9 All creation and its forces in nature obey the Lord.

Vs. 10-13 And through nature, God Himself takes care of the world of animals.

Vs. 14-15 And God meets all of the needs of man, just like Jesus said He could in the Sermon on the Mount.

Vs. 16-18 The trees of Lebanon and the mountains had grandeur beyond what man could grasp, and in them God made animals to dwell.

Vs. 19-23 And just like it says in Genesis 1:14, He made the planets and heavenly bodies for us to set times and seasons. It is interesting that in Genesis 1, God had already covered the earth with vegetation before He made the sun, moon and stars. The heavenly bodies were needed before the creation of the animals, because they are oriented to the sun, moon and stars, just like we are for our orientation to times and seasons.

God points to His own majesty and love in creation. It is ironic. The very thing that should make people question and conclude that there is a God is all around them, yet in an ironic sense, invisible to them.

Proverbs 26:24-26

These proverbs play off the proverb from yesterday. You can glaze something over, disguise and hide a sinful heart and evil motives, but God will make sure it is eventually exposed.

NOVEMBER 2

Ezekiel 3:16-6:14

Keep finding words to circle or underline.

Ezekiel 3:16-27

Vs. 16-21 God has commissioned Ezekiel and is now laying out his responsibility and charge. This is a very serious and vivid image. I'm thankful that our motivation in the harvest is the grace and love that we have found in Christ. Still, we can identify with this responsibility to warn others.

Vs. 22-27 It is interesting that God gave Ezekiel this news as He showed him His glory. Think over what God just told him. God was going to bind him at home so he couldn't go out (paralysis?) and make Ezekiel unable to speak. Only as God gave him an assignment or gave him a word would Ezekiel be able to go out and be able to speak. This would be for about seven years of his life and marriage, until he received news of the fall of Jerusalem. It was nice that he had seen the glory of God first.

This would be a sign to the people and it would protect Ezekiel. Normally he would be fully harmless, totally "bound" (whatever that meant) and absolutely speechless. Why hurt a guy like that? I can't imagine this was any fun for his wife, but I have a feeling God gave them some grace in this. Maybe when no one was looking, God let Ezekiel do the dishes.

Ezekiel 4

This "sign" is fairly self-explanatory in its details. This had to have been very public and visual. God probably allowed Ezekiel to go to a public place like a market and do this.

Vs. 1-3 This was not happening yet in Israel for about another three years, but Ezekiel would enact the future siege of Jerusalem.

Vs. 4-8 No one is completely sure what the significance of those days (years) is, especially for how they apply to Judah. Judah went on about 100 years longer than the northern kingdom. What is interesting is that once Ezekiel got himself set up on one side or the other, God paralyzed him again so that he couldn't move.

Vs. 9-17 This would show the people how desperate times would be in the city. God gave Ezekiel some grace here, because human waste wasn't an acceptable way for anyone, especially a priest, to cook his food. Yet, in the desperation of the siege of Jerusalem, this is how things would be.

Summing this up: The madman who lived in that house over there, who couldn't move or speak, would come out every day, go into the busy market square with a big building stone that said "Jerusalem" on it. Then he would make it look like a city in siege. He would then lie on his side the whole day, paralyzed. Then he would suddenly move and would make bread over cow pies. Then he would get up, take the brick and go home, and do it all over again the next day. He did it for 430 days, for over a year. The elders would go to him and ask what this meant; and once or twice suddenly, he spoke and told them. Now the word has spread around and everyone comes to the market to see the crazy prophet.

The people hoped that Jerusalem would survive, but God was telling them it wouldn't.

Ezekiel 5

Vs. 1-4 Remember that Ezekiel had to have done this publicly if it was to have had any impact. Imagine a guy in the mall suddenly pulling out a sword and shaving his head and then doing the rest of this. It would be memorable to say the least.

I'm sure people laughed for a while, but as we'll see, eventually they began to take Ezekiel very seriously.

Vs. 5-17 This is a public declaration from the Lord. Again, look for stuff to underline. God really wanted them to know that He is the Lord. Notice here how often the Lord says, *nations all around you*.

V. 11 It isn't clear to us yet how the sanctuary of the Lord's temple was defiled, but that is coming up. God will take Ezekiel on a field trip.

Ezekiel 6

Vs. 1-7 I think this, too, was a public declaration. Somewhere in the market square or in the official part of the city, Ezekiel took a stand and announced that he was facing (or maybe seeing) the mountains of Israel; and when he had their attention, the Lord let loose. The land was full of idols and the worship of these was most often sick and sexual. Notice how this section ends.

Vs. 8-10 Somehow in their exile, the people who live on will finally acknowledge that their punishment is the result of their *whoring heart*. Notice how this section ends.

Vs. 11-14 Those who are left in Jerusalem apparently were the worst of the worst. God promised to punish those who remained and those who ran. We saw this in Jeremiah, when the remnant there fled to Egypt and took Jeremiah hostage with them. God led Nebuchadnezzar to Egypt to find them. Interestingly, that event hasn't happened yet at this point in time. Notice how this section ends.

Guess what the important recurring phrase in this chapter is?

Hebrews 4

This chapter is just full of stuff. The one question you need to find some clarity in is "what is this *rest*?"

In the OT the *rest* had to do with entering the land, not specifically being saved. As mentioned, the disobedience of the people, including Moses, kept them from entering the *rest* that God had prepared for them.

In the land, as God's covenant people, God promised to care for them completely. They needed to work, but there was peace and security promised to them. They were to enjoy the Sabbath without fear or worry, but they didn't obey and hold the Sabbath. They were to give the land a Sabbath rest and rest themselves as God provided, but they didn't. They were to attend all of the feasts in Jerusalem, leaving their lands unprotected, because God would care for them; but they didn't. In the land they were to have had rest in God, perfect peace and security of heart; but it was dependent on faith and resting in His care and promises.

The situation with the people being addressed in this letter was such that they were being persecuted and they were afraid. They may have thought, "Wouldn't it be better to give in and conform to the pressure and go back to the practice of the law?" To do that would have been to turn their backs on the grace of God, the work of Christ and the promise of God to care for them. They would have been seeking rest by their own hand, seeking peace by compromise and becoming slaves to the law. It doesn't mean they would become "unsaved," but it would keep them from experiencing God's rest as promised in Christ. Jesus promised a rest that was more than salvation.

Vs. 1-3 We have entered into that rest through faith, just like the people who went over the Jordan entered into the land; yet, to experience that rest would be a matter of living by faith.

Vs. 4-10 Joshua wasn't able to give these people rest. Moses couldn't either. Entering the land didn't give them rest. The law didn't give them rest because the law reveals sin in people. The people did religious stuff trying to get good with God, but works don't work. Only faith in God works and brings rest.

V. 11 Notice that this is applied to the believing and the writer includes himself, *Let us...* Entering that rest seems to imply striving to live by faith and continue in grace.

Vs. 12-13 The Word shows us whether we are living in the flesh (soul) or by the Spirit. It shows us if our faith is resting in us or in Him. It shows us where our devotion is focused.

Vs. 14-16 Again, Jesus becomes the object of our rest. Notice v. 16, *Let us...draw near*. And what do we find when we draw near: confidence, mercy and help. Maybe another way to say that is, we find rest.

Much of what the Lord said to His disciples to train them had to do with rest, borne out of faith and complete dependence on Him. Everything we read that seems so other worldly like turning the other cheek, not resisting a lawsuit, not being anxious about food or clothing, loving enemies, etc., implies that we know how to completely rest in Him, even in tribulation. Think that one through, resting in tribulation. When Jesus sent out the Twelve and then the 70, they were to take nothing with them. They were to work, for sure, yet they had no money or food and everything was unsure. And, they faced threat and animosity, but they were to rest in Him. They entered into His rest by trusting His grace and love and power.

There are many believers who are not in the harvest, who live by their own hand and effort, according to their desires and perceived needs. They know little about faith; they've forgotten what grace really means, and they do not live in His rest. They've missed it. Being comfortable does not mean you've entered His rest. If we can only be at rest when there is peace and comfort, that is not the rest of God that we have in following Jesus in the harvest as His disciples. *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.* (John 14:27)

Psalm 104:24-35

This is the second half of what we read yesterday.

Vs. 24-26 God's majesty and grandeur are seen in His wisdom. Who could possibly have had the power and wisdom to make and imagine all that lives in the oceans?

Vs. 27-30 And no matter how mighty or how small any of these creations are, they are all dependent on God to sustain them.

Vs. 31-35 The glory and awesome power of the Lord should lead to thanks and meditation. Verse 35 seems to indicate that not to acknowledge God for all He has done will get some people in trouble. He deserves to be praised, known and worshipped. Not to acknowledge God by getting to know Him through our Lord is to say to Him that we don't want to go to the next place He makes. Only those who know Him get to live there.

Reading this after reading Hebrews makes me think of God's care and that we can rest in Him. We need to have our hearts and minds renewed in Jesus.

Proverbs 26:27

That should be something to calm God's people, remembering of course that God doesn't always pay on Friday. (He doesn't always repay the wicked immediately.) Jesus and Paul say that disciples should rest when mistreated, and show the love of Christ, overcoming evil with good.

NOVEMBER 3

Ezekiel 7-9

Ezekiel is a very orderly and chronological kind of guy. Everything we are reading follows the last event in a way we can understand. What we see today will really conclude in chapter 11, but it all makes sense.

Ezekiel 7

This is another public proclamation Ezekiel made during the time he was lying on his side. When he walked and spoke, Ezekiel, the paralyzed and mute guy, was a sort of living disturbance. The hardness of this message would have gotten everyone's notice. I have a feeling this *word of the Lord* came toward the end of his daily enactment of the siege on Jerusalem. The elders of the Jews were probably standing in a group on the corner of their new home in exile singing, "What do you do with a problem like Ezekiel?" They were now sure that this very strange man was actually being controlled and used of God. The reason for the hardness of this prophecy will be explained in the next chapter. God will give Ezekiel, the elders, and us a look at the people in Jerusalem.

One interesting note: It says three times in this chapter, *Then you will know that I am the Lord*. The word used in my German Bible is not "know," but "experience." That adds a twist to the meaning. There is a sense in which these people will find out and experience that He is the Lord.

Vs. 1-4 Notice the repetition of *the end*. Finally all that the prophets had been saying, especially Jeremiah, would come. Notice how this section ends.

Vs. 5-9 Notice the different words repeated here. Although the Lord is giving prophecy to the exiles in Babylon, it applies to the people still in Jerusalem. Now, some of the exiles were probably thinking, "You know, Babylon isn't so bad after all." Notice how this section ends. This was for all the people, but the only people who would benefit would be the survivors who were in exile in Babylon.

Vs. 10-13 You notice again that words are repeated. Life as they knew it would end in Jerusalem. As of this time, King Zedekiah hadn't yet rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. In Jerusalem there was a certain amount of calm and prosperity. Everyone was telling "Jeremiah" jokes. But God knew that the sin in Jerusalem would take the upper hand and that they would rebel against Babylon. Then, destruction would come.

Vs. 14-22 What had been of value would be worthless. If you're starving, a slice of bread is worth more than ten bags of gold. All they had lived for would be lost. They hadn't become rich toward God. In v. 22 God said He would also allow the temple to be ruined and profaned. In God's eyes, that had already happened.

Vs. 23-27 The people were in bondage to everything, sin and other kings. This was the last time until 1948 that Israel would be a sovereign state. They are still not free from bondage to sin. That will come. Notice how this section ends.

Remember that what is happening to Israel is a small model of what is happening every day to humanity. There is tragedy, loss and bondage every day. There is rebellion, sin and ruin. In the harvest, we are following our Lord reaching out to seek and to save the lost and to make disciples, who make disciples. The things we are reading are meant to give us a heart of compassion as we work. Humanly speaking, there is only danger and ruin and judgment, but with the Lord the salvation He offers is incredible and the hope is forever.

Ezekiel 8

V. 1 So the elders come to Ezekiel and sit before him at his house. Notice the time designation. This is almost exactly 430 days from the time God first spoke to Ezekiel. That means he was either finished with the siege enactment (with the gross lunch thing he did) or that enactment was almost finished. Also, since the sixth year was marked from the time that Jehoiachin was taken to Babylon, that means it was also the sixth year of Zedekiah's kingship. Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in his ninth year and Jerusalem fell in his eleventh year. This vision would show why all of the judgment spoken against Judah and Jerusalem was justified. It would show how the sin of the people drove the presence of the Lord out of His temple and out of the land. The fact that Ezekiel is working, along with Daniel & Co. and Jeremiah, shows that God hadn't abandoned His people.

V. 2 As they were sitting there looking at him, Ezekiel went into a trance. Talk about freaky. This could have taken a minute or an hour, but the elders stayed for the entire show; and in 11:24 it says Ezekiel explained the entire vision. They apparently stuck around.

Vs. 3-4 This doesn't sound like the best way to travel, but it's not like he had a choice. Seeing the glory of the Lord at the end probably made it worth it.

Vs. 5-6 You understand here, that the point of the vision is to show Ezekiel what is driving God from His temple and from the city. What we see here will justify the hardness of God's judgment in chapter 7.

In Solomon's temple the main entrance into the inner court was on the east side, but there were also entrances on the north and south sides. This north entrance is where Ezekiel is brought. As he stands next to the glory of the Lord, looking into the inner court, there, next to the entrance, is an idol, probably an Asherah pole, a statue of sorts. Asherah was a goddess of fertility, the wife of Baal, and usually depicted as very well endowed. Imagine that they had something like this at the entrance into the court where the sacrifices were offered to the Lord.

Vs. 7-13 This chamber, where 70 men could have been together, might have been the "Holy Place," where the lampstand, the bread of the Presence and the altar of incense were. The temple was already defiled. These were the priests and leaders of Israel.

Vs. 14-15 Tammuz was another fertility god who died in the winter. The women cried for him and in the spring he would come alive again (if they cried enough) and bring rains.

Vs. 16-18 Now in the inner court, between the altar and the Holy Place, you have these 25 guys with their backs to the Holy Place and Holy of Holies and the mercy seat (and God Himself); and they are worshipping the sun as it rises.

God says there is nothing here to move Him to pity.

Ezekiel 9

Vs. 1-7 Notice that there is some mercy in this. The marking on the foreheads of the ones who were righteous looks very much like Revelation 7:3-4, where the 144,000 are marked or sealed on their foreheads to be saved out of the judgment of the Tribulation to serve God.

Vs. 8-11 In this judgment there was mercy.

So let me ask, what impact does all of this Scripture dealing with judgment and mercy have on your thinking? Today in the harvest it all seems so slow and fuzzy. Will the Lord really come? Will the Lord really judge the unbelieving? It seems so slow and foggy and unreal that we don't feel any urgency or emotion toward it. Yet the reality of judgment appears throughout Scripture and Jesus mentions it quite a bit. As disciples, following Christ in the harvest, we need to keep alert to the reality of life. Books like Jeremiah and Ezekiel help, and I think that's why God put them here.

Hebrews 5

The discussion of Jesus' priesthood will go from here to chapter 10. At the outset, you might want to muse why the writer thinks this is so important. Obviously, for these Jewish Christians thinking of slipping back into Judaism, it is important for them to know that Jesus is the better priest and His sacrifice is the final and ultimate sacrifice. But along with this thought of the priest, there is a very present help for them and for us. Those who rely on their mediator/priest will be blessed and helped. Those who rely, in this life, on other things will not experience the help and closeness to their Lord. It only makes sense. The saved will all be saved. Some of the saved will grow close to the Lord by following Him in the harvest, but some of the saved will have their wood, hay and stubble burned away and will regret what they missed by not following their Savior on this planet.

Vs. 1-6 The *for* refers back to the final verses of chapter 4, introducing Jesus as the priest who can identify with our weakness.

So how did Jesus become a priest?

V. 5 His Father appointed Him to be a priest. But I thought only those descended from Aaron could be priests.

V. 6 God made Him a priest pre-dating the law, going back to Genesis 14:18. Notice that the author is quoting from Psalm 110:4. What is interesting is that Abraham was ministered to by this priest. Jesus then is that kind of great priest. In chapter 7 the writer will enlarge on this connection to Melchizedek.

Vs. 7-10 This is how Jesus was prepared for His priestly responsibility and how He served on earth as a priest. And, Jesus is still making intercession for us. The *order of Melchizedek* would make Him greater than the priests of the Law of Moses. The point for the people reading this letter was clear. Going back to the law was rejecting Jesus' priesthood.

Vs. 11-14 Because of fears and cares these believers had stopped growing. They had been choked like the seed sown among thorns. Where they should have been was probably closer to Philippians 3:7-21.

Thinking of these last words, it reminds me that God allows things to enter our lives to test/strengthen our faith and our resolve to follow in the harvest. Almost everyone begins well. We'll see later that the people in Hebrews began very well, but they settled into having treasure on earth. Now, in danger of losing that treasure, they are finding it almost impossible to live with that early sense of sacrifice and willingness to follow Christ. God is showing them that other things have become more important for them than denying themselves and taking up their death daily and following Jesus. We need to be careful, too, that this place doesn't become our home and that things don't shine brighter than Jesus. We're here to follow Christ, sharing His love with a dying world, making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples.

We are in the process of moving, cleaning out and letting stuff go. Spiritually, we all need to do the same thing. We need to minimize, until Jesus is everything, and knowing Him is enough for this life. Then we find rest and direction and purpose in following Him. We find strength and fearlessness, because nothing can separate us from Him or His love. We have a truth that breaks the pretense of this life and becomes a rock of security for those who find it. That truth is God as revealed in the Word and in the Son. It isn't so much a matter of getting rid of stuff as much as it is a matter of us being consumed in Him.

Psalm 105:1-15

We'll be in this psalm for three days.

Although the events mentioned here have to do with God freeing Israel from Egypt, it is written in a way that it could have been meant as an encouragement to those in exile in Babylon. Israel was never to have forgotten the glory and power of God leading them out of the house of bondage in Egypt. That salvation experience was to have been a constant source of hope and encouragement.

Vs. 1-6 Notice the thanks and call to make God known among all the nations. This was exactly what was supposed to have happened. It is a blessing just to look at the verbs of command: *give thanks, make known, sing to him, tell, glory in his holy name*, etc. This is a very rich little section of Scripture.

Vs. 7-11 Israel's blessing was based on God's promise to Abraham. That promise had more to do with the salvation of man than the mere creation of a nation. That nation was made to be a blessing to all other nations in testimony to God.

Vs. 12-15 It never depended on the size of the people, just the size of their God. And He was fully faithful to His promise. Verses 14-15 probably refer to Pharaoh, the kings of Moab, and the kings in Canaan; but after we've read Daniel, it could also refer to Nebuchadnezzar and the kings who followed him.

Proverbs 26:28

This is the truth, although people often think that *lying* and *flattering* have a good purpose.

NOVEMBER 4

Ezekiel 10-11

Ezekiel 10

Vs. 1-8 So who is this guy clothed in linen? This sounds like a normal angel, or it could be the angel of the Lord. He is the one who is ordered to execute judgment on Jerusalem by throwing out the coals. As we've seen, there are some connections here to Revelation. Revelation 8:7 sounds like this. Jerusalem was burned down by the Babylonians. In Revelation, Babylon is also suddenly consumed by fire.

Vs. 9-15 We have seen this description of the glory of God before, but there are a couple of additional details here.

V. 12 The cherubim were *full of eyes*. This is what John also saw in Revelation 4:8.

V. 13 The wheels were called *whirling wheels*.

V. 14 Instead of one of the faces being that of an ox, from chapter 1, here it is the face of a cherub. We don't know what a cherub looked like, but it couldn't have been a human face or it would have been redundant. Maybe a cherub looks a little oxy.

Vs. 15-22 The *glory of the Lord* begins to depart from the temple.

Ezekiel 11

Vs. 1-4 These are 25 other guys who are telling the people not to worry. You should have a note for v. 3 that says this is really saying, "Is not the time near to build houses?" They were telling everyone that things would be fine, deceiving the people.

Since their message was a positive lie, the idea of the cauldron and meat might have meant that those who were left in the city alive were the "best" and they would survive. If you were in the soup, wouldn't you want to be the meat and not a vegetable? Actually, you wouldn't want to be the carcass lying on the chopping board. What was cut off from the carcass "survived" in the soup.

Vs. 5-7 Those righteous witnesses whom these men had slain were really the best. These had been righteous people like Jeremiah who had been persecuted or killed for taking a stand for God.

Vs. 8-12 God's spoken judgment on these men. Notice vs. 10 and 12. We haven't seen this statement for a few chapters.

V. 13 And then suddenly it got very real. This caused Ezekiel to fall on his face again, crying out to God for the remnant. He did this in 9:8.

Vs. 14-21 As a result of Ezekiel's plea, God gives this promise. The irony here is that the people who were left in Jerusalem waved good-bye to the exiles and then said, "Good, now we'll inherit everything." Not so. The people of Jerusalem would perish, and the exiles would come home and inherit the land.

V. 18 We've seen this promise before and should understand that since this is talking about the nation of Israel, the fulfillment will not be until the Millennial Kingdom. We have come to share in the spiritual part of this blessing in our salvation in Christ, but the full blessing will not only be spiritual, but also physical, as Israel is gathered from all nations and becomes a blessing and testimony to the nations. Israel will be a nation in which Christ reigns and all nations will come to Israel.

Vs. 22-23 The *glory of the Lord* left the city and stood on the Mt. of Olives. Think about the significance of that. Jesus left from here and went to sit at the right hand of power. It is also where He will return, when He comes to rule forever.

Vs. 24-25 To me it is interesting that it seems there was a sense of motion moving from Israel back to Chaldea, that is, Babylon. Ezekiel didn't just wake up. In his vision he was flown back. I wonder what the elders thought when Ezekiel related all that he had seen and discovered.

Just for trivia, this is not the final time Ezekiel will be taken to Jerusalem. There is one more time, in chapter 40. How many years was it from this vision to that one?

Just think of our message in the harvest. We tell of the love of God and the sending of His Son. That's John 3:16, right? Now read John 3:17-21. It is the same message. We don't have the right or authority to be selective. People have to know that their decision matters, that God is not some "good ol' boy" who'll let everyone into His kingdom. *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.* (John 3:36)

Hebrews 6

Time to gird up the loins of your mind once again. The question to ask ourselves before we begin this section is, "Is it possible to harm our relationship to Christ to the point that we can never return on earth to the place of innocence and full devotion in following Him?" Paul talks about shipwrecked Christians and Christians who hurt themselves by pursuing riches and comfort. Paul weeps in Philippians 3 about Christians who are now enemies of the cross of Christ. He tells Timothy (in 2 Tim. 2:19) regarding Christians living in error that, *"The Lord knows those who are His,"* and *"Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."* Christians can sink to a life that suggests being lost, but they are still saved, yet no one but God knows for sure. Then Paul gives Timothy the parable of the great house and the vessels for noble and disgusting use. Both sets of vessels are in the great house. If a man has fallen out of love with his wife and has given himself to someone else, is it possible for him ever to return to his wife with the same innocence, fascination and devotion? We'd all like to say, "yes," but it may never be possible. If you compare David's faith and love for God (or how he dealt with people) before and after Bathsheba and Uriah, I think you see two very different men. How we damage ourselves on

earth matters. Grace is always available, but the scars and consequences of jumping in front of the truck remain.

The writer of Hebrews and the Spirit will give a warning here that if a saved person walks away from Christ and replaces Him with something else, it *may be* impossible to return to that first love and to fruitfulness.

The writer has just lamented that these believers should be teachers; but as a result of what they have been toying with, they are still babes, needing milk. Something interfered with their growth in Christ.

Vs. 1-3 All these things listed here are baby things. It would be like having to re-explain to a Christian after 10 years what it means to be saved, or having to explain to that same person that there is no benefit in praying to saints, as in the Catholic Church. The very fact that you'd have to explain these things at all suggests that something deeply wrong has happened in that person's understanding of Christ.

Vs. 4-6 This is a saved person. No dancing around the words can change the force of these words.

The idea of *restore again to repentance* seems to mean restoring a person to that conviction and thrill of being set free and forgiven in Christ. Assuming a person has fully experienced this, to cast it away as ordinary and uninteresting has the danger (and therefore the warning) that there may not be another moment of insight that restores that sense of conviction and thrill. I think this is like David pleading with God in Psalm 51 (after Bathsheba and Uriah) to restore to him the joy of his salvation. David obviously no longer had that joy.

V. 6 To crucify Christ in Jerusalem meant to reject Him and publicly renounce Him as king. A Christian who turns away from Christ, after being known to be His follower, publicly does the same thing. This isn't just a one-time deal. It is becoming a part of a lifestyle that denies Him. Can a Christian recover? Maybe not, so why take the chance.

Vs. 7-8 Think of this illustration as a variation of 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 and the wood, hay and stubble. The person is saved, but only as through fire. The illustration here in Hebrews shows that this person becomes a fruitless believer. Remember John 15:8, *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples*. There is also a description of fruitless believers in John 15.

Vs. 9-12 The writer still had hope for the people. Notice here that the benefits of endurance are knowing the hope of God on this earth. Only by endurance in following do we grab on to the rewards God promises. For example -

Romans 15:4 *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

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.*

These are actually promises, but only if we hang on to Jesus, following Him in the harvest. This is why Jesus could say, "He who endures to the end will be saved." Those who endure have already been saved eternally, but now they are saved from damage on earth. They do not shipwreck their faith.

Vs. 13-20 Abraham waited patiently on a God who swore to him, and Abe received the promise. Imagine if Abe would have given up after 20 years and not waited until the 25th year.

V. 18 Notice the call to hope and to hold fast. As we have said before about this promise or covenant, it was completely one-sided. God based the fulfilling of the promise to Abraham

totally on Himself and His own character. It is an enduring, eternal, unconditional covenant. The faith or faithlessness of Abraham's children is not in question, nor is following the law. God will fulfill the promise through those who have the faith of Abraham, both in the nation of Israel, and in the Gentiles who also follow in faith. So, we hold fast.

V. 19 Notice that we have something just as sure as what Abe had, *a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul*.

V. 20 Our hope is in Jesus our Savior/Priest.

I guess the word to disciples in the harvest is, "Never, Never, Never, give up." It is interesting that when it talks about the only seed that brings forth fruit, that person is in the Word and brings forth fruit with patience. Those who remain childlike in their faith, in their fascination of being saved and in hearing God speak in His Word, will have great advantage here, in the harvest. I have to believe that if we ask and seek and knock, we will be restored and constantly renewed. It's what Jesus told His disciples to do.

Psalm 105:16-36

In terms of all of Psalm 105, what is the point of this section? If it is encouragement in remembering the past, how is it encouraging? How could this be encouraging to you?

Vs. 16-22 This summarizes God saving Israel by His sovereignty in working with Joseph. This "rags to riches" story was all about God's grace and mercy. Imagine God putting a man in power in this way. We'll see this again in Daniel. Even as Ezekiel was seeing stuff above, Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were in key positions of political power in the Babylonian government there in the city of Babylon. These were incredibly godly men.

Vs. 23-25 Israel grew greatly in Egypt. This was also God.

Vs. 26-36 When it came time to help Israel, God sent a prepared leader in Moses, and He developed the faith of Israel, while demolishing the nation of Egypt.

The direction all of this seems to be going is that the exiles can depend on God, so they need to seek Him.

Proverbs 27:1-2

V. 27 sounds like James 4:15.

V. 28 sounds like Luke 14:9-11.

It sounds like the Lord doesn't want us to be proud and focused on ourselves.

NOVEMBER 5

Ezekiel 12-14:11

In reading any of the books in the Bible, it is good to have an idea of what the entire book is about. You'll be able to do this yourself if you ask yourself that question while reading each book year after year. Take notes and make it your hobby to figure out the purpose of each book. As you read you can test your theory. God will not grade you as if you'll get docked points for "getting it wrong." Most Bible expositors differ slightly in their expression of what each book is saying. But God will reward you for digging and thinking, and the Spirit might even give you something that the well-known preachers never saw.

This is just me, but I think that in Ezekiel, God is preparing the exiled people of Israel for the return to the land, and He is preparing the future nation of Israel for the Millennial Kingdom. As God uses Ezekiel, this strange, mute, immobilized man, to jolt the people, God will focus them on who He really is and make them sick of their idolatry. We've seen the idolatry in the temple

that caused God to leave the city. I'm sure that jolted the people. Today, God goes after them again for listening to false prophets, and the idolatry that was at the core of this deception. When Israel returned to the land, for the most part, idolatry is never mentioned again. God is preparing the people.

Ezekiel 12

Vs. 1-7 Somehow this became a big event. Remember that Ezekiel normally couldn't go out of his house. What that baggage meant might have been more than a back-pack. Whatever this was, it became a city-wide event. As Ezekiel put stuff out in front of his house in the morning, it became news. By the time evening came and he had made the hole, everyone was watching.

V. 2 The "eyes and ears" proverb is the same as in Isaiah and what Jesus quotes in the NT. It means they have the ability, but refuse to do it. It's willful.

V. 6 Covering his face would have an interesting application.

V. 7 What made this event even stranger is that, apparently, since God never spoke to Ezekiel during the event, Ezekiel remained completely mute. They could ask him what he was doing, but if anything, he could only grunt.

Vs. 8-16 The next day, finally, God let Ezekiel speak. Now he had everyone's attention.

Vs. 12-13 This is talking about King Zedekiah. Ezekiel wore the veil symbolizing the blinding of Zedekiah by Nebuchadnezzar. All of this took place just as Ezekiel said it would.

If you're underlining, vs. 15 and 16 have that very important phrase in them. Notice that this is said with a strong sense of assurance. God will make sure the lesson is learned.

Vs. 17-20 This is both a sign and a message. This happened somewhere in public, like at a feast, while Ezekiel was eating and drinking; or maybe he brought his own lunch to the marketplace. Ezekiel did this weird thing of eating and drinking with great fear and dismay. I'm sure all the parents rushed to make sure their kids were nowhere near this madman.

Vs. 21-25 Notice *And the word of the Lord came to me*. It will keep coming.

V. 22 The visions were false visions of hope. The people opened themselves up to listening to lies and putting their hopes in false gods. Now they wanted nothing to do with any prophecies including those that were true. They were lumping Ezekiel's sermons into this category of falseness. God didn't like this proverb.

Vs. 26-28 And the point of this sermon is... God is throwing their motto back into their faces. The fulfilling of this word would be soon.

Ezekiel 13

As you observe this chapter, keep in mind that these practices were taking place in Jerusalem as well as among some of the Jews in Babylon. The exiles in Babylon hadn't been cleansed yet, but it would come.

Vs. 1-7 This is against the false prophets. You wonder why these prophets preached. It was obviously for themselves and to be known. The effect of lies and unfulfilled visions is to dull, discourage, and deceive a people. Verse 5 shows that none of the prophets, except Jeremiah, put themselves in harm's way to help the city or the people by standing in the breach. This lack of a man with a heart for the people will be mentioned again in a famous verse in Ezekiel 22:30.

Vs. 8-16 Rather than building up the wall, they disguised and helped its decay. Notice v. 9. The wall in v. 10 was a dangerous, cracked wall that was smeared with a light coat of plaster to hide the cracks.

V. 14 God would make sure it fell and in that day they *shall know*...

Vs. 17-23 This is against the false prophetesses. They actually ventured into paganism with the magic bands. This sounds like Kabbalah bracelets.

V. 18 This was being done by the women and apparently it was like witchcraft and involved cursing people.

Vs. 20-23 God was going to hunt these women down and make it His personal goal to ruin them for this magic and for the effect it had had on the righteous. And He would do it in such a way that they *shall know*...

Ezekiel 14

Vs. 1-5 So, how do you understand v. 3? You could say "old habits die hard," but it is worse than that. These men still love their idols. They may have gotten rid of them, but they are still there, in their hearts. Just like a picture of a spouse or a child that you put on a desk or on the wall where you can look at it, these men still had those desires before their eyes. Yet, maybe torn by the disaster that has happened to them, they are coming to ask of the Lord, just not with their whole hearts. And God can see it.

Vs. 4-5 This looks like God saying He would take immediate and personal action against anyone who filled their hearts with their gods. At this time, the Jews were the only people in the Babylonian Empire who could refuse to worship any god but their own, Yahweh. It was an unheard of exception for an exiled people. God did it and if the people rejected Yahweh, they showed their sickness and their need for judgment. God will eventually cleanse the people of idols.

Vs. 6-8 It seems that God Himself will now take every idolater and false prophet and make an example of them to the people.

Vs. 9-11 Remember back to Ahab and Jehoshaphat and Micaiah in 1 Kings 22:8. Both kings had already decided to do something wrong, but thought it would be good to get God's approval. So the lying prophets all told them to go ahead. Jehoshaphat thought it was all fishy, so he asked if there was a real prophet; and Micaiah was brought out of prison. Micaiah had seen a vision of the demons coming before God and God sending one to be a lying power in the mouths of the false prophets as a punishment against Ahab. That is what is happening here. If the people have itchy ears and seek teachers to say what they want to hear, God will let it happen, but the point even in that judgment is that some may see all of this and turn and be saved.

Hebrews 7:1-17

Vs. 1-3 There is a lot here we can't understand. Our first impulse would be to dismiss this as flowery, sermonic language. But this is one of these places where God reveals something that has only been hinted at in the past. We met Melchizedek in Genesis 14 and it does raise a few questions. I've always wondered how many other witnesses to God there were in the world, on other continents, we never knew of. Suddenly we find this guy who is representing God. Not only is Melchizedek a great guy, but Abraham shows him respect. He's got a rescue mission going in Jerusalem, spreading the Word about Yahweh.

Then in Psalm 110 suddenly it says that the Messiah will be a priest after the order of Melchizedek. So the Spirit is saying that this is really important.

Now, hundreds of years after that psalm, and 20-30 years after the death, resurrection and departure of Jesus, almost at the end of the time of the apostles, this writer and the Spirit tell us something more about Melchizedek and Jesus. I find this very interesting how and when God lets more information flow to His people.

V. 3 If this verse is taken literally, it means that Melchizedek may have been an angel. There is Jewish tradition that indicates that they had that understanding. It is just conjecture, but you wonder in those days how God spoke to people who sought Him. Why not angels? Whatever Melchizedek was, he was a priest of the Most High God whose priesthood was "forever" and greater than the priesthood of Aaron under the law.

Vs. 4-10 The point here is that Melchizedek was greater than Abraham. Abraham didn't worship Melchizedek, but worshipped God through the mediation of Melchizedek, showing that Abraham, the inferior, went to the superior person to honor and learn of God. The Jews would have understood that Melchizedek was a very special character and a mysterious mediator of God.

Vs. 9-10 This is an interesting application, once again showing that Jesus' priesthood is superior to the Levitical priesthood.

Vs. 11-17 This shows that going back to the inferior law with its inferior priesthood is foolish. Jesus, the Messiah, is the ultimate mediator for mankind, after the order of Melchizedek.

Just so we don't forget what is happening here, these people are in danger. They are tired and under pressure to be quiet and retreat to safety. It's no different than the danger each disciple faces every day. We are under the constant pressure to be comfortable, to be inoffensive, to be self-focused, and to be "used to" our salvation. What the writer to the Hebrews is doing is showing them Jesus. Jesus is the center of our faith and our lives. It is impossible to know Him and still be content on earth. It is impossible to know His salvation and not care about the salvation of others. It is impossible to call Him Lord and not follow Him into the harvest. If any of these are possible for us, we may have fallen to what the Hebrews had fallen to. The answer, as we are seeing, is nothing other than Jesus. We need to rekindle that first love, if it's possible, and follow Jesus our Savior.

Psalm 105:37-45

Vs. 37-38 It wasn't Israel's effort that did this. Israel's glory was the mercy and love of God. With all we have read about idolatry, we can understand God being so upset about their sin.

Vs. 39-42 And God did all of this because of His promise to Abraham, the man saved by faith. The truth for Israel here is that God will always honor that promise, so there is always hope and they should always follow.

Vs. 43-45 God brought them out with joy and gave them a position, but to what purpose? That is in v. 45 and it was to have been Israel's witness to the nations. As Israel obeyed and was blessed, the nations would see and would know.

V. 45 Praise the Lord! God provides deliverances and we've read about a lot of these. We experience a lot of little deliverances in our lives, and through them God puts a new song in our mouths. That's what The Psalms are all about. Now, we are involved in this harvest in bringing news of the greatest deliverance to people who desperately need to hear it. Although the message is at once very serious and very good, because we have experienced it and know Jesus, we can deliver the message with a tone of praise.

Proverbs 27:3

And because it is so heavy and foolish, the Lord is telling us, warning us, not to react to it.

NOVEMBER 6

Ezekiel 14:12-16:42

Chapters 14 and 15 belong together, then chapter 16 will introduce a very disturbing image that will be used by God again in this book.

Ezekiel 14:12-23

Vs. 12-20 The message here is very straightforward. The people who remain in Judah and Jerusalem (these people in Babylon had been a part of that crowd) are so sinful, that if these three men were there, by their own righteousness they could only save themselves. Now, Daniel, from the book of Daniel, is listed as part of this trio. To understand the significance of his inclusion, look at Genesis 6:9 and Job 1:8.

So, who were these men? We understand Noah being in this group. He was the most righteous man on earth during his lifetime. Job was the most righteous man on earth at the time he lived and the only one that could have faced that kind of testing. This must mean that at the time of this writing, Daniel was the most righteous man on earth. Wow! What company to be named in. Daniel will be the next book we read and once we read the first six chapters, you'll never be able to think of them as disjointed children's stories again. This also means that at this most critical time for the nation of Israel, God had placed on earth, in Babylonian government, in world government, one of the most righteous, God-fearing and God-following men who has ever walked the planet. His impact is largely hidden, but we'll discuss it as time goes on. That a man like Daniel was even present shows God's grace, mercy and steadfast love to His people.

Vs. 21-23 Apparently the people in Babylon had already begun to reform a little. Even though they are praying for those left in Jerusalem, those in exile don't quite remember how bad their conduct was. When these people are brought from Jerusalem to Babylon, the people who are already in exile in Babylon will be appalled to see how idolatrous and evil these newcomers are. They will understand and *know* why God had to bring such cleansing to the city and the land.

Ezekiel 15

This is a very simple message. These people were so corrupt, they couldn't be used for anything, even as a peg in the wall on which to hang a vessel. Israel's purpose was to bear fruit for God. If you want an interesting connection between Israel's purpose and the church's purpose, read John 15:1-8. There is nothing wrong with being a branch in the vine unless you don't want to abide in the vine and bear fruit.

Ezekiel 16:1-42

This image of a whore expresses God's jealousy and sense of betrayal by Israel. We'll see it again in a few chapters. The focus here is on Jerusalem. The city is being used to represent the people. The people's hope was in the city and the temple, because of God's promises associated with the city. Yet, God would destroy the city and all that was in it. The judgment of Jerusalem would be a picture of His displeasure with the people.

Vs. 1-5 Verse 3 is important to note that the message is to the city. Apparently it was settled by Amorites and Hittites. The city now will become a picture of God choosing this people to be His people as He chose Jerusalem to be His city.

Vs. 6-7 This selection was on the basis of God's mercy and pity. Under His care the city/nation became healthy and grew.

Vs. 8-14 The image of God entering into a special relationship with people is common in Scripture. What is interesting in both the Old and New Testaments is that the image is marriage. We will see this image of marriage a couple more times in the OT, and in the NT we have the image of the Bride of Christ. In both testaments, these special people are meant to show the salvation of God out of gratefulness for His blessing and deliverance. In a way, the image represented in the verses up to this point could be true of everyone who knows Christ.

V. 8 Notice that this covering is what took place in Ruth 3:9 between Boaz and Ruth.

Vs. 15-22 This is where the analogy with anything good and redemptive breaks down. Notice the description of ungratefulness. This was true of Israel as God's chosen nation and Israel is an example to all mankind. All mankind is guilty of this. Everyone enjoys the blessings of God every day, but rather than turning to God in Jesus Christ to give Him thanks, we use His benefits to ignore Him.

V. 15 is interesting. It was pride in the very beauty and privilege given by the Lord that sin took and perverted. This wouldn't be the first time that God's blessing was warped by sin. In Ezekiel 28:11-17 we'll find one of those passages that seems to rise above the description of a human, to a description of Satan and his fall. There, too, it is because of his God-given beauty and privilege that he chose to rebel against God.

Notice v. 17. They took what God gave them and made idols of them. Some of these idols were used in sexual worship rites.

V. 20 is appalling and Malachi 2:15 shows another reason why God was totally upset with this.

Vs. 23-29 Israel not only committed "adultery" by taking on the gods of the surrounding nations, but rather than depending on God, they looked for help from these other nations in terms of treaties and security. You see this in Solomon's political marriages, and particularly with King Asa, when he sent gold to have Syria attack the northern kingdom rather than take the matter to God. (2 Chr. 16:1-10) We have already seen how God leveled Egypt. Then we saw how God destroyed the Assyrian army in a night. Why would you seek these nations for help? But Israel did. Look at Psalm 78:5-7. They were to have only sought hope in God.

Vs. 30-34 The imagery here is that of brazen, open harlotry. A normal harlot would have made a chamber in private quarters. Israel did it openly in every square and wide place in Jerusalem. What are referred to here are shrines and memorials throughout the city that were actually small worship stations. These also had a political/economic purpose in that they could say to a Babylonian with whom they were doing business, "Look over there. We have a little statue of Nebo. You want to go worship?"

A normal harlot was paid for her work. Israel invited other nations in, adopted their gods and may have given them financial incentives for bringing their business to Jerusalem. Some of this probably happened to open up trade with other nations. Honoring their gods would have shown good will. God didn't think so.

Vs. 35-42 The judgment God would bring would be very specific and connected to their sins. None of the gods Israel worshipped would help them and none of the nations they connected with would save them. In fact, the nations whose favor they sought would all have a hand in exposing their sin and punishing them.

For us in the harvest, we need to stay in the Word and allow lessons like this to wash our hearts and our motives. The Lord is our hope and this world is where we work. The world is not our hope. It is easy to put our hope in people and in strategies, but the Lord has recorded these events and judgments to help us keep our eyes on Jesus and to stay focused on the blessing of seeing others come to Him and become disciples, who make disciples.

1 Corinthians 10:11 Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come.

Hebrews 7:18-28

Vs. 18-22 You can tell this was written to believers, because the unbelieving Jews we see in the NT would have gone nuclear if they had heard this. When Jesus made the new covenant with the bread and the wine, we know He could do it because He is God. Here, it is also stated that on the human side, He could do it because of God making Him a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Notice how Psalm 110 is being relied on again. Who knew those words would be so important? God Himself made an oath.

Vs. 23-25 Since Jesus lives forever, you only need this one priest and He intercedes continuously for His people. This was something good for them to remember in the situation they were facing. Hey, that's good for me to remember too.

Vs. 26-28 Why would they want to go back to the law knowing this? They would have to deny Jesus Himself.

Psalm 106:1-12

I mentioned something yesterday about how helpful it is to know the point of something while you are reading. So, we'll be reading this for the next two days. Verse 47 will give you an idea of when this was written. If you understand that, it puts this history into a slightly different light and you understand the appeal being made in all of this song.

Vs. 1-3 If you read v. 47, these words take on some interesting significance. The mention of God's goodness and His *steadfast love* that *endures forever* are something the exiles had experienced in a strange land during their punishment. As we'll see in Daniel, and have seen in Esther and Nehemiah, God still did show Himself mighty.

Vs. 4-5 Now we have the plea. Notice the request for remembrance, for salvation for the people, gladness for the nation and glory for God's own inheritance.

Vs. 6-12 The sin of the nation is summarized in forgetting their salvation. How God saved them from Egypt was supposed to have made a lasting impression. God knew they would forget; and through their pride in God's blessing and perversion of the glory and beauty He gave Israel, all mankind would see that we need a spiritual cure, not just a physical fix.

Proverbs 27:4-6

V. 4 seems to stand alone, but it is very powerful. With both *wrath* and *anger*, a person will give regard to their own safety, but the motto of *jealousy* is "blow up the world." Jealousy is both anger and wrath with a sense of mission and dark abandon.

Not that we can attribute to God the nasty side of our emotions, but think of the jealousy He is talking about in Ezekiel. It definitely fits the scenario.

Vs. 5-6 We still don't get "speaking the truth in love." Most often we just avoid the subject. That's not love.

NOVEMBER 7

Ezekiel 16:43-17:24

It is hard for us to imagine what it was like for the exiles living in Babylon, receiving news from Jerusalem, watching world events and hoping Babylon would be defeated. They hoped that Jerusalem would survive and that they could return to Israel. But there were these disturbing men. A Jew named Daniel was chief advisor to Nebuchadnezzar. He was obviously a traitor, as were the other three Jews who were responsible for the showcase province of Babylon. They were all working for the enemy. Then there was this awful prophet back in Jerusalem, Jeremiah, who was really, really negative. But worst of all, living among them, there was this very spooky

prophet who couldn't speak, or move from his house. However, when he did speak and when he did move, there was a dark sense of awe and power in what he said that confirmed that God would judge Jerusalem and its people for their sin.

Ezekiel 16:43-63

Vs. 43-52 The Spirit changes the analogy slightly, from a whore to a family of whores.

V. 43 Notice how important it was for Israel to have remembered God's selection of Abraham and the covenant God made with him. God chose Abe and from him, God made Israel into a nation. Their salvation and deliverance from Egypt was to have been remembered and celebrated. That was to have always confirmed God's love and given them a heart of gratefulness to follow in faith. That is exactly the same for us.

V. 45 I don't think this is describing the origin of the people of Israel. Here are two possibilities. First, the mother and father could be talking about the DNA of their abominations and idolatries. Second, the mother and father could be talking about those who originally built Jerusalem. I think this is more likely since a focus of God's judgment is on the city itself. The Jebusites who were in Jerusalem, when Joshua came into the land, were probably descended from the Hittites and the Amorites. Notice that as this analogy goes on, other cities, Samaria and Sodom, are referred to. So, it would make sense that the mother and father of Jerusalem were Hittites and Amorites. The sickness of Canaan came from these people and God judged it through Israel, but Israel adopted their worship and became infected by their ways.

V. 52 This is shocking just reading it; and for Ezekiel's audience, it would have been a cause for them to want to kill the prophet, except that the supernatural sense around Ezekiel made them realize the words were from God. When God took Ezekiel back to Jerusalem and he viewed all of the idolatry, we saw how corrupt the city was. Add to this the fact that God had had His presence there. That made their sin that much graver and inexcusable. I was reading this morning as Jesus sent out the seventy, *For if the mighty works done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.* (Matt. 11:21) Sodom is mentioned in this too. Jerusalem, of all places on earth, had no excuse for this behavior. Israel of all people had no excuse for this depth of sin and faithlessness.

Vs. 53-58 What ought to stand out here is the millennial blessing promised to both Samaria and Sodom. That really surprises me.

Vs. 59-63 Even in punishment, God promises to remember His covenant with Abraham and make a new covenant with Israel. God will restore Israel at the close of the age. Notice v. 60. When the kingdom comes and all three cities are restored, Jerusalem (the Jews) will then become a "mother" to these "daughters." I guess this means that Israel will be a source of spiritual connection and help for them.

V. 62 There's that promise again.

V. 63 And here is a final rebuke for Israel.

Ezekiel 17

This parable was probably a response to rumors being heard from Jerusalem that Egypt would rise to save them. This prophecy was given before Zedekiah actually joined up with Egypt and rebelled against Babylon.

Vs. 1-6 This eagle was Nebuchadnezzar, whom God sent to take Jehoiachin to Babylon, and then Neb took some of the "seed" and planted it there in Babylon next to the rivers. Ezekiel's audience was this seed. About 12,000 craftsmen and businessmen were taken in that deportation.

In all of this, Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy Jerusalem but left there a "seed" of David, Zedekiah. I think this act of mercy was because of the influence of Daniel and because of what God had done in Nebuchadnezzar's life. Everything was OK.

Vs. 7-8 This is the offer of Egypt. Verse 8 says that they had already been planted and made secure.

Vs. 9-10 But Zedekiah was now being enticed to make a treaty with Egypt. By rebelling against God and Nebuchadnezzar, both Jerusalem and Egypt would be punished by God.

Vs. 11-15 This is an explanation of what happened.

Vs. 16-21 This is what God vows to do about it. Note v. 21.

Vs. 22-24 This is God restoring Israel in Zion with His Son, the Son of David, the Messiah.

These people were being punished because of their disobedience, and now, they still wouldn't obey God and accept the changes He had made in their nation and in their lives. Even as disciples following in the harvest, it is hard to accept changes that don't meet our desires or expectations. Yet, if our only goal on the planet is to live for Christ in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, that simplifies life for us. Not only that, abiding in Christ means we see and expect His hand to lead us. Regardless of where He leads us, there we are with Him. This morning I was reading in Philippians and in Romans, and what struck me was that Paul expected harvest wherever he went. Actually, Paul even bore fruit in prison. As Jesus said in John 4, the fields are always white for harvest.

Hebrews 8

Vs. 1-2 The writer is summarizing, saying that we have the best priest and that He is sitting in the right place. Just as trivia, remember that it is not only important that Jesus is God, but it is especially important that He is a man sitting at the right hand of God. He is the human who can reclaim humanity and lead mankind to righteousness before God. He has authority over mankind and has disarmed and judged the spiritual authorities that have been "lording it over" sinful mankind.

Vs. 3-5 This is showing that Jesus is not a priest of the old covenant. Not only that, it shows that the temple and temple service were still going on, indicating that this was written before 70 A.D.

For trivia: The Romans destroyed the temple in 70 A.D. Both Paul and Peter died in Rome in Nero's persecution in 67 A.D. The apostle John survived and wrote his Gospel, his letters, and Revelation around 90 A.D., twenty years after the temple was gone.

Vs. 6-13 In showing that the first covenant was incomplete and passing, he quotes Jeremiah 31:31-34. We just read that. Laura found it interesting that in today's reading of Ezekiel we heard about the covenants, both old and new.

The new covenant goes back to the Abrahamic covenant encompassing the plan of God to bless all nations and therefore, to redeem all mankind. The new covenant, as expressed in Jeremiah and throughout the OT, has both spiritual and physical promises. The church does not inherit the physical promises of a land, or being regathered to Jerusalem and having a king/Messiah reign in Jerusalem. Those physical promises are for Israel. The church does inherit the spiritual promise of salvation, spiritual rebirth and the Holy Spirit. The church becomes the Bride of Christ. The point here for the people receiving this letter is that the old covenant, and therefore the following of the law, was not a place for them to return for peace and safety.

Vs. 10-11 I think the Jews understood this promise as being connected with the Holy Spirit and the kingdom. In Peter's Pentecost message in Acts 2, he mentioned the promise of the Holy

Spirit. Also, when Jesus promised the Holy Spirit in Acts 1:5, it prompted the disciples to ask about the kingdom in v. 6. They associated the Holy Spirit with the restoration of Israel.

Psalm 106:13-31

We still have one more day in Psalm 106. You have to read ahead if you want to get the full point of all of this. The writer is showing how unbelieving and hard-hearted the people were. Yet, God still showed them mercy.

As an aside, it looks like Paul knew this psalm pretty well. Some of what he says in Romans and in 1 Corinthians 10 sounds like this section today.

Vs. 13-15 This is Numbers 11:20.

Vs. 16-18 It is incredible to think that the people openly rebelled in the presence of the cloud and the pillar of fire. God Himself was present with them. What were they thinking?

Vs. 19-23 Here is Moses interceding for the people after their incredible act of disobedience. Verse 20 sounds like Romans 1:23.

Vs. 24-27 This is the rebellion at Kadesh-barnea that launched the people into 38 years of wandering in the wilderness. (Num. 13-14)

Vs. 28-31 This happened at the end of the entire 40 years of wandering. (Num. 25)

The men mentioned in vs. 23 and 30 give me the feeling that the psalmist and the Spirit were encouraging people to stand in the gap for the people as they prayed for God to bless the remnant. As disciples in the harvest, regardless of how the Lord is using us, by following the Lord and seeking to reach the lost and make disciples, who make disciples, we are standing in the gap for our generation.

Proverbs 27:7-9

V. 7 There is a healthy hunger in life and I think we are to have it in the harvest. Jesus promised that those who chose to be hungry would be satisfied. If our hunger is because of the mission and the desperate need on this planet, the Lord himself sweetens all that is bitter. What a difference this makes from one person to another.

V. 8 If a person came from a nurturing home, but rejected what he gained there, we would think he had made a mistake. Think too of the people in Hebrews. They found a home in Christ, but now they are in danger of drifting from that home.

V. 9 To understand this, think of someone who has strengthened you. Anyone can show us what is wrong, but it takes a friend to add strength to counsel. *Wait on the Lord, be strong and let your heart take courage.* (Ps. 27:14) Ultimately, with the Spirit, this is why the Word and prayer are so important. Our hope and greatest resource have to be fully in the Lord.

NOVEMBER 8

Ezekiel 18-19

Ezekiel 18

Vs. 1-4 God does a little housekeeping here. Seen here and in v. 25, the people were actually blaming others and God for their misfortune. This portion is interesting when you place it next to the Scripture that says God visits the sins of the fathers on the sons down to the fourth generation. (Ex. 34:6-7) With this text in Ezekiel you see how God Himself understood that declaration. If the generations persist in the sins of the fathers, as they probably will, judgment will follow. But if a single person is different or if he repents, God treats that person according to his own behavior.

Vs. 5-9 A righteous man. God is giving a basic definition regarding behavior. Not only that, He is not talking about eternal life or damnation, rather how this person would fare in the upcoming judgment of Jerusalem. This would be similar to Abraham talking to the angel of the Lord (Jesus) in Genesis 18:23-33, where Abe was basically trying to save Lot.

Vs. 10-13 An unrighteous son of the righteous man.

Vs. 14-18 The righteous son of the unrighteous son of the righteous man.

Vs. 19-20 This sums up these past three examples, and v. 20 says it all.

Vs. 21-23 This is an unrighteous man who repents. Notice that this is not talking about eternal life. It is life on earth, and in terms of the coming judgment of Jerusalem, who would live and who would die on earth.

V. 23 This is why we are left on earth, to proclaim this in the harvest. Some people will turn to God.

V. 24 This is a righteous person who goes bad. The penalty is death on earth, not eternal judgment. Imagine someone in Jerusalem getting caught up with the hopelessness and the "tomorrow we die" mentality and deciding to go for the gusto and go nuts morally. God is saying that person would receive judgment. That is the same as today if a good person goes on a one-night binge and drives drunk and kills a person.

Vs. 25-29 It is clear to us that Israel was shifting blame to God. Eventually they would see that their own sin and judgment was caused by themselves.

Vs. 30-32 What a very "grace-full" and loving declaration.

Ezekiel 19

This is a lament on Judah's kings.

Vs. 1-4 The *mother* is the nation of Israel. This *lion* taken by the Egyptians is the son of Josiah, Jehoahaz, whom Pharaoh Neco took into captivity.

Vs. 5-9 This is Jehoiachin, whom Nebuchadnezzar took into captivity to Babylon. Jehoiakim is skipped here because that donkey of a man only deserved the burial of a donkey.

Vs. 10-14 This is Zedekiah. After him, there will be no more kings in the line of David until Jesus. Truly, it was lamentable.

We've been reading about times getting worse and worse in Judah. We've seen bad rulers destroy what was good and allow a culture of ungodliness to grow. The word "ungodly" may seem subjective, but God being God is very objective. He is greater than human opinion on any subject. He is the One who says what reality is. For the people who were obeying and following God, there was the despair of seeing the land and its people come under judgment. But, God was still working and giving hope to those who sought it. God's declarations of judgment and hope were meant to give people an opportunity to turn to Him. Sending men like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel was an act of compassion on God's part.

Today in the harvest we know that judgment is coming. Human governments and nations are only incidental. The book of Revelation is the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing for reading it. God wants us to keep our perspective on the world and our commission. We cannot have heaven on this earth. Here is where we follow our Lord in the harvest, reaching out to the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples, until our Lord returns.

Hebrews 9:1-10

Vs. 1-5 The approach to God in the law was very guarded and not available to everyone. Contrary to the people's habit of worshiping on hills, there was only one place that forgiveness could be sought, the tabernacle/temple.

One note here is that in v. 4 in the ESV it mentions the altar of incense being in the *Most Holy Place* instead of being in the *Holy Place* in front of the veil. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament, it does not say altar, but censer. This is also the translation of the King James Version. A censer was a metal container on a chain that was filled with incense and swung to fill the room with the fragrance of the burning incense. That censer was probably what was inside the Most Holy Place and used on this one day when the high priest went inside. The altar of incense was in the Holy Place and stood in front of the veil.

Vs. 6-10 This sort of worship under the law was very limited. *Only the high priest* was allowed into the Most Holy Place and then only *once a year*.

This description of the Most Holy Place, the priest and the rituals leading up to the Day of Atonement under the law is building up to v. 11. In a way, this is not only saying the earthly routines and regulations of Judaism were limited and ineffective, but it is also saying that anything we do today that involves religious routines and regulations are equally as ineffective. We are always tempted to coat following Jesus with ritual. With what we'll see regarding the work of Jesus, no routine or liturgy or regulations are required for our spiritual life. We still insist on a liturgy in the West because it makes us feel more spiritual. I doubt that they have much liturgy in house churches in areas of the world where Christians are persecuted. A couple of believers in China meeting quickly and privately, praying and encouraging each other in the Word, is very honoring to God. This is perhaps more of what God has in mind, than what happens in most churches in the West on any given Sunday. What is essential to being a disciple in the harvest is following Jesus, reading His Word, and making disciples.

Psalm 106:32-48

Vs. 32-33 This rebellious people also assisted Moses in missing out on going into the land. Notice that *they made his spirit bitter*.

Vs. 34-39 This is a summation of the history of Israel in the land. This is what we are reading about in Ezekiel.

Vs. 40-42 This history of judgment goes from the judges right up to what we're reading in Ezekiel.

V. 43 Notice the interesting role this verse and this truth has between what is said before and what comes in v. 44. In spite of God continually rescuing them, they still rebelled. And although He punished them, God never gave up. Who says there is no love in the Old Testament?

Vs. 44-46 The psalmist is not only praising God for this; he is reminding God that there is a precedent for what he is about to ask. Notice the mention of hearing *their cry*, the *covenant*, the *steadfast love* and pity.

V. 47 Here is the plea. I would say that these are Ezekiel's people.

V. 48 Whoever wrote this understood that God would hear and act. The point of this long song is found in vs. 44-48. In spite of all of that, God still showed them mercy and heard them. Therefore, they should keep on praying, trusting Him and praising Him.

Proverbs 27:10

This proverb has to do with friends as opposed to relatives. The idea of not going *to your brother's house in the day of your calamity* is that, in this case, the brother lives weeks away. Instead, just go to your friend.

By not forsaking *your friend and your father's friend*, you will have friends who are near you *in the day of your calamity*.

NOVEMBER 9

So, you ask, what is the purpose of all we've read in Isaiah and Jeremiah, and are now wading through in Ezekiel? In as much as the Lord revealed Himself to Israel and is using them as a visual lesson to mankind, why do you think we have all of this text? The weight of this lesson, I think, is that without a new spiritual rebirth in Jesus Christ, mankind is completely without hope. No amount of God's revealing Himself to humans will overcome the sin within us that rebels against Him. If kindness and help and signs and wonders could have saved people and brought them to God, these people would have been a testimony to the world. But they rejected God and they and their culture became hopelessly perverse. I'm sure they were nice religious people, but they were anti-God and anti-truth. So now we see judgment coming upon them.

Our world stands under this same judgment every day. The harvest is now and the gospel of Christ is the only hope for mankind. Unless there is forgiveness and a spiritual rebirth in Christ, there is no acceptance before God and there is no change. Our job in the harvest following our Lord is not to transform society, but to reach one person at a time with the message of our Savior. The fields are white for harvest. We need to go and make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples while there is still time for us to work.

Ezekiel 20

In God preparing the people to return to the land, there is a lot of immediate and extensive surgery going on here. The climactic act that will humble these people will be the fall of Jerusalem, still a few years off.

V. 1 This is now two years since Ezekiel began to prophesy. Again the elders are sitting before him. Ezekiel has been incredibly active and has become a phenomenon in the community of the exiles.

Vs. 2-31 Having gone through Psalm 105 and 106, this is going to sound very familiar to you. God recounts their history to them. Go slowly through this section and look for how often God mentions holding back His judgment.

In this section look for repetitions of words. Some of these words are *wilderness, Sabbath, for the sake of my name*. There is a lot in this section. For example, *moreover* is repeated four times. The first one is good, and the next three are bad. The last one signifies God giving them up to their sin. Notice that God is dealing with them regarding their idolatry. Notice that v. 31 refers back to the elders coming to inquire of Ezekiel.

Is there idolatry in our culture? More so than we realize. Are believers neutralized by idolatry? *And as for what fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.* (Luke 8:14) To me, this sounds like us - hearing the Word, enjoying church, living a clean life, sleeping in the light and bearing no fruit that comes to maturity. It looks like fruit, and that makes us feel good, but it is stilted by our true desires for our own safety, needs, comfort and urgings to have more.

Vs. 2-4 The reason God wouldn't be inquired of by them was that these men, and all the exiles, hadn't fully given up their allegiance to idols. We'll see that this was also true of the people who came out of Egypt.

Vs. 5-8 This is kind of mind numbing to think of, that the people in the Exodus brought idols with them. We remember from the story that they were very quick to make a golden calf once Moses was out of sight.

V. 9 This will be repeated. God didn't want His name reproached, because it has always been His desire to save mankind. Israel was then, and still is, the nation though which He planned to reach the nations. An interesting verse to put together with this is Isaiah 55:13, *Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.* God makes His name known through His people, and that includes us.

Vs. 10-17 This is the generation of people who rebelled at Kadesh-barnea.

V. 12 The Sabbath was to have been a blessing to them, but only through faith. The Sabbath will be mentioned several times. In order to enjoy the Sabbath you had to trust God and not be consumed by needs and desires. You had to have faith and He had to be your only desire. Then, obedience was easy and didn't seem like duty.

V. 15 This sounds like what we've read in Hebrews about the people not entering into God's rest in the land. Only faith in Him could give them rest as it was promised.

Vs. 18-24 This is probably not the generation that went into the land with Joshua, but their children who we read about in Judges. The judgment in the wilderness cleansed the generation that entered the land. The generation after Joshua and Caleb flowed straight into sin. God gave them over to their enemies because they didn't obey.

Vs. 25-26 This is similar to Romans 1:24, 26 & 28. God gave them over to their desires. He allowed sin to have its way with them and become statutes to them. The flip side of this is that if we will fight against sin, God will help us to defeat it.

Vs. 27-29 When we read Judges it was amazing to see how quickly and completely the majority of the people became idolatrous and ignorant of God's Word. This generation of Israel in Ezekiel's day was like their idol-following "fathers." You realize what they were really following was the sin and desires of their own hearts.

Vs. 30-31 It appears that these people had blood on their hands. We'll see this in chapters 22-24. Righteous people had died in Jerusalem when they had stood in the way of "progress." And the people had been for, or were OK with, the idolatry they had left in Jerusalem; that is, Baal worship that resulted in children, who were then sacrificed to Molech. These people had innocent blood on them. With hearts still like this, God found nothing sincere in their request to hear His Word.

V. 32 This is a very strong verse. God was and is determined to save Israel. For the sake of His promise to Abraham, God will save and bless Israel whether they like it or not. *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.* (Rom. 15:8)

Vs. 33-38 Notice the wildernesses here. As God chastened and cleansed Israel in the *wilderness of the land of Egypt*, He will now do the same to them in the *wilderness of the peoples*.

V. 39 Another very strong verse. Thankfully there were many who heeded this challenge. Have you been underlining the mentions of God's name? It is interesting to wonder why the people wanted to be called by God's name at all if they would not obey or follow Him. Why not just move to Moab and be free?

Vs. 40-44 This is the promise of physical and spiritual millennial blessing, but notice v. 43. There is acknowledgement of sin and repentance by Israel. Everyone who enters into God's blessing will enter it humbly, knowing they were saved by grace.

History is important to God as a way for people to trust Him and understand His plan and His love. Just as our faith is to be built upon what God has done in the past in the Bible, it is also to be built on our personal/family history with the Lord. God didn't just expect these people to know this history; He expected them to know and trust Him because of this history. For us as disciples in the harvest, faith is never easy; but being in the Word daily helps us see again Whom it is we follow and how wise and loving He is. Those things that He has done and is doing for us are more than events in our lives. He expects us to remember them and be strengthened in our faith by them as we wait on Him.

Vs. 45-49 I think this should have belonged to the next chapter. Actually, v. 45 is the first verse of the next chapter in the Hebrew Bible. God directed Ezekiel to begin pronouncing judgment on the land of Israel. The image is that of a fire sweeping over the entire land.

V. 49 Ezekiel informed God that the people were ridiculing him, saying this man was a *maker of parables*. They didn't get what God was saying through the prophet, so they were disregarding what Ezekiel said. In chapter 21 God will become very clear.

Again, for us in the harvest, these things are written to remind us that there is a fire coming. God will judge and our Master will return. Our work is now. People need to hear the message, and at the same time, we need to live in the daily expectation that our Lord could come.

Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. (Luke 12:43)

Hebrews 9:11-28

Vs. 11-14 How could they go back to the law, or how could anyone dismiss Jesus since He entered the presence of God with Himself and His life and His blood as a sacrifice for our sins? The *dead works* are those acts of the law that cannot make us right before God. Our acceptance is wholly in Jesus, not in anything we can do.

V. 14 *Purify our conscience*. Paul makes a big deal about conscience. In the sense of being acceptable to God, a person could have a bad conscience with regard to wondering if they had done enough. But in Christ, "it is finished." There was never anything for us to do, but accept the gift. We can have a guilty conscience because of unconfessed sin, but never because of wondering if we're good enough or have done enough. This is the same thought as in Romans 8:31-34.

V. 15 Jesus sealed this covenant with His own blood. Again, this covenant doesn't have two parties, just one, Jesus Himself. This means that we enter in by faith in **His work**, not by doing works of our own.

Vs. 16-17 The covenant by Jesus is likened to a will. Jesus set the terms of it, and at His death the benefits come to those to whom He willed them. The beneficiaries of the will don't have to work; they only have to accept.

Vs. 18-23 The old covenant, even though inferior, temporary and looking ahead, still had to be ratified in blood. Verse 22 is pretty important. Blood showed that our sin brought us under the judgment of death.

Vs. 24-28 So the Lord died once for all. One question on v. 28 has to do with those who are waiting for Him eagerly. Jesus bore the sin of many, but could it be that the circle of those who wait expectantly for Him is smaller. If you look at Hebrews 3:14 and think of the rewards offered for those who endure and hold fast, you get the idea that waiting expectantly for the Lord is one

of those things that gives endurance and opens the door to a closer relationship with Him here on earth.

Psalm 107

This is a good psalm to look for recurring words. Finding the word *some* will help put structure into what the author is saying. It is hard to know when this was written or if any particular OT history is being referred to. For example, vs. 23-32 talk about a sea voyage. We don't know of anyone but Jonah who was at sea, and I'm not sure this section reflects what happened in that story. It is enough to say that these are all experiences that stretched people the psalmist knew. It could be that these stories were from those who had been taken into exile and they were describing their return to Israel.

Vs. 1-3 This sets the tone for this psalm. Thanking and giving public praise to God will be repeated. God's *steadfast love* will be mentioned often in connection with people being *redeemed* and saved *from trouble*.

Vs. 4-9 Notice how this section begins with the word *some*. This describes the danger they faced. Notice v. 8 and then in v. 9, the *for* shows what God should be praised for. This is the basic pattern of all these sections.

Vs. 10-16 These people were in prison.

Vs. 17-22 These people got themselves in trouble by their own foolishness. Notice that here, in their case, God sent His Word to heal their foolishness. This only works if people are broken and crying out in humility.

Vs. 23-32 These people were on the seas.

Vs. 33-38 This is how God cared for everyone, not only in their danger, but in helping them establish themselves.

Vs. 39-42 God exalts the humble, but puts down the proud.

V. 43 says it all.

Proverbs 27:11

Apparently one of the ways to reproach a father was through the conduct of his son. That made me immediately think of our conduct and our Father's name. In 1 Timothy Paul mentions different groups of people living without reproach or defaming the name of God. *Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.* (1 Tim. 6:1)

To me, it is interesting how this fits with the reading in Ezekiel. We should all be wise sons and daughters, hallowing (honoring) our Father's name.

NOVEMBER 10

Ezekiel 21-22

As you read this, keep underlining, *shall know that I am the Lord*. It is behind all of what God is doing. Also, just think about this very intense judgment of Israel and others. If God is this focused on cleansing and judging His own people, what is it going to be like for those who deny Christ and for the generation on the earth who rebel against God and persecute His people during the Tribulation?

Ezekiel 21

Vs. 1-5 As a result of the people ridiculing or criticizing Ezekiel because of his cryptic visions, God "sharpens" the focus. Now it is a *sword* brought against Jerusalem and the land. That's pretty easy to understand.

Vs. 6-7 Ezekiel was to add public groaning to this message. Apparently he walked around the market making noises, causing the parents once again to scramble and find their children.

Vs. 8-13 Somehow I think this must have been a very loud prophecy. It is almost funny. They didn't respect *the rod*, so now they get *the sword*.

Vs. 14-17 I think Ezekiel acted this out publicly with a sword, sending parents scrambling again to save their children. Imagine the shock of seeing Ezekiel just walking down the street, wondering what insane thing he might do next.

Vs. 18-23 I'm not sure how Ezekiel acted this one out, but it sounds like it was visual. Apparently v. 21 actually happened. Nebuchadnezzar had a choice to go to Ammon (modern day Amman, Jordan) or to Jerusalem, and he and his advisors did the superstitious version of flipping a coin. Oddly enough their divinations told them to go and attack Jerusalem. Hmmmmm.

Vs. 24-27 The *prince of Israel* is Zedekiah.

Vs. 28-32 The *Ammonites* were in the alliance with Egypt and Israel to fight against Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar chose to go to Jerusalem first and destroy the city, these allies were very happy. Also, when Babylon did take Jerusalem and appointed Gedaliah to be governor of Judah, the Ammonites sent Ishmael to kill Gedaliah. That is the reason for this "honorable" mention of judgment for the Ammonites. In a few chapters there will be more judgment predicted for them.

Ezekiel 22

Vs. 1-16 These pronouncements of judgment must have been ringing in people's ears. Here, once again, the nation is shown to be totally corrupt, not just because of idolatry or neglecting the things of God, but because of the spilling of innocent blood. Notice how often you find blood in this section. Notice too that it began with the leaders and became a part of the culture. If you have a concordance or an online Bible, do a search on "innocent blood." You'll notice that God takes that very seriously. *And also for the innocent blood that he (King Manasseh) had shed. For he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the LORD would not pardon.* (2 Kings 24:4 ESV)

Vs. 17-22 So what do you do if your "ore" is totally impure? You burn out the impurities. Note that this isn't just for punishment, but also for redeeming some who will know that He is the Lord and who will acknowledge why God has brought this upon them.

Vs. 23-31 The point of this cleansing is seen in the punishment of different groups of people. Find and circle them. Here the corruption began with the religious leaders and seeped into the life of the people.

V. 30 is very famous. Now, there was still a small remnant of godly people and there were men like Jeremiah still in Jerusalem. So what does it mean that there was no one who would stand in the gap? I think it means there was no leader who was willing to lead and fight against the corruption of the nation, to lead them back to God. Moses would have been this kind of man. Jeremiah was not designed to be that kind of a leader, although he was courageous, yet he only moved as God moved him. It seems that all of the godly leaders had been killed in trying to stop the corruption and had had their blood spilled in the city. This then was a judgment not only on their murders; but in murdering the good leaders, the people had removed the protection these vocal leaders could have provided.

When I think of standing in the gap, I don't think it is courage as much as love for Christ and conviction that gets the job done. You come to the point of saying, "If this stuff is really true, then somebody's gotta do something." And you know that that somebody is you. It's time to live dangerously in the hands of God. Check out the song, "Living Dangerously in the Hands of God," by Steve Camp.

Hebrews 10:1-17

Vs. 1-4 This is a brilliant argument. The very fact that the sacrifices had to be repeated year after year meant they could not bring a person to lasting forgiveness. They were only an image of what was to come in Christ.

V. 4 is a rather famous and important verse and declaration.

Vs. 5-7 Laura and I have Psalm 40:1-10 memorized, and these verses are from that psalm. Verse 5 in the Hebrew says "but you have given me an open ear." The translators of the Septuagint (Greek OT) understood this verse as being figurative for a body. The Septuagint would have been the Bible that Jesus and His generation read from. The fact that this verse is stated here shows that "body" is a proper rendering and understanding. Jesus was given a body and was given understanding of His mission.

Vs. 8-10 Again, these are very strong and logical verses. Already in Psalm 40 God was showing that a new covenant was necessary and it would be instituted by the Son presenting Himself for sin.

Vs. 11-14 These verses say it all. Notice how the author brings v. 14 back together with v. 1 through the words *perfect/perfected*.

Vs. 15-17 These, again, are the spiritual promises to Israel from Jeremiah 31. Israel receives both the spiritual and physical promises for the Millennial Kingdom. The church partakes of the spiritual promise now as the Bride of Christ. I still find it interesting that the Jews knew that the Holy Spirit was promised. *And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father.* (Acts 1:4-5)

Psalm 108

Vs. 1-4 Most of The Psalms begin with a declaration of confidence, but this one seems to stand out. This was probably during the early days of David being king. He knew of God's faithful provision through all the years of running and through all of the uncertainty. I've never seen before how David declared the *steadfast love* of the Lord so often. Laura added to this by showing me that God's *steadfast love* and *faithfulness* are often mentioned together.

Vs. 5-6 I think that when David knew how God had saved him so many times, it gave him a vision of God making His glory known in all the earth.

Vs. 7-9 David's confidence in the Word.

Vs. 10-13 David knew to pray, yet he was confident in God's care.

Proverbs 27:12

Compromise is one thing; prudence is another. Jesus told His disciples to beware of men, and therefore, to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Paul told Timothy to beware and avoid Alexander the coppersmith.

On the other hand, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to bow to Nebuchadnezzar, willing to die if necessary; and God brought an incredible blessing for all of Israel in exile. Wisdom must be in knowing the difference in these situations and understanding the Spirit's leading.

NOVEMBER 11

Time to look forward to something. In our reading on November 18 God will begin taking Ezekiel on field trips, and then things will get exciting because there will be more visions dealing with the end times and the restoration of Israel. For some of us, getting through this heavy reading toward the end of November will be a true cause for thanksgiving. Look for ways to motivate yourself to keep up with your reading in The One Year Bible. All of this is very important Scripture, but honestly, it is hard to wade through. With such a large volume of Scripture showing God's judgment for spurning His existence and His love, it reminds us that this world we live in is doing the same thing. If a vote were held today, God would be voted out of His own creation. To switch analogies, the world is poisoned by sin and it doesn't know it. Yet we have the antidote, and that's why we follow Christ in the harvest.

Ezekiel 23

When Ezekiel gave this message I'm sure the parents ran for their children, this time to cover their ears. The imagery is purely to rebuke Israel for their idolatry as you'll see in v. 49. Notice again the mentions of blood and offering children. We don't see sin as God does. This is how He saw the actions of Israel. He is the spurned husband having to witness His wives' appalling, sick and humiliating whoring. And they do it with all He's given them, in every place He's built for them, right in front of Him. And the judgment is appropriate and harsh. It is amazing that He was as patient and gracious and guiding as long as He was.

Vs. 1-4 Both sisters are Israel and their whoredom began in Egypt. This has been a long history. One sister represents the northern kingdom of Israel and the city of Samaria. The other sister represents the southern kingdom, Judah, and the city of Jerusalem. One other note: Jerusalem looked with scorn upon Samaria. After all, Samaria didn't have the temple or the city of God and they worshiped stupid stuff. Yet according to God, Jerusalem was worse. The name *Oholah* means "tent," suggesting that Samaria made their own sanctuary of worship. But *Oholibah* means "my tent," suggesting that Jerusalem was the place of God's sanctuary.

Some of this language, in the Hebrew, would be very offensive in our ears.

Vs. 5-10 Interestingly, little is written about Samaria. They never had a godly king, and Elijah and Elisha prophesied long and hard trying to stem the tide of ungodliness in that country. Although Samaria had a fling with Syria, their main attraction was for Assyria. Samaria was always totally idolatrous.

Vs. 11-21 By the sheer volume of text directed against Judah and Jerusalem, you can see this is really God's point. The fact that God had a very special relationship with the Davidic kings, and that Judah did have some very godly kings, made their sin exponentially worse than what happened in spiritually ignorant Samaria.

Vs. 22-27 So here is the punishment on Judah and Jerusalem, and it is graphic and much worse than Samaria. Notice v. 25. This was how you maimed prostitutes to make them utterly unattractive.

Vs. 28-35 Jerusalem's pride in being better and godlier than Samaria will be used to humble Jerusalem.

Vs. 36-42 Lest we think that God was being too severe, we see what was really the reason behind God's actions. This was a culture which was perverse and lost every day. The worship of Baal was every day. The people gave birth to kids as a result. They sacrificed those kids to Molech. Then they also went to the temple to worship, and they couldn't and wouldn't see anything wrong with that.

Vs. 43-45 These righteous men were the prophets and godly men God sent to warn the people.

Vs. 46-49 Oddly, there is a ray of hope here. The people receiving this prophecy were in Babylon listening to Ezekiel. They would be spared the destruction of Jerusalem, and eventually their children would be cleansed of idol worship and come under the influence of a godly community that would grow in Babylon. Verse 49 seems to be a promise that through all of the punishment, the people will come to know God.

Working in the harvest, the lost we work among are at best ignorant of God and at worst they really don't care, but everyone lost is under Satan's power. It is amazing to see what people get tangled up with. We don't have to judge or be appalled. God does that for us. We extend His truth and forgiveness. *For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible.* (Eph. 5:12-13) We bring the light. Especially reading what we're reading here, we know that God forgives. Knowing our own lives and what Jesus has done for us, we know He forgives and is strong enough to reclaim and heal us. This is what we bring to the harvest as we reach out to the lost and make disciples, who make disciples. Sin is devastating, but He is stronger.

Hebrews 10:18-39

This is the part of Hebrews that will transition from the proofs of Christ's superiority and the warnings against turning their backs on Him, to the practical exhortations to endure and follow Him.

V. 18 This should have been included in yesterday's reading.

Vs. 19-25 Notice the structure here. There are two uses of *since* followed by three exhortations marked by *let us*.

V. 20 Jesus' body was the "veil" that separated us from the holy place of receiving forgiveness and mercy. Remember that when Jesus died, the veil in the temple was torn. Because Jesus' body was "torn," we are able to enter into God's presence.

V. 21 Jesus is living to intercede for us.

V. 22 Drawing near to God with a clean conscience is only possible because of Christ's payment for our sin.

V. 23 Publicly enduring and holding fast is based on Jesus, who He is and what He has done.

Vs. 24-25 *Encouraging one another* and hanging tight together is another way to obey Jesus' commandment to love one another.

Vs. 26-31 This is a very strong warning that is really a summary of everything that has been said in Hebrews up to this point.

Vs. 26-27 This is written to a Christian who strongly and resolutely turns his back on Christ through actions or attitudes and continues in this defection. The question then is, "what more can God do to awaken this person since Christ will not die for him again?"

As for the judgment of believers, you only have to look at Acts 5, 1 Corinthians 3:12-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:30 to find that there is judgment for the saved. Jesus Himself exhorted and warned His disciples to endure. There is a sense of loss now on earth when we cave in and give up. Look at Matthew 10:22 and James 1:12.

Vs. 28-29 You see the connection between these verses. Just as the law promised judgment when violated, so also the new covenant requires punishment for those who disregard Christ. These people are definitely Christians and are saved. Look again at the wording of 1 Corinthians 11:28-32, to see that this is possible for believers. Look at 1 Corinthians 10 to see more of this. Those believers in 1 Corinthians were dabbling with worshipping demons. These are just a few

examples of born again, eternally secure believers, defaming Christ through their lifestyle and decisions.

Vs. 30-31 Would we think that somehow God would not punish His own children if they willfully walk away from Him? The point of God doing this is restoration of the person, and salvation of the lost by not allowing His children to defame Christ's name. Look at 1 Peter 4:17 or John 15:6.

Vs. 32-34 Now we can see the situation of these believers in a slightly fuller perspective. When they first came to Christ, in the reality of their salvation and the power of that first love, they were alive, courageous and sacrificial. But now, after these years of routine belief and becoming comfortable, quietly allowing the flames to die out, they were not willing or able to face persecution and the loss of their lifestyle and the things that gave them comfort and meaning. Now it seemed better for them to be quiet, to blend in and to compromise their faith in Christ by returning to the law and Jewish custom. God wasn't asking them to become political or social activists. They could still live a quiet life, godly and respectful in every way; but they needed to keep their lamps burning and to be salt. They had to follow Christ with the cross on their shoulders, ready to share what He had done for them.

Vs. 35-39 These people were saved and had had great confidence in Christ. If they didn't endure the present threat and if they compromised their faith, they would lose what it meant to live in Christ. If they shrunk back from Christ to help themselves, Christ would shrink back from them and not send them the strengthening help that He would gladly send to them. The destruction that would come would not be loss of salvation, but damage on earth of their faith, their hearts and their lives.

Psalm 109

As you read this you can imagine David in the middle of his years of running from Saul. He is hunted without having done wrong and his name is constantly lied about to gain the sympathy of the people for Saul. The hope was that these lies would set the people against David. In the meantime, David heard of what Saul and his nobles are doing to the people, how they are neglecting them, twisting justice, using everything for their advantage while people suffered.

Now this is a very negative psalm. How could God inspire something so negative and vindictive? Good question. Many times what David felt and experienced was meant to show what Jesus would live through. Oddly enough, there are several allusions to Jesus' crucifixion and rejection by that generation of Israel. God did promise a special punishment for those people who demanded Jesus' death. That judgment came in 70 A.D., and I'm sure the judgments pronounced here came upon those people.

Vs. 1-5 If you read about what Jesus had to put up with as He hung on the cross, you understand this. Verse 3 sounds like John 15:25.

V. 4 This is something David learned and that Jesus commanded to His disciples.

Vs. 6-15 This section may apply to the people who said to Pilate in Matthew 27:25, *And all the people answered, "His blood be on us and on our children!"*

V. 8 It may be that this section also is a judgment pronounced on Judas. Acts 1:20, *"For it is written in the Book of Psalms, " 'May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it'; and " 'Let another take his office.' "*

Vs. 16-20 When I read this I thought of what Jesus said about the scribes and Pharisees in Luke 20:47, *who devour widows' houses.*

Vs. 21-29 This is the hallmark of David's life, knowing the *steadfast love* of the Lord. This is a hard way to learn God's steadfast love, but this is how we all must learn.

V. 25 Matthew 27:39 - *And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads.*

Vs. 30-31 And this is the response of David to God's deliverance and knowing God's steadfast love. He always gave praise to God to the entire congregation.

And when God takes us through trials as we follow our Lord in the harvest, He teaches us all of this so that we will gain amazing faith and confidence in Him and praise His name.

Proverbs 27:13

The word *adulteress* is not necessarily here. "Foreigner" might work better. The idea is one we've seen before. God is telling us not to make ourselves responsible for those for whom we should not be closely associated. In other words, we are not to be yoked to unbelievers and we should not make ourselves liable for the foolish.

NOVEMBER 12

Well today we get one very sad chapter in Ezekiel and a part of one very famous, inspiring chapter in Hebrews. Amazingly they are both connected by the price faith pays to follow God.

Ezekiel 24-26

Ezekiel 24

This is probably one of the grimmest chapters in the book. I think it is sad and sobering.

Vs. 1-2 Notice this time notation. You'll also find it in 2 Kings 25:1 and in Jeremiah 39:1 and 52:4. It is an infamous date for Israel. Although Ezekiel is hundreds of miles away, he is told of the beginning of the siege of Jerusalem. This would last for about two years.

Vs. 3-14 This is another parable of the total cleansing the people needed. In an earlier chapter the people had called the city a pot. Here, God says the pot is totally corrupt and needs to be melted down.

Vs. 15-18 The death of Ezekiel's wife and his lack of mourning would be a sign to the people. I'm not sure what the message was that he brought the people that morning. I don't think the message was that his wife would die. It might have been the message in vs. 3-14, of the siege of Jerusalem.

Ezekiel was only 34 when this happened, meaning that his wife was young too. All of this would have been a shock for the community. It isn't shocking that someone in their 30's would die. That happens. It was probably that God knew she had a problem and was going to die of a stroke and He had it coincide with this event. On our part, however, we think that since God was involved at all, that He should have saved her and spared Ezekiel and his wife this sorrow. Humanly speaking, and slightly hidden behind our emotions and reasoning, is the feeling heaven is on earth and everything good is to be enjoyed now in this time and in this body. To go to heaven is to lose everything. In our heads, we know that this earth is wrecked and true life will only begin when we are with the Lord, but our feelings tell an entirely different story. God understands this, yet in His love and unfathomable wisdom, He makes the choices and asks us to trust. We have this entire book that tells us what's going on and that we should trust, so we have been talked to and prepared. Still, it's a shock; yet He makes the wise choice. And still, He understands and knows our loss.

As disciples, when we say, "Take my life," we mean, "And do something cool with it." We have the idea that the men in the Bible must have had great lives, especially if they had a book named after them. Not so. Lots of younger people died, but you'd have thought that God would have gone easy on Ezekiel and spared his wife. Yet if she was a follower too, she had yielded her life to God. Jesus said to His followers to "take up their cross daily." The cross meant death. Once

again we come to the place of asking what we really understand about discipleship and following Christ on this planet. What is this, down here, really all about? Some believers still believe that heaven is really on earth and to die is total loss. That's not what the Word shows us and a disciple of Jesus knows better.

This is why I like the RSV translation of Romans 8:28, *We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.* The "with" gives the sense of God using us, for His good in His purpose, but not necessarily for the comfort and longevity of our life on earth. This life isn't about us and happiness on earth. This also fits well with Romans 8:36, *As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'* For the sake of God, for the good purpose God is working in the world to see Christ exalted and the lost saved, sometimes it is better that we die young or suffer misfortune.

This was the life of sorrow that was typical of many of the prophets and great men of the Bible. Having a book of the Bible named after you almost certainly meant you suffered. They were used by God for the good, and they are now at rest with God enjoying the benefits of where they put their treasure. As disciples, we give our lives to Christ, as He gave His life to His Father.

Vs. 19-24 The community was appalled at her death and even more at Ezekiel's behavior. That she was *the delight* of Ezekiel's eyes (v. 16) meant that this was a very loving relationship, and it would have been a deep loss for Ezekiel. For Ezekiel not to mourn publicly was not human. God got their attention.

Vs. 25-27 This would happen two years later. Notice that Ezekiel was mute and that his muteness would be taken away. I wonder how he had communicated with his wife. Maybe privately he could talk.

Ezekiel 25

This is pretty straightforward. These prophetic judgments were for the events surrounding the taking of Jerusalem, and the joy the Ammonites, Moabites, Edomites and Philistines would have in the destruction of Jerusalem.

Vs. 1-7 The Ammonites (Jordan) had an alliance with Israel, but rejoiced when Nebuchadnezzar decided to destroy Jerusalem and let them off the hook. God would remind Neb to return to the Ammonites and clean house. Notice that the Ammonites would know Yahweh is the Lord.

Vs. 8-11 The Moabites would be judged too. Verse 11 says that they too will know the Lord.

Vs. 12-14 The Edomites would only know God's vengeance and by Jesus' time had ceased to be a people. They were eventually absorbed into Israel. More on that when we get to Obadiah and Malachi.

Vs. 15-17 These people had always been a pain in the neck for Israel. By Jesus' time these people also were gone.

Ezekiel 26

This pronouncement against Tyre and Sidon will actually go through chapter 28, and there will be one of those descriptions of the pride and downfall of Satan later in this message to Tyre.

This chapter is the destruction of the city. Just as a short summary of events, Tyre rejoiced over the destruction of Jerusalem, but Nebuchadnezzar returned to assault them too. There were settlements on the coast, but the main city of Tyre was an island about a half a mile from shore. Nebuchadnezzar went after the city for 18 years and finally took it by surrender. Later, this proud city defied Alexander the Great too. He actually filled in part of the Mediterranean Sea, making a road out to the city on the island, and then destroyed it completely.

Vs. 1-6 This chapter was written about nine months before Jerusalem fell. Apparently Jerusalem, in its hey-day, had been Tyre's competition for traveling merchants. They were expecting a windfall since Jerusalem was on the verge of complete destruction. Tyre was proud and arrogant and they are mentioned often in Jesus' own pronouncements of judgment. Here God says Tyre would be punished and plundered.

Vs. 7-14 As mentioned above, some of this destruction would come with Alexander the Great. As invincible as Tyre thought they were, God would keep bringing judgment until they were completely destroyed.

Vs. 15-18 Now it gets interesting. The nations would mourn because of the loss of this city that satisfied the vices and desires of the world. You'll see something similar if you read Revelation 18:9-19.

Vs. 19-21 God will bring their glory *down to the pit*. He promised that Tyre would never again have the honor they had had before. And they haven't.

Hebrews 11:1-16

So, if we understand the hard times these believers were facing, we can understand why the writer now turns them to the "hall of faith." Following Christ by faith is the only answer for them, but it will mean hardship and persecution. In the next chapter, the example of suffering faith will be Jesus. Here, the author is showing that following in faith has never been easy.

Vs. 1-3 Notice that all of these aspects of faith are built upon us having valid information. This faith is built upon assurance, conviction, commendation and understanding that come from the Word and the revealed character of God. Faith is not irrational belief in a feeling and pie-in-the-sky.

Vs. 4-6 The lives of Abel and Enoch are summarized by v. 6. Notice that one of these guys was murdered and one of them never died, but both pleased God and were used by God for good. Notice that part of faith is based in knowing God, and part of it is seen in seeking Him.

V. 7 There is a lot in this simple verse and story. Noah had faith and heeded God and was saved from death on earth. Eternal salvation isn't mentioned here, but the faith to obey certainly played a role in all of this. Noah's faith condemned a faithless and sinful world just by following God.

Vs. 8-12 Abraham is the great example of faith in the OT and also in Romans. Abraham and Sarah had everything going against them. They were old; they came from the city and were strangers in a strange land. Actually, following God in faith, they always had God.

V. 12 Just as trivia, *as good as dead* is used by Paul talking about Abraham's faith in Romans 4:19. We've read about the life of Abraham. Anyone who thinks the lives of Abraham and Sarah were easy hasn't read closely.

Vs. 13-16 This understanding that we are aliens on earth seeking a homeland that is not here and is with God is very important both for the people in Hebrews and for us. Nothing erodes our faith like wanting heaven and comfort on earth. Jesus said that the seed that didn't bear mature fruit wanted peace and pleasure on earth. Jesus said He didn't come to bring peace on earth, but instead people would be divided, based on each person's response to Jesus and His sacrifice to save mankind.

Psalm 110

I have to think that this very messianic psalm was written sometime after David was promised that his offspring would continue on the throne and sometime before his actions with Bathsheba. Think through every verse. Some of these clearly apply to the Lord's coming at the end of the Tribulation.

V. 1 This verse looks so simple, but it is one of those proofs that the Christ had to suffer and enter into His glory. This was a command for the Messiah, the human Son of Man, to come and sit at God's *right hand*. The only way for Him to get there was to suffer for mankind. To sit at God's right hand is the ultimate statement of His authority and kingship. And to think, He is sitting there not just as God the Son, but as a human who now has authority over the human race. This also means that everything necessary for salvation and redemption is finished.

Vs. 2-4 You recognize v. 4 from Hebrews, right? He has not only been given all power and authority in heaven and earth, He is the only mediator of forgiveness and peace with God.

Vs. 5-7 Verses 5 and 6 seem pretty easy to understand. Verse 7 suggests the King's vigor, energy and freshness as He brings justice to the earth.

Proverbs 27:14

I think the thought here is to greet people according to who they are. Or, as we see elsewhere, to rejoice with those who rejoice and to mourn with those who mourn. A positive attitude doesn't always win the day if it is poorly expressed.

NOVEMBER 13

Ezekiel 27-28

In Ezekiel, we are in some very spooky territory. God is pronouncing judgment on the surrounding "minor" neighbors that encouraged Israel to join their alliance against Babylon, who now would rejoice in the destruction of Jerusalem. Tyre, one of these minor nations, was minor in size, but major in world influence. In chapter 28 when God describes the pride and influence of Tyre, the description takes on very cosmic proportions.

Ezekiel 27

Vs. 1-2 If only it was always this easy to understand the point of a chapter. A lament is a funeral song. This destruction was years off, but 100% certain.

Vs. 3-9 This is likening Tyre to a ship skillfully built by the nations. The fact that Tyre was the focus of so many nations is interesting. The nation that is destroyed in Revelation 19 will look like this too. Because of what is written here and in Revelation, that kind of nation takes on eerie significance in spiritual/world affairs.

Vs. 10-11 So valuable was Tyre that other nations provided military support.

Vs. 12-25 Besides the other things you can observe here, underline the nations and peoples who came to Tyre.

Vs. 26-36 This is the lament of the nations because of the ruin of Tyre. The hissing in v. 36 is still in lament for Tyre, not some sort of righteous indignation. The nations are aghast that this has happened. Notice that the sadness of the nations here is very similar to how the nations react in Revelation 18:11-19, to the destruction of that nation called "Babylon." There is clearly something going on here regarding world influence and world corruption that ties these two events and nations together. You might also notice that for a small nation, God is giving it three chapters of judgment. Revelation 18:10 says it will be destroyed *in a single hour*.

I often wonder what nation in the world, during the Tribulation, will have so much influence in the world in commerce and culture and influence and corruption, that when it is destroyed "in an hour," all the nations will weep because of the "stuff" they will lose. Sometimes I think it could be the ol' US of A.

Ezekiel 28

Vs. 1-10 This is directed against the **human prince of Tyre**. Notice how often this man is mentioned in thinking he is a "god" because of his influence and wealth. We'll see where he is getting this and whom he is imitating. Just for trivia, look at what happens in Acts 12:20-23.

Vs. 11-19 This is a description of the one who really ruled Tyre. Notice now it is not the *prince of Tyre*, but the *king of Tyre* who is being addressed. In Daniel 10, we'll see that there are angelic "guardians" that are over nations. Now that mankind has fallen, it appears that their "guardianship" has become more control-oriented and that they have been given more authority than would have been the case if mankind had stayed true to God. In Galatians Paul shows that if the heir is unfit, the guardian assumes authority over the heir. That would be the case regarding mankind; that is, until one man stood up and lived a sinless life, shed his blood for mankind and defeated death. The lead angel in this order, the guardian cherub, is fallen and we know him as Satan. In Isaiah 14:12-14 it appears that Satan didn't like the idea of serving mankind, particularly because he himself was so beautiful, so he found a way to rule over mankind by corrupting mankind and he now receives worship himself.

Vs. 20-23 Sidon is always associated with Tyre and receives the next word of coming judgment.

Vs. 24-26 Yet, at the coming of Christ to establish His kingdom on earth, Israel will be reestablished and secure. Even in all of this, the purpose is that all the nations will know that the Lord is God. Notice the briars and thorns here and in Isaiah 55:13.

Yesterday we read in Psalm 110 that Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God. Jesus is now the new ruler of this world and the old one has been judged. It would seem that nothing has changed except for this new nation on earth that doesn't have a land or a common language. This new nation is reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. In this time before God redeems Israel, we are following our Lord on earth. Our very existence means that Jesus is coming to set everything in order. When the full number of Gentiles is in (Rom. 11:25), then the last week for Israel begins. In the Tribulation Israel will suffer but will defeat Satan by testifying to a dying world. Then the King will come and reign. The guardian cherub will receive his eternal punishment, and mankind will be fully redeemed. Then we can get on with what we were created for, to live with the Lord forever.

Hebrews 11:17-31

Now, in this section of the "hall of faith," the trick is really to understand what is being said about this faith. We are covering hundreds of years of people living and suffering on this dusty planet. Notice that there was sacrifice, suffering, and danger involved in almost all of this. This "faith in difficulty" is some of what the writer is trying to make clear to his weak and wobbly readers. Underline the names. When it says, *by faith Moses*, notice that one of those is not Moses.

Vs. 17-22 This is the promise to Abraham and how it was maintained *by faith* in Abraham's family. It wasn't pretty, but they still held on to the promise.

Vs. 23-28 This is Moses paying a price to live for the promise *by faith*. Faith costs something and requires courage. Notice that all of these examples involved resisting others in order to follow God in faith. The readers of this letter were being encouraged to do the same.

Vs. 29-31 The people showed *faith* by walking through the Red Sea. Even greater, in a way, was Rahab's *faith* forty years later; because she fully believed in the truth of that event and the God who did it. It was that faith that not only saved Rahab, but put her in the lineage of Jesus.

Following Jesus in the harvest is by faith, and in order to serve Him and receive His promises, it means turning our backs on a lot of things just as these people did. To serve Christ without

having to turn our backs on little or nothing might just be the way the enemy is fooling us and placating us with a comfortable Christianity. The harvest is dirty; the work is hard, and the resistance is real. Real faith gets the job done, but it is not easy.

Psalm 111

This is a great song and psalm. For your information, there are three words, repeated five times each (one without an "s") and when you put them together, they make a great little title for this psalm: The _____! Or you could add a word here or there to make a smoother title like: Praise the _____ of the _____!

Vs. 1-3 What a great declaration of God's greatness.

Vs. 4-9 This is what *He* has done and why He deserves such praise.

V. 10 We've read this in Proverbs 1:7, 4:7 and 9:10, and it is just as true for us today. Fearing and revering the Lord for His awesome power and wisdom gives us wisdom.

Have fun.

Proverbs 27:15-16

It is hard to find any order to these thoughts if you only go one or two verses at a time. I would suggest that this is a block from vs. 11 to 16, and that vs. 11-12 hold the leading thought. Verses 13-16 show things that a person suffers, if he is not prudent from the beginning in entering into relationships.

NOVEMBER 14

Ezekiel 29-30

I was caught off guard by this reading. I've been reading like this since 1995, and what I read today sent me thinking. I finally saw something that was right in the text, but I had never paid attention to it. I'll mention it when we get there.

Ezekiel 29

Vs. 1-12 According to 2 Kings 25:1-3, the siege of Jerusalem began on 9.10.10, that is, the ninth year (of Nebuchadnezzar's reign) in the tenth month on the tenth day. The city would be taken on 11.4.9, exactly a year and a half later. Notice when this judgment is given. 10.10.12 would be the tenth year in the tenth month on the twelfth day (January 5, 587 B.C.). The siege had been going for a year and there were only six months to go.

Vs. 6-9 Notice why this punishment is promised. Egypt was one of those nations that enticed Judah to break off their relationship with Babylon. Egypt promised them protection in spite of what God told the people through the prophets.

Vs. 9-10 It was typical back then to see the king as a little god or the god's man on earth. You see this as far in history as Rome, and I tend to think that the Roman Catholic Church borrowed the idea with the pope (especially in light of Matt. 23:9). God always opposed this kind of arrogance, especially since He is the Creator.

Also, keep underlining *know that I am the Lord*. Even as this phrase is used in this section, it raises some interesting questions.

Vs. 13-16 Egypt would also be taken into captivity and allowed to return after 40 years. Their return would coincide with the return of Israel. Notice too, that they would never again be a world power.

Vs. 17-20 This is the defeat of Egypt. Notice the time marker. It is now 27.1.1 (April 26, 571 B.C.). This is 16 years later and still a couple of years (about 568 B.C.) before Nebuchadnezzar set up his throne over those rocks that Jeremiah buried. This is what really got me thinking. When Jeremiah buried those stones in Jeremiah 43:10, he told the people who were in rebellion that God would bring Nebuchadnezzar to Egypt to destroy it and to judge them, but that judgment wouldn't come for another 15-18 years. They must have thought that Jeremiah (and God) were nuts as the years kept slipping away and nothing happened. That is almost the same amount of time from the first time Nebuchadnezzar entered Jerusalem, mildly looting the temple and taking Daniel and others as prisoners, to the destruction of Jerusalem. It just made me think how patient God is, on the one hand, and how He uses time and silence to build and prove and test our faith (or lack of faith) in His Word.

After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in 586, he went back to work on Tyre. Neb never could defeat the city, but it did surrender in about 572. Since there must have been an agreement for peace, and since the city fathers had shipped off the wealth of the city to an undisclosed location, Nebuchadnezzar had nothing to pay his troops. So, they went to Egypt. Neb had already broken the power of Egypt, so it was an easy victory and the place was full of riches (gold, silver, iPads, flat screen TVs, etc.) for his men.

V. 21 It is hard to fully understand what this verse is saying. The mention of a *horn* usually has something to do with a deliverer or king. One guess would be that when Zerubbabel (of the house of David) led the first group of exiles back to Israel, he read from Ezekiel when they arrived in Jerusalem.

Ezekiel 30

Vs. 1-4 These verses have a Tribulation/ end-times feeling and might have some connection to v. 21. Egypt will receive millennial blessing.

Vs. 5-19 Back to God's judgment on Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar. Notice vs. 8 and 19. There are still two more to come in this chapter.

Vs. 20-26 This would be about April 29, 587. During the siege of Jerusalem, Egypt challenged Nebuchadnezzar and Neb left Jerusalem for a short time. If you remember, it was during this time in Jerusalem that the wealthy reclaimed their slaves. But Neb "broke the arms" of Egypt and returned to finish up with Jerusalem, knowing that Egypt wouldn't be a threat any longer.

Hebrews 11:32-12:13

I guess the question in this section is, "How long do you pursue God in faith?" The answer is found in all the faithful examples of the lives to which the author is about to refer.

Hebrews 11:32-40

Vs. 32-39 You'll notice that vs. 32-34 seem positive and the rest seem negative. But if you look into the lives of David and the prophets, there was a lot of "negative" for them to endure too, as they followed in faith.

V. 37 Tradition has it that Isaiah was sawn in two by King Manasseh.

V. 38 This wandering could have been David or Elijah or others or all of them together.

V. 39 This is something Jesus mentioned, that many prophets and kings longed to see what the disciples saw, but didn't see it.

V. 40 The fulfillment was in Jesus, and we have tasted the first fruit of this blessing, which is also the fulfillment of their faith. They held on through long, difficult times, following in faith, living and dying for their faith. Obviously the writer and the Spirit are saying that these people (and we too) ought to do the same.

Hebrews 12:1-13

Vs. 1-2 The running of this race in faith *with endurance* is defined and modeled by our Savior. If you unpack these verses you know what a disciple is supposed to do on earth. What would you say a disciple is supposed to do?

Vs. 3-4 Jesus is the model of living, and living by faith. The question of "how long" is answered in Jesus: to the death. The Hebrew readers of this letter had not yet gone that far.

Vs. 5-11 The word *discipline* means "child training," so this isn't strictly punitive. It is comprehensive training as any parent would do in teaching and nurturing a child. Notice the alternating examples of our earthly fathers and God.

V. 10 This *holiness* isn't just "purity," but also being set apart to God and His purpose.

V. 11 It is OK not to feel good when God is teaching us. Just as we learned in Job, it is knowing the goodness of the Lord as revealed in His Word, and knowing He is totally wise that gives us the endurance to hold on in faith. Job did it. All the people in Hebrews 11 did it. Jesus did it. Therefore, the Hebrews (and we) should do it too.

V. 12-13 This is a warning. If a person allows a weak faith to wreck them, their hurt can grow deeper, to the place of shipwrecking their faith and taking them away from God's rest and blessing, possibly for the duration of their time on earth. We've seen this expressed by the writer in other ways. Paul and Jesus said the same things.

Psalm 112

This is a great psalm and must have been written by someone who had gone through deep trials and darkness, but endured by faith and proved God to be true to His Word. This song, and its confidence, is the result.

Vs. 1 This sets the tone and subject of the psalm. This is about a person *who fears the Lord* and lives in His commandments. Psalm 1 and Psalm 119 give the idea of always meditating on the Word.

Vs. 2-3 The person will have and leave a godly heritage. Notice that v. 3 is a refrain in this psalm that marks the changing of the subject.

Vs. 4-6 This person also brings God's truth, and with it, all the character of God, His graciousness, mercy and love. He brings God's justice. He is remembered forever.

Vs. 7-9 His heart is secure and he is unwavering, helping those around him. He will be honored .

V. 10 This is also kind of like how Psalm 1 ends.

This is a lot of encouragement to stay in God's Word. That is exactly what we're doing.

Proverbs 27:17

Sounds like a great title for a book. This assumes that the men are godly men. This is exactly what Jesus meant by making disciples. But, He also cautioned that a disciple is not above his teacher. We ourselves need to become the kind of iron that can sharpen other iron. That's what we're trying to do here.

NOVEMBER 15

Ezekiel 31-32

These are the final two chapters focused on the punishment to Egypt. We need to ask ourselves why God was so upset with Egypt. If anything, it seems they were trying to help Israel. We have four chapters of judgment directed to them. In reality, Egypt encouraged Israel to rebel against

God. They promised a false hope and they used Israel as a pawn against Nebuchadnezzar, trying to occupy his strength and distract him. Jerusalem was off the beaten track, in the hills. If Neb had to go after Jerusalem, he couldn't trouble himself with the Egyptians. For all of these reasons, Egypt deserved to be punished. It was because they encouraged Jerusalem and Judah to disobey the Lord and to scorn the words of the prophets.

Ezekiel 31

The point of this entire chapter is that if God punished Assyria for its dealings with Israel, He would certainly punish Egypt.

V. 1 This prophecy was pronounced on 11.3.1. This is two months after the prophecy in Ezekiel 30:20. On 11.4.9, just a month later, Jerusalem would fall.

Vs. 2-14 The example of Assyria. Kings and their kingdoms were often likened to great trees, and the kings of trees were the cedars of Lebanon. In Daniel 4, Nebuchadnezzar will also hear this illustration used for him.

V. 14 This is the reason God did this. It kind of goes along the lines of Matthew 23:12, *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*

Vs. 15-17 Many smaller nations looked to the larger, stronger nations for support and help. When Egypt would fall, many nations would mourn and be shaken.

V. 18 And this will happen to Pharaoh too.

Ezekiel 32

There are a lot of repeated phrases. Enjoy.

V. 1 This is now about a year and a half after Jerusalem fell. This chapter is out of chronological order because it is dealing with the judgment on Egypt. Actually, chapter 33 takes place two months before this. By now the exiles knew that Jerusalem had fallen. As this was written, Nebuchadnezzar was setting up Gedaliah as governor of Israel (2 Kings 25:24). Soon Gedaliah would be assassinated, and the remnant of the survivors would kidnap Jeremiah and head south to Egypt where they would be safe. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if this prophecy coincided with either the remnant marching south with Jeremiah, or with Jeremiah burying the stone before the palace.

Vs. 2-8 This is a very poetic and cosmic pronouncement of destruction on Egypt. Apparently Egypt had a pretty high opinion of itself. It is as if a mythical god were dying.

Vs. 9-10 Again, all the nations would mourn as they watched this.

Vs. 11-15 And God will use Nebuchadnezzar as His tool. It is interesting how God uses the arrogance of men to accomplish His purposes. In Neb's mind he was simply doing what he wanted to do and being successful at it because he was such a super-awesome dude. Unknown to him, he'd soon be back in Babylon eating hay.

Vs. 16-32 This is the lamentation, or funeral chant, that was given to Ezekiel two weeks later. Pharaoh will have some famous company in Hades. What a poetic consolation prize, but alas, there is no party in hell, only punishment. What is interesting is that soon after this, God personally would humble Nebuchadnezzar. While Neb was grazing, God would teach him to respect the Lord and thereby save Nebuchadnezzar the fate of Pharaoh. It sounds weird to say, but it is possible that Neb and Darius the Mede were saved.

As disciples, we need to learn the entire counsel of God. It is great to share redemption and the love of Christ, but when God says so much about judgment for the rebellious, how can we ignore

that? We need to present God as He is, not as we would like to dress Him, to be more acceptable to a fallen world.

Hebrews 12:14-29

Vs. 14-17 Notice that there is a warning here to avoid three things. Giving up on following Christ and shipwrecking your faith causes damage on earth. This is not talking about loss of salvation, but the loss of blessing and protection (all found in growing close to Christ) that enduring in faith and following Him on earth brings. It is like choosing to walk in front of a car as a Christian. You'll still go to heaven, but the rest of your time on the planet will be walked with a limp, or worse.

Vs. 18-24 Notice the contrast between vs. 18-21 and vs. 22-24. In 22-24, notice again that Jesus is the true focus.

Vs. 25-29 This has come full circle to Hebrews 1:2. God has spoken through His Son. But notice that it is the Christians who are supposed to give heed to this. This is for us.

V. 29 This could be looked at as a warning, or it could be looked at as saying that God consumes what is offered to Him. Depending on our relationship to God, being consumed by Him and His love might not be a bad thing. To hold ourselves back when we are called by the glory of His love and mercy, by His Son, to present ourselves as living sacrifices, is to miss what full faith and abandonment to His love would give us. Jesus says in John 14:21-23 that what we truly gain is Him. It's time for disciples to step into the fire and be consumed.

Psalms 113-114

"Psalms 113-118 form the Hallel, a collection of songs sung at the great festivals of Israel--Passover, Pentecost, the Tabernacles--as well as on other holy days. At the Passover, for example, Psalms 113-114 were sung before the meal, and 115-118 after it." ([Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 875)

Psalm 113

If you want to see something interesting, compare this psalm to Mary's prayer in Luke 1:46-55. Mary would not have been taught in the synagogues, but she would have known these songs. Also, as Mary declared this, she was standing before Elizabeth who was *advanced in years*, who had been barren, but was now suddenly pregnantly plump.

V. 1 Notice that this call to praise is to the *servants of the Lord*.

Vs. 2-3 Basically this is when the Lord should be praised, that is, forever and every waking moment.

Vs. 4-6 This would have been a good guiding thought in thinking about the Passover and it was an important thought for Mary.

Vs. 7-9 This was not only seen in God saving Israel, but Mary found it true in that God reached out to the lowly in bringing His good news to the world.

Psalm 114

Vs. 1-2 This is not only talking about Israel coming out of Egypt, but it shows that God was present among His people as He led them. *Judah became His sanctuary* and *Israel became His dominion*.

Vs. 3-6 This is the crossing of the Red Sea and the fireworks on top of Mt. Sinai. The physical world responded to God's presence not only in obedience, but with fear.

Vs. 7-8 Interestingly enough, God not only used His power to make the creation tremble, but also to provide water for His people. God's presence was for the good of His people and was a sign of His love. Notice the shaking in today's reading of Hebrews. Apparently shaking comes before blessing.

Proverbs 27:18-20

If v. 18 were linked to v. 17, that sharpening process would have to do with diligence and loyalty.

Verses 19-20 look like they hang together well. Verse 19 has to do with the heart, and v. 20 has to do with the eyes, which really are regulated by the heart. Jesus said a lot about the heart, and something we as disciples need to attend to. We need to be cultivating our own hearts and to be conscious of when we are having heart problems.

NOVEMBER 16

Ezekiel 33-34

Chapters 33-38 are a major section of Ezekiel dealing with God's blessing on Israel. What is interesting is that this section begins with a re-commissioning of Ezekiel. You can imagine that Ezekiel was tired and felt used up. There is nothing more thankless than working with stubborn people who blame God for all their problems, seeing themselves as honest victims. Not only had these been a very intense seven years, but he had lost his wife, God using her death as a symbol to the people. Sure, Ezekiel was a great man and had a book of the Bible named after him, but what a price. I don't think Ezekiel had any problem with the proverb for today as it applied to the people, but I'll bet he had his days when he himself felt crushed.

Ezekiel 33

Vs. 1-16 I wonder if Ezekiel knew why his mission to the people as a watchman was being renewed? God spoke to Ezekiel at the beginning of his ministry, making him a watchman in 3:17. As you read this, without departing on a guilt trip, this commissioning is also a part of our commissioning as disciples in the harvest. Even when Jesus' disciples were rejected, they were still to shake the dust off of their feet and warn the people of their coming judgment. Sometimes people respond better to a warning than to flowery words of having a good life, being empowered and receiving heavenly love. In the West, even unbelievers think God loves them and they're going to heaven. As the atheist Penn Jillette, of Penn and Teller, has said, how much do you have to hate a person not to tell them about God's judgment if you really believe that. The simple gospel that Jesus gave His disciples was that the kingdom was coming and that people needed to turn from their sins to God. This message of warning is in that simple presentation of the good news.

V. 11 Notice the grace in this to the people. This section is beginning to set the foundation for the blessing of God to the nation. There is hope for anyone who turns to God. God's heart is inclined to them.

Vs. 17-20 This is all very ironic. The people should have known the Lord but didn't. Now they felt they could judge Him. This is the kind of bitterness and rationalizing that keeps people from turning to the Lord. They are lost and blind and they blame God. That is still true today. Everyone blames God for the mess in the world and sometimes for the mess in their lives. What is interesting in the first verses of Daniel is that these teens knew that it was God who had acted against Judah and Jerusalem, and they understood why.

Vs. 21-22 Jerusalem fell on 11.4.9 (the eleventh year in the fourth month on the ninth day) of Zedekiah's reign. This was a year later. (The German says the eleventh year and 10th month, or six months later.) Notice that Ezekiel says it was the 12th year of their exile. Ezekiel's

deportation and Zedekiah's reign began at the same time. It was a long way to walk from Jerusalem to Babylon and took over four months. And, I'm sure the army didn't begin to bring people back the next day after they broke into the city. The Babylonians had to tear down Jerusalem and set up a provisional government. With the travel time, all this probably took six months to a year. And remember, back then, cell phone reception was spotty at best.

The news finally reached Ezekiel and the exiles in Babylon. It had been seven or eight years since God had struck Ezekiel with this muteness. Now judgment had struck Jerusalem. This weary prophet was vindicated, but neither he nor the people had anything to celebrate. It was time for Ezekiel to stand again, and, as a watchman, begin to point the people to the future as God directed him. But in directing the people to God's blessing, there would still be judgments to pronounce and attitudes to correct. I wonder if the false prophets were suddenly (and finally) out of business.

Vs. 23-29 This is addressed to the remnant with Gedaliah in Jerusalem. We've read about them in Jeremiah 42. God was going to cleanse Israel down to the last person. The fact that there was still a remnant of people didn't mean God would rebuild with them. Their analogy with Abraham was silly. He was righteous and they were very unrighteous. Abraham followed God. They didn't know God at all. In fact, we saw in Jeremiah how this remnant asked Jeremiah to inquire of God for them and then accused Jeremiah of lying when he brought them the Lord's word.

Vs. 30-33 The work of rebuilding the nation would begin with the people in exile. Ezekiel had become a rock star to them. He was a famous man. That was step one in God's plan. But they hadn't really turned their hearts toward God. That would come and they would really understand that a *real* prophet was among them.

Ezekiel 34

In blessing Israel, God will give them a great Good Shepherd and a pretty good under shepherd.

Vs. 1-10 God declares His judgment on the leaders of the people. If you read John 10:1-18, it seems that Jesus must have had this section in Ezekiel in mind when He spoke those words and declared Himself to be the Good Shepherd. What is also apparent by Jesus' words is that God's word through Ezekiel hasn't been fulfilled and is still future. Jesus said that all who came before Him were thieves and robbers and that the sheep did not heed them. Even with exceptional men like Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah, the normal leaders were still a disaster. Remember when Nehemiah left and returned, how he found everything in disarray. Then read the final book of the OT, Malachi, and notice how God takes the leaders to task for their lack of leadership and devotion to God.

Vs. 11-22 Jesus Himself will be the Shepherd. What a great future promise for Israel. In this too, Jesus will judge between the sheep. Still, if Jesus is King over all the nations, who will do the day-to-day over the nation of Israel?

Vs. 23-24 How about the resurrected shepherd of Israel, David? Obviously this is in the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 25-31 I'll bet this was easier for Ezekiel to preach. I'll bet he felt great walking home. I'll bet the reality of the present hit him like a hammer when he walked into that empty house. This would have been the same for all the people hearing that message. What a great hope for the future, but what an awful, present situation.

In the harvest, this is the same for us. We live in many present distresses, yet it is the truth of God and the life of His Spirit in us that keeps us strong as we walk in faith. This is why our joy has to be in the Lord, and our hope has to be in Him and His appearing. This world is not our

home, and for many, it isn't a place of comfort. But, the Shepherd is coming and that should give us joy.

Hebrews 13

The author of Hebrews is being pastoral, or apostolic, in giving guiding exhortations to the people. This is a great closing.

Vs. 1-6 There is a lot going on in these very general exhortations.

Vs. 1-2 This sure sounds like Romans 12, vs. 9-10 in particular.

V. 3 More and more Christians were adorning the inside of prisons. Paul told Timothy of the bravery of Onesiphorus, finding and visiting him in a Roman prison. It's hard to be brave in visiting someone if you know they might throw you in jail too. The focus is on encouraging those suffering for Christ.

V. 4 Marriage is the proper place to express sexuality. God takes all sexual deviation, including your "run of the mill" adultery and immorality, very seriously.

Vs. 5-6 These verses go together. God will take care of us. The more I read Jesus' words, the better I understand that our seeking of comfort works against our trust in the Lord. Some of the wording here seems like it might have come out of Psalm 27.

Vs. 7-17 This section is bracketed by the exhortation to remember and obey the leaders. When you read this you get a picture of what leaders were to do for the group and why the people were to follow these leaders during such hard times. The people were to follow the leaders in resisting false teaching and in holding firm in faith through the tough times. Most of all, the leaders were to direct people to Christ as in v. 15.

Vs. 18-19 This sounds a little like Paul in Ephesians 6:18-19.

Vs. 20-21 What a great benediction. This sounds like work in the harvest to me.

Vs. 22-25 This is a great ending, though vague in detail. It sounds like Paul in Philippians 2:19-23, only that here, Timothy had been a prisoner and released. Obviously the writer of Hebrews couldn't have been Timothy. So much for that theory.

V. 24 Were the readers located in Rome, so that those who had been from Italy were sending greetings? Or, was the writer in Rome, and were the believers in Italy sending greetings to the readers in some other place?

What do you get from this entire letter to strengthen you in your work in the harvest? What speaks to me is that now, God has spoken through His Son, so don't give up or give in.

Psalm 115

V. 1 This declaration to give glory to God has David's favorite formula. The *steadfast love* and *faithfulness* of God stand together.

Vs. 2-3 This is almost like Psalm 2 where the nations rage. Here, at least in David's reign, as the nations visited the new and improved Israel they didn't see idols all over the landscape. Therefore the nations asked where Israel's god was. Well, He is a living God, with a big "G" and He occupies the heavens.

Vs. 4-8 This section works its way to v. 8 where you become what you make.

Vs. 9-11 How hard it is to have a heart of faith and seek your help in a living, invisible God. It proves one's faith.

Vs. 12-13 God's remembrance is keyed to many things, but particularly to the promise to Abraham. (Luke 1:54-55)

Vs. 14-15 God is the One who gives increase and blessing, because He is the living Creator.

Vs. 16-18 This declaration seems like an oath to obey, to bless and to praise the Lord. It is interesting that he mentions that the earth was given to mankind. That earth and plan were ruined, but God will renew everything and then we can begin anew with the Lord.

Proverbs 27:21-22

V. 21 Both the crucible and the furnace show what is in the metals. If they are pure, this testing shows it. If there is impurity in either, the heat brings it to the surface. I guess this is what the praise of others does to us. It reveals the truth of our hearts and what is in us. That puts a different perspective on God allowing us to be well thought of. It makes me think of how important those 25 years were for Abraham, or those 40 years for Moses, or those 10 years for David, or those 14 years for Paul (although he also needed a thorn), to keep them humble in the testing flame of the praise of others. It is good to be humbled, and through that humbling finally and deeply to understand it is the Lord, not we, who accomplishes things.

V. 22 The foolishness in a fool is through every molecule. Or as C.S. Lewis said in The Magician's Nephew, "Now the trouble about trying to make yourself stupider than you really are is that you very often succeed. Uncle Andrew did." And so do we, and sometimes it pickles every molecule of us.

NOVEMBER 17

Ezekiel 35-36

Ezekiel 35

In restoring Israel and bringing them to a place of blessing, God will take away their reproach and their enemies. Of all Jerusalem's neighbors, no one showed the level of hatred that Edom did. To see that this peace was hoped for and connected with the Messiah, look at Luke 1:72-74.

Vs. 1-9 Until we get to v. 5 we don't understand the reason for this judgment, but even so, we won't understand it fully until we get to the prophet Obadiah. The Edomites allowed their hatred and hostility to get the better of them. And then they mocked God. The judgment in Malachi 1:4 shows that God was mad.

Vs. 5-6 Notice the word *because* in both of these verses. This is one of the reasons God is not happy. There is one more reason in a few verses, also introduced by *because*.

V. 9 Notice how often God says, *you will know that I am the Lord*.

Vs. 10-15 Not only did they use their mouths against the Lord, in Obadiah we'll see they were on the temple ruins drinking themselves silly.

Ezekiel 36

Vs. 1-7 You may remember that God had Ezekiel speak to the mountains in chapter 6. For the renewed people of Israel, the mountains will be a place of blessing instead of judgment. God will humble the nations that reviled and reproached Israel.

V. 5 Notice how God refers back to the past chapter in explaining why His judgment is so hot.

Vs. 8-15 Notice v. 11. This section is hinting at a change of heart that God will give Israel. The nations will no longer be able to ridicule Israel for devouring its own people. God will bless them and change them.

Vs. 16-32 In this second part of the message, God declares why He will bless them. If you underline the word *name*, you'll figure this out. Romans 2:24 mentions this. Also, in Daniel 9, Daniel utters one of the best prayers in the Bible, absolutely stellar (and probably what he was praying in chapter 6 of Daniel). God's concern here was also Daniel's concern there.

Vs. 16-21 The name of God was blasphemed among the nations because of Israel. See Romans 2:24.

Vs. 22-32 This is clearly millennial blessing. Notice the steps in this. First, the Lord will gather them from all nations. Some think this will happen during the first three years of the Tribulation, when the nation of Israel will be at peace. It will definitely happen at the end of the Tribulation when the Lord returns. Verse 26 is the second step. There was a partial fulfillment of this on the day of Pentecost. Peter mentioned that the prophecy in Joel was fulfilled in the coming of the Spirit, but there, like here, it is only a partial fulfillment of what will happen to the entire nation. Apparently there will be some blast of recognition at the beginning of the Tribulation so that the nation (the majority of the people) will understand that Jesus is the Messiah. They will need that to begin to fulfill their destiny during the Tribulation. Verse 28 will be fulfilled after the Tribulation, with Jesus ruling the world from Jerusalem.

Vs. 33-38 This promise of blessing ties the two parts of the chapter together. What an amazing blessing, and it will be the hope of every believing Jew during the Tribulation. I think that as disciples, this promise for them gives us hope and perspective too. After all, we have been blessed with the firstfruits of that blessing: salvation and the Holy Spirit.

James 1:1-18

"Everybody loves Romans. Nobody loves James." At least that was sort of the motto during the Reformation. This letter was written by James, the brother of Jesus, who became the leader of the church in Jerusalem. It is very likely that James is the very first letter written. It went out to the Christian Jews who were scattered throughout the Roman Empire, but some think, particularly to the east of Israel. Why to Jewish Christians? During the birth of the church at Pentecost, the city was full of Jewish pilgrims from all nations. During those days and weeks, the city swelled from the few thousand who lived there, to over 25,000 people. During that time there was a great harvest in the city. The numbers mentioned in Acts 2 and Acts 4 suggest that 8,000 men came to faith, besides women, and more people were being added to the church every day. When these people left Jerusalem, there was a need for teaching and follow up. We know of what happened north and west of Israel thanks to Acts, but many of these people returned to their homes in the east, toward Persia and Babylon. It is thought that some of the apostles went east to work with these people, some as far as India. The ministry to Jewish converts everywhere, and to those in the eastern lands of the Roman Empire, was the focus of James' letter.

Vs. 1-4 It is interesting to me that the benefits of *trials* are mentioned right at the beginning. Paul waits until chapter 5 in Romans. A new view of trials is inherent to a new view of life on this planet once we've been born in Christ. These new believers would face persecution when they returned home to their Jewish communities. Notice that trials are to make believers steadfast and able to endure.

Vs. 5-8 This is best seen in the context of the trials. The *double-minded man* is what we've just seen in Hebrews. Either God has spoken in Jesus or He hasn't. If a man straddles a fence he gets hurt. It's that simple. Certainly some of these converts under persecution would be brought to the point of doubt. Jesus spoke often about the reward of endurance.

Vs. 9-11 Position in life might be one of those things that makes trials hard to bear. The poor need to rejoice that the message of the gospel was meant for them. The rich are not better off spiritually because they have resources. They also have a lot to lose. You could imagine that

there would be financial repercussions for those who had zealous Jewish employers who didn't think Jesus was cool.

V. 12 This is a summary declaration of the benefit of enduring trials. Notice again the word *steadfast*. This is what David learned from God as a result of running from Saul for ten years.

Vs. 13-15 When a person falls in times of trial and trouble, it is not God who lured them into a fall. The mechanism is already within us. God allows trials to test us and reveal what is within, but He doesn't lure us in to sinning. Hard times do funny things to all of us. In Luke 8:13, the seed that sprang up quickly fell away in time of persecution when temptation overcame it. The next seed was overcome by the cares and riches and pleasures of life. Persecution can also affect our jobs, our possessions and our comfort.

Vs. 16-18 In trials, as new creatures in Christ, as the firstfruits of His salvation, we look for blessings, not on earth, where moth and rust corrupt, but from the Father, who never varies in His love and approval of us as He sees us in Christ. Trials have a way of making us think we are under punishment from God. It is in those times of trial that we are able to appreciate the very subtle and quiet gifts He gives us that become more meaningful than stuff.

Following Christ in the harvest, we learn, like so many other disciples who have come before us, that God's love is steadfast and faithful.

Psalm 116

This is a beautiful psalm/song of being delivered. In Ezekiel 36:16-32, the *name* of the Lord was very important. Underline *name* here also. It is the key to understanding this psalm and living as a disciple in hard times.

Vs. 1-4 This kind of sounds like the effect of obeying James 1:2-4. How else do you experience this? Notice when David learned to seek help.

Vs. 5-7 How does your soul learn true rest and peace? The psalmist made God his hope. He cried out; he endured and he was never the same.

Vs. 8-9 Apparently the writer was in deep despair. This definitely sounds like David in Psalm 27.

Vs. 10-11 This is the bitterness of feeling helpless and having powerful enemies like David did. Notice that God didn't take David out of this. He led him through it.

Vs. 12-14 If this is David, it is his constant refrain that as a result of God's mercy, he would praise God before all the people and all the nations. Calling *on the name of the Lord* here is the result of calling *on the name of the Lord* in v. 4. There, it was out of desperation. Here, it is out of praise for deliverance.

Vs. 15-19 The psalmist wasn't killed and was able to praise God in the tabernacle or temple in Jerusalem. Even when God allows His saints to be killed, they are still precious. When we get to Revelation, we'll see that the slain saints were very precious to God. They not only defeated Satan, but they revealed the righteousness of God's judgment against the peoples of the earth. Their secret was that they called *on the name of the Lord*.

Proverbs 27:23-27

Vs. 23-27 Especially here in the west, we are unconsciously ruled by our resources and our wealth. Even as believers we still weigh our stuff and our needs above the need to give everything to the Lord and work in the harvest. How different are Jesus' words to the disciples, *pray....give us this day our daily bread*. The Lord has put what we need before us and if we maintain and "honor" Him in it, we will never lack what we need, spiritually, physically or emotionally. According to Jesus, what makes us fruitless and needy is desiring too much for

ourselves. See Luke 8:14. If we take care of the things that are important to Him, we will be taken care of by the things He has produced in and around us as we have labored for Him.

V. 23 This is the key and leading thought of the proverb. Tend the flock and all will be well. As disciples, we need to tend the flock first, making disciples who are stable, growing in the Word and obeying our Lord by following Him in the harvest. He will take care of us if we follow Him first and obey. Being anxious to meet our needs first leads to fruitlessness and fear of loss. Notice Jesus' words to Peter in John 21:15-19. This "fisher of men" was to begin by feeding lambs and tending and feeding sheep. The entire church is to be a disciple-making community and the disciples who comprise it need to be tended and fed.

V. 24 The NIV has a better translation here, *crown is not secure for all generations*. The German translation implies that the crown doesn't protect forever.

Vs. 25-27 Even if it is not stuff that the Lord provides through our service, realizing that our time on earth has mattered for Christ will keep us clothed and nourished. Knowing that there are people who have been brought closer to Christ as disciples and are going beyond us, making disciples, who make disciples, will give us something that few people on earth possess. And, it will be a heritage and a help to those closest to us.

Luke 12:31 *Instead, seek his kingdom, and these things shall be added to you.* 32 *"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.*

NOVEMBER 18

Ezekiel 37-38

Resurrection at any level is actually creation. When you look at the raising of Lazarus or Jesus, after days of death, their bodies were not "livable" in any respect. Their bodies had to be re-created before their spirits could return to them. Dead tissue is no longer tissue. Dead blood is no longer blood. You get the picture, right? God is, after all, God, and He can do that stuff in a milli-second. But what about bringing to life an entire nation? Israel, north and south, were both scattered among the nations. For most nations, when this happened, they ceased to be a people ever again. Since we've read Ezra and Nehemiah, we know that God brought Judah back. In Daniel we'll see how He did it. Here, Ezekiel is given a vision and a message that the nation of Israel will not only rise again, but that they will be a nation before God forever.

Again, keep observing and underlining stuff.

Ezekiel 37

Vs. 1-14 I can't imagine what this vision looked like. I'll bet it was graphic and powerful for Ezekiel. And, what an amazing promise for the nation.

Vs. 1-6 Here is the set-up and the question to Ezekiel. Could God bring life again? Ezekiel had seen the glory of the Lord so He gave a wise answer.

Vs. 7-10 They became an army full of life. Ready for a mission? This will certainly be Israel at the beginning of the Tribulation, preaching the gospel of the kingdom throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations. See Matthew 24:14.

Vs. 11-14 Twice God says here that they will know that He is the Lord. In a way, I don't think this is referring to the resurrection of the OT believers, but rather to the raising up of a believing nation. Those who are with Christ awaiting resurrection already know the Lord. They don't need to be convinced. At the beginning of the Tribulation, Israel will not only be convinced and know the Lord, but they will be willing to give their lives so that mankind can hear the gospel and be saved.

Vs. 15-23 Israel had been a divided nation since the death of Solomon about 400 years earlier. Once God "raised" the nation, He would unify them. Here is where it pays to remember Genesis. Remember that Jacob gave the firstborn blessing to Joseph, signified in blessing Ephraim. But God, for some reasons we can understand, blessed Judah and gave his descendants the kingship of the nation, which came to David and then to Jesus. When Israel divided as a nation, Judah and Benjamin stayed together, symbolized by Judah; and the other ten tribes joined together, symbolized by Ephraim. When Judah was taken into captivity, there were people of all 12 tribes living in the southern kingdom. They came to Judah because the true worship of God was in the temple and most of the kings of Judah still respected that. The kings of the northern tribes never worshiped Yahweh. When you see the register of who returned to Israel from the Babylonian captivity (exiles from Judah) in 1 Chronicles and Ezra, all the tribes are represented.

V. 22 Just for interest, notice the mention of *the mountains of Israel*. We've seen these mountains mentioned before and we'll see them again. And by the way, who will that king be?

Vs. 24-27 This is a very cool section. Notice the three things God will do here. The people won't be resurrected believers because they can have children. This prophecy of David has to be literal and will obviously be for the Millennial Kingdom. He is the first resurrected person we know of who will have a job.

Notice here the mentions of the *sanctuary*. We'll be getting the blueprints soon. This is a big deal.

Ezekiel 38

Men have written books about this nation. Some people suggest it is Russia or parts of Russia and its allies, because of the references to *the uttermost parts of the north*. If you look far above Israel on the map, guess who's there. You'll notice that Iran is also part of this group. But as you make your observations on this chapter, here are some guiding thoughts.

Vs. 1-6 God has just spoken of giving peace to Israel. This foe will represent the greatest future threat to the nation of Israel. God is going to use this nation to show who He is and to show that Israel is His own possession. In principle, this is the same thing God did with Egypt in the Exodus.

Vs. 7-9 The best time for this battle is during the Tribulation. And the best time during the Tribulation is in the first 3.5 years, possibly near the end of that time. Israel will be at peace and will dwell securely (v. 14, also). These nations will come in to loot and destroy Israel. It is possible that this is at the instigation of the antichrist and this defeat might be what tips him over the edge. Their staging area will be the mountains.

Vs. 10-13 During the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation, much of the earth will be destroyed by natural events, and up to two thirds of the world's population will be gone. It will not be a world we recognize, and our dependence on high tech will paralyze the world. Transportation and communication will be reduced drastically. Things like running water and electricity will be gone or very limited. Governments and nations will be in disarray. I don't know if cell phones or the internet will work. I don't think there will be smart bombs or the money and factories to make them, and there may be very little ammunition. I think Einstein is credited with saying, "The third world war will be fought with atomic weapons. The fourth world war will be fought with clubs." It could look pretty primitive, and materials of any kind will be scarce. So the idea of looting Israel might be very accurate, particularly if Israel misses some of the destruction like Goshen did before the Exodus.

Also, the antichrist will not be followed by all nations. Sure, he'll have a very powerful, dark, spiritual backing; but humans are notorious at being rebellious to all spiritual authority, light or darkness. The line I like in C.S Lewis' The Last Battle is "The dwarfs are for the dwarfs." And so

we are. The battle of Armageddon, at the end of the Tribulation, can only happen if forces are coming against the antichrist. In the case of the battle talked about here, this battle will probably happen just before the antichrist walks into the temple and declares himself to be god.

Vs. 14-16 God makes a point of calling on the arrogance of these nations to come down to Israel and be broken. God will vindicate Israel and show the world that He is God. This will be a very important event for several reasons. It will be a testimony to the earth about Israel. As a result, there will be the kind of faith that will cause people around the world to protect the believers of Jesus. There will be godly, spiritual understanding. Those who believe and help the followers of Jesus with just a cup of water will enter the Millennial Kingdom. That will make the antichrist and Satan really mad. And, this army that comes to loot and destroy will bring so many supplies with them that Israel will be able to live off of those supplies for 3.5 years of hiding in the mountains and in the wilderness.

Vs. 17-23 This seems to indicate that this nation will symbolically represent all nations that Satan has used to oppose Israel, Israel being the nation that was to have proclaimed God's redemption to the world. Israel will fulfill this mission during and after the Tribulation. Israel's greatest enemies always came from the north. This will be the ultimate northern enemy.

Vs. 19-23 If you look at what God does here, as seen also in the result stated in v. 23, there will be something about the way God saves Israel that will cause the antichrist to snap. After this, the antichrist will himself attack Jerusalem, kill the two witnesses in Jerusalem, desecrate the temple and begin to exterminate Israel. The people will flee to the mountains, and thankfully, there will be lots of resources of the fallen army so they can hold out in the hills. Remember back to the large armies King Asa and King Jehoshaphat went up against. When God overthrew those armies, the people lived off of the supplies of those armies for years.

Again, when we see how difficult warfare is in a mountainous place like Afghanistan, even with smart bombs and drones, imagine how the antichrist will fare with few weapons and little gasoline. And, the people God is saving, who are scattered in the mountains, will have God supplying resources for them.

James 1:19-2:17

So, just for chuckles, imagine that there is a fairly consistent theme in James. One of the old "criticisms" against James was the seemingly random presentation of topics. Actually, compared to Proverbs, James is a tight formula. So, just for fun, let's think of these people being written to as encountering very hard circumstances because of their faith (kind of like in Hebrews). Stress has a way of breaking us down. Personally we fall apart, and our attitudes, disciplines and routines get shabby. Our relationships start looking messy and our marriages and families begin to unravel. And, of course, it doesn't do church any good either. You'll hear James taught many different ways, so for this time, try to think of those introductory words in 1:2-4, as presenting the general atmosphere or framework for the different situations mentioned in instructing these believers.

James 1:19-27

Vs. 19-21 When life seems out of control, it is easy to react and lose your temper. Anger never works.

Notice the call to meekness. This sounds a little like Peter saying in 1 Peter 5:6, *Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.* Meekness in trials, accepting the working of God, holding tightly to the Word of God, seems to be the recipe throughout all of Scripture. We definitely have seen this in David in The Psalms.

Vs. 22-25 And in these trials, what God shows you in the Word about yourself, you need to respond to. Obviously this is a wonderful general principle seen throughout all of Jesus' teaching (*Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*); but particularly in times of trial, we see something different, sometimes ugly, sometimes rebellious and unfaithful, coming out of us. As we spend time in the Word, in meekness, we need to submit to God and act on what He shows us.

Vs. 26-27 What are you like when events squeeze you? Do you complain and criticize? Or do you huddle closer to God and show compassion to others? Remember in Hebrews, at the end, how the author told the people to go and visit (show mercy) to those in prison? It is the same thought. A true relationship with God gives us a reserve of peace that helps control our tongues and moves us to show compassion. Otherwise, we are just stuck in our own worlds. That doesn't show we belong to Christ.

James 2:1-17

Vs. 1-7 Verses 6-7 return to the difficult situation these believers were facing. It puts the entire situation in perspective. We would normally have a problem with showing partiality, but in times of stress, the situation is intensified.

Vs. 8-13 This sounds very much like what Paul says in Romans 13:8-14, also a chapter about Christians in stress with the Roman government. As disciples in the harvest, we carry our death following our Lord. It is no news to us that we are to face death and danger in the harvest. So, showing His love and compassion and mercy to the lost and to brothers and sisters in Christ is our duty. To allow our love to grow cold because of hard times shows that we are too anchored to this earth and our treasure is down here. See Matthew 24:12.

Vs. 14-17 In good times, you could understand what James is saying. Now, add to this the threat that in showing mercy to others, you yourself could be punished for it, or if you are under stress because of trials and someone shows up at your door. In stress, the temptation is to withdraw into ourselves and to let our hearts shrink. That may be natural, but it is not the supernatural life of Christ in us. We can say we believe, but where is the power and the evidence thereof? Paul told Timothy to suffer *by the power of God*, and that Timothy had not received a spirit of fear, *but of power and love and self control*. (2 Tim. 1)

Looking at the book of James like this makes it a discipleship guide for times of stress. Sometimes suffering for Christ in the power of God is not only God's perfect will for us, but it is the most powerful witness. Just think, two men came to faith in Christ as Jesus hung on the cross. One was the criminal hanging on Jesus' right and the other was a Roman centurion. Jesus never uttered a word. He just suffered. His enemies did all the talking.

Psalm 117

This is a very simple psalm, so I would imagine that as they sang it, there was some repetition and the music must have framed the song well. Notice the *steadfast love* and *faithfulness of the Lord*. This is David's and God's favorite combination.

Also, wouldn't you know it, v. 1 is quoted in the New Testament as the result of Christ's work on the cross and as showing that in God's eternal plan and unfathomable wisdom, He was always planning to save the Gentiles. *And again, "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him."* (Rom. 15:11)

I'm kind of humbled and amazed at how well Paul knew The Psalms and how often The Psalms are quoted regarding Jesus.

Proverbs 28:1

I wonder if this is because the righteous know that God is present, or as Paul says in Philippians 4:5, *Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand.* If you think about it, this might also be what James is saying to the persecuted believers to whom he is writing.

NOVEMBER 19

Ezekiel 39-40:27

Ezekiel 39

Vs. 1-6 It seems that the main action will take place in the mountains toward the Dead Sea and east of the Dead Sea.

Vs. 7-8 During the Tribulation, even though the power of the antichrist will grow and Christians and Jews will be persecuted, God will be active and will let people know that He is at work.

Vs. 9-16 This will be the cleanup of this demolished army. The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 1302, says that the references to locations are all around the Dead Sea. The burial place will actually be in modern-day Jordan. This is the same mountainous region where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found.

Objection is usually taken to the mention of bows and arrows, etc., but after a couple years of devastation as described in Revelation, it will be interesting to see how functional anything is. As mentioned yesterday, Einstein was the one to say that the third world war would be fought with atomic weapons and that the fourth world war would be fought with clubs. God didn't need atomic weapons to destroy Egypt in Exodus, and He doesn't need them today either.

Vs. 17-20 Apparently all of nature will aid in the cleanup.

Vs. 21-29 This event will be known throughout the world, and I think it will give people a reason not to follow the antichrist. It will give many a reason to aid those who follow Christ. The understanding of the world, that God is protecting His own, will be what sets up the separation of the sheep and the goats at the coming of Christ. Most people will rise up in hatred toward God and anyone who names the name of Christ, but there will be many who will see "the handwriting on the wall" and will aid believing Israel and anyone who is a follower of Jesus.

Ezekiel 40

In preparing Israel for the Millennial Kingdom, God will judge Israel's enemies, and Israel as a nation will come to Christ. In these remaining chapters, God shows Ezekiel and Israel where the focal point of the planet will be during that time. It won't just be Jerusalem, but it will be the place where there is healing and where the glory of God resides, the Millennial Temple.

Vs. 1-4 According to the BKC-OT, p.1304, this day may have been the Day of Atonement, October 22, 573 B.C. If Ezekiel had been 30 when he was first called as a prophet, he would now be 55. Since the last time notation in Ezekiel 33:21, thirteen years have passed.

Now, one of the things to do here as you read is either to do a drawing, or look at the drawing of the Millennial Temple at the end of this document. ("The Millennial Temple," Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 1303.)

You'll also find a drawing of the entry gates.

V. 4 The mention to *look with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your heart* sounds like verses from Isaiah 6:10 and Matthew 13:15.

Vs. 5-16 A cubit was normally about 18 inches, or the distance from the elbow to the longest finger. God used a special cubit here which was a cubit plus a handbreadth, so altogether, the stick was about 10.5 feet long. That's 6 inches above a basketball rim. This entire description is

just walking through the east gate. Through the east gate you would walk across the outer court to the east gate of the inner court. Entering the inner court, you would walk straight to the altar, and beyond that, straight into the entrance of the temple, then into the Holy Place and then into the Most Holy Place. So then, the throne of God would face east and basically look through the two east gates and to the Mount of Olives. It will be from the Mount of Olives that the Messiah will return to the city. So it is significant that the description begins here.

Vs. 17-19 This is a basic description of the outer court.

Vs. 20-23 Then they went from the east gate to the north gate.

Vs. 24-28 Then they went from the north gate, around the inner court, to the south gate.

James 2:18-3:18

I'm sure someone has written a book on this, but you wonder what it was like for James to grow up with Jesus as an older brother. Not only was Jesus an older brother, but He was also the firstborn. After Joseph died, Jesus would have had leadership responsibility with his brothers. Up to Jesus' 29th year, He was employed full-time as a carpenter and builder, helping make ends meet in the family. The point I'm getting to is that when Jesus was 29, he didn't just suddenly invent stories to use in His ministry. He probably had all the illustrations He used in ministry before His ministry. That means Jesus probably would have used these observations and stories with His brothers and sisters.

There is something about James' teaching that sounds like he grew up with someone who used a lot of illustrations. Not only that, some of what James says is very reflective of what Jesus said, and we know that months before Jesus' death, his brothers were still unbelieving. That means they didn't follow with Him as disciples and hear Him teach. But maybe they did hear Him teach for years of their lives as Jesus filled in for Joseph, dealing with family matters, taking care of disputes or just shooting the breeze with His brothers.

James 2:18-26

V. 18 The problem here is not how a person is saved (faith or works) but how true faith is seen. I would say this is a problem that every group faces, in that the understanding of some people is that faith can be private and hidden. Jesus didn't believe that. Jesus told His disciples on several occasions that no one lights a lamp and then puts it in a cellar or under a bushel, but rather on a lampstand that all who enter may see the light. James himself might remember an occasion where he and his brothers went with Mary to seize Jesus. Jesus was surrounded by a crowd sitting around Him as He taught, so they couldn't get to Him. No sneak attack was possible. When Jesus was told His mother and brothers wanted to speak to Him, do you remember what Jesus said? After saying that His disciples were His mother and brothers, He said, *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it.* (Luke 8:21) Jesus would have agreed that faith without "doing" was dead.

V. 19 What a powerful verse and truth.

Vs. 20-25 These are great illustrations from the Bible.

Abraham's saving faith was shown in all he did.

Rahab believed and showed this by risking her life to hide the spies. Oddly enough, both Jesus and James were descendants of Rahab. This might have been a family story.

V. 26 There is no contradiction between Paul and James. Paul said that elders and deacons were shown to be faithful and qualified by their actions. Deacons were to be tested first.

Especially in times of stress and persecution, it is easy to hide in the quiet shell of a hidden faith. Faith bears fruit; it is active and bears witness by word and deed. Even Paul had to tell Timothy to get active in spite of his fear.

James 3

This is a very famous section in James. Just so you see what the contrast to a wild tongue is, look now at 3:13-18. It is easy to preach and talk, but what qualifies you to be a teacher is in vs. 13 and 17. What makes you one of those bad preachers is in vs. 14, 15 and 16. I think the need to be a known and vocal teacher in the church was the root problem behind this section. Paul also addressed the church's fascination with being the "mouth," when he taught about gifts in 1 Corinthians 14.

Also, in the synagogue there was a position of a visiting, informal, untrained teacher. Jesus as a "common man" taught in His local synagogue and in many other synagogues. Paul taught in synagogues all the time. Now in the church, that role was broadened and sought after. Everyone wanted to be a teacher, but as vs. 14, 15 and 16 show, the desire behind that ambition was to be known and acknowledged by others, not to feed the flock.

The men who were truly qualified were men of faith, and their faith showed itself in service and mercy, as in v. 17. You can imagine too, if the church and the believers were under stress, it was hard for some to be humble and submit themselves to leaders who told them what James was telling them. There are always people who want to be heard and rail against others.

Notice all the illustrations James used here. Also, notice v. 12.

Particularly if the church and the believers were in stress, they needed to watch their mouths. Spiritual maturity is seen in what we are when we are afraid and shaken. Most husbands and wives are civil with each other, until something goes bad, and the stress of the situation remains or increases. Good times do not show maturity. Hard times show what is in the heart. I think what occasioned this section on the tongue wasn't just a general situation, but the need under pressure for everyone to allow the Spirit to work a deeper control and Christ-likeness in them.

Vs. 1-2 These verses set up the context of the following discussion on the tongue.

Vs. 3-12 The tongue and the challenge of controlling it. Jesus used the illustration a lot. I'll bet James heard this growing up. *You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?* (Matt. 7:16) Interestingly, Jesus was talking about false teachers. I think that further helps define the context of James' teaching here regarding the tongue.

Vs. 13-18 The heart is the real issue behind the tongue.

Psalm 118:1-18

This is another one of those psalms that confirms that if you want the reality of being able to declare the faithfulness of the Lord and to testify to His *steadfast love*, you have to pay the dues. Look at what the psalmist endured. Look at what he learned as he waited on the Lord. That is all in direct proportion to the depth of his distress.

We only have part one of Psalm 118 today, but tomorrow we'll see two verses used to refer to the Lord in the New Testament. That means that it is good to read this portion today with the idea that what David is expressing might also have a prophetic connection to what Jesus felt or experienced.

Vs. 1-4 This is the declaration of praise because of God's *steadfast love*.

Vs. 5-7 We know that David faced enemies, but when you look at Jesus' ministry, He was constantly surrounded by aggressive enemies. In Luke 22:28, just before He died, Jesus said this

to the disciples, *You are those who have stayed with me in my trials*. The word "trials" might sum up His entire ministry. (Verse 6 is found in Hebrews 13:6.)

Vs. 8-9 This is something all of us have to learn. God supplies people to help; but our true help, trust, and hope has to be in the Lord.

Vs. 10-13 David, the anointed king, was pursued and afflicted. So was Jesus.

Vs. 14-16 It is interesting that in this psalm tomorrow it will talk about Jesus, who sat down at the right hand of God.

Vs. 17-18 And in all of the unfairness, the writer (probably David) noticed that he was personally being disciplined in what he was going through. I think of the close call that David had in almost killing Nabal. God rescued David through Abigail and showed David what was in his heart. David knew that God was also teaching him through those tough times to be wise, show mercy, bridle his tongue and control his moods. In Psalm 119 we'll see how David brought his heart under control in those stressful, distressing times he was living through.

Proverbs 28:2

This is a very interesting thought, especially in any election year. What is interesting is that it is based on the hearts of the people, but we always yell at the elected leaders. It seems that if we understood the Word and our world and the Lord and the harvest, we'd just shut up and do our work, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples. But faith in "word only" has a way of wagging its tongue at the situations of life, rather than doing the work of faith and mercy in the harvest.

NOVEMBER 20

Remember to take a look at the "Millennial Temple" at the end of this document.

Ezekiel 40:28-41:26

If you're like me, you don't have as many observations as you do questions from all of this detail.

First, if the temple was already built, why did the angel measure everything with Ezekiel? There is some importance in Ezekiel seeing him measure everything firsthand. I'm sure the angel was "online" with God and could have just said how long, tall and thick everything was. The audience of Ezekiel's prophecy was to have been impressed too. Also, as Ezekiel is taken on this tour and verbally related it (before writing it down), it may have been a "you had to be there" kind of experience, where it was so well communicated orally that it was actually like being there. To alter an idiom, the hearers may have been "spirit-bound."

Second, in the measurements there is repetition. Verse 28 says the south gate was the same size as the other gates, but even here, the angel measured it first. You find eight steps a lot. There is apparently an order and symmetry about everything. It might be worth looking at the diagram of the Millennial Temple and making arrows as you read to trace Ezekiel's journey.

Third, why all the mention of sacrifices?

The sacrifices of Israel were never for the forgiveness of sins (only Christ's sacrifice could do that), but for a faith-inspired obedience looking for the future fulfillment of forgiven sin. *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.* (Heb. 10:4) For the church today, we have the Lord's Supper as a remembrance and memorial of what Jesus did. We are not Israel and so the Levitical sacrifices were not for us. Jesus did say that the celebration of the Lord's Supper was just until His return. Apparently in the Millennium, which will have a very Jewish focus to it, and in which, Israel will fulfill its service before the Lord, sacrifices will be a

memorial remembrance of what Christ did on the cross. The sacrifices belong to the Jews and this will be a way for them to celebrate and remember His sacrifice.

As for the need of a memorial to remember Christ's death, even though Jesus is there, remember that once the Tribulation is over and Jesus is sitting on the throne, people will begin to see Him as any other political figure. Pictures of Him will look like a man. The Millennium will be 1000 years. After twenty years people will forget what happened and a new generation will grow up, only hearing about the Tribulation and Christ's coming. There will still be sin in each person, and each person will have to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God who died to save them. One of the purposes of the Millennium will be to prove to mankind that our real problem is sin, not Satan. Satan will be bound for those thousand years, but rebellion toward "that guy on the throne" will grow. Therefore, in Jerusalem all nations will be told to come to visit and to take part in the memorial commemorating the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God. Apparently toward the end of the Millennium, some nations/people will refuse. See Zechariah 14:16-17.

Ezekiel 40:28-49

Vs. 28-31 From the south gate of the outer court, the angel led Ezekiel across the outer court to the south gate of the inner court. This gate was a mirror image of the south gate of the outer court, that is, identical but exactly the opposite. If you look at the diagram of the Millennial Temple you can see this. To get into the temple you had to go up eight steps. I have a feeling that with the Lord present, there will be little concern for handicapped friendly structures.

Vs. 32-34 Now in the inner court, Ezekiel is led from the south gate to the east gate.

Vs. 35-37 This is now the north gate. If you're looking at the diagram of the temple, you can see that Ezekiel and his guide have made a semi-circle around the altar.

Vs. 38-43 If I understand this properly, the vestibule of the gates to the inner court is the large opening on the inside of the gate, like a foyer or entryway, as you enter from the outer court. This is where the sacrifices would be killed and prepared for sacrifice. Again, this sacrifice will only be in memorial. It is funny to think that people will need any memorial, but even though they will have Jesus there, they still have to believe that He died for them and rose again. Once people see Jesus, as time goes on for 1000 years, I'm sure because of sin, people will treat Jesus as common place. The memorial sacrifices are to help people remember that it took a death and blood to purchase their redemption. Still, when Satan is released after 1000 years, he will find rebellious hearts all over the planet. See Revelation 20:7-9.

Vs. 44-47 These are chambers for priests to make themselves ready. I doubt they'll have Coke machines and candy bar machines in there, but who knows.

Vs. 48-49 Now Ezekiel is standing before the steps leading into the temple proper.

Ezekiel 41

See the diagram of the "The Millennial Temple Proper" at the end of this document.

Vs. 1-4 So what happens here is that the angel takes Ezekiel into the temple proper. Ezekiel was led into the temple from the steps on the lower end of the diagram. The angel led Ezekiel through the entry or nave. Since Ezekiel was a priest, he could go into the large long room, the outer sanctuary; but only the angel could go into the inner room, the Most Holy Place. The doorways get progressively narrower.

Vs. 5-11 These are three levels of side rooms for storage. I can't visualize this, especially how to get to those rooms.

V. 12 This huge building/room is mentioned, but it is never said what goes on in there. Is it a spare room or will someone live in it?

Vs. 13-26 In the temple, in the room before the Most Holy Place, there was a lot of carving of palm trees and cherubim. The only piece of furniture is a wooden table. Interestingly, it is not covered with gold like the furniture in the tabernacle was. In the tabernacle and temple, in the Holy Place before the Most Holy Place, there was a lampstand, the table of the bread of the Presence and the altar of incense. All of these were made with or covered with gold. Some might suggest that this is the altar of incense, but that isn't said to be its purpose. It is simply the wooden table that is before the Lord. Maybe it's the first table Jesus made as a carpenter.

Nothing is described inside the Most Holy Place where the ark of the covenant stood. The ark has been missing since the days of Hezekiah or Manasseh. Thanks to Indiana Jones, we know the ark is safely hidden in some undisclosed government warehouse, probably in Ohio.

We are not yet done with all of the descriptions, but it is safe to assume that when the people and leaders got all of this information, they began asking their own questions and trying to understand the shapes and dimensions of everything. And to think, this will stand for 1000 years, and then come the new heavens and new earth.

James 4

Vs. 1-4 We have seen the idea of adultery used before. It signals the idea of belonging to God, but living by one's own desires and so using His blessings to live for ourselves. Being faithful means that our devotion should be wholly for the Lord. If something else takes the place in our hearts that only God should own, He calls that adultery. We normally face these temptations, but in stress and hard times, the temptation only grows deeper. We read about church fighting in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3. Paul's comment to them was that they were not behaving like spiritual men, but as men of the flesh, as babes in Christ. I think that is what was happening here too.

Remember too that in Hebrews 10:34, it mentions that at one time, in those early days of faith, those believers were willing to allow their property to be taken. That was no longer the case with the Hebrews and I'm guessing it was not the situation here either. They had been mature, but regressed. Hard times, without a fresh love for Christ ruling our hearts, can make us redefine following Christ to include a life lived for earth stuff and to exclude carrying a cross.

Also, Jesus mentioned to His disciples that when they faced persecution, the hardship would cause many professing believers to ... *fall away and betray one another and hate one another*. (Matt. 24:10) I think this is what was happening to these believers as they faced persecution.

Vs. 5-10 This makes me think of Paul's reminders to the Christians in 1 Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19, that their body was a *temple of the Holy Spirit*. God jealously watches over His own. The rest of this sounds like Peter talking about our *adversary the devil* (1 Peter 5:8) and humbling ourselves *under the mighty hand of God* (1 Peter 5:6). Not only did these apostles know one another and face similar problems in churches, they were all inspired by the same Author of the Bible.

Vs. 11-12 In those same lessons to His disciples Jesus warned His disciples about condemning and judging others (Luke 6:37). When our hearts hold on to stuff, and when we cannot accept that God brings hard circumstances into our lives to show His love through us, we become angry, bitter and complaining toward others and toward God too.

Vs. 13-17 As those who were dead and have been given life by the death and resurrection of our Savior, it ought to be a crime to live for ourselves and not for Him. This is the intent here. Our lives are not our own and the life we live is to be lived following the Spirit, not our plans. As Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:4, we live under the orders of *the one who enlisted us*, and our life's desire should be to satisfy Him. In this case here, it appears that these are rich people who were living above the circumstances because of their money. Therefore, they didn't have to be dependent on God for how they lived or for what they wanted.

To me it is interesting to see that all of the discipleship teaching of Jesus, Paul, and James flows together. The look and adornments of our cultures have changed, but disciples today face the same debilitating temptations to become neutralized as disciples did back then.

Psalm 118:19-29

Vs. 19-20 You have to admit it is a little coincidental that we're reading so much about the temple structure, and here we have gates and a stone and an entrance of a king. The joy and thanksgiving are because of this king, and the way to enter into God's presence is by giving thanks expressed with joy. This desire to enter into the presence of the Lord is always found in David. His ultimate desire was to be with God. Long years of running created this longing in his heart.

Vs. 21-23 These verses must have applied to David. Saul and his men wanted to get rid of David, but as often as they tried to reject him, kill him and drive him off, God kept bringing David back and saving him. Isn't it amazing then that Jesus and Peter quoted these verses regarding the Jews casting away their Messiah?

V. 24 The day when that rejected *cornerstone* was exalted was a great day.

V. 25 And so where does that success and salvation come from?

V. 26 This is what Jesus said the people would cry out during the Tribulation, showing their humility in needing Him. Their shouting of this prayer will begin the process of His return to Jerusalem. It will begin the salvation and success of the future Israel.

V. 27 God made His face to shine upon us by binding the sacrifice, figuratively speaking, to *the horns of the altar*. The horns of the altar were to be grasped by those pleading for mercy and forgiveness. How could David have had these thoughts other than the Holy Spirit inspiring him?

Vs. 28-29 This seems to be the universal praise of the redeemed and those who follow in the harvest.

What a great psalm! He'll return in the future and today we have the joy of letting people know they need to be ready.

Proverbs 28:3-5

These verses continue the theme of a land full of transgression.

V. 3 In this land, the poor have no compassion for other poor.

V. 4 The heroes of this land are like the people praising them, the wicked. But there are still people who keep the laws and work against this lawlessness.

V. 5 Seeking the Lord is what keeps the disciples on target, knowing right from wrong when everyone else has no clue.

In all of this, it shows the importance of those who know the Lord to be active, reaching out and making disciples, who make disciples.

NOVEMBER 21

Ezekiel 42-43

Ezekiel 42

Vs. 1-14 Since there will be active sacrifice in this temple, there are chambers for the priests during the time they are serving. When Israel was following the Lord, the Lord was always present in the temple when the priests carried out their duties. During the Millennium both Jesus and the resurrected King David will be present and visible in the temple area. On the one hand,

that will be amazing. On the other hand, I wonder if the priests will begin to take things for granted. As they say, "familiarity breeds contempt."

Vs. 15-20 This is the entire area of the temple. Apparently the area will be big enough for 13 football fields, suggesting of course, as we all know, that soccer (real football) is the sport of heaven.

Ezekiel 43

Vs. 1-5 It is interesting that Ezekiel witnessed *the glory of the Lord* so often. I wonder if this helped offset the sadness of his ministry. Now with the description of the temple complete, the Lord was returning to the temple.

Vs. 6-9 God is speaking to Ezekiel and it is interesting that he is seeing a vision of future glory and splendor, but God speaks to him of the present cleansing of the people. In the Millennial Kingdom the Lord will set up His throne here, and unlike the tabernacle and temple, this place will never be desecrated. The Lord will know the hearts and intents of all who approach Him. They won't need metal detectors or "evil heart" detectors. That generation of Israel will be cleansed, but the cleansing was beginning now, with Ezekiel's generation. In the future, no deceit will be allowed to enter God's presence. We are so used to living hidden lives with secret sin. There will be forgiveness during the Millennium, but there won't be any lying or hiding before His throne. That will freak out a lot of people. And it seems that once they are 500 to 600 years into the Millennium, there will be a growing sense of rebellion and dissatisfaction.

Vs. 10-12 As Ezekiel described this temple in all its detail to the people, God expected the people to be ashamed. Why do you think that was?

Vs. 13-27 This is the altar and its consecration. If there was ever any doubt that there will be sacrifice during the Millennial Kingdom, this should dispel it. Again, these sacrifices will be a remembrance of what Christ did. Salvation will still be by personal faith in Christ.

We don't have much detail as to what life will be like during the thousand-year reign of Jesus on earth. This shows that there will be need for a constant, visual reminder to the people on earth that Jesus sacrificed Himself for sin. Once Jesus is seated on the throne, He will become "that guy" ruling the world from Jerusalem. People will forget the seven years of the Tribulation and the display of God's power, just like the people of Israel forgot the wonder of the Exodus. People will still be people and sin will still reject God. Although Satan will be locked up, the heart of man will still be sinful. In spite of a perfect government and direct access to the Lord, there will still be unbelief and rebellion at the end of the Millennium. True faith and trusting Christ will still be a choice. With the depth of sin we bear, even seeing doesn't mean believing. We are sicker than we think, and we don't need the devil in order to dishonor God and find our way to hell.

It is amazing to think that with Jesus present, people will still reject Him. But even more amazing is to think that we can go into the harvest with the message of Christ; and without seeing Him, people will become devoted followers of Christ, disciples, who make disciples. *Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."* (John 20:29)

James 5

Vs. 1-6 Remember that in chapters 1 & 2, James had lots of negative things to say about the rich. According to James 2:6, the rich were also part of the hard times these believers were facing. It fits then that James aims some of his concluding remarks toward these people. He has just mentioned the rich at the end of chapter 4 in terms of their arrogance. It may be that there were some of the rich in the church, but it seems this condemnation and rebuke was meant to

strengthen the hearts of the believers who were being oppressed by the rich Jews who were outside the church. They were reminded that God would repay these people.

Vs. 7-11 James calls the believers back to suffering and to waiting for the Lord with patience and humility. His use of Job is very much on target. As Job was suffering, it was his "rich" friends who were aggravating his problem and making it hard for him to endure. Notice in this exhortation the mention of the farmer. I'll bet James heard that from big brother Jesus. Verses 8-9 sound like Paul in Philippians 2:14 and 4:5. Same spiritual Author.

Vs. 12-20 It seems here that James is warning them not to invoke oaths before God or to make promises such as, "Lord if you do this, then I'll do that." Instead of bargaining, they were simply to draw close to one another and pray. Ron Blue's explanation of this in the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), pp. 833-835, is very good.

V. 14 The word used for sick is also used to mean weak or heartsick. The anointing is also the same as that used to encourage or welcome a guest. This is an interesting wrinkle. Another way of looking at this would be that if a believer was really discouraged, weak in faith, thinking of defecting from the group, they should call the elders and have the elders encourage them. In other words, this can be understood without the person being physically sick and the anointing can mean to refresh a person's heart. I've anointed people with oil who were sick. In the last case, the physical problem was really a problem of being heartsick. They were cured, but only after moving away from the oppressive atmosphere that had been created by some very contentious believers.

It seems that the focus here is for the believers who are discouraged to draw together, and for the rest of the group to reach out to them and draw them in.

V. 16 This healing is of the soul, a lifting of the heart, and for protection from damage. It is the same word as in Hebrews 12:13; and, in fact, the situations of both verses might be very similar, *and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed.*

So, why is the example of Elijah used? Notice the result in v. 18. His prayer brought restoration and new life to the land. It seems clear that the idea in the conclusion of this letter is for the church to bind together to get through the stress and discouragement they were facing.

V. 20 This is a rather abrupt conclusion if compared to Paul's letters. The wandering one in view here is a believer. If you look at 1 Timothy, you'll find Paul telling Timothy about all sorts of believers wandering from the faith. In fact, in 1 Timothy 6 Paul talks about believers who went astray, seeking wealth and comfort.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. (1 Tim. 6:9-10)

The idea here is for the church to go after its members who have wandered away because of the discouragement and persecution they have faced. They are in danger of wrecking their walk on earth for Christ. In helping these wanderers, the forgiveness the wanderers receive will help them recover from the guilt of the sins they have committed.

Think of a group of believers reaching out to those who have been morally ruined and who have committed acts for which they might not be able to forget or forgive themselves. The church's restoration, help, and forgiveness can help them cover and recover from that guilt. This is also a part of the work we do in the harvest making disciples. Sometimes we need to restore fallen

disciples to make them disciples who follow in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 119:1-16

Like most of the psalms of David, this is the celebratory introduction to the psalm. The nitty-gritty is coming. In many places David was discouraged and stressed as he wrote this. He had the same problem as the people in Hebrews and in James. What is it that will keep his faith solid and refreshed as he waits on the deliverance of the Lord? We'll see.

This introduction gives you David's answer, and it is my answer, and it is your answer. It is God's answer. Christ doesn't call us to follow Him without suffering. He Himself suffered. Jesus calls us to Himself as we follow Him in the harvest. And we find Him in His Word. That's why we're reading this stuff, right? To draw close to our Shepherd.

Vs. 1-3 This is the summary declaration of what it means to be blameless before the Lord. It doesn't mean perfection; it means having our feet constantly cleansed by the Word.

Vs. 4-8 Notice how many ways the Word is referred to. Also, notice that part of the obedience to the Word is expressed as praise to God for His Word. The closer we draw to the Word, the more we understand our need and what it is God does for us in His Word.

Vs. 9-16 Verse 9 is the question that is answered in this section. Notice all the body parts that get involved with the Word. None of this is a 100% guarantee that we will stay faithful to the Lord, but it will keep us closer to Him than if we were indifferent to His Word. We all fall, but even after David fell, this devotion to the Word is what brought his broken heart back to God. David was restored and remained for the rest of his life, a man after God's own heart.

Proverbs 28:6-7

Amen.

NOVEMBER 22

Ezekiel 44-45:12

I'm sure there is a lot we don't understand yet about life and living during the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. In fact, we know practically nothing about it. In these chapters we are given a glimpse into what is going on, in and around the temple. In some respects, all of this detail gives us some idea of what the Lord will be doing with Israel and with the world.

Israel will fulfill their obedience before the Lord and be a witness to all other nations for those thousand years. The sacrifices will be a memorial remembrance to Christ's sacrifice. Although their "religious" lifestyle might look burdensome to the world, there will be amazing blessing in Israel. Those with discerning hearts will see that it is not a blessing borne of works, but borne out of a relationship with their King. Their obedience will be out of love and gratitude, not out of payment for a service. The nations, who will all be rebuilding their cities and governments, will need assistance and will come to Israel for healing and to draw near to the visible Lord God of Israel. Faith in Christ will still be a choice.

Ezekiel 44

Vs. 1-3 This east gate of the temple has not been made yet, so it isn't that closed, golden gate you sometimes see in the wall of Jerusalem. That golden gate might be what Jesus will use to enter Jerusalem, but this temple will not have been built when He returns. This gate will be off limits, because the glory of God will enter the temple through it. Only the prince of the people, David, will be able to use it.

Vs. 4-8 As God gives Ezekiel these instructions, it is still present time. The people had desecrated all that God had given them and all that was holy. By doing so, they had held God up to scorn for the nations. Therefore, there is a sense of judgment and harshness in these words. Those who serve the Lord in that temple will not need these words of caution. Most of those listening to Ezekiel speak will never return to Israel, and many will only see a temple (those early chapters of Ezra) that was the shadow of the glory of Solomon's temple. These words then are first, a rebuke to the exiles, but second a revelation to give Israel hope as a nation, that they will someday have a glorious future in service to God.

Vs. 9-14 Notice that circumcision will still be practiced as the sign of the covenant with Abraham, that is, a sign of the faith of Abraham. But even more importantly, no one will be able to come before God with a false heart. There won't be any politicking with Jesus.

The Levites will still serve in the temple, but because of their past transgressions, none but the sons of Zadok will be able to come before the Lord. It seems interesting to think that there will still be distinctions between people with Jesus present, but these 1000 years serve more than one point for all of mankind. The fact that the Jews will serve before God and that the nations will still be the "Gentiles" shows that, in humility, people will have to seek Christ and understand and trust Him. And even now in the church, we have human distinctions based on God's choice of leaders and His assignment of gifts.

Vs. 15-27 These are the priests, *the sons of Zadok*, who come before the Lord in the temple. As you read this, take note of the detail. I wonder what that table is for. It is mentioned again. I wonder why they can't sweat. Will there be air conditioning?

The job of the priest as described in vs. 23 & 24 is interesting. This is the opposite of the effect the priests had on the people in the time of Jesus.

Vs. 28-31 We have often read that the priests would have no inheritance, but that God would be their inheritance. Their joy was to serve in His presence and their trust was to have been in His sole provision. I think this service and inheritance foreshadows the life of a disciple.

Luke 12:32-36 *Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.* ³³*Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys.* ³⁴*For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.* ³⁵*Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning,* ³⁶*and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.*

Mark 10:28-30 *Peter began to say to him, "See, we have left everything and followed you."* ²⁹*Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel,* ³⁰*who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.*

Ezekiel 45

Vs. 1-8 This will be the land that is designated for the city, the prince, the priests and the Levites. Apparently it will extend from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan and will encompass the city of Jerusalem.

V. 8 These princes are still future and they will help rule, or judge, Israel. If you are asking me, I believe we know the names of these princes. *Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, in the new world, when the Son of Man will sit on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."* (Matt. 19:28)

Vs. 9-12 So who are these princes? God seems to be referring to the conduct of the past kings and present exiled leaders. The only prince that has been mentioned up to now is David, who will rule the city and country as the king. This passage then seems to be a rebuke to the leaders, as represented in all of the kings and leaders up to this point. Remember that if you look at the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel together, you find a lot of kings; and most of these were horrible shepherds who fleeced the sheep. God will assign the prince his portion so that he will not take land or stuff from the people. In a way, this is more of an object lesson to the people present with Ezekiel, because I'm sure that David won't abuse his privileges and neither will the twelve disciples. The mention of honest measurement might be literal, as in how the leaders cheated the people who brought their tithes and taxes; or it could be a reference to the dishonesty of their hearts. In both cases, that will never be the situation in the future when the Messiah reigns over the world.

You can see that after the harvest of our times, there will still be a last period of time where people will have to make a choice for Christ. During that time there will still be death and there will be sickness, but the cures for all of these will be in Jerusalem. The nation of Israel will be the light, and the King on the throne will be the Savior. And who knows what we'll be doing. Some of us might be getting some much needed R&R, and others might be helping by teaching and by helping rebuild a very tattered earth. After the rapture, the Tribulation and the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom, we might find ourselves still employed in the harvest, teaching and helping others, but we'll be fully resurrected in Christ. (Rev. 20:6)

1 Peter 1:1-12

We haven't heard from Peter in months. At the time of writing this letter, Peter was now a very seasoned apostle, having served for more than 30 years after the resurrection of Christ. It seems that this letter was written to all Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire. This letter is probably written sometime between the beginning of Nero's persecutions in 64 A.D. and Peter's death at Nero's hand in 67 A.D.

Like James, this letter is written to encourage Christians in the harvest who were having to endure very tough times. Doesn't it seem like endurance in following Christ is becoming a constant theme in the Word? We saw it in Hebrews, in James and now here. But then, we also saw endurance in faith in Paul's life and in his letters. And we saw it in the life of Jesus. The Lord let His disciples know from the beginning that this life in the harvest wouldn't be easy. Many of Jesus' disciples left Him. During this time in the church, many were leaving. And even today, many people hang around church and make the right noises only because everything in the west is so easy and non-confrontational. In our western culture, if we don't live as a witness for Christ, who cares? Believing is totally easy and the requirements of following Christ are few. Just stay out of trouble.

But Jesus invited people to walk as He walked and to suffer as He suffered in the harvest. *For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.* (Phil. 1:29-30)

The point of remaining on earth is to reach the lost and to make disciples, that is, being witnesses and followers of Christ. On this planet, that means opposition. If we give up and don't learn to endure in our faith, we miss God's purpose for us. We miss seeing His grace in the lives of those who are saved and then become disciples, who make disciples. We miss the work that only He can do in our hearts unless we only have Him to depend upon. And worst of all, we miss getting to know Him and having Him and the Father make their home with us. See John 14:21-23.

Vs. 1-2 Since we are reading of the temple in Ezekiel, remember that everything that was holy and to be used in the service of the Lord was sprinkled with blood. There are also references like

this in Hebrews. Peter is trying to encourage disciples who are beginning to face a hard persecution.

Vs. 3-5 There is a lot to observe here, but for me the comment in v. 5, that our faith guards us, is important. Peter will develop this.

Vs. 6-7 Notice that the testing, or proving, or strengthening, of faith is valuable and important. Notice the word *necessary*, referring to God's choice for them. Notice also that not only does our faith protect us, but when it is proven, instead of bitterness and dejectedness, our faith, in the present and in the future, projects glory and praise to Christ. How often have we read that disciples shouldn't complain about anything if we believe God truly is in control and if the Holy Spirit guides our steps each day?

Vs. 8-9 And this is why we don't complain. It is because we are in love with the Lord we follow.

Vs. 10-12 It is interesting how Peter is encouraging them. I was reading yesterday that as Jesus was observing the joy of the 70 and was teaching, at one point, He turned to the Twelve and said privately to them, *For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.* (Luke 10:24) Jesus was telling them what a privilege they had received. Peter, remembering that day, was telling these people, and us, what a privilege it is to know Jesus and to be following Him in the harvest at a time like this.

Psalm 119:17-32

So, you've read this amazing psalm already once this year. But now, you've got a lot more of the Bible under your belt. As you read and make observations, notice how David begins to weave his feelings of distress and suffering and depression into his prayer. It is the Word that is strengthening David to get up every day.

Vs. 17-24 Notice how the first verse sets the tone of this section. To be dealt with bountifully meant to receive God's protection of his life. In the midst of all the threats to David during this short journey on earth, the Word became David's delight.

Vs. 25-32 *My soul clings to the dust* may be an expression regarding the frailty and sinfulness of the flesh, similar to Paul's *Wretched man that I am*. The life David needed was in the Word. Notice in v. 26 that there was the recognition of relationship, that God was answering David out of the Word. In all of this there is a sense of desperately pursuing God.

It seems pretty obvious to me, that just like people who are clinically sick physically, sin makes us spiritually bi-polar and clinically at risk. We need our meds constantly, every day. We are only kidding ourselves if we skip the Word or get hooked on secondary sources. It is the Word that is alive. This spiritual sickness we have doesn't require intermittent care, but rather, constant care; and that spiritual care we need is the daily input of the Word of God. Accept no substitutes.

Proverbs 28:8-10

V. 8 seems to say that God will make sure that what this guy idolized is properly distributed to aid others.

V. 9 This could be that same guy, but now he is religious. He is religious and now leading God's little ones to stumble/sin. (Matt. 18:6)

V. 10 This could still be that same guy, but God reminds us again that following the Lord will be rewarded in the end and that He will protect His own.

NOVEMBER 23

Ezekiel 45:13-46:24

Ezekiel 45:13-25

As you read this section and make observations, keep in mind that you are learning something about the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit here. We tend to think that because we know Jesus, everything is over regarding the plan of salvation, and that after the time of the church comes one big party. After the Lord returns to earthy reality, there will be a thousand years of Israel serving God, and there will be a world trying to grasp worshipping a very visible God. In a way, it will be just like everyone is always saying they wish it was: God will visibly be here, ruling; we will know answers right away. Criminals will be caught immediately; the poor will be fed, etc. And to boot, Satan will be gone. But is that really what everyone wants? Without accepting the visible Christ by faith, the sin nature will still be unbroken and people will still be condemned. Ask any of the chief priests, scribes or Pharisees who persecuted and condemned Jesus; seeing is not believing.

Knowing God, all of what is being played out during the Millennium is necessary. Some of these sacrifices might seem crazy to us, especially to those with western sensitivities, but they will be visual aids and memorial reminders of what Jesus did for the human race. It will be so easy for everyone to love and revere Jesus, right?

Vs. 13-17 Notice that David will provide the offerings and notice too that the Sabbath will still be practiced in Israel.

Vs. 18-20 This is the Passover and notice that the blood is put on the doorposts of the temple. It seems that this will be the only place where blood will be used on doorposts. In other words, this will be a symbolic sacrificing of the Passover lamb for the entire nation, showing that Jesus is the Lamb of God.

Vs. 21-25 Notice that the Passover/Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of Tabernacles are mentioned as required. These will be celebration feasts and are all very visual reminders of spiritual truth. What is missing from this list is the Day of Atonement with the scapegoat. That won't be required because atonement has already been accomplished.

Ezekiel 46

Vs. 1-12 A couple of things stand out to me here. First, at least in Israel, the Sabbath will be kept. Second, the prince, who we know is David, will be leading part of the worship. The fact that David will be leading worship is a very fitting thing. No other king was so passionate about being in the temple and singing to the Lord, than David. It is also interesting that David could enter the east gate of the inner court, but he couldn't go into the inner court. He remained in the east gate and left that way. Reading this description of him going in and out before the people, I wrote a note in the margin of my Bible that he was leading the people like a shepherd, going in and out before the sheep.

Vs. 13-15 In Israel under the law there were morning and evening offerings like this. Here it will only be in the morning. Again, it will be a memorial reminder to the world (actually, it had always been a reminder) for people to get their hearts right with God every day. The morning is a good time to do this.

Vs. 16-18 The part here about the prince and his sons is confusing. So far, the prince has been identified as the resurrected David. I don't think he'll have any more kids. But there will be rulers under him who probably will be identified as princes. If so, this would apply to those who are in leadership with David, ruling the peoples. I think this will only apply to the thousand years of this time on earth.

One interesting note here: In Isaiah 55 it says of David, *Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.* The next verse talks about foreign nations.

David never really ruled any other nations, but apparently in the Millennial Kingdom, he will be a leader and commander for them.

Vs. 19-24 The outer court will be so big, with so many kitchens, that people will meet and eat right in the temple area. I guess this will be like a millennial food court. It is interesting to me that God is not a vegetarian and that those who are involved in these sacrifices are required to partake of them. I suppose this symbolizes that after forgiveness, there is blessing and bounty.

1 Peter 1:13-2:10

1 Peter 1:13-25

Peter is encouraging these people to remain strong and close to the Lord in hardship. Knowing this, you should be able to think your way down through these verses and find principles for strengthening yourself in trials.

V. 13 There is a lot in this verse. What do you see? Do you sense the tense atmosphere of being under stress? Just the thought of being ready *for action* protects us from being passive and defeated.

Vs. 14-16 The emphasis here isn't just being holy (set apart). The real point here seems to be living fully alert, obedient and God-honoring in our conduct at all times, particularly in hard times.

Vs. 17-21 This has to do with having a Father to call on during this time of exile, knowing we have a future inheritance. This sounds pretty strengthening and encouraging, particularly for people going through hard times. Do you think it encouraged them to know they were exiles and that this place isn't home? Does it encourage you?

Vs. 22-25 It seems like the Word is the point in this section, being mentioned twice in the last verse. Verse 22 looks like the effect the truth in the Word has on us. Verse 23 reminds me of the parable of the sower. *The sower sows the word.* (Mark 4:14) How does this aid a disciple going through trials?

Vs. 24-25 See Isaiah 40:6-8.

Isn't it interesting that we are also reading Psalm 119 where David is constantly strengthening himself in the Word?

1 Peter 2:1-10

Vs. 1-3 I think this is still connected to talking about the Word. This is one of the only ways we are to remain like babies. We are to be constantly desiring and needing the Word. This is not only a good thing; it is a vital thing. Notice too that it is a command to long for the Word. That takes cultivation. It is not automatic. You hear people say that they "love" reading the Bible, but do they need it so badly and long for it so deeply that even when they don't "love" reading the Bible, they are still irresistibly drawn to it? That's why we're doing this together.

Vs. 4-8 After being grounded in the Word, we grow into Christ *as a spiritual house*. We are reading about the temple in Ezekiel. Here the temple is figurative, but even more fantastic. We are built into Christ. It is the Word through the Spirit that matures us in our Lord.

V. 9 is one of the shortest and clearest declarations of our blessing and joy in salvation and our mission on this planet. We are a priesthood. How? Notice the privilege that is being spoken of here. Can you see how this is connected to the harvest and our mission following Christ? Isn't it amazing how Peter is encouraging these people, in their trials of faith, to keep following Christ? This is what we are supposed to do for others as we make disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples. Through the Word, Peter was obeying Jesus' command to him to feed the lambs, tend the sheep and feed the sheep. (John 21:16-17)

V. 10 And we should never forget this.

You have to admit that Peter had a knack for encouragement. Everything Peter is saying is focusing these people on Christ. Following Christ in the harvest is all about our salvation and our Savior. We have an amazing privilege and task before us on this earth. It is interesting to me that the two apostles, Peter and Paul, who are shown in Acts as having the largest ministries of reaching people, are also the two who fell the deepest and were later restored. Peter denied Jesus, and Paul persecuted and killed Jesus' disciples.

Psalm 119:33-48

Notice the different words David uses to refer to the Word.

Vs. 33-40 Notice in the first six verses how David asks God to make the Word known to him. Verse 40 shows that if you are passionate about something, you keep asking and God keeps answering.

Vs. 41-48 Notice how vs. 41-42 hang together. If you only had v. 41, that would be great; but v. 42 gives you the context and lets you see how the Word strengthened David in his trials. In this section it is God's *steadfast love* that holds David's heart so that he can be strong to follow and be a witness to others.

Notice the mentions of bearing witness, distress, seeking and worship. David understood as a shepherd, that the Word was to be spoken of to help and guide others. We saw in Ezekiel 34:23 that David's future role in Israel will be as a witness and leader to his people and the nations, going in and out before them, worshipping God. The Word is what God used to make David this kind of shepherd.

Proverbs 28:11

Comfort and money make you seem wise, but the better perspective comes from being needy and dependent on God. Blessed are those who hunger now. (Luke 6:21)

NOVEMBER 24

This is a day to celebrate. Today is our last day in Ezekiel. For some people, this might be the first time you've read this book, and already, you might have a better grasp of what God is saying and doing through Ezekiel than many people who have been believers for years. Just think how much better you will understand the Lord and this book when you read it next year. Tomorrow we begin Daniel and you'll enjoy it.

The point for us as disciples isn't to know the book better than others. Our desire is to learn more about the heart of God, to know Him. He loves His people Israel, and He will faithfully guide every one of His promises to fulfillment. You learn how wise and loving and just He is. And then, some of what we are reading describes God doing great things that are still future, that are beyond our understanding of Him. These chapters today are my favorite chapters in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 47-48

Ezekiel 47

Vs. 1-12 There is a lot to observe here, but I'll just make some general comments.

This is a literal river. The fact that it mentions fishing on the Dead Sea shows this is a real thing. This river is also described in Zechariah 14:8, so we'll see it again. The river will divide and flow east and west, but here, we're only following it to the east. The entire ten-mile distance from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea will have trees lining both sides. At that point in world history, there will be a lot of hurt people all over the globe who will need healing. I don't know how those leaves will heal, but I imagine the British will turn them into a "cuppa." The leaves and the

fruit will never run out, bearing new fruit every month. I've got to think the water will be pretty refreshing too. Just think of everything Jesus said about living water, and look at the first verses of Isaiah 55.

These people will witness and experience what Jesus said would be true of us when we are saved and have the Spirit within us. These will be living waters. So, knowing what the waters and trees are capable of, how do you make a figurative connection to what the Spirit is supposed to do within us, creating streams of living water? It's something interesting to think about. Is it for us personally only, or is it really for the harvest? The effect of the new life in us, as we follow Christ into dead and sick parts of the harvest, brings the water of life to the dead, see? ☺

Notice that in v. 11, the marshes remain salt. I know, practically, Israel will need salt; but even more than that, it will constantly show what an incredible, on-going miracle this river is.

This will give everyone in the world a reason to visit Jerusalem. Zechariah mentions that Jerusalem will still be elevated, but the rest of Israel will be as flat as a pancake. That will make hanging out around the river easy.

Vs. 13-20 Just a couple of notes here. First, notice that to the north, Israel will be above, and will include modern day Damascus, so Syria will belong to Israel. Then, to the south, the border will skirt along that very famous place, Kadesh-barnea, and then will go up the brook that was the border of Egypt. The Nile was not the border of Egypt, but was more in the middle of Egypt.

Vs. 21-23 These are the general rules of how the land will be divided.

Ezekiel 48

Vs. 1-29 Generally, the land will be divided in east-west bands from north to south, each tribe's land extending from the eastern to western border of the land.

It is interesting that Judah and Benjamin are north and south of the prince's portion. That is basically the land that Joshua gave them, but they were both tribes from which God chose kings.

David will be the prince or ruler of all of Israel. Each of these tribes will also need government, and as I suggested yesterday, I think that each of the twelve apostles will govern or judge these tribes. *You are those who have stayed with me in my trials, and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom, that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Luke 22:28-30) As to who will govern the cities in Jerusalem and around the world, I wonder if the parables of the pounds and of the talents tell us anything. *And he said to him, 'Well done, good servant! Because you have been faithful in a very little, you shall have authority over ten cities.'* (Luke 19:17)

Vs. 30-35 Notice that the gates are named after the children of Jacob. On p. 1316 of the BKC-OT, Charlie Dyer makes some interesting observations about these groupings.

The city will be called "The Lord is There," or literally in Hebrew, "Yahwehshammah." Of course, the ACLU won't like that, but Jesus won't ask them. Everyone will know where the Lord is.

I wonder what the feeling was when the people in exile stood up after hearing this vision. They had this vision in their minds and hearts, but walked back to their houses in the land of Babylon, laborers in the country that God had just used to punish them and to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. This had to have been emotionally confusing, but it should also have given them some hope.

As disciples, we have a vision like this built into our hearts and minds because of our salvation. We know this "assignment" is temporary, and that we don't belong here. We are here as foreigners and exiles (1 Peter 2:11), following our Lord in the harvest, living for Him, making

disciples and looking forward. But we don't look forward to a city or temple. We look forward to meeting our Lord and being with Him forever.

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, ¹²Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; ¹³Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; ¹⁴Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. (Titus 2:11-14 KJV)

1 Peter 2:11-3:7

1 Peter 2:11-25

Vs. 11-12 Don't these verses sound like the verse above in Titus? Peter and Paul were on the same wave-length and connected to the same server, running the same software. Notice how Peter keeps emphasizing that this world is not our home.

Vs. 13-17 Seriously, this is like a condensed version of Romans 13. The idea of good deeds here is that believers are evangelistically loving their neighbors, doing good stuff for them to open doors for the gospel. It is easy to argue with Christ's message. It is hard to argue with His love.

Vs. 18-20 This is pretty clear. If you have to face punishment, let it be because you love Christ, not because you steal company time, spending too much time in the break room "witnessing."

Vs. 21-25 This is such a great statement. We have been called to suffer in following Christ, bearing witness as Christ bore witness to His Father. In using the example of Jesus, behind these words, Peter is referring to Isaiah 53. Read Isaiah 53 and you'll see this.

1 Peter 3:1-7

Vs. 1-6 These instructions are generally for all married women, but particularly for women facing the trial of an unbelieving husband.

Vs. 1-2 The Word is to be alive in them.

Vs. 3-4 This is like what Paul said to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:8-9.

Vs. 5-6 Sarah did not think it was demeaning to be subject to Abraham. I think the word *frightening* here is the idea of a woman placing herself in God's hands, both for her future and for the result of trusting the Lord in obeying these commands. We're not talking about extreme situations of abuse here. In my experience as a pastor counseling couples, most women who resist submission to their husbands don't fully trust God.

V. 7 This is just one verse, but it says volumes. A man is to understand his wife and understand how God has made women. That is what living in an understanding way means. It is living purposefully and intelligently, putting into practice what God has revealed as true.

If a man doesn't heed this, his prayers will be hindered. It is hypocrisy to come before God for understanding and grace, when he will not extend that to his wife.

Psalm 119:49-64

As you read this, look again for all the ways David refers to the Word and all the ways he was feeling under pressure.

Vs. 49-50 Notice what David is saying here. Isn't this something God is saying to us all? Isn't this the reason we all need to be in the Word every day?

Vs. 51-53 Notice that it was the Word that gave David both the protection from the wicked, and an answer for the evil in the world.

Vs. 54-56 This is what made David a man after God's own heart. And this was happening in David's years of trials and running. Most people take a vacation from God when they are under pressure.

Vs. 57-62 The Lord was David's portion and he pursued God through the promises of His Word. What is remarkable is that David pursued God while he himself was being actively pursued by cruel and unjust people.

Vs. 63 If only this would always have been true of David.

V. 64 This is the real song of David, and again, it shows why David was a man after God's own heart.

Proverbs 28:12-13

V. 12 What is interesting here is that this principle is true, but as seen in Hebrews and Peter, during times of wickedness, disciples are not supposed to hide. We may work under the radar, but we are still working and following our Lord in the harvest. If we feel the oppression, so do the lost who need a savior, and we have an answer for them.

V. 13 I was reading today about Jesus warning His disciples against hypocrisy. And, I was reading in Isaiah 55, that if the wicked will forsake their way and turn to the Lord, He will have mercy and compassion upon them.

It is amazing, although there is so much Scripture and so many authors, if you listen closely, there really is only one Author, saying the same thing to us in so many different ways. He loves us and wants us to turn from our sin, turning to Him.

NOVEMBER 25

Daniel 1-2:23

The book of Daniel has been an unexpected blessing in my life. The Lord surprised me with it one day. Back in 1979 or 1980 as I was studying in an empty college classroom, I opened my Bible for my quiet time and began to read Daniel. It was one of those things where the Spirit just "opened my eyes" to some things. I saw connections. In the week that followed, my desire for reading the Word, and pursuing God in it, received a huge shot of adrenaline that has carried me through to today. I remember taking a walk on one of those days thinking my life would never be the same. In a way it hasn't been. Though some of the emotion and thrill of discovery has faded, I received a lasting sense of expectation and a desire to search the Word and ask the Lord to draw near to me. Even this morning as I was reading through Isaiah 55, I felt that privilege again, of having the Lord show me something in the Word and of Himself that will stay with me as I follow Jesus in the harvest.

I'm going to try to make observations here to help you discover stuff, but I know I won't be able to restrain myself and I'll probably say too much. Almost all of what I'm sharing with you I've gotten out of my quiet time and personal study, not from books or seminary classes. I want to encourage you to spend time in the Word, asking questions, looking for clues and connections. It will not only mark you for life with a sense of desire and joy in the Word, but when you share what you've learned, it will have a sense of life to it. You will become a contagious teacher.

Daniel was a special man and God used him in an incredible way. You've heard me hint at things about him. Yet, as we've learned from examining great men, there are some very normal things that we can learn from Daniel. In Ezekiel 14:14, Daniel is mentioned with Noah and Job. I remember asking myself why Daniel is mentioned with them, and it hit me that both of those men were the most righteous men on earth at their particular times in history. So was Daniel. He is the only man I know of other than Jesus where God refers to him as "beloved." We'll see that.

So where did this “superman” come from? As we have seen with other men in the Bible, Daniel paid his dues in following God; and the background and foundation of his faith were the result of a string of failures.

King Manasseh repented of his great sins, but could not reverse the damage he’d done, or get his son to follow the Lord. Yet, Manasseh spent the last six years of his life with his grandson Josiah. After his father's short, two-year reign, Josiah became king at age eight and was immediately known as a godly king. That had to have come from Grandpa Manasseh, the failure. But there was no Bible until ten years later when they were repairing the temple and found a copy of the law. When the first five books were read to him, the 18-year old King Josiah was moved to tears and was emotionally alarmed by the judgments God had spoken in Deuteronomy. God commended Josiah for his passion and tears, but He would not withhold the fury of His judgment against Judah. As if hard of hearing and against all hope, Josiah launched a revival in the land that was the greatest Israel had ever known. In fact, I think Josiah was the godliest king Israel ever knew. But in the end, it was a "failure." His sons, who became kings after him, were ungodly men. In fact, not only did Pharaoh Neco take his first son captive, but Nebuchadnezzar walked into the city, looted the temple and took some of Judah’s finest sons as captives to Babylon. Israel was no longer a sovereign state. The times of the Gentiles had begun.

So, who is Daniel? I’m going to suggest that Daniel was about 16 when Neb took him to Babylon. If Daniel was 16, it means he would have grown up during the end of Josiah’s reign, but his parents would have been born and raised during Josiah’s revival. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah were four very godly teenagers who came out of four very godly families. Their dads and moms were products of Josiah’s revival. Josiah’s hopeless effort to save the nation failed, or did it? Wait until you see what God does with Daniel and his friends to save Israel. Faithfully bearing witness against all hope, like kings Manasseh and Josiah did, is all God wants. He does the rest. For us, this is following in the harvest, reaching out to the lost and making disciples.

God has a funny way of working under the radar. Two failed kings hoped against hope, working, knowing that God’s wrath would come. Manasseh influenced Josiah; Josiah influenced a generation of men and women. Four families had godly boys, and God used them to save the nation. Never give up. Make disciples, who make disciples, and leave the rest to God. I think that’s pretty cool.

Daniel 1

Vs. 1-3 This is God humbling Israel. To walk into the temple of a people’s god meant your god was bigger than their god. To take that god’s stuff and lock it in the treasury of your god showed superiority.

Vs. 4-7 We will get an idea in chapter 3 of Neb’s plan in educating these boys. He apparently took young men from every country to train them and send them back as loyal servants, governing their land for the Babylonian Empire. It was a brilliant plan. Alexander the Great’s idea was to encourage his men to intermarry in their conquered kingdoms, and therefore the Greeks I grew up with used to say that the original Greeks were all blond-haired and blue-eyed until Alexander conquered Persia. Anyway, you’ll see the "loyalty test" for Nebuchadnezzar’s educational plan in Daniel 3.

The food had all been offered or blessed in worship to Babylonian gods. Yet, who could blame anyone under those circumstances for eating his first pork chop?

V. 6 Notice the words *among these*. Daniel & Co. were not the only Jewish boys taken, so, for good or for ill, there was a peer group of Jews. That would have compounded the difficulty of standing alone. Thankfully there were four of them, like a disciple's cell group.

V. 7 All the boys had names that honored the God of Israel. They were renamed in honor of the gods of Babylon.

Now, write out a list of what these boys had lost: parents, home, names, language, etc. Not only that, they were threatened with death should they disobey. Not only that, they were with others they knew from Jerusalem who were "understandably" being compromised. None of this put them in a "secure" situation. Why would God do this to them?

V. 8 The contrast with all they had lost makes the faith of this verse so deep. Daniel & Co. had every excuse to compromise. They could have said they were going "undercover" for God. He'd understand. And after all, "Those of us who run away live to run another day."

Vs. 9-16 Do you notice the words, *God gave*? You've seen this before in v. 2. You've also seen this in Joseph's life in Egypt. This is what Daniel & Co. knew. They understood all of this as God's work. They might have been sad, but they never lost their understanding that the Lord was working. They understood that God was with them and loved them. What had happened to Jerusalem and what was happening to them was from the hand of God. This is why they had the courage to suggest this test. And *God gave*. Think of the things that make you anxious or ready to flip out. These guys had more than enough to stress an elephant to death, but they understood the Lord and knew He was with them. They just didn't know what God would do, but it was more important for them to honor God than to stay alive on earth. We'll see that very clearly in chapter 3.

Vs. 17-20 And *God gave*. Something else happened too. They were so good that Nebuchadnezzar kept them close, in the city, in his personal service. They became notable and memorable and useful to Neb. We'll see how that plays out in chapter 2.

V. 21 This is a significant time marker. What is really interesting is that Daniel 10 happens in the third year of Cyrus. That's two years later. So, why the mention of the first year of Cyrus? Why is that year so important? You should know this. In the first year of Cyrus, Cyrus the Persian king (who had just become the ruler of all that had been the Babylonian Empire) gave the command for the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The 70-year exile began the day Daniel was taken, and Daniel was still serving in the government the day the exile ended. Daniel will be the story of God preparing the nations for the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and preparing the nations for the return of Christ to establish His everlasting kingdom.

Notice, that even in this crisis, through this crisis and by means of this crisis, God was working for good.

Daniel 2:1-23

V. 1 This was the second full year of Neb being king, but they may not have counted the months before that full year. It seems that this happened after the education of Daniel & Co.

Vs. 2-4 These various men were there especially for Nebuchadnezzar. They were his counselors, his support system, and his access to the gods. He was in a very personal and emotional distress, and now he needed them.

V. 4 Up to this verse everything has been written in Hebrew. From this verse to the end of chapter 7, Daniel is writing in Aramaic, the common language of the empire. Great scholars wonder why. You'll figure it out just by observing the text.

Vs. 5-11 So what do you notice here? Why do you think Neb was so ardent that they tell him the dream too? As things are heating up in this confrontation, God leads the issue to exactly the point He is going to make to Nebuchadnezzar. Actually, God is taking Neb to school. I think vs. 10 & 11 are the key verses here. Is there a man on earth who can talk to the Most High God, who

doesn't dwell with men? Nebuchadnezzar is about to find out that there is a man and that the Most High God does talk.

Vs. 12-16 Apparently Neb went nuts. What you need to see here is that this is now a very public event in the city of Babylon. Troops are showing up at the houses of wise men (still wearing their Disney© Sorcerers' Apprentice pajamas and cone-shaped hats with the stars and moons on them) and dragging the wise men out into the street, and taking them to prison to hold them for execution. The city would have been electric as well as the entire government. People in the market places would have been talking. Wolf Blitzer would have been there for CNN.

In a crisis like this, I could have imagined Daniel & Co. trying to escape somehow; but notice Daniel's composure in this life-threatening crisis. They have seen God's blessing, and they know God is with them, so they bring their personal calm into the public chaos.

Arioch listened, and Neb must have remembered that Daniel had made a fantastic impression during his oral exam. Apparently Daniel & Co. hadn't yet been brought fully into service. This might have happened very close to the time of their graduation and presentation to Nebuchadnezzar.

Vs. 17-23 It doesn't say "God gave," but we're seeing that God was with them.

V. 18 Notice that they cried out to God.

V. 20 Notice that God spoke to Daniel and that Daniel spoke back.

Vs. 20-23 Notice the understanding that Daniel and his friends had. At this point, I think Daniel was about 19. I'll explain this "guesstimate" when we get to the end of the chapter.

V. 21 Although this dream was to begin Nebuchadnezzar's education and give the world some interesting information on God's working, imagine what this must have meant to Daniel & Co. And we are disciples too. When you read about the dream tomorrow the question will be, "what does this information mean to us?"

V. 23 Notice the "us." God spoke to Daniel, but Daniel understood that this answer was in response to all of them seeking God together.

Does crisis always mean a loss of blessing or a disaster? It depends on what we're living for, and what we understand about God and this life on earth. As disciples in the harvest there is a lot for us to learn from looking at what God did through Daniel and his friends.

1 Peter 3:8-4:6

And now, we are on to another crisis. Peter is encouraging and strengthening these disciples to thrive in the on-coming persecution Nero will bring against the Christians in the Roman Empire.

1 Peter 3:8-22

V. 8 This sounds like Paul in Romans 12 and is addressed to having a kind heart toward other believers.

Vs. 9-12 It seems that Peter might have gotten some of this from Psalm 34:11-22. Very interesting. Also, this looks again like Romans 12.

Vs. 13-17 We are called to be put to the test so that others can observe Christ in us and ask us why we have this hope. We need to make sure we are honoring God. These are great verses. Just so you know that Peter was listening when Jesus taught, here is Matthew 10:18-19, *and you will be dragged before governors and kings for my sake, to bear witness before them and the Gentiles. When they deliver you over, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour.*

Vs. 18-22 And in our suffering, to see the world rescued for Christ, we are following our Savior and His example.

Vs. 19-20 I have always understood that after Christ died, before He was resurrected, He spoke to those who lived before the flood. On what basis could God judge those people as righteous or unrighteous since the law hadn't been given? Also, this was a very "spiritual" time, with fallen angels having much more contact with humans. Those angels were judged and locked up. Was God just in doing that? I think the issue might have been raised by Satan that it would be impossible for God to righteously save mankind without violating His own righteousness. But, there were some mysteries that God held back, that Satan couldn't have guessed at. Jesus, by His sinless life and death for the payment of sin, became the basis both for the forgiveness and salvation of all men and for the judgment and damnation of all men and angels. Jesus spoke to all those people. A few were pronounced justified by faith (Methuselah probably died the year the flood began), but most were pronounced guilty. Apparently the people who lived between Adam and Noah were a special case.

So, if Jesus' work brought clarity (the pronouncement of judgment and forgiveness) to that mess, He can certainly rule over this mess.

Vs. 21-22 This salvation brought by baptism is not for salvation (the removal of dirt), but for a clear conscience in that we are committing ourselves to following Christ. We are humbling our lives to His leadership, putting ourselves under His authority. This is meant also to save our faith from damage. This authority was visibly confirmed on Jesus at His resurrection.

Another way to understand this is Paul's mention to Timothy, in 1 Timothy, about the importance of keeping a clear conscience. By denying conscience, certain persons had shipwrecked their faith. As we've seen before, it is possible to damage our faith and walk on earth. God still loves and works with a repentant believer, but once a marriage is destroyed or adultery has been committed, you have to live with the resulting damage. Baptism can save us from this damage, if baptism and discipleship are understood as swearing total devotion to the authority and Word of our Lord. It is hard to sin or mess up a marriage if we are obeying Him and not our gut.

1 Peter 4:1-6

Vs. 1-2 Jesus is our example of seriousness and suffering. Anyone who has suffered has been tempered to see the true perspective of this life, and will therefore not live for passions and what is temporary, but will live for the eternal. Suffering is what God uses to refine us like gold and silver.

Vs. 3-5 Like Paul, Peter is warning these believers not to drift back to their former lifestyles and with their former friends. The temptation to do this would be to look acceptable and not to be mistreated because they belong to Christ. They needed to keep the eternal perspective before them. This sounds like Daniel & Co.

V. 6 Even though our bodies are judged and dead (and awaiting resurrection), our spirits are alive and will live forever with God in that new spiritual body. This is why we work in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples, to let people know that there is salvation in our Lord.

Psalm 119:65-80

Vs. 65-66 Exactly how did God deal with David according to His Word to teach him? Through suffering.

Vs. 67-72 Can you see 1 Peter 4:1-2 in these verses? Can you hear Paul and James and Peter saying that the testing of our faith is more precious than gold or silver?

Vs. 73-74 Through the Word and through suffering, God fashioned David in such a way that he would be a walking witness to others.

Vs. 75-76 These verses remind me of Job. God afflicted him in *faithfulness*, and God comforted him in due time with His *steadfast love*.

Vs. 77-78 In addition, David, even in his dismal days, had the promise he had received years earlier, as Samuel anointed him, that he would someday be king. David was pursued by the insolent and his only recourse to control and calm his thoughts was to meditate on God's precepts.

V. 79 Through David's affliction, and having to cling to God's Word, God made David a witness and a model for those who were suffering. In Isaiah 55 it says, *Behold God made him (David) a witness to the peoples...*

V. 80 Amen.

Proverbs 28:14

Amen, again.

NOVEMBER 26

Daniel 2:24-3:30

Now, when I preach this, I don't spend much time with the dream itself; but I discuss the dream along with the vision in chapter 7. The reason I do this is that if you get too wrapped up in all of the apocalyptic detail of the dream, you can miss the utterly amazing thing God is doing here. God is showing His steadfast love and is saving the Jews. Hold on to your hats.

Daniel 2:24-49

Vs. 24-26 This little introduction has some interesting detail.

V. 24 Notice that the wise men hadn't yet been killed. Arioch rounded them up to be killed together. It wasn't a house to house assassination action. Now, this means, that these men will owe Daniel their lives. Hmmmm.

V. 25 I like Arioch: "Oh king, look what I found." The fact that they were designated as exiles from Judah is important. We'll see in the next chapter, that this was a major cause for conflict and hatred toward these four men, but therein will hide a blessing.

The king addresses Daniel, but from v. 36, we know that all four were standing together. You need to see those little details to paint an accurate picture.

Vs. 27-30 The humility and honesty of Daniel is amazing. This would have been the place you might have wanted to let the king know how cool you were so he'd keep you around. These guys are too secure in God to do this. Jesus told His disciples to pray, "Hallowed be your name." These guys were in a real crisis and praying that prayer. Daniel is honoring God and telling Neb that God is, in a sense, honoring him in that God is revealing some very important stuff to Neb.

Vs. 31-35 In this section, human rule up to the Millennial Kingdom is being condensed into a few words. Notice that the stone in v. 34 and the stone in v. 35 are Christ and His everlasting kingdom.

Vs. 36-45 Let me suggest what we are viewing here. These are world dominating empires. All of these empires ruled many nations of the known world. Since the Roman Empire, there has not been one single empire that has claimed dominant world ruling authority. Even the British Empire, as vast as it was, didn't rule Europe. In the last days, there will be a final human empire

that will claim world dominance and there will be some similarity to the Roman Empire, but with a strange twist to it. All of these empires also ruled over Israel.

Vs. 36-38 This is the Babylonian Empire, represented by Nebuchadnezzar. In God's eyes, Nebuchadnezzar is the finest king of any who will claim dominance over the known world. Look at what God says about him. This is pretty good stuff for God to say about a pagan king. I think you will see how God's opinion of him is borne out by what happens in the next two chapters.

V. 39 When we get to chapter 7, we'll see who these two kingdoms are. That's another reason why I preach this section of chapter 2 together with chapter 7. The next empire is Persia and the third is Greece.

V. 40-42 Here we actually have two different empires, but the one flows into the other in this image. Verse 33 tells us the legs are iron, but the feet are a mixture of iron and clay. This is a little foggy here, but when we get to chapter 7 it will make sense. The mention of the toes might not mean anything until we understand in chapter 7 that when the antichrist arises, there will be ten kings; and he will take out three of them, bringing the remaining seven in submission to him.

Vs. 44-45 Another tip-off as to the ten kings is that it will be *in the days of those kings* that Christ will come to set up His Millennial Kingdom. So we know the event is still future and we know there will be many kings.

The reason it mentions the stone destroying all of the metals (or empires) is not because all the empires will be in existence at that time, but that Christ's kingdom on earth is so superior, it will overwhelm and end all human domination. Notice too that the kingdom will only come at the end of those kings and it will immediately grow large. That is all to say that the kingdom is not on earth today.

Among other purposes for this vision, I'm sure this was a huge encouragement to the faithfulness of Daniel & Co. So, now shake your head and forget the dream until we get to chapter 7. Buckle up, because now we get to the reason God created this crisis in Babylon.

Vs. 46-47 When is the last time you saw a Gentile king on his face worshipping Yahweh? Although he paid homage to Daniel as the representative of the god who humans can't contact, Daniel understood that Neb was really worshipping God. Look at Neb's words to be clear on this. God just took Nebuchadnezzar to school. To Neb's credit, and unlike Pharaoh in Exodus, Nebuchadnezzar humbled himself. This, I think, is why Neb didn't destroy Jerusalem the next time they rebelled, but showed the city mercy. Nebuchadnezzar was overwhelmed by Yahweh of Israel. But this is just the first lesson. There are still two to go.

Vs. 48-49 You need to think slowly through this to appreciate the impact both for the Jews and for Babylon, the city, the province and the empire.

Daniel just became the ruler of the province of Babylon, the showcase province of the entire empire. A world wonder was there. This is exactly what had happened to Joseph by explaining a dream. Think of all of the Babylonians who would be appalled and jealous that a 19-year-old Jewish prisoner was now the ruler of this province. So much for seniority in office. Not only that, Daniel was now the head wise guy of the entire nation: a Jewish boy. (And remember, we are talking about what is now modern-day Iraq.) I'm sure this didn't sit well with all the other wise men; but hey, Daniel, actually Yahweh, just saved their lives.

The amount of upheaval in these events and in this decision would have been beyond our comprehension, and though there was no internet or TV, it would have slowly become world news. Nebuchadnezzar married a Persian princess, so you can imagine that this news also made it to Susa and to Assyria, the capital of the Median kings. The grandfather of Cyrus would have heard about this. Darius the Mede, a young prince at the time, would have known about this. All

the rulers and people of the surrounding nations would eventually have heard this story. Certainly they would have wanted to know why four Jews were in power and why a nineteen-year-old Jew was the head of the wise men.

Daniel's first decision in office was to ask Neb to have Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego work under him, overseeing the affairs of the province of Babylon. Daniel was now so valuable to the king that his office was just a few doors down from Nebuchadnezzar's. Daniel was now Nebuchadnezzar's closest and most important advisor.

So, let's talk about God's grace. Jerusalem and Judah haven't yet fallen, been destroyed or been taken into captivity. At first, Neb only took a few people. In about five years, he would again humble the city and take Ezekiel and 12,000 skilled laborers into captivity. Before this second wave of captives arrives in Babylon, God has installed four godly Jewish young men into the top leadership of Babylonian government. Before God has fully unleashed His wrath and judgment on Israel, God is already bending the nations to show grace to His people so that they can survive as a people and return to Israel after the exile. I don't know what you call that, but I'd call it grace and mercy and love.

Daniel 3

V. 1 Where do you think Nebuchadnezzar got the idea for this statue? I think God was setting him up, knowing he was a proud man and was impressed by the image in that dream. It might have been that the statue was this size. Neb had already built one world wonder, why not a second? But I've seen statues like this in Germany that stand on a very high monument base. If so, the combined height would have been ninety feet. Who knows? It was tall.

The plain of Dura is a couple of miles southwest of the city of Babylon.

Vs. 2-6 So Nebuchadnezzar sent for and gathered all of his officials from every county of every corner of the entire Babylonian Empire. Some people think that King Zedekiah might have been there, but I don't know.

Notice that these are people of every nation and language. Notice too that this was a test of their loyalty. It wasn't just the dedication of a statue, it was a test of loyalty and submission. In those days people were highly lost, but highly religious. You broke the will by making people submit to your god. You didn't break their minds, you compromised their souls. I believe that this was the final exam of Nebuchadnezzar's educational program. Everyone he had taught and fed and compromised had been sent out to their own countries to rule and carry out his affairs and bring their people into submission to Babylon. Now they were all called back for a big party, but also to bow to him and to his gods.

Now think with me. If you were organizing an event for several thousand people, in the showcase province of the empire, in the capital city of the empire, what would you have to do? Think of the lodging. You couldn't just put them in a Motel 6. You might have to actually build accommodations. That would take time. What about the food, the kitchens, the cooks, all the service? Also, how would you get all those people out to the plain of Dura, make them walk? No way. You'd have to make "stretch" coaches. You'd import Clydesdales from the Bud plant in St. Louis to draw the coaches. Nebuchadnezzar used the Jews for building projects in Babylon, and the preparation for this event might have been one of the jobs they worked on. Actually, it is interesting that when Neb took Jerusalem the second time, he showed the city mercy, but he took 12,000 people captive. They were all skilled craftsmen.

Also, how do you make a statue that big? They had to make a smelting furnace near the site and the heavy pieces would have been finished and polished and put in place. A foundation for the statue had to be made. That would require a lot of work and time.

So, if you were organizing this kind of a national party, who would be in charge? I would probably tell the rulers of the province of Babylon to do it. I think that Daniel, but especially Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, were overseeing, organizing and responsible for the entire dedication event. How could you be the ruler of that showcase province (Daniel) and be the three top men over the affairs of the province (S, M, & A) and not be responsible for all of this? At least this way, S, M, & A got to see the crisis approaching them.

So, picture the event on the plain of Dura. Imagine it looked like a huge football field. At one end is the statue. All of the governmental officials, Neb's trainees, are standing on the field in rows, facing the statue. Over to the left are very nice, raised booths for Nebuchadnezzar and his true-blue Babylonian officials. Because he is not mentioned, Daniel's loyalty was not in question. Neb didn't want to mess with Daniel and his God, so he probably left him in the city to attend to other business. Somewhere, probably between Neb and the field is the orchestra. Somewhere, back to the right or left of the statue, smoke rises gently from the smelting/foundry furnace used to make the statue - a gentle reminder of what will happen to anyone who does not submit and compromise his beliefs to worship the image.

Now, since you usually put the important people forward, I would think that S, M, & A were up on the one-yard line, with an ocean of people behind them. The music played and I'll bet they could hear all of the bending going on behind them, the wrinkling robes, the cracking knees. But they didn't bow.

Vs. 8-12 Notice that their ethnicity is mentioned immediately. This is what leads me to believe that there were lots of hard feelings among the true-blue Babylonians who thought they should have been in line for the jobs that Daniel, S, M, & A were "unjustly" given.

Their accusation in v. 12 is the key verse in understanding the amazing thing God is going to do here. What right did they have not to worship the gods of Babylon?

Vs. 13-15 Nebuchadnezzar was not only mad, but humiliated. He hadn't expected a fly in the ointment or anyone to ruin his event. The smoking furnace should have been enough to curb any rebellious person. Here were three non-Babylonians whom he had "blessed" with great privilege. Now, if nothing else, Nebuchadnezzar would make an example of them; and every official in the entire empire was there to witness it. Now everyone would be given "the fear of God."

Notice the eerie words of arrogance that Neb spews out. God was setting him up. As mentioned in Jeremiah 29:22, Nebuchadnezzar had already roasted two false prophets of Judah. Now, Neb didn't know they were false prophets. He thought they were the real deal, so when he threw them in the furnace, and they lit up, it proved for him again that his gods were more powerful than Yahweh. Also, I'm thinking that there weren't furnaces all over the place and that roasting wasn't the normal way to kill people. I wonder, just speculation, if those prophets were not prophesying against this event, or during the time the statue was being made and were thrown in this very furnace. I think Neb was utterly arrogant because he had burned these two false prophets; and, in his mind, God was powerless to help them, so he said, *And who is the God who will deliver you out of my hands?* Watch out! Fire in the hole!

Vs. 16-18 Think of the spiritual presence and attitudes of these young men. They are probably now 10 years older, in their late twenties. Granted, they would have had time to prepare for this moment, but their devotion to God and their willingness to die rather than dishonor Him is remarkable. These guys were disciples.

V. 16 Since Neb asked, *and who is the God...*, they were telling Neb that he already knew who that God was. Nebuchadnezzar had already worshiped Him.

V. 17 Notice, they had no illusions. God could save them, and He would rescue them, if by no other way than by death. God's will is God's business. We simply serve. (Look at 2 Tim. 4:18 where Paul, knowing he will die, says God will rescue him.)

V. 18 No one talked to Neb like this.

Vs. 19-23 Nebuchadnezzar's face became contorted in anger. All of the hype, the hotter fire and the stronger men were done to make a point to all of the foreign officials and government leaders in his empire who were standing there shaking in their sandals.

Vs. 24-25 Looking in the observation hole, Neb was amazed, not just by the fact that S, M, & A were unharmed, but that a fourth person was in there. He was either an angel, or, some think, the pre-incarnate Christ.

Vs. 26-27 Neb's voice was now more humble and controlled. Notice what Nebuchadnezzar called S, M, & A. In the back of his mind, Neb knew.

V. 27 This is a huge verse. Everyone witnessed and many got close enough to really observe that they were fully OK.

V. 28 Nebuchadnezzar worshiped and gave honor to Yahweh. Notice that he blesses God.

V. 29 This decree was binding on the entire empire. All the governmental officials witnessed the event and heard the decree. No one could dare compel the Jews to worship any god but Yahweh. This gave the Jews a status of favor above any other people in the Babylonian Empire. It saved them by allowing them to remain a distinct people, worshiping their God only.

V. 30 S, M, & A got a raise. This might seem insignificant, but the status and wealth of Daniel, S, M, & A had ramifications. At this time, the Jews in Babylon may have numbered around 20,000. In seven or eight years the bulk of the people would arrive. The community of Jews was now free to organize around the worship of Yahweh. Many good things came out of the Babylonian captivity. The synagogue system came out of Babylon. A school of scholarship and study of the OT came out of Babylon. One of the Hebrew versions of the Bible came out of Babylon. It was a very fruitful time. But who financed it? Who bought the buildings? Who paid the salaries for the teachers or for the education of the students? You'd need some men with deep pockets to oversee this, but everyone was broke. The First National of Jerusalem was shut down, and no funds were transferred to Babylon. The exiles were broke and, if they were paid, they received a slave's wages. I'm willing to bet when S, M, & A got their promotions, they didn't buy flat screen TVs and iPads. These four men were devoted to their God and to their nation, and they had been reared in the revival of Josiah. I'll bet they financed and continued Josiah's revival among the exiles. Maybe that revival didn't die; it was just carried on by some disciples.

So, after three chapters of Daniel, what are the recurring themes or events?

A disaster and crisis lead to blessing in all three chapters.

A pagan king worships God in each of the last two chapters.

God is glorified in all chapters.

Notice the sphere of the testimony of the events. In chapter 2 the events were mainly in the city and province of Babylon. In chapter 3, the events were broadcast, through the eyewitnesses, to all parts of the empire.

I wonder if these patterns will continue in chapter 4.

1 Peter 4:7-5:14

Having seen what God is doing in Daniel, it is interesting to see how Peter is encouraging these disciples to keep following Christ in the harvest during crisis situations.

1 Peter 4:7-19

Vs. 7-11 This section begins with the call for alert, serious mindedness due to the growing crisis in the world. It ends with the glory of God, just like the chapters in Daniel. In the middle, this sure sounds like Romans 12. The church is to strengthen and encourage one another as it serves together.

Vs. 12-18 Suffering is normal and is to be expected. Isn't it interesting that Peter says this is a "fiery" trial. I wonder if Peter and the Spirit were thinking of Daniel, chapter 3.

Vs. 12-13 Suffering and crisis are parts of following Christ in the harvest. (See John 15:18-20.)

Vs. 17-18 Suffering and crisis are what God uses to strengthen our faith and cleanse us from junk.

If someone was forced to throw 50 lb. bags onto trucks, 12 hours a day, "saving him" wouldn't necessarily mean stopping him from doing that task, but rather it might mean strengthening his body and mind as he did the task. "Saving" him the first way would make him comfortable and weak; the other would make him confident and very, very strong. Guess which way God works with us on earth, in the harvest?

V. 19 What does this say to you to see words like, *God's will*, *entrust their souls*, and *faithful Creator*? Doesn't this seem to say that God is the One doing it? Doesn't this sound a little like Job?

1 Peter 5

Vs. 1-4 This is talking about shepherding/leading a group through a crisis. Notice the emphasis on leaders being shepherds.

V. 5 It is hard for younger men to subject themselves to the wisdom of wiser men, especially in times of crisis and stress. Everyone is exhorted to be humble rather than defiant in the situation they are facing. Again, Jesus' trial before the Jews is the example Peter used earlier.

Vs. 6-7 Just like S, M, & A, we are to recognize God in the crisis and humble ourselves under His hand. God is ultimately responsible for each crisis. We are to honor Him, not duck the crisis. Do we really believe He cares for us? S, M, & A are examples of casting all their cares upon Him.

V. 8 Satan works by casting doubt on God's care for us. "If He really loved you He wouldn't let that happen. He'd give you a break, or a job, or better health." Satan's roaring has been likened to lions that encircle sheep in the wilderness that have been enclosed in a tall hedge of thorn bushes. The lions can't get in and the sheep are really safe, but because of the roaring and the circling of the lions, the sheep will freak out. They will run in a circle in their enclosure and eventually a sheep will spring up over the hedge and become lunch. If we stay close to the Lord and to one another we remain safe. Roaring is just roaring.

Vs. 9-11 Now, how do you resist the devil? There is definitely the armor of God. There is the protection of being with others in the harvest. But if you look at Psalm 119, what was it that kept David safe and close to God? It was the Word that gave him the strength and perspective to resist giving into despair and spiritually-inspired fear.

Vs. 12-14 What can you say? What a great letter to encourage the people of God in the harvest. *Peace to all of you who are in Christ.*

Psalm 119:81-96

Vs. 81-84 Notice the longing for God. This kept David safe.

Vs. 85-88 This is the testimony of a man who faced dangers and stress that most of us will never face, yet resisted and remained strong in the Lord. Here is how. Keeping close to the Word and comforting ourselves, secure in the *steadfast love* of God, is our hope.

Vs. 89-91 The evidence of the Word and its power is seen in creation. Creation is a reminder that everything was created by the Word of God. This isn't just flashy power; it is security. If God can do that with His Word, then strengthening us is also within His power. It is also interesting to think that the creation itself testifies to God's power and the power of the Word. David might not have always had his ESV One Year Bible at hand, but he could always see the creation and gaze into the universe at night.

Vs. 92-93 What a great testimony to the power of the Word to save us.

Vs. 94-96 Even in David's crying out for deliverance, he is focused and thinking about the Word. That is not an easy feat. We wonder sometimes what we need to do to take our mind off our problems and guard our minds against the memories of things that have been spoken against us. Filling our minds with the Word and God's thoughts is the idea that is being recommended here.

Proverbs 28:15-16

V. 15 It's interesting to read here of another *roaring lion*. Is this referring to being brutal and inspiring fear? If so, that is just like Satan.

V. 16 A *cruel oppressor* is contrasted to someone *who hates unjust gain*. Is unjust gain what causes the oppressor to be cruel? If so, Satan rebelled against God to take for himself the worship he didn't deserve, and that rightfully belonged to God. In a way, Satan is very much involved in *unjust gain*.

The phrase *prolong his days* is interesting if you think about Isaiah 53:10, *Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.* Jesus is the Ruler *who hates unjust gain*. He gained us "justly" by buying us with His blood.

NOVEMBER 27

Daniel 4

This chapter is one surprising, amazing chapter. Who says there is no love and grace in the Old Testament? We get to see God conclude His education of Nebuchadnezzar. Not only was this God's mercy to Neb, but in it, though it is still years away, God is paving the way for His people to return to Jerusalem by preparing the nations. That was also love and mercy for Israel. What we will read today was world news.

Vs. 1-3 So, to whom is this letter written? Since the reference to the peoples of the earth is general, it looks like Nebuchadnezzar is writing this to everyone. There were lots of nations outside of his control to the north, west, and east. It is very likely that there were trade and diplomatic relationships with some of these countries, like India, for example. Notice how the scope of the event and the communication of the event have increased in these past three chapters.

V. 3 We have the same question reading this that the original readers would have had, "What in the world happened to Neb?" And you and I would have another question, "Did he become a believer?"

Vs. 4-9 Nebuchadnezzar was having another bad dream and personal crisis, compliments of God. Notice that although Daniel doesn't show up right away, he was still the head of magicians and

wise guys. Either Daniel wasn't on duty, or Neb didn't think he needed Daniel for this "run-of-the-mill" malfunction.

Vs. 8-9 We'll have to compare these words with Neb's final words.

Vs. 10-26 This is the dream and its interpretation and it is pretty straightforward. I just have three comments. First, the seven periods were seven years. Second, the goal of this discipline on Neb is clearly stated in v. 25. Third, it is interesting that God is taking this kind of care to mold and teach Nebuchadnezzar. This isn't to say that God didn't give other kings lots of lessons and signs to get their attention. The kings of the northern kingdom of Israel saw miracles like crazy from Elijah and Elisha. So what is the difference? Besides the fact that Neb was a Gentile, he responded positively to God.

V. 27 If Nebuchadnezzar had listened, he could have avoided this.

Vs. 28-33 God gave Neb time to repent, an entire year.

Nebuchadnezzar ruled for 43 years and, like Solomon, did a lot of building. Apparently he was finished. One of those things he built was a wonder of the world. Since he will be out of it for seven years, I'd suggest this happened sometime around the 30th year of his reign.

Notice that the words were not yet out of his mouth. Notice too that vs. 28-33 are now in the third person. This would have been Daniel's account of what happened. And remember, this is all written in Aramaic. All nations could and would have read this.

What an incredible way to humble the ultimate human ruler. One minute you're admiring your world wonder, and the next, you're out on the front lawn eating grass. Now, there are Bible expositors who have found a human ailment that looks like this condition, as if to prove it is possible that this happened to Neb. So what did God do? Make him crazy? I wonder if God simply pulled away the image of God. We all take the spiritual for granted, that we are made in the image of God. This isn't intelligence or IQ or awareness. It is something the animals don't have, regardless of how much intelligence they show. We are spiritual and have the characteristics of God. We are not God, but He has shared with us His own attributes of personality and understanding. The image of God is an incredible gift, and no one really thanks Him for it. In fact, we use it to dishonor Him and claim He doesn't exist. That's ironic. Here is an example of what would happen if God ever took it away from us.

Vs. 34-37 This is Nebuchadnezzar's testimony and worship of Yahweh before the world. There is a lot to observe here, but most significant is v. 37. The *now* goes hand in hand with *praise and extol and honor*. These last three actions of worship are written in a way that suggests that Neb would continue to do this.

So then, what happened here? What would this have meant for the kingdom? Why didn't they appoint a new king? The fact that they waited for Neb to regain his "mind" meant that they believed Daniel. It is very possible that Daniel was in control of the government during this time. It was because of Daniel that when Neb's understanding returned, the government was peacefully handed back to him. Because of Daniel, they could have all had this date set on their iPhones. Maybe they had a countdown clock app.

Wouldn't this have become world news? Information flow was slower than today, but it flowed. Not only would this have been news in the empire, but everywhere that people knew of Nebuchadnezzar, there would have been interest. Imagine if this happened to the President of the United States and he grazed daily on the White House lawn. Barbara Walters would be out there feeding him a carrot on national TV. It would be the top story in the news every day. And this lasted for seven years.

Note, too, that Cyrus, the future king of Persia, was probably alive, but young, when this happened; and Darius the Mede was already officially serving his country. They would have known about this.

So the burning question around the world was what had caused this. Surely the word got out that it was Yahweh, if only as a rumor. Now, with this letter, the official word had been heard and Nebuchadnezzar was a worshiper of Yahweh, the God of the Jews, the King of heaven. And, for the remainder of Neb's reign, he would have given testimony to the greatness of God.

Can you see how God was preparing the nations for the return of the exiles to Israel? Can you see that Cyrus' decision to send Israel back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple has a connection to the work God was doing as the people were in Babylon, being punished? Daniel is an amazing book, and in the next chapters, we'll see how God used Daniel personally.

It was a long education, but I think that as a result of this letter, Nebuchadnezzar received an "A+" as his final grade from God.

2 Peter 1

It is thought that this letter was written close to Peter's death in Rome. Peter apparently lived his final ten years in Rome, though *never* as the pope. The focus of this letter is not only encouragement for those who were facing suffering, but the churches were encountering more and more false teaching. Someone has said that one recognizes the miracle of the apostolic age in noticing how quickly error came into the church once the apostles were gone. Actually, we've seen error being countered in all of the letters of Paul. Even in Acts 20, Paul warned the elders in Ephesus that ravenous wolves would come from within that church, not sparing the flock. The next thing you know, after the history recorded in Acts, Paul sent Timothy (in 1 Tim.) to Ephesus. He was to stop false teaching and to rebuild the church. Apparently something happened to the church in Ephesus. This letter from Peter is also written around that same time.

V. 1 Notice the *faith of equal standing*. It seems that this might have been said to counter some teachers who were saying there were different levels of perception or of belonging to God.

Vs. 3-4 These are two packed verses. Simply put, we are born again by *His divine power*. Notice that *granted* is used twice and each time the word refers to something else. The first has to do with God's divine power granting us life in Christ, as seen in knowing Him. The second has to do with the knowledge of Christ granting us the benefits of belonging to Him, or as Paul said in Philippians 3, *the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord*. Do you see how these things build on one another?

Vs. 5-9 Faith should automatically launch us into a process of growth, change and understanding. Being a child of God should change our lives and our conduct. Apparently there were teachers saying that the spirit of man was good; therefore, whatever you did now, in the body, didn't count, so you could do anything. Peter is saying that conduct is important because it reveals your knowledge of Jesus and your understanding of what He has done. A person who knows Christ becomes like Him and becomes engaged in His mission as a fruit-bearing vine.

Vs. 10-11 Being diligent to confirm our calling and election is based on our gratitude to the Lord and our understanding of what He has done for us and for all of mankind. Knowing Him and knowing what is happening on this earth, how could we treat this lightly? This entrance into heaven is as someone who has worked hard in the harvest and honored God on earth, as opposed to someone who lived a life of hiding, gratifying their desires and dishonoring Christ. To put it another way, it is the difference between the *gold, silver, precious stones, and wood, hay, straw*. The Lord welcomes these people differently.

Vs. 12-15 This is Peter, the proven disciple and shepherd, making disciples right up to the end of his life.

Vs. 16-21 Peter is asking them to submit, to commit themselves to the Word and to the apostles' teaching. Peter begins with the eyewitness account of the apostles. Peter was on the mountain with Jesus when Jesus was transfigured. He saw His future glory, as we'll see Jesus described in Revelation, and as He is in heaven right now.

V. 19 More sure than their testimony of the Transfiguration was the prophetic Word (the Scriptures) the apostles and prophets were now sharing with them. And even more sure than *the prophetic word* is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who was producing new Scripture by supernatural inspiration (through the apostles and prophets, Eph 3:5), and, according to John 14-16, the Spirit was teaching it to them. Remember, the Spirit's ministry is to reveal Christ.

The focus of all of this is the Lord Himself, and all of this goes back to v. 3 and the knowledge of Jesus. Notice that in Ephesians 4:14, Paul talks about the equipping ministry of the leaders as protecting the people against false teachers by bringing them to maturity in knowing Christ.

What Peter is saying here is exactly why we are in the Word. To make disciples, who are able to handle the Word and grow in the Word, we ourselves need to be in the Word, growing in our Lord and following Him. A disciple is not above his teacher. We need to know Christ fully so that the disciples we make will be like Him, not simply like us.

Psalm 119:97-112

And David will tell us how the Word protects and matures us.

Vs. 97-104 This reminds me of the comment of the Pharisees regarding Peter and John: *Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.* (Acts 4:13) And Jesus was the Word made flesh. Again, the disciple is supposed to be like his teacher.

Since the Word is from God, anyone who loves the Word and abides in it will have access to wisdom and understanding that are eternal and far above human achievement.

Vs. 105-112 Verse 105 is a famous verse, but notice the context of affliction. Emotional distress is almost blinding. It is hard to think straight or concentrate. It is hard not to react instinctively with anger or despair so quickly that it defies the ability to control ourselves. This was hard work, but this is what saved David. This is what God wants us, as disciples, to learn also. It is the Spirit, working through the Word that gives us control, leads us to safety and gives us an undivided heart in following Jesus.

V. 108 Notice too that David not only read God's Word, but he praised God, even in the storm.

V. 111 At this point David didn't have the promise of a continued throne, yet he considered his heritage and inheritance from God to be God's Word.

Proverbs 28:17-18

V. 17 That burden can be removed before God and before men, but that person has to be totally remade by God and be in submission to the Word.

V. 18 Amen.

NOVEMBER 28

Daniel 5

One of the reasons that God has put the stories of so many people in the Bible is for us to learn from them. In a way that only God would dare, He shows us their faith and their failures. At

times, like with David, He shows us things in great detail. God does this expecting us to learn from them. Put another way, God really, really expects us to learn and be warned by what He shows us from those who lived before us.

Nebuchadnezzar's life became an open book to the world, that Yahweh and His people were to be respected. It's time to see who learned and who didn't.

After Neb, the Babylonian Empire declined through murders and weak rulers. Finally, Nabonidus became king and reigned for the last 17 years of the empire. He actually left the city of Babylon to rule from another city further north. He appointed his son, Belshazzar, to rule in Babylon as a co-regent. So Babylon had two rulers.

We will see from the coming chapters, that Daniel lost his position in the palace when Nebuchadnezzar died. Two of the later chapters mention Daniel during the years of Belshazzar, and in one of those chapters, Daniel seems to be in the Persian capital of Susa, apparently working as a diplomat. If that was the case, God perfectly designed this "demotion" of Daniel. As a result, Daniel most likely knew both Cyrus and Darius, the coming rulers of the Persian Empire.

As Babylon was falling apart, the Persian Empire was going through its own growing pains. The young Cyrus wanted to expand Persia, but was held back by his grandfather who ruled in Assyria. A member of the royal family of the Medes, a general named Darius, sided with Cyrus and together they launched a civil war. Darius was an older man and was apparently highly respected. It seems that Cyrus and Darius agreed to co-rule Persia. Well, the civil war went so well that they decided to go against Babylon. Nabonidus was an absentee ruler and Belshazzar was really not a ruler at all. Persia began devouring Babylon. All of the diplomatic ties were cut and the city of Babylon began to become a small, lonely island.

The night of this chapter is the last night of the Babylonian Empire. Darius was working to take the city, having already captured Nabonidus. Belshazzar didn't know that yet. The city had massive walls and enough supplies to endure a 20-year siege. Now we'll look at what Belshazzar, this military genius and leader of the people, decided to do to stop the Persian attack on the city of Babylon.

Vs. 1-4 Belshazzar *drank wine in front of them and tasted the wine*. In other words, he got roaring drunk. At some point, probably recounting the victories of Babylon, he ordered those cups and vessels to be brought out that Nebuchadnezzar had taken from *the temple in Jerusalem*. We read about Neb taking these in chapter 1. Then they praised the gods represented by the precious metals.

Vs. 5-6 This was a visible hand and finger, and the writing was inscribed into the plaster of the wall. The king's reaction might hint that he knew what he had done and that it wasn't smart.

Vs. 7-9 Now we see another crisis and another failed attempt by *the wise men of Babylon*. The king's offer of being *the third ruler in the kingdom* was right, except that he didn't know that Nabonidus had already been dethroned and captured.

Vs. 10-12 The actual genealogy of Belshazzar is hard to understand. It appears that he might not have had a clear blood tie to Nebuchadnezzar, but Neb is referred to as his father meaning he was his successor. I've read elsewhere that Belshazzar was a grandson and that the queen mother was one of Nebuchadnezzar's wives, probably his queen. If this woman was Neb's queen, she was Persian. We just don't have enough records to know. But this woman knew about Daniel. According to her, Daniel had to have been indwelt by *the spirit of the holy gods*. How else could he know what he knew? The *excellent spirit* describes Daniel's attitude and heart. Not everyone who is an exile and a slave and demoted, etc., has an excellent spirit as a result of the Spirit. Daniel was a disciple.

Vs. 13-16 Notice that Daniel is still referred to as a Jewish exile. Since you know that the exile of the Jews lasted 70 years, and now with the Persians coming, you can imagine that Cyrus will soon be sending the Jews back to Jerusalem as God foretold, you can add up some years. If Daniel was taken when he was 16, that would make him about 86 now. Sometimes when you wake up old people they get grumpy. As Daniel walked in, having served all the years of Nebuchadnezzar, I'm sure he was disgusted to see what was happening. The empire had crumbled and this night was the cherry on top. Also, Daniel recognized the vessels of gold from the temple in Jerusalem.

Vs. 17-23 This is a very strong section of Scripture. Notice that while Daniel is respectful in turning down the riches and the offer to rule, there is a tone of acknowledging the foolishness of this evening.

What do you think is the key verse in this section? God expected Belshazzar to have learned from all He had done to Nebuchadnezzar. I would choose v. 22.

Vs. 24-28 Measured, measured, weighed and wanting, *your kingdom is divided among the Medes and the Persians*. Notice the *writing was inscribed*. It was not invisible/disappearing ink. It was written into the ballroom wall. That little observation might have a big impact.

V. 29 This is a very interesting and sad verse. In every chapter since chapter 2, we have had a pagan king worshiping God. I know this isn't worship, but it sure feels like Belshazzar is saying that Daniel and God are right, and that he was a fool. Ordering Daniel to be given these things was his humble admission of guilt. Belshazzar was tested on what God had done with Nebuchadnezzar, and got an "F-." He was measured and found wanting.

Understand what has just happened here: Daniel, the 86-year-old Jewish exile, has been made a ruler of the Babylonian Empire. A proclamation was made in the still uncaptured city.

V. 30 Later that evening, Darius entered the city practically without resistance. He captured and killed Belshazzar. At that moment, Daniel was the sole ruler of the Babylonian Empire. In a moment of time, God took Daniel from a place of forgotten obscurity, to being the wisest and sole ruler of the Babylonian Empire. It might look like this is dubbing someone the captain of a sinking ship, but God was on the move at the right time, to rescue His people and to show them grace. God was still bending the nations to His will. In Daniel's years of obscurity after the death of Nebuchadnezzar, God was strategically positioning Daniel to save His people and begin their journey back to Jerusalem. What an amazing God and Savior.

Here are some thoughts for tomorrow. Why is it important that Darius was 62 years old. So what? Why didn't Darius kill Daniel? You always killed the top rulers of a nation when you took it over. Do you think Darius was told what had happened that night? Was there any proof other than Daniel's new clothes and royal necklace? Keep all of this in mind when you begin reading chapter 6. There are reasons why the following events and a new crisis situation will develop.

2 Peter 2

Vs. 1-3 Peter and the Spirit are not holding back talking about the *false teachers* that are rising up in the church. Harry Ironside is credited with the saying, "Where there's light, there's bugs." It sounds funny, but when it comes to teachers who create dissension in the church, there is nothing funny. It is terrible to see very good and godly people get drawn into bitterness or into something false. This is why elders have to know the Lord, know the Word and be committed disciple makers, passing on a passion for the Word. If you understand Ephesians 4:12-16, you see that disciple-making not only brings maturity in Christ, but is a protection against false teachers and deception.

Peter mentions four things in this section that result in the rise of false teachers. Take a minute to identify these. The bottom line is that the work of a church in the harvest is lost and Jesus is held up to ridicule.

Vs. 4-10 To get what Peter is saying here, notice the “if – then” structure. There are lots of “ifs,” but the “then” doesn’t come until v. 9. Highlight *if*, and when you get to the *then*, notice that it has two parts, a positive and a negative.

V. 4 This is the first *if*, and a very interesting verse. If you look at Genesis 6:1-5, you will find that *the sons of God* saw the *daughters of man* and mated with them. These sons of God are fallen angels. I don’t understand it, but it wasn’t good. That we know of, no other demons are bound. These are a special group. It would be nice if they all were bound, but this particular group violated something that God had forbidden. I’m not sure how it worked, but it increased evil in the world and it deepened the rebellion against God, and God stopped it. If you think of what demons said to Jesus, you can see that they were still afraid of being judged as God had judged those angels back in Genesis 6.

Notice that all of these “ifs” are chronological. So what you see in Genesis 6 is correct. This action by these angels preceded the flood.

Vs. 10-16 Peter and the Spirit are on a roll.

It is hard to boil down all of these descriptions, but look to see what themes you find in this section. A couple of things stand out to me.

First, these teachers have no real spiritual understanding, but play with spiritual things, like a drunk juggling knives. They get hurt and don’t really understand the powers they are dealing with. Remember that Jesus said it would be possible to use His name and to perform signs and still to be lost. *Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’* (Matt. 7:21-23) Never means never. Jesus never knew them. They didn’t lose their salvation. They never had it from the beginning.

Second, they are in the company of believers. They are at the feasts. They are accursed children. Worst of all, they are like Balaam, who for the sake of money gave spiritual insight to the enemy, to the king of Moab, showing him how to bring God’s wrath on Israel. Paul told Timothy (2 Tim. 3:5) and the Romans (Rom. 16:20) to avoid these kind of people. They were to be disciplined and put out of the fellowship, but not to be argued with.

Vs. 17-22 These people promise freedom, but are themselves slaves. Worse than that, it appears that some of them might be saved; but they have twisted the truth so much, that they’ve shipwrecked their faith and warped their understanding. They will be permanently damaged on earth, only to be saved as through fire.

And in the meantime, they cause unbelievers to scoff and they *deceive the hearts of the simple-minded*. (Rom. 16:18 RSV)

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.*

Again, this is why you are in the Word, so that as you follow the Lord in the harvest, those you bring to Christ, and those who become disciples, will be firmly rooted in the Word and in following Christ in the harvest.

Psalm 119:113-128

As you see how David depended on the Word, find in each verse a concern on David's mind. For example, in v. 113 David was concerned with those who were shaky in their loyalties, or in their promise to help him. But rather than worry about them, he found the faithfulness and firmness he needed in God and His law. That's a good lesson for all of us. David was a very distressed individual. What would he have done without God and His Word?

Vs. 113-120 *The double-minded* are the problem here. This is very interesting since we are reading something like this in 2 Peter regarding the false teachers. They were kind of following God, but not following God. Notice v. 115. That sounds a lot like Matthew 7:23. The judgment that David feared in v. 120 would be that same judgment of fire and the revealing of the heart. This judgment would reveal those who truly loved God and His Word and those who were merely there to enjoy the benefits, using godliness as a means of gain.

Vs. 121-128 The first two verses define David's concern in this section. He had powerful, hypocritical, religious-sounding enemies. Yet David was true to God, following the Word. To honor God and honor the Word, David had spared Saul's life twice. Still, David had moments he feared for his life, or feared that he himself would be put to shame for having such trust in God and His Word.

David longed for everything he had read about in God's Word. God's promises cannot fail and His steadfast love never ends. You might want to listen to "Your Love Never Fails," by Chris Quilala / Jesus Culture.

Proverbs 28:19-20

V. 19 It is interesting to read this. I like the "p's" at the end and the play on the word *plenty*. Actually, I was just reading the parable of the man who built the barns in Luke 12:21. God says it is worthless to lay up treasure for yourself and not be rich toward Him.

V. 20 Why the punishment? *But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.* (1 Tim. 6:9) They punish themselves.

NOVEMBER 29

Daniel 6

In my thinking, there are few chapters in the Bible that are as under-taught, underestimated and misunderstood as this chapter. This is one of those chapters that makes Bible study a lot of fun. Buckle up!

Vs. 1-3 Now, how is this possible? It should be impossible for anyone to read this and just accept it without wondering why Darius, the conquering general and ruler over this part of the Persian Empire, should elevate Daniel. Daniel was not only the final ruler of the Babylonian Empire, but he had served Babylon as a high ranking official for 67 years. These are the guys you kill when you take over. Assuming Darius was a rational man, why would he do this? It doesn't make sense. Darius must have had very good reasons for bringing Daniel into his government.

Just for fun look at the following verses: Daniel 9:1 and 11:1. All of this is happening in the first year of Darius.

The fact that Darius was 62 years old meant he would have been in his twenties when Neb lost his mind. There were great relationships between the Babylonians and the Persians and Medes. As royalty, Darius would have visited Babylon many times on official business or to attend events. He may have even fed Nebuchadnezzar a carrot. He would have known Daniel all his life as the ruler of the province of Babylon and the chief of the wise men. Daniel's eminence would

have been even greater during the seven years while Neb was grazing. We don't know when Daniel was sent as an ambassador to Susa, but we find him there in chapter 8. This would have given Darius and Cyrus more contact with Daniel. Now, these could have been some reasons for Darius to have respected Daniel, but as we read on, we will find some reasons that were far more powerful.

Vs. 4-9 There are two things that are important to see here. First, these people were very religious, and to break the will of a people, you made them compromise themselves in the worship of their gods. We saw that in Daniel 1 and 3. So, as silly as this might sound to us, it made good sense to them. Second, in v. 8, it is very clear that Darius was an equal with Cyrus, in that he could sign a decree into existence that was binding and could not be broken in the entire empire. Official records of this would have been made, sent out by courier and put into official books. This information about official recorded decrees will come in handy at the end of the chapter.

Vs. 10-11 Daniel went and prayed anyway. Why? I've heard people attribute this to the faithful habits of a person having their quiet time and their sweet hour of prayer before the Lord. That is all great stuff. But, if you really want to know why Daniel prayed, as well as what he prayed, read Daniel 9:1-19. This was an absolutely crucial time in the history of Israel. Daniel's passion for the Lord and for his people, as representatives of the God of salvation, was burning in him. The seventy years were up and a new government had taken over. Daniel knew his entire life had been directed by God to save his people. He was begging God to fulfill His promise, given in Jeremiah 29:10, to end the exile after 70 years and return the people to Jerusalem. It is really deeper than that and we'll see it in chapter 9. There was no way in the world, regardless of the enemy or the cost, that Daniel would not beg God for His people. (By the way, we'll see later that facing Jerusalem in prayer was a part of another promise in Scripture.)

Vs. 11-13 The trap was sprung, but as we saw in Esther with Haman, sometimes the traps you set for others have a way of biting you back. In this case, the biting is meant literally.

Vs. 14-20 Here we go again. Darius is acting very strangely.

V. 14 I've heard this explained that Darius really loved Daniel and didn't want to lose such a cool leader. Maybe, but how do you explain that Darius is very distressed. This section shows that Darius was fearful. How do you explain that? Read on.

V. 15 This would not have endeared these men to Darius. How many men were a part of this conspiracy? Certainly there were the two other presidents, but some suggest that many of the local leaders were a part of this. I've read of numbers into the hundreds, but only so many men and their families would have fit in the lion's den. I think the main actors here were those other presidents and a few other high ranking men.

One of the things that leads people to misunderstand the depth of this book is that the first six chapters are seen individually, as disconnected children's stories. Just for the fun of it, Google "Daniel in the lion's den," and then click on "images." Notice how many of the pictures do not show that Daniel was in his eighties. I found one picture that looked like "Samson in the lion's den." Anyway, it should be impossible to read chapters 1-6 and not know that 70 years have passed, but most people still visualize Daniel as a young man.

V. 16 How did Darius have this information? I think Darius had known this about Daniel most of his life.

V. 18 No TV, no dancing girls, no nothing! Why in the world is a pagan king fasting, and whom is he seeking by his praying and fasting? Why couldn't he sleep? What was he worried about?

V. 19 Why is he going to the den so early and with so much agitation? Did he want to collect the bones? Guys like this never traveled alone, so the coach or the guys who carried him apparently had to do double-time.

V. 20 Why is he crying out in anguish? Just think of what Darius says here, *servant of the living God*. That is a grade “A” shocker. How did Darius know that?

I think Darius expected that God would act that night to save Daniel. I think Darius knew all about God’s education of Nebuchadnezzar: the first dream, the dedication and furnace, and particularly the events that led up to Neb being punished. All of these actions were official Babylonian events, recorded in Aramaic, copied, sent out to the capitals of the provinces and filed. Then, the night that Darius took over, he heard of this strange event in the ballroom. He and Mrs. Darius walked into their new ballroom the next day to decide on paint and drapes, and there on the wall they saw the words carved in the plaster. Not only did he know the stories of what had happened to Neb, but now he had become a part of that history of this mighty God who mixes Himself in empires, and disciplines those kings who resist Him. For Darius, living in Babylon might have been kind of like inheriting a haunted house. I think that when Darius realized he had been tricked and maneuvered into putting Daniel to death, he feared for his life before Yahweh.

Vs. 21-23 Not only was Darius happy (and off the hook), but it was a visual sign and miracle to all of those officials and soldiers who were with him.

V. 24 Darius was also very mad. It was time for some "payback." And just like we saw in the book of Esther, when the decree was given to destroy the Jews, their enemies revealed who they were and were dealt with.

Vs. 25-27 I just have a few observations here. First, another pagan king is worshipping God. Actually, Darius is doing such a good job of it, you wonder if this event moved him to become a worshiper of Yahweh only.

Second, Darius writes a binding decree for the entire Persian Empire stating that people were to fear Yahweh. Remember that Nebuchadnezzar did this after the furnace in chapter 3. The force of Neb’s decree was that no one dared force the Jews to worship any god but their own. That decree protected the Jews up until the Persian Empire. When the Persians came to power, they hit the “reset” button and the Jews were threatened again with being forced to worship other gods. With this decree, the Jews were again a favored people in the empire and they were granted the freedom to worship Yahweh only.

Third, this information, the entire written account, would have been sent out in Aramaic to all the ends of the earth, not just the empire. Cyrus would have gotten a copy. The first year of Darius was also the first year of Cyrus. Guess what Cyrus did in his first year, and after this event? He sent the Jews back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. Notice that they were sent to rebuild the temple, not the city. The focus of Cyrus’ decree was the worship of Yahweh and wanting to earn Yahweh’s favor. Was this event the catalyst to Cyrus’ decree? That makes a lot more sense to me than that God just whammied him and Cyrus mindlessly did it. Read Ezra 1:1-2, and you’ll notice that Cyrus had a lot of information. He most certainly had been influenced by what happened to Neb and Cyrus might have read some of the official Babylonian documents that had been written by Daniel, that is, chapters 2, 3, 4, 5 and 7. (Chapter 7 is interesting and was written in Aramaic, years earlier.) I think that God used this crisis to put the fire under Cyrus to seek the favor of God and to send the Jews home.

Fourth, look at what God does through crisis. In God’s hands, crisis is our friend. This should teach us something.

Fifth, though Belshazzar knew what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar, he failed to learn from it and paid the price. Darius was different. He not only observed; he took it to heart. Darius got an "A."

As disciples, when Jesus tells us to go into the harvest and not to fear, I think He can really back that up. The question is, after reading all of this, have we learned anything?

2 Peter 3

Vs. 1-3 Peter is doing the same thing that Paul did with Timothy, when he told Tim in both letters that in the last days there would be false teachers. In this case Peter is saying that, from within the church, there will come false teachers who, among other things, will cause others not to take certain things seriously. People will scoff at God. It happens, too, and as a result, bitter, disillusioned, fruitless believers are easy to find.

Vs. 4-7 In this case they are creating doubt regarding the return of the Lord and judgment. Peter uses the example of the flood, to show that what happened once will certainly happen again. The same Word that created the world has brought judgment once, by water, and will bring it again. As sure as there is a visible world, there will be a time of accountability before the Creator. I think the issue here is not only God's delay, but whether He will bring judgment.

Vs. 8-10 Notice the prominence of the harvest and the importance of our mission in what Peter says here. The reason that God is waiting is for the harvest to be brought in. Notice that this judgment will come with fire on the earth. That sounds like the book of Revelation.

Vs. 11-13 Since we know the judgment is coming, we should live a particular kind of life, following Jesus. Since everything on earth will be done away with, except people, saving people is the goal, not acquiring stuff or fulfilling our desires. By working in the harvest, bringing in those whom God will save, we are hastening the coming of the Lord. Notice that Peter adds some reality here regarding the coming judgment and the promise of our future not being on this earth, but on the new one. Too many believers still think that heaven is on this earth. This earth and this time on earth is like the foyer or entrance to a building. We haven't really entered the true building yet.

Vs. 14-18 Notice here that Paul's writings are equated as Scripture. The people are to resist the false teachers, wait on the Lord, honor God and work in the harvest during this time of God's patience. Notice that there were "other Scriptures" besides what Paul had written. This could be referring to the Gospels of Mark, Luke and the letter from James.

V. 18 says it all. Amen!

The time to be working in the harvest is now, before God's judgment begins. And, this is the perfect season in many western nations to use Christmas as a conversation starter, or to show kindness to someone in the name of our Lord.

Psalm 119:129-152

Vs. 129-130 Here, the Word becomes the light to the soul, giving understanding. *Unfolding* gives the sense of the Word gradually making sense to us as we spend time in it daily.

Vs. 131-136 On the basis of the light you have, you know how to move and respond in the darkness. David had plenty of darkness around him.

V. 133 David needed God to steady his steps and this came through the Word. In reading this, I think of how strong David was when he was afflicted and distressed. He was forced to go to the Lord in His Word. It seems like David lived in the Word. When he got comfortable and busy and important in his palace, I think he let the Word gather dust, and we've read the tragic results.

Vs. 137-144 Righteousness seems to be important in this section. Righteousness is like a standard, or measurement or guide to help us. Driving "righteously" would be obeying the rules, stopping at signs and staying inside the lines. We learn of God's guides for us in His Word. David's adversaries were out of bounds in pursuing David. It was a matter of knowing God's Word and living righteously before Him. David was distressed by the danger and the unjustness, but the Word gave David comfort. The righteousness of God and those standards expressed in the Word pleaded David's case.

Vs. 145-146 David's interest in God and in His Word was with his whole heart.

Vs. 147-148 I wonder if this was David's quiet time. Notice the mention of the promise.

Vs. 149-151 And here's the reason David got up so early. David knew of the *steadfast love* of God as revealed in His Word. God was near.

V. 152 David knew that the Word was eternal.

This makes me think that we need to pursue the Lord in times of "peace," the way we do in times of need and distress. The reality of this life is that we live behind enemy lines, with people around us being deceived and destroyed, around the clock. When God gives us peace, we shouldn't abuse it by forgetting why He has left us here. We are to pursue Him in this dark harvest, following Christ, reaching the lost, making disciples, who make disciples. Very soon, both in the OT and in the NT, we will begin reading about the judgment that is coming.

Proverbs 28:21-22

V. 21 I'm sure this was another reason why Jesus taught His disciples that we should expect our bread from God and lay up treasure in heaven. If that's where our bread comes from, we can't be bought.

V. 22 I'm sure that "poverty of soul" is included in this.

NOVEMBER 30

This is a red letter day. Today you'll begin 1 John and finish Psalm 119. Tomorrow you will begin your final month reading The One Year Bible this year. Hopefully you feel encouraged. Don't give up if you've fallen behind. Just begin again on January 1. Everything you've learned in the Word this year will seem familiar as you begin reading in January. Also, you've learned some stuff about yourself, and this next year you'll be more likely to be more regular about reading every day. It takes three to five years of reading The One Year Bible to develop the habits that will keep you on track for a full year. Imagine, there are people who have been believers 40 years to whom the Word is a familiar, yet foggy, book. Their quiet times come out of secondary sources that only reference the Word. They are attuned to the words of men about God, but not God's Word. They never invested five years to set their hearts on developing a life-long walk with God every day in His truth. And if you are meeting regularly with 2-3 others, sharing what the Spirit is teaching you, the effect of walking with the Lord like this is magnified 100 times and becomes a disciple-making way of life.

Daniel 7

Daniel is either liked because of the "children's" stories in chapters 1-6, or because of the apocalyptic portions where beasts are doing beastly stuff, or because angels are warring with one another. In my opinion, if you only look at the first six chapters as interesting kids' stories, you miss the entire point, and with that, Daniel ends up in the lion's den as a 20-40 year-old man. Clearly in the first six chapters, God is moving and influencing the nations for the return of Israel to their land. Now, in chapters 7-12 we need to ask ourselves what God's purpose is in letting us have this information. I would say that God is showing how He will also be moving the nations

and influencing them for the return of the Messiah and the establishment of His kingdom. Yet, there is still the question of why God is giving us this future information. Think about that.

V. 1 The first year of Belshazzar's reign means this vision is given to Daniel about 14 years before the lion's den. Why did God give this to Daniel now? It's all speculation; but I think, among other things, He wanted to encourage Daniel. When Belshazzar was given the rule in Babylon, while Nabonidus was living the high-life elsewhere, that must have felt bad. The empire began to decline even faster. Daniel was powerless and was now demoted. This might have been to inspire Daniel to know that God was still in charge and that this weakening of Babylon was a part of His plan to bring about the next empire. That might be a reason for all of these chapters. One thing all of these empires had in common was their rule over Israel, God's people.

Many people on this planet feel powerless regarding the direction of their country, government, and the trends of culture. Daniel felt that, but what God showed Daniel has to help us too. We are disciples following Christ in the harvest on a dying planet that will ultimately experience the wrath of God. We are no longer people identified by a nationality like Jews or Greeks, or identified by a geological area like the USA, China, or Europe. We belong to the kingdom of God, and just like Jesus sent the 70 ahead of Him into every place where He Himself was coming, we are heralding the coming of our King and His offer of forgiveness. We need to wake up and do our work. We were meant to love our cultures and care for our people, but this time must come to an end because of the ravages of sin and the rule of Satan. God says that things will only get worse before the coming of our Lord. But as the clouds roll in before the storm, many people will be stirred and will open their hearts to Christ. We are here for Christ to reach out to them.

This is the final chapter that is in Aramaic. Now, you could understand chapters 2-6 being in Aramaic, since they were like news communications in the empire, but what about chapter 7? This again is speculation, but I think that as chief of the wise men, Daniel published this in their literature. Chapter 7, as well as chapter 2, hang together and help interpret one another. The rest of the chapters deal exclusively with Israel and how nations and events will impact God's people. Those chapters, specifically for the Jews, are written in Hebrew. Chapter 7 belongs to the explanation of chapter 2, and so I think this was also included in the official records of Babylon, though maybe, only under the note, "for wise guys only."

Just as an aside, we have no idea as to what Daniel did among the wise men. I can't imagine they just did card tricks all day. He must have had some input into their learning and doings. You know that the wise men who visited Jesus after His birth came from the east, from the region Daniel ruled. How do you think they knew about this coming King who would set up an eternal kingdom? Although you can't say for sure it was the influence of Daniel, it would be silly to exclude that possibility. I don't know how, but I think that through Daniel, God gave the information to the wise men that would culminate with the journey of the Magi to worship the young child Jesus.

Vs. 2-7 In chapter 2, we had four metals as a part of one statue. In the last of those kingdoms, something funny happened in the feet that was a part of that last kingdom, a continuation of some sort. In the days of those last kings, God sets up His eternal kingdom. Here we have four beasts, and in the days of that final beast something funny happens. Like the iron legs of the statue that have these toes, this final beast will eventually have ten horns. After those horns, God will set up His kingdom. So, we have two visions with one meaning. But now Daniel is shown something about that final kingdom and God has Daniel particularly concerned with a little horn.

Note, God used the sea often as a symbol of rebellion to His rule. Out of that sea of human rebellion come the nations that will claim world domination, and particularly domination of Israel.

V. 4 Just as the head of gold was Nebuchadnezzar and was given prominence, this beast is also given some honor in its description. God removes the wings and gives it the mind of a man. This is probably alluding to God's education of Nebuchadnezzar, making him rational and understanding that the living God ruled.

V. 5 The bear representing the Persian Empire would have been the breast and arms of silver on the statue. The bear was lopsided, some suggest, because it was of the Medes (weaker side) and the Persians (the stronger side.)

V. 6 This is Greece, the bronze torso and thighs of bronze on the statue. The animal imagery here is very direct. The leopard was a symbol the Greeks used; and after Alexander's death, the empire was divided into four kingdoms: north, south, east and west.

V. 7 Breaking into pieces sort of describes this empire, both in the legs of iron and in this beast with its teeth of iron. I don't know my history, so I don't know that the Romans were more brutal than all other empires, but they did have the distinction of being the empire that both killed the Messiah and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. The ten horns, as we'll see, are ten kings and they would correspond to the toes on the statue. In the description of the statue in chapter 2, it mentions the *days of those kings*. Since we know here, that there are ten kings ruling at once, looking back on that phrase and those ten toes makes sense. I think that because of the way both of these visions help interpret each other, Daniel wrote this in Aramaic, probably to put it together in the file with the vision of the statue.

V. 8 So, in the days of those ten horns, a small one comes up and plucks up three of the others by their roots, meaning, totally removed. The description of the eyes must have to do with some special dark intelligence given to that horn. While it is saying these *great things*...

Vs. 9-10 ...God takes His seat to pronounce judgment on mankind. This is like the beginning and duration of the Tribulation. Notice that some of this description of the glory of God sounds like what Ezekiel saw.

Vs. 11-12 Eventually this horn was judged. The dominion of the other beasts (Iraq, Iran, Greece and Italy) has been taken away, but their lands remain. We don't have enough information on this final manifestation of the final beast, but with everything that is said here and elsewhere about the horn, the killing of the beast seems to be talking about a man.

Vs. 13-14 This would be the coming of Christ at the end of the Tribulation.

As a result of v. 13, the Jews had a title for the Messiah, the "Son of Man." Imagine the distress of the religious leaders, when they heard Jesus refer to Himself as the "Son of Man." As you read through the Gospels next year, underline "Son of Man." It will give you an idea of how often Jesus used this title. Here are a couple of times Jesus said this of Himself.

Mark 2:10-11 *But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" -- he said to the paralytic -- ¹¹"I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home."*

Matthew 26:63-65 *But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." ⁶⁴Jesus said to him, "You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven." ⁶⁵Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy."*

Vs. 15-18 Daniel seeks help and is given a very brief summary, with the assurance that God will fulfill His promise to Israel. Remember, this vision is given to Daniel as the Babylonian Empire

was crumbling. Daniel is shown and told that God will sovereignly guide Israel to fulfill the promise given to Abraham.

Vs. 19-22 Now, some of this seems like a review of what he saw, except for the part of the horn beating up the people of Israel/followers of Christ until God puts an end to it. Daniel didn't mention this persecution before, but God knew it would catch Daniel's eye. What concerned Daniel was that this king was fighting and beating the "saints" / people of Israel and followers of Christ during the Tribulation. Why would God allow that?

Vs. 23-28 Notice that this last kingdom, in the final years before the return of Christ, will have power over the whole earth. Those who stand and survive against this power will be few. There will be believers on the earth and there will still be nations that will resist God and the antichrist. As C. S. Lewis said, "The dwarfs are for the dwarfs."

V. 25 What is significant in this description of the antichrist is that he will be given power to kill the followers of Christ during the Tribulation, who will mostly be Jews. We will see this when we read the book of Revelation, and there, we'll see God's purpose in it. Remember Romans 8:36.

V. 27 This is clearly the Millennial Kingdom with the Jews being a witness to the world and Christ reigning. For another prediction of this, see Isaiah 55:5.

V. 28 Daniel was distressed because of the damage this king will do to the saints of God. Revelation explains a little more about this. Those days are still future for Israel, but then there will be full vindication from God.

So, knowing that God has everything in His hands, now is the time to work in the harvest, sharing and witnessing the blessings and power of the gospel as we follow Christ, reaching out to the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

1 John 1

After reading Paul and Peter, what we'll find in John's letters will fall right in line. John wrote this after many churches were established, probably in the 60's A.D., and before the persecution by Nero. What marked this time was the rise of false teaching in the church. God, of course, knew it would come and so He used this rise in false teaching as a help for us to see the apostles address the issues. In dealing with the false teaching, John will also express, in his unique way, the focus of disciples following Christ in the harvest.

Vs. 1-4 Like the introduction to John's Gospel, the focus is immediately on Jesus and His message. See how many things you can find in this introduction that would caution the believers to resist false teachers.

V. 4 As with Paul, John's joy was in seeing disciples joyfully and faithfully following Christ, making disciples.

Vs. 5-10 This section is definitely aiming at something. Now, even if there weren't false teachers, there would still be the presence of inappropriate lifestyles and the warped rationalizations that supported those in the guise of being OK with God.

Vs. 5-6 We've seen people in Corinth doing all sorts of sin, from immorality to idolatry, justifying it before God. Apparently there were teachers who were not only rationalizing this, but they were promoting it.

V. 7 Notice how this great truth not only rebukes those not honoring Christ in their lives, but it says that as disciples follow Christ, God continually cleanses them from the sins they will inevitably commit. This led John into the next extreme in teaching.

Vs. 8-10 There is no sinless perfection on this earth, whether we say, "Oh that's just the flesh and it doesn't count," or if we say, "I've reached that higher plane of existence." John and the Spirit didn't have much patience for any opinion that says we don't continually need to ask forgiveness before God.

V. 9 This is forgiveness in the family. When a child or spouse sins, it doesn't mean they are out of the family, it means that until someone says they're sorry, you can't pretend that nothing happened. On the basis of the power of what Jesus did, He can justly forgive us and cleanse us as often as we sin. We only need to confess.

V. 10 Again, since this is addressed to Christians, this is not talking about sin before conversion, but sinning while walking with Christ. A disciple will keep a very short, and sensitive, account of his sins and will be talking with God often. It's part of the joy of that closeness with the Lord.

Psalm 119:153-176

Isn't it interesting that David used this alphabet pattern to write this entire psalm. Then in the first part of each section, he refers to something about his life, but the second part always says something about the Word. He goes out of his way to refer to the Word in different ways, yet it is always the same. He couldn't live without being in God's Word in every situation every day and every hour. We need to learn to do the same.

As you read, notice again all of the references to distress or trouble and how the Word helped him.

Vs. 153-154 This is David's plea to God in this section. God knows those who are His and He will deliver them, according to His wisdom and His plan. Sometimes heaven is that deliverance.

Vs. 155-160 God's salvation and compassion are based on a person's relationship to Him. The wicked do not seek or obey God's Word. David not only read and obeyed, but he also loved God's Word.

Vs. 161-162 In the face of unjust persecution, David focused on God's Word to the point of having joy. Notice here that v. 161 sort of echoes John 15:25, *They hated me without a cause.*

Vs. 163-168 Notice all of the emotions in this section from v. 161 to 168: awe, joy, praise, love, peace, hope and love.

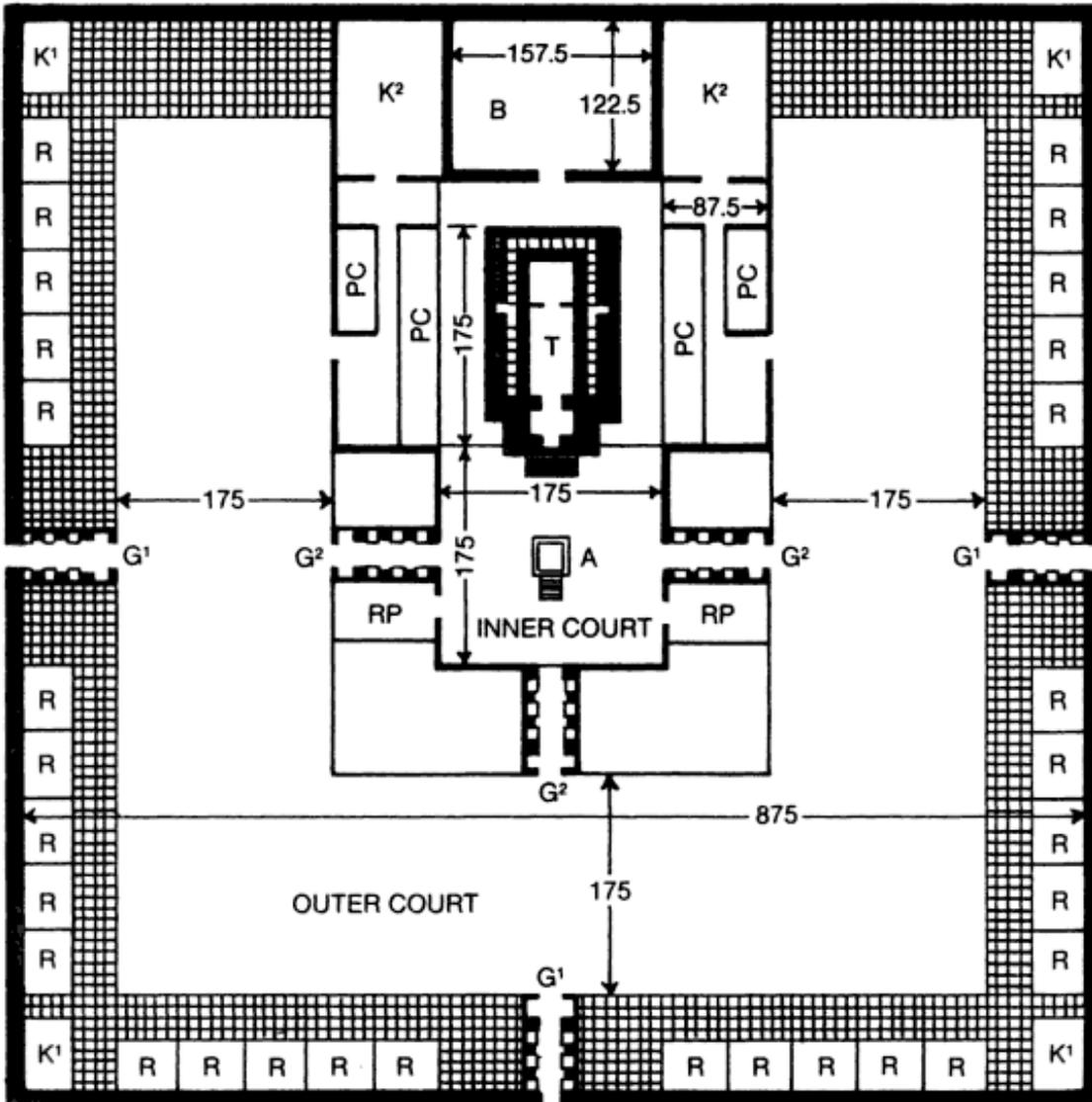
Vs. 169-176 Underline *let* in this section. Notice too how crying, pleading, and praising are mentioned.

V. 176 David asked God to seek him when he went astray. God did this for David.

Proverbs 28:23-24

V. 23 I was reading this morning how Jesus strongly cautioned His disciples to avoid the leaven of the Pharisees, which was hypocrisy. Immediately afterward He told them not to worry about death or persecution. To live as honestly and transparently as we should for Christ, apparently, could get us into trouble. At least Jesus must have thought so.

V. 24 Having just read 1 John 1:10, isn't this a funny "coincidence?" We need to call a sin a sin.



THE MILLENNIAL TEMPLE

(Dimensions are in feet)

- A Altar (43:13-17)
- B Building (function not explained) (41:12)
- G¹ Outer gates (40:6-17, 20-27)
- G² Inner gates (40:28-37)
- K¹ Kitchens for people's sacrifices (46:21-24)
- K² Kitchens for priests (46:19-20)
- PC Priests' chambers (42:1-14)
- R 30 rooms in outer court (40:17)
- RP Rooms for ministering priests (40:44-47)
- T **Temple** proper (40:48-41:11, 13-14, 16-26)

