

READING NOTES – DECEMBER

The One Year Bible (ESV)

DECEMBER 1

Welcome to December and heading down the home stretch of this year's reading of The One Year Bible. I think that calls for a gingerbread something.

Daniel 8

This vision was given to Daniel two years after the vision in chapter 7. Though it involves both Persia and Greece, the major revelation of this vision concerns the people of Israel as the time of the end approaches. Although everything revealed here will apply to the next century of trials for Daniel's people, it will mirror the time of the end before the Messiah establishes His reign on earth and Israel becomes a leader for the nations.

You'll find a chart, "A Comparison of Daniel 2; 7; and 8," at the end of this document.

Vs. 1-4 We'll see that the ram is Persia, the horns are the first two kings who served at the same time. Darius (representing the Medes) is the little horn and Cyrus (representing the Persians) is the big horn. By the time you get to Esther, Ezra and Nehemiah, you don't hear of the Medes anymore, but Persian kings were still named Darius and Ahasuerus in honor of those early leaders.

V. 2 So where was Daniel? In the vision, he was in Susa (in Iran), the capital of the Persian Empire. It was only about 150-200 miles directly east of Babylon. Daniel's description seems as if he was very familiar with the city. We know from Daniel 5, that Daniel was no longer working in the king's direct service but was totally forgotten. The king didn't know who Daniel was. My suggestion is that Daniel was sent out of Babylon, during the reign of Belshazzar, as a diplomat to Persia. He was still in the king's service, just out of sight and out of mind. During the conflict with the Persians he would have returned to the city of Babylon. This is all speculation, but it does make sense of some of the information.

Vs. 5-8 This is Greece and the mighty horn is Alexander the Great. The four horns are the four kings and kingdoms that rose after Alexander died at the age of 32.

Vs. 9-12 Here's that little horn again. Yesterday it was associated with the fourth kingdom, coming at the time of the end. Today we meet a king who foreshadows that coming king who will persecute the Jews and claim an authority above God. Oddly enough, the ruler from the Greeks who will arise is Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who we'll refer to as AE. He will foreshadow the antichrist (AC). It's only in English that the spellings of Antiochus and antichrist are so similar, but still, it is ironic.

V. 10 This is hard to understand. AE and the AC will both be given power over the people of Israel and especially over those who are following God. Since we haven't read Daniel 10 yet, we don't understand that behind the earthly warfare there is also an angelic warfare going on. The mention of stars can refer to angels. To see this connection of angels and stars, look at Revelation 1:20, and read Revelation 12:4 which is very parallel to this verse in Daniel. So then, with all of these words that can have double references, both the human and angelic aspects of this battle could be in view.

V. 11 The *Prince of the host* could be referring to the angelic representative for Israel.

V. 12 I think the *host* here is clearly referring to the people of Israel.

Vs. 13-14 Since offerings were offered evenings and mornings, this number should be divided in half, which makes it closer to 3.5 years. This was the length of time the temple was desecrated

by AE during the time of the Maccabean revolt, and it is roughly the same amount of time it will be desecrated by the AC in the future.

Vs. 15-18 This is one of four places in the Bible where we meet Gabriel. He is here and in Daniel 9, and then we see him twice in Luke, announcing the births of John and Jesus.

V. 17 *The vision is for the time of the end*, but this information about the antichrist as seen in AE will also be a help to the Jews, led by the priest family of the Maccabeans who in 170 A.D. had to endure AE's madness. Hanukkah is the Jewish celebration of the Maccabeans rededicating the temple after AE desecrated it.

Vs. 19-26 Notice that Gabriel, in describing AE, doesn't go to the very last times historically, but rather to the end of this rogue Greek Empire. Actually AE was chased out of Egypt by the Romans, so this was, as v. 23 says, toward the end of these Greek kingdoms. When AE arrived in Jerusalem, he wanted Israel to be a buffer state against the Romans; but the Jews were always stubborn, so he went crazy. There was a massive persecution of the Jews with much killing and destruction.

What is to be noted here is the extreme arrogance of AE and his success against God's people. This example, and what we'll learn in chapter 10, will help the Jews living in the Tribulation understand what is happening to them and will give them strength to hold on. Actually too, those believers in the Tribulation will have the book of Revelation so they will fully understand why the persecution against them is so hard and so relentless.

V. 25 AE died of madness in Persia. At the end of the Tribulation, it will be Jesus, the Prince of Princes, who does away with the antichrist.

V. 27 Since Daniel had lived for God and for his people, I think it was the vision of this destruction of his people that made him sick. In this vision, too, what he couldn't understand or grasp was the spiritual overtone of this battle and the apparent victory given to the bad guys.

As disciples, we are following Christ in the harvest in the calm before the storm. The Bible says the clouds are gathering. Now is the time for us to be working.

1 John 2:1-17

Since this letter is written to believers, we need to understand John's warnings as trying to keep believers from becoming damaged on earth, and to motivate and help disciples to walk closely with the Lord.

Vs. 1-3 Notice this is addressed to all of the believers as *little children*.

V. 2 *Propitiation* means that God was completely "satisfied" by the sacrifice/payment of Jesus. Nothing more is needed.

Vs. 4-6 Both in John 14:21-23 and in John 15:1-8, there is a special relationship that is promised to those who walk closely with Jesus. It doesn't mean that a child who stays distant from his father is not a child, but it will influence how much benefit and closeness he receives from the relationship. Even what I was reading this morning, about Jesus acknowledging or denying His disciples before the angels of God, has to do with blessing and provision, not with salvation. If a person denies Jesus, Jesus doesn't need to help them (acknowledge them) because that person is helping himself, getting out of a tough jam by denying Jesus. If you acknowledge Jesus, He acknowledges you and sends help from the Father. It has to do with relationship, not salvation.

Vs. 7-11 Now John just mentioned the idea of keeping the commandments of Christ. If someone asked you what some of those commandments were, there are a few that should come right to the surface. Anyone who has had to work with Christians, encouraging them to work in the harvest, knows that working in the church is not easy. Loving one another is one of those major

commandments that Jesus gave the night before He died. The commandment to love one another was prefaced by Jesus saying He was leaving, but sending us into the world as witnesses. He knew the world would hate us, yet we are to love one another as we bear witness to Him.

It needs to be emphasized that keeping His commandments will always be tied into the Great Commission and bearing witness for Christ. To live morally is the least we can do for what He's done for us. It is daring to die for Him in reaching out and making disciples, that puts us in the position of obeying His commands. For most people, being a Christian means staying away from sex and drugs and fun and trouble in general. We are to imitate our Savior and follow and obey the Father as He did. (John 14:13) And in joy, it led Jesus straight to the cross. Loving one another takes on a special, God intended meaning, when we are all risking our lives on earth to make Christ known. Without the mission and living as disciples, loving one another is just another flowery, religious thought.

Now, in John's Gospel, he says, *The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world.* (John 1:9) This light is Jesus. However, if you've been in church, you know that it is possible for born-again people not to like or love one another. Again, what John is saying here is that the proof of growing in Christ is loving one another. It is a sign of abiding in Christ. And if this abiding is the same as the context of John 15, this abiding is done by disciples in the harvest, living to bear fruit for Christ. When we forget Who saved us, where we are and why we are left here, all we have is a social organization called "church," in which we vie for position and recognition and where we demand that our needs be met. The church exists to carry a light into the harvest. In Christ, His salvation and mission binds us together.

Vs. 12-14 One way to try to understand this section is to understand that John is addressing everyone as *little children*, then everyone as *fathers*, and finally everyone as *young men*. John has already said in 2:1, that they are all *little children*. So, it seems to me that John was saying first that he was calling them *little children*, because they were innocent, like those who had just had their sins forgiven in Christ. He was saying they were like *fathers* in that they knew the Ancient of Days, understood His wisdom and could give perspective to life. And they were like *young men*, because they had fought and overcome the evil one by obeying God.

Then the next section of restatement adds a source or directive to what was said: *little children* are to grow to know the Father, *fathers* are to keep on doing the same thing, *and young men* are to be strong in the Word.

Vs. 15-17 It seems that this section is a warning. Being lured into these desires will keep them from the faith of a child, the perspective of a father, and the victory of a young man. Abiding in Christ, or not, is the point here.

This morning I was reading of Jesus warning His disciples in Luke 12:1-15. What is interesting is that His warning about hypocrisy only begins with *beware*, but when Jesus warns them against all aspects of coveting and possession in v. 15, He intensifies the warning by saying, ***Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness.*** Sometimes it is easier for us to see religious problems than for us to see the desires of our hearts that are consuming us. Just like the seed sown among thorns, believers get choked, their fruit does not mature and so they prove unfruitful. That choking was the result of cares and delights and desires. Living for those things describes a lot of people in a lot of churches. This is a good warning.

Psalm 120

Remember, a song of ascents was sung by the pilgrims coming to Jerusalem for the feasts, three times a year, preparing their hearts for worshipping God.

I would guess that this song (sort of an unusual song to read so it must have sounded great when sung) would have reflected a desire to dwell in the Lord's presence. *One thing have I asked of the*

Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple. (Psalm 27:4)

V. 1 Not everyone went to the feasts. To do that, you had to leave your house, possessions, and property unguarded. You missed work. Eventually you were scorned and ridiculed for being faithful.

Vs. 2-7 This must have been the inner feelings of being scorned and ridiculed for coming to the feasts. Dwelling with the Lord, in peace in the inner man, is the hope of those who must live in a hostile, unbelieving part of the world. As disciples we work where human things are often out of control, where there are few choices, but we do have a choice where our heart dwells.

Proverbs 28:25-26

V. 25 As I've been reading about Jesus teaching His disciples not to have any anxiety about life or stuff, it not only shows you the trust that He wants His disciples to have; but that trust is the key to them being full of joy and having peace. Those who are content in Him and put their trust in Him bring that joy and trust with them wherever they go. They have it in the middle of chaos, because they have Him with them.

V. 26 This again has to do with trust. Notice in the second line the trust is in the Word (how else do we know God's wisdom?) and it leads to deliverance. This means that the person who trusts his own wisdom ends up in a trap.

DECEMBER 2

Daniel 9-11:1

These are two very interesting chapters in Daniel. Chapter 9 not only contains the second greatest prayer (my opinion) in the Bible, but it has the prophecy of the 70 weeks. Chapter 10 opens the curtain a little on the spiritual warfare going on behind the nations of the world and, actually, all of life. Buckle up.

Daniel 9

V. 1 Notice that this prayer is in the first year of the change of government. This was probably the year that Daniel was thrown into the lion's den. Very few people see the association between chapters 6 and 9, but you do; and it should make chapter 6 seem much more important and understandable. Just for trivia, let me ask you—what is the last visible, obviously supernatural, miraculous event God did in the OT? I think it is found in Daniel 6.

V. 2 What does this imply that Daniel had in his possession? Even Daniel read his Bible every day. Not only would Daniel have had full copies of everything written since Moses, he also had a copy of Jeremiah. Unknown to us, an entire culture of biblical scholarship had grown up and become established in the Jewish community in Babylon, complete with schools and a synagogue type of worship. I wasn't there but I'll bet it was financed and directed by men like Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. I'd bet Ezekiel was part of it.

Vs. 3-19 Here is the prayer. As you read this, think of Daniel being a teen when brought to Babylon, and now, 70 years later, saying this prayer. What a heart he had for God and for his people. I would guess that this is what Daniel was praying three times a day, and was praying on that day when he was thrown into the lion's den.

I only have a couple of observations here.

First, notice that Daniel identifies with his people. He uses "we" and "us" quite often. Notice too that he identifies with and confesses the sins of the fathers. In Ezekiel we read that Daniel was probably the most righteous lover of God on the planet at that time. Why would he identify with

the sordid sins of his idolatrous countrymen? Well, I'm sure it was because he was a humble guy, but not only that, he was an obedient man and knew his Bible. Read these two passages and you'll see that Daniel not only knew the Word, but he also obeyed it:

- 1 Kings 8:46-53 - This is Solomon's dedication of the temple.
- Leviticus 26:33-45 - This obscure passage will blow you away. I'm sure that Daniel knew these portions of the Bible and that his knowledge of what God commanded in these sections guided Daniel in his prayer.

Second, notice what Daniel's real concern was in vs. 16-19. Notice the mention of Jerusalem. This isn't just a patriotic desire on his part. God had promised to dwell in that city. Notice, too, the desire that God's name should be honored and glorified in the world. I wish I always had that concern guiding my heart and actions. Interestingly enough, it is the same thought that's in the first line of the Lord's Prayer.

Vs. 20-23 Now I don't know if this was before or after the lion's den that Daniel was praying this and that Gabriel was sent to talk to him. I suspect it was after the lion's den, and that Daniel had proven his desire to live and die for God and his people. Notice that Gabriel came flying. I wonder what that looked like. I don't know if you know this, but in the early Superman comics, Superman often flew standing. Apparently wind resistance isn't a problem if you're super. I wonder if that's what Gabriel looked like. Second, notice in v. 23 that Daniel is greatly loved. God loves us all, but of how many people in the Bible does God say this? For most people, Daniel seems like a very insignificant character in the Bible. God didn't think so.

In Chapter 10 we meet an unnamed angel, but because Daniel had already met Gabriel twice and because of the reference to Daniel being greatly loved, some think that that angel in chapter 10 is also Gabriel.

Vs. 24-27 Here is the interesting thing about the vision of the 70 weeks. It is an answer to the question Daniel was not asking. Daniel wanted to know when the Jews could return to Jerusalem, assuming that would end the desolations of Jerusalem. The answer given tells when Jerusalem will finally be restored forever in peace and when the Jews will enjoy the kingdom with their Messiah. Notice that v. 24 will be all of human history until the beginning of the Millennium. That means that some of this has not yet occurred.

In short, the 70 weeks work out like this. Each week is seven years.

V. 25 The decree to rebuild Jerusalem, not the temple, begins the clock. This decree was given to Nehemiah.

From Nehemiah to Jesus' crucifixion was 69 weeks (7 + 62) or 483 years. There are all sorts of calendars and such, but when you work it out, it is right on the money. If you have the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), you can read Dwight Pentecost's discussion of this time between Nehemiah and Jesus on page 1363.

So, even though the walls went up with Nehemiah, seven 7's, or forty-nine years, were needed to completely restore the houses and streets of Jerusalem. Then for the next sixty-two 7's (434 years) Jerusalem existed in very unsure times. The seven weeks and the sixty-two weeks have no break between them. We know this because of Jesus' death.

V. 26 Notice that the anointed one, Jesus, is cut off after the conclusion of the sixty-two weeks (or sixty-nine weeks if you put them together). This is significant in that it shows there is a gap between the 69th week and the 70th week. The anointed one is cut off after the 69th week, yet before the 70th week. The day that Jesus rode into Jerusalem on the colt of the donkey was the final day of that 69th week. The 70th week will begin with the Tribulation.

Notice also that the *people of the prince who is to come*, not the prince himself, destroy Jerusalem. This is in the gap of time between the 69th week and the 70th week. This happened in 70 A.D. when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. This prince, as we'll see in the next chapter, was the "guardian" angel who will guide Rome. More on this in chapter 10.

V. 27 Now then, the 70th week is the seven years of the Tribulation. *He* is that prince of those people; that is, the prince is the antichrist. Remember in chapter 7 we saw that the last empire would have a "horn" or king who would rise and war against the Jews. This is the antichrist who will make a seven-year peace treaty with Israel, and in the middle of that "week" the antichrist will kill the two witnesses, break the treaty, desecrate the temple and launch a worldwide persecution against the Jews. As we'll see in the book of Revelation, God will judge the earth and bring all nations to a place of ruin during the first 3.5 years of that week, and by doing so, the followers of Christ will have a chance to hide and survive and reach out to any who are willing to hear during the final 3.5 years.

So, the 70 weeks are for Israel, specifically for the city of Jerusalem. After the 69th week there has been a pause in the action for the church to be busy in the harvest. Look at Romans 11:25-26 to see Paul's summary of this. When that 70th week begins, it will be all about Jerusalem and about Israel fulfilling its role in this final chapter of their redemptive mission before the coming of Christ. There really won't be a need for the church per se in this 70th week. The focus of that last week will be the city of Jerusalem and the people of Israel fulfilling their mission as witnesses to the world. Everything will have to do with the Jews and the return of their Messiah. This is a reason why the taking of the church at the beginning of the Tribulation makes good sense. It is about the Jews reaching the world. We'd just be in the way, and it won't be about us. It will be all about the city of God and the people of God. This won't be hidden to people. Even the most rebellious and godless will be able to see the handwriting on the wall.

Daniel 10

Daniel 10 will actually continue to the end of the book. The angel who comes as a result of Daniel's prayer and fasting will give him the details of chapters 11 and 12. Note that Daniel 11:1 is a parenthetical note by the angel, saying that he was led by God to stand up and support Darius during his first year as ruler over this part of the Persian Empire, even though the "prince of Persia" would not have appreciated that help. We know why the angel strengthened Darius, right? Darius took a huge chance by making Daniel part of his government and chapter 6 shows that the man had faith. As mentioned above, although no name is given for this angel, some people think it is still Gabriel.

V. 1 Daniel was given a word about a conflict involving his people and he understood it and was deeply distressed by it.

Vs. 2-9 As a result of the disturbing content of that word from God, he went before the Lord, fasting and praying for 21 days. Verse 7 reminds me of Acts 9:7 and Paul's conversion. In case you are wondering if this could be Jesus, the angel of the Lord, you'll see why this is impossible.

Vs. 10-14 This is interesting news. This angel was sent to Daniel the first day of his praying, but was held off by *the prince of the kingdom of Persia* for 21 days. Obviously, if this angel had been Jesus, there would have been no battle. This prince of Persia was one of Satan's angels. Satan has been given the authority over nations, as he told Jesus. I think this was part of Satan's guardianship to help humans. Now that humans are in rebellion and under God's judgment, Satan's authority defaulted to a place of a ruling guardianship, controlling mankind as if we were inmates in a prison.

How do angels fight with each other? How was this angel neutralized for 21 days? What difference did it make that Michael helped him? Did Michael have a trick move or bigger biceps?

Vs. 15-19 It seems to me that the normal state of man in the presence of an angel is debilitation. Notice how often the angel has mentioned that Daniel is *greatly loved*.

Vs. 20-21 More interesting information. This angel had to go back and fight with the prince of Persia and when that was done, the prince of Greece was coming. Apparently every nation has a "prince" assigned over it. According to Deuteronomy 32:8-9, *When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God. ⁹But the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage.* Those sons of God are angels. God only kept one nation for Himself to further His redemption of mankind and that nation was Israel. Therefore, God assigned His own "prince" for Israel, the archangel Michael. We don't know who this unnamed angel is, although it is probably Gabriel, but only he and Michael fight for Israel.

Daniel 11:1

As mentioned above, this seems like a parenthetical thought, that this angel began giving spiritual support to Darius back in the first year of his reign. Since this angel fights for Israel, he needed to strengthen Darius for the events surrounding the lion's den, the making of that decree allowing the Jews to worship only Yahweh, and for Cyrus to make the decree for the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple.

It seems to me, that for us to do our work in the harvest, there must be unseen forces protecting and strengthening us too. Our battle begins in the Word and on our knees. Thankfully, we have the Spirit of God within us.

1 John 2:18-3:6

1 John 2:18-29

Vs. 18-20 John is now directly addressing the issue of false teachers. It seems that what John is saying is that now that we are in the last times, and that the antichrist is coming, little antichrists will arise. Notice that these came from within the church, but John says they were not believers, or they would have stayed in the church.

The anointing by the *Holy One* is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at rebirth.

Vs. 21-25 This is the key issue here. People were denying that Jesus was the Messiah. I don't know if this was a Jewish influence, but obviously you can't have the Father without the Son (John 5:23). The Jews would have been pressing to have the Father, but not Jesus. Though a believer can still be a child of God in disobedience and rebellion to his Father, a person who is religious, but doesn't believe that Jesus is the Christ and Savior, was never in the family.

Vs. 26-29 Notice that everyone is being spoken to as *little children*. I think John is calling on them to live in simplicity of faith and devotion. (See Luke 18:17.) We have read many encouragements to Christians to hold fast to their confession. In both Galatians and Hebrews, there was a call to people to remember that they began in Christ and received salvation through faith in Him. Having begun that way, they needed to hold fast to the teaching they were given at the beginning.

1 John 3:1-6

Vs. 1-3 This is the key to true salvation and following as disciples, knowing the love of God. Of course, this love is seen in and defined by Jesus and the plan of God. John has just called them little children and now he is talking about how they became *children*, by the love of God.

V. 3 This is the yearning as children to be with Christ. I was reading this morning that Jesus told, even warned, His disciples to have their loins girded and their lamps burning and to be like men waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast that they might open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks. There should be that yearning and excitement born out of love.

Vs. 4-6 This gets into the gray areas of who is and who isn't saved, but God knows. Paul knew this was a problem in the church and told Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:19, "*The Lord knows those who are his,*" and, "*Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.*" Paul and Timothy both struggled with this. The sure indicator of true faith is that a believer loves Christ, and though they sin, they keep coming back and asking for forgiveness, and they keep following.

In all we are reading here, you understand the need for good, godly elders in a church who are themselves following Christ in the harvest, and who are shepherds and protectors of the flock. When Paul says elders need to be able to teach, it is not just for making disciples, but for protecting the church.

Psalm 121

In this song of ascents, as the pilgrims were traveling to Jerusalem, because of Jerusalem's height, all roads led up to Jerusalem. In this sense, looking up to the hills was looking toward Jerusalem, to the house and throne of God.

Vs. 1-2 This is easy to say, but trusting it in the storm proves our hearts.

Vs. 3-4 I was just reading about what Jesus said in Luke 12:6, concerning the sparrows, *and not one of them is forgotten before God.* And we are of more value to God than many sparrows.

Vs. 5-8 God is not only our "sunscreen" but also our shield and defender. It's good to know this truth in our heads, but even better when it is in our souls and hearts.

Remember, as the people obeyed God and went to Jerusalem, they often had to leave their homes and possessions unguarded. They needed a protector and God had promised to be that for them.

Proverbs 28:27-28

V. 27 Jesus said that disciples were to give to everyone who begged of them. A disciple shouldn't have an emotional hang-up here.

V. 28 Amen!

DECEMBER 3

Daniel 11:2-35

As we enter into all the detail of the prophecies in the last two chapters of Daniel, there are a couple of things to take note of. First, what we're reading today will all take place before the birth of Christ, during a very dangerous time in the life of Israel. Tomorrow will deal with the Tribulation and the events just before the second coming of Christ. Second, we need to understand what the purpose of this detailed prophecy is. Rather than simply showing us that God knows everything and coordinates everything in advance, it is meant to be a help to the people going through these events and distresses. For example, in our reading today, historians can look back and verify the details of what is said here and give names to the people and identify the events. But for the Jews who went through this, it not only gave them an idea of what would happen, but it gave them incredible hope and courage as they saw the Scripture coming true and the events unfolding. It was almost like having tomorrow's newspaper. They understood that God was with them and that nothing was outside of His control. With some of

this detail, they could even plan ahead. Much of what we read about the Tribulation in the book of Revelation seems foggy and hard to understand for us, but for those people who will go through the Tribulation, what God has written is going to make perfect sense. It will give them hope and courage.

V. 2 Xerxes was this fourth king and was the husband of Esther. He is mentioned here because of his wars with Greece. He was hugely defeated and got the Greeks incredibly mad.

Vs. 3-4 This is the rise and fall of Alexander the Great.

Vs. 5-20 The four kingdoms of Greece will constantly fight with one another, and Israel will be in the middle of a lot of that fighting. For the Jews that lived during that time, these words in Daniel assured them that God was in control of the chaos.

Vs. 21-35 These are the adventures of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (AE), the precursor of the coming antichrist. If you want some good, but not overly lengthy information on him, read the [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), pp. 1369-1370.

V. 21 Apparently AE wasn't an obvious ruler. There was deception and intrigue that led to his sudden rise to power. In the same way, it probably won't be apparent who the antichrist is until he is suddenly in power.

V. 22 The *prince of the covenant* was apparently a priest who AE had put to death.

V. 28 Somehow AE will already resolve to fight against Israel, probably because of their stubborn insistence on worshipping Yahweh.

Vs. 29-30 As AE was in Egypt, he was confronted by the growing Roman Empire and he was forced to retreat. In fact, AE was personally humiliated by the Romans who drew a circle in the sand around him, forcing him to make his decision then and there to agree to their demands.

V. 30 Those who forsake the *holy covenant* are traitorous Jews.

Vs. 31-35 And so AE vented his anger on Israel. These verses describe how he tried to stop the worship, desecrate the temple and exterminate Judaism. This anger and frustration, and the reasons thereof, probably foreshadow why and what the antichrist will do in the Tribulation. During the Tribulation, in spite of Satan's power and the supernatural authority he gives the antichrist, unbelieving nations will still rebel against him, blind to the real drama being played out.

V. 32 AE will win over those who really don't like to follow Yahweh.

V. 35 Even as the angel is explaining this to Daniel in such detail, it seems he makes a transition to begin talking about the time of the end. In the Maccabean Revolt that occurred because of the actions of AE, there were godly men who understood these words of prophecy and sacrificed their lives for God. Some of what happened during that period will mirror some of what will happen during the Tribulation, especially the cunning working of AE and the antichrist.

We can understand the importance of these prophecies to the people who went through those very hard times, if we look at all of the information God has given us to encourage us during this time. As disciples following Christ, working in the harvest we understand more of what is happening in life, both on this planet and in the spiritual dimension, than any other peoples in the history of redemption. Jesus Himself told His disciples that they were seeing and hearing what others had longed to know, but were never able to see or hear. We continue in what Jesus said to His apostles in that we have the complete Word of God. Not living with this book in hand as we walk through this spiritual tragedy on earth is an awful mistake. We should be understanding our times and all the challenges, working in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples. If we

don't live by this book daily, we become lost on earth and live a faith without His strength or purpose. We have been given a great treasure and resource, and we ignore it to our own harm.

1 John 3:7-24

As you read this section, notice how often John mentions loving one another. That thought of a common love in Christ flows through this entire section of the letter. The tension in what we will read is that there were some in these churches who were not believers. It seems that the vast majority were believers, yet they were very immature, living according to the old nature, and not the new nature in Christ. The importance of the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 is to show a believing couple who were motivated by the desire for status in the church. When Peter said to Ananias, "why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back part of the proceeds of the land," it showed that children of God can follow the flesh and be led by Satan. We know that, right? We don't have room here to find all the places in Paul's letters where this is shown or said, but keep this tension in mind as you read these verses in John. John isn't always saying people are not believers. He is saying that as believers they shouldn't be following the impulses of the devil, but those of the Spirit of Christ. John does say which impulses are from whom.

Vs. 7-10 Notice again that those addressed are *little children*, even the 70-year-old little children. I think John's purpose in this is to say, as Paul did, that we should walk worthy of Christ. It is clear from other letters that Christians are capable of all sorts of sin, from idolatry to immorality. In 2 Timothy 2:26, it mentions how Christians can be captured by Satan to do his will. In 1 Timothy 5:15 it talks about believers who have turned aside to follow Satan. Children of God should not act like children of Satan. If people are not unified in love, they are not being influenced by God, but by the devil. Our salvation in Christ and our mission for Him is supposed to bind us together. If being a believer and going to church means anything other than salvation and mission, it degenerates to a social club.

Vs. 11-15 If the last verses had to do with the influence of Satan, this block of verses seems to deal with the influence of the world. If believers are too focused on being accepted by the world, they will not *love one another*. Again, in a mature group of disciples, this wouldn't be a problem, but not all believers are mature and living from the principle of their new life. Paul told believers that they should put off the works of darkness and put on the Lord. That means that as believers, it is possible to live according to darkness, in death, and not in our new eternal life in Christ.

Vs. 16-18 You can see here that John was aiming high, at a cross-bearing kind of discipleship modeled after Jesus' sacrifice and love for us.

Vs. 19-24 Notice how often John mentions *commandment* in this section. It makes me think of David's passion in Psalm 119. Probably, in order to appreciate what John is writing here, we'd need to read John's Gospel, chapters 14-17. Verse 22 is a promise given often in that section of John. The love of Christ in the mission of Christ is what makes possible the kind of brotherly love God talks about. If a person is living that love, following Christ, regardless of failures, God forgives and overwhelms their guilty conscience. The Spirit within us is given to us to keep abiding in Christ and moving forward in the harvest. The fact that we keep moving forward, following the Spirit in the love and mission of Christ, is visible evidence that the Spirit is within us.

Again, believers can hide from following Christ. But then, what evidence do they have of the Spirit in them, or that they are abiding in Christ? And then too, they miss out on all the blessings of the gospel. I grew up in a very Catholic area and the common motto was, "God helps those who help themselves." Actually, this is not true. If we don't abide in Christ and follow Him in the harvest, if we are protecting ourselves from persecution and hardship, why should He help us? We are helping ourselves, dependent on ourselves, and not on Him.

If you want an interesting example of this help, look at Luke 12:8-9. Now, as you read it, understand that by Christ acknowledging us before the angels of God, He is actually saying He will send them to help us when we are in that situation. Those people who "help" themselves by not acknowledging Christ, and are therefore avoiding the punishment or scorn of men, don't need His help; and therefore, He doesn't "acknowledge" them and send spiritual aid. Remember, Jesus addressed this passage in Luke to His disciples, not to unbelievers.

Psalm 122

Both the *house of the Lord* and *Jerusalem* are lifted up in this psalm. We've seen in Ezekiel how the city and the temple, though destroyed, will both be rebuilt and will become the destination for generations in the future. Daniel's prayer in chapter 9, and the massive prophecies he was given by Gabriel, show the restoration of Jerusalem and the anointing of the King. Who knows, in the Millennium as people fly into Jerusalem, maybe they will sing this psalm as they travel from the airport up to the city to see the Lord.

Vs. 1-2 This was a passion of David's heart, forged in long years of running from danger and having to remain distant from the tabernacle. David worshiped God in spirit and in truth in the wilderness, but longed for the time he could stand before the tent which housed the ark of the covenant. That is where he knew God was present.

Vs. 3-5 It was in Jerusalem, once the ark was there, where people came to seek the Lord for judgments and mercy.

Vs. 6-9 Because of the temple, peace and security should rest on Jerusalem. It would have been the presence of the Lord that would have brought that peace. It makes you think of what John was writing above. If the Lord is present, His presence will be evidenced by peace and love.

Proverbs 29:1

Those of us with stiff necks are grateful for God's "gentle breaking," before we did irreparable damage.

DECEMBER 4

We have less than a month to go. If you are caught up, that is amazing. If it has been "hit-and-miss" for you, you've still probably read more of the Word than you did last year, and you have some ideas going into the new year of what you'll have to do to stay on target. But let me ask, why are you doing this? On a superficial level, there is no difference between you and someone who hardly picked up their Bible. But if you are pursuing the Lord, what you're doing makes all the difference in the world. Remember Hebrews 11 and the words, *By faith*. All of those people pursued God by faith and God blessed them, but that blessing was often only in that they grew closer to God. The verses that drive me on are John 14:21-23,

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

Since you are finishing up Daniel today, you might treat yourself to a peppermint something.

Daniel 11:36-12:13

Daniel 11:36-45

Vs. 36-39 At this point the words regarding this ruler, Antiochus Epiphanes (AE), begin to directly mirror the future attitude and behavior of the antichrist (AC) in the latter part of Israel's

history. Though it was still in the future for Daniel, what is mentioned here happened in 170 A.D. with Antiochus Epiphanes; and yet in the future, during the 70th week, the antichrist will do the same thing. Notice the expression of arrogance and self-exultation that happens here. Not only will the antichrist walk into the temple, as Antiochus Epiphanes did, and set up an abomination, but he too will exalt himself above God. Apparently Antiochus Epiphanes was helped by Jewish traitors who helped him do this, whom he later rewarded. It appears the antichrist will do something similar and through this treachery will also kill the two witnesses before he defaces the temple.

Some of the references to *the one beloved by women* and the *god of fortresses* may not make sense to us, but they will be clear to the people who have to go through this worldwide Tribulation.

Vs. 40-45 Not all nations will follow the AC, and since he can't be in more than one place at one time, they will rise up against Israel. Eventually there will be a worldwide showdown in the plain of Armageddon. Remember too, that the conditions of those future days will look very desperate and primitive. There is no reason to believe that oil refineries will be working and that there will be gasoline available for these military ventures. According to Revelation, the king of the east will cross the Euphrates with 200 million foot soldiers to join the party. It is possible that some of these will be on horseback.

V. 41 The area of these countries is present-day Jordan and the area around the Dead Sea. This is important. Jesus said that when the people living near Jerusalem saw the "abomination that makes desolate" in the temple, which the AC will put there, the people were to flee into the mountains. In Revelation, the description of this flight and the pursuit of Satan is scary, but God will save the people in the wilderness. The area of these countries is where the people will go to hide. It's about 15 miles from Jerusalem to the Dead Sea. We see how people in mountains can hide now from the mighty, high-tech U.S. military. Imagine how much better they will hide from the AC if God is helping them and if the world has been reduced to very primitive low-tech warfare.

V. 44 And then the AC will hear about these approaching armies from the north and east and decide he has other fish to fry. Still, he will kill many followers of Christ, in Israel and in all other nations. The slaughter of God's people will be a test of the hearts of men and women, and it will confirm the justness of the wrath of God upon mankind.

Daniel 12

Vs. 1-4 This is a summary of the final 3.5 years of the Tribulation and the judgment that follows. Verse 2 is one of the clearest verses in the OT regarding the resurrection. This sounds like what Jesus said in John 5:28-29. And v. 3 sounds like Matthew 13:43, *Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.*

Vs. 5-7 It is significant that this number of days is given and that the angel gave it by raising his hands and swearing by God. If you were trying to hang on during that time and knew the day those last 3.5 years began, you'd be happy to know an exact number. That the angel swore by God makes this a very solemn declaration. We don't grasp this.

Vs. 8-12 Daniel's heart was so big toward God and his people; the more he heard, the more interested he became.

V. 9 *Shut up and sealed* means you will have to be there in that time to understand what is going on. We are not supposed to fully grasp it.

V. 10 During this Tribulation, those who love God will become more purified, and the wicked will become more wicked. It is a time of testing and revealing.

V. 11 The 1290 days extend from the defiling of the temple up to the cleansing of the temple and reestablishment of worship in the temple. Jesus will arrive in about 1260 days, but I'm sure there will be some business to take care of first, like the judgment of the nations. And I think rather than Him just cleaning up supernaturally, there will be people employed to clean and repair the temple and have it ceremonially rededicated. There will be a lot to do in 30 days.

V. 12 *Blessed* is the person who is there at this celebration. Jerusalem will be cleaned up and the King will officially, before the world, take His throne in Jerusalem and begin ruling the world.

V. 13 Just as it says in Ezekiel that the resurrected David will govern the people of Israel, I wonder if the resurrected Daniel will govern the people of Iraq from Babylon. If so, it will not have been the first time.

But for now, we work in the harvest as the clouds approach. When it all comes down, we'll have great seats to see how Jesus will justly judge the world, and we'll be at the celebration of His thousand-year kingdom.

1 John 4

In chapters 1 and 2 John has talked about walking in the light and truth of Christ. Even Christians can walk out of the light. In chapter 3 John began talking about abiding in Christ's love as the evidence that we know that love. Now John begins to talk about the guidance of the Spirit in knowing and living the love of our Lord.

When Jesus told the disciples about what the last days before His coming would look like, He warned them regarding *false prophets* and false messiahs. (Matt. 7:15, 24:11, 24:24) I'm sure John and the others were surprised how quickly error and false teachers began to come into the church. In the days of the Tribulation it will be far worse.

Note that there is a lot of "love" going on in this chapter. Laura found 27 forms of the word love within just 15 verses. I don't know if that's a record, but it is something to observe and think about.

Vs. 1-6 Up until 3:24 John had not mentioned the Holy Spirit. Notice that the confession of Jesus as God the Son who became flesh is a mark of the Spirit. Anyone could say Jesus came in the flesh without being truly saved, but keeping the commandments of God in the Spirit of God means understanding who Jesus truly is. A false understanding of Jesus springs from a false spirit and leads to a warped walk. As disciples, our obedience and walk are directly connected to our love and understanding of Jesus. Just like in Romans 8 and in John 14-17, it is the Spirit who guides us into a proper balance of understanding. All of this becomes visible by our love for the Word, our obedience to Christ in our walk and in the harvest, and by our love for one another.

Vs. 4-6 Anyone led by the Spirit continues in the teaching of Jesus and the apostles, and in our case, the Word.

Vs. 7-12 The evidence of the work of the Spirit in us is knowing *the love of God* and loving one another. Verse 8 is not stating evidence of salvation, but evidence of knowing God relationally. The true understanding of the love of God is that we love. Even though no one has ever seen God, by loving one another because of the Holy Spirit and the knowledge of God's love, we can show that we have a relationship with Him. Notice what Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:5, *The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*. Even in 1 Timothy, the context for this verse is false teaching and teachers.

Vs. 13-18 The evidence that we abide in God is that His love is alive in us and is seen in our love for one another. If we are fully living in the love of Christ, there is no fear of what will happen when we stand in His presence, because there will be no judgment for us.

I know this all sounds like circular reasoning, but here is the simplicity in our walk with Christ that is very visible. You even see this simplicity of the Christian life in Paul's prayer at the end of Ephesians 3. The most important thing for us to be growing in is the love of Christ. This love is grounded in His Word, understood in His Spirit and poured out in His mission. Working together as His people, we express His love to one another inwardly and His love for a dying world outwardly, and we are strengthened in our work for Him. But it all flows out of knowing and showing His love. Love is the key word and the key for our lives in Christ. But, love is not without definition. Love is defined by God and Jesus and their effort to save a lost world. And where do we know this love? Through His Word and by His Spirit. *And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.* (Romans 5:5)

An example of what is being said here is that a husband is told to love his wife as Christ loved the church. It is fair to say that if a believing man doesn't do this, he really doesn't know the love of Christ. It doesn't make him unsaved, but it really shows his lack of knowing Christ and his lack of maturity in Christ. This is the point that John and the Spirit are making here, using love for one another as the example of relationship and maturity.

Vs. 19-21 According to John and the Spirit, this is an absolute. We really do kid ourselves and treat God's truth lightly when we claim to love God but cannot get that love to connect to loving others, including the lost and the people of God. I think a lot of churches don't work because they are not following Christ in the harvest. It is appropriate not to feel at home in a group like that. However, in a church that is working to reach out and make disciples, we need to love one another as Christ loved, and maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace and love.

Psalm 123

Vs. 1-2 As the worshipers walked up those roads leading to Jerusalem on Mount Zion, it was really the Lord they were approaching. It was really the Lord they were seeking. I like v. 2, that they will persist in prayer until the Lord shows them mercy. When the disciples finally asked the Lord to teach them to pray, He restated the Lord's Prayer to them and then added what they had never heard before: the parable of the friend knocking on his friend's door at midnight. Perseverance is necessary and natural; after all we are praying to our Father who loves us. We are appealing to His kindness and love.

Vs. 3-4 It is a truth that we often seek God because outside circumstances show us we need Him. It is also true that God allows these circumstances to come to us to drive us to Him.

Proverbs 29:2-4

Sometimes, just for the fun of it, try taking a triad of verses like this and restating them. For example:

When the righteous increase, when children love wisdom and the king builds his land with justice, the people rejoice and fathers are glad. But when the wicked rule, when children live in passion and rebellion and when bribes are common, the people groan and the wealth of a land is squandered.

DECEMBER 5

By the way, in some countries St. Nick comes tonight to fill shoes with good things.

Hosea 1-3

Hosea is one of the "minor" prophets, meaning that his recorded message was short. There were actually many prophets whom God used, whom we don't know, who never wrote. So then, it is

significant that God chose to have the message of Hosea recorded and circulated around Israel and included in the Word.

Hosea is one of the better known minor prophets because of the unusual thing God asked him to do. If you look at the chart, “Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets,” (located at the end of this document) you'll see that Hosea continued the prophetic ministry against Israel after Elisha was gone. Although Amos and Jonah were there for a short time after Elisha, Hosea continued. Since God had already pronounced judgment against the northern kingdom during the ministry of Elijah, you wonder what Hosea's impact was meant to have. He couldn't have saved his country. Maybe there were individuals who could still turn to God. That was definitely the case during the time of King Hezekiah when many from the north finally left and moved south to Judah. Also, I think that Hosea had an influence on Hezekiah, who was a godly king and would have paid attention to what the Lord was saying. In fact, if you compare the dates on the chart, Hosea was pretty much finished with his ministry when Hezekiah was just beginning to come to power.

Here are some guiding thoughts about this message of Hosea. First, the message God gave him was to emphasize and expose the spiritual adultery of Israel, and thereby, to warn Judah. Second, though we only have 14 chapters, you can see by the chart that Hosea's ministry spanned a couple of decades. Third, although the message is very hard, there is mercy and hope mixed in; in fact, there is a very clear structure of judgment being declared followed by a message of salvation and hope. This cycle will happen about five times. Just like the promise of God's restoration of His people, I'd like to think that the relationship with Hosea and Gomer ended well, like a little miracle on earth.

Hosea 1

Vs. 1-3 Some of the names of these kings should be familiar to you. It was during this period that the northern kingdom was captured and taken into exile by Assyria and when the Assyrians tried to take Jerusalem.

Vs. 2-3 Lots of people object to God commanding Hosea to do this. We have seen that the life God gave His prophets was not glamorous or easy. Isaiah had to walk around naked for a year. Jeremiah endured persecution and incredible sadness. Ezekiel acted out several disaster scenarios over a couple of years and then lost his wife. Daniel & Co. lost everything.

It is very probable that Hosea already knew Gomer, had a crush on her, and married her knowing she had an unsteady heart, but before she was fully unfaithful. If Hosea's relationship with her mirrored God's relationship to Israel, that would be a fair description. God didn't make a covenant with a whore, but showed His love to an unsteady nation. Could Hosea win Gomer back and would she change? If God's work with Israel is the model for the human drama and sadness Hosea is about to endure, then there would be a happy ending for Hosea.

The son is clearly Hosea's son.

Vs. 4-5 Jezreel becomes a name for judgment. This was the deciding battle where Assyria took Israel.

Vs. 6-7 This is another of Hosea's own children with Gomer, a girl called *No Mercy*. The nation of Israel was removed and God showed them no mercy from the Assyrians.

But notice in v. 7 that God did show mercy to Judah. God says that He will save Judah; notice that He says *how* He will *not* save them. Do you remember what God did to the Assyrian army when they threatened Jerusalem? This was during the reign of King Hezekiah. I think Hezekiah read Hosea.

Vs. 8-9 A third child for Hosea with a very harsh name, *Not My People*.

Vs. 10-11 (Actually, 2:1 is a part of this, and is a transition.) Here is the salvation and hope. Do you see the aspect of this promise that will only be complete in the Millennial Kingdom? Note that Paul quotes from this section in Romans 9:26. Notice too, how the name, Jezreel, that formerly denoted judgment, now becomes a word for salvation.

Hosea 2

V. 1 This is transitional in that the children of this blessing are to cry out to the mother, the nation.

Vs. 2-13 This is the declaration of God's judgment on Israel, mirrored in some respect by Gomer's actions toward Hosea. You can imagine that people were watching this drama between Hosea and Gomer, getting really mad at the behavior of Gomer in response to the kindness of Hosea. But when they said to Hosea, "Too bad you married a whore," Hosea's answer would have singed their ears; because the idolatrous people of Israel were the real whores.

But, on a personal level, can you imagine Hosea going through this, feeling all the love and betrayal and ridicule and anger. This is what God felt toward Israel, and still feels as those He loves betray Him.

V. 3 Notice this image of the wilderness. God will use isolation to punish Israel as in v. 7. If you understand the scope of biblical redemptive history, Israel is still in this wilderness, being prepared to finally cry out for their Messiah.

Vs. 14-23 (actually to 3:5) This is the declaration of hope and redemption. Notice again that the fulfillment of this promise of redemption is still future.

V. 14 It is in the hardness and isolation of the wilderness that God will woo Israel to renew her faithfulness.

Hosea 3:1-5

This is the command to buy back his wayward wife who has become the slave of another. God did the same thing with His people, and with us, as slaves of sin. That is why Jesus is our Redeemer. He bought us back.

V. 5 We have seen this in Ezekiel. David will be the ruler of the reunited and redeemed Israel.

Isn't it interesting that even when God is meting out judgment, He is very careful to affirm His love and to give hope of redemption? Who says there is no love or grace in the Old Testament?

1 John 5

Vs. 1-5 There is a lot packed into these verses. John is repeating what Jesus Himself said so many times in so many different ways: "Why do you call me Lord and do not do what I say?" Remember, Jesus' commandments have to do with following, not living morally and staying out of trouble. Those "right living" things are assumed of anyone who names the name of Christ. His commands have to do with following and acknowledging Him, testifying to Him, in a lost world. We are to work in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. We are to have our loins girded and our lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return home from the wedding feast, to open up to Him at once when He comes and knocks. (Luke 12:35) Obeying Jesus has nothing to do with living mousey, moral, invisible lives on earth. In v. 5 this belief that overcomes is not silent or invisible.

Vs. 6-12 This is a great affirmation to the redeeming power of Christ as our Savior. This also seems to be a rebuke to some of the false teachers. There was a line of thinking and teaching that said that the man Jesus was not God the Son, but was only possessed by God the Son. In their thinking, at the crucifixion, God the Son left that poor guy on the cross because it is impossible for God to suffer or endure such sinful behavior by men. By the way, that was probably also

Satan's thought. The incarnation, God becoming fully man and remaining fully God, was a mystery. If Satan had understood that Jesus was fully God and fully man, he might have understood that Jesus could pay for the sins of man. I think this "wisdom of God" is what Paul was referring to when he said, *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.* (1 Cor. 2:8) Jesus was not only anointed as the Son of God at His baptism, by water, but He was shown to be the Son of God at His death, by blood. The Holy Spirit testified over all of this. The incarnation is the reason why salvation can only be through Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Vs. 13-15 The key thoughts here are, *that you may know, this is the confidence, and we have the requests.* All of these things were shaken by those teachers who had attacked the full adoption as sons that we obtain through Jesus, claiming Jesus was only a man and not the God-Man.

Vs. 16-17 Apparently there were people sinning and being chastened by God with death. We see this in Acts 5:1-11 and in 1 Corinthians 11:30. As we've seen in 1 Corinthians, Christians are capable of a lot of sin and God does, at times, chasten by using sickness and death.

V. 18 Jesus is the one who *protects*, in His hand, those who abide in Him.

V. 19 So we should live like it, working in the harvest.

V. 20 Our lives are to be lived very simply, in Jesus, seeking Jesus, following Jesus.

V. 21 Any passion other than Jesus can lead us into idolatry.

Psalm 124

I wonder what this sounded like as it was sung by the people as they walked to Jerusalem for the feasts. It is interesting too, that this psalm is of David. That might be why there is the thought of deliverance from enemies.

Vs. 1-5 David understood that with all the fighting, ducking, and hiding that took place over the years he ran from Saul, if it hadn't been for the Lord, he would have died. In all the battles David waged for Israel, it wasn't his ability as a leader that won the day. It was not that he had some incredible fighters that gave the victory. It was the Lord. This is the same for us. This realization can't be "lip service;" it has to be heartfelt and deeply understood.

Vs. 6-7 We can say the same not only regarding salvation, but as we escape the effects of the sin within us every day we walk on this planet.

V. 8 Amen!

Proverbs 29:5-8

Vs. 5-6 Lots of capturing birds imagery here. (Notice Psalm 124:7.) I wonder if that imagery is continued in the *righteous man* singing. I guess the guy doesn't understand that he is spreading a net for his own feet.

V. 7 Here too is an inability for the wicked to understand.

V. 8 Those who start fires (among people) often get burned by them, but a wise man understands how to put them out.

DECEMBER 6

So, today you begin and end 2 John, the 24th book of the New Testament and you continue in Hosea, the 28th book of the Old Testament. That is a major achievement on your part.

Regarding Hosea, remember where he comes in the history of Israel. Solomon had introduced idolatry, spiritual adultery, into the veins of Israel at the end of his reign. God broke the kingdom

into two parts, Israel in the north and Judah in the south. The north went completely bad, right from the beginning. There were no godly kings; and in order to keep the people from going to the temple in Jerusalem to worship, they set up two golden calves, allowed anyone to be a priest, encouraged the worship of all gods and mixed these other worship cultures with what was left of the worship of Yahweh. God tried to win the people back through the ministry of Elijah and Elisha, but these men only confirmed that Israel was completely lost. Time wise, Elisha has just died and now Hosea comes with thirty years of sermons on spiritual adultery and an object lesson regarding that adultery, his own marriage to a vilely unfaithful woman. Hosea's marriage became a cultural phenomenon and his sermons were a final warning for people to return to God. Those who heard the Lord went to Judah during the ministries of Micah and Isaiah and the reign of King Hezekiah. Those who remained rebellious to God became totally corrupt. They went into exile with the Assyrians and were lost.

Again, you might want to look at the chart "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," to see this in perspective.

Hosea 4-5

Hosea is organized into sermons of punishment and salvation. Today in Hosea we only get the punishment and one verse of hope and salvation. The hope that God gives that will offset the punishment declared today is in 5:15-6:3 tomorrow.

Hosea 4

Vs. 1-3 Notice that this description of guilt is on all of the people, all of the children of Israel. Notice what God says is missing, and notice what is there. Without knowing the Lord in truth, *there is no faithfulness or steadfast love*. They had mixed pagan worship into the fabric of everything. There was no more knowledge of what was really true. More than that, there was not a pure view or understanding of God. These people had become as corrupt as the people whom Israel had to drive out of Canaan. What was actually worse is that they had had the knowledge of God, but had given it up to pursue gods that were more to their liking.

V. 2 These are all violations of the Ten Commandments. Swearing is invoking a curse against others using the Lord's name, a violation of the third commandment. In Milwaukee, growing up, that's how we greeted people. You would have thought it was a commandment to use His name to curse people.

V. 3 This sounds like the curse on nature and the groaning of creation from Romans 8.

Vs. 4-14 It seems to me that this block of verses is aimed at the priests and prophets. Their corruption in vs. 1-11 led to the resultant corruption of the people in 12-14. We have seen in both Jeremiah and Ezekiel how God holds the leaders responsible for the downfall of the people and the culture. It is hard for us to grasp this, but the worship of Yahweh was mixed with paganism. Not only did Jeroboam bring in the golden calves, but Baal worship was mixed with pseudo-worship according to the law. Remember that Baal and other forms of fertility worship had a very strong sexual component to them, in the "worship experience" itself. How could you compete with that? The worship itself was for them to gain blessing and prosperity for themselves, and then the actual "worship experience" kept them coming back for more. There were priests who were broadminded and knew of Yahweh and though they brought in elements of Judaism, they met the people at the calves, not the tabernacle or temple. They were priests, but they were utterly lost, like so many representatives of "Christian" religions today who conduct services, but do not know God, are teaching error and are bound for an eternity without God.

Notice in some of the wording how God will say, *you have forgotten...I also will forget*.

V. 6 This sounds like Jesus' "woe" on the scribes/lawyers, *Woe to you lawyers! For you have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not enter yourselves, and you hindered those who were entering.* (Luke 11:52)

It is hard to imagine a culture this thoroughly corrupt (except for a small remnant of people), but some of our cultures in the west are getting there.

Vs. 15-19 Judah is warned here, but the point is that the rebellion in the north is so deep that the cure will require something even deeper. King Hezekiah paid attention to warnings like this.

V. 16 This is interesting. A lamb that follows its shepherd is easy to care for and obedient. Israel is no longer like that. In the German Bible, instead of *a stubborn heifer*, it is a mad or crazy cow.

Hosea 5

Vs. 1-14 This is the declaration of judgment, beginning again with the leaders, religious first, and then political.

V. 4-7 This is a very sad diagnosis of why the problem with those people was incurable. It seems that because they had so redefined truth and what it meant to know and worship God, that even when they tried, they did not seek Him, but rather their own lusts. Verse 5 shows that Judah became part of this. Notice in v. 7 how pagan ritual and bearing children through Baal worship is linked to the new moon festivals. Keep this in mind when we read 2 John.

V. 8 Apparently the people of Benjamin led the way in some of this.

V. 10 Removing a landmark was like rewriting the truth. You didn't know where the right or wrong was any more.

Notice the images of the moth/dry-rot and lion and that both of them will strike Ephraim and Judah. What are the differences in the destruction these two very different destroyers bring?

V. 15 This verse is the first verse of the section promising hope and restoration. Though this restoration wouldn't come to that generation that would be destroyed, eventually the people of Israel, in their distress, would earnestly seek the Lord. Until then, God would remain distant from them, waiting.

Even today as disciples in the harvest, we know that not everyone will respond to the offer God is making. Making them respond is not our job. Some are not ready now and some never will be ready; but some are ready now to come to Christ and to follow as disciples, who will make disciples. We simply present the message.

2 John

This short letter by John was probably written in the same timeframe as 1 John, but here John was planning to visit this church and so he kept his message brief. The things John mentions are very similar to 1 John and seem like his way to give this church some basic guidelines and things to think about until he arrived.

Vs. 1-3 The *elect lady* is a church and the *children* are its members.

Notice how often John uses the word *truth* in this introduction. It sets the tone of the entire letter. Just like we saw in Hosea, once the truth is compromised and reinvented, there is no longer a basis for knowing God or knowing what is right or wrong in a culture. Paul often told Timothy to guard the truth and said that the church was the pillar and defender of the truth. The more you read your Bible, the more the Spirit entrusts to you and the better equipped you are to protect the truth and pass it on to others.

Vs. 4-6 John rejoices that there are people following *the truth*. He takes the idea of truth and transfers it into the order to follow the truth, a commandment. He then says the commandment to follow is to *love one another*.

I'm not sure if there was a situation within the church that needed to be dealt with, but I have a sense that when we become so warfare oriented in defending the truth, we can lose our love for those who know Christ. In fundamentalism I've seen this. I've seen a great defender of the truth become hard of heart and make enemies of his friends by harping about the uses and meanings of words. When we get to Revelation, we'll read about the church of Ephesus as a church that fought hard to defend the truth, but lost their love for Jesus. Ironic and sad.

Vs. 7-9 We recognize this teaching about antichrists and deceivers not only from 1 John, but from what we've read in Daniel. Your translation has *the* before both *deceiver* and *antichrist*, but these are not **the** antichrist, just little imitations of the one who will come later.

V. 8 Note that what will be lost is *full reward*, not salvation. I was reading again this morning how Jesus told His disciples to seek the reward the Father offers us. These rewards are all summed up in seeking Him and making Him our treasure. I'm finding out that it is harder than I think to be wholly satisfied in Him and seeking Him. I need to work on finding everything I need in Him and let the rest rot. That's hard to do in the west between Thanksgiving and Christmas, when everyone wants us to buy stuff and we equate holiday happiness with shopping and eating.

V. 9 If we don't abide in the teaching of Christ, we operate without God, without the leading and direction of His Spirit. We see this all the time, as Christians we know, or who are public figures, get themselves into trouble. For a disciple, simply and humbly abiding in Christ is important. Following Christ in the harvest is important. To live without abiding in Him is not how we want to live. If we leave the truth, if we disobey, if we get drawn into sin, then we step away from God and His truth, following our pride and passion. We don't lose our salvation, but we do dishonor God and give Satan something to use to reproach the name of our Savior. That's the point here.

Note that the result of mixing truth and error is what we are reading about in Hosea.

Vs. 10-11 This is the same as being unequally yoked with unbelievers, or what Paul talks about regarding associating with Christians living in sin (2 Cor. 6:14). You still love them, but your relationship to them is one of restoration, not acceptance. And beyond that, there are people and false teaching that need to be dealt with strongly. If you saw someone pouring poison in a well, the time for being politically correct and winsome would be over.

V. 12 This was enough to get the people thinking, but John was on his way and would continue in person.

V. 13 John means that the believers where he wrote this were greeting the believers to whom he was writing.

Psalm 125

As you read these opening verses and think of what we read in Hosea, you wonder what went wrong. These people were certainly singing the right words. But it all comes down to obedience to the truth. If the truth gets eaten away by false teaching or by our redefining truth to our passions, then we remake God in our own image. In that sense, God becomes lost to us.

This is why we are in the Word, firsthand submitting our hearts and minds to His truth. In this way we learn who He truly is, and He defines us. And that's a good thing, because in Him and in His truth we are unmovable. We abide in Him regardless of what life throws at us as we follow Him in the harvest.

Vs. 1-2 This was the psalmist taking the eternal view of Jerusalem as God's chosen city. This is true, but will only be realized during the Millennium.

Vs. 3-5 All of this has an "earthly" ring to it; that is, these are earthly consequences, not necessarily dealing with heavenly salvation. The Lord brings justice to the righteous. He blesses the upright who follow Him. Those who turn away from the Lord wind up like those who don't know the Lord at all, at least on earth.

Proverbs 29:9-11

So, what do you think God is warning us about with these three proverbs? It is far easier to read these proverbs than to heed them. Wisdom eventually teaches you that you can't reason with this type of person and that you just need to keep silent and/or walk away with your "pearls." (Matt. 7:6)

DECEMBER 7

Hosea 6-9

So, if you understand God's pattern in Hosea, He gives a pronouncement of judgment followed by a declaration of salvation and hope for the millennial future of Israel. Since we're reading a one-year Bible this pattern is broken. For example, today we will begin with the salvation and hope declaration from yesterday's judgment.

Just for your information, the third cycle of judgment/salvation is: 4:1-5:14 (judgment) and 5:15-6:3 (salvation). Today we'll begin a fourth cycle of judgment (6:4-11:7) and salvation and hope (11:8-11). Tomorrow we'll finish Hosea and it will end with hope.

You might not get all of the imagery or nuances from Hosea or the other minor prophets, but at least when you get to heaven and you bump into these guys, you can say you read their books. And for here and now, the Spirit will give you what you need, this year and in the years to come.

One thing to think about as you read this is that what we have written here were probably different sermons or messages that Hosea gave to the people. Can you imagine what it would have been like to hear this stuff? At first some people might have made fun of him because his wife was a whore, but once they understood that she stood as an image for the people, I'll bet the snickering ended. After all the years of God working with Israel, heroically trying to win the people back, God is expressing through Hosea what it has felt like trying to lead these people, and mankind in general.

Yet, in the end there is salvation; therefore, it is very intriguing that Hosea is quoted in a couple of interesting places in the New Testament having to do with God's plan of redemption.

Hosea 6

Vs. 1-3 This is the hope from the previous declaration of judgment we read yesterday.

V. 1 Notice how God had just talked about tearing Ephraim and Judah like a lion, but now God will bind up what He has torn.

V. 2 This is an interesting reference to being raised *on the third day*. I'll bet that is exactly what it means.

V. 3 This is a spectacular verse that will be on the lips and in the hearts of that generation in the Tribulation that turns to the Lord. You might wonder how this supernatural change will come upon Israel. Compare Isaiah 55:10-11 with this verse.

Vs. 4-11 Judgment for Ephraim (the northern kingdom) and for Judah (the southern kingdom).

V. 6 Notice what God really wanted. This is the same as the first commandment, to love God. Also, this is quoted by Jesus to the Pharisees of another adulterous generation at Matthew's party

in Matthew 9:13, *Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.*

V. 11 This could be pointing to the fact that Judah came out of their exile, or it could be referring to the place of eminence this tribe will have when the Kingdom is established.

Hosea 7

This seems to be exclusively written to the northern kingdom. Notice that God mentions their lack of crying out to or seeking the Lord. This is a sign of the depth of their blindness, especially when you consider that the ministries of Elijah and Elisha were exclusively to the northern kingdom. Along with this lack of crying out was their hopeless religious confusion. They thought that crying out involved burning incense on hills and "bowing down" to Baal.

Vs. 1-7 They were totally corrupted, like bread that was totally leavened.

V. 7 Not one king of the north was a godly man. Notice that none of them called upon God.

Vs. 8-10 Notice that you can see a pattern, in that this block begins with a declaration about Ephraim and ends with their lack of returning or seeking or knowing God. So, what does God focus on here?

Vs. 11-13 What is God's focus here? What do you think God meant that they spoke lies against Him?

Vs. 14-16 This seems to summarize this lack of seeking God. Notice v. 14. They cry out to God, but what they really desire is a return of wine and grain. They are not crying out for Him or to Him alone. I think that's a lot like us. If someone asked us what could happen that would really make us happy and feel good, it would look like a million dollars, recognition, computers, cars, media stuff, a house, etc. Could any of us be happy in a hut with the presence of God, but no food that we knew of for the next day - no job, no insurance, just the presence of God? Especially in the west, our spirituality is thinner than we think. We would be crying out like these people and our desire wouldn't be for God per se; it would be for the "stuff" of God.

Hosea 8

The emphasis of this part of God's judgment seems to be how the people outwardly claimed to know God, but never followed His Word.

Vs. 1-3 This is interesting because it is saying that the sign of judgment is in the sky above them. Crying out with idolatrous and adulterous hearts seems to be the focus. The more I read what Jesus said, the more I find Him telling people not just to hear what He said, but to do it.

Vs. 4-6 They chose their own kings and gods according to their desires. How could they say they knew God?

Vs. 7-10 The first part of this verse is famous. They would not only reap what they sowed, but God would punish them by intensifying what they wanted. If they wanted to go away from God, He would show them the result. Without His care and protection, there would be no food. Not only that, the countries to which they ran for help would use and disappoint them.

Vs. 11-14 What a funny contrast, even though they were sacrificing, they didn't understand God or His Word.

V. 14 This is what the people sought instead of God to make them feel secure. God would remove everything, until eventually, He was all that remained for them.

Hosea 9

At the root of their rebellion was the satisfying of their needs. Again, it is interesting how much teaching Jesus gave to His disciples on not being anxious about life, seeking Him first and being rich toward God.

Notice how often the mention of wine, food and offerings is mixed together. They were religious, but if God is only a tool for us to get fed and have comfort and satisfy our desires, our desires are really our god. And God isn't fooled by our religiousness.

Vs. 1-3 This is what drove their religion and their actions, a prostitute's wages, food and clothing. Notice that Ephraim returned to Egypt looking for help, but was dragged away to Assyria. Even those who ran to Egypt for help were eventually confronted and killed by Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon.

V. 4 God is not mocked. He wouldn't accept their worship.

Vs. 5-6 In fleeing the Assyrians, the Egyptians would take them and abuse them.

Vs. 7-8 In the day of their need, their lying prophets were no help to them.

Vs. 9-10 The seeds of their corruption were seen back in their history. Gibeah was the town in Benjamin, at the end of Judges, filled with homosexual men who killed the traveler's wife. This launched a civil war.

Baal-peor came while the people were still being led by Moses in the wilderness, when the presence of God was visible in the cloud and the manna was being given every morning. Sin is a spiritual disease in us that defies every rational thought.

Vs. 11-17 Notice that this is all directed to Ephraim, the northern kingdom, and the result will be exile. As far as we know, these people were lost to Israel forever. There were some of the people, the remnant, whom God might have kept track of, but it seems from Chronicles, that the only Israelites who survived from all of the tribes were those who heeded warnings like this and moved south into the land of Judah. Those people went into exile with the southern kingdom into Babylon and were restored to Israel.

When you read what God says about Israel, you realize that they are representing all men. We are all fallen and we are all this sinful. Sin is awful and utterly awesome in us. Sin will dominate us if we desire anything other than God, and the only way we can desire God is through Jesus. In Jesus we are forgiven, and the Holy Spirit gives us a newly created life, residing in us so we can follow Christ. Israel tried to fulfill their desires and passions and sort of give lip service to God. Sin is too powerful for that kind of life and deception. This is the same for us even as Christians. If we desire anything more than Jesus, it takes over. When Jesus told His disciples to take heed and beware of all coveting of anything, He wasn't being religious, but vitally real. He was trying to protect them and us. The reformers said "Sola Scriptura" (only the Scriptures). As disciples our cry has to be, "only Jesus." Our focus on Him and following Him in His Word and in the harvest is the only way we can really live to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, with all our strength and with all our mind. Paul told Timothy this in 1 Timothy 6:12, *Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.* If we don't take hold of it, something else takes hold of us.

3 John

V. 1 From v. 5, it appears that Gaius was a respected man in the church and had some influence in terms of leadership and making disciples.

Vs. 2-4 Probably as a result of Gaius, there are people walking in the truth. This guy is someone John knows and trusts.

Vs. 5-8 As in all the churches, there were traveling preachers and workers who were passing through and going on to other lands. The gospel was new and there was a world to reach. Gaius was one of those people who supported this work, in spite of false teachers.

Vs. 9-10 Here is the reason this is being sent to Gaius and not the entire church. Diotrephes was stopping the church from supporting outsiders. Under Diotrephes, the church was becoming an isolated fortress. It appears that Diotrephes was overly conservative and held a very self-centered, authoritarian view of leadership. In the early church, there was a spectrum of error, but most of the deep problems faced by Paul came from the very conservative, exclusive, law-driven side of the church. It seems that Diotrephes was so law and authority-oriented, that he didn't even recognize the authority of the apostle John.

Vs. 11-12 This is the other reason John is writing Gaius personally, so that he would welcome and help Demetrius. In fact, some think it was Demetrius who carried this letter.

Vs. 13-15 Again, this letter was intentionally short because of the need for Demetrius to be helped, and because John was hoping to come personally and tend to the situation.

We are used to seeing Paul having to defend himself and his apostleship, but even John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, was not counted as worthy by a guy like Diotrephes. Sometimes the church is just more fun than you can stand. Thankfully we know the Lord of the church.

Psalm 126

This song, sung by the worshippers coming to Jerusalem, could have been written during many periods of Israel's troubled history. Since the psalm is talking about the fortunes of Zion being restored and the city being a testimony among the nations, it could be that this song was sung by those who returned from the Babylonian exile with Zerubbabel.

Vs. 1-3 I can't imagine what it was like for these people who returned, or even for a man like Daniel, to know that the Lord had allowed the people to return to Jerusalem. It was a miracle.

Vs. 4-6 These verses sound like what Jesus said to His disciples in John 4:36, *Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together.* Today we work in the harvest following Him, denying ourselves, taking up our cross, choosing to hunger now, being poor now and mourning now for this lost world. Someday we will fully understand the work that He did through us, by making disciples and bringing in the sheaves, and we will rejoice.

Proverbs 29:12-14

I guess if I had to put all three verses together, I would camp on v. 13. The poor man and the oppressor owe God faithfulness, since He gives both of them their life and understanding. In God, they are both equal and so, I guess, the oppressor ought to be humbled.

To deny our debt of gratitude would be v. 12, with the result that light leaves the land and it is ruled by darkness, like in Ephraim, the northern kingdom.

To respond in faithfulness to God is v. 14, with the result, as God showed to David, that God will further bless that faithfulness. Our real faith and trust in God is seen honoring God in the small things. The Lord notices. (Luke 16:10)

DECEMBER 8

Well, these are the last days...of December. If you've been keeping up, you might be exhausted. If you haven't been keeping up, hopefully you're thinking that January 1 looks good for a new

beginning. I know there are Christmas parties and church things, shopping and traveling. But if you do have time to catch your breath somewhere in the day, I'd encourage you to keep reading. Tomorrow we begin Revelation. Revelation is the only book in the Bible that promises a blessing for reading it and heeding it. And besides, if you have a couple of quiet times between now and the end of the year, you won't feel like such a spiritual schlep when you regather your nerve endings when the kids head back to school, and you begin another year in the Word. Trust me, if you struggled reading your one-year Bible this year, next year you'll do much better.

By the way, you will be finishing two books today and beginning two new books tomorrow.

Hosea 10-14

Our last day in Hosea. As you're reading though all of this, keep making observations and looking for associations either in the text or between things said here and other parts of the Bible. Keep yourself awake and observant.

Hosea 10

Notice that it seems this is all exclusively aimed at the northern kingdom.

V. 1 This is total irony, to take God's blessing and make idols for ourselves. We've all stopped doing that, right?

V. 2 The breaking down of altars was done by King Josiah. You remember who he was, right?

Vs. 3-6 These people didn't need God as their king. They felt content and self-sufficient. Even today, if we're feeling good, do we really "need" anyone? God would remove that arrogance from them.

V. 5 This altar at Bethel was one of two that Jeroboam set up, so the people wouldn't go to Jerusalem to worship. After all, he thought, didn't Israel worship a calf in the wilderness? And if it was in the Bible, then it must have been biblical, right? This is what determined the dark path of the northern kingdom. To be fair though, it was Solomon, the wisest guy in the world, who introduced idolatry into the united nation's bloodstream. The joke here is that the Assyrians threw Israel's "god" on a wagon and carted it away.

Vs. 7-8 God would humble this people by taking away His blessing. Interestingly, Jesus quoted v. 8 to the women of Jerusalem as He walked through the streets to His crucifixion in Luke 23:28-30. Also, the people of earth will say this during the Tribulation in Revelation 6:16.

Vs. 9-10 This is referring to Judges 19. Again, the events at the end of Judges were big things. The event in Gibeah was a poison that never left the veins of Israel. There was also another interesting story in Judges 18 and as a result of that story, guess which tribe of Israel is not represented in the 144,000 in Revelation 7:4-12. Those little stories had huge results because they showed a poison that had infected the people.

Vs. 11-12 God had pampered Israel, but God would refine Israel through hard work, hoping Israel would turn to Him. This is rare in Hosea to find God calling out to the people in the middle of His pronouncement of their sins and their judgment. It must have been because of the imagery of sowing and reaping and seeking the Lord (instead of Baal the fertility god) for their needs. Even in this final hour, God was pleading with the people to seek Him.

Vs. 13-15 Bethel means "house of God." During the times of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, this place had good connotations. Can you remember a showdown at Bethel where God pronounced judgment? It was in 1 Kings 13, just after the northern and southern kingdoms were established. A man of God was sent to pronounce judgment on King Jeroboam and the northern kingdom. Now, 200 years later, this is the final fulfillment of what God said. Who says God isn't patient? He tried everything to give the people a chance to repent and come to Him.

Hosea 11

This chapter laments the northern kingdom's seeking help from Egypt.

V. 1 Guess where this verse is quoted. Look at Matthew 2:15. In the history of Israel this was a great moment, as well as in the history of salvation.

V. 2 This makes me think of that generation of Israel that rejected Jesus. The more He called them, the more they rejected Him.

Vs. 3-7 Verses 3-4 are contrasted to vs. 5-7. God tried to help and heal them, but they rejected Him and would be subject to cruelty and slavery. Notice in v. 4 how God bent down to them and how in v. 7 the people bent themselves away from God. As God has said before, their calling out to God was for themselves and their appetites. It was not from true repentance or a sincere desire to draw near to God.

This ends this long portion of God declaring the people's sin and His judgment on them. Just to keep this in perspective, remember that God is showing how all mankind responds to Him.

Vs. 8-12 Now comes the promise of hope and salvation.

V. 8 The cities mentioned here are obscure, but flip the page and look at Jude 7. These were the *surrounding cities*. Kind of cool, huh?

God's compassion is tender. This is either the image of a man to his child, or because this is Hosea, the image of a man to his unfaithful wife whom he still loves.

V. 9 So how is God going to change them without coming to them in wrath? Look at Isaiah 55 (particularly vs. 8-11) and you get an idea of what God is alluding to here, and what His resources are to transform the hearts of people.

Vs. 10-11 He has used both of these animals before in a negative sense. Now God is saying when they hear His roar they will be glad and will seek Him for shelter and protection. This time the dove will have sense and seek Him.

V. 12 As we've seen in Ezekiel, those in the southern kingdom were also idolatrous, but God rescued the majority of those people from exile. I think their faithfulness was seen in that they still had men like Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel & Co., and others who sincerely worshiped God. The northern kingdom was devoid of godly leaders.

Hosea 12

V. 1 This seems to stand alone as a rebuke to Ephraim (the northern kingdom).

Vs. 2-6 There will be punishment for Judah, and thereby God will, in symbol, punish all of Jacob. Notice God's summary of Jacob's life from the book of Genesis. God didn't miss anything. Jacob was a liar and a thief, but there was faith found in him. God will nurture that ember of faith in Judah, representing Jacob, and they will return to God. These people are the ones God brought out of exile, and they are the seed of those who will be present when Jesus establishes His kingdom.

Vs. 7-9 For Ephraim's dishonesty and injustice, God will lead him again into the wilderness. The Feast of the Tabernacles, near the Day of Atonement, was to have made the people remember their humble pilgrimage through the wilderness. Israel, united or divided, never held this feast, living in tents or booths, until the days of Nehemiah. (Nehemiah's celebration of the Feast of the Tabernacles, in Nehemiah 8:14-18, was still over 250 years in the future). They may have held the feast, but they didn't live in tents and makeshift huts as they were told to do.

When Jesus told His disciples, *Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh* (Luke 6:21), He was sharing this same

principle. If we forget our salvation and saturate ourselves in the things of this life, we forget His love and care. And we can make idols out of all of His blessings.

Vs. 10-14 Because of Ephraim's provocation God will humble them, as He humbled Jacob by making him work for someone craftier than he. God will guide them by His prophets.

Hosea 13

Vs. 1-3 Ephraim was an exalted and respected tribe which carried the birthright given by Jacob. Joshua was of Ephraim. But the people of Ephraim were foolish and led the nation into idolatry.

Vs. 4-14 Actually, it was God who exalted Ephraim. So, since God gave and was not thanked, but rejected, God will now humble the people. Notice that in v. 4 God ransomed them out of Egypt. Then in v. 14 He says He will not ransom them now.

Vs. 4-8 Because they used God's blessing for their own sin and pleasure, God would become an adversary and make them live in fear and awareness of their danger. It doesn't matter what your position is or if you have a bag of gold, if you live in fear.

Vs. 9-13 In 1 Samuel 8, the people rejected God and demanded a king of their own liking. God gave them a king that reflected their hearts, King Saul. That wasn't very pretty. It led Israel into further confusion until God appointed David, a man after His own heart.

V. 14 Notice that this is a famous verse quoted by Paul in 1 Corinthians 15:55. In Hosea, death will consume Ephraim, but in 1 Corinthians 15:55, because of Jesus, death no longer has any power.

Vs. 15-16 Back to the thought of Ephraim being exalted among his brothers. That is ended now, once for all.

Hosea 14

This is the final message of hope and salvation

Vs. 1-3 God not only encourages them to return in repentance, but He tells them what to say.

Vs. 4-7 God promises them restoration.

Vs. 8-9 This is an interesting challenge from the Lord. It sounds like the appeals of wisdom in Proverbs, but more like the challenges in the book of Revelation to take heed to the message of the book. Look at Revelation 22:10-21, and compare Hosea 14:9 with Revelation 22:11.

Jude

So, meet another of Jesus' brothers. Jude wrote with apostolic authority, so he must have been a respected leader in some circles. Like James, this letter is filled with images and references to Old Testament history.

Vs. 1-3 Although he had planned to write a letter encouraging these people about their salvation and growth in Christ, he found it necessary to warn them to put up a strong fight against false teachers.

V. 4 There was a line of teaching, seen even in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6, that since God is interested in saving our spirit, and since the body is fully kaput, one should feed the spirit. Whatever the body does doesn't count. This led people to embrace the kind of spirituality we've been reading about in Hosea where you give lip service to God on Sunday and then let your body and its desires lead your life the rest of the week.

When we live in a way that is dishonoring to Jesus, we deny Him by our lifestyle and choices. Since the faith has been delivered to us, it is vital that we guard and protect it, especially from hypocrisy.

V. 5 Here is one example of apostasy, the children of Israel being led out of Egypt. Paul refers to this in practically the same way in 1 Corinthians 10:1-5, including the reference to Jesus.

V. 6 Although these angels had great privilege and power, when they overstepped God's command and will, they were put in prison. This, I believe, is a reference to what happened in Genesis 6:1-5.

V. 7 The area around Sodom and Gomorrah had been like the garden of God, and apparently Lot was a witness to them, but they didn't heed the word and they were destroyed.

Vs. 8-13 These teachers are compared to those who had great privilege and went astray, and Jude described them in very graphic terms.

Vs. 8-10 These people were arrogantly involved in defying the spiritual forces, ranting against demons. I've heard of people doing this in such a proud way that it makes you wonder why Satan doesn't just whack them since they are so proud and unbalanced in their attitudes; but actually, Satan probably likes it. This gives these teachers a following among the unsteady, but the true spiritual attitude is the one Michael showed.

V. 9 The event Jude is referring to here is not in Scripture, but it was a part of Jewish tradition. Apparently there was some truth to it. God did, in fact, hide Moses' grave; and He did it for a reason.

V. 11 Notice the apostates and false teachers shown here. Cain, the firstborn son of Adam, is known for a half-hearted sacrifice and murderous jealousy against his righteous brother. Balaam was a prophet of God who taught the enemy how to corrupt God's people, bringing God's judgment on them. Korah was a Levite who incited a rebellion against the men God was using to lead the people of God. All of these people had a position of respect before God which they misused to their own destruction and the destruction of others.

Vs. 12-13 They bring nothing to the church but hidden danger. They are empty and deceitful.

Vs. 14-15 Both in the oral tradition of the Jews and then written in the non-biblical book of Enoch (110 B.C.), it was said that before Enoch was taken (about 65 years before the birth of Noah) he pronounced judgment on his generation, that is, that generation mentioned in Genesis 6. Some think that Enoch will be one of those two witnesses in Jerusalem in the book of Revelation.

V. 16 Here is Jude's final description of these people. They are not just teachers; they are complainers. Look again at 1 Corinthians 10:9-10, where Paul mentions some of these same things.

Vs. 17-19 These warnings appear in John, in Peter and in Paul's letters. John, Peter and Paul said these guys would come. Jude says they have arrived.

Vs. 20-21 Just as Paul challenged Timothy so often, the people were first to make sure they were close to the Lord, following His Word.

Vs. 22-23 Then they were to minister to the weak and doubting and to those lost in error, some of whom were unbelievers. In doing so, they were to keep themselves clean.

Vs. 24-25 Focusing on our Lord is what keeps us from stumbling and makes us able to bring glory to God. This is one of the greatest blessings in the New Testament.

For us as disciples this all reminds us that making disciples keeps us focused on protecting the truth and entrusting it to the next generations who will go beyond us.

Psalm 127

As the worshipers approached Jerusalem, this song reminded them of the foolishness of toil and anxiety when only God can bless us. Then it brought them to focus on the true blessing God gives - our children, both physical and spiritual.

Vs. 1-2 These verses talk about our striving where only God can give us success.

Vs. 3-5 These verses tell us where our real passion and labor of love should be.

Proverbs 29:15-17

How funny that these proverbs appear with this psalm today. It seems interesting that v. 16, about the increase of wickedness, is sandwiched between two verses of parents loving and investing in their children. And yes, the rod, reproof, and discipline are love. It works for the Father, and we would be remiss to dismiss discipline, reproof and the rod. See Hebrews 12:6-8.

DECEMBER 9

Joel 1-3

Hang on to your hats. When you get to heaven and meet Joel, you're probably going to look at him and say, "Dude, really?" No one knows when this sermon was written. So we don't know the historical timeframe, the situation, or who the listeners were. Adding to that, you have prophetic references and real references mixed together like salt and pepper on your potatoes. This bugs people about Joel; in fact, there are lots of bugs, real ones. Then, adding only to my confusion, Luther decided to make four chapters out of Joel in the German Bible, where the English Bible has only three. O Weh! For our endeavor today, I will, as most Germans do, not pay attention to the German Bible.

But we know that this is not Joel's problem. The Spirit did it. I wouldn't recommend going up to Him and saying anything about "dude," or "really." I can only think that, like the book of Esther, God wants us to seek Him and put it together using all of our knowledge of the OT and the NT. There is nothing wrong with having to think, and to use what we've learned. It's sort of like "wax on, wax off," if you know what I mean. I am going to suggest a time/event framework for Joel that is only my opinion, but is in the timeframe of when the smart guys guess Joel wrote. Then I'll make some suggestions as to what I think the future prophecy is pointing to.

Just to give you a road map, I think the message of Joel goes like this:

A sudden storm of locusts stripped the land during the reign of Hezekiah. Joel stood up and said this was only a taste of what would happen with the coming Assyrian army. In shock and deep repentance the people of Judah and Jerusalem came before God and humbled themselves with prayer and fasting, and repented. Because of that act of faith of this remnant of Judah, God destroyed the army of Assyria and promised to restore the land.

All of this foreshadowed the sudden days of danger for Israel during the Tribulation before the coming of Christ. A nation from the north will unexpectedly invade the land and strip it bare. This will be the army represented by Magog from Ezekiel 38-39, but there will also be looting bands from North Africa and Egypt. Jerusalem will be the final target. The people will repent, believe in Christ and cry out, *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*. (Matt. 21:9) The Spirit will be poured out on the nation, and God will destroy this army near the Dead Sea. It will be an obviously divine judgment. After this, when the antichrist breaks his treaty with Israel and desecrates the temple, those who flee Jerusalem will live in those mountains and live off of the supplies of that army. Later will come that final battle of Armageddon, north of Jerusalem. During this battle, the Lord will return to Jerusalem, gather those in hiding and then go on to the battle. He will finally restore Jerusalem and set up His millennial reign on earth.

In Joel, we are entering into the last days, and by beginning in Revelation today, this will all work toward God preparing us to enter His harvest today and in this coming year with renewed hearts.

Joel 1

Vs. 1-4 Apparently this plague of locusts had just happened. These people lived from their fields, not from Walmart ©, and they were in utter shock that something this devastating could come so quickly, destroying their economy and changing their lives. God used it to wake up the people to an approaching army that would make this look like a picnic.

Vs. 5-20 Now, for the fun of it, look at the different groups of people who God is shaking up and calling out to. List the different responses He expects to happen right away. There is a dire immediacy to this warning. It sort of reminds me of Jesus saying to the people in Jerusalem who hear that the antichrist is in the temple, immediately to head for the mountains without going back home to get stuff.

V. 15 There is something in the suddenness of the locusts and the approaching army that mirrors what will happen in the future to Israel. Very clearly here, and throughout this message by Joel, *the day of the Lord* is being focused on. There are present events that the people must respond to, but in the time of the Tribulation those Jews will need to pay close attention to what is being said in Joel. They'll need to respond to the Lord quickly.

If men couldn't stop the devastation of locusts, what would they do if something bigger happened? It is amazing how easy it is for God to humble man. With our technology we see storms forming in the oceans weeks in advance, yet in spite of all our preparations, when the storms hit, we are devastated and for a short time become very "third world." Imagine what will happen in the Tribulation. You'll be seeing this in a few days in Revelation.

Joel 2

Vs. 1-2 Notice that Zion, the city of Jerusalem, is the focus here. What will be happening now and in the future is bringing the judgment of the Lord. *The day of the Lord* is always associated with judgment. Someone is going to get whacked, now and in the future. Keep this impending judgment in mind, because I think it helps pinpoint the historical time and event that is referred to here. The army of locusts is still in view, but it is being likened to both the coming Assyrian army and an army in the last days of Israel.

V. 2 The description of this army is clearly for the Tribulation. The locusts would have darkened the sky, and during the Tribulation it talks about the sky being darkened.

In the immediate future for Joel, I would suggest that the army that was about to come against Jerusalem was probably the largest army that ever assembled against it. The Assyrians came with a huge army, numbering well over 200,000 men.

Vs. 3-11 This army would give us a look at the future army that would come against Israel. There will be similarities, but obviously many differences. Notice in v. 11 that this imagery is for the end times.

Now, although this army looks like another plague of locusts, I think they are only being compared to locusts in that they will cover the land and loot it. Just like the army of locusts from chapter 1, they will be totally irresistible. Only God will be able to halt them. The only thing that will be left for them to take is Jerusalem, or Zion. This is exactly what happened when the Assyrians came against Jerusalem. Jerusalem was the only city that was left. Everything else had been stripped. Also, that's why the Assyrian camp was full of goodies.

So, thinking about the future of Israel, there are two armies we know of that will come against Israel during the seven-year Tribulation. Remember that during the Tribulation, from the outset,

there will be such natural disasters upon the earth that resources will be scarce and our global infrastructure of communication will probably have collapsed or will have been severely damaged. This will be good for those trying to stay under the radar of the antichrist.

In Ezekiel 38 and 39 we are told there will be an army from the far north that will also be joined by Egypt. This action will probably take place sometime in the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation. From the outset of the seals being opened in Revelation 6, the world will become traumatized. The world will encounter one "9-11" experience after another, and within months the earth will be full of wreckage and paralyzed governments, yet it seems that Israel will have been spared much of the devastation other places in the world have seen. If you read the description of this army in Ezekiel 38-39, they will ravage the land and there is some very similar imagery to the locust plague. They will be encamped near the Dead Sea, just a few miles east and south of Jerusalem, and there God will miraculously strike them down in such a visible way that the entire world will see that God is for Israel. It will make no one happy, least of all the antichrist. Either this event will cause the antichrist to make a peace treaty with Israel (the beginning of the Tribulation) or this event will cause him to snap and break the treaty with Israel (the middle of the Tribulation).

The other battle that we all think of will be the battle of Armageddon. This battle will take place about 75 miles north of Jerusalem and will be a stage for the rebellion of nations against the antichrist. We'll be reading about this in Revelation. The rivers to the east in Iraq and Iran will dry up and the King of the East, who everyone thinks is China, will walk there with 200 million soldiers. I'm sure there will be other nations gathered there too. But this battle will never threaten Jerusalem per se, and the Jews will not be the primary object of this aggression. The antichrist will have set up shop in that region; and so, lacking smart bombs and cruise missiles, the nations that want to fight with him will have to walk to the battle. It is during this world event at Armageddon that Jesus will return to Jerusalem, gather a few friends, and head north to the battle Himself.

Now, both of these battles could be in view in Joel (remember what I said about salt and pepper), but I think the primary future battle being mentioned in Joel is the coming of Magog in Ezekiel 38. Back to Joel 2.

Vs. 12-17 Because of this new impending threat against Jerusalem, everyone is to drop everything and immediately humble themselves before the Lord. In v. 16 the situation is so dire that even the groom and bride will forego the wedding night so that they can humble themselves and seek the Lord's help.

Apparently, the people of Israel in the future will also find themselves in this dire necessity. Possibly as a result of this prophecy, they will know to drop everything and seek the Lord.

Vs. 18-20 God heard. So that means that in the past at some point in Israel's history, the people cried out and God heard and saved them. What event might this have been? Here are a couple of candidates.

My second guess would be the battle Jehoshaphat "fought" in 2 Chronicles 20. There will be a reference to Jehoshaphat in Joel 3:2. Also, Egypt will be punished in Joel 3:19 and they were a part of that battle too. Egypt will be a part of the situation with Magog in Ezekiel 38. The problem here is that none of the attacking nations came from the north and none of them challenged Jerusalem. It could be that God only mentions Jehoshaphat because of the area of where this took place, near the Dead Sea.

However, my first guess would be that this coming threat in Joel's day was the coming of Assyria against Hezekiah and Jerusalem. Here are some reasons. When Assyria swept into Israel they took everything but Jerusalem. Zion is the focus of the arrogance of the Assyrians. The

Assyrians came from the north. When Rabshakeh stood outside the walls of Jerusalem venting his arrogance and ignorance, the entire city was absolutely obedient to King Hezekiah and they humbled themselves before the Lord. It looks like they could have heeded this call to repentance and seeking God. In God's promise to Hezekiah, He mentions a restoration of their fields and crops, giving the idea that everything had been lost and destroyed. And, the army of the Assyrians was destroyed by God's own hand, exactly like the army of Magog will be judged.

V. 20 Although Egypt and some group from northern Africa will be part of this group that participates with Magog in Ezekiel 38, Magog is the main nation and they come from the far north. As the Lord destroys them in Ezekiel 38-39, it will take months to bury their corpses, and therefore, the stench.

Vs. 21-27 This kind of agricultural restoration was promised to Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:29-30.

Vs. 26-27 Notice that this is addressed to present and future Israel, mixed together here, but really dealing with the future generation that will have to endure these threats in the Tribulation. The future will be the only time they are not put to shame.

Vs. 28-32 The German Bible makes this block a separate chapter.

V. 28 Now we are focused on the future. The "firstfruits" of this happened at Pentecost when the Spirit came and the church was birthed. Peter mentions this, but the church is simply enjoying the spiritual blessing promised to Israel. Paul says this in Romans 15:27.

There will be an event in the Tribulation, probably at the beginning, but possibly near the end of the first 3.5 years, when the nation of Israel will believe. In that moment, the Spirit will be poured out on them. Again, that won't make anyone happy, especially the antichrist.

Vs. 30-31 The Tribulation will be no picnic.

V. 32 Here is a famous verse quoted by Paul in Romans 10:13. This verse in Joel is very cool. Notice that it looks like the people in Jerusalem are fleeing. You can imagine the Jews fleeing Jerusalem, obeying Jesus, as the antichrist moves in with a vengeance. As mentioned when we were doing Ezekiel, it looks like the people who run from the antichrist will do this around the Dead Sea and Jordan. There, they will find plenty of resources because the army of Magog brought provisions that they won't need anymore.

Joel 3

Vs. 1-13 This, I think is the demise of Magog from Ezekiel 38-39. In that fight, looting bands from the south, comprised of Egypt and as far as Libya, will ransack Israel; but the main force of this northern army will be near the Dead Sea, which is only about 15 miles from Jerusalem.

Vs. 2 & 12 No one knows exactly where this *Valley of Jehoshaphat* is. I would suggest it is referring to the valley in 2 Chronicles 20:1-25, where God destroyed the army that came against Jehoshaphat. The reason I think this valley and this event are mentioned is that it is right about where the armies of Magog will camp, near the Dead Sea, near Engedi. The Lord fought this battle for Jehoshaphat and the result was that it took them months to collect the vast supply of goods from that destroyed army. I think that is a picture of what will happen in the future.

Vs. 14-17 I would say this is the final battle of Armageddon and the Lord's return. Zion will be totally secure and at peace, and the Lord will dwell there.

V. 18 Not only will the land be fruitful, but there will be a fountain from the house of the Lord that will become that stream we read about in Ezekiel 47. It will run to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Dead Sea. From Jerusalem to the Dead Sea, there will be trees on both sides; and when it enters the Dead Sea it will make the waters of the sea fresh and alive.

Vs. 19-21 This ends in judgment for Egypt and its neighbors, but there will be a happy ending for Judah, Jerusalem and for the world.

Revelation 1

What a way to end the Bible and the year. Prepare to be blessed.

Here are some fun facts about the background of the book. It was written by the Apostle John in 95-96 A.D. Apparently John was working in Ephesus and was exiled to the island of Patmos to work in the mines during the Domitian persecution. After Domitian died in 96 A.D., the next emperor, Nerva, allowed John to return to Ephesus. John was probably the only living (on earth) apostle.

The book was questioned by some men like Luther because it teaches a literal 1000-year reign of Jesus on the earth. There are many issues not raised in this book because it is a message from the Lord. The destruction of Jerusalem isn't mentioned, not only because it was old business from 70 A.D., but also because this is Jesus' message and deals with the future.

Revelation breaks down like this: Chapters 1-3 are to the seven churches. Chapters 4-18 are the Tribulation. Chapters 19-22 are the Millennial Kingdom, and then, the final, eternal world.

V. 1 The word *soon* doesn't mean that the events would happen immediately, but that once they happen they will happen quickly. That means that it might take time for them to begin, but once begun, they would rapidly be fulfilled. The bulk of the book, chapters 4-18, will take only seven years.

V. 3 I think this blessing is still in force. Why do you think God would promise this? Why would you think He thinks it is important to read this book? What do you think the blessing might be? Remember that back in that day, not everyone had a Bible. Bibles were rare. So if you had portions of Scripture, the church gathered and it was read aloud. Everyone who read the book of Revelation aloud, in order for people to hear it, would be blessed. All who heard and "kept" what was read were blessed. That would now be the same for you by reading and heeding what is written in this book. The blessing still applies, even if it is not read aloud.

Vs. 4-8 What an introduction. Notice that not everyone will be happy to see the Lord.

Vs. 9-11 Since it says that John was *in the Spirit*, it suggests that this wasn't Sunday when it happened; but rather, it is saying something like, "in the Spirit I was brought to the day of the Lord." Daniel and Ezekiel were never in the Spirit prior to a vision. It was in the Spirit that they were shown the vision or taken to a certain place. John is being brought to see the day of the Lord, from its beginning in heaven to its conclusion with a new heaven.

Vs. 12-20 The Lord appears and gives John his orders. As you read through this, what do you think Jesus was trying to emphasize by appearing to John (and us) like this? Since the book is written chronologically, and since the judgment of the earth in the Tribulation begins in chapter 4, it is no accident that Jesus' first words are to the church. After chapter 3 there is no more church in the book of Revelation. The Tribulation begins, and it is all about the Jews and the judgment of the earth. This isn't a conclusive argument for the pre-Tribulation rapture, but in the entire scheme of the Bible and God's revealed plan, it makes such good logical sense.

V. 17 It is interesting that Jesus touched John. It had been a long time. I wonder what it was like after over 60 years for John to hear the Lord speak again.

V. 20 Some people understand the *angels of the seven churches* as the elders or head elder of these churches. The word in the Greek is messenger or minister and can mean angel or messenger/representative. The letters are written to the *angels of the seven churches*. Surely heavenly angels don't need letters, and since there are rebukes and warnings given to the

churches, those certainly wouldn't apply to God's holy angels. Everything said in these letters is directly from the Lord to the leaders of these churches.

Psalm 128

Vs. 1-2 As the worshipers came to Jerusalem, singing this psalm, it reminded them what God's true blessings were. Prosperity and blessing are only from the Lord. And it was a reminder, in reverse, that these things are given by God, not Apple or Sony, or by working long hours. Following the Lord in His Word directs our hearts to what He says is good and true and right.

Vs. 3-4 And true blessing is relational, not in stuff. It begins with our relationship to God and flows to those closest to us. This reminds me of what Jesus said to the disciples when they realized that following meant leaving some blessings behind at home. In Mark 10:28-30 Jesus said that working in the harvest would lead us to hundreds of new relatives, including sons and daughters.

Vs. 5-6 This blessing was to come from Jerusalem because that was where the temple and throne of God were.

Proverbs 29:18

Boy, are we getting *prophetic vision*. Maybe that's why God is giving us this strong dose, so that as we walk on earth, we will keep our hearts focused on the Lord, on the harvest, and on the joy before us.

DECEMBER 10

Amos 1-3

Amos wasn't a prophet in terms of being in the groups of prophets who existed during the time of Elijah and Elisha. Amos was a sheep breeder, a herder and a cultivator of mulberry trees. Apparently this is to say that Amos was a respected man and had leadership within his trade. Amos was preaching during the time of Hosea and Jonah. Though he was from Judah, he was sent to preach to Israel, the northern kingdom. The ministries of these three prophets (Hosea, Jonah and Amos) came right after the death of Elisha, and though the judgment against Israel had been pronounced, God still worked with these people for another hundred years to show grace and bring people to repentance. Anyone who did respond to God through these prophets probably headed south to live in Judah where there was still a godly influence.

Unfortunately, this was a time of prosperity for both kingdoms and so the messages of these prophets went unheard, except for those who had ears to hear and hearts of faith.

Amos 1

Vs. 1-2 You might want to refer to the chart, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," at the end of this document to see where Amos fits. Notice that the Lord is speaking from Zion, in Judah. Since the northern kingdom had abandoned worship at the temple and disowned Jerusalem as the Lord's city, this would be a very pointed statement in their ears.

What follows are pronouncements of judgment on the surrounding nations for violence they committed against all of Israel, both north and south. The tool of judgment would be the rising power of Assyria.

Vs. 3-5 Damascus, representing all of Syria, was the major power in that region, until the Assyrians came. For years they had been very destructive to Israel.

Vs. 6-8 The Philistines had always been arch enemies of Israel, and during the times of the northern kings, they had been capturing Jews and selling them as slaves.

Vs. 9-10 Although Tyre had a treaty with Israel, they worked with Israel's enemies in selling Jewish slaves to Edom.

Vs. 11-12 The Edomites were arch enemies of the Jews.

Vs. 13-15 The Ammonites came from Lot and one of his daughters. Their sin was evident and their acts were brutal. They did this to strike terror into the hearts of their enemies.

Amos 2

Vs. 1-3 The Moabites came from Lot and his other daughter. Now this is interesting because their wrong was not against Israel but against Edom. But it could be that among the bones they burned were the bones of Esau, the son of Isaac and the brother of Jacob (Israel).

Vs. 4-5 Now we have Judah. Some of the kings of Judah were godly, but there were ungodly kings and the people were not always obedient. Notice that they will be irrevocably judged because of rejecting the statutes of the Lord. This is a long time before judgment came. God was patient and we've read the story of what God did with Judah.

Vs. 6-8 This is the judgment of Israel, the northern kingdom. What a list of sins.

Vs. 9-12 Although it was God who had saved them, they got rid of those who were devoted to God or would speak for Him. Whereas there were still godly people and godly kings in Judah, in Israel they had taken care of any godly influence so they could enjoy themselves. Verse 12 is interesting regarding the Nazirites drinking wine. The people of Israel corrupted them. It makes me think of Daniel and his friends in Daniel 1. They resisted eating the food and wine offered to the gods of Babylon, to keep themselves devoted to the Lord. Even that small compromise would have hurt them.

Vs. 13-16 God Himself would humble Israel, and no amount of effort or strength on their part would save them.

Amos 3

Vs. 1-8 What do you think the Lord is saying here? In some respect this might look back to 2:11-12. It seems that God is saying that just like there is a cause-effect relationship in these other things, the people should have responded when they saw the prophets, realizing that God had spoken and was trying to save them. The long years of the ministry of Elijah and Elisha were full of signs and offers to the kings and people to repent. No one listened. I was reading about Jesus asking the people how they knew how to interpret the appearance of the earth and sky, but why they were not able to interpret the present time, that is, the time of His visitation. God seems to be asking the same thing here through Amos.

Vs. 9-10 This appears to be God calling the ungodly to look at Samaria and be witnesses to its godlessness.

Vs. 11-12 Only a small remnant of the northern kingdom would survive. Talk about graphic imagery.

Vs. 13-15 Notice the two things mentioned here: the worship in Bethel (to keep people believing a lie and not going to Jerusalem) and the luxury of the rich. These were among the gods of the northern kingdom.

As disciples it is easy for us to slip into the mode of assuming there is lots of time and God will always be patient. His patience is amazing, but when it is time to judge, His judgment comes and rolls and is relentless. We are working in the harvest because He is coming. The offer for forgiveness stands now; but it will expire, and then comes judgment beyond our comprehension.

All of Revelation, and the Bible itself for that matter, is a call for us to stay awake and get the Word out. The more you read this, the more you understand why we've been left here to work in the harvest. We need to stay awake and keep sharing the gospel of Christ and let people know that the kingdom of Heaven is coming.

Revelation 2:1-17

Many people have posed different schemes for understanding these churches, and I'd suggest taking a very natural approach. All of these churches existed at the same time, not during different ages, so we don't need to see the churches representing different ages in the history of the church. Also, these churches were selected by Jesus because of particular elements that He wanted to comment on, and wanted us to learn from. In fact, all of the letters we have from Paul that were addressed to churches were designed to address challenges in each church, but were also written down for our instruction. Although all of these churches were near one another geographically, there were also big-name, nearby churches, like in Colossae, that are not mentioned here by Jesus.

As you read through these letters to the churches, you will notice a certain pattern that repeats, yet the message for each church is very individual. Also, just think about this: These are the only letters in the Bible from Jesus Himself to churches.

Vs. 1-7 The *church in Ephesus*.

V. 1 Notice that the letter is to the *angel of the church*. The word "angel" means messenger. In Matthew 11:10, Jesus uses the same word for John the Baptist and it is translated messenger. In this case, angel must be referring to one of the elders or the pastor. A real angel didn't need correspondence. Also, five of these seven "angels" receive a warning about judgment. I don't think God's holy angels need warnings. We "angels" do.

Notice how Jesus introduces Himself. This will be different for each church and will be significant for His message to them. Usually, the *right hand* means authority. The stars, as we've seen, are leaders/pastors of these seven churches. This might mean something like, "Jesus holds this authority, not the men, and the churches are led or held by His authority."

Vs. 2-3 First the positive. The *endurance* is not from suffering, but from maintaining a constant fight against error. That will wear you out.

V. 4 Just so you know, five of the seven churches have a charge against them. How do you think this rebuke relates to vs. 2-3? Losing this first love is a very serious thing. As believers and as churches, our joy in our salvation and Savior cannot be superseded by any other thing. When the church engages in wars, doctrinal, social or political, it begins to rob people of the remembrance of being saved, of receiving mercy and unmerited love. A disciple is to live in that love and remembrance of mercy and to be empowered by that joy daily. Our remembrance of our need and the mercy we received is what the Lord uses in us to share His message in the harvest with tenderness, patience and compassion.

V. 5 This warning is very serious. To have the *lampstand* removed is to close down the church. The church in Ephesus no longer exists.

V. 6 No one knows exactly what the Nicolaitans taught, but it seems to have been excessive freedom that led believers into moral sin and caused others to stumble because of foods. We saw this mentioned in 1 Corinthians and in Romans. John, Peter and Jude made references to Christians and teachers who were leading believers into immorality and following their passions.

V. 7 So, Jesus is delivering a message from the Spirit.

One of the issues in these letters is the promise made at the end. This promise, *to eat of the tree of life*, is offered to all believers, regardless of whether they fail or endure. Whether a Christian is

obedient or disobedient, they will still eat of the fruit. So what is the promise? I think, in all of these promises, the reward is living closely with Christ on earth with the confidence of the reward, and therefore, knowing God's joy and peace as we walk on earth. It would be like two sons who are guaranteed an inheritance. If one of those sons was very close to his father, the reward of the coming inheritance would be present in his life every day. For the other son, he would miss the daily blessing of his father and would give no thought to what that inheritance meant for his life now and for his future. Living in this promise leads to a deeper relationship with Christ and joy, peace, purpose and all those fruits of the Spirit. We live with an expectation of welcome when we come into Christ's presence. If a Christian doesn't live obediently, they still get eternal life. But living now with eternity in view affects us now and has to do with relationship and communion here. What we benefit from Jesus now is up to us. A lot of what Jesus said to His disciples made the blessings of following Him on earth totally up to them, whether or not they would follow. There will also be benefits in heaven, but we are not told a lot about those.

So I wonder, what did Jesus holding the stars have to do with the warning or with the promise at the end?

Vs. 8-11 The *church in Smyrna*.

V. 8 Notice how Jesus introduces Himself.

V. 9 This is their current situation and their commendation. The *tribulation* and *poverty* were real. It is interesting how Jesus names this synagogue.

V. 10 We've seen this before, that often the purpose of prophecy is to help people going through a hard time to hold on, having been told in advance what would happen. Remember those detailed prophecies at the end of Daniel? Because of this word, these people can be sure that they, and the situation, are in God's hands.

The *crown of life* seems to be a special reward for those who suffer for Christ. We'll see these crowns being cast down at the feet of the Lamb in a couple of chapters.

V. 11 The promise to those who conquer is again something that all believers can be assured that they will receive. So then, the difference is that those believers who are close to Christ live with this assurance and confidence. I've met quite a few believers who will live forever in heaven, but on earth they live in fear of death.

Notice here that there was no rebuke or warning. We've seen that God uses suffering to teach us and cleanse us. I think their suffering is the reason they were healthy. Do you see how Jesus' introduction might have been important to what He said to this church? The church in Smyrna is still there today.

Vs. 12-17 The *church in Pergamum*.

So, you've noted Jesus' introduction and His commendation of the church.

Vs. 14-15 What is the real issue here? Look at 1 Corinthians 5. Paul accused the elders in Corinth of arrogance because they did not remove people from fellowship. Again, read 1 Corinthians 5 and you'll see the issue. The church in Pergamum had grown too tolerant, maybe out of noble reasons, but they allowed these people to remain in the church. I think of Eli and his sons. Eli couldn't help that his sons were awful men, but the fact that he didn't remove them as priests was the sin for which he was punished.

V. 16 This is a very clear connection to Jesus' introduction in v. 12. Hebrews 4:12, I think, gives the idea of what would happen here. The intent of hearts would be judged and possibly the church would split.

V. 17 So, what is this reward? Actually, it looks like two rewards. Both of these seem to be allusions back to the people in the wilderness as God was forming the nation of Israel. *Manna* has to do with food from God, possibly some spiritual nourishment as a reward for dealing with this situation. The only place I can think of where there is a *name written on the stone* has to do with the priests. When the priests served, they wore clothing that had twelve stones, each with the name of a different tribe. This was to have reminded the priest that they were to represent, bless, and protect the people by their service. It could be that those who were willing to protect the church like this would be drawn closer to Christ and given "hidden" nourishment and a special empowerment for service. I'm just guessing, but serving in the church, especially when there are these kinds of problems, takes a deep strength and a real commitment and empowerment to lead and serve well.

And of course, after you deal with all of this stuff, there is still the task of moving the church to follow Jesus into the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples.

Psalm 129

Vs. 1-8 This would have brought the worshipers approaching Jerusalem into the remembrance of the hardships they had endured and how the Lord had saved them. God's people and that city are His possession. Let God judge His own people, but if anyone else lifts their hand against His people or His city, God will eventually punish them.

In all we are reading about the judgment of the Lord on Israel, we should remember that God has used this nation to show all of us what the heart of man is like. In Israel we see failure and faith, but God shows Himself to us in His dealings with them. In a way, Israel has paid a price for this service, and God will yet reward them and fulfill His purpose. He won't forget their labor or their suffering for the redemption of the world. As Paul says, we owe them respect.

Proverbs 29:19-20

Words seem to be the theme of these two verses. Words without substance do nothing. Even in following the Lord, there are words; and then as James said, there is doing. Jesus always associated words with doing, for those following Him.

DECEMBER 11

Although I know that it is a little wearisome to read of continual pronouncements of judgment against Israel, it is still instructive. We learn something about God. God never wanted these people to have to be punished. Even in our reading today, God will make several pleas for the people to repent. After Elijah and Elisha, there were three other prophets God sent to give Israel a final chance. We've read Hosea. Here is Amos sent from God, from Judah to Bethel, to appeal to individuals to turn to God. Finally we will have Jonah. Yes, Jonah and his adventures were written and sent to Israel to show them that they needed to repent. If God would save Assyrians (and cows) if they repented, He would certainly have saved His people. Yet it was the Assyrians, ironically, who repented, and who later took the northern kingdom into exile. There are lots of interesting lessons in what took place and in how God worked. The chart, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," is at the end of this document.

Amos 4-6

Amos 4

Vs. 1-3 God has just rebuked Israel for their ivory houses and affluence. These women apparently lived in those houses. While neglecting the poor and the oppressed, these women lived for the affluence of their times. Bashan was the lush area around the Sea of Galilee. The Hebrew word for *husbands* isn't actually husband, but "master." The joke is that these men were

like slaves to these women. Some might think that God's title for these women isn't "politically correct," but then, let them be the ones to tell Him that.

When the Assyrians led captives into exile, they literally hooked them together like fish on a stringer.

Cast out means that the ones who died in the march would be thrown out and left on this mountain.

Vs. 4-5 God challenges them to worship their idols, to see if they can alter the "bad luck" they've had.

Vs. 6-11 Highlight or underline all of the ways the Lord tried to break through to these people. God couldn't do this today, could He? Notice the recurring line that concludes each section here.

If you want to read something that is like what you've just read, look at Revelation 16:9-21.

Vs. 12-13 The people really don't know God. Verse 12 is ominous, *prepare to meet your God*. That was not an invitation, it was a warning. I have met so many religious people who think they know God. Sadly, they will have the most tragic shock when they stand before Him and He says, "*I never knew you, depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*" (Matt. 7:23) This is reality.

Amos 5

Vs. 1-3 God promises this awful destruction and judgment.

Vs. 4-9 So God exhorts and urges them to seek Him. While there is no hope for the northern kingdom, individuals could still come to Him. Neither God nor Amos is shy about telling the people what the result will be for ignoring Him.

Vs. 10-13 Because they got rid of the prophets and hated the truth, oppression of the poor flourished and they built their own *houses* and *vineyards*. Notice again that the result of their actions was that the righteous became *silent*.

Vs. 14-15 Another plea by God for them to seek Him.

Vs. 16-17 For ignoring God, He will judge them and strike their crops.

Vs. 18-20 There must have been some ignorant people who were wishing for the Lord to come. They didn't realize that if He came, it would be in judgment and they would be the targets of His justice and rebuke. When I hear unbelieving people wish that God would return to the earth, I know that even with the best of intentions, they really don't know what they are wishing for.

Vs. 21-27 God is saying that their devotion to Him was always half-hearted at best. According to v. 25, even *in the wilderness* there were people who didn't give up worshiping false gods. The present situation is just a continuation of that. Notice in v. 26 God says He will send them *into exile* and they will carry their helpless gods with them.

Amos 6

Vs. 1-3 What is this *woe* about?

Vs. 4-7 What is this *woe* about?

Vs. 8-10 Apparently the people will know it is the Lord working against them. They will try to make it better by not talking about the Lord.

V. 11 The rich and the poor alike would be judged.

V. 12 Although it made no sense, Israel gave up justice and thereby poisoned itself as a nation. Even animals know not to hurt themselves.

V. 13 This was a delusion.

V. 14 And God would *raise up* the Assyrians to humble them.

When you read v. 12, it seems so simple. There are some things people will not do in one area, like not letting their valuable horses run on rocks; yet at the same time people destroy their own lives and foolishly choose not to think about life itself. No one would assume they were alone in the woods if they found a car with the lights on. God has put us in this amazing world and given us unexplainable bodies and minds, yet it makes more sense to our rebellious hearts to ignore that evidence of His presence and His existence and not to think about life or a Creator. These people in Amos foolishly thought they could make a religious effort to appease God, but they really didn't want to worship God in truth, because they really didn't want to obey Him. This is what Jesus said in John 3:19-20. It is far easier to worship your own conception of God and do what you want. Over the centuries, man has not changed.

Revelation 2:18-3:6

Revelation 2:18-29

This is the *church in Thyatira*.

V. 18 Notice how Jesus describes Himself. I wonder what this will mean.

V. 19 Only one short verse of commendation. It really sounds good.

Vs. 20-23 But this really sounds bad and is very hard to imagine. It appears that the real problem was with the leaders who allowed this to go on, thereby infecting the church. What is interesting here is the woman referred to as *Jezebel*. According to 1 Kings 16:31 and many other references, it was through Ahab marrying Jezebel that Baal worship became a cultural norm in the northern kingdom. There in the OT, as in this reference in Thyatira, this worship was very sexually oriented. Again, we have seen a church in immorality in 1 Corinthians, with each of the three chapters, 5-7, addressing some issue of sexual misconduct among believers.

Vs. 24-29 So what is the reward here, and is this a general reward that everyone will receive? And does Jesus' description of Himself have any connection here? Since the reward has to do with authority, ruling, judgment and discernment, that is probably what is meant by these aspects of Jesus' description.

My first instinct in reading this is to see Jesus' description of Himself as having ruling and judging authority from the Father. His eyes of fire probably have to do with the kind of piercing discernment needed to judge the hearts and intents of people. The bronze feet (2:18) are solid and unmovable.

It seems that this promise for those who conquer in this situation is that they will be given discernment and authority now as they struggle to hold this church together and reform it so it will honor Christ. In the future, God will give these people more authority, possibly leading a city as a mayor or something during the Millennium. The *morning star* (v. 28) seems to be for guidance and discerning location and direction. Since Jesus is called the morning star, it would mean guidance from Him. Jesus told His disciples more than once that He was giving them the keys to the kingdom of heaven and whatever they bound on earth would be bound in heaven because He was in their midst. This is present authority. In the parable of the talents, Jesus talked about the faithful receiving cities to rule. Maybe this future expansion of responsibility and service is also being referred to here.

Revelation 3:1-6

Vs. 1-4 Notice Jesus' description of Himself. Wow, there isn't a commendation here for Sardis. You might have thought Laodicea was bad, but this church is pronounced dead. Isn't it interesting that they had a reputation for being alive, outwardly, but that it was only a sham? The Lord saw past the outward show.

Now this is interesting, because Jesus is actually repeating Himself here. Late in His ministry and just months before His sacrifice, Jesus was again teaching His disciples. Peter even asked if this applied to them and Jesus' implied answer was "yes." To get an idea of what Jesus is saying here, read Luke 12:35-50.

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. ³⁷ Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. ³⁸ If he comes in the second watch, or in the third, and finds them awake, blessed are those servants! ³⁹ But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. ⁴⁰ You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.” ⁴¹ Peter said, “Lord, are you telling this parable for us or for all?” ⁴² And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? ⁴³ Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. ⁴⁴ Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. ⁴⁵ But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, ⁴⁶ the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful. ⁴⁷ And that servant who knew his master's will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. ⁴⁸ But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. ⁴⁹ “I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled! ⁵⁰ I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!

Notice that in this text there is punishment, but not damnation. The fact that believers will be chastened on earth is seen in Acts 5 and 1 Corinthians 11. The fact that believers will be rebuked as they enter heaven and stand at the judgment seat of Christ can be found in 1 Corinthians 3:15.

This church outwardly was doing business, but was no longer in the harvest. Everyone thought they were a happening place and God was present, but Jesus said they were dead, that they had fallen asleep. If you read the passage in Luke, you have this intense sense of readiness on the part of the church. That section ends with Jesus casting fire on the earth, giving Himself as the sacrifice for mankind and then bringing division because of His name. This readiness in awaiting our Lord's return means living for Christ in this harvest.

V. 5 Before you focus on the blotting out part, notice the part about Jesus confessing the name of that disciple before His Father and His angels. Jesus said this to His disciples more than once. It was never a threat to them of losing their salvation, but rather that they wouldn't receive divine help and commendation for their present trials and endeavors in the harvest. This reference is also from Luke 12:8-9, *And I tell you, everyone who acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man also will acknowledge before the angels of God, but the one who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God.* Rather than Jesus potentially blotting anyone's name out of the *book of life*, this seems more like Him highlighting that name as an acknowledgment. He is really assuring them that in spite of their trials and fears, their names would never, ever, ever be blotted out. That should give the present-day disciple great assurance.

Notice the *white garments*. These garments are a symbol of forgiveness, having been cleansed by Jesus. If you do a search in Revelation on the white robes, you'll find Revelation 7:13-14. They are made white by the blood of the Lamb.

It seems to me that the description of Jesus having *the seven spirits of God and the seven stars* (3:1) has to do with the seven churches being sent out to all the world. Again, if you do a search on the seven spirits, they are sent into all the world. That seems like witness to the world. So, in one hand Jesus has the seven stars, representing the churches or their pastors, and in the other the seven spirits that go out into the world. It seems that the church is to be out in the world proclaiming Christ and making disciples. That apparently was not being done by this church.

I think all of this has to do with salvation. The fact that Jesus uses what He said to his disciples from Luke 12 is pretty cool. I think the reward Jesus is talking about is spiritual enablement in carrying the gospel to the lost. The robes are white from the blood of the lamb (Rev. 7:14), and Jesus is constantly sending angelic help to us as we are awake and working in the light, in the harvest, expectant of His return. Look at what the angel said to Daniel in Daniel 12:3, *And those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the sky above; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.*

You could do a lot of sermonizing here regarding churches that look alive but are dead; because they have lost their first, "salvation," love for the Lord. They are no longer reaching out. But the message is for each of us, in our personal love and pursuit of Christ in the harvest. Verse 4 says there were still some people who had not lost the love of their Lord and the joy and wonder of their salvation. Jesus personally appeals to them. It only takes one person on fire for Christ, in love with Him, following in the harvest, to start a fire and make disciples, who make disciples, who reach the lost and make of them disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 130

I guess it would have been nice to go to Jerusalem to worship and to have had everything in life running fine. But when you read this psalm, you sense a closeness and need for God that we don't often sense when everything is going smoothly. I think the deeper sincerity and deepest longing for God came from these people who were worshipping from the "depths." I think of the church of Smyrna, the church that suffered, being the only one that was whole before Jesus. I think I'm beginning to understand spiritually, the connection between suffering and need, and closeness to Christ. I think I'm beginning to rejoice in the needs the Lord allows in my life to keep my heart longing for Him. He deserves deep and sincere worship and praise.

Vs. 1-2 This is the cry for the Lord that made this worship very close and personal.

Vs. 3-4 This reminds me of Jesus' constant mentions to His disciples that as they prayed, they needed to forgive others. Here the psalmist is saying that he knows his own frailty and guilt before God.

Vs. 5-6 Waiting for the Lord is a very difficult show of trust and dependence on God. It is what God really wants.

Vs. 7-8 Now it is not just individual waiting, but the entire nation is to look to God and wait. Notice that there is a mention of *steadfast love* here. God keeps His covenant. Keeping His covenant with Abraham means that someday God will redeem the entire nation and save them. That is what we are reading in both Amos and Revelation. In the end, God will save and redeem. So, for now, we wait and hope.

Proverbs 29:21-22

There is a wide range of meaning for v. 21. Some translations say that if you pamper the slave, he will become rebellious. Given that v. 22 has a man of wrath who creates destruction, I would say that v. 21 is the opposite. Because of the kind treatment of the master, not only is the slave not rebellious, he becomes like a son. This is a good picture of Abraham and Eliezer of

Damascus who was Abe's best servant and would have become the heir of all he had. It was this same godly Eliezer whom Abe sent to find a bride for Isaac.

He that delicately bringeth up his servant from a child shall have him become his son at the length. Proverbs 29:21, KJV

DECEMBER 12

You can celebrate today. You will finish Amos and in Revelation you will read the last letter that Jesus ever wrote to a church. This is a big day of big truths and amazing messages for disciples who have been left to follow Christ in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Amos 7-9

Amos 7

Vs. 1-9 God gave Amos three visions.

What do you notice that is the same in the first two visions? The third vision provides a measure or standard of judgment.

God was willing to "repent" of His actions in the first two visions. That was mercy, and it showed His willingness to listen and to save. Yet He gave them a standard by which to measure the people. That was mercy too. They could have obeyed.

Vs. 10-17 This is an example of why God would judge the northern kingdom and why the plumb line wouldn't work to rescue them. In spite of God's willingness to show mercy, the leaders, as personified in this priest, would not listen. This looks like an example of what God said in Amos 2:11-12. Amos was a little guy compared to Elijah and Elisha, yet even those two great prophets were ignored by the leaders and people.

Often, the only thing that prophecy and miracles do is to show that God's actions of judgment are just.

Amos 8

Vs. 1-2 The vision was *a basket of summer fruit*, that is, the final fruit of the summer. This signified that the time of the end for the northern kingdom was coming. What is interesting to me, even as Amos told of these visions, there was grace mixed in. The final day of the northern kingdom would not come for another 60 years. For those with faith, they took this to heart, picked up and moved south. For those without faith, they stayed and died. What a God of patience and forgiveness.

The rest of this chapter is a description of God's judgment. I think that the upcoming earthquake from Amos 1:1 was about to happen. I don't know how you would break down the themes in this chapter, but I'd do it like this.

Vs. 3-8 Notice the two mentions of their oppression of the poor. Also, I think v. 9 is a reference to the upcoming earthquake. The imagery of this section makes you think of an earthquake.

Vs. 9-10 This might be the physical and the emotional state of things after the earthquake. It will certainly be the emotional mood of the country when it is overrun by the Assyrians.

Vs. 11-14 What is surprising here is the mention of God's silence. After everything that Elijah and Elisha did and said, then came Amos, Jonah and Hosea. The people were fed up with prophets. They would get their wish. God would stop talking. That might sound great for them, but in their need, it would be like turning out a light in a cave. Total darkness and loss of identity.

If you want to see a biblical, personal example of this, look at King Saul in 1 Samuel 28:6. After chasing David for ten years, after killing the priests of God and acting against God in every honest way, the still religious King Saul sought God in his need and God wouldn't answer. So where did Saul go to contact God? He went to a medium. Saul was totally confused and corrupt in his heart and God was tired of throwing His pearls before swine. That is the same as what happened over the century God tried to help these people.

Amos 9

V. 1 This vision shows God standing beside the altar at Bethel, not Jerusalem. Notice again the earthquake imagery. It appears that God was about to destroy their buildings of worship in Bethel. It would still be 100 years before King Josiah would come and destroy the altar at Bethel.

Vs. 2-4 Just as there is no place to hide in an earthquake, there will be no place to hide from God. That is an obvious truth, and scary too. When God finally is moved to judgment, it is with focused determination.

Vs. 5-6 The God of creation can cause an earthquake. They should have believed that God could and would do this.

Vs. 7-8 The people should have been sons to God, but instead they made themselves foreigners to God.

Vs. 9-10 God would literally *shake the house of Israel*.

Vs. 11-15 So, Amos ends on a happy future note.

Vs. 11-12 We have seen references to David. Raising up *the booth of David* is to raise up his lineage and fulfill God's promise that a son of David will reign. That Son is the Messiah, who we are reading about in Revelation. The reference to *nations* gives me the sense that this is for the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 13-15 Verse 15 shows that the fulfillment of this will be when Jesus returns.

Revelation 3:7-22

Vs. 7-13 To *the church in Philadelphia*.

V. 7 Note how Jesus introduces Himself. The *key of David* seems to refer to Isaiah 22:22, referring to Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah receiving the stewardship and authority of David's house and possessions. In short, there were two men in authority under King Hezekiah. Shebna (Isaiah 22:15-19), who abused his position, misused Hezekiah's property and did not help the people or honor God as the Assyrians came against the city. Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah (Isaiah 22:20-25) was the opposite. Eliakim honored God, was faithful in his service to Hezekiah and he strengthened the people. Both looked good from the outside; in fact, without this passage from Isaiah, both of the men look like fine religious men, standing together to represent the king in the face of the arrogance of Rabshakeh in 2 Kings 18:18-19. But one of these men was not faithful and the other was. This church in Philadelphia was fully faithful to Christ like Eliakim was to Hezekiah, to God and to His people.

Vs. 8-11 Notice that this was also a suffering church. They acknowledged the name of Christ and stood against the persecution of the *synagogue of Satan*. Apparently these synagogues of Satan were a franchise operation. There was also one in Smyrna which is extremely coincidental. You'll see why in a minute.

V. 10 Notice that they kept the Lord's Word. Keeping Jesus' Word is also mentioned in v. 8. The repetition is very significant. Keeping His Word is a mark of a disciple, as is acknowledging Jesus' name in the face of persecution. Also notice that Jesus says He loves them. I think this is what the fulfilling of John 14:21-23 looks like. In fact, keeping Jesus' Word and the world

knowing Jesus has loved His disciples is woven throughout all of John 14-17. This is the first time I have ever fully noticed these verses in Revelation. Thank you Lord. (2014)

Now there is an aspect of this special church that goes beyond them and the first century. In saying they will be kept from the *hour of trial that is coming on the whole world*, it is saying they will be kept out of the Tribulation. The Tribulation didn't happen during the time this church existed. So, this promise must be applied beyond them to give hope to faithful believers who are going through similar circumstances in the future.

But I have a couple of questions. First, what is important about this promise, since all believers, even disobedient ones, will be taken at the rapture before the Tribulation? Also, even if this promise is applied to that generation that lives just before the Tribulation, they would never know it because no one knows the hour the Tribulation will begin. And, we're not encouraged to guess. So how is this a promise that we can use?

I would say this is an assurance of truth for those who are suffering and enduring. I think this promise means more to those who are pursuing Christ in the harvest and paying the price. We have a lot of truth rattling around in our heads, but it doesn't become assurance for us until it is meaningful and helping us daily in our lives. In their suffering, Jesus tells them that judgment is coming, but they will be saved from it, never to enter into it. It is the daily reminder that they are the Lord's own. For those who are focused on Christ and the harvest, this truth holds them fast and helps them endure with a heart of hope and a perspective of God's purpose. Truth is meant to live in our hearts and inform our thoughts and actions every minute of every day. Jesus said, *If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.* (John 13:17) The blessing of knowing truth only comes from using it.

V. 11 That crown is awarded for endurance in suffering for Christ and His gospel. Again, the *coming soon* could be looked at from the perspective that a thousand years is as a day with God. Or, the word itself means that when the event begins, it happens very quickly, with focused determination. (Amos 9:2-4) This is an encouragement for this church and its people to hold on to their endurance. The ability to endure in Christ becomes a reward in itself. According to 2 Timothy 2:11-12, those who know Christ will live forever with Him, but those who endure suffering and persevere will reign with Him, probably during the Millennial Kingdom.

V. 12 So what is the reward here? How special would it be to be to receive a special commendation from the Lord? I think of what Gabriel said to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, in Luke 1:19, *"I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God."* Would that be important to us, to be one of those who stands in His presence? David's prayer in Psalm 27:4 was, *that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.* Would we desire that? Or are we fine with God when He's gone and we can do our thing with relative privacy, not always under His scrutiny? Obviously, in reality, what I just said is theologically impossible because God is always present, but we do not normally think being in God's presence would be the high point of our lives. For those who suffer, like David did, their desires are so focused on the love and compassion of God that He and His presence is all they want.

When the Twelve finally asked Jesus to teach them to pray, they could see that suffering was on the horizon. This time when Jesus told them about asking, seeking and knocking, He said the reward or answer in each of those actions would be the Holy Spirit, that is, the peace, joy and power of His presence. More than a specific answer to prayer, this is what His suffering disciples working in the harvest need.

Like the church in Smyrna, this was a suffering church that faced deadly persecution, that lived out the gospel in the harvest, testifying to the name of Jesus, and like Smyrna, "coincidentally" did not receive a rebuke from its Lord. The suffering purified their desires, hearts and vision.

Vs. 14-22 *The church in Laodicea.*

This church usually gets most of the attention when people think of the churches in Revelation.

V. 14 In a way this is a very unusual introduction. Jesus is everything this church wasn't.

Vs. 15-20 Notice here, there is no commendation. Like Sardis, they looked alive, but were dead. They, and everyone else, thought they could see, but were blind. They thought they looked good, but Jesus said they were naked. Many people see this church as representing this present age of the church. I don't think that ages are being talked about here, but we do have an abundance of churches today that look alive and are neither hot nor cold. Jesus' threat to spit them out of His mouth should be something that makes every church leader very humble and alert. But like these churches, they thought everything was fine. Jesus' opinion is the only one that matters.

V. 18 Jesus actually gives them counsel, to seek Him.

V. 19 Jesus wants them to humbly submit to His discipline, and to repent.

V. 20 Jesus wants them to hear His knocking and to open to Him. And you notice that this very famous verse is written to Christians. Notice too, that just like at Sardis, although the church is dead, Jesus is appealing here to individuals. So many Christians lament their church, but Jesus doesn't tell them to complain about the church or stage a mutiny. Rather, they are individually to hear His voice and to respond. That's how church renewal begins - people listening to Jesus and doing what He says rather than raising an unholy ruckus.

V. 21 Jesus came to the earth and went to a dead people. Yet, He was the only one who was truly alive, and heard and followed His Father. Some followed Him. In this respect, everyone who is in a place of death, whether a dead church, or among dead and lost in the harvest, yet, who hears Christ's voice and follows Him and His Word, is like Him.

I find it incredibly interesting that those who respond to Him, to renew the church in this context, will receive such an amazing reward. Imagine sitting with Jesus on His throne. Jesus loves His church. What a wonder it is to think that we would be conquerors, like He was a conqueror, that we would sit on His throne with Him. If I'm in the shop of "Jesus' Rewards," this is the one I'm looking at and putting everything I have on the counter, so that I can receive this from Him. In all of these church situations, Jesus gave the faithful something to strive after to help that particular church become healthy and re-enter the harvest, following Christ.

These are Jesus' final words to the church as it comes to the time of finishing its work in the harvest. Now, the church exits and the time comes for Israel to fulfill its mission to the world. Now the Son of God, the Messiah, the human ruler of mankind, the second Adam, the Son of Man, takes His seat at the right hand of God the Father and begins the judgment of the world. Only Christ, of all men, is worthy to rule and judge mankind, *...because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.* (Isaiah 53:12)

Psalm 131

Vs. 1-3 In preparation for worship, David wrote this song for those walking up to Jerusalem. The song was for them to prepare their hearts, but what is cool is how God prepared David's heart to write this. Maybe the "key of David" was the hardship that "opened the door" and drove David to love the Lord and desire Him only.

Proverbs 29:23

Doesn't this sound like something that could flow right out of Psalm 131? So, how does God make us *lowly in spirit*? I think it comes from needing Him so badly that we finally see that we only really need Him.

DECEMBER 13

Obadiah

Welcome to the shortest book in the Old Testament. We know very little about Obadiah. It was a common name, but the most famous Obadiah was the guy who worked for King Ahab in 1 Kings 18. He was secretly a worshiper of Yahweh and hid the prophets of God from Jezebel, providing them with bread and water during the drought. But I don't think this Obadiah was that guy. Although we don't know when he wrote, the fact that Jeremiah quotes Obadiah gives us some direction. My guess is that Obadiah wrote after the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem. The object of God's message was judgment against the nation of Edom because of the actions of the Edomites during and after this event. It was because of these actions that God said:

²“I have loved you,” says the Lord. But you say, “How have you loved us?” “Is not Esau Jacob's brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob ³but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.” ⁴If Edom says, “We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,” the Lord of hosts says, “They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called ‘the wicked country,’ and ‘the people with whom the Lord is angry forever.’” (Malachi 1:2-4)

Vs. 1-4 God's pronouncement against Edom is red-hot and v. 4 is very dramatic.

Vs. 5-10 There are at least three things God will do to the Edomites. Take time to note these. Notice how long God will be mad at Edom.

Vs. 11-14 Now, note what the Edomites did and how those things relate to what the Lord will do to Edom. Notice too, the phrase, *on the day*... On that particular day they betrayed their brothers. They looted their city. They cut off the fugitives and survivors. Do you see the connection?

Vs. 15-16 And now comes another day. What Edom did is a picture of the arrogance of all the nations against Israel. I think that something similar to this will happen during the last 3.5 years of the Tribulation when the temple in Jerusalem is desecrated. The Edomites would be repaid in kind. This will also be true of those who persecute the followers of Christ in the Tribulation. (Rev. 16:6)

Vs. 17-18 Notice God's jealousy for Zion and for His people. We've seen this before in the OT, and we'll see it again.

Vs. 19-21 When the Lord returns and Jesus sets up His kingdom, Israel will possess the lands of their enemies.

In all that we are reading, you would think that the nations of the world would take note that if God disciplines His own people, that is God's business. They should stand in awe. If God doesn't spare His own when they sin, He will not spare these Gentile nations either. When the nations strike God's own people, as will happen again in the future, God will unleash His fury. God loves Israel. And because He has called and used Israel as a servant for the nations He will save them and contend for them. Also, since this portion of the Bible has been in print for over 2000 years, you'd think that kings and governors would notice how God will treat nations who defy Him. If He didn't spare His own people, He certainly won't allow the unbelieving nations to dishonor Him. This stuff is all written down, but I'll bet reading it isn't a government priority in any country on this planet.

Revelation 4

This is a short, transitional chapter that gets us to the throne in heaven. It would have been good to have had chapters 4 and 5 together. Remember that this is still before the beginning of the Tribulation; in fact, we are seeing what happens in heaven at the throne of God to begin the Tribulation.

V. 1 Notice that in this verse, *after this* occurs twice. After what? I think it is not only after the letters to the churches, but it is after the church has fulfilled its mission.

Vs. 2-3 Here we see the throne and the One who sits on it. In some respect, this is like Daniel 7:9-14. In Daniel, the One on the throne is the Ancient of Days. Here, it is God the Father.

For the imagery of the rainbow, I'd go back to what God said the rainbow meant when He gave it to Noah. It might suggest that God is the embodiment of salvation or is "surrounded" by the will to save men.

V. 4 Twelve of these guys have to be the apostles. Jesus promised them this. Who the other twelve are is anyone's guess. The *golden crowns* have to do with living and conquering by faith before God in this fallen world. You can come up with your own list. Abraham might be one of them. Daniel, Noah and Job would be good guesses. I'd also think Moses and Elijah were there since they appeared with Jesus and spoke to Him about His sacrifice in Jerusalem. It's all speculation.

V. 5 Further setting the stage here, there is a dynamic representation of creation. Anyway, that's what I make out of it.

These *seven spirits*, which are the *seven torches* before the throne, we have met before and we'll see again. Somehow I think these seven spirits are related to the message of salvation. In Revelation 5:6, the spirits are seen with the slain lamb and sent by God into all the earth. Since they have already been related to the church in 3:1, it could be that they are "empowering angels," sent to give care and strength to the ministry of the church as it works in the harvest. After the Tribulation begins, neither the church nor these spirits are mentioned again.

Vs. 6-8 This should recall Isaiah 6 and the visions of Ezekiel and the glory of God.

Since the angels in Isaiah 6 and the angels here all sing *holy, holy, holy*, I would say that God's holiness is something very important to the angels. This is not choreographed; it is a natural shout of praise to God for something that must be very meaningful to them. Notice that the elders (v. 11) say something else that is almost the same thing they will say before the Lamb.

When you put together certain events in the Bible, you get the idea that Satan has called God's righteousness, even His holiness, into question. Satan's words to God in Job suggest this. Satan is shown as the accuser of mankind before God, demanding that God be holy and righteous in judgment. And then it says in Romans 3:25-26, (*Jesus*) *whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.* ²⁶*It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.*

In Ephesians, Paul says that the principalities and powers in the heavenly places had something revealed to them in the church. I don't think Satan thought God could save mankind without violating His own holiness.

Anyway, I think it is very important for the angels that God is holy.

Vs. 9-11 The praise here of the elders for God the Father is expressed differently than the reason for which the angels praise Him.

What we are seeing is the ending of redemptive history. What a long, sad tragedy this has been for mankind. Yet, it will end in praise and in glory. We stand in that last part of history before God's judgment is revealed. We have been redeemed by the blood of Christ and are His witnesses to a dying world, testifying to what He has done. We get to present the offer of salvation, forgiveness and a new life. We get to work in the harvest making disciples, who make disciples. What we are seeing means that there will be total victory and fulfillment. In faith then

we need to keep working and serve our Lord in the harvest, even when it is rough now. We can see that the best is yet to come.

Psalm 132

This song of the pilgrims coming to worship in Zion was a remembrance and a prayer. They were praying for the continuance of the Lord's blessing on David, and that God would remember His selection of Jerusalem as the place of His blessing and presence. I get the impression that Solomon wrote this, possibly for the dedication of the temple.

Vs. 1-5 This is referring to David's desire to bring the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. That wasn't a political move since the ark had been out of Israel's worship for many years. David himself loved God and wanted God's presence to be near to him.

Vs. 6-7 Here is all of Israel calling one another to go to the temple to the dwelling place of God.

Vs. 8-10 This may have been Solomon's call to the Lord to enter the Most Holy Place (Holy of Holies) and dwell there once the ark had been placed there.

Vs. 11-12 Solomon was referring to the promise to David and he saw himself as the fulfillment of this promise. Jesus, of course, will be the son of David who will reign there; and during the Millennium, all peoples and nations will be able to come to Jerusalem and worship Him. At the end of Revelation, we will be reading the fulfillment of this psalm.

Vs. 13-18 Not only did God say He would dwell in Jerusalem, at the end of the Millennium there will be a New Jerusalem and Jesus will dwell there.

Proverbs 29:24-25

It seems like both the thief and the man of fear destroy themselves in ironic ways. Trusting in the Lord might not seem logical, but it sure beats the alternatives.

DECEMBER 14

To see where Jonah fits with the other prophets and the history of the OT, look at the chart at the end of this document, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets."

Jonah 1-4

In reading Jonah, I really don't have much to say about the story itself. It's pretty straightforward. My thoughts have more to do with what the book of Jonah was meant to say to his people and to us.

Think about this. After the long and decisive years of ministry of Elijah and Elisha, the northern kingdom experienced its best years. Jeroboam II reigned for 41 years, and Assyria, the rising star, was eaten up with internal problems. This meant that everyone had peace and prosperity. So, what happened to the threats of God's coming judgment to northern Israel, this very idolatrous and rebellious nation? If I had been planning it, judgment would have fallen immediately after Elisha died. Israel had been given enough patience, in my opinion. Even so, I wouldn't have given them prosperity. I definitely wouldn't have given them another 70 years before the hammer fell. What was God thinking? What a testimony to His patience and mercy.

At the beginning of Jeroboam's reign God sent three prophets to Israel who all appeared at the same time. Hosea prophesied on and off for about 20 years. At the same time God sent Amos who only preached for a short time, right before the great earthquake. Notably, God said there would come a drought of His Word in the land, and for 50 years, before the end of Israel, there was no prophet. The people would have had to go south to Judah for the Word of God. That was probably the plan.

And then there was Jonah. Jonah is mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, telling Jeroboam that God would restore part of the old borders of Israel. In the book of Jonah, Jonah's preaching wasn't even to Israel. Since we have the book of Jonah, we know that Israel heard the story of what happened to Nineveh, but that wouldn't have disturbed or convicted them. It would have just confirmed for Israel that God didn't really mean business. So, what is the point of this story?

I think the point of Jonah is what Jesus mentioned several times during His ministry. *The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.* (Matt. 12:41) Jonah became a sign of the resurrection and of God's judgment and sovereign working. The men of Nineveh, by their repentance and response to the Word, became a sign of judgment against the unbelief of Israel.

The story of Jonah and Nineveh would have made people laugh, but behind the story was a serious testimony and judgment against Israel. God sent a little known, unwilling prophet to speak to this ungodly Gentile city. Assyria had experienced deep problems. Historians say there was an outbreak of the black plague that ravaged the city. They were now recovering and then Jonah arrives, and these people saw the hand of God and repented. Gentiles, the uncircumcised, repented. Yet even Israel with all its privilege and heritage did not heed God's Word. They could make jokes like, "How many Ninevites does it take to put sackcloth on a cow?" But an important, massive judgment against Israel had just been delivered. Ironically, the Assyrians would recover and lead Israel into exile. I think God scripted the events of Jonah to sound funny to the unbelieving, but in the end, they were not laughing.

One more thing to think about regarding Jonah is that he wrote this book. That means that after his "fit" at the end of the book he saw his patriotic childishness, repented, laughed at himself and understood what God was doing. The fact that he wrote this shows he understood God's grace and God's righteous judgment against Israel. The fact that this book was added to the Old Testament books in the temple in Jerusalem means that godly people in Judah/Jerusalem immediately knew that this book was a word from God and the Word of God.

Jonah 1

Vs. 1-3 Jonah knew God had said Assyria would punish Israel. Amos (3:9) had predicted this. Jonah tried to avert God's plan, like trying to change the future in some sci-fi movie. Tarshish was in Spain, hundreds of miles in the other direction.

Vs. 4-16 Notice that the unbelievers were more God-fearing than Jonah. Obviously this was said in purposeful irony, to show that sometimes the lost are more perceptive of God than the saved. Just for another example of something like this, find the place in 1 Samuel 6:1-6 where the Philistines had captured the ark of the covenant, and look at what they said and did. They weren't "saved" and believing by any stretch of the imagination, but they showed more sense than God's own people. Religious activity doesn't mean that a person is saved.

V. 17 This would have added a lot of humor to the story of Jonah. Talk about having the ultimate bad day. He couldn't even get out of this assignment by drowning. Yet consider that this event was also designed so that years later, Jesus Himself could refer to it. Jesus only ever referred to four prophets by name, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah and Jonah. Jesus said, *"An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.*⁴⁰*For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.* (Matt. 12:39-40) Jesus' own words make the overall message of Jonah important.

Jonah 2

Vs. 1-9 This wasn't a prayer for God to save him; it was Jonah's thanks for being saved.

V. 10 This would have made the hearers laugh themselves out of their sandals. Depending on where Jonah was vomited out, he probably still had a 500-mile walk.

Jonah 3

Vs. 1-5 Nineveh was a huge city and it grew to have suburbs with several markets and community centers. Jonah would have stopped in each of these. Imagine how long it would take you going through Chicago or New York and their suburbs, if you had to stop at every shopping area and preach. This should be understood as saying that Jonah began preaching when he hit the first marketplace and it took him three days to do Nineveh.

Some people think that Jonah's appearance might have added to his message: bleached by the whale's digestive fluids, clothes covered with vomit, etc. But after a long journey, Jonah would have been tubbed and scrubbed, maybe just a little dusty. The response of the people was because of God's work, not Jonah's appearance or preaching. Nineveh was already having problems. Having Jonah show up was like the cherry on the top. Look at Peter's sermon in Acts 2. It was God who worked, not the preacher. God had already gone ahead of Jonah. Jonah didn't realize it, but he was really only following God. That's what we're doing too, following Jesus in the harvest. He opens the doors, not us.

Note that there was nothing in Jonah's message that was tailored to speaking and relating to Ninevites. Jonah did no research on how to understand and relate to these people. The message was very simple and it worked. Today we get so paralyzed in thinking about relating to "boomers," "gen-x," "post-modern," or the next special group, that we say nothing or blame ourselves for the lack of response. Here are three things Jesus said that work in every culture and in every generation to direct and aid us in our witness.

Matthew 4:17 *From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."*

Luke 24:47 *and that repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*

John 18:37 *Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to (hears) my voice."*

Jonah didn't need to convince anyone. He just said what the Lord told him to say. That "strategy" still works.

Vs. 6-9 Sackcloth on the animals? King Jeroboam must have laughed when he heard this part of the story. I wonder if he was convicted by this, or if he laughed so hard that his wine backed up and started coming out of his nose.

V. 10 The God of all the earth doesn't desire that any should perish. God had done so much through Elijah and Elisha, so many signs and wonders and yet Israel didn't respond. Here, some ignorant, uncircumcised people were repenting and receiving God's mercy. Go figure.

Jonah 4

Vs. 1-4 This is the reason that Jonah ran. He knew that God was going to use the Assyrians to destroy Israel, and he thought he could change the future by running. I think Jonah "McFly" had watched too many sci-fi "change the future" flicks.

Jonah is a good example of someone who knows the nature of God in his head, and is totally unlike God in his behavior. This should be convicting to us.

Vs. 5-11 This was another humorous move by the Lord. He got Jonah to attach himself emotionally to this plant. I wonder if Jonah named it "Wilson?" While Jonah sank into his

moodiness, God explained that all men on this planet are His concern. That last line about the cattle might also have gotten a laugh.

On hearing this story, those who were serious and open to the Lord would have been appalled and begun packing their bags. They would have seen the subtle, yet deep, judgment against them. They would have gathered their families and headed south to Judah, to introduce their kids to Yahweh. Others would have laughed at those dumb "Ninnys" and told this story to their kids.

For us as disciples, this story tells us that God is patient, but that judgment will come. It tells us that we reach out, but it is God who prepares the hearers. Our job is just to go and follow Christ into the harvest. He will do His part, but we need to obey and to follow.

Revelation 5

As we read these chapters in Revelation, remember that God is showing John very specific things that He personally wants us to know. There is symbolism that might be hard to understand, but still, these are very literal events in heaven. The events we'll read of today are fairly easy to understand.

How would you title the event in chapter 4? What was its purpose? It was giving honor to the Father, but I don't think it is something that happens every day or week or month. I think it was a special one-time event that led up to chapter 5. Likewise, what we are reading today is a "once-in-all-of-eternity" event that we have been invited to see in advance. Through faith, this ought to rock our world. It should strengthen and set our hearts on fire. Being human we are wet wood, I know; but that's why it is written, so that we have the luxury and privilege of reading and re-reading what is happening here. This event will lead to chapter 6, which launches the Tribulation, that is, the seven-year "day of the Lord."

Vs. 1-2 The Father holds the *scroll*. Apparently, on one end of the scroll there were wax *seals* at different places, kind of like paper clips, so that the scroll could only be rolled open to a certain place. The angel crying out like this is making an official, judicial challenge to all of created reality. The scroll is the judgment of God on mankind. Who would be *worthy* to open that scroll? God could have judged, but how much better if there were a human who had defeated sin and Satan, and who could now re-claim human rule and authority as the second Adam. "Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He."

Vs. 3-5 I find it interesting that the phrase, *in heaven or on earth or under the earth*, is used. Paul uses this phrase also in Philippians 2:10. Also, it is interesting that John is heartbroken, sobbing. Why do you think that was? Is judgment something that we should desire? Or could it be that it is actually more than judgment? Was it more like a fulfillment and finally fixing the long tragic story of mankind?

Vs. 6-7 I find it interesting that Jesus is *among the elders*, standing right there with them. We've seen these *seven spirits* before and it seems to me that they have something to do with the mission of the gospel. Taking that scroll is a world-changing event. I really wonder what is happening on earth during these events.

Vs. 8-10 Notice that the taking of the scroll is mentioned again. It was a decisive act that set off a one of a kind expression of worship and praise. This is a big event.

V. 9 The *new song* was given at that time. The song seems to say three things. First, Jesus was slain. Second, by His blood He ransomed people. This mix of people is the church. Third, He made them a kingdom of priests. The redeemed serve mankind before God, reaching out to those yet lost. That is being a priest in the simplest, servant sense of the world. Another way of putting it is being ambassadors for Christ.

The entire song is saying why He has the right to open the seals. Not only did He sacrifice Himself, but His death brought forgiveness and righteousness to those who accepted the offer. His victory in producing these people is the proof that redemption was possible. Redemption becomes the proof that God is righteous in judging those who refused to be redeemed. The human condition is impossible, but God found a way around the impossible in the sacrifice of His Son and the redemptive power of the Spirit as evidenced by us, the church.

V. 10 We will reign with Him on earth. I think this is where the parable of the pounds (Luke 19:13-26) comes in. During the Millennial Kingdom we already know that the disciples will govern the twelve tribes (Luke 22:30) and that David will govern Israel (Ez. 34:23-24). Apparently those who have invested wisely, following Christ in the harvest during this time of the church, will be given responsibilities in governing and leading around the world during the Millennium. Jesus will make sure it is a time and world of perfect justice and mercy.

Vs. 11-14 Our Lord, and what He did, brings all history together for the angels, for mankind, for all of creation. Taking that scroll in hand celebrates the commencement of the end of this entire drama. This is like Jesus officially taking the throne, taking His ruling seat as Son of Man. All of these things have been promised and were sure, but now they become actual. Even though the removal of that first seal will begin the Tribulation, what is beginning is the healing of everything and every order that God created. And they all worship together.

Psalm 133

David wrote this song for the worshipers coming to Jerusalem to appreciate the miracle of God's unity. There was no one who could have known the wonder of unity better than David. We've looked at his life and know of his long years of running from Saul. Having read David's psalms, especially Psalm 119, we know that he suffered from all of the lies spread against him, yet he kept himself in the Word, crying out desperately to God. Then there were the seven years of civil war as David reigned in Hebron as king of Judah. Finally, God brought peace, and David immediately worked to bring Israel together in worship to the Lord.

Vs. 1-3 Although, as a pastor, I don't fully identify with the oil poured on Aaron's head and running down his face and on to his clothes as blessing. I still appreciate the miracle of unity. Should the Lord put me in a situation where everyone is working in the harvest, seeing people come to Christ and making disciples, who make disciples, and we have this kind of God-given unity, then I'll go to Sam's, get a 55-gallon barrel of olive oil and let the elders douse me regularly.

Proverbs 29:26-27

Looking at the verses in reverse order, it looks like God is saying that there will always be conflict between the righteous and the unrighteous. So on earth, we should understand that whenever justice wins the day, it isn't because of men, but because of God.

Thinking about Psalm 133, it is probably also the case that if there is peace among believers working together in the harvest, it isn't because of our people skills, or "chemistry," or leadership skills. It is because of the Lord and His desire to see disciples making disciples of the lost.

DECEMBER 15

Not only are you closing in on the end of the year, but you are closing in on having read The One Year Bible for a year. Today you begin the 33rd book of the Old Testament with only six more books to go. If you are still reading, even struggling, God will reward you, so keep going. Christmas chocolates and cookies might help.

Micah 1-4

One of the challenges reading the minor prophets is to pay attention and try to understand what makes this messenger unique. After a while, it just seems like "Blah, blah, blah, blah, oh, blah, blah, blah, sickness, sorrow and despair, people dying everywhere, blah, blah, blah, blah, oh, blah, blah, blah, blah." Reading the Bible every year gives you the basic events. What we don't often understand is the working behind those events. For example, Cyrus sent the people back to Jerusalem to build the temple, but how did God move him to do that? Then, when you put Daniel 5 & 6 next to that event, you understand how God moved Cyrus and you see the glory and grace of God.

The same is true with Micah. Micah has some "stand-alone" bright spots, that is, a few verses dealing with Jesus' birth and one passage dealing with devotion to God. Yet, we have something in Jeremiah that shows us how God actually used Micah and his messages.

Micah of Moresheth prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah, and said to all the people of Judah: 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins, and the mountain of the house a wooded height.' Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Did he not fear the LORD and entreat the favor of the LORD, and did not the LORD relent of the disaster that he had pronounced against them? But we are about to bring great disaster upon ourselves. (Jeremiah 26:18-19)

So, you wonder how it was that Hezekiah was spiritually ready to stand against the massive force of Assyria coming against Jerusalem. It was Micah. Sure, it might also have been God working in Joel and the grasshoppers. Hezekiah had Isaiah close at hand too, but it was definitely the influence of these messages by Micah that helped Hezekiah. These seven chapters are full of judgments, but they also have some great promises to the future glory of Israel. In that sense, they fit nicely with our reading in Revelation.

Remember to look at the chart, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets."

Micah 1

V. 1 This message is mainly to Israel, the northern kingdom, but notice how God says that their sickness has infected Judah and come to Jerusalem.

Vs. 2-4 What do you think about this call to all the peoples of the earth? Notice that the temple is immediately in view and is, so to speak, the center of the world. The Lord's judgment will begin with His own people. Again, Israel is serving the world as a lesson, but very few people or nations are paying attention.

V. 5 This seems to say that both of these cities are guilty. Calling Jerusalem a *high place* was a way of chiding Judah for the idolatry that had been, and would be, practiced there.

Vs. 6-9 This judgment of Israel by Assyria will come to the gate of Jerusalem. We know from 2 Kings 18 & 19 that the Assyrians came, they saw, they threatened, they taunted God and they went home broken.

Vs. 10-16 When Assyria swept Israel away, they also came into the kingdom of Judah and took cities and villages. The names of some of these places were in Judah, but God only allowed Assyria to come to the *gate of Jerusalem*.

Micah 2

The message, perhaps years later than chapter 1, came during the time of Hezekiah and was aimed at Judah.

Vs. 1-5 This seems to cite some of the sins of the people, probably the rich.

Vs. 6-11 This is a word against the false prophets who told the people what they wanted to hear. Verse 6 shows the message of the false prophets against the true prophets. In the minds of the false prophets, the people needed good news, not bad news. In v. 11 you have the false preachers again, probably citing both their wages and their inspiration.

Vs. 12-13 This is not only a note to future blessing, but within it, it is a threat that only a remnant of them will be saved.

Micah 3

Vs. 1-4 This is God's judgment of the *rulers* of Jerusalem and Judah. The leaders used the people for their own advantage.

Vs. 5-7 Naturally, this disrespect of God was powered by false *prophets*.

V. 8 The lies told to the people must have gotten Micah's blood boiling.

Vs. 9-12 This is what was quoted in Jeremiah 26 and was directed to King Hezekiah. Like the king of Nineveh, but unlike the kings of Israel, Hezekiah took this to heart and repented.

Micah 4

Because of the salvation to Jerusalem that Hezekiah's response would bring, God discloses this future blessing.

Vs. 1-4 You not only have the Messiah, but also peace and prosperity. Notice how the Messiah is associated with the Word.

V. 5 This is a present contrast between the moment Micah was writing and what the future will hold for Israel.

Vs. 6-8 God will take weak Israel and make them a witness and leader for the nations.

Vs. 9-12 This is a very quick confirmation that Judah will go into exile in Babylon, but will also be returned, not only to Jerusalem, but to usefulness for the Lord.

V. 13 I guess you could title this "Victory in Jesus."

So, remember that the force of this really convicted Hezekiah. If you look at the context of the passage in Jeremiah, if the events were similar, Hezekiah might even have been moved to anger against Micah when he first heard this. If so, Hezekiah humbled himself and obeyed the Word that the Lord spoke through Micah.

Revelation 6

For me, the best way to understand Revelation is chronologically; that is, most of the events happen one after another. There are a few exceptions, but it seems to be the way things are laid out by the Spirit. You have the church, then the introduction of the Ancient of Days, then comes the Lamb to take the scroll and then He opens the seals, then come the trumpets and then the bowls, etc. Then comes the end.

Since I'm not God and since no one really fully understands this book, I'll suggest some order to things, but I reserve the right to change my mind later as the Spirit makes things clearer to me.

Vs. 1-2 So though we know what the *white horse* means, we don't really understand how it fits to the Tribulation. Since this sounds a lot like Jesus in Revelation 19:11, I'm going to suggest this "could" be the Lord taking the church. The church finishing its mission would be considered conquerors. The church gets taken at the beginning of the Tribulation and this guy doesn't seem to have any negative connotations or to be inflicting disaster on the earth. This is just a guess. Of course, if a lot of people suddenly disappeared off the face of the earth, it would not only make the evening news, it would create a lot of havoc worldwide. It would also be that sign that would

cause Israel to wake up, to be "jealous" of the church and to come to faith in Christ. Their wake-up call will come when the number of the Gentiles (the church) is complete. (Romans 11:25-26)

Vs. 3-4 Now this *second seal* and horseman do create disaster on the earth. This could be the anarchy created after so many believers from every country are removed. (Matt. 24:6-8)

Vs. 5-6 The *third seal* and the black horse bring financial chaos and famine on the earth. This will make what's happening in the U.S. and in Europe today look like a picnic.

Vs. 7-8 A very simple thing like a plague, a flu, a divine something, will wipe out a quarter of the earth's population. That would be about 1.75 billion people. That is more than the population of India. Compared to that number, the U.S. is just a drop in the bucket. And imagine the disease and disorder that will come from that. Imagine the disorder when politicians, doctors, pilots, and geeks who keep the internet going are suddenly sick and dying. We humans think we are so big.

Vs. 9-11 This *fifth seal* is a call for justice, or God's vengeance, I believe it is from those martyred for Christ since His resurrection to that day. What will follow in the Tribulation will be the slaughter of God's people, the Tribulation saints, because they name the name of Christ and/or protect the Jews. I think this persecution of believing Jews and followers of Christ will begin soon after the beginning of the Tribulation and will intensify during the final 3.5 years. (Matt. 24:9-13)

Vs. 12-16 This is only the *sixth* of seven seals. I don't know if this is a result of the call for justice from those saints or whether this is a stand-alone curse on the earth. Whatever it is it will look like the natural result from the earthquake or volcano or both. It could be that the atmosphere of the earth will be changed because of volcanic ash or something. Yet, there could also be a spiritual or cosmic element to this too. It looks like the heavens and the stars are affected as well. The result will be so devastating and make people feel so emotionally helpless and distraught that they will wish for death. There will be no place to hide, and they will hate the two witnesses, but they will understand that this is from the Lord.

Now as a note here, somewhere in all of this are the actions of the two witnesses. They might come after the sealing of the 144,000. They will be like Aaron and Moses, walking around in Jerusalem and being the human agency that calls down the wrath of God on the earth, as the seals are broken in heaven.

Also, it is interesting to note that Jesus said that as soon as the Tribulation begins, normal life will end. Weddings, business ventures, and having a good time at the mall will all cease. If you can imagine the trauma of these first six seals, you can see there will be great fear, anxiousness and disorder on the planet. And, the real fun hasn't even begun. This is designed by God as a last effort to prepare the hearts of men to trust Christ, while also bringing a much deserved judgment against mankind. Tomorrow we'll meet the missionary force sent out into this dark time of harvest. Then we'll see that the judgment of the earth is just, in that those who reject the message will show their hearts by taking out their anger against God on those who follow Christ.

Psalm 134

Vs. 1-3 This looks like a song of the pilgrims approaching Jerusalem to inspire the priests and the Levites who would stand before them and the Lord.

It would be good today if people would appreciate, trust, and follow their leaders who are truly shepherding them into the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Proverbs 30:1-4

I don't think *Agur* is being too humble here. I think that the closer we walk with the Lord, the more amazed we are with the depth of our depravity and the wonder of God's help to us. What would we do without the Word and the Spirit daily in our lives?

While claiming he is too human to have wisdom, Agur suddenly says something that is very amazing. You kind of wonder who that *son* is that Agur mentions. Here is something Jesus said. This is pretty cool.

No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man. (John 3:13)

DECEMBER 16

Micah 5-7

When you read this "minor" prophet, you get a sense that he might have had a major influence. Since we didn't live at that time, we don't know what kind of interaction Micah and Isaiah had. God makes the prophet by giving him his message and God certainly said more through Isaiah than through Micah, but this portion we'll read today is very strong and inspiring. Some of the things Micah said about the Messiah and the future glory of Israel would have inspired both Isaiah and Hezekiah. What Micah says about God's desire and His forgiveness of sins is tender and profound.

Micah 5

This chapter belongs to and concludes the message to Judah that started in chapter 3. The end of chapter 4 was very end-times in its force, with the Messiah arriving and bringing glory to Israel among the nations.

V. 1 In the Hebrew Bible, this verse belongs to chapter 4. It seems to be a reference to a nation humiliating one of the kings of Judah. Some think this is Babylon punishing King Zedekiah.

Vs. 2-5 But a ruler will come who will lead Israel forever. You should recognize v. 2 as being from the birth of Jesus and quoted in Matthew 2:6. God is promising Judah that there will be eternal blessing for Judah in spite of the kingdoms rising against Israel. This would have given Jerusalem hope. It is interesting that HE shall be their peace. HE is everyone's peace.

Vs. 5-9 This pronouncement of victory over the enemies of Israel is definitely future, and although Assyria is mentioned, it is also mentioned as the land of Nimrod. This is northern Iraq-Iran, eastern Turkey and Armenia. The upshot is that whoever attacks Israel from this area will get more than they bargained for.

Vs. 10-15 In order for God to use Israel as a tool of judgment for the nations, God will cleanse them. That will involve humbling them in terms of their reliance on military power or the pride and safety of their cities. It will also involve God returning their hearts in devotion to Him.

In chapters 3-5 there are a lot of hard things said to Jerusalem and to Hezekiah, but with those judgments, there was the hope of a Messiah and a glorious future. I'm sure this message was something that helped Hezekiah lead the people to stand in hope against the hopelessness of resisting the Assyrians.

Chapters 6-7 make up the final climatic sermon in Micah.

Micah 6

Vs. 1-2 God is calling all creation to witness His contention against His people. That's pretty dramatic. It just blows me away to think that we should be so rebellious before the God of the universe whose wisdom imagined the foundations of the earth, and yet He's willing to even take the time to try and speak sense to us.

Vs. 3-5 These are instances of God saving His people. These are grace, love and mercy for anyone with a spiritual perspective.

Vs. 6-8 So here Micah speaks. What does God really want of us? That last line in v. 7 is great. Verse 8 assumes you also know His Word.

Vs. 9-16 God again cries out against Jerusalem. Notice the parallel between vs. 14-15 and Isaiah 55:1-2.

Micah 7

I'm not sure, but I think Jesus knew this chapter very well.

Vs. 1-6 This is Micah's lament. He has heard what the Lord has said and as he looks at the people he knows that God will have to punish them. Verse 1 reminds me of Jesus' curse of the fig tree in Mark 11:20 and one of His parables in Luke 13:6-9.

V. 4 Look at Isaiah 55:13. I'll bet that Micah and Isaiah used to meet at Starbucks© and shoot the ox. Jesus also used references to briars and thorns in Luke 6:44.

V. 6 Now this surprised me. Jesus used this to teach His disciples to endure rejection as they followed Him in the harvest. He used this portion of Scripture with the disciples in Matthew 10:35, when He called the Twelve and then about a year and a half later, just months before the cross in Luke 12:49-53. Obviously Jesus was God, but as a man, He Himself knew the Word.

V. 7 This is pivotal, and it is the hope and refuge of all of His disciples.

Vs. 8-10 This is Micah sensing how the nations will gloat over Judah and Jerusalem as the Lord humbles them for their sins. Verse 8 could have applied to Jesus in His trials. Verse 9 applies to us.

Vs. 11-14 But Micah also sees the vindication of Jerusalem before the nations.

V. 15 God Himself confirms this vindication.

Vs. 16-17 Micah says God will chasten the nations and they will come to Him in fear.

Vs. 18-20 You could call this the song of Micah. It is a beautiful testimony to God's *steadfast love* and *faithfulness*, not just to Israel, but to all of mankind. He has patiently endured our sin and insanity and then He sent His Son into this darkness to save us. That sounds like the Christmas story.

Revelation 7

V. 1 The sixth seal has been broken and now there is an interlude in the judgments. Apparently there has now been enough judgment on earth for the hearts of men and the hearts of the Jews to be open and to be aware that what is happening has a very spiritual source.

Vs. 2-8 Now God seals His servants for this time of harvest. Apparently God kept track of the lineage of all of these people. As mentioned before, I think the tribe of Dan is missing because of what they did at the end of the book of Judges. They were the first tribe that went totally apostate. Keep in mind that none of these 144,000 are mentioned as martyrs. I think they stay under the radar for a long time. Remember the earth is getting pretty wrecked, so they can scatter all over the place almost unnoticed. And now people are finally ready to ask whether God has a wonderful plan for their lives. ☺

Although it never says that these 144,000 are missionaries, they are sealed for something. Along with this we have Jesus' words about this time of Tribulation in Matthew 24:14, *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* There will be worldwide preaching during the entire Tribulation. If you add up all the missionaries from every mission agency in the world today, you do not come up with 144,000. God will be organizing the greatest outreach, during the storm, that the world has ever seen. How is that for grace and mercy?

Vs. 9-10 And this is the fruit of their ministry. This is a vision, a prophetic summary, of all who will come to Christ from the work of these servants. During the Tribulation there will be lots of people who will come to Christ from all nations and many of them will die for their love of Christ. As we'll see, there will be a worldwide search for those who believe in Christ. Believers will stand out not only by their testimony to the lost, but also, for example, by the refusal to receive the mark of the beast in Revelation 13:17.

Vs. 11-12 The praise of this multitude moved the elders and the creatures to fall before God and worship Him. Again, out of disaster, chaos and judgment, God brings salvation and shows great mercy and love.

Vs. 13-17 I always wonder if this elder wasn't the future John talking to himself here. That comes from watching too many sci-fi movies.

But notice that God is drawing our attention to who these people are. It doesn't say that all of these people were martyred, although they may have been, but that they all suffered. What they all have in common is that they were in the Tribulation and were made clean by the blood of the Lamb.

V. 15 Their privilege and reward for coming to faith in the Tribulation will be to live in the presence of God *day and night*. Again, not many of us would consider that a reward. That just shows how sin pickles our souls.

V. 16 They suffered. Not every believer will be killed during the Tribulation, but all will suffer. Some believers will be alive and go into the Millennial Kingdom as unresurrected, reproducing humanity.

V. 17 Jesus Himself will be their reward and their comfort. Note that the wiping of *every tear* was mentioned in Isaiah 25:8, *He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the LORD has spoken.*

Yet as we read this comforting of these people, that is still future in the book of Revelation, waiting for the return of Christ to the earth. We are still in chapter 7 and there is still a lot of the Tribulation ahead. It is at this crucial time after the sixth seal that the earth is ready for these servants of God to fan out on the earth and carry the message of Christ into this very dangerous harvest field. Isn't it interesting how God still shows us that He will always be extending love, mercy and forgiveness? It is interesting to have read in Micah 5:5, *And He shall be their peace.* And that is in the harvest during the Tribulation. He should be our peace too, as we follow Him now in this time of harvest.

Psalm 135

This is a song either of, or for, the servants of the Lord. Notice that among the blessings at the end are those of the house of Aaron and Levi, putting the emphasis on those servants. Actually, Israel was the servant of God to bring the message of redemption to all the nations. And, as we're seeing in Revelation, Israel will fulfill that service.

Vs. 1-4 The privilege of knowing and serving the Lord.

V. 5 A pivotal statement of God's greatness.

Vs. 6-7 His greatness over all of nature.

Vs. 8-12 And His greatness is over all nations.

Vs. 13-14 As His name and renown are unending and never changing, so is His plan for His people Israel.

Vs. 15-18 The nations are totally lost. Just think, during the millennial reign of Christ, there won't be a "religious tolerance" day. Everyone will know that Jesus is God.

Vs. 19-21 So the servants of the Lord are told to praise God for the privilege of knowing Him and having good news to tell.

Proverbs 30:5-6

Amen. The focus on the Word is our life and health. I was thinking this morning that when Jesus had fasted for forty days and Satan suggested He turn a stone into bread, Jesus quoted the Word about the importance of the Word. Here is the entire verse from Deuteronomy 8:3, *And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.*

We are His messengers and what He says should be said by us in humility, with as little of us mixed into it as possible.

DECEMBER 17

Nahum 1-3

You might ask, what is the point of the book of Nahum? Good question. Lots of prophets wrote of the downfall of Nineveh and Assyria. We just read some of that in Micah. If I was going to hazard a guess, I would suggest that this prophecy was used by God to spook (shock) the Assyrians into letting the newly repentant and "born again" King Manasseh of Judah out of his Assyrian captivity.

About 100 years earlier, Nineveh had fallen on hard times and was shocked into repentance by the preaching of Jonah. Assyria had grown slowly, biding its time and had now come almost to the stature of an empire. After the Assyrians took the northern kingdom of Israel into captivity, they were humbled in trying to take Jerusalem. This was a setback and now they feared the God who dwelt around the mountains of Jerusalem. Even though Judah and Jerusalem pledged allegiance to Assyria, it never mentions the Assyrians coming to Jerusalem. Even in 2 Chronicles 33:11, when it says that Manasseh was taken with thorns and hooks to Babylon by the Assyrians, it never says they took Manasseh from Jerusalem. From secular documents it says that Manasseh attended an event in Assyria. That is probably where he was taken captive, and possibly for fear of Yahweh, Manasseh was removed from Nineveh to a prison in Babylon.

During that time Amon, Manasseh's son, would have run the government, though not officially as king. In the meantime, Manasseh came to his right mind, repented and was saved. God had an assignment for Manasseh. Manasseh wasn't able to undo his horrible wrongs and influence in Jerusalem and Judah. He couldn't change the heart of his son Amon, but it does appear that the repentant and humbled Manasseh might have used his last years to influence his grandson Josiah. Josiah went on to be the godliest king of Judah, and through his reforms and influence, eight godly young people formed four godly families and had four godly teenagers who were taken to Babylon and became key leaders used by God to protect Israel during the Babylonian captivity.

I think this violent little letter by Nahum struck the heart of the new Assyrian king. He would have known of Jonah and the 185,000 men Assyria had lost outside of Jerusalem, slaughtered by no human hand. When he heard this message and remembered that his father had imprisoned Manasseh, he, like the kings before him, felt the dread of Israel's God, and returned Manasseh to Jerusalem.

If you want to see where Nahum fits in the history of the Old Testament, look at the chart, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," at the end of this document.

If you have the Bible Knowledge Commentary and if you are interested in seeing how vile and violent Assyria was, and how exact this prophecy of Nahum was, then you might be interested in reading the "Introduction to the Book of Nahum," Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 1493.

Nahum 1

Vs. 1-6 Notice how threatening and violent this sounds. It actually will sound kind of like events we'll read about in Revelation. Verse 3 is a comfort, but when God has been ignored long enough and His judgment starts to roll, it rolls to completion.

V. 7 This is one of a few breaks in this chapter where God declares His protection of Judah and Jerusalem.

Vs. 8-11 This is God threatening the rulers of Assyria. Actually, Nineveh was taken by a literal flood. Their army came as a "flood" among the nations, but God used their enemies to make a real flood against them. I think v. 11 might be a reference to Rabshakeh in 2 Kings 18:17. It's a bad idea to get on the bad side of Yahweh. After all, how often can you afford to lose 185,000 men?

Vs. 12-13 God is declaring deliverance for Israel in spite of Assyria's strength.

V. 14 God will make an end to Assyria.

V. 15 In contrast to the message of Rabshakeh, a messenger will come to Zion declaring the good news of Assyria's demise. Paul and the Holy Spirit used this verse in Romans 10:15. The good news of deliverance we bring into the harvest is about a million times better.

Nahum 2

Vs. 1-9 Apparently there is imagery in this vision of the destruction of Nineveh that reflects some of what actually happened.

V. 2 Note again. This is confirmation that God is bringing this destruction because of what has happened to Israel. So, if the king of Assyria is listening, he will try to do something nice for Israel. Sending King Manasseh back might have been a noble-looking peace offering.

V. 3 The Assyrians would have seen these red shields as an allusion to the army of Babylon.

Vs. 10-13 This is God mocking the pride and power of Assyria. God would humble them.

Nahum 3

Vs. 1-7 The destruction of Nineveh was so complete, that years later Alexander the Great rode by and had no idea that the ruins he saw had once been this city.

Vs. 8-10 Although Egypt had power and lots of allies, when Assyria brutally took Thebes, none of these things helped. In the same way, Assyria shouldn't think its strength or allies would be a help. In fact, it was the allies of Assyria, the Medes and the Babylonians, who finally destroyed Nineveh.

Note that this event in Egypt is already past. It took place in 663 A.D., which gives us a little help in putting the date of this book in the reign of Manasseh.

Vs. 11-19 Again, this is all very graphic and violent. If it was read in Hebrew to the king of Assyria, with that guttural, throaty sound, it might have even been that much more frightening.

We've seen that God had no problem scaring kings and humbling them. Nebuchadnezzar was a great lesson. In what we are reading in Revelation, it shows us that the only thing holding God back from mastering all nations is His own patience in seeing people in the harvest saved. Jesus told His disciples not to fear rulers. Why? Because He is in control behind the scenes in an infinitely wise and intricate way, bringing *justice to victory*. (Matt. 12:20) If we get dragged

before kings, it's because He wants us dragged there to give testimony to Him, of His gracious offer and sacrifice, and of His coming in glory and judgment.

Revelation 8

V. 1 I can only think that this was a very solemn thirty minutes, showing the importance of this *seventh seal*. According to those theologians who think in "points and sub-points," all of what follows is actually a sub-point of this seventh seal. The book and its seals are the actual book of judgment. What is about to happen next will make the first six seals look like a warm up, which actually was what they were. By now people on the earth are responding to what God has done, but as bad as that was, it is nothing compared to what is about to hit the earth. The 144,000 are out and working. The antichrist has revealed himself and has shown he is a supernaturally skilled organizing- and consensus-winning dynamo. He has brought order to the world order and made a peace agreement with Israel that is agreed upon by all nations. Imagine that. In the new religious tolerance that the antichrist creates, believers are being persecuted and killed; because, after all, all religions accept Jesus. However, Jesus doesn't accept any other religion, nor do His disciples. People are either thinking about God or they are not. I think it is during this time that the two witnesses also rise to prominence in Jerusalem. I think that the events we are about to witness are called down by these witnesses, so that when God allows the antichrist to kill them, the entire world will rejoice.

Vs. 2-4 I believe the prayers of these saints are prayers for God's justice. Now the angel mixes them with the coals from the altar of sacrifice and holiness, and judgment will begin.

Vs. 5-6 Now Jesus will literally get His wish. *I came to cast fire on the earth, and would that it were already kindled!* (Luke 12:49) I'm guessing in all of this, the earth is about to experience a massive and yet somewhat progressive meteor storm. Notice that when the judgments begin, it looks like they all happen pretty near each other.

V. 7 There is no way to imagine this. Talk about throwing the entire world into an emergency. And in all of it, the 144,000 are working in the harvest, under the radar, under that smoke. And, everyone in the world is mad at those two guys in Jerusalem, but they can't do much about them. They're too busy putting out fires, literally. And to think, this happened because of all the little pieces that got through the atmosphere. I have a feeling that wherever this third of the earth is, it is far enough away from Israel that Israel will have relative peace.

Vs. 8-9 This is the second trumpet and a big piece gets through. We don't know which ocean gets hit, but we see the result. Who can say what the *blood* means. Maybe it is simply appearance, but the effect is amazing. Not only are the ocean's waters poisoned, so that a third of the aquatic life dies, but the tidal wave also destroys a third of all merchant shipping. I have no idea how destructive this will be to commerce or to every city near the ocean. Also, what will be the ramifications of having poisoned oceans? And again, the 144,000 are working away in the harvest. Some people are getting saved and others are really, really getting mad at the two rats in Jerusalem.

Vs. 10-11 The third trumpet and yet another big piece gets through. Did you know that the Great Lakes hold about one-third of the fresh water in the world?

V. 12 This is hard to understand. I have read that if the earth were struck by enough big meteors, that it would create such a dense cloud of dust on earth that it could fill the atmosphere and block the sun's rays, possibly throwing the world into an ice age. We won't have an ice age, but the world will be changed. And what will that mean for any and all communication, for satellite guidance and tracking and for air travel?

V. 13 There is an eagle in heaven directly over John, talking. And basically it says that the people on earth haven't seen anything yet. Everything so far has had a "natural" look to it. To be in the path of a meteor shower is just bad luck, right? Things are about to get "spiritual."

But in all of this, keep in mind that some people will be opening their hearts to God. This is the last great harvest. What mercy and love in the midst of judgment. In all the confusion, the 144,000 are quietly working in that very dark harvest. As disciples our hour is now. We need to be doing our part in our field's harvest.

Psalm 136

God's love is the common element in all of the things mentioned. In fact, it is God's loyal love. In the list of events in this psalm are nice things and awful things. The constant is the loyal love of God. As we are seeing in Revelation, in the middle of tremendous judgment, His love is still operating to save those who are willing to turn to Him. Regardless of what comes into our lives, His *steadfast*, faithful, loyal *love*, because of Christ, is always working and *endures forever*.

Vs. 1-9 This is God's love to us in the creation.

Vs. 10-16 This is God's love by saving Israel out of Egypt.

Vs. 17-22 This is God's love by protecting Israel in the wilderness and giving them victory in the land.

Vs. 23-26 This is God's love in the present. He reigns in the world, yet He attends to our needs with *His steadfast love*.

Proverbs 30:7-9

I think it is healthy to be a little fearful and weary of the sin within us. Get us off our meds (the Word) and we are capable of anything. We are weaker than we think. Isn't it interesting when the Lord gave His disciples the prayer that was to "tune" their praying, at the end is the reminder of their weakness. *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.* (Matt. 6:13. RSV) One of the benefits of being a disciple, living close to the Lord, utterly dependent, is that we see ourselves, but we know His love and strength. To see ourselves without Him would be awful.

DECEMBER 18

Hark! A week before Christmas. If you can, keep carving out some time to read your one-year Bible. This is a busy time, but keeping our eyes on the Lord is even more rewarding as we come to Christmas.

Remember the chart, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets."

Habakkuk 1-3

So, the first order of business is trying to figure out how to say this guy's name. In the U.S. we generally say, Huh-BACK-uck...or something like that. In Germany, it is Hab-ah-cook. He probably pronounced it totally differently in Hebrew, so when you get to heaven, ask him how he pronounces it.

In the world outside of Jerusalem in 612 B.C., the Babylonians and the Medes destroyed Nineveh. That created a power vacuum in the world. Egypt was aspiring to world power status in the south, and the rising power in the north and east was Babylon. Egypt went up the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to challenge the armies of Babylon.

Meanwhile, in Judah the reforms of Josiah created deep changes in some people, but lurking under the surface was rebellion. When Josiah died trying to stop the advance of Egypt up

through Israel, the leaders did a quick, spiritual about-face. This is when Habakkuk wrote, or rather, sang. Pharaoh Neco made Jehoiakim (that donkey of a man) king, and immediately the poisons of a sinful people flowed through the city and society. This change from godly King Josiah to King Jehoiakim is what brings Habakkuk to question God.

Apparently Hab was a Levite singer. Much of this short book is a song. There is a song in chapter 2 and all of chapter 3 is a song. In fact, the entire thing may have been put to music, but we'll just have to ask him about that when we see him in heaven. And remember first, to ask him how to say his name.

Habakkuk 1

Vs. 1-4 This is Hab questioning God about all the injustice he is now seeing in Jerusalem. Life was so great under King Josiah, but now it was a lawless free-for-all, and God just kept silent.

Vs. 5-11 Here is what God has planned. He is going to punish Jerusalem for its evil by bringing the Chaldeans (the Babylonians) to execute His wrath.

Vs. 12-17 Hab now has an even bigger problem with God. How fair is it that God uses Jack the Ripper to judge Bonny and Clyde? Hab thinks that God should use a righteous judge, because then there would be a limit and a just end to the penalty. I think there is also the sense that these are God's own people who are being punished, evil though they may be. What Habakkuk doesn't see in this, and why we need to trust the wisdom of God, is that because the punishers are so deeply ungodly and idolatrous, the people of Israel will come back from exile, virtually idol free. There is wisdom to God using a greater evil to chasten His wicked people, making them sick of their own sickness.

Habakkuk 2

V. 1 So, Habakkuk has questioned God regarding His use of the Babylonians to punish Jerusalem and now he waits for an answer.

Vs. 2-5 God answers that He is going to judge Babylon and that Hab needs to be patient and wait.

V. 4 The *his* refers to the Chaldeans. While the Babylonians grow in pride, the righteous need to wait on the Lord, living in faith in Him, in His wisdom, in His justice and in His faithfulness.

V. 5 Babylon is getting ready for judgment by becoming "drunk" on its own wealth and pride.

Vs. 6-20 This is a song. Notice the verses are marked by *woe*. So, figure out what charges God is bringing against Babylon. This song is actually saying that God will repay Babylon "in kind," that is, with the same cruelty that they gave out. How interesting today that we have Psalm 137, with those very awful vs. 8-9. Those verses are saying, too, that as the Babylonians did to others, God will make sure is done to them.

Notice that all of these things could apply to any person or nation. I think there is a warning here for any people or nation that lifts itself against the Lord or against Jerusalem.

V. 14 This is a contrast to the city of Babylon and its wonder, the Hanging Gardens. Their work was evil and wasted, but God's glory fills the earth and never ends.

V. 15 I think the meaning of *neighbor* here could extend to the surrounding nations. Look at Revelation 14:8, *Another angel, a second, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality."*

Vs. 18-19 Note that the *woe* comes later, in v. 19.

V. 20 is ominous in that it is a call to the earth from the temple in Zion. I think that in describing the judgment of Babylon, God is also describing the judgment of nations during the Tribulation.

Habakkuk 3

This chapter is a song. Notice that v. 1 begins like many psalms; for example, the introduction to Psalm 57. Notice too that after certain verses there is a *Selah*, as is also found in The Psalms as a musical notation.

Vs. 1-15 Although there are images here that go back to the Exodus and the book of Joshua, the entire tone seems to be apocalyptic, having to do with the things we are reading about in Revelation. Verse 13 will certainly apply to God's vengeance on the nations when Jesus returns at the end of the Tribulation.

Vs. 16-19 Here is what Habakkuk learned in questioning God and humbling his heart to receive God's answer. He is sick that judgment must come, but he knows God's love and wisdom. He will wait patiently on the Lord. Even in chaos and disaster, he will rejoice in the Lord. God is his strength.

Vs. 17-19 are not only beautiful, but they are worth memorizing. And I would say that as we follow Christ as His disciples in His harvest, these verses are the strength of our hearts too. Especially since we have already found His love and are already secure and have a seat at His table when this darkness comes to an end.

I'm sure there are a lot of songs written to certain verses in Habakkuk, but the verse that attracts me as a disciple is 2:14. As disciples following Christ with His message, we need to go and draw people's attention to God's Son and His glory. The glory of God already fills the earth, like water the seas. We need to point to it and see who is ready to move toward Christ.

Revelation 9

Vs. 1-12 The fifth trumpet sounds. This will appear to be a *star* or meteor, but it is a *he* with a *key*. Usually this "he" is associated with Satan. Since it doesn't say it, I'd hesitate. The next angel who blows a trumpet will also release satanic forces. It appears that this thing or angel will go to the core of the earth where it releases a demonic plague of some sort. It will last for five months and it appears to be insects, literally from hell, worse than fire ants. Maybe they're flying fire ants.

V. 4 Notice that this will not affect the 144,000 or those who know Christ. I don't get it either, but just like the children of Israel were spared some of the plagues of Egypt because they belonged to God, the same will be true here. The nations and peoples will be so busy trying to kill these things and find a cure, that the believers in Christ will be free to continue working in the harvest under the radar. I wonder if someone comes to faith, if the bugs lose their bite on that person. This will surely be an interesting way to see the difference between those who belong to God and those who don't.

Vs. 13-19 The focus here is the release of four demons.

V. 15 It is the four demons who, through all that they incite, are responsible for the death of a third of the world's population. With the fourth seal a fourth of mankind had died, and now with this trumpet a third of those remaining will die. Together, that means that half of the earth's population has been destroyed.

The Bible does talk about imprisoned angels and some think that these four angels were chief angels under Satan who sinned as mentioned in Genesis 6 and have been imprisoned for this very hour.

V. 18 This mentions three plagues caused by these angels. It is hard to understand all of what they do. It's clear that they dry up the rivers allowing an army of 200 million men to go from the east to the west. Yet, even if China invaded all the countries west of it, marching right up to

Israel, I don't think they could kill a third of the world's population, so there must be more going on here.

The earth is looking more and more like Egypt when God's plagues hit it. Imagine how debilitated and restricted life on earth will be at this point.

Vs. 20-21 All of mankind is aware of these plagues and they are aware there is a spiritual hand at work. Instead of seeking God, they seek the gods of their own imaginations. Of course, Satan will also be performing deceiving signs and wonders, just as Pharaoh's magicians did in response to Moses.

I don't know, but I think this is near the end of the first 3.5 years. A long interlude in the judgments is about to follow, and in it the two witnesses will be killed, ending their 3.5 year ministry. Then Satan is cast down from heaven, goes after Israel and is given power to kill the followers of Christ. At the point where the antichrist enters the temple and breaks his peace treaty with Israel, there begins a part of the Tribulation referred to as The Great Tribulation. That is the Tribulation on steroids and aimed at the Jews. It is referred to as "great," because at this point, and for the next 3.5 years, the antichrist will try to exterminate the Jews and the followers of Christ. It will be good for them that the earth is so wrecked.

Still, at this point in the Tribulation, the disciples of Jesus, the 144,000, and those who are now believers, are boldly telling others to turn to God as the darkness continues to fall. As Jesus' disciples now, following in this harvest time, we need to be doing the same. When He comes, He comes very quickly.

Psalm 137

I think this fits amazingly well with our reading in Habakkuk. There will come a day when a future generation of Israel will rejoice and trust God. This will be the result of lessons learned from all of the previous generations of the Jews, whom God used to teach us our failings and His love. That is why we have all of this written in the Word.

Vs. 1-3 Not only were the people taunted by their captors, they were reminded of their own sin that brought God to have to punish them by exile.

Vs. 4-6 But now, after God's chastening, all they wanted was to remember Zion and return to Jerusalem. It was only God's grace, as seen in Daniel, that made this possible.

V. 7 As we've already seen, God promised a special punishment of Edom.

Vs. 8-9 Babylon may have been God's instrument of punishment, but God never allows or condones utter, grotesque violence and carnage such as Assyria and Babylon used. Babylon would be repaid in kind.

Proverbs 30:10

The key word is *slander*. Apparently pride is at work here, thinking that since the despised person is a servant and of little priority or value, you can get away with running him/her down. God says not to criticize and despise people. It comes from pride and there is a curse attached.

DECEMBER 19

As westerners these readings in the The One Year Bible seem very removed from real life. We are swiftly approaching Christmas and gifts and family and the irresistible push to be festive. Then comes that weird week between the holidays and again we will be festive on New Year's Eve. All of the words here regarding judgment and disaster are totally out of place...for a westerner.

Occasionally in the U.S. there is some major, violent tragedy where the work of one or a few causes the deaths of many and destroys friends and families and peace, yet we know that such things are very vile exceptions to the norm of life. Acts like the 9-11 World Trade Center strike, or the Boston Marathon bombing, or the Connecticut school shooting are like ugly statues thrown into a peaceful pond. We are all appalled, surprised and shocked, but the statues will sink out of sight and the pond waters will be calm again and the normal life of western society will return. We'll all go back to shopping, entertainment, eating too much and complaining about the government.

But what about the world outside of the west? Is the world really a place of festive lights and joy? Do the words we're reading seem as foreign to others as they do for us? In Syria, a country mentioned in the Bible, there have been well over 50,000 deaths in recent years. Most of those were civilians, dads, moms, kids. Not too many westerners are crying about them. Hundreds of thousands are in refugee camps enjoying..., enjoying what? The conditions in that country are totally third world for most people who are not in the camps but near the fighting. And that is just Syria. Then there are things we never hear of or see in China, India, South America, and Africa. There are tragedies taking place on other continents, in other countries, every day that never make the news but are not lost to the Lord. He sees it all. Most of the population on this planet only knows injustice. Most of the people on this planet will never own or drive a car. Most of the people on this planet know death and hunger and sickness.

There is a need for justice and for salvation. We might not understand God's timing, but His Word is very clear. Justice and salvation are coming. The root of the problem is in each person. We are all carriers of a spiritual disease that makes us rebel against God. That sickness isn't cured on a national level. It is cured on a person-to-person level as we are saved and share that salvation with another person. That salvation is about our Lord, and "Oh Joy!" we're back to Christmas and to all the festiveness. But, the harvest is real and utterly important to our neighbors and the billions who have no clue; because before it gets better, there is a judgment and every person must stand before that Christmas baby, that sacrificed and risen Savior. He will either be their Savior, or their Judge. The gospel is the message of the Savior who saves us from that coming judgment.

Zephaniah 1-3

Because of the limited information God has given us, a cursory reading only gives us a one-dimensional view of the great men of the Bible. In Zephaniah we get a view of the hard road that King Josiah walked. It was already told him that the sins of his grandfather, King Manasseh, would fall upon Judah and Jerusalem. Yet, driven by his passion for God and his love for his people, he bravely fought to save his people. He fought with all the power God gave him to hold back the night.

Somewhere in those 31 years there came a dark night when I think Josiah realized that it wasn't working. He knew nothing of the effect this revival had had on the parents of Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. He could only see his family and those close to him, and their disinterest must have made him heartsick.

So how do you encourage such a brave and weary warrior? God sent His Word through Zephaniah. There are aspects of the coming storm that would have renewed Josiah's sense of urgency, but woven into this prophecy, Josiah received a picture of millennial glory. Josiah wasn't working just for his generation, and certainly not just for his children. He was working for the coming King, the Messiah, the One who was mighty to save, who would lead Judah and Jerusalem into eternal glory and offer salvation to the nations.

To see where Zephaniah fits, look at the chart, "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets."

Zephaniah 1

Vs. 1-7 Notice that the scope of this is both universal, to all the earth, and local, to Judah. Apparently, although Josiah had removed the monuments of the idols, some people's hearts still sought these gods. This is evidenced by the fact that after Josiah's death, few of the leaders, including his three sons, sought God.

V. 1 It is very likely that Zephaniah was a great-great grandson of King Hezekiah. This means he was a part of the royal family. Hezekiah probably had lots of sons, but we only heard about the son who took the throne, Manasseh.

V. 7 *The day of the Lord* is mentioned or referred to more in this book, in these three short chapters, than in any other book of the Bible. You get some insight into how God knew He could revive Josiah's heart and passion. The near day of judgment is telescoped to reflect some of that final rolling out of judgment on all of mankind. What renews your heart and passion for following Jesus in the harvest?

Vs. 8-13 These are those the Lord will punish in the near "day." Notice how each of these sections begins with some reference to *that day*.

V. 8 Josiah's sons were more interested in dressing like the Assyrians, Egyptians and Babylonians than in following Yahweh. What has changed since then? I'll bet they would have had iPhones and been texting their friends during sermons. We don't know about Josiah's son Jehoahaz, because Pharaoh Neco took him to Egypt after only two months on the throne; but we know both Jehoiakim and Zedekiah. Both were worthless men. All three of Josiah's sons were punished. I'm sure Josiah saw their lack of understanding and love for God, and I'll bet he felt helpless.

Vs. 9-11 Looks like it is talking about people who live for stuff.

V. 9 The *threshold* thing was superstition from 1 Samuel 5:4-5 and is mentioned in Malachi.

Vs. 12-13 This sounds like people who are complacent about following the Lord. This is also the attitude that implies, that the things God says are just not worth getting worked up about. If God is silent, apparently things are OK. Silence doesn't mean God doesn't care. God won't be complacent about punishing these people. Comfort can be taken away in a moment.

Vs. 14-18 Notice how God is telling Josiah about a future day of judgment. We are reading about this in Revelation. I think this gave Josiah a shocking view of the judgment coming upon all men. God's judgment was bigger than just Judah and Jerusalem. Josiah might have been discouraged about standing in the gap for this little country that somehow had a connection to a bigger purpose, but now Josiah is seeing that the gap he is standing in has something to do with the salvation of the entire world. This would have motivated a man like Josiah.

Zephaniah 2

Vs. 1-2 God calls the nation to repent before He unleashes His wrath.

V. 3 This reminds me of the 144,000 in Revelation. They are hidden and protected during the Tribulation. Josiah would have understood this as hope to all who came to the Lord. Every individual mattered.

Vs. 4-15 God is predicting the humbling of the surrounding nations and the glory of the remnant of the people who seek Him. Notice that interspersed in all of this is the greatness of God and the hope for those who seek Him.

Zephaniah 3

Vs. 1-5 This is judgment against Jerusalem. What would you say is the key verse here? I think this is the verse that gave hope to Josiah. His reforms had one focus, to get people to put their *trust in the Lord* and to *draw near* to Him. There were some people doing that.

Vs. 6-7 God had humbled the nations, like the Assyrians and some of the neighboring countries, to show Israel that they should hope in Him. But, the result was that the people of Judah and Jerusalem didn't take it to heart.

Vs. 8-10 In that day, God will summon all the nations together and humble and purify them. This is definitely for the end times.

Vs. 11-13 And at that time God will save a godly remnant of Judah. Again, this confirms to Josiah that the number will be small, so to keep on working.

Vs. 14-20 And God will save and exalt Zion. Notice that the Lord will be the King in their midst. This is what Josiah was working toward. God will eventually cleanse the remnant, humble the nations and come and reign in Jerusalem.

V. 16 I'll bet this helped strengthen Josiah's hands too.

V. 17 I hope that Josiah personalized this verse, "Josiah, the Lord your God is with you. He rejoices *over you with gladness* and *he will quiet you by his love*. He exults *over you with loud singing*. I think we can personalize this verse for ourselves too, because of the victory of Christ.

I'd like to think that Josiah was given strength and courage by this prophecy. Seeing the end, the glory of Israel, seeing Zion with her King, the Lord God reigning in her, must have given him hope. Josiah couldn't lose if he kept following, because God was still in control and the Lord would win the day.

We need to remember too, that regardless of our deep weakness and feelings of failing, we are simply called to follow the Lord we love into this harvest. We reach out to whom we can and we encourage and guide the believing to follow as disciples, who make disciples. The work and power are His and He has a unique relationship to those who hope in Him and follow. Josiah might have felt weak and hopeless in his work, but as the Lord reminded him and us, *Fear not ...; let not your hands grow weak. The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing*. Jesus is with us in love and joy, and He is mighty to save.

Revelation 10

Chapter 10 begins a pause in the declaration of judgments from Jesus. This is not to say that there is no activity on earth or in heaven. Actually, there is a lot going on in both places. The seals and the trumpets (there is still one remaining trumpet) of the first 3.5 years have set the stage for the next 3.5. The events of chapter 11 will happen at the mid-point of the Tribulation and chapters 12-16 will happen during this final 3.5 years. Chapter 16 will unleash the final judgments that are very close to the end of the Tribulation and the second coming of Christ.

Vs. 1-7 This mighty angel is declaring a hidden, but very solemn, situation that will be fulfilled. The mention of the *rainbow* should make us think about God's promise to Noah never to fully destroy all of mankind as He did in the flood. The loud voice gives this mystery a special measure of importance. There will be ominous consequences. Apparently what will take place will almost bring the deaths of everyone on the planet. Jesus Himself said, *And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.* (Matt. 24:22)

One question here is what the mystery was that John was not supposed to write down. It was something announced or mentioned by the prophets that will be fulfilled. Obviously this mystery isn't the incarnation or death and resurrection of Christ, or even the existence of the church.

Vs. 8-10 John is told to eat this small scroll. That the scroll tasted sweet is similar to what we saw in Ezekiel 3:3, but that didn't make Ezekiel sick. Daniel was made sick when he saw his visions. Daniel became preoccupied with the visions of the little horn, because it was able to make war with the saints of God and prevail. This would be a good time to look at Daniel 7:18-27 and particularly Daniel 8:24-27. Notice that in Daniel 8:26, Daniel is told to seal up the vision just as John was. Notice that Daniel became sick at the content of this vision.

I think that what is being announced here is that God is about to give the Jews and anyone who believes in Him (possibly with the exception of the 144,000) into the hand of the antichrist. The world stage has been set. The 144,000 have scattered throughout the earth, and many have come to Christ, and they too have been sharing. The world is wrecked, but the antichrist is rebuilding and creating order. He had made a treaty of peace with Israel, but in spite of that, the two witnesses have been a public threat to him. They have been untouchable. People in the world understand that God is behind what has happened, and now their hearts are beginning to be revealed both in hate toward these witnesses, and also toward God and anyone who names His name.

Time wise, the first 3.5 years are coming to an end. The army of the north spoken of in Ezekiel is coming toward Jerusalem. It appears that the disaster that will happen to this army encamped near the Dead Sea will come from those witnesses. The antichrist will approach Jerusalem with his army, and armed with satanic power; and he will kill the witnesses. He will take his place in the temple and desecrate it, and all the believing Jews in Jerusalem will flee to the hills around the Dead Sea. Satan will be thrown out of heaven and we'll read about Satan's pursuit of the Jews who will be saved in the desert. The antichrist will then reveal spiritual power. The persecution of Christians and believing Jews will encompass most of the last 3.5 years of the Tribulation.

God will defeat Satan through weakness. His own sheep will conquer Satan, *...by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death.* (Rev. 12:11) These disgusting, weak humans will wreck Satan. This I think is the mystery. God will give His people into the enemy's hand and it will destroy that enemy. The more Satan rages, the more he loses, and mankind judges itself by how it treats Jesus' disciples.

Look at what God said through Paul in Romans 8:35-39, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

V. 11 So, John is told that in spite of this, the Word still needs to go out to all the people of the earth. *And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.* (Matt. 24:14)

Psalm 138

What an interesting psalm for today. We go from a discouraged Josiah, to a great movement in the Tribulation that will prove God's wisdom and strength through His suffering saints, to David, praising God in the midst of his troubles.

Vs. 1-2 Doesn't it strike you that David thanked God not only for His love, but because God had exalted His name and His Word? When David was in trouble and close to God's Word, he was invincible.

V. 3 What a great testimony of hope to us.

Vs. 4-5 David speaks of all the kings of the earth. This is future and it will be true in the Millennium. Even here, David saw beyond his life to the salvation of all peoples.

V. 6 This is what God said through Zephaniah, that the lowly who seek Him are regarded before God.

Vs. 7-8 David was still living a troubled life, but he knew God's presence and preservation. He knew God had a purpose for him and he knew God's *steadfast love*. Is it worth facing hardship to know the reality of God's steadfast love and to know His presence? I think it is and it is built into following Christ in the harvest. I think it is one of those "rewards" you only get a certain way, and following Him in the harvest is the way.

Proverbs 30:11-14

There is something for everyone here. There are kinds of "people" or "sins." How would you describe or title them?

DECEMBER 20

The next two prophets served the first wave of exiles from Babylon who were trying to rebuild the temple. Ezra mentions both Haggai and Zechariah in Ezra 5:1 and Ezra 6:14. The time was about 18 years after the exiles returned to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. They were commanded to rebuild the temple and they began with zeal; but under the pressure of their neighbors, the rebuilding had come to a standstill. If you reread some of Ezra you'll see that the Jews were forced to stop building. For some reason this time of Haggai was a critical time in the lives of the returned exiles. Ezra wasn't there yet, nor was Nehemiah. Suddenly Haggai appeared with four short messages all within a few months. Amazingly the leaders sprang to life. Then before Haggai gave his final address, Zechariah began to preach. Zechariah is an unusual prophet and what he says will look like the book of Revelation. What is interesting is that Haggai's last messages also look to the end times. For some reason this was a very critical time and as we saw with Zephaniah, in order to inspire hope, the Lord lifted their eyes to the prize of what their earthly labor was working toward: the redemption of man and the coming King.

There are two charts at the end of this document that might help you understand where Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi fit in the Old Testament. These charts are "The Three Returns from Exile," and "Chronology of the Postexilic Period." And you also will find one other chart that is focused on Haggai and Zechariah, "Dates of Key Events in Haggai's and Zechariah's Time."

Haggai 1-2

Haggai 1

V. 1 This Darius was not the Darius from Daniel 6. This is now 18 years later. Darius was a popular name among the Persians and Medes, sort of like names for popes.

Notice that the message is to Zerubbabel and to Joshua.

Zerubbabel was the governor and in the line of David. Wait until you see the good things God says about him in Haggai and then in Zechariah.

Joshua the high priest appears in a very dramatic scene in Zechariah.

To get your bearings here notice when this first message was given. Now go to 2:10 where the day of the final two messages is given. As far as we know, Haggai's ministry lasted only three months, but not without impact.

Vs. 2-11 Remember that this message was given to these two leaders. As I read this, this sounds so much like what any of us are prone to do in the western world. The harvest is difficult, but going to church and living in comfort is so easy. Yet, our lives are so barren of fruit. To draw close to God as a disciple means you will have to become dissatisfied with a lack of fruit. Verse 8 reminds me of John 15:8.

Vs. 12-15 This was a miracle and shows the power of God in Haggai's message. It also shows the hearts of Zerubbabel and Joshua as godly leaders. It just makes you happy to read this.

Haggai 2

Vs. 1-9 This message comes a month into their work on the temple and they were discouraged. How could this temple compare to the glorious temple of Solomon? The Lord tells Zerubbabel and Joshua to be encouraged and keep working. Then in vs. 6-9, God gives them a hint of the coming glory of the millennial temple. God lifts their eyes from that temple to the future temple to strengthen their hands. This is a very direct and heartfelt word to these two men.

It should also be noted that Ezekiel had already completed his book and I'm sure it was in print. Joshua would have brought a copy with him. They would have read about the millennial temple in Ezekiel 40. God, through Haggai, was reminding them that whatever was on earth now was only a frail copy of what would be in the future.

Vs. 10-19 This message is directed to the priests to remain holy, personally and in their attitudes. The people might have "let down" regarding rebuilding the temple, but the priests and Levites couldn't let down in their holiness before God and in leading the people. God marks this day as the day He will begin to bless the exiles for their obedience. It is interesting that the promise of blessing was marked with the spiritual reform of the leaders.

Vs. 20-23 This is the same day, and the message is only for Zerubbabel. The best guess is that this blessing is still waiting for fulfillment in the Millennium. Zerubbabel was true to God and there will be a reward. Since we know that the resurrected David will lead Israel in the Millennial Kingdom, it is thought that Zerubbabel will also be raised to work and govern under David as part of this reward. After this time of Haggai and Zechariah, we hear nothing more about Zerubbabel. He was not present when Ezra arrived 62 years later or when Nehemiah arrived 76 years later.

Reading these prophets, it makes me aware of how important it is to live closely with the Lord in faith, to keep the end in view and to stay motivated in the harvest. God showed these leaders what they were working for, lifting their vision beyond their challenges and beyond their generation. Their work was adding to the coming day of redemption for all peoples and nations. That is exactly what we are working toward too, as we follow Jesus in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples.

Revelation 11

Just as chapter 10 showed a heavenly event that will signify a change from the first 3.5 years of the Tribulation to the next 3.5 years, chapter 11 shows us what has happened on earth as this change has taken place.

Vs. 1-2 The temple will be rebuilt in the first 3.5 years of peace in Jerusalem. Now a change has taken place and the nations will trample Jerusalem for the next 3.5 years. It is exactly at the mid-point of the Tribulation that the antichrist will come into the temple, defile it and stop the worship. Both Daniel and Jesus spoke of this.

V. 3 Now we learn about the two witnesses. Notice that their ministry was for 3.5 years, that is, the first half of the Tribulation. I think it is obvious that neither the antichrist nor the nations could run amok in Jerusalem with these guys on the loose. No one knows who these two guys are, but since it says in Hebrews that you only die once, it seems a good guess to think these might be two guys in the OT who never died, Enoch and Elijah. Or, of course, they could just be two other guys, like Fred and Ralph.

Vs. 4-6 In Zechariah 4:2-14 we see Zerubbabel and Joshua referred to in the same way. The idea is that they bore witness in their generation in giving light like lampstands, and both are empowered by the Holy Spirit, as seen in the oil of the olive tree.

Notice that these guys can call down disaster and no one can stand against them. I think, as the seals are being broken and the trumpets are sounding in heaven, these guys are on earth calling down all the judgments just like Moses and Aaron did. This means that they work in the first 3.5 years.

Vs. 7-10 My sense is that the angel's declaration in chapter 10 will introduce the mystery of God, allowing His followers to conquer Satan by the sacrifice and testimony of their lives for Christ. This mystery will begin on earth with the deaths of these two men. It reminds me of Herod laying hands on the apostles in Acts 12. God allowed it, but it only advanced the gospel.

You've got to admit this sounds funny, that people in the world will be so happy that these guys are dead that they will give gifts. That will make it a real "black Friday." I wonder if they'll put up their Christmas trees. I'll bet there will be fantastic discounts. Even though it has been said, and people know in their hearts, that what has happened is the judgment of God as written in the Bible, they will only think about those two guys. They won't see God. They will think that if they kill the messengers, God will go away.

Think of what has happened with all of the seals and the trumpets. Over half of the earth's population is dead. A third of the land of the earth is scorched. A third of the fresh water is poisoned; a third of the ocean is poisoned, and a third of the world's fleet of ships is gone. There is war and famine all over the planet. Think of how long it took to clean up after Katrina hit the Gulf States in the U.S., with all of the U.S.'s resources. The earth will be totally wrecked for those last 3.5 years and everything will finally resemble an apocalyptic landscape. Without technology, utilities and the ability to make gasoline, we'll all be on equal footing. The earth will be happy these guys are dead and the antichrist and his beast will be very popular, with action figures and TV interviews, etc....

We don't see it yet, but the fact that just a third of everything was destroyed was still God's mercy in trying to wake people up to the judgments yet to come. People could have still repented. In some way this is a very crucial time while there is still the chance to come to God because things will get worse. The hearts of people will now be totally revealed and most will become totally hardened.

Vs. 11-13 Apparently this will be televised. Notice that this is resurrection, but after 3.5 days, it is the total recreation of their bodies. Also, notice that if people are giving glory to God, they are believing.

I would say it is after this that the antichrist takes his place in the temple, declaring himself to be God or the messiah, with a small "m." You have to admit, showing his muscle like this would make a convincing argument that he is the king ant on the ant hill, except that it's just an ant hill.

Vs. 15-19 The death of the witnesses begins the second 3.5 years. The seventh angel blows his trumpet and it is declared that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."

Notice that the *ark of the covenant* is there in the heavenly temple. As important as the ark of the covenant was in the days from Moses to David, it was lost sometime before the Babylonian captivity. In order for Josiah to have sacrificed, he would have needed the ark. It talks about all of the things that Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple, but it never mentions the ark. I know some people think Indiana Jones found it, and obviously Israel had to make another ark for Ezra's generation and for the generation in Jesus' day, but I wonder if this is the missing ark and God took it before the destruction of the temple by Nebuchadnezzar. Just speculation.

This is a solemn moment and there is worship, but what really happens here? Jesus doesn't return at this point and there are still events taking place and there are yet seven bowls of judgment to be poured out. There are still 3.5 years of what will now be referred to as the "Great Tribulation."

It seems to me that God is showing the power of His righteousness and the proof of forgiveness and redemption by allowing the world to be "judged," or "conquered" by the saints. What better proof to the success of the work you have done than to let the finished product speak for itself. The next chapters should make this more evident that God is giving up His own people as proof of the power of salvation in Christ. These people will carry their cross daily and most will be giving up their lives for their Savior.

As we read these next chapters it looks pretty grim for the followers of Jesus. But imagine going through all of this and having the playbook in hand. I'm sure there will be some desperate moments, but I'll bet there will be some Spirit-inspired joy and courage like the world has never seen. Everything that Jesus said should be true of a disciple will be alive and lived through those followers. They will not fear in their deaths and they will give up testimony as they are removed from the earth and enter into life. That is how we need to be working now in the harvest. We have far less to be anxious about than they'll have, and we have the same assurance that we are in the Lord's hands as we work in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 139

As you read this psalm for the second time this year, think of how your understanding or feeling for what David is saying might be different because of what you have read since then.

Vs. 1-6 Verse 6 is the climax here. God knows us intimately, completely, and intricately. In faith we can rejoice in this knowledge, knowing God has cleansed us in Jesus Christ; otherwise, this would be pretty scary.

Vs. 7-12 Again, in a heart of faith, this is a major comfort. As Jesus encouraged His disciples that there could be things done to them that would never be known, that they might be killed and there would be no justice, Jesus said to them, *So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.* (Matt. 10:26) Not only does God see, He is there too. We are never alone.

Vs. 13-18 These verses add another dimension to what Paul wrote in Romans 8:29-31, *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

Vs. 19-22 Regarding the lost, we are to love all men and work to see the lost saved and disciples made. Regarding our Father, our prayer is to be, *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.* Among all the things those words mean, they mean judgment to those who rebel against Christ. We are praying for justice, for the light of God to come and for this tragedy to be over.

Vs. 23-24 This is the kind of bold transparency we need each day as we pursue our Lord, following Him in the harvest.

Proverbs 30:15-16

This is a rather striking image for a lack of contentment. As Paul said, *But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. 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 Timothy 6:6-9)

In this Christmas season, that is a good thought. I'm afraid that for most people and many believers, Christmas and life are reflected in the words of this proverb.

DECEMBER 21

Just a few more days before Christmas. Today in beginning Zechariah it will be like getting Revelation in stereo. Both books zero in on the last days of this tragic earthly history we are following Christ through. What is interesting is that both books will talk about some of the same things, but each will provide unique details. Both books end with the glory of God and with humanity safe and sound with the Savior, and that is a great way to end the year.

Zechariah 1

In talking about Haggai, I mentioned that both he and Zechariah showed up at the same time. The time was when the returned exiles had been in Jerusalem about 18 years and they were stalled in building the temple. There must have been something very crucial going on at this time that you don't see explained in the history that Ezra shares. Just knowing this time frame and the sudden arrival of these two prophets should give us a greater appreciation for these books, and for God coming through in the clutch and motivating the people to action to save them. In Haggai, God gave Zerubbabel and Joshua a shot of motivation, and then He gave them a look at the future to show them that their work would not be in vain. Zechariah continues this look at the future and is like a little book of Revelation in the OT. It will also be good for us to think about why God is giving them these visions of the future. Maybe we need that too.

Take a look at the chart at the end of these notes titled, "Dates of Key Events in Haggai's and Zechariah's Time."

V. 1 If you compare the date of this message with the messages of Haggai, you'll see that Zechariah began speaking about a month after Haggai's second message.

Vs. 2-6 This message is very much like what Haggai was saying and, miracle of miracles, the people obeyed. Notice the illustration given here. Although their fathers died and although the prophets died, the Word continued and was fulfilled. This was true of the past judgment and it would be true of the future glory promised to Israel.

Now, Zechariah is given eight night visions. The chart of the same name is located at the end of this document and it may be helpful to look at. One thing to note here is that he will see these all in one night. What a night.

Vs. 7-17 The vision of the riders.

V. 7 Notice that this vision was three months after his first message. Haggai had stopped preaching by now.

Notice that these angels patrol the earth. We saw something like this in Job 1:6-8. These angels seem to have a special commission from the Lord. It is interesting to think that even though God

is omniscient, He still gives angels responsibilities. It is also interesting to think that angels are still on patrol, as we speak.

Vs. 8-12 Read this carefully. I have missed this every time. The rider of the *red horse* is very important. Notice that He is standing while the other riders are on their horses. Apparently He is the leader. In v. 9 Zechariah speaks to another angel who is with him. In v. 10 Zechariah is answered by the rider of the red horse. In v. 11 this angel rider of the red horse is addressed as *the angel of the Lord*. This is the pre-incarnate Jesus. You'll see this when we get to Zechariah 3:4 where this angel takes away the sin of Joshua the high priest. Only God has that authority.

V. 12 Notice that the world is at rest, but Jerusalem is not. The focus here is Jerusalem. The question asked in v. 12 launches the visions dealing with the city and the people. This is very similar to Daniel's question regarding the city. Daniel received the vision of the 70 weeks. Here, Zerubbabel and Joshua receive these visions through Zechariah. Since their lives have been focused on the temple, the worship and the city, God will encourage them regarding the future of these.

Notice that this is the only place in Scripture where *the angel of the Lord* intercedes and pleads to the Father, the *Lord of hosts*. The Son is still making intercession today.

Vs. 13-17 As a result of this request, God, who is very jealous for Jerusalem, promises to restore Jerusalem, the fulfillment of which will be in the Millennial Kingdom. Still, for Zerubbabel and Joshua and all the people, God's favor on Jerusalem would be good to know. In spite of the challenges they were facing, God confirmed and encouraged them that He would comfort Zion and choose Jerusalem.

Vs. 18-21 The vision of the horns.

V. 19 These horns do not seem to stand for animals or kings, but rather for the power or pride of nations. Horns might be like a threat of strength or pain, like weapons. If you look at 1 Kings 22:11, you'll see a false prophet make iron horns. Things like this might have been put on shields or wagons. If actual nations are in view here, they might be Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. At that moment in history, neither Greece nor Rome had risen as a threat to Jerusalem and Judah or scattered the people. Generally, it might just be referring to the pride of any nations that seek to persecute Israel. Toward the end of Zechariah we will see a very unique insight into the persecution Jerusalem will be enduring the very minute the Lord returns.

Vs. 20-21 Since the horns are manufactured, the craftsmen can destroy them. These angels will work to humble the nations that rise against Israel. Again, that is a promise that the godly leaders of Israel can depend on.

Zerubbabel and Joshua had endured many years of oppression by the Persian government and by the surrounding nations. This vision showed them that God would destroy this opposition. In God's hands Israel was secure. That's a good thing to know, especially reading Revelation 12.

Revelation 12

This is a great chapter of Revelation and it describes more fully the mystery of the victory God will secure over Satan and the world through the suffering of His people.

Vs. 1-2 The woman is Israel. Israel has always been "pregnant" with the Savior of the world, as promised to Abraham. The sun and moon sounds like something that Joseph dreamed, and the twelve stars are the sons of Jacob. Joseph was the first visual "type" or hint of a savior coming from Israel.

The deeper imagery here is from Genesis 3. There is the dragon (serpent, v. 15), the woman and the male child.

Vs. 3-4 This is interesting information. Satan has always known that the Savior was to come from Israel and therefore Israel has suffered so much. In corrupting Israel, Satan (in his mind) has held back salvation from the world. Getting Israel to crucify their Messiah was his master work, which fell back on him because he never realized that God was incarnate or that the sacrifice of Jesus could work salvation for all mankind through faith.

Notice that Satan took a third of the angelic world with him in his rebellion.

V. 5 The child was Jesus. Jesus' entire life, ministry, sacrifice and resurrection is summed up with Jesus seated at the Father's right hand.

V. 6 This is the Tribulation as shown in the 1260 days or 3.5 years. I think that toward the end of the first 3.5 years of peace in Israel, the army of the north (Ezekiel 39:6) will come to loot Israel; but God will destroy them with fire or some other miracle (probably through the witnesses). The antichrist will arrive, maybe to save Israel, but the glory of this salvation by God will cause him to lose his mind. (And a mind is a terrible thing to lose.) In heaven the decree is given to allow the "little horn" to wage war with the saints and prevail (Daniel 8:24-26). The antichrist kills the two witnesses, desecrates the temple (Matt. 24:15) and begins a great persecution of the Jews, and then any believers he can get his hands on. This begins the "Great Tribulation."

But Israel will hide in the mountains around the Dead Sea and live off of the supplies of the destroyed army. Since the world is wrecked and primitive, it will be easy for God to hide them 3.5 years. Actually, for God, it would always be easy to hide them anyway, but having wrecked the world, He was preparing for this event.

Vs. 7-9 During this time, there is a battle in heaven and Satan loses. You might wonder why this didn't happen before, but I think that the slaughter of Christ's followers is already underway and is a key factor in Michael's victory.

Vs. 10-11 Notice that v. 11 is written in the past tense as if it has already been going on. This, I think, is what gave Michael and his forces the power they needed. I think this victory of the saints through their testimony and deaths is what Satan never saw coming, the mystery. It brings judgment and wrath upon him and gives power to the angelic forces defending Israel. These two verses hold amazingly deep spiritual truth.

Notice that although there is a declaration made in v. 10, the battle is not over. Also, notice that this declaration seems very similar to the declaration made in Revelation 11:15.

V. 12 This is wonderful for those in heaven, to have the neighborhood finally cleaned up; but now Satan and his angels are defeated and earthbound. Isn't it interesting that he knows his time is short? This shows the psychotic nature of Satan's evil and sin in general. Why does he keep destroying? He will not rule in hell. Those he deceives do not become his slaves in some fiery underworld cartoon. Satan will be tormented and punished just as all men will. In hell, all are utterly incapacitated in pain. There are no card games and parties. There is nothing for Satan to gain by destroying more people, except the satisfaction it gives him to vent his hate toward God and to see men damned by God.

Vs. 13-17 God protects those who obeyed Him and fled to the wilderness. Whatever this flood was, an army or actual waters, God will so visibly protect them that Satan knows it is useless to pursue them. God will protect them for 3.5 years. The only danger to them is being fooled into thinking that the Lord has appeared, and going out to visit the many impostors who will appear. (Matt. 24:26) Toward the end of this 3.5 years something will happen that brings the Jews (believing and unbelieving) out of hiding and back into Jerusalem.

V. 13 Read Genesis 3:14-15. You have the woman, the serpent and the male child.

Satan then turns his anger to rounding up Christians all over the world. He will slaughter many, but the more he hurts them, the more he weakens himself. And, there will be many from all nations who, on seeing the persecution of Jewish and Gentile believers, will awaken to faith and help them.

I'm not sure what the sand really is, but the first thing that comes to mind is the promise to Abraham in Genesis 22:16-18, *By myself I have sworn, declares the LORD, because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, ¹⁷I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.*

Satan can stand on the sand (the Jews/believers), but the sand will defeat him and become a blessing to all nations. Knowing what these future disciples will endure and how they will defeat the enemy should encourage us to deny ourselves, take up our cross daily and follow Him into the harvest.

²⁷But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are. (1 Cor. 1:27-28)

Psalm 140

It is easy to read a psalm like this and not really read it at all. We need to sense the despair and trouble and anxiousness David felt. You know how you can have one good day and seem to have all the stress under control, and the next day you are a mess? This is what David lived through for 10 years on the run from Saul. Anxiousness and trouble are not our downfall. Our downfall is not having this habit of life, living close to the heart of God, in His Word, crying out to Him.

Vs. 1-5 Not only was David asking for deliverance and protection from these very real dangers, but there is the sense that the poison of this was close to entering his heart and mind.

Vs. 6-8 The protection of David's head, like the helmet of salvation, was actually confidence and protection of his heart and thoughts. That protection is found in knowing God's heart and knowing He is our salvation. It is found in the Word and obeying the Word in faith.

Vs. 9-11 This is a call for justice in kind. As they have done, let it be done to them. But notice, David is not wanting to dispense justice. That is the Lord's job.

Vs. 12-13 David's strength was found in resting on the Lord. Verses 6-7 and 12-13 are the things David learned in the ebb and flow of his emotions. God is a rock. Our emotions move. The creation, the sun, the sea are always there. They are visual aids that God's love and faithfulness never change. It takes hopelessness to reveal this to us, but then, only if God is our hope and our foundation.

Proverbs 30:17

How should one figuratively understand the second half of this verse? This could just be a common curse people gave at that time, or it could be referring to a warning about what happens to our understanding when we ignore what God says. Jesus told His disciples, and then the people, that if your eye turns away from receiving what God says, it results in darkness. Take a look at Matthew 6:22-23 and Luke 11:34-36.

I guess the safest thing to do is just to obey the first half of the verse and honor God by honoring our parents.

DECEMBER 22

Zechariah 2-3

When we read about God restoring Jerusalem, we need to remember this has nothing to do with some kind of divine patriotism. It all has to do with redemption. Yesterday we read in Revelation how the dragon pursued the woman. That would make a great animated cartoon, but in the history of our world it has been utterly tragic for Israel. When the covering angel went rogue to make himself the object of worship for mankind, he was able to take the guardianship of the nations. God allowed that, but kept one nation for himself as a way to reach all of mankind. Actually, it wasn't even a nation, it was a man, Abraham. Since that time, and even with God's promises, Israel has suffered terribly and failed, but not without help. Satan has made a mockery out of God's attempt to use Israel. Yet God has used Israel. Even in its failure, we see our hearts and our sin and our depravity reflected in their rebellion and inability to love and obey God. What a hard, inglorious service they have rendered to humanity. Yet, from that nation, according to the flesh, came the Christ, the Savior. And the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. God will honor Israel. Surely God is guiding nations today, Israel included; but the future generation of Israel we are reading about will not be like Israel today. That future Israel will be honored because they will be humbled and believing. They will willingly serve God and suffer terribly. Yet they will be used to defeat the enemy and win the day for all mankind.

Zechariah 2

Vs. 1-5 So here are poor Zerubbabel and Joshua struggling to rebuild the temple. The glorious dream of returning to the land with God's blessing has turned into disappointment. Imagine what this vision would have meant to them. Remember that at the time Zechariah was speaking, there were no walls around Jerusalem. They felt vulnerable and unprotected. God said that in the future glory of Jerusalem, the city will be so large that it won't have walls. But, the crowning jewel is that the Lord will be dwelling in her midst, giving it security.

Obviously this is the Millennial Kingdom.

One other note, with all of these angels running around, we hear more about angels in Zechariah than any other book in the OT. This is rivaled only by Revelation. And, you'll notice that one of these angels has been referred to as the angel of the Lord. He hasn't said enough yet to know if it is just *an* angel of the Lord or if it is *THE* angel of the Lord. The mystery will soon be revealed.

Vs. 6-13 This declaration was an immediate encouragement to the Jews who still lived comfortably in Babylon, to have the courage to return to Jerusalem. But, this is clearly looking to the future also.

V. 8 Just a reminder, *the apple of His eye*, means His eyeball, not a piece of fruit. An arrogant person might touch something God liked when they thought He wasn't looking, but who would be so insane as to actually try to injure God's eyeball?

V. 11 This is salvation for the nations, not just Israel. They will all be God's people.

V. 13 This is either a warning or an encouragement, depending on your relationship to the Lord. This "rousing" is what we are seeing in Revelation.

Zechariah 3

Now that God has made the future city secure and blessed, the people of Israel have to be fit for worship.

V. 1 Did you notice yesterday in Revelation 12:10, that it said, *the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down*? Here he is. Satan, ironically, insists that God must punish the sin of each person. If God doesn't, He is unrighteous. I think it is actually an attack on God's holiness.

Apparently Satan has something to gain, if he can prove that God is unrighteous and violates His own holiness. That is why, I think, it is important to the angels that God is holy.

Notice that *the angel of the Lord* is standing next to Joshua too. In this scene it not only applies to Joshua's standing before God, but also the nation's right to represent God. In v. 8 it says that Joshua and those with him are a sign; that is, they are all representing something else. In this case, they are representing the nation as Satan accuses it before God. There was a lot to accuse.

V. 2 So, how does the Lord say, *the Lord rebuke you?* The angel of the Lord is God the Son before He came to earth, born as a human. Since Jesus hadn't yet been born and died for our sin, the great question hanging in the heavenly air is, "What right does God have in not punishing Joshua's sin? How can God forgive sin righteously?" Oddly enough, the one standing next to Joshua would pay for sin and prove God's righteous right to forgive sin without having to damn the sinner.

Vs. 3-5 Knowing this is Jesus speaking makes this scene amazing. This is what happens to every person who confesses Christ as Savior.

Vs. 6-10 Joshua and these men are encouraged to keep leading the people to the Lord.

V. 8 Promised to the nation is *the Branch*, the Messiah and eternal King.

V. 9 Promised is that God will remove the sin from Israel *in a single day*. That is definitely for the end times.

For the *seven eyes*, see Revelation 5:6.

V. 10 Promised is not only peace and prosperity, but the *neighbor* probably refers to the nations. Look at Isaiah 55:5.

Revelation 13

During this pause in the judgments, different dramas and personalities of the Tribulation are described. The angel declared the mystery of God, that the saints of God would conquer Satan by their testimony and sacrifice. The two witnesses were the first of these martyrs of the Great Tribulation (the final 3.5 years), commencing this mystery. Now, we learn about Satan's two witnesses. These two work to reverse the testimony of God's two witnesses and His people, to get mankind to worship Satan through them. As you read through this, keep in mind that some of what we read in Daniel comes in handy here.

Vs. 1-2 In Daniel 7, four nations arise from the sea. Here, coming *out of the sea* is a composite nation, made up of elements of the four beasts in Daniel 7. It is symbolically the mixture and final expression of human government without God. If we take our lead from Daniel, the horns and heads refer to kings or leaders. So far we know we have a nation or confederation of nations. Notice that in Satan giving it his power and authority, this is like what Satan told Jesus he could do in Luke 4:6-7, "*To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.*"

Vs. 3-6 The imagery slowly begins to lead to one man, representing this nation, but also representing Satan. This one man has apparently taken the offer that Jesus turned down. He is the antichrist. When the antichrist takes his place in the temple, apparently he will appear to be the Messiah and demand worship. He will have satanic power and will have survived a "JFK"-like assassination attempt. Even though he has been on the rise for the first 3.5 years, his true power and authority doesn't fully manifest itself until he gives himself fully to Satan for the final 3.5 years. The antichrist will receive worship. That is pretty amazing.

Note that in order for the antichrist to put himself forward as a messenger of God, he will verbally, and in other ways, try to destroy Christianity and Judaism. He will make a new religion, as we'll see in v. 8.

Vs. 7-9 This is the same as the little horn in Daniel 7:25 and 8:24. We know that this is the antichrist, so he is an individual representing a nation and he himself is also called the beast out of the sea. We are back to the mystery announced by the angel in chapter 10, because he takes it upon himself to war against God's people.

V. 8 How would you get Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, liberals, atheists and such to all worship together? Signs and wonders help, but he will need to redefine spirituality to make this work.

In the middle of a destroyed world filled with anarchy and disorder, the nation and man that is the antichrist will be a welcomed savior, but only for those who do not believe the Word of God. Anyone who has the Word has the playbook and knows what's going on.

Vs. 9-10 These verses are given an extremely solemn emphasis. God's people will need to hold this truth for help and encouragement. Since God is purposefully giving His people into the enemy's hands, believers (Jew and Gentile) shouldn't be anxious about their lives, whether they are hiding or dying. It is God who is working, and if He has determined a person to be safe, it won't matter if they walk out on the street singing "Onward Christian Soldiers;" they won't get caught. On the other hand, if God has determined a person for martyrdom, it doesn't matter where they hide, or whether they zig or whether they zag when they run, they will get caught. In all of the stress and anxiety, they are to keep a sober and steady mind and heart. God is still in control in this satanic chaos. God will use every believer in a very intentional way.

Vs. 11-17 Enter the second *beast*. This one comes *out of the earth* and is usually referred to as "the false prophet." That is an understatement. These two men are the satanic version of the two witnesses.

The things this beast, or prophet, does seem pretty straightforward. Though you can find a parallel for the antichrist in Scripture, this other guy has no clear reference unless he is the embodiment of every false prophet in the Bible.

V. 12 The *presence* could also be, "by the authority of."

V. 15 It seems that God allows this and Satan cannot make life; it will be some kind of illusion. Notice that this is worship by compulsion. If you don't worship, you die.

Vs. 16-17 In reordering the world after the first 3.5 years of death and destruction, this might make sense for identification, but it has a very religious slant to it. Notice too that people are compelled to receive the mark. The antichrist's government will use this as a way to root out opposition. Imagine that the resources of the world will be scarce and you won't be able to buy without this mark.

V. 18 This might be a mystery that will make sense for the people in the Tribulation, but all the guesses of all the wise have proved futile up to now.

I was reading this morning where Jesus told people to strive to enter by the narrow door while it was still possible. The moment of death is certainly too late to believe, but I think for many people that time of irreversible unbelief comes while they are still alive, when unbelief becomes so set in their hearts that they never will understand. I think this is why comparatively few people come to Christ after the age of 40. But we don't know who will believe, and God doesn't give us the option to ask, so we work and share the gospel.

In the first years of the Tribulation, there will be an opportunity for people to respond to God out of need and out of the witness of those following Christ. In the final 3.5 years, the degree of satanic influence grows more visible and more powerful. Satan has been cast out of heaven and

seems to go for broke. Jesus said in Matthew 24:24, *For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.* There will still be people who respond to the 144,000 in the Great Tribulation (last 3.5 years), but it will become extremely hard. And believers will have to be totally anchored in the Word.

In all of this, both for us reading Revelation and for those living through it, there is one thing to remember; Jesus is coming and we will see Him.

Psalm 141

Vs. 1-2 It sounds like David felt he was in danger. *Incense* and *prayer* are seen together.

Vs. 3-4 It seems like David was being tempted to take shortcuts and not to wait on the Lord. While David was running, he led and lived with men who did not have his same level of faith in God. I'm sure when they sat together deciding what to do, David was constantly having to correct attitudes and plans that were not honoring to God. A spontaneous example of this was when he was in the cave and could have killed Saul at the urging of his men. He resisted, but I'm sure it wasn't easy.

V. 4 Apparently the word *delicacies* has the sense of sexual license. This is fueled by power and arrogance and self importance. As a king David had that, and later, sadly, abused it. Getting away from the Lord and His Word is fatal for everyone, even His servants.

Vs. 5-7 He prays to remain open to godly counsel and knows that he will be vindicated for following God. David would rather be rebuked by the godly than to follow the other guys.

Vs. 8-10 As for David, his eyes were on God to seek Him regardless of what others thought or did. And, as we have seen before, it is suggested that the wicked fall into their own traps and are repaid in kind for their deeds. Amen.

Proverbs 30:18-20

Vs. 18-19 These things all seem to have something to do with submission to God's forces in nature or love.

V. 20 This *way* is not very wonderful. Here it is not the man leading and the woman responding to the way God has made things as in v. 19, but rather sin being planned by this woman in opposition to God's way. The way of sin, apparently, is equally unexplainable.

DECEMBER 23

Zechariah 4-5

This first part of Zechariah has had one main question; that is, how long will it be until the Lord shows mercy to Jerusalem? The book has also had two main men: Zerubbabel and Joshua. God is not only encouraging these men to lead the people and keep their eyes on the future that He has determined for Israel, but God is using them as symbols. In chapter 3 God blessed Joshua and used him as a symbol for the future cleansing of Israel. Now in chapter 4, God does a similar thing with Zerubbabel.

Zechariah 4

Vs. 1-3 There are many ideas of what this all means. To summarize, you have two olive trees through which the oil flows through pipes to a bowl above a lampstand. From the bowl the oil flows through channels to the lamp pods. It seems that the olive trees are Zerubbabel and Joshua through whom the Spirit is "flowing," and the lampstand is the nation and its testimony, giving light to the world. When we get to v. 14 the imagery shifts a little and some think the two anointed ones are the two witnesses of Revelation.

Vs. 4-10 It seems that Zerubbabel is being honored for his leadership in laying the foundation for the temple. God is saying he would finish it. This rebuilding is a shadow of the future temple, and so Zerubbabel's work will carry a lasting honor to it.

Vs. 6-7 This entire vision, with both the trees and the lampstand, is summed up as the Word of the Lord. God uses people, but it is His Word that makes us. This is how the Lord's work is done and Zerubbabel allowed himself to be a conduit for the Spirit's working. This is also a good word to us. Often we give lip-service to faith and following and think that what happens is really because of us. God says that isn't so. Here is something Jesus told His disciples repeatedly. It also has to do with mountains and I can barely wrap my head and heart around this. Matthew 17:20, *He said to them, "Because of your little faith. For truly, I say to you, if you have faith like a grain of mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move, and nothing will be impossible for you."*

V. 10 In some people's eyes, the temple foundation was a sad thing, in no way comparable to what Solomon had built; but it was really just a small beginning that will end in the Millennium. Here at least, Zerubbabel will finish it as God's workman. And there would be rejoicing.

Vs. 10-14 These *are the eyes of the Lord* that go into all the earth to give light and see or reveal. The *olive trees* are giving oil to the lampstand, acting as conduits for the Spirit's work. Again, in v. 14, people have seen the ministry of the two witnesses in Revelation 11. Apparently the work of those two witnesses in Revelation 11 will be momentous, but we can't see it yet because it hasn't happened; and because, like Zerubbabel and Joshua, they seem obscure and only occupy a few verses of Scripture. It is God who gives them and their work importance.

That is the same with us and our witness as disciples in the harvest. Our work, as small as it may seem, is momentous in God's hands and His plan of salvation. And, our work is ordained by His Word.

Zechariah 5

In the answer to the question regarding when God will have mercy on Jerusalem, we have seen God preparing Jerusalem and Israel for the Millennial Kingdom. Now the sin of the people needs to be removed.

Vs. 1-4 This *flying scroll* is exactly the size of the tabernacle in the wilderness. It has two sides just as the law was inscribed on two tablets. It is representative of the entire law. God said the people would be cursed if they didn't hold to the laws. Not only that, the entire world will be judged by the Ten Commandments. Paul says as much in Romans 2. It appears that the sin dealt with here is the sin of our depravity, that is, the sickness in our hearts that rebels against God. This is the innate root of the original sin. The law reveals the sickness within us.

Vs. 5-11 In this judgment on sin, the sin of Israel is being removed and stored in a building in Babylon. As to who the woman is, what the nature of this iniquity is, and why it is stored in Babylon, read Revelation 17. This is the kind of sin that a person would be enticed to enjoy in Walmart or Las Vegas. The judgment on this sin is being kept for Revelation 17. We have no clue who the women with stork wings are. If they are angels, they are a new brand of angel about which we know nothing, since all angels are usually referred to as men.

It is one thing to think of cleansing one person of sin and evil, but God will do it to an entire nation. In fact, those seven years we're reading about in Revelation will be so intense that the physical hardship and spiritual harassment of those times will "cleanse" many people and it will persuade them to be part of God's plan.

Revelation 14

At this point, having described the incredible allowance given to Satan and the two beasts to wreak havoc on the people of God, a bunch of calming, future visions are given. They are future in that God is showing them to John now, but they will be fulfilled in the future chronology of events yet to come in the Tribulation. God is showing them now to give hope that will offset the darkness that has just been revealed.

Notice how many different angels are mentioned in this chapter.

Vs. 1-5 In spite of the power of hell, the 144,000 will win the day. I think these guys were already set into ministry in the first 3.5 years, but are being shown in honor at this point because they will endure to the end.

V. 1 Some people think this is a vision of the day of Christ's return, that all 144,000 will be alive and come to Jerusalem as the antichrist and his army march north to the battle of Armageddon.

V. 3 This song is particular only to them, like a ribbon a soldier gets for fighting in a particular battle.

Vs. 4-5 Since they come to faith in the Tribulation, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 7:26, *I think that in view of the present distress it is good for a person to remain as he is*, they do remain as they are. You might wonder where God is going to find this many people, but remember that at the beginning of the Tribulation there will be 7+ billion people and 144,000 is only three football stadiums full of people. Also, the seven years of the Tribulation will be pretty intense. Jesus said there would be an end to "normal" life. I doubt that there will be many marriages during that time, or an Olympics or normal seasons of sport competitions.

Notice that their marching orders are to *follow the Lamb*. He will lead them into some very dangerous places. Just think of this wording. They will *follow the Lamb*. That presupposes that the Lamb is there going before them. For us too, this means that as we follow the Lord every day, He is really going before us. When we are mistreated or shunned for Him, they are really doing it to Him. We often feel bad for ourselves, but we should really feel bad for the Lord because we know He's great and doesn't deserve to be ignored or ridiculed. But again, we often feel alone and sorry for ourselves, both of which are the wrong understanding of the situation. We are following Him and experiencing how others are treating Him.

John 12:26 – *If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.*

Luke 10:16 – *The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*

Notice too that their testimony is their faith and their lives lived for Jesus. It doesn't say that any of them are preachers, but they will bear witness to the light. You don't have to be a preacher to tell someone where the exit is in a burning building.

Vs. 6-7 This angel may be the one empowering the 144,000. Important to note is that everyone on earth will hear the gospel. Some people think this is a pretty grim gospel, but you can find instances of John the Baptist and Jesus giving this same message as good news.

V. 8 This, I think, is that nation of commerce and world corruption being judged. Later it will say that it is the beast that destroys Babylon, because apparently, this city's/nation's sinful influence was independent of his. The object of Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet will be to have the worship of every person. They will allow no competition.

The destruction of Babylon will give hope to the people who have to live on earth the final 3.5 years of the Tribulation. This destruction is announced here, but it won't happen until after

chapter 16 and the seventh bowl. This is an important event we will read about in chapter 17. I think it is connected to our reading in Zechariah today, regarding the sin that was removed to Babylon.

Vs. 9-11 This is the judgment on all those who take the *mark* of the beast. This will give hope to those who suffer because they refused to take the mark. Notice that taking the mark is fatal.

V. 12 This is going to be hard for God's people to see those who receive the mark boasting and being privileged during the Tribulation, but their laughter will become wailing. This is the second time we've seen this statement and this call to endurance. It means this will be extremely hard on those believers living through the Tribulation. They will need to read this and hold to it. If we have this written for us now, those who enter into the Tribulation can read this and know beforehand that those who take the mark of the beast will be in real trouble, even if that trouble doesn't come for a couple of years. The life of faith is lived by patient trust in the Word of God.

Matthew 24:9-14 - *Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.*

V. 13 Again, this is an encouragement to the saints. They should not be terrorized by the threat of death, but calmly give up testimony as they die. Read Luke 12:4-11 to see what Jesus said to His disciples. Notice that *blessed* is promised twice in this verse.

Vs. 14-16 Though still future in the Tribulation, the saints are encouraged by this vision of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven. How about that, a vision of the future in a vision of the future. Mathematically, that is Hope, to the second power.

Vs. 17-20 Jesus spoke of this harvest in the parable of the wheat and the weeds in Matthew 13:36-43. It sounds a lot like this. Notice that the angel comes from the altar. Under that altar are the martyrs.

V. 20 It doesn't seem that this can be literal since *1600 stadia* is about 185 miles. Whatever this means, something like this will happen and it won't be pretty. But again, who knows. We are about to read about God turning all the waters of the world into blood, as a sign against mankind for killing His followers.

I find it interesting that as God reveals some very difficult things for His people, He also shows them a vision of hope in the not so distant future. I think part of the message for us as disciples in the harvest is that we need to keep a vision of the future, good and bad, before our eyes to inspire our passion and hope. We need to remember why it is important to reach the lost and make disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 142

The only cave we know of that David ran to was the cave of Adullam. These were hard days for David. David wrote and sang this psalm then. I'll bet no one danced, but they learned what it was to pour their hearts out before the Lord. What is interesting is that as David prayed so naturally and deeply to God, it inspired the people around him. How do I know that? There is a famous event in David's life that takes place in that cave that won the hearts of his men and became a legend. See 2 Samuel 23:13ff.

Vs. 1-4 You can imagine that after years of running and crying out, David wondered if it would ever end, if he would ever be heard. Surely the people of Israel had forgotten him. Had the Lord forgotten him?

Vs. 5-7 David had been anointed by God, and although the road was long and hard, God was still protecting him. David felt like he was in prison, but he never forgot that the Lord was his only refuge and help.

Proverbs 30:21-23

I think we get the drift of all of these except for the *unloved woman*. The word "unloved" literally means "hated." I think the idea here is that she earned the hate or is intensely bitter of heart, and so what she brings into the marriage is an incredible bitterness and unrest. She definitely needs Jesus.

DECEMBER 24

Wow, we're almost there, Christmas and the end of the year. This is one of the biggest shopping days of the year for men who have waited until the last minute.

Zechariah 6-7

Zechariah 6

This concludes all the visions that Zechariah had on that one night back in 1:7. What a long night of visions. This will conclude the visions of bringing God's mercy to Jerusalem.

Vs. 1-8 Since these are chariots, fighting appears to be in view, but the Ethiopian official in Acts was in a chariot and he was just crusin' home. It says they are patrolling the earth, keeping watch over it and bringing news back to the Lord. There are only two directions mentioned because invaders only ever came into Israel from the north and the south. Since the horses' colors are the same as those in Revelation, it is thought that this event is the judgment on the earth leading up to the Millennial Kingdom. Who knows? Since no war is mentioned here, it could simply be a symbol of God's watching over the Gentile nations which will eventually lead to peace for Jerusalem and Judah. It is interesting to me that God would use angels like this since He knows and sees everything.

The focus changes now to matters dealing with the completion of the current temple.

Vs. 9-15 This is the actual crowning of Joshua to be the high priest, but it is symbolic of Jesus, the Branch, the Messiah reigning over Israel. We see this crowning of the priest in Exodus 39:30. In Hebrews we read how Jesus is both priest and king. In Israel that would not have worked, but it works with Jesus because he is a priest after the order of Melchizedek.

Vs. 12-13 These are very interesting verses. The Jews knew that the Messiah, the Branch, would build the temple. Think, then, of the significance of these words: *Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."* (John 2:19) These words of Jesus were not only a part of prophecy, but they were mentioned again and again at His trial; and as He hung on the cross they mocked Him with them.

Apparently the temple will be damaged in the Tribulation and the Messiah will rebuild it. We've already seen what the millennial temple will look like.

V. 14 They were to place that crown in the temple they were building as a reminder of the future glory of the millennial temple and its priest-king.

V.15 The nations will help to build the millennial temple.

Zechariah 7

Vs. 1-3 This event took place almost two years after the visions we just read about. The temple was in the middle of its rebuilding. It is a question about fasting, but it is really a question about religious routine. The fasts mentioned here were not prescribed by the Lord, but became

traditions of the people. The fast of the fifth month was commemorating the day Babylon burned down the temple and destroyed it. The fast of the seventh month was mourning the murder of Gedaliah, the first governor of Judah after the destruction of the temple.

Vs. 4-7 God says here that He never told them to do this. The fast was for themselves, to commemorate something important to them, but it was not to seek God's will or favor. It was like a patriotic day of mourning.

Vs. 8-14 It was the false religiousness of the former generations that brought judgment upon them. God is trying to show them that in this rebuilt temple, religion without true relationship will only bring them judgment. Religion, without loving God and doing what He says, helps no one. For an interesting slant on this, read Isaiah 58, which also has to do with useless fasting. God didn't like it.

As disciples, in all our work in the harvest, in our work with people and in our churches, our first love for Christ has to keep growing. Without a deep warm love for Christ, we grow hard and religious. That first love was born out of salvation and stays alive and burning as we follow Him in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Revelation 15

V. 1 I'm guessing that at least two years have passed since the death of the witnesses and the commencement of the mystery. There are seven more plagues to be poured out. I'm thinking they do not happen right at the end, in the last month, so that there is still a chance for people to decide and so that those to be punished can be punished for a while. Not only that, a great gathering of armies will take place north of Jerusalem and it will take months to get that organized in a wrecked world. While the bowls will be poured out in quick order, it could be six months to a year from the first bowl to the final. Then there will be the mourning over the destruction of the whore of Babylon, and then comes the end. Anyway, I think there will be some time in this.

Vs. 2-4 Notice who is here, those who have conquered the beast. How did they conquer him? That was the mystery. These are martyrs who have conquered the beast and Satan by their testimony and deaths through the blood of the Lamb. God uses the foolishness of the world to shame the wise and the weak of the world to defeat the strong, and He uses things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are.

I'm not sure what the *song of Moses* is, but it is identical to *the song of the Lamb*. Notice that Christ will be the *King of the nations* and that these things have become a testimony to the nations. Nations will come and worship the Lamb. This "witness to the nations" could be the song of the Lamb, but what about Moses? Glad you asked. Look at what Paul says in Romans 9:17, *For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth."*

God has been giving testimony in all of this. The bowls are plagues, so if you'd like to see the full connection to Moses and testimony to God and plagues, read Exodus 9:13-16. It could be that this testimony to the world is a part of the expression of the "song" of Moses. Notice the connection between God's people, the oppressive unbelief of the enemy and the plagues. In the end, God used Pharaoh's sin as a testimony to the world, and nations feared God. The same thing is happening here.

Just for trivia, notice that the central theme of the song is not God's holiness. I think that holiness is an angelic thing. The central theme of this song is about God's harvest and acclaim among the nations. That is the plan of redemption.

Vs. 5-8 If we thought we had seen "solemn" before, this is a new level. As we'll see in chapters 16 and 17, the death of the saints heightens the wrath of God that is about to be poured out. This scene is literally awesome. There is glory and purity and righteousness and power and wrath all gathered together, so intensely, that even in heaven, you couldn't enter the *sanctuary*. As the song "Awesome God" says, when God has rolled up His sleeves, it isn't for show. He means business. He is about to avenge His saints.

And even today, as He gives up His Son's followers in this part of the harvest, by whatever means or circumstances, it has an intentional purpose in His plan. And He's keeping track and taking names. Yet, our business is just to love Him, reach out to the lost and to make disciples, who make disciples. When He thinks we're done and ready for retirement, we'll receive, by whatever means or circumstances, as Paul put it, *the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus*. (Philippians 3:14)

Psalm 143

Somehow my heart feels the deep cry of David in this psalm. So much of this sounds like what David says in Psalm 27.

Vs. 1-2 It is hard not to understand God's silence and the hard times we endure as God's anger with us.

Vs. 3-4 Who hasn't felt like this, especially when you've tried to do the right thing and have received criticism?

Vs. 5-6 When all you've got are memories, you still have the Word and you can seek God.

Vs. 7-8 It is natural and necessary for us to want and need assurances of God's love.

Vs. 9-10 We not only need deliverance. We need to learn when God takes us through times like this, so that we can be stronger in faith and more trusting of His care and leading.

Vs. 11-12 What a deep and profound plea to God... *for Your name's sake... for I am Your servant*.

Some people object to a prayer like this for vengeance or justice. Yet we've seen the martyrs in Revelation 6:10 ask the same thing. It is interesting that in the next chapters of Revelation we'll see God avenge His servants. Those who made His servants suffer will suffer, not just because they touched God's people, but because there is a deeper, unseen reality.

Luke 10:16 *The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.*

Proverbs 30:24-28

So, if you had to give a devotional on these verses, what would you say God would like to see in us? What is the quality in each of these to which He is drawing our attention?

DECEMBER 25

Merry Christmas! Everyone thinks of peace and silence when they celebrate Christmas. Even if they don't believe in Jesus, they think of peace. They like the festive atmosphere, and they like the day off of work. It really is too bad that they don't get what is going on. Jesus' second coming will have peace and silence only after the dust has settled, and that is putting it lightly. Today I was reading about Jesus evading arrest in the temple around Hanukkah (around Dec. 25th, just months before His sacrifice), and later saying to some Pharisees who were trying to scare Him in Luke 13:34-35, *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood*

under her wings, and you were not willing! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!"

The offer of peace comes and goes. People still miss Him this Christmas, although the offer is being made today. Until a person is thirsty, they will not come to the waters. Until they are so needy that they cry out, "I need you" (or, blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord), they will not welcome the message or the Messiah. As disciples, we bring this message of His coming and His offer into the harvest; and those who are thirsty come to the waters and find peace.

Zechariah 8

The time of these messages is still the occasion noted at the beginning of chapter 7. The people had come to Zechariah and asked him if they still needed to fast for Jerusalem. To understand everything God is saying be sure to underline, *Thus says the Lord of Hosts*.

Vs. 1-8 We have a "before and after" scenario here. Verses 1-2 have His wrath against the nations (wait until you read the chapter in Revelation today), but the rest of the verses describe peace and security, with God dwelling in their midst. For Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the other leaders who have had to deal with opposition from within and without, this vision of the future of Jerusalem made their efforts worthwhile.

Vs. 1-3 Once again, notice God's care for Zion. Let *Him* punish Jerusalem and Israel if He must, but a wise nation would make peace with these people and bless that city.

Vs. 4-5 This is what God has planned for the people of that future city.

Vs. 6-8 At the Lord's second coming He will gather all of Israel that is scattered all over the world.

Vs. 9-13 The beginning and the end of this section says, *let your hands be strong*. Even though God would bless that present remnant, the generation and remnant they were working for was the future Israel that would be saved and be honored by God at the second coming of Christ. We know enough from Ezra, Nehemiah, and Malachi to know that this present generation did not honor the Lord. But that shouldn't discourage them, because God has told them of the future and of His future blessing to the nation. God has given us all of this information for the same purpose, to make our hands strong as we follow Christ now in the harvest.

Vs. 14-17 If they had obeyed God, they would have experienced more blessing. When we get to Malachi it will look very sad. Malachi reads like the 1 Corinthians of the OT. Still, as evidence of God's deep patience and faithfulness, there will be a remnant of Israel that will serve Him in the Tribulation and be a testimony to the earth in the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 18-19 Instead of Israel commemorating their sad and tragic past by these fasts they imposed upon themselves, God will turn their fasts into feasts. Notice the last sentence and the *therefore*. What do you think the *therefore* is there for?

Vs. 20-23 This is their testimony to the nations in the Millennial Kingdom. For an interesting connection to this, read Isaiah 55. In Isaiah 55 God tells Israel how He will make this prophecy possible.

Revelation 16

As I've mentioned before, the only people who will really understand what is happening in the Tribulation, particularly the timing of events we're reading about here, will be those who are believing and going through the Tribulation. It will give them hope knowing what events follow what events. It will help them hang on in faith and hope. One of the challenges in what we'll read today is that the seals are very similar to the trumpets. Some think they are the same thing and others only put some time between them. I think there is a space of two years or more between

the trumpets and the seals. I think the interlude in the judgments has been used by God to allow mankind to accept or reject Him. Their rejection has been shown in killing God's followers and then following the antichrist. Receiving that mark was a terrible idea. I think God gave the earth this interval of "calm" to give people a sense of false security. They might have thought, "The worst is over, we survived and now who cares about all that scary "God" stuff?" If that is the case, the similarity of the bowls to the trumpets will let people know that God was behind these plagues. The intensity of these bowls will be 100 times worse than the trumpets and they come because the world is killing God's followers.

Vs. 1-2 The loud voice in this case intensifies the burning wrath of God. Notice the wording of Zechariah 8:2. How poetic that the only people affected by this will be those who received the mark of the beast. This will be a worldwide plague of pain. And, it will give God's people a break from being pursued. Just think, all the police and soldiers and politicians of the world will have the mark and be hurting. During the Tribulation, those who are reading this will understand that the bowls of God's judgment are underway. They will know exactly when this judgment has begun. That's pretty cool, I'd say.

V. 3 The second trumpet killed a third of the fish. This second bowl kills *all* marine life. God can make more fish later, but for now, the oceans are totally dead. Also, the blood of a corpse looks black, not red.

Vs. 4-7 The fresh water will be turned to blood. Notice that this judgment shows that all of these are in response to the people of the earth having killed those who follow Christ. Note that the altar doesn't really speak. Under the altar are the martyrs whose blood was spilled out for Christ.

Vs. 8-9 Everyone was happy that the sky finally began to clear up, but wait, the ozone is gone! Whatever the problem is, people are burning up, worldwide. Even a sunscreen rating of 835 isn't helping here. Notice that there is a connection here to the plagues of Egypt in that people know it is God, but they do not repent. It doesn't say that God hardened their hearts because, like Pharaoh, their hearts were already hard.

Vs. 10-11 When God brought darkness to Egypt, it didn't affect the Jews (Ex. 10:23). That means this will only affect those nations that follow the antichrist. It's hard to find your painkillers when you can't see. This is also poetic justice for following Satan and ignoring God. They wanted darkness and they got darkness. And again, they fail to repent. Apparently they had that chance.

Vs. 12-16 Now, the Euphrates was already dried up once. My guess is that through the power of the antichrist and the false prophet (beasts 1 & 2) the water was restored to the river and a treaty of peace was made with China. This time, it appears that the Euphrates is dry for good and the forces opposed to the antichrist get mad. And guess what, because they don't follow the antichrist, they can see and can march on toward him.

There is a question here that we can't answer, but one that is good to consider. Why are these armies assembling at Armageddon? We know the Lord is bringing them there for the day of judgment, but Satan is also calling them there. Satan knows that they couldn't be victorious against Jesus, any more than they could be successful against Satan's own spiritual power. If Satan is rational at that moment, the only thing I can imagine is that he is bringing mankind there to be damned by God. I think that makes him happy, but it might also be that God allows some nations to resist Satan, the antichrist, and the false prophet. As we will see in the next chapters, "Babylon" never submitted to the antichrist and will pay a price for that. Nothing makes you lose your mind more than being the bully on the block and having someone mock you. It could be that these spirits that go out are spiritually inciting the nations who oppose the antichrist to come and duke it out so that Satan can destroy them. This option would be my guess.

V. 15 is Jesus' note to the entire seven-year judgment, that it will begin without warning. This period of time will be so devastating that it will be worth it to be ready. You won't want to live through that time nor be present at this last war. The reason I think Jesus is referring to the entire seven years is that by the time you get to this time period of the Tribulation, those who believe will be able to know that the time of His return is very near. When the war at Armageddon begins, you could almost set your watch. On the other hand, this is also a wake-up call for any followers at that time who have given up hope or are overwhelmed by the sorrow and hardship. Jesus often said, "He who endures to the end will be saved." "Saved" means they will be kept from despair and damage.

Vs. 17-21 Not only is this a great earthquake, 7.9 on the Richter scale, but the earth is also leveled and the islands cease to exist. One note here is that it says that at the time of the Millennial Kingdom, Jerusalem will be the only mountain in that area. That must mean that Jerusalem is spared some of the devastation. It also means that the plain of Armageddon just became broader and flatter. This might be why it says in Zechariah that Jesus will have to rebuild the temple and why the city won't have any walls. But beyond Israel, every city on earth will be destroyed. That will definitely slow down local governments trying to find the followers of Jesus. Then there is a sound and light show and 100-pound hail. Even in Texas that would be considered big. Again, it looks like this hailstorm is worldwide. I'll bet the insurance companies have ceased to exist by this time. So, how can you curse God knowing He did this, and not repent? But hey, we can do anything. We are Man.

I think there will be some length of time in here. It will take time in this newly and completely devastated world to rally troops to Israel. And now too, we'll have an interlude because a city (nation?) of the world has been completely destroyed and the earth will mourn.

Psalm 144

Vs. 1-2 I wonder if David wrote this after a battle. In the heat of fighting, having narrowly missed many swords and arrows, and having defeated so many who came against him, David is now able to think about what happened. Reflecting back he realizes it was God who saved him and who gave him those unique moments when he prevailed. In 2 Samuel 8 it mentions that David's battles were not only with the "neighbors" but with other nations further north that were called out by Syria to fight against David. David was actually fighting against the "nations."

Vs. 3-4 We all need real moments like this. What are we that God is so interested in us?

Vs. 5-8 As we are seeing in Zechariah and in Revelation, God's creative power also works in humbling the pride and rebellion of men.

Vs. 9-11 Outside of The Psalms and one reference in Isaiah, the only other "new songs" are in Revelation 5:9 and 14:3. These foreigners may have been those mentioned in 2 Samuel 8.

Vs. 12-15 David's desire for the peace of the nation will be granted in the future where Christ will reign and where David himself will be the leader of Israel under Him.

It is interesting that one of the things David thinks about is God's steadfast love. God had anointed David as a young teen and told him through Samuel that he would someday be king. David was probably amazed that he was still alive. There was only one thing to which he could attribute this: the steadfast love of the Lord.

As disciples, God has promised us fruit, spiritual joy and abundance in following Christ. But, we've got to keep following and pressing forward in the harvest. And when it comes, we'll say, like David, that it was totally the Lord and our fruit was the result of His steadfast, faithful love, just as He had promised.

Proverbs 30:29-31

We've just seen that God makes things. He made the "small & wise" in the last proverbs. Today, God made it naturally so, that these can't help but look stately and proud. It is His doing. Tomorrow comes the lesson.

DECEMBER 26

Zechariah 9

Vs. 1-8 We can understand this as the judgment on Israel's neighbors and then comes the peace that the Messiah brings to Jerusalem.

V. 9 When you read this, it should be easy to understand why Israel thought the Messiah would be the great conquering king at His coming. When Jesus entered Jerusalem, Jesus fulfilled this verse. How were they to know that the fulfillment of the rest of this chapter of Zechariah would be thousands of years later? Jesus' followers didn't understand this either. They would have had to have listened to Jesus' words and believed Him in spite of what they thought they knew. Jesus had more than proven that He was the Messiah and that He had been sent from the Father. The fact that Jesus was so soundly rejected by the leaders and the people meant that they were bound by sin. The power of sin had to be broken first, before they could believe Him or the Word. But before that, there would need to be a payment for sin as a way to be forgiven. And for that, there would need to be a sacrifice.

Vs. 10-17 There is a mixture of tribulation, redemption, rescue, regathering and millennial blessing in these verses. Not only that, notice that v. 13 is a one-verse encouragement given to the Maccabees in their fight against Antiochus Epiphanes (the little horn and type of the antichrist from Daniel 11).

V. 11 When I read the *blood of my covenant*, I think of Jesus. Covenants in the OT were often made with blood, but not all. Jesus specifically referred to His blood as *my blood of the covenant*. (Matt. 26:28)

After reading what we've read in Revelation, you can understand some of these images better. God will save His people, yet this was all written 500 years before Jesus was born, ministered and died. And now the church has been working for two thousand years. Yet, when the Father determines that the number of the Gentiles is complete, the redemption and restoration of Israel begins and then it will unfold quickly.

Isn't it interesting to think that we are a part of this. As the disciples in the church following Christ in the harvest, we herald His offer until the number of the Gentiles is full, and then begins that final seven years of God redeeming Israel and using them to reach the world during the days of His judgment of mankind.

Revelation 17

There is so much that we don't know about what is being said in chapters 17 & 18. I'll share what we do know that makes sense to me. Really, it makes sense to read both chapters in order to get a fuller picture.

Since this chapter comes after the bowl judgments, and since it mentions *the blood of the saints* (v. 6) and that the Lamb conquered this person, I'm thinking there is a chronological significance to telling the destruction of this city/nation now. I think it is important that Satan and the beasts have sent out spirits challenging all those in opposition to come and fight. It looks like this city was used by the antichrist, but it was not in submission to the antichrist, and so was finally done away with by the antichrist and his nation (v. 16).

Vs. 1-2 This prostitute is a city as seen in v. 18. It is difficult to imagine that a single city could have a worldwide influence and involve the spreading of an immoral lifestyle. This influence is also commercial as seen in making and receiving the world's goods. It is hard to think a single city of the world could do all of this. In the OT, the cities of Tyre and Sidon had this reputation. I think that this "whore" is representative of a nation with world influence, just as the beast is the designation for a person (the antichrist) and for a nation.

The symbol of a prostitute has been used before in terms of being untrue to God and leading others away from Him. The mentions of sexual immorality are obviously figurative. These express her influence leading nations away from God to a lifestyle of self-absorption, sensuality and materialism. That the nations have become drunk, I would think, is the intoxicating fascination by all other nations of what she had to offer. For example, the only nation on the planet today that has this influence over the world is the U.S. People in other nations are drunk with our music, our movies, our sin, our sensuality, our influence, our materialism, our iPhones, iPods, iPads, etc. I'm not saying this is the U.S., but the U.S. serves as a great example of what is meant here. Maybe there is one city, New York or L.A., that would be representative of the U.S. Again, I'm not saying the U.S. is this city or nation. It could be some other nation or city, but the U.S. serves as a good example of this worldwide influence of corruption.

Vs. 3-4 The beast she is riding on is the nation of the antichrist. Verse 16 shows that the beast, the antichrist, and his nation will eventually hate her and destroy her. At this point they appear to be allies, using one another to serve their own purposes. Notice that the beast is red, probably with the blood of God's followers.

V. 5 That she is called *Babylon* is a mystery. Some people believe that the city of Babylon in Iraq will be rebuilt and become this. But that would be a huge mystery, since that area is so unstable and deeply conservative, that it would be beyond anyone's imagination that Iraq could become the center of such a sensual, materialistic and intoxicating influence. Rome is another guess, but again, unless the world changes drastically, Rome is known for its ruins and the Vatican.

During the years of King Nebuchadnezzar, Babylon was the home of a world wonder, but we don't hear of its influence in the world. The only other Babylon that had this influence over mankind came much earlier in the Bible. That was the Babel of Nimrod where all of mankind came together with one mind to go the wrong direction. God confused the languages, thereby slowing down the progress of the ruination of mankind. There was something about Babel that seemed to have a very human quality about it. Rather than being driven by Satan, it seemed to be driven by the soul of man to satisfy himself and fulfill his own desires his own way. I'm speculating. Whatever this Babylon is, it is used by Satan, but eventually it crosses purposes with Satan.

V. 6 So, this city/nation is guilty of killing the followers of Jesus. The very language shows that she is guilty of a great slaughter. Maybe that's why the beast is red, soaked in blood. Here, like Daniel, John is stunned by her ability to destroy God's people.

V. 7 The beast carries or supports her.

V. 8 This will be something that the people in the Tribulation will have to figure out. The only being I can think of where this could be true is Satan. He was, and "was not," in that he will be chained in the abyss for 1000 years, and then rises from the abyss to wreak havoc on earth one last time and then will be thrown into the lake of fire. If it isn't Satan, it will have to be someone or some nation that fits this description, that only those in the Tribulation will figure out.

Vs. 9-11 Every generation of people since this was written has tried to figure this out. So far no one has been convincing. This will make sense to the believers going through the Tribulation.

Vs. 12-14 Now this sounds more like Daniel and the 10 horns. This will be the nation of the antichrist, and though it wars against the Lamb by killing Jesus' people, the Lamb will conquer it through the following of His people.

Vs. 15-18 In the Old Testament the city of Tyre was written about in the same way as this city of Babylon. Both Isaiah 23 and Ezekiel 26 refer to the influence and destruction of Tyre. Also, it was told that the nations would cry when it was destroyed and its goods were no longer available. The thing that was interesting about Tyre in the OT is that it could remain independent of other nations, and because of its trade, it had influence and grandeur and a kind of supreme arrogance. Egypt couldn't beat Tyre. Assyria couldn't defeat Tyre. Babylon couldn't humble Tyre. It was finally Alexander the Great who destroyed Tyre.

It appears to me that this nation is used as a willing tool of Satan and the antichrist, but is ultimately defiant because of its trade and wealth and influence. Since all men are drunk with the influence of this nation, it holds an addictive dominance over nations that rivals the antichrist. It appears that at the end of the seven years, the antichrist will make a play for full and complete world dominance. This nation "Babylon" will be standing in his way. I say that this nation must be motivated by humanness, because Jesus said it was impossible for Satan to be divided against himself. If men can oppose God in favor of their own desires, they can oppose Satan too, and for the same reasons. For Satan, all roads that lead away from God are good roads, even if they don't appear to lead to him.

Vs. 16-17 God will use an evil nation to destroy the whore. It seems that during all the disaster of the bowls, the nation of the antichrist will do something either spiritual or atomic to burn up that "Babylon." As Satan showed when He destroyed Job's children and herds, he has enough destructive spiritual force to destroy a nation if necessary.

Psalm 145

This is a great psalm. Look for words that have to do with David expressing his love and thanks. Then look for things that the *Lord is...* or what the Lord does.

Vs. 1-3 Is it ironic or prophetic that David sings out that he will praise and bless God's name *forever*? Did he actually know he would do that forever? This morning I was reading in Romans 11:33, *Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!* Amen! David may not have known, but the Spirit inspiring David knew.

Vs. 4-7 Now it is not only David's praise, but generations will declare the greatness of God.

Vs. 8-9 This is not only stated elsewhere in Scripture, but David had lived this in those years running from Saul.

Vs. 10-13 What an amazing eternal perspective David had. Since Daniel and Isaiah hadn't been written yet, you have to think that this prophecy was given to him by the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 13-21 And not only does the Lord have eternal dominion and glory, He is compassionate and hears the voices of those who love Him and call upon Him.

All of this praise and all of David's recognition of God's love and favor only came, because David pursued God. This is part of what Paul meant in Philippians 3:12, when he said, *I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.* Paul didn't endure life; he actively pursued Christ in the harvest. That's how we learn to trust and endure and grow. Then, when we have become like Him and have seen His salvation a thousand times through a thousand challenges to keep on following, we learn to proclaim and praise Him.

Proverbs 30:32

So, God makes the small and wise, and He makes the strong and proud. But, when we "make" ourselves, we shame ourselves. We need to let God make us who we are.

DECEMBER 27

Zechariah 10-11

Zechariah 10

This chapter seems to be saying that in His future blessing of Israel, God will give the nation a good shepherd.

Vs. 1-2 A good shepherd would lead the people to God. Without a good shepherd they wander. Notice the encouragement for them to call on and seek the Lord instead of relying on junk and the words of others. Nothing has changed since then and God is telling us the same thing today.

Vs. 3-5 First, God will provide a shepherd to the tribe of Judah. Notice the references to ruling and leading into battle. As we'll see tomorrow in both Zechariah and Revelation, the Lord will come first to Jerusalem to gather His people and then head north to the battle. And there will be an actual battle in both Jerusalem and 75 miles north in Megiddo (Armageddon).

Vs. 6-7 God will then strengthen all of Israel represented in the leading tribes. Again, tomorrow the references to battle will make more sense. According to v. 7, when the Lord leads them to the battle of Armageddon, the people will be so "drunk" with the Spirit that they will go forth in joy and power. They will be invincible. And their leader, this time, will not be turning the other cheek.

Vs. 8-12 With this victory behind Him, this shepherd will gather all of the sheep to Jerusalem and they will walk in His name.

Zechariah 11

But first, the nation will reject the shepherd and be given to judgment. It might be that Zechariah did some role playing here in vs. 4, 7 & 15.

Vs. 1-3 This is a poetic picture of ruin.

Vs. 4-14 Jesus became the good shepherd of the flock or generation of Israel that was doomed to slaughter. Jesus' generation was doomed because they didn't accept Him. This generation was scattered and Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D.

V. 8 The three shepherds may have been the chief priests, the Pharisees and the scribes. These were the main leaders of the people. Most of the priests were Sadducees, not believing in angels or the resurrection. I was reading this morning how hard Jesus was toward the Jewish rulers, Pharisees and scribes. They took away the key of the knowledge of salvation from the people. They themselves didn't enter and they made it extremely difficult for anyone who found the way through the grace of God. In John 19:15, it was the chief priests who cried out, *We have no king but Caesar.*

V. 10 Because of His rejection by the leaders, the staff of *Favor* was broken.

V. 13 This is what Judas was paid to betray Jesus. It is interesting that the money here was thrown to the potter, and in Matthew 27:5 the priests used the betrayal money to buy the potter's field.

V. 14 The staff of *Union* might symbolically describe the Jews being scattered in the Roman persecution.

Vs. 15-17 This is the judgment on those chief priests, scribes and Pharisees who led Israel after Jesus' resurrection. We see in the early chapters of Acts that these Jewish leaders were completely worthless in recognizing what was happening and in leading the people.

For an interesting connection here, read John 10, about the Good Shepherd. You'll see some of this imagery in Jesus' words.

As those who are seeking to make disciples, who make disciples, Jesus said that a disciple is not above his master. That means that those we teach will be like us. That's pretty scary. That means that we better be like our Teacher, the great Shepherd. And we can only be like Him if we humble ourselves daily in His Word and follow Him, with our cross, into His harvest.

Revelation 18

Vs. 1-3 It appears that God has used the antichrist's own anger to judge whatever nation or city is represented by Babylon. You have to wonder why this is such a big deal in heaven. I think that this Babylon, without any of Satan's influence, is the expression of mankind's self-indulgent rebellion and sin. This is how our hearts flow and how we work to ruin one another. If you read Romans 1:18ff, you'll notice that mankind's rebellion and punishment is mentioned without reference to Satan. Man ruined man and all men are under the power of sin.

V. 3 This verse gives us the scope of this world influence and dominance. It is sensual, material, commercial, pleasurable and addictive. As mentioned before, we don't have the name of this nation, but the U.S. would be an example of a nation that has this kind of influence in today's world, enticing the pride, pleasure and greed of men.

Vs. 4-8 Note that there are still saints within her. Notice also that this destruction by fire takes place in a single day. Those believers within that city will have a warning, if by no other means than by opening their Bibles. Notice here it says that Babylon was destroyed in a single (one) day. It will refer to this destruction two times more as "one hour." That gives the indication that it will definitely and literally take place in one hour.

Vs. 9-10 This is the mourning of the kings or the rich of the world. You notice that the immorality is not literal, but spiritual.

Vs. 11-19 This is the mourning of the merchants and consumers of the earth. Notice again that Babylon's destruction came *in a single hour*. Apparently this will be "breaking news."

Vs. 20-24 Notice that judgment is being given for the saints and apostles and prophets. Somehow this nation represents the heart of man opposing God and His servants. The deciding verse here is v. 24, where the blood of the prophets and saints was found in her. I was thinking this morning that two of the archenemies Paul faced were Demetrius the silversmith and Alexander the coppersmith. They were businessmen. Alexander, apparently, was responsible for Paul's final imprisonment, and Paul told Timothy to avoid him.

Notice that God has given us two chapters about a nation and influence that dominated the world. And, we'll hear more about it tomorrow. This nation led people away from God. It seduced people and nations through pleasure, music, goods, power and a focus on greed and self. It killed God's people not because of Satan, but because God's people, by their love for Christ and very presence, were a light to the sin of this nation. By following God, they were a threat. This nation defied God and it defied Satan. Mankind doesn't need Satan to be ruined from sin. We do that fine by ourselves. As C.S. Lewis said, "The dwarfs are for the dwarfs." During the Millennial Kingdom where everything is perfect and where Satan is locked up, mankind will still harbor lust and desire and greed. By the end of the Millennium, there will be many who will hate Jesus. They will see Him and despise Him. When Satan reappears, there will be multitudes who will follow him. The desires of our sinful nature create Babylon and lead us away from God.

Man may be for Man, but as disciples, we are for the Lord and His harvest.

Psalm 146

What speaks to me here is that God teaches us to look beyond the human. He is our only hope. We deceive ourselves thinking that we or anyone else are our help and hope. God may use others to help us, but it is He alone and always only Him. I'll praise God for hard times because that is where I learn and learn to praise Him alone.

Vs. 1-2 This is the call to praise and the declaration of the psalmist. Can we say this?

Vs. 3-4 Since men die, our sure hope is in an undying and unfailing God.

Vs. 5-7 In these short verses you have the promise to Abraham. This promise and faithfulness are illustrated in how God still stayed with that dishonest follower, Jacob. Then there is the creation and how God in faithfulness holds all that together. Finally, God is the Judge of the earth who cares for the poor.

Vs. 8-10 I read this morning how the Good Shepherd healed a woman who was bent over from satanic oppression and released her of that bond on the Sabbath day. Then a worthless shepherd stood up and opposed Him. And in a few words, Jesus rebuked all of those leaders and put His adversaries to shame. There was definitely no cheek turning as the Good Shepherd defended one of His own. He is our strong Deliverer. It is amazing to think of what Jesus has done, still does and will do to save us as we follow Him in the harvest.

Proverbs 30:33

Anger is a good thing not to "press." The joke regarding this verse is that some guy challenged a preacher saying that the Bible wasn't true. The preacher called the guy up on stage, read this verse, and as he reached out for the guy's nose he said, "Let's see if this verse is true."

My German one-year Bible put vs. 32-33 on the same day. Luther gave an accurate and variant translation of v. 32. Putting both verses together, the import would be that whether you have considered something like a fool, or whether you have really done a good job of considering a point (the word consider is the same word as Proverbs 31:16 for the godly woman weighing the pros and cons of buying a field), put your hand over your mouth because stirring up anger and strife is still to be avoided. So whether you are wrong or right, don't cause a fight. Only a fool causes a fight to be right.

DECEMBER 28

It is very interesting that both Zechariah and Revelation are zeroing in on the same battle and events surrounding the second coming of Jesus. Notice however that in both books, the Lord is showing us what will happen from two completely different perspectives. While Revelation is showing us what is happening in heaven, at the same time, Zechariah (in our reading today and tomorrow) is at ground level, in the city, showing us the carnage that will come to the Jews as they cry out for the Messiah. When they cry out He will come and the tables will be turned and then what we read today in Revelation 19:17-21 will take place.

Zechariah 12-13

Zechariah 12

V. 1 This is a solemn declaration to the right of God to do what He is about to do. It makes me think of what we'll be reading about Jesus in Revelation 19. Also, this sounds like the way Paul begins some of his charges to Timothy in 1 & 2 Timothy, declaring God's majesty. God bases His right to save and to judge based on the fact that He is the author of creation and the author of the life of man. I'd say that gives Him the right, alright.

Vs. 2-3 We have seen before that God is very passionate about Jerusalem. God will make Jerusalem a sliver in the world and everyone will become totally preoccupied with trying to remove it. But the more they try to destroy it, the more they will hurt themselves.

It is hard to know what is really happening here, but it could be as follows. It seems to me that just before the mid-point of the Tribulation, the army of "Magog" will come into Israel to fight against Jerusalem and will be supernaturally destroyed. The antichrist will come upon Jerusalem, kill the two witnesses and defile the temple, declaring himself to be the Messiah or God. The Jews will flee Jerusalem, as Jesus told them to and head for the hills, literally. Toward the end of the Tribulation and very near to the time Christ returns, it looks like the Jews will slowly come back into Judah and into Jerusalem. Probably the antichrist will set up his headquarters somewhere else. While he is preoccupied with hunting and killing Jews and believers worldwide, he will also have to deal with the arrogance of "Babylon" and the other nations that do not bow to him. Somewhere in this last year of the Tribulation, and close to the end, the bowl judgments will be poured out. This would allow the Jews to come back to Jerusalem. It could also be that some revelation is given through the Spirit to draw the Jews back for the coming of Christ. It is obvious from Scripture where He is to return.

As the armies of the world begin fighting each other 75 miles north of Jerusalem, it could be that the Jews retake the city and a portion of the antichrist's army comes against Jerusalem to wipe them out. This could be the time that Christ returns to save His city and His followers. We will see tomorrow that this army will kill many and rape and pillage. It will look like extermination is certain for those in Jerusalem. Those Jews who still haven't made a decision will have their opportunity. It will be during this utter distress that they call out to the Lord, saying, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord." This is my take on things.

Notice that in these last three chapters, the phrase, *on that day*, will be used quite a bit. It would be worth underlining it.

Vs. 4-5 *On that day*, God will strike the armies around Jerusalem with terror. It might be that lightning that Jesus talked about. Those living around Jerusalem (the people in Judah) appear to be holding back and not joining those who have gone into Jerusalem. But they will see that the people who have believed and gone into the city to wait for the return of Christ are suddenly given a supernatural strength and protection.

Vs. 6-9 This is fighting. The clans of Judah will be supernaturally inspired and everyone will become a warrior. The people in Jerusalem will be like David in his fighting ability. Those descended from David will be awesome and unbeatable, like Samson. Though the main fighting is 75 miles north on the plain of Megiddo (Har-Megiddo = Armageddon), the forces that thought taking Jerusalem would be a piece of cake will be totally destroyed. When the antichrist finds out that his troops are being swept away, he will be too far north to do anything about it. Just for chuckles, look at the end of this document and you'll find the route from Megiddo to Jerusalem.

It is important to see all of the Bible together. Revelation shows us the judgments on the world that weaken the structure of the nations. Revelation shows the nations gathering to fight north of Jerusalem. Zechariah shows us God's passion for His city, and the battle going on there when Jesus arrives.

Vs. 10-14 These people in Jerusalem will see the Lord return to the Mt. of Olives. Many of them are believing, but those who are not will be cut to the heart just like the Jews were after Peter's message in Acts 2:37. They will weep and repent for the entire history of Israel. The houses of Nathan, Levi, and the Shimeites were all branches of David's descendants.

V. 10 This is quoted in John 19:37 regarding Jesus.

V. 11 This is a reference to the mourning of the people when King Josiah was killed. Josiah was killed on the plain of Megiddo. Although the word "Armageddon" only occurs in Revelation, this is a clear allusion to the place and the battle that will rage there.

Zechariah 13

Vs. 1-6 These verses express the complete cleansing that will take place *on that day*, from sin and from all forms of deception and lies.

Vs. 7-9 This will be the devastation to Jerusalem as that army attacks. In the press of this battle, as the people are losing and dying, they will cry out, *Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*. The lightning will come and terrify the army. The people in Jerusalem, first, will be inspired with joy and superhuman ability like Samson or one of David's three champions. The battle will turn as the Lord appears and arrives to save His city.

To see how devastating this battle at Jerusalem is, look at the first four verses of tomorrow's reading. When the Lord comes, it will look very, very bad for the Jews in Jerusalem. Then, at the moment He comes, the armies are terrified; the unbelieving Jews mourn in repentance and trust Christ, and those who had already believed are already feeling their muscles bulging and are ready to mix it up.

Revelation 19

Meanwhile in heaven.....

Vs. 1-3 This multitude are those killed in the Tribulation as seen in Revelation 7:9. They are praising God for the coming judgment.

It is hard to grasp that the destruction and judgment of "Babylon" is such an important event. It reminds me of Genesis 15:16 where God told Abraham that He wouldn't give him the land yet because the *iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete*. Apparently the full measure of the saints was finally martyred in Babylon and now the sin of mankind and the full measure of guilt were complete. With the judgment of Babylon, the full righteous wrath of God could now roll. But it isn't only judgment that is complete.

Vs. 4-5 This worship of the elders and creatures is because of this pivotal event.

Vs. 6-10 Now, I'm not sure how all of this worked toward the announcing of *the marriage supper of the Lamb* at this point, but it did. That is, I think the order of events is important. The marriage supper has to occur after the Tribulation is over. Something in what has just happened also opened the door for the announcement of the marriage supper celebration of the Lamb and the church, His Bride. The destruction of Babylon and the vengeance on the blood of the saints was important.

V. 6-7 This multitude is the church and they are announcing the marriage.

V. 8 These *righteous deeds* didn't make her pure, but were a symbol of her redemption in Christ. This is our work in the harvest. *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.* (Eph. 2:10)

V. 9 So, we see the Lamb and there is the Bride, the church. The church is given this special honor. It is important to realize that God has special things planned for different groups of believers. Also, there is a difference in rewards and position. For example, the 24 elders are limited to 24. That position and those rewards are granted only to them. There are those who believed in the OT, before Christ; most of whom will not be resurrected until the end of the Tribulation/ the beginning of the Millennium. So, who is invited to this marriage feast? It seems that this feast will be on the earth, and those invited will be all who are resurrected at the coming of Christ, as well as those who enter into the Millennial Kingdom of Christ.

V. 10 John was overcome by all of this and fell down to worship the messenger, but the angel gently corrected him. Earlier when John fell down to worship, it was Jesus, so that was OK.

So what does it mean, *the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy*? If prophecy means, "the telling of things to come," then inherent in talking about Jesus is the revealing of God's past, present and future program of redemption and judgment.

Vs. 11-21 Now in very quick order we have the second coming of Christ. Apparently the stage was fully set with the destruction of Babylon. It really is interesting that in Zechariah we've been reading what will be happening in Jerusalem, in growing detail, while this is going on in heaven.

Vs. 11-16 Now the King is coming to fight.

This army with the Lord might be angels, but who knows. Just to keep things in perspective, this battle will result in the deaths of all of the opposing soldiers. This then is not Jesus sending out His angels to separate the wicked from the righteous. That will happen once Jesus is established on His throne. That is the judgment Jesus referred to as the separation of the sheep and the goats. On the other hand, those who are unbelieving and die here will be sent to Hades where they will sit in punishment to be resurrected to judgment before the white throne at the end of the Millennium. Then they will be sent to hell, the lake of fire.

V. 15 That Jesus will rule *with a rod of iron* is simply saying it will be with unbending truth. No one will be able to tell Jesus He doesn't know their hearts or that He is misjudging their motives.

Vs. 17-21 Putting everything together, Jesus first returns to Jerusalem, to the Mount of Olives and saves Jerusalem. This is visible to everyone, including the armies to the north who now turn all of their fire power (if they have any) on Jesus. I suppose that since Jesus shows up with an army, they think they can fight against Him. Obviously one angel could decimate a human army, but so could anyone with the Lord who was empowered by the Spirit. In Zechariah we have already heard that the believers will be given superhuman ability. The appearance of a human army could inspire arrogance on the part of the armies gathered. They probably think they can put up a fight and win. That might be the human side of the fight. It could also be that on the spiritual side of things, another battle is raging between Satan's angels and Michael and his angels.

V. 20 There is not a lot of drama or fanfare here. The antichrist and the prophet are captured and they are immediately thrown into the *lake of fire*. They become the first official inhabitants of hell. What a great honor.

V. 21 Everyone else who is killed goes to Hades, that place of waiting, in punishment until they stand before Christ for judgment.

This is all coming. Knowing Jesus means we know these events are certain. The same blood that saves is the same blood that judges the sin of the world. Now is the time to work in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who will make disciples until the time when Jesus comes.

Psalm 147

This is a great psalm. Underline or make a list of the things God does. Once you see this pattern, you also see when the pattern is broken, like in vs. 5 and 10-11.

Vs. 1-6 It is interesting reading this immediately after Zechariah and Revelation.

Vs. 7-11 In my Bible v. 9 of this psalm is immediately to the right of Revelation 19:17-18. That, too, is pretty interesting. Verse 11 says it all.

Vs. 12-20 The Lord's interest in Jerusalem/Zion is something we are used to by now. God will call all nations there during the Millennium for blessing.

Vs. 15-19 It is interesting to me that suddenly we have all of these references to the Word. Didn't we just see the Word on a white horse?

V. 20 is meant here to be a privilege, but in Israel's history, knowing God's decrees, and disobeying them, has also been what has led to judgment. But here, having the Word is their joy.

Proverbs 31:1-7

The words of King Lemuel are vs. 1-9. We know nothing about this guy. No king of Israel ever had this name. God knew who he was and here are a few words Lemuel's mother taught him.

V. 2 I read this and laugh. How often do parents look at their sons and say *what are you doing?* Here, she has to ask him three times. I wonder what he was doing. ☺ Obviously the repetition emphasizes her love and concern for him.

V. 3 This is immorality, adultery or sexual excess. We saw what it did to both David and Solomon.

Vs. 4-5 This caution is toward drunkenness and excess, not drinking within bounds. Jesus drank wine.

Vs. 6-7 Excess in drinking is OK for those who are on their deathbed or those who have suffered a great tragedy, probably to get them to sleep.

DECEMBER 29

This is exciting. If you have been keeping up, you are on the verge of a major accomplishment. The struggle is worth it, and trust me - next year will be easier. I can also tell you, you will get more out of reading the Bible next year. Not only will you become more familiar with what God is saying, but you will understand His heart more and more each year. When you are filled with His Word, it becomes easier to trust Him. Also, your life changes and as it does, the Holy Spirit highlights things in different ways to teach, comfort and correct. More and more you will find that something you have read that day will be used to warn you from doing something, or it will be the truth you needed that day to keep you following Christ in the harvest.

Just a couple more days to go. In our reading today we are not at the end of history, but you can see it from here.

Zechariah 14

Vs. 1-3 We are at the very end of the Tribulation. As this army attacks Jerusalem, Zechariah recounts the gruesome scene. Apparently this will last a couple of days since there are people taken alive out of the city. At first, the attacking army will be victorious. This will be the reason the people will be crying out for the Messiah. It is in this devastation as Jesus returns and they visually see Him returning, that the tables are turned. Since Jesus said there would be an awesome sign in the sky like lightning that would herald His coming, it could be that the sign in the heavens is what terrifies this army. At the same time, the Jews in Jerusalem are given a supernatural courage and strength, and they turn the tide. As seen yesterday, apparently the people in the surrounding area see the change in the fighting in Jerusalem and join in to help. Then it looks like Jesus comes visibly and helps out.

Vs. 4-5 Notice the mentions of *on that day*. Apparently Jesus appears first and then everyone sees the army of *holy ones* we saw yesterday in Revelation.

Vs. 6-7 This will be different from the day of battle where Joshua asked for the sun to stand still.

V. 8 We have read about this river that will flow out from under the temple. Ezekiel only told us of the part that flows eastward to the Dead Sea. In Revelation 21:2 we will see that this river with its trees is for the nations to come and be healed during the Millennium.

V. 9 This is the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom and Jesus' eternal reign.

Vs. 10-11 We saw in Revelation 16:20 how at the seventh bowl there was a worldwide earthquake that leveled the mountains.

Vs. 12-15 It looks like amid the terror and confusion of the return of the Lord, the opposing armies are also hit with a plague. Apparently they will rot standing. According to Revelation 19, the birds are called in for clean-up. Although this is a plague, you have to think of what would happen to any of us if God took away His sustaining power from us for 10 seconds. All men are frail and live only by His power. God revoked His image, and Nebuchadnezzar, the great king, became an animal and lost everything. If God revoked His thought from us, we'd fall apart. When He revokes His breath, we die.

Vs. 16-19 This description is only with regard to the people of the nations that are allowed to go into the Millennial Kingdom and describes their submission to Jesus and their requirement to come to Jerusalem yearly. Although we don't have a lot of information about life in the Millennium, we know that there will be an initial judgment within days or weeks of Jesus' arrival separating the wicked from the righteous (weeds and wheat [Mat. 13:24-43], good fish-bad fish [Mat. 13:47-50], sheep and goats [Mat. 25:31-46]) so that these thousand years begin only with people who are believing and in submission to Christ. We know that there will be a need for healing and rebuilding in the world. We know that certain resurrected people will act as leaders, governors, mayors, guiding the people and nations of the world. People will come to Jerusalem for the healing trees. We also know from Ezekiel that there will be memorial sacrifices, remembering the sacrifice of Christ; but these will be celebratory in their focus, not saving or substituting. As we saw in Ezekiel the Feast of Booths will be held, but not the Day of Atonement that accompanied it. Atonement has already been made.

As we are about to read in Revelation, even in a perfect world without Satan to deceive mankind, the sin of man will still grow and rebel against God. When Satan is released after 1000 years, he will find people all over the world who are willing to follow him and come against Israel and God.

Vs. 20-21 *The house of the Lord* will be a busy, festive place – a sign that all is well on the earth.

Revelation 20

And now for the rest of the story.

Vs. 1-3 Notice that Satan is thrown into a pit, not into hell. His angels are with him. I'll bet that'll be no party. Notice in v. 3 that he "must" be released. There is a plan and a purpose ordained in what God is doing.

Vs. 4-6 The Millennial Kingdom hasn't yet begun, but it is close. First, there is judgment.

V. 6 It is generally understood that everyone who is believing, not just the Tribulation saints, but all the OT believers, are resurrected here. (Those who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture of the church understand that the church on earth was transformed and that the "dead in Christ" were raised before the beginning of the Tribulation. 1 Cor. 15:51-52) This "first resurrection" mentioned here is only "first" in reference to the next resurrection at the end of the Millennial Kingdom. Note that only those who are resurrected now are not affected by the second death. This means that all those who are resurrected in the second resurrection experience the second death. This means that all the saved of all generations will be resurrected at the first resurrection and will enjoy the Millennial Kingdom. In fact, some of those who are raised will reign with Jesus as leaders in the world, directing countries, cities and many offices in governments. One of these will be King David. (Ezekiel 37:25) Again as I understand it, the church had already been resurrected at the rapture before the Tribulation began.

Vs. 7-10 The army that Satan is able to amass at the end of the Millennium is huge, like the sand of the sea. This means that even though people will see Jesus and speak with Him, they will still choose to hate Him. Sin trumps rationality. How do you hate the person who gives you life, who is the Creator of the very reality you choose to rebel against? This rebellion by mankind is the last piece of the puzzle that gives Jesus His right to cast rebellious mankind into hell. It is what sets up the final judgment before the white throne. We, not Satan, are responsible for our own sin. Sin is and always has been our problem. Faith in God and His Word has always been the solution. People born during the Millennium have now seen and not believed for a thousand years. Having rejected God's offer of help and salvation, they deserve to be cast from His presence into *the lake of fire*. This will lay to rest the saying, "The devil made me do it." It will also lay to rest every other argument. There will be a perfect world, and mankind will see God and they still won't like Him. God's judgment is absolutely righteous.

V. 10 Notice that there is torment in hell. There is no semblance of activity or life, or government or parties. It is only punishment. All those stories about the parties in hell and hell being where all the cool people are is utter baloney. Also, Satan will not be "ruling." He will also be in torment, humbled to the level of those he worked to corrupt.

Vs. 11-15 This is the resurrection to judgment. No believer will appear before the white throne. In Jesus' descriptions of judgment in John 5:28-29 and in the parable of the sheep and goats in Matthew 25:31-46, the righteous were resurrected first and the unrighteous were then judged and sentenced. He just didn't say the different resurrections would be separated by a thousand years. Jesus will prove the righteousness of judgment by what is written in the books. The dead who are raised will be given an eternal body, but their spirit was never reborn, recreated in Christ. Their sinful nature, at death, was judged and became a permanent fixture of their being. Now, even in their new body, they are rebellious of heart. There is no second chance. They had their second, third, fourth...chances during their life on earth. What is interesting to me is that this judgment isn't given any drama. Earth's history has been tragic. The judgment is concluded. The end of that sad history deserves only a brief description.

V. 14 Notice that both *Death and Hades*, that place of waiting, are gone forever.

Praise God! We are here now to work in His harvest, knowing that we, and all those who believe, will be blessed forever in Christ.

Psalm 148

What better way to conclude the sad tragedy of fallen earthly history than with praise to God. This is one of those songs of worship that included the plan of redemption. Notice that in v. 11 all kings and nations are called upon to praise the Lord.

Vs. 1-2 As we've read, someday this will be totally true, and we'll be there to see it.

Vs. 3-10 Romans 8:19-22 says that the creation waits for our redemption.

Vs. 11-12 And there will come a time when all who are on the earth will praise the Lord.

Vs. 13-14 This is why they were to praise God. He *raised up a horn*, or as Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, prophesied in Luke 1:69, "*and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David.*"

Jesus was that King, the King who has saved us and who will return and reign forever.

Proverbs 31:8-9

King Lemuel's mother also told him this, and God thought it was worth passing on. It is interesting when you read about what Jesus was sent to do, that one of those things was to preach good news to the poor and to bring justice to victory. (Matt. 12:20) Our Lord wants us to have a

heart for the poor and those who need justice, but the most important thing we have to offer is the good news.

Luke 4:18-21 (Jesus reading Isaiah in the synagogue in Nazareth) *"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." And he closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant, and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. And he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."*

DECEMBER 30

Malachi 1-2

After all of the heavenly visions, we are back to reality on the dark planet. After Zechariah and Haggai wrote, Ezra arrived to lead the people into the Word, and then Nehemiah arrived and helped rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah helped repopulate the city and set the Levitical order of worship into operation. The end of Nehemiah shows that even with a godly governor, the people hardly obeyed. Malachi probably wrote after Nehemiah was gone. The word for governor is Persian, suggesting that whoever was running Jerusalem now was Persian. The temple service was running; in fact, it was now running so routinely it became corrupted.

Malachi's name means "messenger." Malachi's will be the last words God speaks to Israel until the events just before the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus. God did a clever job of wording this book through Malachi. God has Malachi listen to the people and record their gripes against God. As God answers these complaints through Malachi, God turns the answer against the people to reveal their very distant hearts. They were going through the motions of religion with no real love for God. This is always a danger. When we have a "problem with God," it is usually the result of our being lukewarm and indifferent toward Him. To follow God closely shows us His heart, but often people only want to appease Him and not really be bothered by Him. In the end, to be religious only leads to confusion, because religion serves us and our expectations. These people were disappointed with God, but as God will show them, they had no real idea of who He was and they misunderstood what would lead to blessing.

At the end of this document you will find two helpful charts, "The Three Returns from Exile" and "Chronology of the Postexilic Period."

Malachi 1

This is a great chapter and could be preached or taught for weeks. We only get one day.

Vs. 1-5 This is the most important part of Malachi. If you miss this you will not fully understand why the rest of these problems crept into the lives of the people. Everything we'll read in Malachi stems from this problem. I'm going to give you the basics very quickly.

Both Jacob and Esau represent countries, countries taken into exile. Only Israel returned. That return showed God's love. Now to understand all that God did to get them back into the land, you need to go back to the "born again" Manasseh returning to Israel, influencing Josiah, who influenced four families, who raised four sons, who God used to save the nation in Babylon. That is the book of Daniel. Think of all that God did in Daniel and Esther and Ezra and Nehemiah. The people missed all of this amazing and mighty love and said, *"How have you loved us?"*

V. 5 Especially when you read some of the things Nebuchadnezzar and Darius the Mede said and did, God received more honor outside of Israel than within it.

Vs. 6-14 This lack of understanding God's care and love led the priests to dishonor God and to allow the people to dishonor God. They thought, "If times are tough, God will understand if you

bring Him lame and blind sacrifices, right? Any sacrifice is better than no sacrifice, right?" But here is the thing, if they had grasped God's love for them, they would have been willing to give Him the offerings He required. The offerings were a test of their hearts, of their faith and trust in God. All this proved they had no real trust or love for God. They were just religious, just punching the clock, just doing what they needed to do to be good religious people in their own eyes.

V. 8 They wouldn't have done this to their governor, but since their religion was routine, the invisible God was as good as not being there. And besides, anything is OK with God, right?

V. 10 You have to ask yourself why the priests kept accepting these sacrifices and why they didn't *shut the doors*. Imagine if a pastor did this on Sunday morning, blocking the door with his body, saying, "Hey, we're not taking this seriously." Soon he'd get no pay check. Guess where the priests got their food and their livelihood? That's right; they received their food from the sacrifices and their money from the offerings of the people. Who were the priests really serving and trusting?

Twice God reminds the priests of His majesty in vs. 11 and 14.

Vs. 12-13 The priests themselves were bemoaning the fact that the people were so sinful and bringing awful offerings. But hey, something is better than nothing, right? And besides, they had to eat.

V. 14 They were allowing the people to bring a curse upon themselves. That betrayed the entire point of the priesthood, simply so they could eat. In contrast to what these priests were doing, look at what Paul, a disciple of Jesus, did, said, and modeled for us.

But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:15-16

Malachi 2

Vs. 1-3 So God will turn the curse of the people onto the priests too. In fact, as we'll see, the curse had already begun. Remember in Haggai how God said the people were working in the fields and hardly bringing anything in? That was the curse. It happened there and it was happening now. Ironically, the more people held back from God because the times were tough, the tougher God made the times.

Since the priests were allowing the feasts and sacrifices so they could get food and further their livelihood, God would smear their faces in "end result" of their sacrifices. Note, that in 1 Samuel 2:22ff, Eli also didn't stop his sons from desecrating the tabernacle. The reason for that was that Eli was happy to be well fed. Notice the reference to Eli at his death (1 Samuel 4:18). In a poetic sense, the impure sacrifices he allowed helped kill him. Fear for our livelihood in the ministry makes us worthless shepherds. But can a disciple really believe that stuff Jesus said about not being anxious about our food and clothing? That's really up to each of us. It's a matter of trust.

Vs. 4-9 This covenant was really the covenant God made with Phinehas in Numbers 25:6-13. Phinehas saw the connection between the plague burning in the camp and the sin of the people typified in this one guy who was walking into his tent with a foreign woman, a cult prostitute for Baal. While everyone else stood frozen, Phinehas grabbed a spear, ran like crazy through the camp and killed the couple. Immediately the plague stopped. The priests in Malachi's day should have been this spiritually alert, brave, and passionate for God and should have taken a stand for the welfare of the people.

Through Phinehas' ministry alongside Joshua, the people were taught to obey and honor God, and that generation was the godliest generation of Israel. Phinehas was a hero and a model of what being a priest meant. God would punish these priests for leading the people astray.

Vs. 10-17 This section has a couple of sub-categories, but generally it all has to do with marriage. Looking at Genesis, first came the fall from God, and then the relationship between Adam and Eve crashed. Those "falls" are connected. The same can be seen in Romans 1:18-27. First the relationship with God was lost, and then the relationship between man and woman became corrupted. Ironically, one of the rebukes that Jesus delivered on the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees was regarding their view of marriage and their allowance for divorce. (Luke 16:14-18)

Vs. 10-12 Since God is their Father, how could the men marry women who worshiped false gods? But once you have lost your love for God, your faith, and trust in Him, and you've defined Him as a good-ol'-boy who accepts anything, anything is possible. Throughout Ezra and Nehemiah this problem is mentioned often.

Vs. 13-14 Yet the people wept because things were not going well economically and God didn't listen. Why? Because they were faithless toward their wives. They were breaking covenant with God which opened the door to men breaking covenant with their wives. God was a witness against them.

Vs. 15-16 God's plan was for godly men and women to raise godly kids. It is all one wonderful plan. When Ruth went to Boaz, she asked him to cover her with his garment. This was her asking for protection and care. For these men to divorce their wives was to pull away that garment in violence, forcing their wives (as Jesus said) to become adulteresses when they remarried (Matt. 5:32). All of this is why God hates divorce. God covers us with His love and "garment" of care. How dare we commit to protect and care for someone in the covenant of marriage and then withdraw that care. God doesn't like that. He makes allowance for the sin of man, but He still expresses His anger toward those who make divorce necessary.

V. 17 And all of this disobedience brings a darkness and bitterness of heart causing us to actually become bitter with God. Israel could look at its neighbors and say, "Hey, they don't have to do any of this stuff or worry about this and they are doing OK. This is totally unfair. This following God stuff doesn't make sense." But I was reading Jesus saying this morning, *And everyone to whom much is given, will much be required.* The privilege of knowing God requires we act like it. And as every parent has told their kids, "I don't care what they do in Joe's family. You are in our family and these are our rules." In Luke 12:48 (RSV), Jesus also said, *and to whom men entrust much, they demand the more.*

Especially with all we have read about the second coming of Christ, for us as disciples following in the harvest, our only responsibility before God is to love Him, trust Him, and obey Him. The more we give to Christ in following Him, the more we get of Him. There's a happy version of the old hymn, "Trust and Obey," by Big Daddy Weave. You can find it on YouTube. Actually, any version will do. That old hymn says it all.

Revelation 21

V. 1 Now it is time for *a new heaven and a new earth*. The heaven means that area above the earth, not heaven as in God's abode. In the judgments, there is some mention of the powers of the heavens being shaken and stars falling, etc. It could be that God did away with galaxies. Notice that this is not an extreme makeover. The old ones were done away with. These are completely new. This is a reference to Genesis 1:1. The one thing to think about is that this earth might have very little similarity to our earth. Obviously there won't be any oceans or seas, but also, there won't be a need for oxygen, heat or gravity. Will the earth even need to spin if gravity isn't

necessary? The earth the Lord makes could be a thousand times bigger and have very different "physical laws," if in fact, "physical laws" are even necessary.

V. 2 The *new Jerusalem* could be the place Jesus said He was preparing back in John 14:2-3. There are some people who think this city will be orbiting the earth during the Millennial Kingdom and will be inhabited by those who are resurrected. They may work on earth, but they'll live there. For those people, the commute will be very quick. It's all speculation, but I thought it was funny. Notice that in this case, the city is the bride, not the church.

Vs. 3-4 God will be present and every aspect of hurt, regret or sorrow from our former lives on earth will be healed. Vietnam vets won't dive under tables every time they hear a loud sound, and children won't duck every time someone raises their hand quickly. All the emotional trauma of divorce and betrayal, the pang of every act of violence done, will be removed. Loneliness and sorrow will be forgotten. We'll all be totally healed.

Vs. 5-8 This is the Lord making an offer, through John, to everyone reading this who has not made a decision to follow Christ. Notice the allusion in v. 6 to Isaiah 55:1 and John 7:37. It reminds me again, that in the harvest, if they are not thirsty, they will not come. Our job is to ask if they're thirsty and to tell them where the water is.

Vs. 9-14 Note that *the Bride* is the city. Note also that the names of the tribes of Israel and the names of the twelve apostles are a part of the city. So, who is the twelfth apostle? It is either the guy they chose in Acts 1:26, Matthias, or if God, as He often does, goes around our choices, it could be Paul. If it isn't Paul, I know he won't mind. Paul was just happy with the honor of being able to follow in the harvest.

Vs. 15-21 The description here defies anything that could be built on this earth. This leads me to believe that the size of that earth and the physical laws, if any, won't be anything like this earth. In v. 16 we could understand a city wall being 1400 miles long, but not 1400 miles high. Being spiritual with spiritual bodies will be so completely different that it will defy our imaginations. Physical laws will be irrelevant. Science and technology as we know it will be unnecessary. There will be no "falling" or weight. Travel will be "instant arrival," and communication will be intuitive. The necessity for a spinning earth or space will be gone. (And while we're thinking about defying physical laws, I like imagining that we'll get to eat all we want and not get fat!) The point is that there is no reason to doubt these dimensions, since so many things will be completely different.

Vs. 22-27 We have hints in the Bible about life after this earth history. There are heavenly rewards and there will be some similarities with life now. Life will be perfect as it was meant to be, but there will still be life and activity. There will be music. There will be love. There will be fun. There will be beauty. There will be eating. This description shows there will be no temple because we'll have access to the triune God Himself. Jesus will supply the light. And as Jesus said in John 14:16, the Holy Spirit will be in us forever.

V. 26 There will be nations, which means there will be some organization of people.

V. 27 Obviously, there will be no sin or bad stuff. The proof is that the only inhabitants of this eternal existence will be *those who are written in the Lamb's book of life*.

And then finally, what God intended life to be will begin. Finally! And knowing God, it will be a zillion times better than the best we've ever experienced here. This life is the bad dream. God's redeemed world will be the reality we have all desired.

Psalm 149

This is a great psalm to follow Revelation.

Vs. 1-4 Notice that the *new song* and this assembly are before the Lord in Zion. If there is this kind of joy mentioned in this psalm, I would expect it to be at least like this in the eternal life with God. If God took that kind of pleasure in His people in Zion, what will it be like in the new Jerusalem?

Vs. 5-9 Notice how vs. 6-9 sound like the fight in Jerusalem when the Lord comes. It sounds like Zechariah 10:7 and Zechariah 12:1-9 all wrapped together in joy and praise.

We don't often think that to withhold praise and open gratitude to God is sin. For all He has given us, we should have hearts of constant flowing praise, trust and adoration. In our Lord we finally know this, yet even the unbelieving world has been made by Him and their very omission of gratitude and praise will stand against them as a judgment. If someone left a car in your driveway with the keys and a note that it was a gift, most of us would seek to find out who gave it and have a heart of thanks. Imagine just taking the gift and not trying to find or thank the giver or pretending the car just happened. God says that everyone who seeks finds.

Proverbs 31:10-24

This final section of Proverbs is different than other parts of the book in that the poem here is an acrostic; that is, each line begins with the next successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. The human author is unknown, but God made sure this was included.

This is not the description of super woman or wonder woman, but a woman who is a help-mate for her husband. This collection of qualities probably doesn't exist in any one woman on the planet, but putting all of these pieces together you get the image of a woman who was a partner to her husband in life. Cultures change, and times, resources, and needs change; but the God-inspired union between a man and woman is the same. They are to be friends, lovers and partners in living life before the Lord and following Him in the harvest on this planet.

Vs. 10-12 This is probably the most universal and meaningful statement in the poem. A husband is blessed when he realizes how blessed he has been by the wife God has given him.

The following verses describe aspects of what has just been said.

Vs. 13-14 She seeks and brings.

V. 15 She rises and provides.

V. 16 She plans and plants.

Vs. 17-18 She knows how the Lord is using her and finds strength in that.

Vs. 19-24 This has to do with her working with her hands to provide for the poor and for her family. In this case, she is great with a sewing machine. Verse 23 in this context means that her husband wears her stuff. Inherent in this is that the community realizes that he is blessed to have a diligent wife. I don't think v. 24 is a requirement for every woman. Again, vs. 10-12 are the focus.

I would suggest that if a husband and wife are a "team" and deeply in love, she is already doing what God has designed for her that fulfills this blessing, even if she isn't dealing for land or sewing clothes. Today, maybe this woman is good with coupons, keeps her family fed and knows when the sales are on at the store.

DECEMBER 31

Time to celebrate!

Malachi 3-4

This generation of Jews had a very muddled history. Part of their history was miraculous privilege and the other part was tragic judgment. Yet they were still God's people, chosen to make His redemptive plan known to the world. They should have been impressed with the astounding manner in which God had bent and moved the nations to protect Israel in exile and to restore them to their land. Instead it was all so wearisome and so vague. There was this hope, but they didn't want to fully commit themselves to God. They thought a little following would work, but it only made matters worse. (This sounds like a lot of people today in the church.) This would also be a picture of the Jews before Jesus arrived. In a way, it is a picture of all of mankind. We have a vague sense we should seek God, but we want His blessing on our terms at whatever level of interest we're willing to give Him. He should just be happy with what He gets, right? Who does He think He is anyway? ☺

Malachi 3

Vs. 1-5 So God will send messengers to prepare the people.

V. 1 There are two messengers here. John the Baptist is the first and *the messenger of the covenant* was Jesus. We know what happened with John and Jesus. In fact, tomorrow you get to begin reading the Gospels.

V. 2-5 Suddenly God warns them of His coming. We saw in Amos 5:18, that a person shouldn't wish lightly for the day of the Lord. The result will be that Judah will be cleansed, but it will be through the fire. I think this is captured in Jesus telling the multitudes that if they are walking with their accuser on the way to the court, to try to settle on the way. If it goes to judgment, they will have to pay every penny. The idea for that generation and each individual was, "Now is the time. Don't wait until the day of the Lord."

Vs. 6-12 The point of this section takes a little thought. It is not that God is interested in tithing, but the lack of tithing did reveal a lack of spiritual understanding.

V. 6 Just as God has always done, He will continue to spare them because of His covenant with Abraham.

V. 7 So what do the statutes have to do with returning to God and paying the tithes? Remember in Nehemiah that Nehemiah set everything in order. The priests and the Levites were all in Jerusalem working and the people were bringing the tithes. Nehemiah left for a time and when he returned (Neh. 13:6), the Levites were scattered back to their farms. The people had stopped bringing the tithes.

I can imagine the people saying, "Hey, the times are hard. Why should I tithe to support a bunch of people sitting around doing nothing?" The thing is that God had appointed the priests and Levites to be teachers of the people. How would the people learn the statutes and the Word (and of God Himself) if the Levites weren't there? That is the point here. A spiritually perceptive person would have seen that his own spiritual welfare and the spiritual welfare of his family and nation were dependent on the ministry of the priests and Levites. And the priests and Levites were supported by the tithes. Tithing tested the hearts of the people. They failed. When the people held back, God held back and not only did the economy suffer, but so did their spiritual wellbeing.

V. 12 Israel was to have been a witness and a blessing to the nations because of God's blessing to them as they followed. In Isaiah 55 God says that they will be a blessing during the Millennium.

Vs. 13-15 I have met Christians who basically have this attitude. Yet, a little following and trust, mixed with a major portion of living your life the way you want, only brings bitter disappointment. We are not left here to have more comfort, better health and cooler toys than the unbelieving world. We are here to serve our Lord, following Him with a cross on our shoulder into the harvest. In this there is joy. Any other view is our own.

Vs. 16-18 Some people did respond and God promises to acknowledge these people on the day of resurrection. God's acknowledgement of them will add to the judgment of all those who didn't respond. It might also be that in the time of Malachi, God chose to bless those who truly repented, and did this in a visible way.

V. 18 God will make this distinction clear at Christ's coming and in all eternity. For those who love Jesus, they already understand the spiritual depth of this difference. It is all grace and nothing we have done. To know Him is itself the reward.

Malachi 4

These are God's final words in the Old Testament, then come 400 silent years. And tomorrow, for us, we read about the coming of the Savior and His herald.

V. 1 This not only sounds like the judgment at the end of the Tribulation, but John the Baptist told the leaders and people that the axe was laid to the root of the trees and that burning would accompany ignoring the message. *John answered them all, saying, "I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I is coming, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. ¹⁷His winnowing fork is in his hand, to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire. ¹⁸So with many other exhortations he preached good news to the people.* (Luke 3:16-18) I always smile when I read that last sentence after John's version of the "good" news.

Vs. 2-3 This really sounds like the fighting in Jerusalem just as Jesus returns. The *sun of righteousness* only appears here and it was used by Charles Wesley in "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." Since it is spelled "sun" and not "son," the meaning has to do with a coming day that will dawn on mankind. Oddly enough, there is a mention to that in Luke 1:76-79 (RSV). Zechariah the father of John the Baptist is speaking. *"And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, ⁷⁷to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, ⁷⁸through the tender mercy of our God, when the day shall dawn upon us from on high ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."* Jesus is that Light that dawns upon us.

V. 4 In a heart of faith the statues and rules were obeyed in faith, out of a heart of love and gratitude for God's salvation and deliverance. The first and great commandment of the Law was to love the Lord with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind. That love came from one's understanding of the Lord's love in saving them out of Egypt (and now Babylon) and for fulfilling the promise to Abraham. In the same way, our service and obedience as disciples flows first from our love for Christ and our gratitude that He saved us. Growing in our love for Him and His Word has to be our first priority or everything else becomes duty.

Vs. 5-6 So, is this John the Baptist? Read what Gabriel said to Zechariah regarding John in Luke 1:16-17 (March 13). He quotes a part of verse six. Jesus said that John fulfilled this ministry. Jesus said in Matthew 17:12, *"But I tell you that Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they pleased."* Still, there is enough ambiguity in what Jesus says to allow room to understand that Elijah really will come during the Tribulation and be one of those two witnesses.

These are the final words of the Old Testament. God wanted to make His point. In His love and compassion there is the warning of judgment. It would be unloving to withhold a valid warning. As disciples we can't afford to be unloving. Tomorrow we begin again in the good news. As we work in the harvest we carry the burden of knowing how important God's message truly is. It is worth it, now on earth, to forsake all else for the surpassing worth of following our Savior, knowing Him and knowing His closeness as we labor reaching the lost and making disciples. As those who have been saved to serve our Savior, we work until He calls us to rest and to witness the beginning of that coming day when life really begins as God meant it to be.

Revelation 22

Vs. 1-5 This scene is reminiscent of the Millennial Kingdom, but different. Some of this looks like a glorious memorial of salvation. *The water of life* goes through the city, not to the Dead Sea. I'll bet there is no more "Dead Sea" on the new earth. We have no idea what life will be like then, but will we need water of life? Will there be new life that will be born and then will these people be led to that water? Who knows? The leaves "were" previously for *the healing of nations*. Now they are for something else. Maybe they are just a remembrance of our salvation and healing.

V. 4 We will see His face and belong to Him, therefore the name.

V. 5 *Reign* is either a hint to other activities or a word that denotes a place of being secure. For example, after all of David's trials, he finally reigned. He came to a place of having the promise of God fulfilled.

Vs. 6-7 These are words of confirmation that this will take place, and when it begins it will happen quickly. Jesus told His disciples in Luke 12:40, "*You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*"

So what does it mean to *keep* these words? Jesus talked often about keeping His Word. I don't think it meant just obedience, but rather maintaining the mindset of what He was saying. For most Christians, obedience to Jesus means staying out of trouble or not stepping out of bounds. I think this misses Jesus' heart completely. I think what Jesus meant by "keep" is expressed in what He said to his disciples in Luke 12:35-36, "*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.*" I think that readiness and attitude is "keeping" his commandments. It is allowing His words to possess our hearts and our actions in this life. In that sense, following in the harvest is "keeping" His Word.

Vs. 8-9 John again is overcome. Notice again the word *keep*.

Vs. 10-11 John is supposed to publish this vision. Life will continue as it has on the earth, but another testimony has been added to what is available for men to consider and to help them make their choice.

Vs. 12-16 This is the final written personal appeal of the Savior and King to mankind.

V. 17 This is the call of *the Spirit and the Bride* (the church) to an unbelieving world to come. We are back to the beginning. Remember, this revelation was written to seven churches. The reason for the Spirit and the church calling is that the Spirit is the one who makes the appeal through those He indwells. Us! Notice again as in Revelation 21:6 and Isaiah 55, the appeal to those who are thirsty. As often as we have read references to Isaiah 55 in Revelation and in the Gospels, I think it would be a good chapter to memorize, along with Isaiah 53, of course.

Vs. 18-19 These are Jesus' words. Just as the Old Testament ends with a warning, so does the New Testament. These are solemn words. The stakes are eternal and the Savior, Judge and King has spoken. Let the earth take heed.

V. 20 This is Jesus again with John's *Amen* at the end.

V. 21 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The capstone to this earthy history of lost and tragic humanity. Darkness beyond imagination was pierced by His life, His light and His grace.

Paul, the disciple and disciple maker, said to Timothy in those dark days before he died at the hands of the Romans, working in the harvest, *You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* (2 Tim. 2:1) The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ is our strength as we follow Him in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples, until our Lord returns. Amen. Here is the expression of that grace that should make us strong as we follow in the harvest.

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them. (Eph. 2:4-10)

Psalm 150

Vs. 1-6 What a fitting end to the year and to all of our reading about the Lord's return. *Praise the Lord!*

Proverbs 31:25-31

I have to wonder why Proverbs ends with this description of a godly woman, especially when Proverbs began with a man telling his son not to be a fool. Maybe the way the Lord keeps us men from becoming fools, in addition to His Word, is by giving us good, godly wives. 😊

Again, I don't think this is super woman. I know if this was written to men, I'd read it and not feel too good about myself. I don't think that is God's intent. Verse 30 is what I would focus on. Proverbs began with the fear of the Lord being the beginning of wisdom, and it ends with the fear of the Lord leading to a fulfilled life and service to those closest to us. Amen.

Following are these six charts:

“A Comparison of Daniel 2; 7; and 8,” [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 1356.

“The Three Returns from Exile,” [The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 652

“Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets,” [The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 513.

“Chronology of the Postexilic Period,” [The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 654

“Dates of Key Events in Haggai's and Zechariah's Time,” [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 1546.

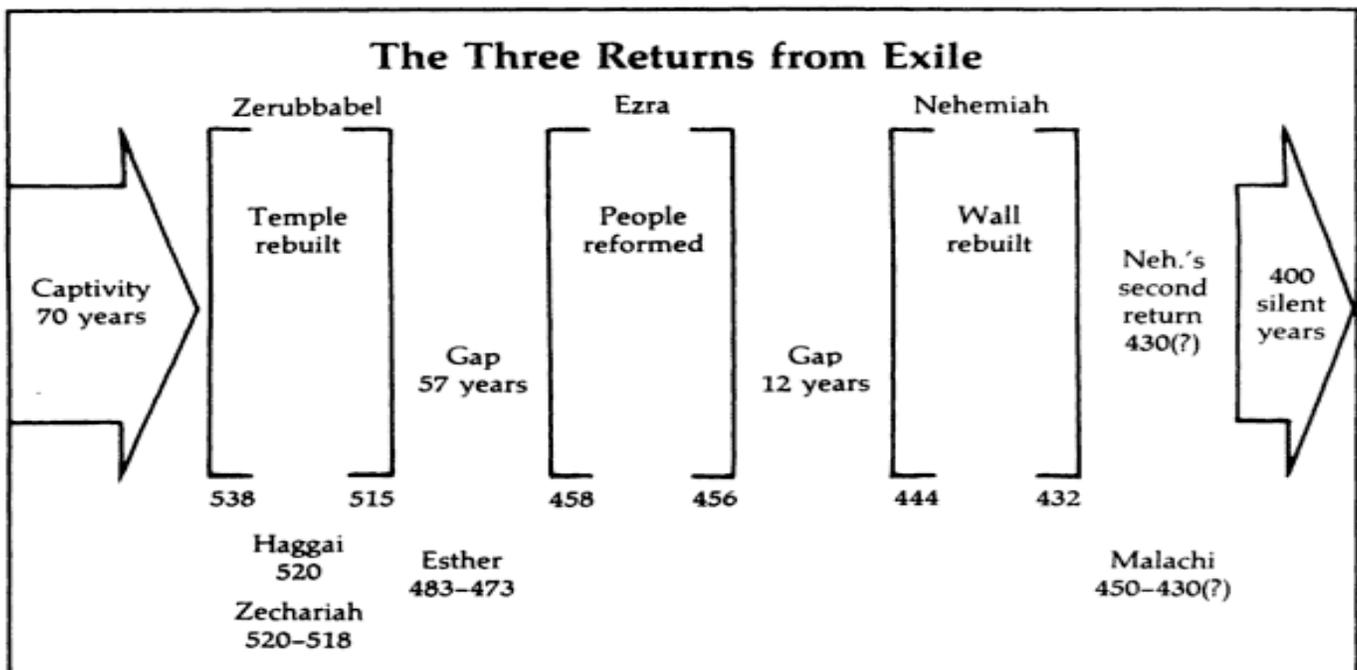
“Zechariah's Eight Night Visions,” [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#), p. 1549.

One map:

“Route from Megiddo to Jerusalem”

A Comparison of Daniel 2; 7; and 8

Daniel 2 Metals	Daniel 7 Animals	Daniel 8 Animals	Nations
Gold	Winged lion	—	Babylon
Silver	Bear	Ram	Medo-Persia
Bronze	Winged leopard	Goat	Greece
Iron (and iron and clay)	Beast	—	Rome



Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets

JUDAH

Kings*	Dates	Years
Rehoboam	931-913	17
Abijah	913-911	3
Asa	911-870	41
Coregency† with Jehoshaphat	873-870	(3)
Jehoshaphat	873-848	25
Coregency with Jehoram	853-848	(5)
Jehoram OBADIAH**	848-841	8
Ahaziah‡	841	1
Queen Athaliah‡	841-835	6
Joash‡ JOEL**	835-796	40
Amaziah‡	796-767	29
Azariah's vice-regency under Amaziah	790-767	(23)
Azariah (Uzziah)	790-739	52
Coregency with Jotham	750-739	(11)
Jotham	750-735	16
Ahaz's vice-regency under Jotham	744-735	(9)
Coregency of Jotham with Ahaz	735-732	4
Ahaz	732-715	16
Hezekiah's vice-regency under Ahaz	729-715	(14)
Hezekiah	715-686	29
Manasseh's vice-regency under Hezekiah	697-686	(11)
Manasseh NAHUM	697-642	55
Amon‡	642-640	2
Josiah ZEPHANIAH	640-609	31
Jehoahaz	609	1/4
Jehoiakim HABAKKUK	609-598	11
Jehoiachin	598-597	1/4
Zedekiah	597-586	11

ISRAEL

Dynasty‡	Kings	Dates	Years
1st Dynasty	Jeroboam I	931-910	22
-	Nadab‡	910-909	2
2nd Dynasty	Baasha	909-886	24
-	Elah‡	886-885	2
3rd Dynasty	Zimri	885	7 days
-	Tibni	885-880	6
-	Overlapping reign† with Omri	885-880	(6)
4th Dynasty	Omri	885-874	12
-	E L I J A H Ahab	874-853	22
-	Ahaziah	853-852	2
-	Jehoram (Joram)‡	852-841	12
5th Dynasty	E L I S H A Jehu	841-814	28
-	Jehoahaz	814-798	17
-	Jehoash (Joash)	798-782	16
-	Coregency with Jeroboam II	793-782	(11)
-	Jeroboam II JONAH AMOS	793-753	41
-	Zechariah‡	753-752	1/2
6th Dynasty	H O S E A Shallum‡	752	1/12
7th Dynasty	Menahem	752-742	10
-	Overlapping reign with Pekah	752-742	(10)
-	Pekahiah‡	742-742	(2)
-	Overlapping reign with Pekah	742-740	(2)
8th Dynasty	Pekah‡	752-732	20
9th Dynasty	Hoshea	732-722	9

*Includes one queen (Athaliah).

†In a coregency the kings ruled together; in overlapping reigns they reigned separately; in a vice-regency a son ruled with his father in a subordinate position.

‡These kings and one queen were assassinated.

§A dynasty is a succession of rulers who are members of the same family or a single ruler of a family different from those before and after him. (The kings of Judah were all of one dynasty because they were all descendants of David.)

**Evangelical scholars differ on the dates of Obadiah and Joel. Some place them at later dates (see the Introductions to Joel and Obad.).

Note: In some kings' reigns the dates (e.g., Rehoboam, 931-913), when subtracted, may vary from the number in the "Years" column for that king. This is because the beginning and ending dates for a given king may include only portions of those years in the Gregorian calendar.

The dates of the kings are adapted from Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1963.

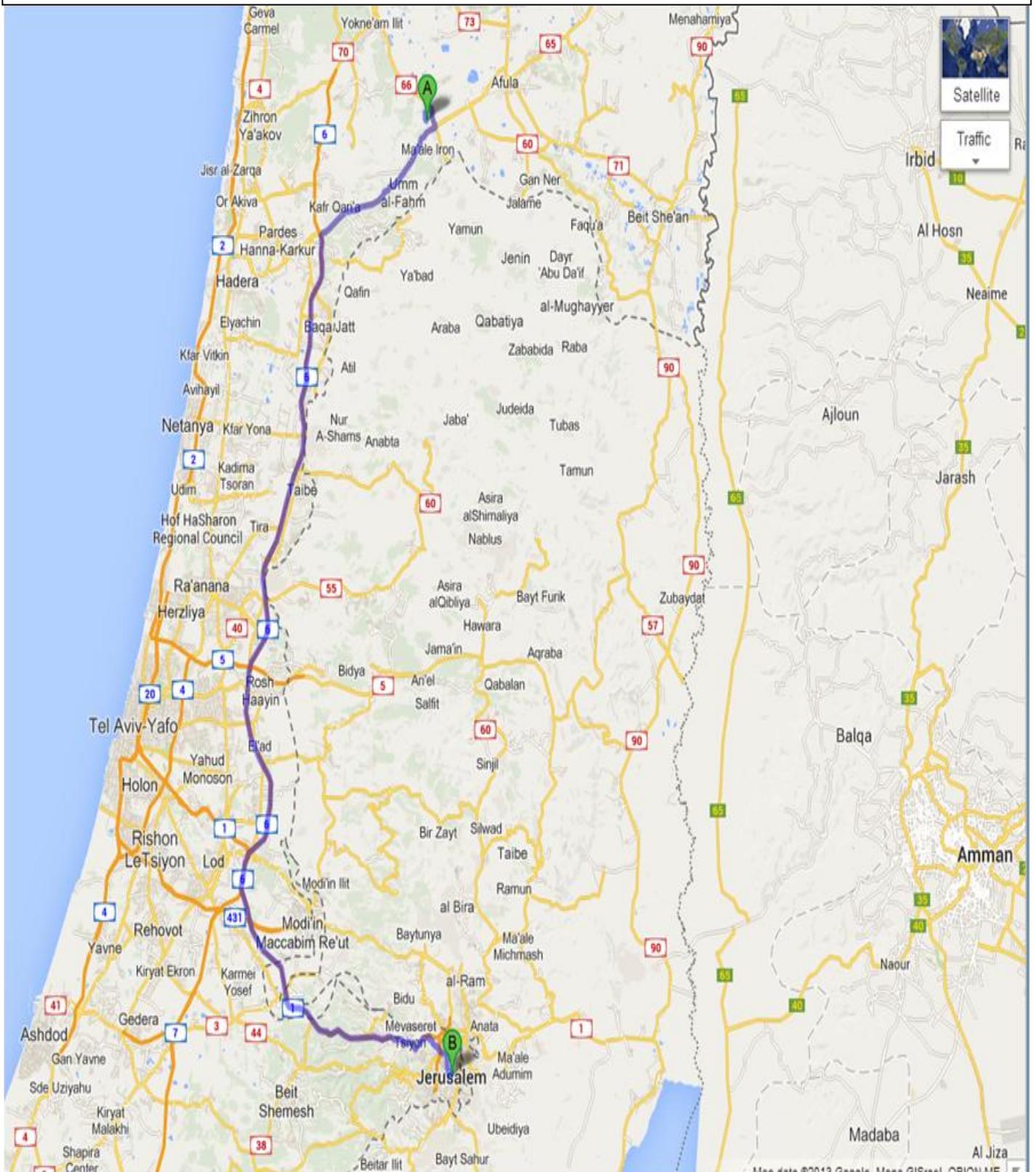
Chronology of the Postexilic Period

Persian Kings	Dates of Their Reigns	Biblical Events	Scripture References	Dates
Cyrus	559–530 B.C.	Edict of Cyrus for the return	Ezra 1:1-4	538 B.C.
		<i>First return</i> of 49,897 exiles, under Zerubbabel (to build the temple)	Ezra 2	538
		The altar and temple foundation built	Ezra 3:1-4:5	536
Cambyeses	530–522			
Smerdis	522			
Darius I	521–486	Haggai prophesied	Book of Haggai	520
		Zechariah prophesied	Book of Zechariah	520–518
		The temple completed	Ezra 5–6	515
Xerxes (Ahasuerus)	485–465	Accusation against Judah	Ezra 4:6	486
		Esther became queen	Esther 2:17	479
Artaxerxes I (Artashasta)	464–424	Artaxerxes stopped the rebuilding of Jerusalem	Ezra 4:7-23	ca. 464–458
		<i>Second return</i> of 4,000–5,000 exiles, under Ezra (to beautify the temple and reform the people)	Ezra 7–10	458
		<i>Third return</i> of exiles, under Nehemiah (to build the walls of Jerusalem)	Book of Nehemiah	444
		Nehemiah's second return	Nehemiah 13:6	ca. 430
		Malachi prophesied	Book of Malachi	450–430 (?)

Dates of Key Events in Haggai's and Zechariah's Time

August 29, 520 B.C.	Haggai's first sermon (Hag. 1:1-11; Ezra 5:1)
September 21, 520	Temple building resumed (Hag. 1:12-15; Ezra 5:2)
October 17, 520	Haggai's second sermon (Hag. 2:1-9)
October-November 520	Zechariah's ministry begun (Zech. 1:1-6)
December 18, 520	Haggai's third and fourth sermons (Hag. 2:10-23)
February 15, 519	Zechariah's eight visions (Zech. 1:7-6:8)
December 7, 518	Delegation from Bethel (Zech. 7)
March 12, 515	Temple dedicated (Ezra 6:15-18)

Route from Megiddo to Jerusalem



Zechariah's Eight Night Visions

Vision	Reference	Meaning
The Red-horse Rider among the Myrtles	1:7-17	God's anger against the nations and blessing on restored Israel
The Four Horns and the Four Craftsmen	1:18-21	God's judgment on the nations that afflict Israel
The Surveyor with a Measuring Line	Chapter 2	God's future blessing on restored Israel
The Cleansing and Crowning of Joshua the High Priest	Chapter 3	Israel's future cleansing from sin and reinstatement as a priestly nation
The Golden Lampstand and the Two Olive Trees	Chapter 4	Israel as the light to the nations under Messiah, the King-Priest
The Flying Scroll	5:1-4	The severity and totality of divine judgment on individual Israelities
The Woman in the Ephah	5:5-11	The removal of national Israel's sin of rebellion against God
The Four Chariots	6:1-8	Divine judgment on Gentile nations