

READING NOTES – JULY

The One Year Bible (ESV)

JULY 1

This looks like a good day to celebrate. You've completed six months of reading your one-year Bible. Sounds like a good day for a Frappuccino© or a Chiller. Keeping up on the Bible is the goal, not these reading notes. The Lord will bless your effort and the Spirit will give you what you need to follow the Lord in the harvest.

2 Kings 18:13-19:37

These are two great chapters of the Bible. As disciples we need to be inspired by these. We need to be inspired by King Hezekiah, a great lover of God, leading his nation in the darkest of times facing an unstoppable world power. There are probably a million ways to apply what we have here, but there is one application that is going to repeat again and again: When God allows us to be pushed into a corner where there is no hope, He might be on the verge of giving a deliverance that is not only for us, but is also a sign for everyone else. Hezekiah is facing total annihilation by Assyria. Unknown to him, soon all nations would be praising the God of Israel and sending Hezekiah "Thank-you" notes.

2 Kings 18:13-37

Vs. 13-16 Notice that Hezekiah tried to avoid a fight. The reason Hezekiah said he had sinned is that the local nations, including Judah, had banded together to resist Assyria. Now, all of these nations were either conquered or they had withdrawn. Egypt was a weaker world power and unreliable. Hezekiah and Jerusalem were standing alone.

Vs. 17-18 Apparently the Assyrians were not happy with the tons of precious metals they had just received. They wanted everything and were ready for a long siege of Jerusalem. Hezekiah and his leaders had already anticipated this.

Vs. 19-25 This is the intimidation part of Rabshakeh's speech. As you read, notice how often the Rabshakeh tries to use a religious argument to defeat the morale of the people. It will happen three more times.

Vs. 26-27 I'll bet they wished afterward that they hadn't asked Rabshakeh not to speak in Hebrew.

Vs. 28-35 But now that he was excited, Rabshakeh revealed more of his disdain for Hezekiah and for the Lord.

This morning I was reading over the temptation of Jesus and realized for the first time that the temptation to throw Himself off the temple was really based on God's promise of help to Jesus. Satan was trying to get Jesus not to wait for the Father to help Him, but to force the promise and get help "now." In essence Satan was telling Jesus not to wait, but to press the "easy" button. Now that is a temptation I can relate to. One of the hardest things we do as disciples is to hope in God and wait on Him in the harvest. And the temptation to "give up" doesn't come from the lost, but from believers. It might come from believers who are not living for Christ in the harvest, telling us that we're being impractical or whatever sounds like it might be from God, but has nothing to do with living to glorify the Father by bearing much fruit and so proving to be His disciples. It might also be coming from disciples who don't understand the irregular way God is leading us in the harvest. This is what will happen to Paul today in Acts. No one will be expecting the Lord to lead a choice servant like Paul into such grave trouble.

I'll bet Hezekiah was tempted too. That offer of "a chicken in every pot" that the Rabshakeh was making must have sounded good. Instead, against all reason, they hoped in God and waited.

Vs. 36-37 Notice the obedience.

2 Kings 19

Vs. 1-4 This is a godly man leading the people in worship and fasting and crying out. This is how the northern kingdom and its kings and people should have come to the Lord. That's what all those miracles were meant to encourage.

Vs. 5-7 Isaiah said that God did indeed hear. The faith here is incredible. They are still surrounded, but they understood Isaiah to be a prophet of God and his words were the Word of God. Imagine the contrast here to what happened in Israel for years during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha.

Vs. 8-13 Rabshakeh should have left well enough alone. This turn of events must have made him think he would lose face and that the people in Jerusalem "might think" this was from God. So he decided to put his arrogance and ignorance in writing, just to make sure everyone knew.

Vs. 14-19 We haven't seen this kind of faith and godliness since David. Close your eyes and try to visualize what this might have looked like, the king coming before the Holy Place dressed in sackcloth, spreading the letter out on the ground, himself lying on the ground before that Holy Place that held the bread of God's provision, the lamp of God's presence and leading, and the incense of prayers constantly being heard by God. Hezekiah realized that just beyond the veil were two golden cherubim, and between them was the ark of the covenant, but that this only represented the reality of God upon His throne, carefully listening to every word that Hezekiah was saying.

V. 19 This is amazing and inspiring. Hezekiah, in this darkness, had a glimpse of God's redemptive purpose.

V. 20 God hears prayer.

Vs. 21-28 Much of this sounds like the book of Isaiah, obviously. It also sounds like what God said to Pharaoh, *But for this purpose I have raised you up, to show you my power, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth.* (Ex. 9:16) This is how God uses the arrogant.

Notice God's commitment to Zion and to Jerusalem. In 100 years God would have these places destroyed because of Judah's disobedience, but God promised Solomon that His eyes would always look there and that His name would someday dwell there forever.

V. 28 This reference to hooks is referring to how the Assyrians used hooks to lead away their captives.

Vs. 29-31 After this, this small remnant of Judah would prosper. Even though the people hadn't been able to work the fields, God would supply what they needed. He would make the land produce enough food all by itself. That was the sign, and really, that would be nothing compared to providing manna for forty years.

Vs. 32-34 God is still responding to His promise to David.

Vs. 35-37 Assyria was no longer a world power. In a moment, God broke them. Years earlier He had done this to Egypt, and they never recovered. There is rejoicing among nations; there is freedom; there is a vacuum of power in the world. All eyes are on Israel and their God. And people of all nations are beginning to send boxes of chocolates to Hezekiah.

Oh yeah. And again, God opened windows in heaven to supply the needs of His people. When the few survivors of the Assyrian army awoke, found the dead and left (fled?) for home, they left a tent city full of supplies, food and precious metals (money). For Hezekiah and the people it would have been like a super Wal-Mart. God was taking care of His people and because they followed, ironically, there was "a chicken in every pot," compliments of the Assyrians.

Being moved to the brink of despair spiritually and emotionally is not fun, but God does that for His glory and to teach us what we could not learn in any other way. As disciples following Christ in the harvest, we need to bear the weight of faith, showing to others what it means to have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and who saves those who believe.

Acts 21:1-16

Vs. 1-6 Verses like v. 4 have led people to believe that it wasn't God's will for Paul to go to Jerusalem. Assuming for now that it was in fact God's will for Paul to go (we'll find proof positive in Ch. 23), why do you think the Spirit was telling people to tell Paul that trouble was before him? I don't think the Spirit was telling them Paul shouldn't go, but the Spirit was telling them that Paul was facing some very hard times. This reminds me of the sons of the prophets telling Elisha that he was about to lose Elijah.

Vs. 8-9 So we meet Philip again. Notice the words that Luke uses. Philip was *one of the seven*. In the background you can almost hear the theme song of the "Magnificent Seven."

It is interesting that Paul was a part of the mob that killed *one of the seven*.

Vs. 10-11 What I learn here is that if a guy named Agabus comes into the room, I'll definitely tell him to stay away from my stuff.

What's interesting here is that the Holy Spirit is saying this will happen. It is not an "if-then" proposition. Paul was definitely going; this was definitely happening. It was God's will. So why is the Holy Spirit doing this?

Vs. 12-15 Paul was used greatly by God. Knowing Paul, because of what the grace of God made him, Paul was actually a great man. Imagine the shock to the church to have one of your heroes put on ice, in jail, for over three years on some silly technicality of the law and some political corruption. You could imagine that people would be discouraged and churches would be shocked. Paul's opponents would say, "See, we told you." But the Spirit is warning the spiritually perceptive, that His plan in using Paul is about to change. I think the Spirit is getting everyone ready. This is not Paul's mistake. It is God's will and plan.

V. 15 This guy, Mnason (whose name appears to be missing an important vowel), is from Cyprus, just like Barnabas. It was the believers from Cyprus who first began to share the gospel with Gentiles. This would be someone in Jerusalem with whom Paul could feel at home. As we'll see, Paul even had relatives in Jerusalem, but they might not have been believers or sympathetic to how Paul had "thrown his life away."

As disciples, sometimes I think we second guess what happens to others, as if we are God and know better. God's will doesn't always look smooth and straight. His will for us, for a week, a year or a decade of our lives, doesn't necessarily have to follow our plan or have to make sense to everyone else. We only need to follow Christ in the harvest, wherever that harvest is, whatever the field might look like. We draw near to God every day bearing our cross. If that's all we know of His will, that's a plan and all we need to do.

Psalms 149

I know it is easy to identify with the "praising" part of this psalm and not really endorse the "judgment" part of the psalm. I wonder if the people in Jerusalem who heard the "Rabshakeh Rant"© would have understood both parts of this psalm?

Vs. 1-4 With the reference to *a new song* and to Zion rejoicing in its king, you could imagine this being the day when Jesus walks into Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom to reign forever.

Vs. 5-9 Notice that the *godly* are mentioned three times in this psalm. The reference to the *two-edged swords* does sound like the judgment of God at the end of the age.

I would say that vs. 7-9 give this psalm a very prophetic, forward look to the judgment of the nations at the coming of Christ.

As disciples, we need to remember that a part of the gospel is judgment. It is not only love's privilege to make an offer of redemption, but it is also love's duty to warn of impending judgment. And judgment will come and we will not only welcome it when it does, but we will be a part of that judgment.

1 Corinthians 6:2-3 *Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? ³Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more, then, matters pertaining to this life!*

Proverbs 18:8

The words of the Rabshakeh were meant to divide and go deep. He said that God had sent him. He said God didn't care. He said life could be good by following him. As a pastor and disciple, after all these years, being on both sides of whispers and gossip, I think it is always a bad thing when this happens in a church. If you can't talk openly, sin is around the corner. If I feel I need to whisper, I might need to leave. We are here to follow Christ in the harvest and see the lost reached and disciples made. Focusing on being a disciple who makes disciples can, itself, take away a lot of reasons to whisper. For the sake of Christ and His work through us, we are told to be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. If we are whispering at church, there might be something wrong that needs to be addressed. If it can't be addressed and the Lord has made it important to us, we might need to leave before we cause upset and division.

JULY 2

2 Kings 20:1-22:2

2 Kings 20

It should seem unusual that suddenly we have three whole chapters having to do with Hezekiah. We have had little detail regarding kings like Asa and Uzziah, but here we are being treated to some in-depth treatment of Hezekiah. A person's importance, for good or for bad, is often signaled by the amount of space they receive. Hezekiah was a great king; but his world and his faith got "rocked," and he slipped and fell. This story is here for us as disciples so that we don't slip and fall too.

Vs. 1-11 This appears to have happened just after God delivered Jerusalem from Assyria. Look at 2 Kings 18:13. So this is probably happening later that year. This should have been the time to celebrate. The prospect of dying seems to have challenged Hezekiah's faith. Also, if this happened in Hezekiah's 14th year and he was 25 when he became king, he was now dying as a young man of 39. Many people would find this to be a bitter turn of affairs. Many of us would do the same thing if we were in the same circumstances. The point is, as strong as our faith and walk is as disciples, we don't know how something unexpected might hit us. For one person, impending death doesn't shake them. For another person it shakes them to their foundation. It could be anything - death, threat, financial ruin, sexual temptation, the need for recognition, money, constant aggravation with something, loss of a job, loss of someone we love. In the kings of Judah, we see almost all of these. How these things challenged or ruined their faith are recorded, so that we can learn from them.

V. 3 Not to judge, but I think Hezekiah thought he deserved to live.

V. 8 Why did Hezekiah have to ask for a sign? Did that show how precious his life was to him?

V. 11 I don't know much about physics, but unless this was a trick with angels holding flashlights or mirrors, God did something pretty amazing here. I'll bet He didn't even break a sweat and He didn't break the world.

Vs. 12-15 There may have been several reasons for this visit. Now, it could have been that they cared for Hezekiah, but it might be too that the sun going backwards really got their attention. We will see that the Babylonians were interested in heavenly signs. The other reason these men came to visit Hezekiah was because the Assyrian army had been decimated in trying to attack Jerusalem. They were not only thankful, but they were kind of scouting out the territory. Babylon would become the first great empire in that part of the world. Jerusalem was a long way from Babylon, but it was located strategically between Egypt, Syria and Assyria.

V. 14 Up to this point, we don't have any idea that something might be wrong. In 2 Chronicles 32:23-31 we'll see that Hezekiah really tripped and fell here. What is written in 2 Chronicles ought to strike some fear into any serious disciple.

Vs. 16-19 Although this might seem harmless, we know from other accounts of this event that Hezekiah's words in v. 19 indicate that something was wrong. He was betraying the next generation for peace and comfort in his life. This is something for us to learn. God allowed him 15 more years, so he died at 54.

2 Kings 21

V. 1 Note that Manasseh was 12 when he began to reign. How many years did God grant to Hezekiah when he turned to the wall and wept bitterly? That's right, there would have been no Manasseh if he had died. I heard Walter Martin mention this in a sermon and then he broke into a Yiddish accent and said, "Sometimes, better you should die."

Vs. 1-16 Manasseh brought a curse of judgment upon Judah that God would not forgive. Ironically, Manasseh was the longest reigning king of Israel, northern or southern kingdom. How unbelievable. How tragic. And as much as we have here that is said about Manasseh, there is still more to be said, especially about the shedding of innocent blood. Tradition has it that Manasseh put Isaiah to death by cutting him in two. A magic trick gone bad? The innocent blood was from those who spoke out against him.

In order for Manasseh to reign the longest of all the kings, 55 years, he had to have been a good king, a good administrator. They had prosperity and he was likable. Ok, he killed all of his opponents and anyone who didn't see things his way, filling Jerusalem with innocent blood. Success and having "a way with people," in this case, brought an incredibly hard judgment from God.

But, in 2 Chronicles 33, we'll learn something about Manasseh, really about God, that will blow you away.

Vs. 19-26 Now, it should be no surprise that Amon was evil. His father was a true piece of work, but the story is a little more complicated. What we don't see here is that Amon ruled during his father's absence (Manasseh was on "vacation" in Babylon), and when his father returned, some things changed. Amon un-did the changes and that is why he was killed.

2 Kings 22:1-2

It is funny that these two verses are here today. Maybe The One Year Bible editors wanted to cheer us up. There is a lot to say about Josiah and some of it is supposition on my part. So, bear with me.

Notice how old Josiah is when he began to reign, and what it says about him in v. 2. How did that happen? Possibly his mother, right? Now, go back a little over these numbers. How old would Josiah have been when his grandfather Manasseh died? Now, it might be a good idea to

read 2 Chronicles 33:10-23. Something happened to Manasseh which he couldn't pass on to his son, because Amon was already old and set in the ways of his father; but Manasseh might have been able to pass his newfound convictions on to his grandson. I think this is what happened. I think God used the worst king, to influence the best king.

Tomorrow we'll read about Josiah who, in my opinion, was the godliest king of Israel. The Spirit says there was no king like Josiah. Josiah is the only king of whom it is said that he sought the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might. Now David was unique and Hezekiah was unique and both were godly. The context of each of these men defined their unique faith and godliness. Josiah's context is also very unique. As we'll see tomorrow, his challenge was completely hopeless. God said so. Still, he served with an energy and vision that were amazing. Just before the storm struck, Josiah would be a light of grace and would be used by God to save Israel during the exile and to preserve God's redemptive purpose in Israel. It will take a couple of months before all of the pieces fall together, but it will amaze you. You don't get this stuff out of a book or a Sunday school class or even a seminary class. It is the result of reading your Bible year after year after year.

The Lord has put these records here to strengthen our hearts in the harvest. Even an evil man like Manasseh was shown grace and responded, and the small effect of his repentance grew. The Lord knew we would need to read these year after year to inspire us with hope in the harvest. When we feel like giving up, the lives of these men tell us that God's grace is amazing and to keep following our Lord and making disciples.

Acts 21:17-36

Vs. 17-26 Notice that the church in Jerusalem was very heavily burdened by believers who still regarded the law as binding. This might have been more cultural than theological, but the impact was very oppressive. We tend to think that "liberalism" is the greatest threat to Christianity, but in the NT, it was radical conservatism.

If you want an interesting note on what is about to happen here, look at what Paul says to the Christians in Rome in Romans 15:30-31. He knew what was possible and this prayer was answered...kind of.

Some people think Paul made a mistake by following James' advice, but Paul did keep vows. In 1 Corinthians 9:19ff Paul expressed his freedom to fit in when necessary for the gospel. Knowing Paul, this was not wrong or a mistake. In Acts 23, we'll see this was all according to God's plan. It didn't matter whether Paul zigged or zagged, he was on his way to bear witness to the Romans. And it began here.

V. 27 Wouldn't you know it, Paul was almost done and Boom! Someone saw him. Remember, God waited until the last minute to free Peter. Now He waited until the last minute to have Paul spotted. It was God's design of this situation that Paul wasn't seen until the end of the week, meaning that any charges against him wouldn't be credible. He had worshiped like this for a week without a problem.

Vs. 28-36 In Texas they have "flash flooding." In Jerusalem they had "flash rioting."

V. 29 Because of the political power of the Jews, they were granted the right to kill anyone, including a Roman citizen, if that person profaned the temple. Trophimus never went in, but these Jews from Ephesus saw him and assumed the worst.

V. 31 The Romans had a garrison overlooking the temple grounds; and, like the fire department, they were always ready for a riot. They definitely earned their pay this day, saving Paul's life and actually having to carry him above their heads like he was a rock star. How ironic. The people were beating Paul, so they arrested and chained him. You wonder why Paul didn't begin to speak

right away, but I assume having been beaten, he was still in shock. The Romans assumed he was just a radical Israelite or an Egyptian rebel. Paul wasn't just any radical. He was a Roman citizen.

As we watch Paul the disciple, we learn what it means to abide in Christ. Paul completely submitted himself into the Lord's hands with his focus set on fulfilling the mission Jesus had given him in the harvest. I'll bet it felt good when they stopped hitting and kicking him. But as we'll read in 2 Corinthians, Paul was used to suffering for His Lord in the harvest.

Psalm 150

Can you believe it? Today we are reading the last chapter in The Psalms. When was the last time you read all 150 psalms. Reward yourself with something special!

Just a thought here: If you wanted to use this for a devotional in a group, you can find some different "points" very easily. What follows the words *praise him*? You should get three groups. This is also a good Bible study.

V. 1 This is where to praise Him.

V. 2 This is why we should praise Him.

Vs. 3-5 This is how we should praise Him.

V. 6 To boil it all down and to complete The Psalms, everything should just *praise the Lord*.

Proverbs 18:9-10

There are lots of people who work hard and live on earth never knowing what's going on. I would understand these two verses together as "working for the Lord." Jesus said, *Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.* (Luke 11:23) There is no neutrality in this dark time of harvest. If we know what is happening in the world, we need to be in the harvest. To know and not to follow Christ in the harvest is what brings ruin. To live and stand in the name of the Lord is what brings a life in line with reality, and though it might not be an easy life working in the harvest, it is still the safest place on earth as we follow Christ.

JULY 3

2 Kings 22:3-23:30

Today we will read about the godliest king of either kingdom - my take on Josiah. It will be said in 2 Kings 23:25 that there was no king *who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might*, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any arise after him. Josiah will have no black mark against him. The circumstance of his death, I think, was just God getting him out of the way. He had accomplished his purpose. In all of this, there is the wonder of what happened to Manasseh at the end of his life. There is the wonder of how Josiah could be the best king of all, as the grandson of the most evil king and the son of an evil king. And finally you have to wonder what the point of Josiah's reform was, since after his death Judah totally reverted back to idolatry and apostasy. You can wonder now, but when we get down the road and talk about this again, you'll see how God used his life and you might be filled with wonder. It teaches you never to give up and to keep following whether it makes sense or not. Honoring God always makes sense.

2 Kings 22:3-20

Vs. 1-7 So, how old is Josiah? That he had been following the Lord to this point is pretty amazing, considering what is about to happen. According to what we'll read in 2 Chronicles 34, Josiah also had red letter years in the 8th and 12th years of his reign. This, however, would be the most important year in Josiah's life; and since he would reign for 31 years, the next 13 years would also be pretty intense.

I think Josiah's interest wasn't in rebuilding the temple for looks, as much as I think he might have been sensing the need to worship God as God had prescribed. We read in 2 Chronicles 34:3 that when Josiah was 16, "still a child," he began to seek the Lord. I think he wanted to worship in the temple. If that was the case, God would help him with a little present.

Vs. 8-10 As they were rummaging around, they found a copy of *the Book of the Law*, the Bible. Now think for a minute and imagine what this means. It means that up until now, they did not have a copy of the first five books of the Bible. Josiah had never heard the law before. Considering what Josiah had already done as recorded in 2 Chronicles 34, that is pretty amazing. Manasseh must have died believing he had destroyed the last existing copy of the books of Moses. Apparently he had made a point of getting rid of the law. Imagine the guilty conscience he must have had as he died, especially if you realize he had changed. I wonder who the hero was who hid the scrolls.

Vs. 11-13 So, was this for show or was it real? We'll find out in a couple verses that Josiah did more than tear his clothes. I wish we had this kind of reaction as we work in the harvest, knowing the offer God is making and knowing the storm that is approaching for every person on this planet.

Vs. 14-20 At this time there were other prophets, but I think there was a sense of urgency here and this prophetess lived in the city. Notice that along with the urgency, Josiah sent five of the leaders of Judah.

V. 17 Notice the end of this verse. The sins of Manasseh brought irrevocable judgment against Judah. So, what would be the point of anything, if you knew that regardless of what you did, judgment was coming? Regardless of the reforms Josiah made, everything was promised to end in ruin. That sort of sounds like the harvest we're working in as disciples of Jesus. Josiah is such a cool guy in this respect and a model disciple maker. He had no idea how God would use him.

Vs. 18-19 I've got to admit that it is a privilege to read these verses with you. I can't remember what year it was when I first read them, reading my one-year Bible, but I have printed these as a plaque on my wall and they have been a constant encouragement to me to work hard in the harvest, regardless of how disappointing and dark it gets. God only asks for our love, faith and obedience in following. The results are totally His.

We know the Word of God against this place in which we live today. Does it move us to grief and tears? It moved our Lord to give all that He was for our salvation. This is the heart we need as disciples following our Lord in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples, who make disciples until our time is up and until He returns. We need to leave it all in the harvest, following and imitating our Savior.

V. 20 So, Josiah could have kicked back and relaxed because he would have peace. This is what Hezekiah thought. But this is why Josiah was so much better. Because of his love for God and for God's people, Josiah went "nuts" in a good spiritual way. Fighting an impossible fight, he would work like no other and appear to lose, but God used Josiah to save Israel.

2 Kings 23:1-30

Vs. 1-3 One thing you can be sure of, Josiah completely obeyed everything. This also would have meant that he wrote his own copy of the law and read it daily. I'm sure, with only one copy in existence, he also had the Levites making several copies. It seems that all of this is Josiah. He called the meeting; he read the book, and he made the covenant.

Vs. 4-14 There were no more offerings on the high places. Josiah not only stopped all of this, but he desecrated the spots to make sure they were "unholy" and would never be used again. As I read this I wonder why they hadn't removed some of this stuff earlier. It must have been that

everyone just grew up with it and assumed it was for the worship of God. Manasseh was king for 54 years. That would be a lifetime for many people. They saw stuff and may have just thought it belonged there. As Joshua and the priests and Levites went through the temple and the city, they must have questioned every statue and memorial for its meaning.

V. 13 Notice who made these altars: the wisest man in the world, the same king who built and dedicated the temple. With his skill as a builder, I'll bet they looked pretty. And in all of these years since his death, none of the kings (not even Hezekiah) destroyed them. Note that Chemosh and Milcom were gods to which you offered babies. Ashtoreth was the girlfriend of Baal and this was sexual worship. Probably the unwanted babies from that worship were offered to these other gods.

It should be noted that all of these reforms and cleansings took time. The area around Jerusalem had to have happened in the 18th year, otherwise Josiah would not have held the Passover. The other reforms, like the ones in Samaria, could have taken place over the next 12 years.

Vs. 15-20 If you remember back to 1 Kings 13, this had been foretold by the "man of God."

Vs. 17-18 This is why the lying prophet wanted to be buried with the man of God, so that his bones wouldn't be taken up and burned.

Vs. 21-23 Imagine the honor given to Josiah here. None of the kings before him celebrated a Passover like this one, and that includes David and Solomon. This doesn't mean that the other Passovers Josiah celebrated weren't good, but that this Passover established a sense of devotion to God that had been lost in Israel for hundreds of years and through all of the kings of Israel.

Now, we haven't read this yet, but Hezekiah also celebrated a Passover that was renown, in that no Passover like it had been celebrated since Solomon. When you read what Hezekiah did, it will impress you and it was a truly godly event and effect. The fact that Josiah's Passover goes back to a godly man like Samuel speaks for its deeper devotion. Josiah didn't have the resources Hezekiah had. Josiah had just found the Bible and was still trying to rebuild Judah after decades of his grandfather's evil influence. Also, Hezekiah didn't have priests who were consecrated to lead the people in worship. Somehow, Josiah had everyone ready.

V. 25 I have to believe this is saying that Josiah was the godliest king Israel ever had. When Jesus was challenged regarding the first commandment of all, Jesus cited Deuteronomy 6:4-5. Josiah is the only king this is said of. Yet, his effort will look "wasted," but it wasn't.

Vs. 26-27 Judgment was coming, no matter what.

Vs. 28-30 We'll have to read the account of this in 2 Chronicles 35. It is the only instance of "foolishness" on Josiah's part, but honestly, vs. 26 and 27 tell you the clock was already ticking and this battle was just a way for God to take Josiah out of the equation. God retired Josiah. His work was done. Now the judgment would roll.

Acts 21:37-22:16

It is unfortunate that this speech by Paul is carried into tomorrow. As you read this, it seems like everyone was really listening to him. Think of everything Paul is saying here. There are no objections. Isn't that incredible? But tomorrow he'll say the "G" word and the dust (and stones) will fly. Good thing the Romans wore helmets.

Acts 21:37-40

Vs. 37-39 Apparently there was an Egyptian guy who had come to Jerusalem before this with 4000 men, stood on the Mount of Olives and declared that at his word the city would fall. All that happened was that a bunch of guys ran up the hill after them wearing shiny suits and holding shiny pointy things. The Romans had no sense of humor. The Egyptian got away, but on his

"wanted" poster it mentioned that he couldn't speak Greek. The tribune thought Paul was this guy until he heard Paul speak Greek. (The Bible Knowledge Commentary-NT, p. 417)

V. 40 When the crowd heard Paul speak in Hebrew or Aramaic they went silent.

Acts 22:1-16

V. 1 Apparently this is how Stephen also addressed the crowd before he died. Maybe Paul remembered this.

V. 2 A hush fell over the crowd. I tend to think that Paul was speaking high Hebrew.

Vs. 3-5 This describes Paul's upbringing and pedigree as a very zealous Jew. Verse 4 describes Paul as being very hard and violent in his anger against Christianity. He put men and women in prison. He'll say more the next couple of times he gives his testimony in Acts.

Vs. 6-11 It is interesting that there is no uproar here from the Jews. The Pharisees believed this kind of event was possible; in fact, tomorrow the Pharisees will say this and defend Paul.

Vs. 12-16 It is still amazing that they are listening to Paul.

Psalm 1

It is difficult to emotionally "agree" with spiritual truth when your life circumstances seem unsettled. But that is why God gives us His truth, to make us see beyond the physical and beyond our needs. When you read this psalm, change the words *man* and *righteous* and the pronouns to "follower of Christ," or "disciple."

Vs. 1-2 The blessed person both delights himself in the Lord and meditates on His Word *day and night*. That makes sense, but for most people it doesn't happen. You've heard me say that we are spiritually bi-polar and that we need our "meds" every day. We assent to our need for the Word, but we really don't believe it. God says we need to both delight in Him and to be in His Word daily.

On the other hand, do any of us really walk in the *counsel of the wicked* or stand in the *way of sinners* or sit in the *seat of scoffers*? The media definitely helps us do that. We watch stuff on TV that is insane. The thoughts of our own hearts as we face people, situations and fears qualifies us as sinners and scoffers. And many of us listen to our own hearts and react. The point is that we need to be totally immersed in the Lord's love and the Lord's Word.

Vs. 3-4 The contrast is interesting. Two people standing next to each other are experiencing the same trials of life. God makes all the difference. For us as disciples the thought of fruit is important and is promised if we are planted in the Lord.

Vs. 5-6 The wicked cannot stand before the Lord or avoid judgment because they don't know the way. By grace, we know the Lord and the Lord directs us on His way.

These are such simple verses, but they determine the most profound differences in the hearts and attitudes of people walking through this life, even among those who say they know the Lord.

Proverbs 18:11-12

Like Paul said, *When I am weak (and humble), then I am strong*. Paul was glad to admit his humility in Christ. As disciples, sometimes, it takes a long time to learn this. We do ministry in unseen arrogance until the Lord finally gets our attention and we see that it is His harvest, His power, His grace, and we are just unworthy servants who have done only what was required of us. All those things we depend upon, our youth, our health, our intelligence, our money, etc., sometimes get in the way of humility and finding ourselves in Christ, as His servants in the harvest.

JULY 4

Laura mentioned this morning that she found it kind of cool that on the day that Josiah found the Book of the Law, the psalm we read was Psalm 1, *but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night*. I found that kind of cool too.

Today we are given some very fast-paced history which will bring the kingdom of Judah and the book of 2 Kings to an end. There are many important events here that we will read about later.

2 Kings 23:31-25:30

2 Kings 23:31-37

Pharaoh Neco removed Jehoahaz as king, showing he was boss, and installed Eliakim as king, renaming him Jehoiakim, showing again that he was boss. Both of these guys were sons of Josiah and both were bad. Neco's decision had to do with having a king in Jerusalem who would support Egypt and Assyria against the rising Empire of Babylon. The city where this took place, Riblah, is about 200 miles north of Jerusalem. That was a long way to go to get fired. Later, Nebuchadnezzar would also set up his court in that city.

2 Kings 24

Vs. 1-7 We'll meet Jehoiakim later in Jeremiah. He was a grade "A" jerk and was buried without honor. He is important for one big reason. When he made peace with Nebuchadnezzar, Neb took some of the young men captive to train them to serve him as governors, etc.. This was 605 B.C. and it began the Babylonian captivity. The clock of the Babylonian captivity was now ticking. Daniel and his friends were taken at this point. What I've never noticed before is that Jehoiakim served Neb for three years. Those three years play a very important role later.

V. 7 Babylon defeated Egypt and now controlled everything down to the Brook of Egypt, which was a river in southern Palestine and still about 100 miles from the Nile. About 20 years in the future, Neb would lead his army into the heart of Egypt and defeat them.

Vs. 8-17 Now Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's son, was not a godly king. The last words of 2 Kings talk about him being taken out of prison in Babylon and being honored by Nebuchadnezzar's son, Evil-Merodach. Of course, you're wondering why you would name your kid, "Evil" anything. But the real question that you can't find answered here is why you have the story of Jehoiachin at the end of 2 Kings and also at the end of Jeremiah. You get the facts here but they mean little to you. I'll give you my thoughts when we get there.

Vs. 10-17 Nebuchadnezzar took Judah captive in three waves. The first wave which comprised only a few thousand was in 605 B.C. This was when Daniel & Co. were taken. This now would be the second wave, taking most of what was in the temple and about 12,000 of the skilled laborers. This was meant to have humbled the country, but not destroy it. If you take all the businessmen, soldiers and craftsmen, you don't leave much that a country can build on. The prophet Ezekiel was taken to Babylon in this second deportation.

As a note of interest, you have to ask yourself why Neb didn't just destroy Jerusalem and take everyone. It is because something happened in those three years that Jehoiakim served Neb, that gave him a reason not to want to destroy Jerusalem. If Jehoiakim had rebelled earlier, it would have made it tough on four Jewish boys, but once their three-year education was over, it didn't matter too much what Jehoiakim did, because Nebuchadnezzar had already had his first lesson in learning the fear of God, literally. The grace of God was working internationally before this second deportation even took place. We'll see this in great detail when we read Daniel.

This isn't something you get from reading commentaries. It is what the Spirit gives you, if you read your Bible year after year and are willing to be curious.

Vs. 18-20 Neb renamed Mattaniah (Josiah's third son), Zedekiah, showing he was boss, and left the humbled, yet existing, Jerusalem intact. God's judgment on Judah was not complete. We don't see it yet, but God was working overtime in great grace and mercy to preserve Israel as a nation in exile. It was grace upon grace and a very visible commitment to His promises to Abraham (an offspring and a nation through which all nations would be blessed), to David (his "son" would rule Israel forever) and to Solomon (that God's name would dwell in Jerusalem in the temple).

2 Kings 25

Vs. 1-7 Unfortunately Zedekiah didn't listen to Jeremiah. God told Zed through Jeremiah that he should open the gates of Jerusalem and walk out to the Babylonians. If he had done that, God promised to preserve his life and the city. Obviously he didn't obey. We'll see all of this close-up when we get there. Zedekiah was the final king of Judah.

Vs. 8-21 The city was destroyed and the temple was destroyed. When they burned the building, all of the gold melted and ran in between the stone blocks that made the foundation of the temple. These blocks were removed (and probably used for other buildings) so they could get the gold. This is why there wasn't one stone left on another and why Zerubbabel and the returnees (they were not a rock band) had to rebuild the temple foundation before they could rebuild the temple. All the cool stuff Solomon made was either destroyed or taken to Babylon, and to think that Solomon began this ruin by worshiping other gods. Most of the people were taken away into Babylon (a long walk) and only the very poorest of people were left. Jeremiah was left. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar gave special instructions about Jeremiah. I'm willing to bet it was on Daniel's advice.

Vs. 22-26 God's judgment wasn't over. When Gedaliah was killed, the people came to Jeremiah and asked him to ask God what they should do. God told them to remain in the land. They said that Jeremiah was lying, so they took him hostage and took off for Egypt. Neb followed them to Egypt and killed them and the Egyptians. I think that Jeremiah and his servant survived and Jeremiah returned to his hometown.

Vs. 27-30 This note is also at the end of Jeremiah, indicating it was years later, and after the death of Nebuchadnezzar. Since Jeremiah wrote it in his book, we know he was alive.

Here is why this event is important. More than once, God told the people through Jeremiah that if they surrendered to Neb, opened the gates and went out, they would live and see God's mercy. Jeremiah said this very thing later to Zedekiah also, but no one did it, except Jehoiachin; and look what happened. Even this evil king was honored by God for obeying His Word spoken through Jeremiah. It was a last kind of proof to the people that if they had obeyed God, even in His judgment of them, He would have honored them.

The word to us as His disciples and to those we speak to in the harvest is that if we obey God, He will save and restore us.

Acts 22:17-23:10

Acts 22:17-23

Vs. 17-23 It is hard to believe that they were listening until he said the word *Gentiles*. Their fanatic racism was not to be taken lightly. Remember, this also existed in the church, therefore the necessity to give the Spirit visibly and to accompany the giving of the Spirit with the gift of tongues, tying together the experience of the Jews with the experience of the Gentiles. This racism explains these two visible manifestations.

V. 19 Notice that Paul had been involved in beating Christians - more on this later.

Vs. 20-21 This is an interesting interchange between Paul and the Lord.

V. 23 Can you imagine them flinging dust into the air. This sounds like something you'd expect to see in the primate house at the zoo. Actually, it is the heart of terrorism. We'll see this in action tomorrow.

Vs. 24-30 Paul might have been slow to show his Roman Citizen ID when he was in Philippi. Here, Paul played the card quickly. Roman soldiers like these almost whipped Jesus to death and they didn't like the Jews, for apparent reasons. These are the guys who used that cat-of-nine-tails with the metal and bone attached to the ends.

Acts 23

Vs. 1-5 Ananias the high priest was not Annas the high priest who accused Jesus. The commentators are all over the place here with Paul's response. I wasn't there, but I'll tell you what I think. After Paul was struck, he reacted. Even Jesus responded to being struck (John 18:23). But in answer to the question in v. 4, Paul got sarcastic. According to the BKC-NT, p. 419, Ananias was not known to be a good man. I believe the people did not respect this high priest and no one spoke well of him, therefore Paul's comment. If it was the case that all spoke evil of Ananias, he must not have been the ruler. So Paul said, "Oh, I didn't know he was high priest because everyone in Jerusalem tells Ananias jokes." You get the idea.

Vs. 6-10 At this point Paul began smelling "kangaroo." It was the court. Then he began smelling "goose." It was his and it was cooked if he stayed there. Paul knew there was no justice to be had with that group and that his situation was dangerous and hopeless. So Paul drove a wedge between the groups by appealing to the resurrection of the dead, which the Pharisees held and the Sadducees (the priests were Sadducees too) rejected. Amazingly it worked and the Pharisees began to stick up for their boy Paul.

V. 10 The Romans took Paul out of danger again.

In an odd kind of way here, the Lord was giving Jerusalem more grace, but they were rejecting it. Matthew 23:29-39 is a very intense word of judgment against these leaders, delivered two days before Jesus died. In response to Jesus' rhetorical question to them, how they would avoid being sentenced to hell, Jesus answered His own question, saying, *Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town.* Notice that what Jesus said was in the future tense. Before Jesus died He said this would be an attempt to keep them from being sentenced to hell, but their response would be violent toward His messengers. This is exactly what had happened to Paul. He had been scourged in synagogues and persecuted from town to town and now they wanted, really badly, to kill him.

In about 13 years, in 70 A.D., the Romans would finally be fed up with the Jews and destroy the city and the temple. Jesus said that this would happen. Just as Jesus was using Paul as an instrument of grace and judgment by putting Paul in a position to proclaim Christ, the Lord uses us the same way in the harvest today. Our job is to follow, reach out and make disciples, who make disciples of those who come to Christ. Those who hear and don't respond are responsible to the Lord.

Psalm 2

This psalm was probably written by David, sometime after the Lord had made the promise to him that his son would reign upon the throne of Israel. David's kingdom and influence was expanding because of God's blessing, and David was acutely aware that this was God's work, not his. David saw the plan of redemption and the promise to Abraham progressing through God's promise to him. Inspired by all of this, I believe that as David wrote this psalm about his earthly son, the Holy Spirit moved him to write what would become a prophetic description of the Son of David taking His millennial throne.

Vs. 1-3 This is a great question. With all we've read so far, the answer has to be the irrational power of sin in us. Even if God were visible, as He was in Jesus and will be in the Millennial Kingdom, man would still rebel against Him.

Vs. 4-6 David was seeing the Lord humble nations before Israel. This is exactly what the Lord will be doing during the Tribulation and at the beginning of the Millennial Kingdom. Actually, God is in charge today and regardless of what anyone thinks, the time will come when every knee will bow to Him.

Vs. 7-9 This is clearly prophetic. This never could have applied to any physical son of David. It applies to the coming Son of David.

Vs. 10-12 This doesn't just apply to kings, but to all people.

It's ironic. We are guests in God's "house;" and we decide, democratically, that we don't like His view of marriage or spirituality. We decide that His "rules" don't allow us to express our "humanity" and "freedom." The earth is terribly full of our "humanity and freedom." And the reality is that this "house" is ruined and will be replaced with a new "house." Why would the Lord want to take anyone with Him to the new house, who hated Him in the old house? The only sane people on this planet are those who know they are sick and lost, and know where to run. The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous run into it, and they are saved.

Proverbs 18:13

Oh well, I guess most of us husbands and parents are "cooked" on this one. Anyone who's trying to do better, raise your hand!

JULY 5

1 Chronicles 1:1-2:17

Having read the books of Samuel and Kings, Chronicles will add some very interesting information. Chronologically these books were probably written after the Babylonian exile. Their purpose was to reestablish both the genealogy of Israel and the history of Israel for a new generation reentering the land. It has been supposed that Ezra, of the book of Ezra, was the writer. When we get to Ezra, we'll see that it was not easy for Israel to reestablish itself. This genealogy and history would help. Ezra will show that the plan of redemption runs through Israel and through the lineage of David. Ezra will also show that the worship of God was to be led by the Levites. This history is to properly order Israel as a nation returned from exile, knowing both their heritage and their purpose.

1 Chronicles 1

Why start at the beginning? Well, as mentioned in a famous song from "Sound of Music," "That's a very good place to start." Actually, the direction Ezra is going is toward the lineage of David and the Davidic kingship. That is "the shoreline" we come to today. The writer is linking David to Adam, both of whom had a special relationship to God. Enjoy the reading. Some of this will be review. See how much you remember.

Vs. 1-27 This is the lineage of redemption up to Abraham. Notice how Ezra writes this. He is showing the godly line of God's redemptive plan beginning with Adam. If a person had more than one son, and understanding what those other sons did is important, Ezra will explain what the other guys did first and then after that, he'll talk about the son who brought the godly line forward.

V. 19 Notice Peleg. In his days the earth was divided. This doesn't mean that surveying crews went out and set up boundaries. This was after the confusion of languages. People scattered from

the area around Babylon. After this scattering of people, it is thought that the continents began to drift apart.

Vs. 28-33 Ezra thought it important to explain the lineage of Abraham's other sons first. Some of them became important nations in Israel's history.

Vs. 34-54 The son of promise was Isaac, but Isaac had two sons. The lineage of Esau is developed first. Again, all of this was significant information for the newly returned nation of Israel.

1 Chronicles 2:1-17

Vs. 1-4 Notice how quickly Ezra goes to the tribe of Judah.

Vs. 5-8 Ezra does quick work explaining the line of Zerah. His famous descendant was Achan, that troubler of Israel. Do you remember where we read about him?

Vs. 9-16 This goes straight down the line to David, but notice at the end you have some development of the sons of David's sisters. You should recognize some very important names here.

V. 16 Notice the relationship between David and Joab. This was another reason why it was so hard for David to get rid of him. And notice the relationship between Joab and Amasa, whom Joab murdered.

It is interesting that as the exiles returned, in rebuilding Israel, they went all the way back to the beginning, the fall and the promise of redemption. It might have been that they wanted the people to see their lives in the perspective of God's plan, rather than simply living every day with no perspective of what their lives and their nation meant. For us as disciples in the harvest, we begin each day knowing why we are here and who it is who is leading us into the harvest. Our purpose for being here each day goes back to the plan of redemption.

Acts 23:11-35

V. 11 This is how we know that all of this mess was not a mistake on Paul's part. The Lord Himself stood with Paul in prison and told him that everything was going according to plan. So when you get here, you can look back over Paul's journey to Jerusalem, all of the warnings, Paul taking the guys into the temple to complete the vow, etc., and understand that it was God's plan, not some human mistake.

It is interesting that the word "facts" is not in the text. The issue here is that two different words for testify are used. The first means something like a solemn, insistent pleading, like laying out a case and trying to get someone to see the truth. The second word for testify is the normal word for witness.

Jesus was not only encouraging Paul, but He was acknowledging that what Paul had done, he had done well.

Vs. 12-15 This is simply first century terrorism. It's a suicide squad. I wonder if these guys really held to their vow. It would serve them right if they did. But since the circumstances changed, the high priest probably released them. Jesus predicted that the time would come when those who killed His followers would think they were serving God. Actually, Paul understood that line of thinking too.

Vs. 16-22 This tells you that Paul had family in Jerusalem and that they were still connected to the religious elite. That's the only way Paul's nephew could have been close to those who knew this information.

V. 17 This is another example in Acts of a Roman officer who was positive toward Christianity. What Luke mentions here would have gone into Roman records that might have been called upon for Paul's trial in Rome before Caesar.

Vs. 23-35 Caesarea was the Roman capital of Israel. This would be Paul's home for the next three years. Note v. 29. This again would have been in the official Roman record. So why wasn't Paul released? Because, as we will find out, Felix was a rat. Oh, and God had a purpose in all of the next three years of confusion. Imagine, Paul had been so busy and traveling so broadly, and now God's will for him was to sit "under house arrest" for at least three to four years in Caesarea and then in Rome.

As disciples we learn like Paul, and all the great servants of God before him, that we serve where and when and how He chooses. And even in jail or in isolation, we are in His will, serving the same God in His harvest.

Psalm 3

Wow. I wonder if Paul read this psalm in prison in Caesarea. God was, in fact, a shield around him. Actually, we know the circumstances of David writing this psalm. Keep in mind that he probably wrote this sometime after his return to Jerusalem when he was safe. Possibly civil war was looming as he wrote this.

Vs. 1-2 This had been true of David on several occasions.

Vs. 3-4 David had learned that God was his protector and the only thing that he had to be proud of. David's desire was to build the temple and he desired it to be in Jerusalem. As he had gone out of Jerusalem during the shame of Absalom seeking to kill him, David believed that God answered his cry from Jerusalem.

Vs. 5-6 With all the things from which God had saved him, including the results of his own sin, once David understood the Lord was with him, he could sleep.

Vs. 7-8 Amen. I'll bet Paul knew this too.

Proverbs 18:14-15

What crushes a spirit? In the Spirit, a person close to God, led by the Spirit, prays and cries out and comes to understand the times and the Lord's leading. He or she survives those times that crush men's souls through coming to grips with God's will and His love. I'm sure that is how Paul survived those very long years in jail. The knowledge that is mentioned would be in knowing God and knowing that we are always in His hand.

JULY 6

1 Chronicles 2:18-4:4

Admittedly, I tend to read some of this with half an eye, but there are some things to note. Keep in mind that the reason this information is important is that after the exile, there was a need to reestablish the nation in the land. They needed to orient the people toward Israel's purpose, give the history and significance of people and places, and they needed to know who was a true-blue Jew. The genealogies were very important. For example, if a person couldn't prove their connection to Levi, they couldn't serve in the temple. If someone couldn't prove his lineage back to Aaron, he couldn't be a priest.

1 Chronicles 2:18-55

Yesterday in 2:9, Ezra began to mention Hezron. The line of David and the Messiah ran through his son Ram. Now Ezra is going back to other sons of Hezron who also had importance. What you find here are a lot of names that became towns and villages.

Vs. 18-50 In all of these descendants from Caleb (not the fellow spy with Joshua), probably the most important is Hur in v. 19. The line of Hur will be picked up in vs. 50-51. There are some other names and places mentioned here like Tekoa and Ephrathah and Gilead. I'm sure this must have had more significance to the Jews than to us.

Vs. 50-55 Kiriath-jearim became home to the ark of the covenant for a while and Bethlehem became a well-known place too. You have also heard the name Ephrathah before. Micah 5:2 *But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days.*

V. 55 Now these are some interesting names, all associated with the tribe of Judah, specifically the line of the sons of Hur.

This is the first time you see the name of Jabez. Here it is the town named after the guy we will meet in chapter 4. Notice that this town became the home to clans of scribes. Now, if you ask me, it was no accident that the scribes who made copies of the Bible settled in a town governed by a man like Jabez. Godliness attracts godliness. Then you have a summary of these clans of scribes who are called Kenites who come from the house of Rechab. The Rechabites will also figure to be important, especially in Jeremiah 35:1-19, where God makes an eternal promise to them. Godliness attracts godliness. I'll have more to say about Jabez tomorrow.

1 Chronicles 3

In this list of sons of David the intended goal seems to be getting to v. 19. Zerubbabel was the first governor of Israel after they returned from Babylon. This establishes Zerubbabel as a continuation of the Davidic line. The other names continue the line of David to the 400 silent years, but the point is made that the line of David is clearly able to be established, even after the exile.

Vs. 1-4 These are David's sons, born to him as king of Judah during the civil war with Saul's family and the northern tribes. In a sense, this civil war would set the precedent of the northern tribes being separated from Judah when God caused the split later as a result of Solomon's disobedience.

I am still somewhat partial to Abigail; and, for what it's worth, I think he should have just settled with her and been happy. But what do I know? I do like the name of their son.

Vs. 5-8 Notice how many kids David had with Bathsheba (Bath-shua). What is really interesting is that God was partial to Bathsheba. Both Joseph and Mary were descended from David. Joseph, Jesus' "legal" father, was descended to David through Solomon. Mary gave Jesus His blood line to David through Nathan, one of Bathsheba's other sons. That will become significant later since God seems to say later that Solomon's line will not extend to the Messiah. Notice too that if this order was birth order, and it usually was, Solomon was the youngest of her four sons. God is the one who made the choice of Solomon.

The other sons were either from an unnamed wife or they were prominent sons born of David's concubines.

Vs. 10-15 This list of Solomon's descendants goes to the Babylonian exile. We've read about these kings.

Vs. 16-24 Now Ezra's purpose was to show that the descendants of David's line of kings extended into and through the exile. None of these men was ever a king, but Zerubbabel was the first governor of Judah after Cyrus of Persia (Iran) sent the exiles home.

1 Chronicles 4:1-4

So, now the author is taking a look at the lineage of all of Israel, beginning with Judah, possibly with an emphasis on entering the land after Egypt. Again the mention of Bethlehem is important because in Ezra's thinking, all roads led to David. That's OK with me; because for us, Bethlehem means the birth place of our Lord.

Acts 24

This is another formal hearing regarding the "innocence" of Christianity in the Roman world. This would have been interesting news for Theophilus and the other readers of Acts. I was reading Matthew 23:36 this morning; and when Jesus said these words, He was speaking of events exactly like this one.

Vs. 1-9 This Tertullus was a trained lawyer and had a Roman name and pedigree to win favor with Felix. All three of his points were designed to make Paul look like he was in violation of Roman laws. Paul instigated riots; he led an unapproved non-Jewish religion, and he had profaned the temple, which was under Roman protection.

Vs. 10-21 Paul's defense not only has the backing of the Roman tribune who sent him to Caesarea, but the fact that Paul was found on the last, seventh, day of the cleansing, proved that he had done nothing to make a disturbance. This is why God allowed Paul to be caught on the last day.

V. 14 Paul affirmed that Christianity was the fulfillment of Judaism and that Paul was only following the law by acknowledging Jesus.

V. 18 As for profaning the temple, the eyewitnesses (liars) weren't there and they didn't have any witnesses, or Gentiles in custody, to prove Paul had brought them into the temple.

Vs. 22-23 Felix understood that Christianity was the fulfilling of the Jewish religion, the question being if Jesus was the Messiah. The promise here of Lysias (the guy who wrote the letter and sent Paul to Caesarea) coming and setting the matter to rest would seem to work out for Paul.

Paul was placed under house arrest. So, being in the palace, he didn't have it too bad and he was protected.

Vs. 24-27 Felix and his wife both listened to Paul, but were never moved to conversion. This reminds me of what it says about Herod listening to John the Baptist gladly, but still killing him. There is a perverse delight in learning about God and His judgment. You feel challenged and guilty and somehow cleansed. And you can still be lost and do what you like. I think this is what Jesus meant when He warned His disciples to beware of the leaven of Herod: the joy of listening and soothing your conscience without conversion or true faith.

It is said that Paul came from a wealthy family and therefore Felix's desire to be bribed. If Paul's family still held to the law, there was no way they'd pay for Paul and there is no way Paul would help himself.

Probably like today, an official leaving office could grant pardons. But there is no pardon for Paul because the ones who were really good to Felix were the Jews.

All of this looks like a victory for Paul's enemies. Paul was not guilty; but the hate and influence of the Jews, coupled with a corrupt politician like Felix, kept Paul under house arrest for two years, inactive and ineffectual. Or did they win? And was Paul really inactive and ineffectual? Paul had quite a bit of freedom and had visitors when he wished. Caesarea had a thriving Christian community and a major seaport. All the Christians traveling by sea from Italy, Greece or Turkey to Israel would have to land at Caesarea. Philip was there and it's possible that Cornelius was still there. It would have been a great place to do ministry and to make disciples

and to teach. I'm thinking that groups of people could have met with Paul for Bible studies. Really, Paul could have been like a one-man Bible institute. Looking past the "imprisonment" part of this assignment, Paul was now teaching and equipping, and being taken care of and being protected. He was exactly where God wanted him to be.

As disciples, we need to have a very high view of God's sovereignty. If we see ourselves as victims, we become bitter and ineffectual. If we are humbly following God, we are always where He wants us in the harvest. God can't lose or be frustrated.

Psalm 4

I have to admit. I've never noticed how these psalms reflect what Paul must have been going through in Acts. Read this imagining what Paul must have been thinking being in jail, having his accusers "victorious," thinking that at least Paul was locked up and there would be no real justice as long as Felix would do them favors.

V. 1 This is David's plea to God to hear his cry and show him mercy.

Vs. 2-3 This is almost like David warning his enemies to stop and remember that God loves David.

Vs. 4-5 Doesn't this verse sound like Paul's words in Ephesians 4:26, *Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger*. I'll bet this is where Paul got this.

It is suggested that this psalm was also written after the situation with Absalom's rebellion. If that is the case, we could understand the *be angry but do not sin* part. Ahithophel (Bathsheba's grandfather) was bitter and sinned and didn't trust the Lord at the end of his life.

V. 6 Notice the irony in this verse. Who would show David good? The Lord. How? Just by looking at David, making His face to shine on him. That was all David needed and it is probably this thought and thoughts like this after David recovered from his fall, that gave him a passion to build the temple and to have God's presence near him. And, doesn't this verse sound like a good thought for a song?

V. 7 Again an ironic contrast. They had the well-dressed table, but David was living on the run. Yet, David had the joy.

V. 8 I think this is the kind of training the Lord gives us in the harvest, following Him, abiding in Christ, making disciples, but always living with a degree of stress and fatigue and uncertainty. He teaches us how to rest in Him, finding peace that we are in His heart and that His face is shining on us.

Proverbs 18:16-18

This is an interesting bouquet of verses considering we have Paul being falsely imprisoned and held there by corruption.

V. 18 allows the decision to become the Lord's, assuming *the lot* isn't fixed. But then again, if we are following Christ in this dark time of harvest and if God is sovereign, can He really be frustrated by the corruption and designs of men? In Christ, we see and live a different life. 1 Corinthians 2:15, *The spiritual person judges (understands) all things, but is himself to be judged (understood) by no one*.

Ironically, Paul would be brought before great men, including Nero, because of where he was serving Christ.

JULY 7

1 Chronicles 4:5-5:17

1 Chronicles 4:5-43

Vs. 5-23 Ezra is tracing again the descendants of Judah. There are a few famous names here so I would guess that Ezra wants to show the returning Israelites where some of their folk heroes came from.

Vs. 5-8 You have to be dedicated to keep going back and forth to make connections in all of this, but it is possible. Earlier, Ezra was tracing the lineage of one of the descendants of Judah through his son Perez, then Perez's son Hezron. So far this is all in the lineage to David and to the Messiah. Hezron had three sons and Ezra immediately developed the lineage of Ram, who develops the line of David. Now, Ezra wanted to show the significance of one of Hezron's other sons, Chelubai, who here is called Caleb, but not the Caleb we all love who was a good spy. That Caleb will come later. This Caleb, the son of Hezron, (through the wife of his father) had a son named Ashhur. That brings us to today. Ashhur was the father of Tekoa. Tekoa is a famous town in Israel.

So you're reading all of these names and suddenly you come to 4:9-10. Before, when I used to preach on Jabez, I would have someone read 4:1-10, because you could hear the monotony break when you got to v. 9. But then I stopped doing that because no one could really read those hard-to-pronounce names anyway.

Vs. 9-10 When I returned to the States in 2001, I was stunned to hear that BW had written a book called The Prayer of Jabez. This portion had been one of my favorite sermons in English and German, and now people were telling me that everyone was sick of hearing sermons on Jabez. I've never read the book. You might already know all this information, but here are some notes.

Jabez is from the tribe of Judah. You can see this if you look back at the beginning of this chapter.

The time of his prayer appears to be the beginning of the conquest of Canaan. One of the ways to find this is to read your Bible every year. Another way is to use a search program. I found this by reading every year. If you look at the words *enlarge my border*, you'll see them again next year in Deuteronomy 12:20. This was what Moses said to the people just before Israel crossed the Jordan.

The promise was made to all of Israel. You can picture all the soldiers of Israel standing there, sword in hand, ready to take the land, but Jabez prayed. He prayed according to God's promise, and he prayed because he had learned to go to God because of the mark his mother had put upon him, in punishment for his painful birth. His adversity taught him to go to God. That is why Jabez was more honorable or "of greater substance" than his brothers. All the people were ready to go and claim the land, but Jabez humbled his heart before God, having learned, and knowing now, how much he needed God. Adversity doesn't always lead you to God, but it did in Jabez's case.

I've heard some people preach this saying that God was so happy to have anyone pray, that He was willing to answer even a selfish prayer, as long as it was a prayer. How silly. Everything Jabez prayed was a promise of God.

As disciples, the Father prunes us through adversity to be fruitful in His harvest. The promises of God do not relate to our comfort or bank accounts, but to His mission. That is where Jabez found God's blessing, doing God's work, and that is where we find our blessing, following Christ in the harvest.

Vs. 11-23 All this seems too hard to follow, but there are some interesting names. After Jabez, you have Othniel, the first judge of Israel. This also helps to establish the time of Jabez. In this lineage you also have our hero, Caleb the son of Jephunneh.

Vs. 24-43 These are the descendants of Simeon. A possible reason for their mention here is that their land was south of Judah's land. When the nation became divided, it wasn't just divided by tribes, but also by geography - north and south. The ten tribes north became Israel, and the two tribes south (Judah and Benjamin) became Judah. The land of Simeon became the possession of Judah and the people either remained in Judah or went north. Notice in v. 41 that in the days of Hezekiah, before the exile, some of the tribe of Simeon became registered citizens of Judah.

To understand the focus of this section of Chronicles, look for any mentions of genealogies or registers. Ezra was making sure everyone knew to whom they were related.

1 Chronicles 5:1-17

Vs. 1-10 This is the genealogy of the sons of Reuben. This is an interesting note regarding the giving of the birthright to Joseph. Judah, it appears, was blessed in spite of missing the birthright; although Judah would have been next in line, after Levi and Simeon were disqualified. Do you remember all of that?

Vs. 11-17 These are the sons of Gad.

It is too bad that this chapter is divided between today and tomorrow. Here, Ezra was dealing with the 2.5 tribes that were located on the east side of the Jordan, who they were and why they went into exile. Apparently, as of the writing of Chronicles, they were still in exile.

Acts 25

Vs. 1-5 The success of any Roman governor over Israel was in the hands of the Jews, so a wise governor was kind to them. Notice that one of the top things on the Jews' "list of favors" was Paul and trying to kill him. Maybe after two years those guys still hadn't eaten and really, really needed to kill Paul.

Vs. 6-12 We don't see all of the detail of who Paul interacted with these two years. The temptation would be to see this as wasted time, particularly because of Festus. In v. 9 it is clear there would be no real help from this conniving ruler. You could think that Paul should have appealed to be tried before Caesar much earlier, but the Lord had a plan in all of this. Apparently Paul had enough to do in ministry to stay content and busy. Only when Festus was ready to put Paul into the hands of his enemies, did Paul use his right to appeal to Caesar.

Vs. 13-27 Here is one of the purposes for Paul's stay. Notice v. 23; this was a gala event. Everyone was invited to hear Paul give his testimony. This would not only be hugely public and help in Paul's future release, but, as we'll see tomorrow, Paul was very persuasive.

Look at Festus' words in vs. 24-27. This is Festus saying "See how smart I am?" NOT! Had he been anything but a favor-seeking politician, he would have had the guts to let Paul go. God was using the guile of this crooked man to accomplish His own purpose. He forced Paul to play the "Caesar" card, again, accomplishing God's purpose. Now there was a big, public event.

So, when they would send Paul to Nero, the letter of accusation would say, "Dear Nero, we think he's innocent, but he wanted to talk to you."

Once again too, in Luke's writing, a Roman official is saying that there is nothing wrong with Paul or Christianity.

It is good for us to observe that in this portion of Paul's work in the harvest, it was chaotic and frustrating, but God was completely in control.

Psalm 5

I can imagine that as this hearing was being set up, Paul was praying something like this. Reading this psalm and the letters that follow, you get an idea of how well Paul knew the OT. Compare v. 9 to Romans 3:13, *Their throat is an open grave, they use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips.* Paul definitely knew his psalms.

Vs. 1-3 What is interesting is that David was not only well acquainted with crying out to God, but v. 3 sounds like, "It's morning and here I am again, Lord." God was training David.

Vs. 4-6 Whatever David was facing from his enemies, it was deeply affecting him every day. David was reminding the Lord that the Lord can't tolerate such people.

Vs. 7-8 This is good for us to learn. Rather than stress and obsess over his enemies and keep thinking about what they said, etc., David focused all of his attention and trust on the Lord.

Vs. 9-10 This is a cry for justice.

Vs. 11-12 I wonder if Paul prayed something like this when he was taken in before Agrippa and Bernice and all the leaders and officials of Caesarea?

Proverbs 18:19

And unfortunately this is just as true among believers, as among those who don't understand the grace of God or our mission here for Christ. Or actually, maybe it is only true among believers who don't understand the grace of God or our mission here for Christ.

We are all bound to offend people. Among believers, it is the love of Christ that saves us and covers a multitude of sins, and offenses. Quarreling is just something we all need to get over for the sake of our Lord and the harvest.

JULY 8

1 Chronicles 5:18-6:81

1 Chronicles 5:18-26

I think the purpose of this grouping is that these were the three tribes on the other side of the Jordan.

Vs. 18-22 Notice that Ezra says that this victory was because they cried out to the Lord. The result was a lot of booty. This must have been after they returned from helping the other tribes take Canaan. They were warned about taking slaves because of the idolatry of the people.

V. 21 says that they took 100,000 men alive. Now the people outside of the land of Canaan were not under the ban, unless God had specifically told the Reubenites to kill all of these people. The reality is that they must have joined with these people. Verse 25 indicates that this is what happened.

Vs. 23-26 Actually, idolatry came into Israel immediately after Joshua. What we have here is 400 years of history summarized until Tiggy took the people into exile. Notice that as of this writing, after Judah's exile in Babylon, these tribes were still in exile.

1 Chronicles 6

After determining the lineage of Judah and David, the next lineage of great importance is that of Levi. After the exile, they had to know who could serve at the temple. It should be noted that after the Babylonian exile, idolatry was never an issue for Israel. The Jews never worshiped on the high places around Jerusalem, but the Samaritans still felt free to do so. Something happened during the exile that the Lord used to cure the Jews.

So, for the sake of staying awake and for Bible study, as you read the paragraphs, decide why Ezra made these groupings. What new themes (singers, dwelling places, etc.) was Ezra taking note of?

Vs. 1-15 Verses 4 and 15 give you the goal of this section. This established the priesthood through Aaron to the exile.

Vs. 16-30 These are the chief men of the other families. Notice that Samuel is listed here.

Vs. 31-48 These are the singers. Notice that this is related to David's organizing of the singers for worship at the temple. This theme of David being the organizer of the worship will be developed in a few chapters. Ezra will underscore that a true leader of Israel leads in the worship and makes sure this is all ordered and maintained.

Vs. 49-53 The priests.

Vs. 54-81 As the Levites were coming back into the land after the Babylonian exile, it was important for Ezra to let everyone know what land and cities had been allotted to them. I'm sure for some people returning, the land looked completely open and you could take what you wanted. Ezra wanted Israel to respect what the Lord had given the Levites.

Acts 26

There are lots of good things in Paul's testimony. I'll mention only a few.

Vs. 1-8 It was important for Paul to establish his early life as a Jew. This not only showed the change that Jesus made, but he would show that his new faith, and Christianity itself, was a fulfillment of Judaism.

Vs. 9-11 Notice the plurals here. There were many people Paul saw put to death. There were many people Paul beat and tried to make blaspheme the name of Jesus. And, Paul went to more than one foreign city.

Vs. 12-18 The Lord knew the right time to intervene. I think that Paul was under conviction, not only feeling bad about his violence toward believers, women in particular; but I think their determination to suffer for Christ began to show Paul the reality behind what they believed.

V. 15-16 Notice that Jesus appeared to Paul. It wasn't just a voice and blinding light. Notice too, that Jesus didn't chide Paul, but rather commanded him to obey.

Vs. 17-18 Notice that these are Jesus' words. Salvation involves *going from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God*. This is good to think over.

Vs. 19-23 Not only does Paul conclude with his obedience, but he lets them know that this testimony he is giving them is part of that mission that Jesus gave him.

V. 24 Good old Festus, showing again how smart he was.

Vs. 25-27 Thanks to Festus, God gave Paul a very natural way to bring the decision to Agrippa. Paul knew that Agrippa was a firm believer in Judaism.

V. 28 Agrippa, I think, was putting Paul off in a lighthearted way, to bleed off some of the intensity.

V. 29 I'll bet Paul got a laugh with the last line.

Vs. 30-32 Agrippa was wrong. There is no mistake here. Paul should have been released long ago, but with Festus being corrupt and trying to win the friendship of the Jews, Rome was the only option. Yet, God had built such a case over these two years that when Paul finally appeared before Nero, he had no choice but to declare Paul and Christianity "not guilty."

As disciples, we are seeing some things in Paul's life that "look" out of control. The stories are there to teach us patience as we strive to work in the harvest, following Christ during times when it seems like little is happening. Abiding in Christ in the harvest means following His lead, even if it means what we're seeing here. Knowing that the Lord always sees us and is always working makes all the difference in the world.

Psalm 6

I can see these words coming from David as he ran from Saul. With all that Paul had been through, he probably could have written this psalm too, but I'd guess that Paul's maturity in Christ kept him from experiencing some of these emotions.

Vs. 1-3 I don't think David was physically sick. I think he was heartsick over the injustice of his situation and the determination of his enemies. I can imagine that David thought the Lord would "cure" this situation quickly, but as one year ran into another I'll bet he dealt with some darkness of soul.

Vs. 4-5 David often promised to praise God publicly before nations and the people. The point here is that he couldn't do that if he were dead. He wanted God to save him.

Vs. 6-7 This sounds like depression to me.

Vs. 8-10 At some point in David's prayer, David strengthened himself in the Lord and realized the Lord heard his prayer. Perhaps he remembered that the Lord had commanded Samuel to anoint him as king when he was twelve. God would keep His promise since His character is not subject to our problems and emotions. He remains true to His Word.

V. 8 The first part of this verse is verbatim to Matthew 7:23, *And then will I declare to them, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."* You see this in the Greek, not in the English translations.

Regardless of how we feel about ourselves or our work in the harvest, we are defined by Him, not by our feelings. He leads and we follow, whether we "feel" good or not. Look at Paul's situation above.

Proverbs 18:20-21

I think these verses sort of echo James' words on the tongue. If you control it, it brings you satisfaction. If you let it control you, the tongue brings you ruin. I sure saw a lot of this growing up.

JULY 9

1 Chronicles 7-8

As Israel was rebuilding after the Babylonian exile, one of the objectives of Ezra and the other leaders was to put together a unified Israel. Israel hadn't been unified since Solomon died. You will notice the mention of David in certain connections that show that the northern tribes had been important to David during his reign. In a couple of days Chronicles will take up a more narrative tone as Ezra will begin to show God's working through the line of David.

1 Chronicles 7

Vs. 1-5 This is the genealogy of the tribe of Issachar. You notice in this that Tola was a judge of Israel. Notice the "random" mention that Issachar had 22,600 men in David's army. The focus of 1 Chronicles is soon to become David, and God's blessing to Israel through him. Every mention that Ezra gives David is meant to draw the eyes of the returned exiles to God's blessing on Israel. It is interesting that at the end of some of these summaries, there is a note regarding the enrollment. Some tribes don't have this note.

Vs. 6-12 This general genealogy of Benjamin will be added to in the next chapter. Just for fun, look at v. 12. Who would name their boys Shuppim and Huppim? Were they twins?

V. 13 A very short genealogy of Naphtali.

Vs. 14-19 Notice that Machir is the son of interest here. So now you have Machir giving wives from his own family to Shuppim and Huppim. Apparently those were men of note. Maybe the women were twins too, Taghim and Baghim. ☺ Of interest to me in this genealogy of Manasseh is the mention of Zelophehad and his daughters. It is also interesting that in these accounts of Manasseh, it never talks about those who were enrolled in their genealogies. I wonder if some of the tribe had a hard time tracing themselves back to their roots.

Vs. 20-29 This is the genealogy of Ephraim. Like in the verses about Jabez, you have to notice the break in the rhythm and wonder what the point of this story is. Apparently Ephraim lived in northern Egypt near the border of Canaan, and raiders from Gath came down and killed some of his sons. After he was comforted he had a "replacement" son named Beriah, who had a son named Rephah...follow the names and you get to..... And that's the reason for the story. So, if not for the raiders from Gath, we would have one less book of the Bible, kind of.

Vs. 30-40 This is a long list of people descended from Asher. Note that at the end it mentions the enrollment by genealogies. Again, for Ezra and the leaders who were restoring Israel to order, having enrollments and proof of descent was important.

1 Chronicles 8

This chapter is an expansion of the tribe of Benjamin because of their importance in the kingship of Saul, which in turn led to David. Just think, the apostle Paul could probably have traced his lineage all the way back to Jacob. Again, these genealogies were important after the exile, particularly knowing who could worship in the temple and who could serve in the temple. Many of the mixed people in Samaria would claim to be descendants, but they couldn't prove it. To be a true-blue Jew, you had to be able to provide proof through documents.

Vs. 1-28 Notice that you can find a judge of Israel in all of this.

Vs. 29-40 This is beginning to zero in on the royal family. Notice too that these people came from a man named Gibeon. In the days of David, probably for political reasons, the tabernacle was set up in Gibeon and the ark of the covenant was in Jerusalem, the city of David. So you had the worship of God represented in both Benjamin and in Judah.

You have the name of Jonathan's son, Merib-baal (Mephibosheth), which goes to his son Micah. Micah's descendants apparently were the only surviving lineage of Saul, and it looks like they went clear through the exile and ended up back in Jerusalem. It would be kind of cool if Paul was a descendant of Jonathan through Mephibosheth and Micah. Jonathan was a model of godliness, humility and strength. I think Mephibosheth was like his father.

As disciples, isn't it interesting that we can trace our genealogy back to Jesus. He's the only one that counts.

Acts 27:1-20

Vs. 1-9 Now, at this point, Paul had been imprisoned for over two years. It was time for a road trip.

V. 3 The centurions were always nice guys in the NT. Notice that Paul needed to be cared for. No one is really sure what his problem was, or what his thorn in the flesh was. It might have been his sight. In any case Paul seems to have needed someone to be with him and help him. Here, Dr. Luke is with him also. Luke's presence with Paul during this trip also speaks to Paul's need for help.

Notice Luke's descriptions of the sailing and trip. This is some of the most detailed and accurate reporting of sailing in those times in any ancient literature. This has led some people to think that Luke was an experienced sailor, probably being a ship's doctor.

Vs. 9-12 *The Fast* was the Day of Atonement in October. By November they usually closed all shipping in the Med that was traveling west. It became stormy, and the strong winds came out of the north and west, making travel very dangerous. Sailing to the west was almost impossible.

V. 10 You might ask what "knowledge" a preacher had of sailing. You'll see that Paul had some firsthand experience with ships that had pressed their luck against the weather, when you read 2 Corinthians 11:25, *Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea.* Notice that Paul says he was adrift in the sea an entire day. That happened before this trip, since Paul had written 1 & 2 Corinthians two and a half to three years ago from Ephesus. When they jump overboard in a couple of weeks, it would be just a short swim to shore at Malta. Then Paul would be able to say, "Four times."

It is good to note that Paul said this and was ignored. Later Paul will say, "I told you so." When the centurion finally writes his report, he will have some good things to say about Paul.

V. 11 It's good to know that this centurion learned his lesson later.

Vs. 13-20 Isn't God good at storms? We haven't read Jonah yet, but keep this all in mind. God lured them out (they really wanted to go out against all good judgment anyway) and then, Bam!

Paul was having some exciting days in the harvest. God would use all of this for His glory and for Paul's deliverance and testimony for Him. We need to remember that God uses chaos and the bad decisions of others in the harvest.

Psalm 7

Vs. 1-2 It would be understandable if Paul felt like this. David did. It gives you the sense when he mentions *soul* that David wasn't just concerned for his death, but also his heart being damaged from all of this pressure and violence.

Vs. 3-5 In order for Saul and his government to justify their campaign against David, a national hero, they had to smear his name and spread lies. They had to make it look like David was a sinner needing justice. David knew that God knew his heart was pure before Him.

Vs. 6-7 Because of the terrible lies involved in Saul's pursuit of David, David thought God should also be emotionally upset and do something.

Vs. 8-11 David was ready for God to judge, beginning with him. David knew that God would defend and vindicate him.

V. 11 This being true, it is a testimony to God's patience and grace that He waits for the full number of those who are to be saved.

Vs. 12-16 tell the story of those who do not respond to God's patience and forgiveness during this time of salvation and harvest. David predicts and the Spirit says that God will use the evil and treachery of the evil against them. Paul says this in 1 Corinthians 2-3. In some respects this is what happened to King Saul.

V. 17 This is David's legacy. Not that he ended his psalms with praise, but that he also continually praised God publicly and led others to see God's love and deliverance. That's what these psalms are, public testimony.

When I read those words of God being our shield, I always think of the song, "We Rest On Thee." It's an oldie and I like the version that has all four verses. Beth's dad and the other four guys sang this, just before they gave their lives in the harvest following Christ in Ecuador.

Proverbs 18:22

What can you say but, "Amen!"

Interesting that it doesn't say anything about the deal the wife gets, getting a husband. I assume it's assumed.

JULY 10

1 Chronicles 9-10

We're almost out of the woods.

1 Chronicles 9

Vs. 1-9 This gives you the point of this chapter and the past eight chapters. Who were the first of the people to return from exile in Babylon? Those who could trace their roots.

Vs. 10-35 The particular interest in this chapter is the Levites and setting up the worship of God. One of the questions you might ask yourself is how they were so ready to return, both in terms of organization and genealogies. Did they have a "heads up?" God did some amazing things during their time in Babylon. More on that later. I'm amazed how organized this was.

Vs. 10-13 These were the priests who returned ready to roll.

Vs. 14-16 These are the seven families of Levites who returned to serve in the temple.

Vs. 17-27 Since the temple operated every day for morning and evening sacrifices, the gatekeepers were important and appropriately organized.

Vs. 28-32 They apparently needed fewer Levites to attend to the services in the temple.

Vs. 33-34 And then you have the singers. We'll hear more about them later.

In a way this shows that when Israel returned they knew it was God's grace. Where the worship of God had been a mess before the exile, they wanted to return and worship God properly with the proper people. This was a very good thing. What is interesting is that this was prepared for during the exile. When we begin the book of Daniel you will see how these preparations could have been possible.

Vs. 35-44 Once again, this is the lineage of King Saul going up to those of his descendants who returned to Jerusalem after the exile.

1 Chronicles 10

This is a very abbreviated rendition of Saul, in fact, only his death. The real point is to get to David in the next chapter.

Vs. 1-12 This is the account of Saul's death and his sons. Notice that this account is at odds with the guy who came to David and said he had killed Saul (2 Sam. 1:14). Saul was dead before his armor bearer killed himself. It gives proof to the fact that the kid lied in order to win David's favor. His lie got him killed.

Vs. 13-14 This is an interesting commentary on Saul's sin and death. How do you reconcile the fact that Saul said he had tried to contact God, but God wasn't talking, with this report that Saul didn't seek guidance from the Lord? Sometimes seeking is a matter of how and how long. Also, we never heard that Saul was in any sense repentant for killing a town of priests and unjustly seeking to kill David. Sometimes seeking God needs to happen the right way. It is clear that most of his life Saul didn't seek God.

Acts 27:21-44

Vs. 21-26 Some people wonder why Luke included this story of Paul's trip to Rome. The trip is evidence of God's working. And, I'll bet it made the centurion's report exciting to read.

V. 21 Inspired by the Holy Spirit, Paul says, "I told you so."

Vs. 23-24 Once again we have confirmation, that even in this catastrophe at sea, God was in it. Remember too, that the centurion would have to file a report.

Vs. 27-32 That's a long time. I definitely would have been beyond seasick.

V. 29 Nelson, of Her Majesty's Navy, took a lesson from this use of the anchors and did likewise before one of his battles.

Vs. 31-32 It wasn't a matter of God needing the crew together to save them all, it was a matter of needing all the experienced sailors present when they struck land so they could save everyone else.

So the centurion wrote in his little book. "Once again, that Jewish criminal was pretty helpful."

Vs. 33-38 Paul had faced so many storms for Jesus, that he was definitely in control and able to serve them.

Vs. 39-44 The centurion was a good guy. I'll bet he wrote in his little book, "We all made it safe to land. Little Jewish criminal was right again. His vision must have been true."

It is interesting to me that as Paul and company were going through this, they were encouraging those who had given up and helping others see that God was in the situation. It is a good thing Paul knew God was present. As disciples, we don't determine the harvest field; the Lord does. All He asks us to do is to follow with the passion to reach lost people and make disciples. He does the rest. He trains us and gets us to the place where we can bring calm into a storm. The people around us see that it is because of our Lord. He does this. It isn't a strategy. It is following in the harvest.

Psalm 8

I wonder if David wrote this one evening in the wilderness when there was a pause in running from Saul.

Vs. 1-2 It is interesting that even in a praise psalm like this, David still had his enemies in view. He says that God's wonder, spoken through the lips of *babes and infants*, is so strong that it defeats and confounds His enemies. This is what Jesus meant and what the Pharisees would have understood in Matthew 21:16, when the Pharisees *said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, 'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise?'"* In the context of this psalm, the Pharisees would have understood they were God's enemies and that these babies were defeating them.

Vs. 3-4 This is part of the purpose of God's creation.

Vs. 5-8 There is an important contrast in v. 5. The angels are heavenly and glorious, yet man is crowned *with glory and honor*. This definitely applies to Jesus in Hebrews 2:7, and in the future it will apply to us. This is what made Satan mad enough to become proud and rebel. He was the beauty of God's creation and should he serve mankind?

V. 6 David the shepherd appreciated this command from the creation to have dominion over the work of God's hands. Notice that *under his feet* prophetically applies to Jesus, but in terms of man's dominion, it doesn't mean to crush or treat in a demeaning way. David as a shepherd loved and cared for his sheep, protecting them with his life, pulling a lion's beard here and clubbing a

bear to death there. Authority means different things depending on the degree of rebellion and submission of the followers.

V. 9 Amen.

Proverbs 18:23-24

I guess this is saying that the poor make real friends because they are humble and know they are needy. There is something about adversity that teaches you humility and bonding together. I'll bet that Paul and the centurion on the ship were friends after their adventure together. Both were needy and humble, and the centurion was willing to trust the word that Paul had heard from the Lord.

In our lives here on earth, I think it is the harvest that gives us this kind of humility and this kind of closeness. Churches and pastors herniate themselves trying to produce the kind of unity that only comes from knowing we're saved by grace to follow Christ and work together in the harvest. Musical worship and potlucks and summer missions trips will never replace living as disciples in the shadow of His grace, in the shadow of the coming storm, working together in the harvest.

JULY 11

1 Chronicles 11:1-12:18

When you read this history, you should see it as Ezra trying to underscore important events for a generation of Israelites who have never lived in the land promised to Abraham. Israel was exiled for 70 years and it was still years before most of the people returned. I'm going to be "supposing" and suggesting, as if I know why Ezra included the information he did. That is a part of Bible study, observing what is there and trying to understand why the Spirit included it and what He wants us to learn from it. There is first the context of the original audience to whom this was written, but there is also an application and purpose designed for us.

1 Chronicles 11

Vs. 1-3 This seems to be a high point. All of the tribes of Israel went to David after the defeat and death of Saul (actually it took seven years and it was after the death of Ish-bosheth). Notice that there is nothing mentioned of the conflict between Saul and David. That isn't the point here. The point is that a beaten Israel was rising in unity against its enemies, but it is rising by grasping on to the hope that God had given them. They finally acknowledged and embraced God's will and appointment of David. I'm amazed to see that the elders of Israel had all of this information about God's anointing of David 25 years earlier by Samuel. David still had to run from Saul for ten years and be the king of Judah for seven years during a civil war.

Vs. 4-9 This then is the second important high point, the taking of the city of David, the city of God. For the returned exiles it would be important to see how Zion was established as the promised location of God's dwelling place on earth. All of this is revolving around David and God's promise to him.

Vs. 10-47 Finally, the blessing of God on a people is seen in unity, loyalty and courage: People embracing God's destiny for their lives. Here, that destiny is seen in the men that God led to David, men who knew David was to be the next leader of Israel, but who came to him when it wasn't safe or popular to do so. This must have been an encouragement to David, now and then, to have people coming to him from all of the tribes of Israel.

There are some challenges here, if you compare the list of these names to those in Samuel. Ezra is writing years later, using manuscripts that are years old. Not only that, but the Hebrew language, pronunciation and spellings have changed. Imagine what your native language looked

like 500 years ago. Most English readers would be severely challenged if they had to read Old English from the 1300s. That was Ezra's challenge.

These men would have been folk heroes and the stuff of camp-out stories and bed-time stories. Then, of course, you had all of David's own adventures.

Vs. 10-14 These are David's three mighty men. Only two of the three are mentioned here. In 2 Samuel 23:8-12 you'll find Shammah listed there. In 2 Samuel it says 800 men, whereas here it says 300. Apparently it would have been easy for a person making a copy to confuse an 8 and a 3 in Hebrew too. I'd go with the 800. This would put Jashobeam just a little bit under Samson.

Vs. 15-19 Mentioned again is the famous raid these three men made out of love for David. Although the object is always what they did, David's response is equally famous.

Vs. 20-21 We've seen Abishai before. He was the *chief of the thirty*.

Vs. 22-25 Benaiah receives more honor here, I think, because he was a more honorable man than Joab and his brother. We've seen his character when Solomon became king. His loyalty was proven.

Vs. 26-47 If you're interested, there is a chart of "David's Mighty Men" on pp. 478-479 of the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT. What is interesting to me is that the situation with Bathsheba and Uriah is never mentioned in this history. For that matter, Absalom's rebellion is left out too. That wasn't Ezra's purpose in this history. Yet, both of those situations were connected. In the chart mentioned above, while Uriah is mentioned, Eliam the son of Ahithophel is not. I don't think it means anything, but it is interesting.

1 Chronicles 12:1-18

Notice here when these men came to David and who they were.

Vs. 1-7 Why would Benjaminites coming to David at Ziklag be noteworthy? You can figure that out. And these guys were like the artillery on legs. This showed that even while Saul was still king, there were members of his own tribe who acknowledged that God had chosen David.

Vs. 8-15 This group of men from Gad, from the north and the east side of the Jordan, came to David when he was still in Israel, in the mountains of Judah, living in caves. Read what it says about these guys. They were willing to live in hardship and in danger to be loyal to God's anointed king. What an amazing blessing. What should that have said to the people coming to rejoin Israel in hardship, leaving behind the comforts of Babylon and Persia? What should all of this say to us as disciples of Jesus in the harvest? How good are we at living in hardship to be loyal to the Son of David? How skilled are our hands for the harvest?

Vs. 16-18 And then there were still others from the tribe of Benjamin who came to live with David in hardship, in caves, in danger, running from Saul, their own countryman and tribesman.

V. 17 You can imagine why David had to give them this warning.

V. 18 Then we have the words of their leader, inspired by the Spirit. They were of Benjamin, yet loyal to God and His promise. And David made them all leaders of his troops. It must have been a good day for David to see God confirm him like this in the middle of his suffering and waiting.

What a fantastic testimony to a new generation of people leaving the comfort of Babylon and their houses and businesses, to return to the land promised to Abraham and the city of God. Did I mention Jerusalem was all in ruins? Do you see what Ezra and the Spirit are doing? We too have been called to join Christ in the harvest, in the middle of His promise of redemption to the world. The work is now and it is hard. The party is later.

Acts 28

It is kind of interesting that a few years ago at this time, my daughter and her family were on Malta. They took care about collecting driftwood, but somebody ran into their car. Paul didn't have to worry about cars.

Vs. 1-6 This is the only instance recorded in Acts where someone is bitten by a snake, and Mark 16:18 comes true, ...*they will pick up serpents with their hands; and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not hurt them.* So, even in the book of Acts, this wasn't the norm.

It is interesting to think of the stuff that the Lord had old Julius the centurion put in his report. This would make very interesting reading in Rome. Maybe he retired and wrote a book. Hopefully he came to Christ. And even here, God wasn't done.

Vs. 7-10 Suddenly Paul was back in the thick of things, healing, preaching and teaching. So what was the difference? It was the will of God. God was doing this now, to get fruit in that field and to get the report ready for Nero to read in Rome.

V. 10 I like Luke's note here that they liked Paul so much, that as he left, the islanders brought Paul Snickers © bars and Coke.

Vs. 11-15 Apparently after three months on Malta, this was a fairly quick trip to Rome.

V. 15 Notice that Paul was not above discouragement or emotional exhaustion. In saying Paul was encouraged by seeing them, the "them" is referring to the brothers who came from Rome, not the Three Taverns.

V. 16 Paul is now in Rome, but under house arrest again, probably in a nice rented house. It is not until 2 Timothy that Paul was in a dank, dark, smelly Roman dungeon, awaiting death by this same Nero.

Vs. 17-28 Same old Paul. First he went to the Jews. You can be sure that some of the Jews believed. We also know from the letter to the Romans, that there were already thriving churches there and many believing Jews.

Vs. 30-31 This is where Acts ends. Paul had been under house arrest for two years in Caesarea, and now he was under house arrest for two full years in Rome. The Lord gave him enormous freedom, as he had in Caesarea, to preach and teach. During this time Paul wrote Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon and Philippians. At the end of Philippians, he sent the believers in Philippi a special greeting from all the believers who belonged to Caesar's household. He was bearing fruit in jail. Paul still hadn't had his trial before Nero. At this point Nero was a respected and sane ruler. Luke ends Acts here and sends the manuscript to Theophilus. God's plan for Paul was to be imprisoned and become a person of note to the Roman community. Where Paul was jailed, he was also a great resource to the church, who could gather to Paul freely. Then there were the contingents of Roman guards who always had to watch Paul in pairs for eight-hour shifts. This went on for two years in Caesarea and for two years in Rome. What a distressing assignment, being locked in a room, sometimes even chained together with Paul. But Paul bore fruit for Christ even there, and now there were believers all over Nero's palace. That's what Howard Hendricks called a "chain reaction."

Both 1 and 2 Timothy occur after Acts. In 1 Timothy, Paul and Timothy are flying around fighting fires and doing damage control in churches. It may be that the persecutions under Nero had begun. It was certain that the internal problems of which Paul had warned the Ephesian elders (Acts 20) were beginning to become more of a challenge and churches were splitting. Apparently something happened at Ephesus that tore apart its leadership, and one of Timothy's assignments was to rebuild the church and its leadership. Paul was running off to Macedonia (probably to Corinth and Philippi) to take care of business in the churches there. In 2 Timothy,

Paul had been pursued and caught. Apparently Alexander the coppersmith had something to do with him being arrested. All of the people who traveled with Paul deserted him except Luke. It must have happened with a lot of violence and surprise. Paul was in a Roman dungeon. He had given testimony before Nero and the other Roman officials, and Paul judged that his time to be "graduated" had come. In Paul asking Timothy to come to Rome, he was asking him to come into harm's way. We never hear anything of Timothy after this, unless Hebrews wasn't written by Paul and was written later. (Hebrews 13:23)

Tradition indicates that this time of Nero's persecution not only claimed Paul's life but also Peter's. This would have been about 67 A.D. Nero died in 68 A.D. Two years later the Romans would destroy Jerusalem, fulfilling Jesus' judgment of the generation that witnessed His words and works and yet rejected Him as their Messiah. Ironically, the next time Israel will see Jesus, they will accept Him; but Jerusalem will again be on the verge of destruction. This morning I read Jesus saying, *For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'* (Matt 23:39) They will call, and then He will come. Until then, we have a harvest to follow Him into, reaching the lost and making disciples who make disciples.

Psalm 9:1-12

It's interesting to think that these songs were sung in worship. I could imagine David writing this after the group from Benjamin came to him in the wilderness, and through the Spirit pledged their loyalty and affirmed God's blessing on David.

Vs. 1-2 In spite of his troubles and waiting on the Lord, David proved that it was still possible to praise Him.

Vs. 3-6 There were times when David had a glimpse of God working His righteousness and justice. As God had cleared the way for Israel in the past, He would do it in the future.

Vs. 7-8 It is interesting that David saw more than Israel. He knew that the Lord would judge all nations and all men.

Vs. 9-10 We just read that the soldiers of Benjamin came to David in the stronghold. But for David, the Lord was his *stronghold*, physically and emotionally. How can you estimate the value of learning to trust in the Lord and have confidence in His love?

Vs. 11-12 The other great theme of David is publicly praising God in the congregation and among the nations. It is interesting that the words in v. 12 express both judgment and compassion.

Proverbs 19:1-3

V. 1 This verse probably belonged better to the proverbs from yesterday. Integrity is worth it, even if what you have to "pay" to gain it is poorness.

Vs. 2-3 As disciples, following Christ is a very simple matter. We complicate it by our Christian culture and many nice, but unnecessary, things. All we need is joy in our salvation, lost people to share with, and a desire to follow Christ in His harvest. Everything else is nice, but unnecessary.

So we serve Christ with stuff, with visions and great ideas, yet we lack maturity, balance and proper leading. We make haste and we slip and do dumb stuff and blame everyone else.

V. 3 And who gets the brunt of our rage for going too fast, without knowledge? We rant at God or get bitter and give up. Imagine Moses thinking he would free the people when he was 40. He was right and he knew God would use him to free the people, but he did it his way, too fast, without knowledge of God. It took 40 years of serving sheep in the wilderness for God to get him ready. You notice that when God spoke to Moses at the burning bush, Moses was still a little

mad at God. It's His mission. We are His servants, so we need to learn of Him and go at His pace, with the knowledge of Him.

JULY 12

Today isn't just July 12. You'll be starting Romans. That in itself is a good excuse to treat yourself to something. At the beginning of August you'll be ending 2 Chronicles and Romans, almost on the same day, and you'll be off to other adventures, reading different books and off for another culinary treat.

1 Chronicles 12:19-14:17

Ezra will begin to show, like no other writer, why David was a man after God's own heart and why the people and leaders of Israel should make David their model of devotion to God.

1 Chronicles 12:19-40

Vs. 19-22 Boy, did these guys come at the right time. Remember what David found when he got back to Ziklag? Notice that this story points to God's provision and to the united Israel. Toward the end of his reign I doubt that King Saul was popular, and different tribes could see that the kingdom was failing. It says these men deserted. What is significant is that the people of Manasseh made a choice for David before the death of Saul and before the ensuing civil war.

Vs. 23-40 Notice who these people were, where they were from and when and where they joined David. These men joined David during the seven years he was king of Judah at Hebron during the civil war with Saul's followers. There is a note in 2 Samuel 3:1 that David grew stronger and stronger. This explains how that happened.

V. 32 is interesting. These men were not only good fighters; they knew what Israel needed and did it. This would be a lesson to those returning to Israel after the exile. This should be a lesson to us also, to know the times and live accordingly. (Romans 13:11-14)

1 Chronicles 13

This is a retelling of the story of David bringing the ark to Jerusalem. Remember Ezra is giving the returned nation a view of how God formed Israel under David, to give the returning people pride in their calling by God. Having the presence of God in Jerusalem, and being near God's presence was David's passion. We read about this in almost all of his psalms. But David failed on his first attempt to bring the ark into the city. If even a great leader like David failed on his first attempt, the returned exiles shouldn't lose heart trying to reestablish the worship of the people in the rebuilt temple. When we read Ezra and Hosea, we'll see they had plenty of challenges getting the temple and the worship back in order; in fact, the people gave up.

What Ezra is showing the returned nation is what made David a man after God's own heart. We'll see this clearer in 1 Chronicles than anywhere else. Ezra will not mention David's faults because they are recorded elsewhere, but he will clearly show why David was given such honor by God and why the leaders and people should make David the model of their leadership and devotion to God. The Lord has this written here for us too.

Vs. 1-4 Now David was leading the united Israel. It is interesting that David brought all the commanders and leaders into this decision. Notice that no one was asking God anything here. This all must have seemed like a "no brainer." Of course, God would want this. What could go wrong?

Vs. 5-8 The celebration here was going to add to the intensity of the lesson David and the people were about to receive.

Vs. 9-14 David was disappointed for a lot of reasons. He had assumed on God, that doing anything would make Him happy. As you read The Psalms you understand that David really wanted God's presence with him in Jerusalem. That was a very sincere desire and passion. But ignorant passion, like what Moses showed at 40, isn't always honored by God. That ought to say something to us working in the harvest. We need to do things His way. Knowing Him and the Word is absolutely vital.

Notice that God immediately and visibly blessed Obed-edom and the ark only stayed there for *three months*.

1 Chronicles 14

God established David so that he had peace with his neighbors and rest from his enemies. Notice that the seeking of the ark and seeking God's presence and favor was sought by David before he sought the security of the nation with its neighbors. The message to the returning exiles was clear, that David sought the Lord's favor first, before and above his own security. This should be a model for the reestablished nation. And it's good advice for us as disciples.

Vs. 1-2 After living in caves and tents for so long, Hiram sends in the Extreme Makeover, Royal House, edition. David is finally settled. In the next chapter we'll see that this had an effect on David. He probably sat some nights looking at the security and the fine house he had and it not only made him thank God, but it moved his heart to want to do something for God.

Vs. 3-7 In Deuteronomy 17:16-20, God says that Israel's king was not to multiply wives. I think that one of the reasons they did it was to have heirs to the throne. The point here is that David also had rest and security in his personal life.

Vs. 8-12 Significant in this section is that David sought the Lord through the Urim and Thummim. God not only answered and led David, but He led David to victory. Notice that the Philistines left their idols. This might be similar to how the Israelites deserted the ark 100 years earlier. It was ironic that each man had to carry his god into battle, like a mascot or a hood ornament. David burned their idols. Some would have been of stone, but some would have been wood, coated with gold or silver. They all ended up trashed.

Vs. 13-17 The Philistines had been the main threat to Israel over the preceding 100 years. Now this threat was removed and David had rest from immediate danger. Notice again that David asked of the Lord. That's not a bad habit to develop. God answered with very specific information. This would be a test of David's faith, having to believe and exercise obedience and faith. That never hurts either.

V. 17 Notice that the Lord brought the fear of David upon the nations.

Of course this is all good information for the returning exiles. For us in the harvest, all of this is here for our instruction.

Romans 1:1-17

Wow, we are beginning Romans! There is so much here regarding discipleship and living for Christ that you'll be gleaning from this book each year for the rest of your life. You'll make plenty of your own observations, so I'll just make a few.

Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, during the three months he was in Greece mentioned in Acts 20:3. Phoebe, mentioned in Romans 16:1, was a deaconess of the church of Cenchrea, the eastern harbor of Corinth. Part of the purpose of this letter, toward the end, is to introduce her. In fact, her trip to Rome might have been what got Paul thinking that if he wrote a letter to the churches there, she could take it and he could save on postage.

V. 1 Always notice how Paul introduces himself. Particularly here in Romans, it has something to do with his entire focus in the letter.

Vs. 1-7 Notice how often you find something that refers to being called by God. Notice the promise in these verses and how Paul mentions David. Notice how the mission is woven through all of this. Notice how the Spirit is writing this, so that it could apply to you too. We are called to Christ to serve Him in the harvest.

Vs. 8-15 Notice that their faith was known and visible. How do you think it was seen? We have no record of any church planting activity in Rome. It is likely that some of those people saved in Jerusalem on Pentecost were from Rome. All roads led to Rome and many Christians walked them.

V. 9 Jesus told the Samaritan woman that those who worshiped the Father would worship Him in spirit and in truth. So what does it mean for a person to serve God in "spirit?"

V. 13 We'll hear more about the reasons for this delay in visiting Rome in chapter 15. Notice that Paul naturally assumed he would be fruitful in the gospel when he came to Rome. Shouldn't we also assume the gospel will bear fruit?

V. 15 Paul said that he was eager to preach in Rome. Later Paul will say that he didn't want to preach where Christ had already been proclaimed. Paul's desire to preach in Rome and to strengthen the church indicates, possibly, that the church began by spontaneous generation, neighbor to neighbor, but that no one had formally built the church and preached in Rome. If that's the case, the city still would have been fresh turf for evangelism, and therefore, fair game for Paul.

Vs. 16-17 Maybe a lack of fruit is because Christians lack this sense of conviction, confidence and calling. This is why a disciple is left on earth, to follow Christ into the harvest and to bear much fruit. The gospel is still powerful, but saying that is not the same as believing it. The way you get this confidence in the gospel is not by reading Paul; it is by reading Jesus. Reading the entire Bible is very important every year, but particularly the words and life of Jesus give you the confidence of bearing your cross daily. Watching Jesus shows you what it means to abide in Christ and follow His lead.

Notice here too that Paul says *to the Jew first and also to the Greek*. This shows that one of the purposes of this letter will be to strengthen the unity of these mixed house churches in Rome. This church was very Jewish and very Gentile. Greek in this context refers to everyone who was not a Jew, not specifically Greeks. And too, the church was in Italy. I wonder if they had pizza at their fellowship dinners.

For us as disciples, we need to internalize for ourselves the first six verses, follow Christ into the harvest, and in confidence of the gospel's power, not be ashamed.

Psalm 9:13-20

We have read of Abraham waiting. We have read of Moses living in obscurity for 40 years as a shepherd. We've seen David anointed and victorious and still have to run for his life for 10 years. We've seen Paul chased from town to town, beaten and lied against and then imprisoned for 4-5 years. Yet, as we'll see in Romans 8, God uses all of this for good, for His purpose. And in our suffering and waiting, He teaches us humility and seeking so that we'll be fruitful for Him in the harvest.

Vs. 13-14 Not only did God consistently save David, but David consistently let everyone know of God's love and His deliverance.

Vs. 15-16 David could read in the Scriptures that God had done this, but shortly after David became king of the entire nation, everyone began coming after Israel. David needed God's help against the neighboring nations.

Vs. 17-18 Israel was *the needy*. Under David they had a man who could lead them to victory, because David knew what it meant to come to God in humility, crying out for His help.

Vs. 19-20 This is David asking God to show *the nations* His glory. We saw what happened to Assyria, when they mocked God and His people.

V. 20 Go back and read 1 Chronicles 14:17 from today. That's kind of interesting isn't it?

Proverbs 19:4-5

It seems that v. 5 is the commentary on v. 4. Verse 4 is full of lying. Verse 5 says that even in relationships like these, there will be justice.

JULY 13

1 Chronicles 15:1-16:36

Both of these chapters are dedicated to David bringing the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. For the returnees, this is an important point of history. David's kingdom wasn't complete without God's presence established near him. This was David's passion and Ezra was suggesting that it should be their passion.

Contrary to what should have happened and totally because of God's grace, Israel grew strong as a nation in exile. When they returned they brought with them the synagogue system. There was a school of training and textual study that developed during that time. I think the work of men like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (of the tribe of Judah) helped to keep the nation focused on their destiny and unity as a people. Still, why would you want to go back to Jerusalem? Anyone who had grown up near Babylon saw one of the Seven Wonders of the World. The Hanging Gardens were built by Nebuchadnezzar (Iraq) for his Persian (Iran) wife. Jerusalem had nothing to offer that even came close to the glory, wealth and comfort of the city of Babylon. Going back to Jerusalem was like going back to the ruins of a ghost town.

In this history then, you can see why Ezra is emphasizing the glory of Israel. They had the covenant of God. They had the king of promise, David, bringing the very mercy seat of God's presence into Jerusalem. The God of creation formed and spoke to this nation to further His plan of redemption in the world. Babylon and Persia couldn't touch that. That is why this history is important.

One additional small note: They should have included the last seven verses of chapter 16 in today's reading.

1 Chronicles 15

V. 1 David needed more than one house because he had more than one wife. This is another reason to only have one wife. The tent he put up would have been a second tabernacle. This mention of houses and the tent will have an effect on David in chapter 17.

Vs. 2-24 We've read this story before, but this information is entirely new. It not only shows David as a spiritual leader of the people, but he is the designer of their worship. David, the king of promise who wrote most of the songs of worship, also ordered the worship of Israel. Leaders must lead spiritually.

Vs. 11-15 God's humbling of David on David's first attempt to bring the ark to Jerusalem had borne fruit. Notice that the lesson wasn't just obeying the instructions in the Bible, but also seeking God.

Vs. 16-24 This isn't just David commanding and leading the Levities; this organization is from David.

Vs. 25-28 This is David leading all the elders and leaders of Israel.

V. 29 We've read this before too, and in greater detail. Since Ezra makes no mention of the rivalry with Saul's lineage, this story is totally devoted as a warning against despising those who worship God with all they are. So then, those entering the new nation should worship with passion like David.

1 Chronicles 16

Vs. 1-3 The offerings David made here were for himself in accordance with what is written in Leviticus for the sin and freewill offerings for rulers and people. Afterward they had a barbecue.

Vs. 4-7 David made sure that the Levites and the priests fulfilled their parts and were organized.

As an historical note for the returning generation, it mentions in v. 7 that this was the day that David appointed Asaph and his brothers to accompany the worship in song. David, himself a musician and song writer, decreed from this point on that music would always be a part of Israel's worship. Asaph was the first worship leader. For these people, hundreds of years later, they would read this and go, "So that's where the Beatles, I mean, the sons of Asaph came from. The sons of Asaph were like a cultural phenomenon in the worship of Israel.

Vs. 8-36 And this is Asaph's first song.

V. 8 Note how global this song was. This is the first time you get the idea that Israel understood its role in the redemptive plan of God. It seems to me from what is seen in other psalms, that David probably wrote all or most of this song. Asaph and others may have added the melody, and they did the singing.

There are lots of things to see in this song. As a disciple, do you see the redemptive plan of God and how naturally it is woven into the praise of God? It is clear that all nations and people were to look at Israel and praise God.

Notice vs. 35-36. It could be that Ezra added these verses as a prayer to God for those still in exile. Or it could be that in all the years since Joshua, Israel had been scattered because of their enemies and because of their disobedience.

I guess our desire should be to want to see people brought out of slavery to Christ.

Romans 1:18-32

This is one of the most incredible portions of Scripture or world literature. It's the Genesis or beginning of how the world got wrecked by sin. No other religion explains the confusion and differences in worship in this lost world. No other religion or philosophy can account for the constant downward movement in the human heart and why every generation and culture fails to get better. The answer is sin, and it accounts for this mess, brilliantly.

Vs. 18-20 There is enough visual evidence of God to make every human being guilty before God. The invisible spiritual sickness of sin irresistibly pushes us to suppress this truth.

If you took a simple plastic spoon and tried to convince your neighbor that in 70 gazillion years that spoon just happened, he'd say you were nuts. Something as simple as that spoon needed an engineer, a designer, complex processes and machinery. But that same neighbor might say this world is all an "accident." God doesn't have understanding with that kind of logic. He just says it is sin and suppressing the truth. We know that this world and everything in it isn't an accident.

Vs. 21-23 The story of mankind since Genesis is not one of knowing God better, but knowing God less. Adam and Eve and Cain and Abel saw and heard God, probably the angel of the Lord.

And still they disobeyed. But we were made to worship and have connection with God. The need is irresistible. If sin pushes us away from Him, we still need something to seek, to worship and to ask help from.

Vs. 24-25 This is the origin of our relational and sexual dysfunction. Being "one flesh" is the way we were made. We cannot deny it. We will always seek it. It is built in. There are some exceptions, but they are exceptions, not the norm. The unity in being one flesh is almost mystical beyond our thinking. In a proper way it is spiritual and needs to be linked to God for it to remain healthy. Well, we know the story here. This is the general, heterosexual side of sexual sin and dysfunction.

Vs. 26-27 This is the homosexual side of the dysfunction. It is all sin. I think the order here makes perfect sense. A man is to be the protector of the relationship and the nurturer of his wife. If a man doesn't see this and if the spiritual "one flesh" nature of the relationship is lost, sex becomes a function or obsession for a man. The difference in sexual expression between men and women, the need and response, was designed and built in by God. Sin breeds stupidity and selfishness and perversion: men became dominated by their desire; women became frustrated by their need; both were unsatisfied emotionally and spiritually.

Regarding homosexuality, God created sexuality and calls this a perversion of what He created. God is God and we don't need to be ashamed of holding to what He says. And we don't need to soften His words for the sake of the feelings of those who enjoy any particular sin, even if we like these people and would like to see them come to Christ. Repentance is part of the gospel; and where there is no repentance, there is no forgiveness.

Homosexuality is sin like every other sin, yet, honestly, there is something about it that makes it seem different. Sexuality is a very deep and vulnerable part of who God made us. Things that tamper with "nature" are hard for us to treat as "normal." Also, there is something about homosexuality that seems to border on addiction. It doesn't seem easy for people who have given themselves to this, to just hit the "reset" button and go back to God's specs. Addictions, whether to drugs, alcohol, gambling, pornography or homosexuality, cut deep and often never completely disappear. It isn't an accident that homosexuality is mentioned in Romans 1:18ff. Paul and the Spirit are describing man redefining himself apart from his Creator. Sin destroys, but doesn't have to be fatal if you admit that it's sin and repent. The problem with redefinition is that you don't see things as sin. Unfortunately then, the Creator owns the world and reality. Once we redefine ourselves out of His world and His reality, then, well, there's only one place left to go.

Vs. 28-32 Note this list of qualities is just as bad as whatever came before. These things are what plague all human relationships and come from the sin in each of our hearts.

Notice that there is a general progression in this section today. First came the loss of God and truth, then the loss of marital oneness and intimacy, then loss of social unity and order.

Notice also that there are three instances where, *God gave them up*. Think about that progression and what connection there is between what they did, or didn't do, and what God gave them up to. God's severest punishment, though fitting and ironic, is to give us what we want. Sin affects everything, and Paul will eventually describe sin as a force: something spiritually sick within us.

Psalm 10:1-15

Wow, read this psalm and relate it to the passage in Romans, especially Romans 1:18. Notice what the thoughts or words of the unbeliever are and how they fit into the reading in Romans for today.

V. 1 So what was the trouble?

Vs. 2-11 As we have seen in God's dealing with the kings and people of Israel, God doesn't always judge immediately. It looks as if it is possible to spit in God's face and prosper. That is why the psalmist was suffering. He saw this happening and wondered why God didn't do something.

Vs. 12-15 The writer wanted to see God arise and judge the wicked and care for those who cried out to Him.

In the harvest, reading through the Bible year after year, we understand this as God's kindness and patience. He wants to see all men saved; and His kindness, forbearance and patience are meant to lead people to repentance. God will judge. At the same time, God has many things working that we could never understand. We can only trust His wisdom and goodness. In the meantime, we go forward following our Lord, reaching the lost and making disciples who make disciples.

Proverbs 19:6-7

The point of these verses is that all of this is built on words without reality and substance. Neither the rich man nor the poor man has an honest friend, when gifts and position are what really matter.

JULY 14

1 Chronicles 16:37-18:17

1 Chronicles 16:37-43

This is a continuation from yesterday showing that David, as king, took the lead in organizing and designing the worship. One mark of all godly kings in Judah was that they personally invested in and organized the worship of the people. For the rulers of Israel, returning to the land after the exile, Ezra was emphasizing the need for them to model spiritual involvement and worship for the people.

Vs. 39-40 This is interesting. There was the tent in Jerusalem for the ark, and there was the tabernacle in Gibeon. This is why David had two high priests, Abiathar and Zadok. The question is why the tabernacle was in Gibeon and the ark was in Jerusalem. Sacrifices were being made in both places. I wonder if David had the tabernacle placed in Gibeon during the civil war, so that it would have been outside of Judah in the territory of Benjamin, Saul's tribe. When Solomon was worshiping to God and received the promise of wisdom, Solomon was at Gibeon. Somehow I think God allowed this, but didn't necessarily approve. Hezekiah and Josiah removed all the high places and made the altar in Jerusalem the only place to sacrifice or worship.

1 Chronicles 17

Today, in this very select history for the returning exiles, comes the Davidic promise. David sought the glory and honor of God, and God honored David with this promise. The importance of this promise in the OT is rivaled only by the promise to Adam and Eve and the promise to Abraham. These were redemptive promises, even if at times, Israel only understood them as nationalistic. Even in Romans 1, as Paul introduces himself, he includes David's name in the description of the gospel. The Messiah is the eternal ruler who was promised by God to come through the house and lineage of David.

As you read this chapter, what do you think Ezra was trying to say to the new generation entering the land of promise?

Vs. 1-2 It apparently bothered David that he now lived comfortably in a permanent house made of cedar, but the Lord was represented by a tent. Nathan assumed that everything David desired would be blessed.

Vs. 3-15 This is the promise or covenant with David.

Vs. 11-12 These verses transform this promise into something that could only be fulfilled by God Himself. To reign forever meant that this son would have to live forever. Solomon fulfilled v. 11, but only Jesus could fulfill v. 12. This was a part of the confused Jewish theology Jesus lived with during His ministry. They understood this theologically, but couldn't accept it in reality. For example, in John 1:49 Nathanael answered and said to Jesus, *Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!* It was one thing to say that the Messiah would be God's eternally living Son; it was another thing to meet God's eternally living Son and like Him and follow Him.

Vs. 16-27 This entire chapter is inspiring. Out of all the earthly confusion we have read about regarding Samuel and Saul and David, suddenly the plan of God clearly comes to the forefront. You wonder as you read this how much David understood of God's plan of redemption. We know from what we've read in 2 Samuel, that David lost perspective because of his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah and began to worry and obsess about which son would fulfill this.

I'm reminded of what Jesus said to His disciples in Luke 10:24, *For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.* And think of our privilege. As disciples in the harvest we have been saved by this plan. We know the Messiah; we can explain the plan of salvation to others, and we have been called to become ambassadors of this truth. We dare not let our downfall be that, knowing all of this, we take it for granted and hide our light.

1 Chronicles 18

We've seen that David fought battles and God gave him the victory, establishing David's house. But, we haven't yet seen what Ezra is trying to emphasize about David that these people should model.

Vs. 1-8 We've read about these battles before, but notice vs. 7-8. Even though David was told he couldn't build the temple, it was still his passion to see this done. David knew a temple would be built and that Solomon would do it. In everything that David did, he still had that desire burning in his heart. He wanted God's presence near him, and he wanted God's presence to be the center of Israel's existence. This is what made David a man after God's own heart. This is an example of David's passion for God showing through. Whereas Solomon made himself rich by acquiring gold and precious metals, David began to stockpile these metals for the building of the temple.

Vs. 9-11 Even the gifts David was given went into the treasury for the temple.

Vs. 12-13 It was just mentioned that David carried away the wealth of Edom and the other nations. Apparently it was Abishai who was responsible for the campaign that brought Edom into submission.

Vs. 14-17 Here is David again - leading, guiding, organizing and serving Israel, the people of God. Notice in v. 17 it says that David made his sons officials in his government as they came to adulthood. In 2 Samuel 8:18 it says they were priests, but "officials" is what was meant. They became like governors and judges, mediators for the people.

When David comes and sits before the Lord in 1 Chronicles 17:16, he asks the question every disciple of Jesus should ask, *Who am I?* When we read those first few verses of Romans 1, we realize that we have been called to belong to Christ and have been appointed to take the news of this salvation to the lost and dying. That should be a cause for feeling just as David felt when he was told that God would pour out kindness and honor upon him. In many ways, the kindness and honor God has shown us is so much greater. Jesus told His disciples in Matthew, *But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. For truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous people longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and*

did not hear it. (Matt. 13:16-17) We are those disciples of honor who have been saved, who see and hear and have the privilege of working with our Savior in the harvest.

Romans 2:1-24

In this chapter Paul is working toward what he's going to say in chapter three, that we are all condemned and guilty before God because that we are all under the power of sin. The only answer to the condemnation of man and the power of sin will be faith in Christ. Paul is also defusing any sense that Jews or those who follow the law are better than those who "only" know Christ.

In your observations, notice how Paul is building an atmosphere of coming judgment.

Vs. 1-5 This could apply to any person who is a judge of others, Jew or Gentile. Knowing what is right doesn't free anyone from the power of sin. Thinking we are better than others because we "know" makes us hypocrites because that same power of sin is still roaring through our veins. Knowing right from wrong doesn't save you. Only Christ saves and only the Spirit can aid us against sin. There is no ground for pride in our salvation.

Vs. 6-11 might give the "idea" that there might be something someone could "do" for acceptance before God, but this is just Paul setting up his argument for man's hopelessness in chapter 3. Look ahead to the end of what Paul is saying here in v. 16 and notice the basis of this judgment. Judgment is according to Jesus Christ. That will mean "by faith in Christ." I was reading this morning in John 6 that when the people asked Jesus, "*What must we do, to be doing the works of God?*" *Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."* That is the only *work* that works: belief in Jesus, welcoming Him as Savior and Lord. In John 6, Jesus is taking their view of works and saying that there is no work, only faith in Him.

Notice too that in this section, Paul is beginning to show that since God shows no partiality, the Jews and the Gentiles are equal. All are lost and all are saved by faith in Christ.

Vs. 12-16 This is some amazing information. Even those who don't know the Law of Moses/God are responsible for the law. The law's most important components are written on the hearts of humans, since we are all created in the image of God. This goes back to Romans 1:19-20. All mankind is without excuse before God. Notice that judgment is a part of the gospel. That is one of the reasons God has left us here in the harvest, to warn people.

Vs. 17-23 Now, although there is a tone in this letter as if Paul is writing to a completely Jewish audience, he is not. This is one of a few instances where Paul addresses and names a particular group in the church in Rome. Paul will again address the Jews in chapter 7 and then the Gentiles in chapter 11. It was a mixed congregation of people. The point here was that the Jews were so shot through with sin, the spiritual disease, that there was no way they should feel safe or better or saved because they were Jews.

The contradictions between belief and behavior are also famous in the church today. A theoretical Christianity is powerless. We are not better off for all the videos, books, preachers and podcasts we have. We still need to be in the Word daily and humbly following our Lord every day, pouring out our lives to make disciples of those He is seeking. That is the only way we stay in His presence and care, by staying close to Him.

It could be that there were Jews in the church who were either not yet saved, or they were Jewish Christians who were still very rooted in the law. These "law abiding" people were a deep threat to understanding the grace of the gospel and the saving faith in Christ alone. Paul is doing some very thorough theological re-orientation here for those stuck on the law. Paul will level the playing field and show that neither Jew nor Gentile has any hope without faith in Christ, and that even in the OT, salvation was based solely on faith.

One trap that we fall into as Christians is thinking that we are better than "sinners." That attitude will keep us from being effective for Jesus in the harvest. Humbled disciples know that the disease of sin still rages in this body of death. It is only by grace, by the daily cleansing of the Word, by following the leading of the Spirit that we are able to do anything that is half-way honoring and glorifying to God. It is pure grace and purely by His help. As Jesus said, *apart from me you can do nothing*. Paul said to the Corinthians, *What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift?* (1 Cor. 4:7, RSV) Knowing the gift draws you in love to the Savior who is, in fact, still working in the harvest.

Psalm 10:16-18

This is the very intense ending of the psalm. There is a kind of spiritual affliction that comes from seeing the harvest, and sensing our call to serve God in the harvest. The work is important and it is desperate. That is why Jesus could tell His disciples, in Luke 6:21, *Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh*. We don't have to be afflicted now, but we will gladly be afflicted now because we understand the grace given to us, the amazing grace and love in the gospel and the coming judgment on those who have not yet responded.

Vs. 16-18 Since God is the King forever, and He is also the cure for all that will come in the "forever" part of this life, now is the time to face affliction and put aside our interests and work in the harvest reaching the lost, making disciples who make disciples.

Proverbs 19:8-9

Truth or lies. Is a person living according to reality or closing their eyes to reality? Christians get ruined too. And pretending that there is no harvest is the same as saying there isn't one. Jesus said in Luke 8:21, *My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it*. For a disciple, the "it" always involves following their Savior into the harvest. Submitting to His reality and truth shows we love Him, and, according to v. 8, that we love our own souls. Hmmm. And we will discover good.

JULY 15

1 Chronicles 19-21

As you read today, remember that Ezra is writing to the Jews who returned to Jerusalem after the Babylonian exile. Our question as we read is to understand why God is leading Ezra to include some information and leave out other information. You will read some things that seem verbatim with what you've read before. In a couple of parts you'll notice that Ezra leaves out a lot of stuff. Then you'll read a familiar story, but you'll notice that there is a lot more detail added. The Lord had His purposes for how He led Ezra to write for these people.

1 Chronicles 19

We've read of this battle before. I think the significance for Ezra in reviewing this entire story was that this was the largest foreign army David fought against. The situation began innocently enough, but God *allowed* it to escalate into a major international showdown. It was God's way of revealing threats to David and Israel and taking care of them. The Ammonites hired an army from the areas around Assyria and Babylon, and Israel defeated them with God's help. After this, the names of God and David were known as far as Babylon. The returned Israelites could depend on God for His help too.

Vs. 1-5 David was innocent of any false motives, but things still went bad. This was what had also happened to the returnees when they began to rebuild the temple. They were being charged with wanting to become rebels and reestablish an independent Israel.

Vs. 6-15 The words of Joab to his brother were exactly what the people needed to hear. They needed to be strong and to use their strength for their people and for the cities of their God. Israel's history showed that God would honor their faith and He would reward them for seeking Him.

Vs. 16-19 It seemed like things had gone from bad to worse, but history showed that the Lord was working in this to bring an even greater victory, and to bring renown to Israel and to His name.

These are also good lessons for us to learn for our work in the harvest.

1 Chronicles 20

Vs. 1-3 We've read this story before too, but what is interesting is what's missing. There is no mention of Bathsheba or the death of Uriah.

Vs. 4-8 This is a very thin summary, showing the returning generation that God rescued Israel from huge armies and (literally) enormous foes.

No one could stand before Israel if they sought the Lord.

1 Chronicles 21

We have also read this story. The twist here is that Ezra says that Satan stood up against Israel and incited David to do something that would bring God's judgment on Israel. The story was important for the returnees to know, because this is how the location for the temple was chosen.

It is interesting that Ezra points to Satan being against Israel. We know this is true, but this is the first time I can remember it being said. Israel had seen trouble and had been disobedient; and as a result, they were kicked out of their land. They almost ceased to exist as a nation and only God's grace in Babylon saved them. As the nation of God, tracing its roots back to Adam and Eve, they needed to keep in mind that they had an enemy who would incite them to sin. Even God's favorite son, David, when incited to sin, was punished.

Vs. 1-6 This is recorded in 2 Samuel 24 where it says that God was angry and incited David to take the census. This needs some thought. I would suggest comparing this to the situation of Ahab and Jehoshaphat who had already made the decision to work together without consulting God. God gave them the desire of their hearts, but God was clearly unhappy with them and allowed a demonic power to influence them. The point is that they had already sinned in their hearts and actions. I think David had already sinned by becoming so prideful of his nation that he felt he wanted to see how great he had become as a military power. In God's anger at David's pride, God allowed Satan to incite him. David was open and willing, and Satan knows a thing or two about pride.

Again, it is ironic that a man like Joab saw what David couldn't see. This often happens to us when we choose to sin. God speaks to us in some very ironic ways: through the mouth of a donkey here, and through the words of a bad person there.

Vs. 7-13 In 2 Samuel 24 it says that David's heart struck him. Here it says that God struck Israel and then David knew he was wrong. Apparently God began to move and then David saw the connection between the beginning of God's judgment and his prideful action.

Vs. 14-17 Ezra is adding more detail to his rendering of this story. He is showing that there was grace and purpose in what God did here. This threshing floor is the point of the story.

Vs. 18-27 We have a lot more detail here. *The angel of the Lord... commanded Gad* to tell David to make a sacrifice. It is a good guess that this angel of the Lord was the pre-incarnate Christ.

V. 20 It is funny that this guy and his sons *saw the angel* and hid.

V. 23 If I was that guy, with a deadly angel standing there with his sword ready for action, I'd just want to give the property away too.

V. 25 In 2 Samuel 24 there is another amount given, but David actually bought two things. He bought the threshing floor and the acreage around it.

V. 26 Here we learn that the Lord *answered... with fire from heaven*.

V. 27 Only then did the Lord command the angel to sheath His sword.

Vs. 28-30 The idea here seems that David recognized that this was where the Lord wanted David to worship every day, not in Gibeon. Gibeon was far enough away that David wouldn't have gone there regularly. This was the place of worship and sacrifice and seeking God's favor. Later, we will hear the name of this place is Mt. Moriah. It is where Abraham had been willing to offer Isaac, and it was the place where the temple would be built. Ezra was trying to help the returned Israel understand that this place of mercy should be their focus and priority as they sought God to rebuild the nation.

Romans 2:25-3:8

Romans 2:25-29

V. 25 What is the value of circumcision for a Jew? It is seen in Romans 4:11 regarding the faith of Abraham. It was a symbol of the promise of redemption through God's work in Abraham. It was what symbolized the nation built on faith in that promise. It still boiled down to faith. To break the law was to break faith and undo what circumcision meant.

V. 26 A Gentile who kept the law would show that he had both the faith in the promise to Abraham, and the work of redemption God was working in the world. It still boiled down to faith.

Vs. 28-29 In chapters 9-15, Paul will say that there is a difference between the church and the Jews and that the Jews will fulfill their destiny. There is no ground in Romans whatsoever to say that the church and Israel are the same. Paul's purpose in saying that a real Jew is a Jew inwardly is that a real Jew is not only descended by blood from Abraham, but is a man or woman of faith in the promise to Abraham and shares the faith of Abraham. Romans 9 makes this very clear. The real descendants of Abraham not only have the blood tie, but they also have the faith tie. Paul's and the Spirit's logic is compelling.

Romans 3:1-8

Vs. 1-2 If the Jews had lived by faith, it is hard to overestimate the privilege and "advantage" mentioned here. Compare this to what Paul says later in Romans 9:4-5.

V. 3 God will still honor His promises to Abraham, to David and to Solomon regarding the temple and Jerusalem. The nation of Israel will fulfill its destiny and proclaim God's grace to the earth. Israel's rebellion doesn't show God's failure; it shows the truth of His Word and the wisdom of His actions. We'll see all this in chapters 11 and 15.

V. 4 This is one of those many places in Romans where Paul asks a rhetorical question that is answered very strongly with *By no means*. In the Greek this is a very, very strong denial. To get the right effect in the English, you probably need to take your shoe off and bang it on the table as you're saying this.

The issue of God being "judged" is interesting and very important in the dramas being played out in this time of spiritual darkness. Paul will mention God's righteousness again in this chapter. Although Paul will use some arguments in chapter 9 that will make it look like God can do what He pleases, God still brings about salvation in such a way that it is totally righteous and just. Satan is not only the accuser of the brethren, but he's keeping an eye on God too, to hold Him to

the line. When all is said and done, without having to violate righteousness and play the card that says, "I'm bigger than you, so I can do anything I want," God will appear totally righteous, good and loving in how He brought about salvation universally and personally. (See Psa. 11:7 in today's reading.)

Vs. 5-7 We will see this argument surface in a different way in chapter 9. If God uses the unrighteous, does that make God unrighteous in judging the unrighteous? Of course not, but some people think they understand justice and righteousness better than God. Actually, to question God in this regard is rebellion and a lack of trust in who God is.

V. 8 Apparently some people twisted Paul's teaching on grace, as Peter says later, to their own destruction.

Psalm 11

As disciples following Christ, we don't live our lives according to the "tune" of our culture. We see a different reality and know a Savior who is still interested in seeing people saved. That means our lives have to take a different trajectory every day. No one else in the world rises every day to take a cross that declares they are following Christ to the death should He ask it. Our work in the harvest is to work as He worked whether or not others understand it or support it.

V. 1 is the taunt of the unrighteous. Even those who were running and hiding with David must have suggested that he abandon any thought of help from God and just head for the hills.

Vs. 2-3 As David ran from Saul, the resources of a nation were bent on destroying David. If David were killed, what would the anointing of Samuel mean? Yet they were really fighting against God, not David.

V. 3 This seems like what people are always attempting. If the foundational truth can be "redefined," then the righteous are helpless. But God doesn't change or go away. He is the foundation of truth and reality. Unbelief may rage against truth and reality, yet we are always secure. Paul and the Spirit say so in Romans 8:28-39.

Vs. 4-7 None of this escapes the Lord's attention or is beyond His sovereign working.

V. 5 The tension is that on the one hand, those who follow are being tested. Yet on the other hand, to the person not following God, this testing proves their point, that those who follow God do it in vain. And God knows their thoughts and sets His face against them.

V. 7 is our only true hope. As we follow, our lives are used by God for His purpose. Success is defined by the Lord, not by us or our culture. Our hope is in knowing we will see His face and know His kindness in Christ forever.

Proverbs 19:10-12

It's hard to know what to do with this little mish-mash.

V. 10 You have the disparity of seeing the foolish do well, but they do, especially in Hollywood.

V. 11 You have the internal wisdom that supplies a person with balance in an "unequal" world.

V. 12 Then there is the judgment of a "king."

I guess in all of this, the person made wise by following God can make sense of the disparity of this life and he knows how to seek the favor of God.

In reading all of this, there is the question of whether it's worth it or not to make so much of following God. Ezra is trying to make a case for living as God's chosen people. Paul is saying that the life of faith is worth pursuing. The psalmist is crying out after listening to people tell him there's really no help, but helping yourself. Even the proverb says it's hard to see the foolish

prosper because it looks like they were right. But reality never changes. God has a plan and it's coming to completion. If you only do the speed limit when you see a cop, it means that you really don't see the law as important. If the only time we obey God is when we can see Him, that would be compliance, not love and faith. When we "can't see" Him working, but we keep on following in the harvest, that is love and faith. Others might think we've lost a couple of cards from the deck while they enjoy a comfortable life, but I'd rather follow, even if it means being hungry now.

JULY 16

1 Chronicles 22-23

1 Chronicles 22

This chapter adds some interesting information and perspective to what we have read before. Before you read what I've written below, read chapter 22 and see what questions or observations you come up with. This is a very rich chapter, full of information and it gives us David's words to Solomon.

Now from Ezra's perspective, other than the fact that this gives the returnees some great historical insight, I wonder what Ezra's purpose was for including this. The entire chapter is devoted to David's preparation for building the temple. I wonder if it was known among the people that for all of the good he had done, Solomon was the first king to lead the nation into idolatry. It could be that the temple had a kind of "strike" against it because of this. Since Solomon died as a bitter, backslidden idolater, I'm wondering if Ezra wanted to correct the notion that the temple was Solomon's idea. Having read 1 Kings and about Solomon building the temple, we stand here viewing this with the same surprise that Ezra's readers had. It was really David who did the greatest amount of preparation for the temple. David couldn't build it, but David devoted the last years of his life to amassing materials, making drawings, organizing labor, enlisting the support of the political and religious leaders of Israel, and then, carefully instructing Solomon on what to do. Ezra is showing them that although David was not allowed to build the temple, he prepared the next generation to do it. David, the king of promise, the "man after God's own heart," was responsible for the temple.

What this gives us is some interesting perspective on Solomon. Before David became sick and bedridden, he spent hours with Solomon to pass on these instructions. We read of Solomon in 1 Kings, organizing for the building of the temple, not realizing that this wasn't all Solomon; it was David.

This chapter also gives some added perspective to Adonijah's attempt to become king. According to this chapter, after David knew where the temple would be built, he spent years making it clear that Solomon would be his heir and that he would build the temple. David commanded all the leaders of Israel to help Solomon build the temple. So then, Adonijah, Abiathar and Joab staging the coup in the first chapter of 1 Kings was really a crass, intentional act of treason. They thought that because David was a fading, tottering, old man, they could get away with this. If not for God, via Nathan, Solomon would not only have been passed by, but also would have been killed.

In the gap between 2 Samuel and 1 Kings, you don't have any of this information about David preparing for the building of the temple. This is pretty cool.

Vs. 1-5 David realized that in God telling David to build an altar on this threshing floor, God was showing David where the temple should be. I believe that even prior to the census, David was already planning for the temple and that he already knew Solomon would build it. First

Chronicles 18:8 happened years before this event and mentions David amassing a large quantity of bronze which Solomon later used in the temple.

Vs. 6-10 This is David's charge to Solomon to build the temple. Notice that this is David before he was a tottering old man who couldn't get warm. That, or God, gave David an amazing second wind before he died.

Vs. 11-16 There are lots of interesting things here. God told David that Solomon would build the temple.

Vs. 12-13 This is a charge for Solomon to seek discretion or wisdom and for him to keep the law of the Lord. I wonder if this is where Solomon got the idea to ask God for wisdom.

V. 14 According to the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 612, we are talking about 3,750 TONS of gold and 37,500 TONS of silver. You really wonder why Solomon felt the need to keep collecting gold all his life. He seems to have been a man of excesses.

Vs. 17-19 This was David's charge to the leaders of Israel to help Solomon. Interestingly, David commanded them to seek the Lord.

1 Chronicles 23

V. 1 Between chapters 22 and 23 you have the fun and games of 1 Kings 1-2:9. Again, what Ezra is showing here is that it was the godly king David who organized those who were to serve Israel in the worship of God in the temple.

Vs. 2-6 This was the general organizing of the Levites. David took as much interest in the organization of worship, as he did in the building of the temple. David wasn't just a warrior and musician; he was an organizing animal. Sometimes, very disorganized people are very "together" in the area of their passion. In the last years of David's life, he pursued his passion: loving and following God. The text makes it look here that David did this organizing work after he made Solomon king. If so, God did give him an amazing last surge of strength. My guess would be that David already had much of this organization in place during the preceding years. This is the David who validates the statement, "a man after God's own heart."

Vs. 7-23 Here Ezra shows why the genealogies of the Levites were so important. David reorganized the Levites (except for the priests) for service in the temple according to their major families.

Vs. 24-32 Originally, God didn't number the Levites who were under thirty. In v. 26 David changed that because there was no longer a need to move the tabernacle. The temple would be the permanent home of the Lord, the ark and of the worship of Israel. He would enlist the Levites, giving them new duties and raising the level of the daily worship in the temple.

In one sense, Ezra was making disciples. He was helping a new generation find the calling of their heritage. I think he wanted this new nation to pursue God with the life passion of David. David didn't just gather raw materials and draw up building plans; he was also totally involved in wanting to see God honored by the worship of the people. David was now seen as the planner, with God, of the temple.

As we work to make disciples, who make disciples, I think it is good to focus on the passion of David and of Paul pursuing God, but even more to focus on Jesus. His passion for the harvest and intensity in following the Father is what we all need to keep our hearts ignited, from generation to generation, as we work until our Lord returns.

Romans 3:9-31

This is one of those portions in Romans where it is worth memorizing more verses than just Romans 3:23.

V. 9 *Under sin* means under the power of sin. Paul will talk more about this in Romans 7; for example, Romans 7:23, *but I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members*. Sin is a spiritual sickness responsible for the acts that we call "sin." The sin within us can only be fully cured by the resurrection. That is why the resurrection is a great hope for us, finally freeing us from this sickness.

Vs. 11-18 This seems hard, but it is the truth about sin. We are totally ruined by it. In the OT, leprosy was the physical disease that symbolized sin. It was incurable and it permeated all of the body and life.

Paul is showing some of his knowledge of Scripture, particularly The Psalms, bringing together several different portions of the OT. Apparently after he came to faith, everywhere he studied the Scripture, he saw our helplessness.

Because it says that no one seeks after God, you hear some people say that there are no "seekers." Since the Bible has commands to seek God, it seems that there must be something we need to understand in these verses. In Kings, for example, God did many things through Elijah and Elisha; and He expected people to turn their hearts to Him, to seek Him. Most didn't, but some did. God gave them something to initiate the seeking. Without God's input there would be no seeking; but once God reveals Himself in some way, then it becomes a possibility. We can either come to Him or ignore Him. I think the words, *no one seeks for God*, express that our depravity is so deep that without His help and grace and kindness, throwing crumbs and boulders in front of us, we would never seek Him because of the deep blindness of our hearts. If we sought anything naturally, it would never be Him. This would hold true for all of these, including doing good. I don't think we understand how much work God does in the world to nudge the hearts of all people. The only thing He can't do is to make people come to Him and love Him. Other than that, He can lead His children in kindness to someone who needs it.

Vs. 19-20 In God's own words, no human being will be justified by doing good, not even religious good. God considers everyone accountable to Him because of the law. He has revealed himself in the Word, in nature and in what is left of His image in us, written on our hearts. There is enough to hold us responsible and to judge us, but nothing to save us. That comes through Jesus.

Vs. 20-25 This is a great portion to memorize. The more you go over it in your mind, the more you understand the flow and the truth of these words. *Propitiation* means that the payment Jesus made fully satisfied God's justice. His payment by blood, His sacrifice, because He was man and God, had an infinite effect that would cover every sin committed for all time, for those who by faith would receive Him as their Savior.

Vs. 25-26 I've hinted to the drama going on to see if God is really righteous. Since God had *passed over* sins ages ago without a real payment for those sins, everyone was wondering how God could righteously forgive sin. This was the mystery of Christ and the incarnation. The principalities and powers were all holding their breath, thinking God couldn't possibly cover sin without violating His own sense of holiness and justice. He did it!!!

Vs. 27-31 How would you explain what Paul is saying here? It seems that what Paul is saying is that there is no ground to think that because a Jew is a Jew, he has a better position in terms of forgiveness and salvation. Reliance on the law only gets you judged, not saved. Salvation is, and always was, through faith. God shows no partiality. All men are saved by faith. But this faith doesn't destroy the law; it proves the importance of the law.

As disciples knowing that salvation is through faith, the pressure should be off of us. We are not the agents of faith. We are the messengers of the Word. Sometimes we put so much pressure on

ourselves to say "it" well, that we could get the idea that salvation rests on us and our explanation. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5, *And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, ⁴and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.* We just need to get the message out there, and let the Father worry about who is ready to respond and be drawn toward His Son.

Psalm 12

It says that this psalm is written by David. Thinking back over David's life, when do you think he might have encountered something this devastating that it would have prompted this song?

Vs. 1-2 Because of v. 1, I wonder if this was the death of Samuel. David was on the run, and would be for the next 10 years. Saul was free to kill priests and do whatever was necessary to instill fear in the people, in order to keep the crown.

Vs. 3-4 I think that the lying and flattery was in Saul's government, promoting Saul and justifying hunting David.

Vs. 5-6 Since this isn't talking about God refining us, what is the point of what this verse says? It seems that because God's Word is holy, it cannot fail. If the poor are oppressed, there will definitely be action, somehow, sometime, against the oppressor. God's Word can't fail.

Vs. 7-8 Can you imagine singing this in a worship service? Maybe it had a catchy melody. Since it was used in worship, what exactly is this psalm exalting and why would this be something important to remember in worship?

Proverbs 19:13-14

It is hard to see the connection in all of this, but I say "amen" to the last one. It's hard to know where stuff comes from...a foolish child, a bitter wife, inherited wealth or talent. Sometimes you can find a cause, but sometimes it seems like it's just there. But you know for sure, that if you have a good wife, you have been blessed by God. Amen!

JULY 17

1 Chronicles 24:1-26:11

When the question is asked about David being a man after God's own heart, it gets kind of muddled by the catastrophe of his acts with Bathsheba and Uriah, and the fallout within his family and among his friends. Ezra knew this was all recorded in 2 Samuel. Here, Ezra is showing the David who recovered from these losses and served God with all he was until he died. What we see here is the deep heart of passion of David, visible in the spiritual leadership he took in Israel. This is what showed David was a man after God's own heart. Thank you, Ezra.

These chapters are easy to "organize," thanks to the editors who made the chapter divisions.

1 Chronicles 24

Vs. 1-6 This is the organization of the two chief families of the priests. Notice in v. 3 that David himself took the leadership to organize the priests. Notice also in v. 4 that Ithamar had fewer people. This was thanks to King Saul and Doeg slaughtering all the priests and their families at Nob in 1 Samuel 22:18. This was also because of God's judgment on Eli and his sons back in 1 Samuel 2-4.

Vs. 7-21 David organized the priests into 24 divisions, meaning they would only serve about two weeks a year. Notice the division of Abijah in v. 10. In the future, ending the 400 silent years that came after Malachi, we will meet someone famous in Luke 1:5 who belongs to this division.

Vs. 20-31 These Levites were to help the priests in the temple service and were selected by lots and paired with the different divisions.

Did you know David did all of this?

1 Chronicles 25

Vs. 1-8 David, a singer and musician himself, exercised spiritual leadership in organizing the singers. Notice in v. 1 that David and the chiefs of his servants did this selection. In the German, it says it was the army commanders. It gives the idea that the singers may also have accompanied the army into battle. Jehoshaphat brought the singers into battle with him.

V. 5 Notice that this guy, Heman, was blessed by God to perform his service. This was the first family gospel band.

V. 6 Notice that three of these guys were directly answerable to David.

V. 7 Also, there was training and schooling for singing and playing.

Vs. 9-31 Again there were 24 divisions of singers to match the 24 divisions of priests.

1 Chronicles 26:1-11

We don't see David's name until v. 27 (tomorrow) as the responsible party in organizing these "gatekeepers." Now it isn't exactly clear what they did, but it seems that they also helped in the worship and music. It is possible that the gatekeepers organized groups of pilgrims who were arriving for the feasts. They would have led these people in cleansing, worship and singing. In Nehemiah the gatekeepers were also singers, and they were associated with the worship. You wouldn't want a singer to guard the gate. You'd want a soldier. These guys must have met people and used their gifts in worship to bring these people to a place of spiritual and physical readiness. Just a suggestion.

V. 4 Notice the name of Obed-edom. His was the family that hosted the ark of the covenant after David's first attempt to bring it to Jerusalem failed. Obed-edom's house was blessed, but in 2 Samuel 6:11 we never heard how he was blessed. Now Ezra tells us. Look at vs. 4-8. Not only did God bless his land and crops, but his family also grew from sons to grandsons; and they were all blessed by God for the service of worship in Jerusalem.

We haven't finished finding out how much David organized, but Ezra's point is clear. A leader makes it his personal passion to lead the people in worship. He himself worships, but he also takes the responsibility to make sure things are well organized and prepared for the people of God. This would be Ezra's message to those who returned from exile and thought they were leaders of the people.

As disciples who make disciples, our service to others is to prepare them in following Christ and making disciples. They say that leadership and passion are "caught" not taught. Love and passion have to be in us, for it to be passed on to others. And we need to be intentional in leading others to be disciples who love Christ and make disciples, who make disciples.

Romans 4:1-12

Up to this point, Paul has done some heavy duty theology and has really messed with the thinking of the Jews. Now it's time for an illustration: Abraham.

Vs. 1-5 In the ESV there is a note that *gained by* can be rendered as "about." I think "about" is accurate. Paul is saying something like, "For example, let's take a look at Abraham." This point about Abraham is clear. Abraham became righteous by faith, not by works or religion.

Vs. 6-8 Righteousness by faith and grace was also a part of David's experience. David was regarded as an inspired prophet. Here he says that forgiveness and righteousness are possible without the law. But more than that, David was spared from death for the crimes he committed by God's mercy. According to the law, David should have died. Apart from the law there was a way that God could righteously forgive David.

Vs. 9-12 This part of the argument is fairly easy to understand. I'll bet this had the same effect on Paul's readers as it did on Paul himself when he first discovered this. What a great argument and truth. If you look at this section in Genesis 15:1-18, it is pretty stunning to think that Abe had this kind of faith, especially when you remember that he had to wait 25 years to see the promise, in the form of Isaac.

Paul is still making a distinction between Jews and Gentiles, but he ties them together by saying that both are saved by the faith of Abraham.

Psalm 13

Back at the beginning of the year when we first read this psalm, we hadn't read about David running for a decade from Saul. David was definitely in the "pits" when he wrote this. Those were long years of living in the hills and on the run.

Vs. 1-2 How many times does *how long* appear, and what is the subject of each question? Verse 2 is a verse you wish you never had to identify with, but in following Christ as a disciple, it is a certainty. It is hard to live day after day, taking counsel in your soul, not hearing from the Lord, seeing no clear leading or deliverance. Day after day, realizing that the Lord is keeping you safe, but you're always carrying a weight of sorrow. It is a kind of "weight" training that every disciple must go through.

Vs. 3-4 As David cries out, notice *lest* and note the different fears David had.

Vs. 5-6 David trusted in God's *steadfast love* even when he didn't "feel" that love. His heart would rejoice in spite of his emotions. David, as usual, promises to sing the praises of God.

Interestingly, we just read 1 Chronicles 16:41, which is toward the end of David's life with those years of despair and running long behind him. He commands the singers to constantly be reminding the people in worship, to *give thanks to the Lord, for His steadfast love endures forever*. The "weight" training left its mark on David's faith. Those long years of struggling taught David the love of God.

Proverbs 19:15-16

V. 15 might just sound like a general life principle, but next to v. 16 it takes on an added meaning. Are the commandments just the moral laws or do the commandments open the door to the redemptive purpose of God and what's happening on this planet? It seems to me that to drift through life as a believer gets you into trouble too.

After Paul talks about the armor of God in Ephesians 6, he goes on to say to keep alert with all perseverance. I was reading this morning Jesus saying that, *For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it*. (Mark 8:35) Notice that Jesus also says you have to be willing to lose your life for the gospel's sake. For our sake, we tend to separate Jesus from the gospel: the savior from the salvation of men. We love the good buddy Jesus and we love to sing about Him. But Jesus is still in the business of saving people, and spreading His gospel is really loving Him. *His ways* in v. 16 would include the command to go and preach the gospel. Disciples are disciples in the harvest.

JULY 18

1 Chronicles 26:12-27:34

1 Chronicles 26:12-32

Vs. 12-19 Again, it is hard to know exactly what the gatekeepers did. Since there were sacrifices always going on, there would constantly be people coming to Jerusalem to worship and offer sacrifices when the tabernacle was there. Also, there were the three festivals each year to which all the men were to come. This would require a lot of organization. The gatekeepers were not guards. Soldiers would have had the responsibility of guarding the gates and the city. The job of the gatekeepers might have been more that of organizing and helping in worship and preparation for worship. Their primary responsibility seems to have been at the gates of Jerusalem, meeting the people coming to worship and to offer sacrifices. Since Jerusalem wasn't a huge place, and since wherever the tabernacle was set up it couldn't have held all the people at once, there must have been places around the city where these men led people in worship, singing and prayer.

Vs. 20-28 Samuel and Saul, but especially David, dedicated huge amounts of precious metals to the service of the Lord. David literally amassed tons of gold, silver, copper, and iron for the work on the temple. All of this needed to be kept track of, guarded, and disbursed for payments, buying supplies and making repairs to the tabernacle and later to the temple.

Vs. 29-32 This is the political organization of the country, beginning with the 2.5 tribes on the west side of the Jordan.

V. 31 Notice that this happened in David's final year. If not for Ezra and this record of David's organizing, we would never know this about him.

1 Chronicles 27

This is the summary of David's organization of the government. There are lots of little, interesting things to observe.

Vs. 1-15 This was the standing army. Every month a new tribe was on duty with their 24,000 men. Notice the name of Jashobeam in v. 2. He was not only of the tribe of Judah, but he was the chief of the three and took out 800 men all by himself in one battle.

V. 7 Notice who Asahel was. This means that David began his organization of the country immediately after he became the king in Hebron, at the beginning of the civil war with Saul's followers.

Vs. 16-24 These are the king's chief liaison officers in contact with the heads of every tribe. Of interest is v. 21 where David appointed Abner's son (Abner was murdered by Joab) to be his chief officer to the tribe of Benjamin.

V. 24 Ezra makes no mention of Bathsheba, but the census is mentioned again a second time. It might be that the Spirit and Ezra are making a point that the glory of Israel is not to be seen in its numbers, but in its worship of God. This would help keep the returnees focused on the right thing and keep them from being discouraged.

Vs. 25-31 These are the chief stewards over David's personal property.

Vs. 32-34 These were David's counselors. Of course, you notice Ahithophel.

The question to ask here is what Ezra's purpose is in recording all of this. Tomorrow David will inspire the nation and hand off the leadership to Solomon. But here, we see David the hero and sweet singer of Israel as a dynamic spiritual leader, organizing the worship of the nation and laying out the government.

Again, I think the point Ezra is making has to do with the preeminence of David as the king of promise and as a model to the new leaders leading the returned nation to honor and glorify God.

As disciples who are to make disciples, modeling the right stuff is important for us too. Discipleship is "caught." We need to show what it means to follow Christ. Paul says this to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 11:1, *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ*. I also like what someone said, "Set yourself on fire, and people will come for miles to watch you burn."

Romans 4:13-5:5

Romans 4:13-25

This is really a great passage on faith. Verses 16-25 are worth memorizing.

Vs. 13-15 This is Paul's final argument that Abe could have only been justified by faith. Notice v. 15. What does that say to you? This will be worth discussing in your cell group. For any Jew or believer focused on the law, the law causes sin to have an allergic reaction to God. Grace and faith do not have that same effect. Any non-Christian trying to please God by the law will only have His wrath to face. Any believer who transforms faith in Christ to a list of "Do's and Don'ts," simply following laws, will enrage the power of sin and will miss the grace and love of God. We'll see this in the first words of the next chapter.

V. 16 This is the pivotal verse here. The common denominator is faith, not the law. The promise to Abraham and the promise of redemption is not limited to the Jews. The faith of Abraham brought him the righteousness of God before he was a Jew, so to speak.

Vs. 17-21 Notice the expression of Abraham's faith in the promise. I am always struck when I read this, *but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised*. What amazing faith! The strength of Abe's faith is magnified by the length of God's silence. But Abe didn't have faith in "an immediate answer," he had faith in an amazing God and the promise He had made. In hope Abraham believed against hope *that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told*. What a model for us as disciples and how humbling.

Vs. 22-25 Amen!

Romans 5:1-5

These would also be good verses to memorize. I wish they would have included 6-11 in today's reading. It completes the thought that the Spirit and Paul are expressing.

V. 1 This is the only way to *have peace with God*. This is the gospel. This peace, as we'll see in a few verses, is peace as in deliverance from God's wrath. Remember what Paul just said, *the law brings wrath*. Anyone who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him. *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*" (John 3:36)

V. 2 This is John 3:16 and Ephesians 1-3 all rolled together in a few words.

Vs. 3-5 An utterly new life. Not only do we stand in grace and the prospect of receiving God's kindness in all eternity, but He changes our lives now as we follow in the harvest. This is not a "perspective" on life, it is the active working of God to sanctify us and change us into the image of His Son. I don't know how often I have been helped by this progression from tribulation to hope. The key element that makes this process work is the work of the Holy Spirit pouring the love of Christ into our hearts. We are never meant to recover from our salvation. It is what keeps us fresh in loving our Lord and living for Him in the harvest. We follow and obey out of our love for Christ.

Notice for the first time, the Holy Spirit is mentioned as having a major part in our new lives. His role will be fully developed in Romans 8. God gives us new life at salvation. A new creation of spirit is created within us. The Holy Spirit is given to walk with us, within us, to help, strengthen and lead us; and He is the guarantee and proof of our inheritance until the resurrection. Without the Holy Spirit within us, even though saved, we would not stand a chance against the rebellious nature within us. With Him, all things are possible.

Read and re-read these passages in Romans. They are like a breath of spiritual life. I would suggest that you memorize these portions to make them a part of your heart and meditation and what you pass on to the disciples you make in the harvest.

Psalm 14

V. 1 Notice also that Romans 4:15 says that the law brings wrath and that Romans 5:1 says that there is only one way to have peace with God. The fool of this psalm is in control and doesn't sense the wrath of God or the fact that he and God are not on good terms.

V. 2 This psalm speaks to the purpose of God's silence. It allows the fool to show himself; and it causes those who love God to seek Him, crying out to Him and holding tightly to their knowledge and faith in Him. The Lord will come and put this all in order. David suffered during these times, but when he finally saw the deliverance that he knew God would bring him, David became that man who led and organized the worship of Israel. Because David experienced this, later, he ordered that there would be perpetual thanks given in worship and that it would be continually sung that the steadfast love of the Lord endures forever.

V. 3 Look at Romans 3:10-18 and see if you can tell that Paul knew this psalm.

Vs. 4-6 I like the contrast here. It reminds me of what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 2, that the unspiritual man doesn't understand the gifts of the Spirit. His ignorance of God is evidence of God's wrath on him. God's foolish gifts to the spiritual man look just like the process in Romans 5 of growing in suffering. Suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character, character produces hope, and hope doesn't allow us to be disappointed because we know the love of God, which has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. To learn that God is with us and is our refuge is a great gift.

V. 7 David was longing for this, and it will happen when Jesus returns to Jerusalem and then gathers His saints to do battle as He establishes His eternal kingdom.

Proverbs 19:17

It is interesting that Jesus commanded His disciples in Matthew 5:42, *Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.* But the point is not giving to get a reward from God. If you read that context in Matthew 5, you'll see it has to do with living as a disciple whose only purpose on this planet is to follow Christ in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples who make disciples. The resources God gives us are given for a purpose. Sometimes we don't know what that purpose is and then we are nudged by the Spirit to give to a person or an outreach. This proverb intensifies Jesus' command to be generous to the poor. We are really giving to the Lord.

JULY 19

1 Chronicles 28-29

We haven't read what is in these two chapters. It is recorded only here and must have been a part of other records and documents. My tendency is to read what David said to Solomon and begin to lament because I know what Solomon will do. Ezra is trying to move the hearts of that generation returning to Israel after the exile, by emphasizing the words that David spoke to Israel

and to Solomon. Few of these people remember the former days of Israel. Many or most of them had been born in Babylon and know "Israel" only because of what has been handed down to them. In these chapters Ezra is directing this final charge of David to the hearts of these men and women, who had returned to Jerusalem and to this entire generation.

As you read these chapters, try to imagine you are one of these returnees. Because of David's heart and love for God, it's easy to be inspired by what he says here.

1 Chronicles 28

Vs. 1-8 After David hastily had Solomon crowned king in 1 Kings 1, there was another ceremony recorded here. First Chronicles 29:22 confirms this. This chapter must have taken place between 1 Kings 1 and 2. David had been frightfully awakened out of whatever he had been ailing under and called upon his last strength to set in motion all that he had been preparing over the past several years.

Notice that David explains all of what is happening as God's will by virtue of the choices God Himself made. Notice also how David's passion to build the temple became a directive of God. God chose the builder to be Solomon. That adds a lot of perspective to God's choice and purpose for Solomon. It also shows that the actions of Adonijah, Abiathar and Joab (1 Kings 2) to make one final effort to take the throne from Solomon, after David was gone, was very deserving of death.

V. 7 is interesting to think about. God promised He would establish Solomon's kingdom or line of rulers forever if Solomon faithfully followed the Lord. Solomon didn't and the kingdom of Israel was divided after his death. Not only that, one of the kings in the line of Solomon, Jehoiachin, will be told by Jeremiah (Jer. 22:30) and God that none of his sons will ever sit on the throne of Israel. Matthew traced Jesus' genealogy back through Joseph, through Jehoiachin, through Solomon to David. According to Jeremiah 22:30, Jesus couldn't sit on the throne of David. But Joseph was Jesus' legal father, not His physical father. Luke traced Jesus' genealogy back through Mary to David through David's son Nathan, another son of Bathsheba. So actually, neither Jehoiachin nor Solomon is in the physical blood line to Jesus. This means that this conditional promise to Solomon was made void when Solomon became a worshiper of idols later in his life. Solomon's bloodline of kings ended with the sons of Josiah at the Babylonian captivity.

V. 8 This charge was to all of Israel, and Solomon failed here. By his own actions, he left the nation and its next generation damaged by injecting the poison of idolatry into its veins.

Vs. 9-10 This was a very clear promise and warning to Solomon. Solomon did succeed in building the temple and securing the Lord's promise to always dwell in Jerusalem. That would "stick," but nothing else did.

Vs. 11-19 Notice that David gave Solomon written plans and that these plans came from the Lord. Reading 1 Kings, you would just think this all came from Solomon. It makes Solomon even more suspect, when he dedicates the temple and keeps saying, *that I have built*. Ezra is showing that David is the one who had the passion for the temple of God among the people. God spoke to David and gave him the detailed plans for the temple. It is interesting that God apparently took as much interest in the building of the temple as He did in the design and building of the tabernacle.

Vs. 20-21 Isn't it interesting how often God tells someone to be strong and courageous? I have to admit that all of what we are reading here really elevates David in my estimation. What a guy.

1 Chronicles 29

What an amazing chapter of the Bible.

Vs. 1-5 Beyond the massive personal investment David had already made, he left the rest of his personal fortune to the building of the temple. You can figure out the weight of all of this. A talent was 75 pounds and a daric was a fourth of an ounce. We are talking tons of precious metals.

Vs. 6-9 Verse 9 shows that leadership and passion are more often caught than taught. The people were moved with David's total love and devotion to the Lord. Again, we are talking tons of metals here.

Vs. 10-19 These are some of the final words of David and what a testimony they are to his heart and love for God. It is definitely more inspiring to think of these as David's last words than to think that his last words were to Solomon telling him to make sure that Joab and Shimei went to their graves in blood. (See 1 Kings 2.)

Notice that David knew that all things came from God, so that what they were offering to Him for the building of the temple was really from Him. There is a lot of spiritual insight and maturity expressed in this prayer.

Vs. 18-19 In my mind, the only prayer that God can't answer is the one that would demand Him to overpower someone's will to make them love Him and follow Him.

Vs. 20-22 David led them in worship; and at the end, for the second time, they made Solomon the king.

Vs. 23-25 David probably reigned together with Solomon, as co-regents. Considering David's health, that probably wasn't a long time. This is a summary of the effect of this day both before the people and before the Lord.

Vs. 26-30 Ezra doesn't record anything negative about David except for the census, which resulted in the finding of the location for the temple. Since the nation had just returned from exile, they themselves knew enough about sin and what effect it had had on them. Since 2 Samuel has the record of David's mistakes, Ezra is showing here that David recovered and became a model of spiritual leadership and a model for how God can take a sinful man (or nation) and restore them to become a blessing for others.

Good thoughts for us too as disciples. We will slip and fall, but knowing these stories and knowing the incredible grace of our Savior, we get up and follow Him in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples who make disciples.

And hooray, you just finished 1 Chronicles.

Romans 5:6-21

In reading a letter like Romans, one reading doesn't really do it. Reading Romans once a year in The One Year Bible is helpful, but you still forget a lot. If you were studying Romans without a commentary, you would read through it several times getting the main arguments and divisions set in your mind. Then you would work through understanding why Paul goes on from one thought to the next and how they fit together. That would be more than you'd get from most commentaries. If you were doing your own study of Romans, you would only go to a commentary for a particular question or after you had familiarized yourself with the book so well that you could talk your way through it, chapter by chapter.

For our purposes here, since it is unlikely that you're going to go back and study Romans, I'm going to fill in some detail about where I think Paul is going with his argument before he gets there. Hopefully it will be helpful.

Vs. 6-11 This really belongs to the reading from yesterday. The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Understanding that love is what the Holy Spirit helps us to do; this then is the fuller description of that love.

Notice the reference to being saved from wrath. This fits nicely with v. 11. We can only rejoice in God, because of what Christ did for us. Many people have happy "god thoughts." There will be no happy meeting with God without the blood of Christ covering them, having been made a new spiritual creation in Christ. People mistake their warm feelings and imaginations for reality. At the end of life, without Christ, there is only wrath and judgment, not some jovial bearded old man smoking a pipe, welcoming us home.

Vs. 12-21 In this section Paul shows what Jesus did in contrast to the way sin has ruined mankind in relationship to God.

Vs. 12-14 Sin came into the world, into the human race through Adam. It seems that since Adam was the first man and became maimed and sick spiritually, in whatever way the life and spirit of man is passed on in the reproductive process, everyone since Adam has been born with that same spiritual sickness. Just as bodily defects can be passed on, this spiritual disease called sin has been passed on causing us to be born spiritually dead. The result of spiritual death is physical death.

Death is separation. Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the spirit from God. Spiritual death results in physical death because the physical is dependent on us being spiritually connected to God. It's like cutting a flower. The second it is cut from the root it dies, but it appears to live for a while. The same is true with us. Because of spiritual separation from God, our body is born sick and dying.

Paul is about to talk about the effects of sin vs. the effect of the free gift; but what Paul is working toward is that this body is joined to the sinful spiritual nature. The physical is not evil, but this body has been contaminated by this sin within us. This body must die or be recreated at the rapture. There is no cure for the "body of death" in this life. In salvation, we are given a new spiritual life (new creation, new nature) that dwells in this body along with that old spiritually sick spiritual nature. It is a class "A" miracle. In the resurrection, for those who are saved in Christ, the newly created spiritual life and nature is put in the resurrection body. The old nature dies with the old body since it has been judged in Christ. For those who are not saved by Christ, they too are resurrected with a new body, but one that will be indwelt by that sick, rebellious nature, and will therefore have to live in separation from God. At that point, that union becomes permanent, like the angels, and unable to be changed. Sin is a very big deal, and really, an incurable sickness in this body. God does not and cannot change the sinful nature. He judges the old and gives us a new nature in Christ. Sin is a spiritual disease and still beyond our comprehension.

Vs. 15-19 Notice how each verse alternates between death and life and condemnation and justification. Verses 15 and 17 are parallel, and vs. 16 and 18 are parallel. Verse 19 is an all inclusive summary of sorts.

Vs. 20-21 is the purpose of God explained in the long unfolding plan of redemption. When we get to the closing verses of Romans where Paul mentions the *mystery that was kept secret for long ages*, this is a part of what he's referring to. Part of the reason the law was given was to increase the reaction of sin to make it more visible and more understandable in its power and effect. The law causes sin to go nuts and we remain under God's judgment. Grace made it possible to become forgiven and righteous before God by faith in Christ. The Lord's righteousness imparted to us leads to eternal life.

Again, hooray! And this is what we get to share in the harvest. It's the best news in the world!

Psalm 15

David had been pursued by men who wanted him dead. Lies had been circulated around the nation regarding David to justify Saul's bitterness, murder and threats. But what made David the man he was is that he really had only one ambition, to be at the feet of God, in His presence, before this mercy seat and throne. It must have hit David as he thought of wanting to be before God, that those who were pursuing him couldn't come before God because of their hearts. David had to live away from the tabernacle of God; yet in exile, he lived at God's feet. Those who pursued David could stand in the tabernacle, but their hearts were far from God. It isn't "doing" that makes you acceptable to God; it is the heart of faith responding to Him. Later David will put it simply in Psalm 51:17, *A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.* Is it any wonder that David's life ambition was to build a temple so he could be near the Lord?

V. 1 This is the great question, but for most people, even in David's time, it wasn't really the true desire of their hearts. Most people are fine with God, if He will just leave them alone. Someday He will.

Vs. 2-5 Now, you could read this as earning God's favor by doing religious stuff. But it is really the intent to dwell in God's presence and to honor Him. At the heart of obedience to God is love and faith. Abraham was righteous by faith, and out of love and faith he obeyed. *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.* (John 14:21)

Proverbs 19:18-19

Read this along with Luke 15:11-24, and you'll see this is not only a mark of the Father, but a mark of a disciple of Jesus in the harvest.

JULY 20

2 Chronicles 1-3

Leaving David, Ezra is now showing the people the grandeur of the temple. As you read over these three chapters, it is fairly easy to understand the purpose or main subject of each. Enjoy figuring this out.

Think about the purpose of God and Ezra in writing this. When the returnees came to Jerusalem, they began the work on the temple immediately; but due to persecution, they let off the work and lost interest. These chapters, beginning in 1 Chronicles and continued here, are to motivate the people to continue building and to treasure having God's presence among them. Eventually, Ezra will show them the point at which God will make a binding promise to dwell in Zion and in the temple that will continue through the Millennium. That would be an important reason for them to trust God, rebuild the temple and hold on to God's love for that place.

2 Chronicles 1

V. 1 This seems to be the introduction to what we are about to see. To Solomon's credit, he took up the torch of his father's passion for the temple and for God.

Vs. 2-6 The lavishness of offering 1000 burnt offerings on the original altar in the tent made in the wilderness must have reflected the sincerity and desperate desire in Solomon's heart to receive God's help.

Vs. 7-13 Solomon's request was humble, sincere and pretty short. The Lord on the other hand was willing to bless Solomon as a testimony to the nations.

Vs. 14-17 I think this is meant to show some of the greatness God allowed Solomon to have. Ironically, it also showed Solomon's ignorance of what God had said. A king was warned not to

go to Egypt for horses. Along with this, you can imagine that Solomon probably had the best military force on that side of the world. He could have built an empire. But rather than that, his real purpose is seen in chapter 2.

2 Chronicles 2

Vs. 1-10 Solomon poured all of his energy into organizing everything to build the temple (and his palaces for his massive number of wives). Solomon's desire and energy would have become world news and a relief to all the surrounding nations. This man was amazingly wise, powerful and rich. He was a superstar and all he wanted to do was build a temple. It would have been news.

Vs. 11-12 Hiram was not necessarily a believer, because everyone believed in many gods, but he did publicly pronounce his amazement and testimony that God was blessing Israel and Solomon.

Vs. 13-16 So, Tyre as a nation was now working hard for Solomon and Israel. The wood was not only for the certain things in the temple, but for transporting the blocks and probably also for Solomon's houses. The temple was made of stone blocks, but the inside walls were wood panels overlaid with gold. Plus, there were lots of wood carvings, which, too, were overlaid with gold.

Vs. 17-18 Interestingly, Solomon used the people of Israel as overseers and the resident aliens as forced labor. I wonder if he paid well. One positive thought here is that this wasn't evil forced labor; it was giving people jobs. With all of his wealth, Solomon may have been an employer who paid well. Many people lived from hand to mouth back then, and having a good steady job would have been welcomed.

2 Chronicles 3

Vs. 1-2 Here is where you see that the place was Mount Moriah. This mount is only mentioned in one other place in the Bible in Genesis 22:2.

There is a diagram, "The Plan of Solomon's Temple," in the Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, on p. 500.

Vs. 3-7 This was the main building.

Vs. 8-14 This was the back part of the building, separated by the veil, and housing the ark of the covenant.

Vs. 15-17 These pillars seem to be Solomon's idea. Jachin means "He establishes," and Boaz means "in Him is strength."

Romans 6

Take your time reading this chapter and write down lots of questions. Make observations and be honest to admit that if sin is "dead," it sure seems pretty alive in us.

V. 1 When Paul asks these rhetorical questions, it is probably because he has heard similar questions raised before, most likely by opponents. If and when Paul does quote an opponent, he always answers the question immediately.

Vs. 2-4 Paul is saying that at conversion we are baptized by the Spirit into Christ's death, freeing us from the law, and the Spirit gives us a new spiritual life. Water baptism is a visual of this burial and rebirth. I think this is a new thought for the Romans. Paul is stating it in question form, but now he will explain what he means. Do you "feel" like you have died to sin? I sure don't. But it is true. You've just got to figure out what he and the Spirit mean. Paul is going to talk about something that took place in reality, and he really won't get to the conclusion of this thought until Romans 8.

Notice how often death with Christ and resurrection with Christ are mentioned in vs. 3-11.

Vs. 5-11 Notice that the “death” to sin’s power has already taken place, and Paul points them to the hope of the resurrection, which, of course, is still future. The body of death and our old nature are both still present, but the power of sin’s absolute control is broken and can be overcome with the Spirit. The body will just have to limp along, decaying as it goes. Now, God could have solved this problem immediately by taking us to heaven at conversion. The sin nature would be gone and the dying body translated into an eternal spiritual body. But then, who would be down here to work in the harvest telling others what Jesus did, rescuing the lost and making disciples. It is no accident that we are still here, especially when you think that the other alternative would have been quick and easy for God and for us. For now the power of sin is broken, and our hope is in the promised resurrection when all of this decay will be done away with. Admittedly too, there is something God wants to prove to the principalities and powers through us. So, the drama continues as God uses us to prove them wrong. And even Israel, as a nation, will rise up in God’s grace and Christ’s redemption and stick it to them as Israel reaches the world during the Tribulation, fulfilling their mission and destiny.

Vs. 12-14 The Spirit’s presence in us, along with the new spiritual life, enables us to make the choice to follow God. That choice is important because we still feel the pull of the old nature.

V. 14 This is a key thought. The death to sin is actually death to the law, meaning that the effect of the law on sin, that allergic, rebellious reaction, should be gone because we are saved by faith, not by the law. Being saved by grace through faith means we are dead to the law. We face God’s love, not law. We respond and follow by being overwhelmed by His love and grace and kindness in Christ. This is what the Spirit uses. Our obedience is not out of fear but out of gratitude. The sinful nature, though still alive, has been given the death sentence. Paul will explain this more in chapter 7.

Vs. 15-23 Read these verses, understanding that the sinful nature has been judged and neutralized. It can’t react to the law, because we are not under the law. Within us now is a newly created nature that responds to the love and grace of God in Christ. This isn’t the full story. We still struggle with sin, but we still have two chapters in Romans to understand what God has done for us in Christ. One interesting note, as you read, is to think of these closing words in 1 Corinthians 15, *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Notice that it talks about becoming willing slaves. Becoming slaves of God and slaves of righteousness is still what we do in yielding ourselves to God. The reality is that now we can do that. The reality is also that this “slavery” is not optional. In this life, we will always be slaves to something. Now we have the choice and only a fool would resist the love that has proven itself by death, to gain our life and freedom.

Vs. 22-23 What a message for those who still don’t know.

Psalm 16

The first verse seems to give an idea of where David was in his life when he wrote this. He was probably on the run from Saul. He was in the wilderness with people who were gathering to him. David had nothing to offer them. There was no pay, no insurance, and no benefits. They didn’t even have TV or computers. David had plenty of nothing. Actually, that’s not true. David had the Lord. David must have written this on a good day, during a good time on the run, where he understood that the closeness to the Lord was better than anything he had experienced before. This is what David learned in hardship. This is why David was a man after God’s own heart. You can also sense some of what Paul says above, echoed in these words.

Vs. 1-3 David’s life was reduced down to what he absolutely cherished and had to have, and that was the Lord. Actually, the thought of “slavery” is in this verse, since the word *Lord* means

someone who has ownership or control over you. Does this sound like joy in being a slave of God? I think so.

V. 4 So here is the description of those who were still slaves of the other things, who didn't even know they were lost or were slaves.

Vs. 5-6 This sounds like David was yielded to God.

Vs. 7-8 David was following God and seeking His way. This could be like Paul saying that we need to be led by the Spirit and to yield our members to God's instructions.

Vs. 9-11 And in all of this, David learned that his true joy was in God. Being yielded to the Lord brought him deliverance and the kind of confidence and joy that only comes from learning to trust the Lord in very hard circumstances. This all kind of sounds like the way Paul ended Romans 6.

Proverbs 19:20-21

You've got to admit. These two verses are a perfect complement to Psalm 16 and Romans 6.

The first three lines are all relative and only make sense if the last line is important to us. What is *the purpose of the Lord*? As disciples that is what we live for. Many disciples have been smashed on the rocks of their plans and expectations. God's purpose might be a train wreck. It could be a desert. For Paul and Barnabas it was a heated argument and a parting of the ways. We tend to listen to advice that pleases us and define wisdom as what we are doing. We make our plans and cast our vision and hope that God will bless them. But what is God's purpose for us, for our time, for our work in the harvest? In submission to Him, following Christ in the harvest, making disciples who make disciples, the list of our expectations and ideas gets smaller, and our joy and contentment with Christ grows. Living life on earth becomes more about Him and less about us.

JULY 21

2 Chronicles 4:1-6:11

So, if you had been raised in Babylon and someone mentioned the palace of Nebuchadnezzar and the Hanging Gardens, you could close your eyes and see it. Then your parents or some leader would come along and mention that you are a Jew. Then they tell you that this is the most amazing privilege to belong to God, and you would agree, but in your mind's eye, you don't have land and you don't have any "thing" to be proud of. Ezra and the Spirit are painting a picture of the glory of Jerusalem. The temple was something to be proud of. In the past, it was a glorious and amazing structure. The question was, would people be willing to leave the comforts and prosperity of Babylon and Persia and return to Israel? And for the people who did return, would they take pride in rebuilding the temple? I think that is some of what Ezra and the Spirit are doing in writing this.

So if you were giving these chapters a name or title to generally describe their contents, what would you title them? These are the kinds of Bible study exercises that teach you how to observe and to think through what the Lord's purpose is in giving you this information. And as you read through these chapters, make as many observations that interest you, speak to you or say something to you about being a disciple in the harvest.

2 Chronicles 4 (your title here)

Vs. 1-6 You have to admit that this all would have looked impressive. The altar was 15 ft. high, and there were steps to get to the top. The sea could hold 17,500 gallons, but according to 1 Kings 7:26 it was not filled to capacity. The exiles could have been awed by all of this.

Vs. 7-8 These lampstands and tables were in the Holy Place, the first room in the temple. Originally there had only been one lampstand and one table for the bread of the Presence. For Solomon to have changed this means that it was probably one of those instructions that the Lord gave to David.

Vs. 9-10 This describes what was placed outside in the inner court where the sacrifices were made, and in the outer court where the people gathered for feasts. When Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, went in to burn incense at the hour of prayer, the people were in the outer court praying and he walked through the inner courtyard into the Holy Place.

Vs. 11-18 This tells us who the main craftsmen were, what they did, and where their foundry was located. All of this was under Solomon's personal direction.

Vs. 19-22 The emphasis for the exiles here is that everything was made with the purest gold. It was glorious and on par with anything they had ever seen in Babylon or in Persia.

2 Chronicles 5 (your title here)

V. 1 Not only was the temple finished by Solomon, but the treasury was filled with such vast amounts of metals that Israel, at that time, was probably the richest nation on earth. Again, that was a sign of God's blessing and Israel's glory.

Vs. 2-14 We have already read two different occasions when David moved the ark. This was the fulfillment of David's dream and passion. It wasn't just having a cool-looking, world-class temple; but David knew that God dwelt between the cherubim, and David wanted God to dwell near him in a place of honor. The cover of the ark was gold with two cherubim facing each other. This was the mercy seat where the blood was sprinkled for the Day of Atonement for the nation. This was what David wanted. For God to have a house near him would have been a dream come true, and it all revolved around the ark of the covenant.

V. 8 Solomon, on David's direction, made a cherubim carving to be above the ark.

V. 12 This is why David had organized these singers. I'll bet David even gave Solomon instructions on what they were to sing.

V. 14 And the Lord blessed this. If you were an Israelite in exile, wondering what was so cool about belonging to Israel, this would be the reason. Babylon had nothing that could compete with this.

2 Chronicles 6:1-11 (your title here)

What Solomon is going to say here, and God's response to it, is another moment when a defining event in the plan of redemption took place. God would vow to make this His home on earth. Although the temple has been destroyed twice since then, prophetic Scripture assures us that Jesus will return to Jerusalem and reign in the temple as His palace during the Millennial Kingdom.

Vs. 1-3 Solomon addressed the Lord, inspired by what had just taken place. Just as a slight word of caution, notice that Solomon uses *I* in four places. For some reason, that looks kind of self-exalting to me.

Vs. 4-9 This is Solomon recounting God's declarations regarding Israel, Jerusalem and now the building of the temple. These would be the promises that Solomon would invoke to secure God's eternal promise to Zion and to the temple.

Vs. 10-11 Now Solomon is saying that it has all been accomplished, and tomorrow Solomon will plead for God's commitment to the city and to that house.

There is no "I" in team. Anyway, to this point, you can see the Spirit and Ezra showing Israel they should be awed by the grandeur God Himself brought to Israel. Tomorrow will blow them away.

And to think, that what we have in Jesus makes all this look like dust in the wind. We have become the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. We are not our own; we were bought with a price; so we are to glorify God in our bodies by bearing much fruit in the harvest and so proving to be disciples of our Lord.

Romans 7:1-13

Vs. 1-3 This is one of those verses where Paul addresses a specific group within the Roman church. Although this could be *law* in general, it is obvious by v. 7 that the Law of Moses is meant. This argument follows the logic of chapter 6. A death has occurred so we are no longer bound to the law as a way to follow God.

Vs. 4-6 This is the explanation of what Paul is saying about the law and sin. Verse 5 is really important to understand what is going on in this conflict. So, what do you understand?

V. 6 is a very key verse in Paul's argument. The RSV says *the new life of the Spirit*. I think this is accurate and this "new life" will be explained more in chapter 8.

Notice the contrast here. Either you face or follow God through the law, or you approach God through the new life of the Spirit. One way causes sin to rage. The other way responds in love to Christ's love, and sin doesn't get enraged. It becomes powerless.

Vs. 7-12 This is the mechanics of how the sickness within us works. This is why it is important to live in the new life of following the Spirit in the Word and in the love of Christ. Even as Christians, if following God becomes too law- or works-oriented, it enrages the sin within us.

V. 9 is where we get the teaching on the age of accountability. This is a very important verse. Before a person can morally understand right or wrong, they are "alive." The sickness of sin can still be seen in a child, but sin as a volitional, rebelling and damning condition is dormant. But when the "commandment comes," that is, at whatever age for that person they become morally accountable and "know" good and evil (so to speak), sin awakens in them to rebel against God, and they are immediately judged and "die." A child might do stuff that is angry and sinful, but until they cross the line to moral understanding, it is just the baloney kids do. Once they cross that line, if it is at 4 or 5 or 6, they stand before God accountable to the law and the sin within them reacts to that moral accountability to God.

V. 13 Paul has actually said this a couple of times. In 3:20, Paul said, *For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin*. Among other things, the law was given, like a blood test, to show us that we have a disease. We may rationalize and explain away our problem, but all of us know that there is something wrong with us. The law acts as a mirror, showing us our condition, but you can't wash your dirty face with a mirror. You'll cut your face. You need soap, or in our case, the blood of Christ.

Every person who does not know Christ (being saved by Him) stands before God under the law. Facing God through the law causes sin to go nuts. As disciples, how do we face God? It needs to be through the love of Christ and the grace of God.

Psalm 17

We've read this before. What do you observe here, having read of David's life? What are some common themes that should be important to us as disciples?

Vs. 1-5 When David regained his balance after the fear and injustice of being hunted by Saul, David saved Saul's life twice. David could have justified killing Saul, even saying that God had

put Saul in David's hand. Yet David honored God and resisted the words of his men in sparing Saul. David was tested and passed.

Vs. 6-9 On this basis David cries for deliverance. God was his only refuge. It is of course interesting that David wanted to build an actual house for God in which David must have imagined taking quiet refuge in His presence.

V. 8 *apple of your eye* = eyeball.

Vs. 10-12 This is in contrast to the pity David showed to Saul. Notice that as David is asking for God's protection, he says *our* and *us*. There isn't a "we" in team either, but David was speaking as a shepherd of the weak who were around him. If David had been caught, they would have been killed also.

Vs. 13-14a This is David's cry for God to rouse Himself and judge the arrogant.

Vs. 14b-15 Notice the note you have for the second part of v. 14, "As for your treasured ones, you fill their womb." I am always impressed that rather than obsess with the problems and with his enemies, David sought God and meditated on His Word. I think that is something God is suggesting to us too.

Notice how this psalm fits well with the verses below from Proverbs.

Proverbs 19:22-23

Is it me, or did we just have three readings today that mentioned God's *steadfast love*? In this case in Proverbs, *steadfast love* is learned from God. Amen!

JULY 22

2 Chronicles 6:12-8:10

These are great chapters. We have read all of this before, so I only want to mention a few things.

Keep in mind the purpose of Ezra in writing this. He could have told everyone to refer back to 1 Kings where this is recorded, but it is repeated here for this generation. What is Ezra's purpose? Here again we have a great king, Solomon, taking spiritual leadership for his people. But more than that, Ezra seems to be pointing them to God's eternal promises and how that has undergirded their history, from Abraham, to the establishing of the Davidic covenant, through being preserved in the exile, to the return by command of Cyrus...all according to the promise (and *steadfast love*) of God. What we are witnessing here today, and what Ezra is showing the people, is that based on the work of David and Solomon in leading the people in making the temple, God makes an eternal promise to them, right here. God heard and honored Solomon's prayer of dedication. Because of the promise God makes here (among other promises) Israel is allowed back into its land.

2 Chronicles 6:12-42

There are many repeated words and ideas here and there is a very clear structure. Take time and do a lot of underlining and observing. Notice how often the word *servant* is used and notice the references to God's love.

Vs. 12-17 Notice the references to the promise God made to David. Solomon builds this plea on the fact that God had already shown His faithfulness to David by saving him. This is very powerfully expressed, and it is something that should make us think about what it means when God visibly helps us in different situations. Verse 17 calls on God to confirm His Word to David. The question is how that promise would be confirmed in the dedication of the temple.

Vs. 18-21 Solomon knew that God couldn't dwell in a house. Verse 20 says that God had already promised to set His name in that house. God's promise toward the temple was what Solomon was crying out for God to confirm. In this way it would be an additional confirmation of His promise to David. The plea for future forgiveness is still in force. Two days before Jesus was killed, he told the nation, *For I tell you, you will not see me again, until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'* When the Jews finally pray this, there will be a deep sense of repentance and desperation, and God will forgive.

V. 19 Notice the intensity of this prayer. Notice that the faith of those who pray will be directional, toward the temple and the city.

Vs. 22-39 What are the *if's* and *when's* that Solomon mentions? Solomon will get God to promise to forgive every conceivable situation. Much of this is prophetic, and it will be used and very important in Daniel 6 and 9.

Vs. 22-23 This is regarding a person sinning against a neighbor and the need for justice in the land. Here they come into the temple.

Vs. 24-25 If there was a defeat in battle, it showed, as with Joshua in the case of Achan, that Israel had sinned before the Lord. This is also done in the temple, not in any other place.

Vs. 26-27 Drought was an indication of sin and guilt in the land. We've seen this with Elijah and with David and the case of the Gibeonites. In this situation the people all over the land were to pray toward the temple and humble themselves to be taught the way of the Lord.

Vs. 28-31 This deals with individual or national affliction caused by natural events or by the oppression of the enemy. Interestingly, this doesn't seem to be because of sin. It is simply the people crying out for help, like we have seen David do in The Psalms.

Vs. 32-33 This is the most redemptive part of the prayer, referring to an individual or to all nations. Again, this prayer and pleading is not because of sin.

Vs. 36-39 For me this is the most interesting part of the prayer. The Spirit must have put it into the heart of Solomon to extend the prayer to the circumstance of being sent into exile. This part of the prayer was used extensively while they were in exile in Babylon.

Vs. 40-42 This is a great ending to the prayer. It begins with a request and ends with the appeal to the promise to David.

2 Chronicles 7

Vs. 1-3 What a way for God to publicly confirm His answer to this prayer. Notice what the people said in response in v. 3. This was Israel's praise of God because of David. This might have been Israel's holiest moment as a nation.

Vs. 4-6 Notice Solomon's leadership in offering sacrifices.

V. 7 This is Solomon taking the leadership in directing the dedication of the inner court.

Vs. 8-10 Here, Solomon is leading this feast of celebration. I'm sure Ezra wanted to show the returnees the grandeur of the dedication, and also the passion of the leaders in worshiping God. This would normally have been the Feast of Booths, directly following the Day of Atonement. Nothing is said here of the Day of Atonement. Also, from what Nehemiah says, from Joshua to Nehemiah, this feast was never celebrated by the making of booths and people living out of doors, remembering Israel's days in the wilderness following Moses.

V. 11 Remember the timing here. It took Solomon 7.5 years to build the temple and another 13 to finish his palace and residence. The dedication of the temple would have been after the temple's completion. God is now speaking to Solomon, not that night, but a night 13 years later. I

think the point is that Solomon had been on a mission for God. Now he was done. From this point on, Solomon could do what he wanted to do. And what would that look like? Would he serve God or would he drift from God? That is why this is such a crucial point in his life. God honored Solomon's prayer and devotion, but not just for Solomon's sake.

Vs. 12-18 God made three promises here. One was the promise to hear the prayers directed toward the temple. The second was that God would set His name in the temple forever. The third was to Solomon regarding his royal lineage.

V. 14 is kind of a famous verse.

V. 16 Notice the eternal nature of this promise. Daniel, in particular, held on to this promise, which means he had to have read 1 Kings, since this wasn't written until after the exile.

Vs. 19-22 Notice again the warning to Solomon. As already mentioned, Solomon would fail here. His bloodline of royalty would not extend to Jesus, the ultimate Davidic king. Although Joseph's genealogy extends to Solomon, Joseph was only "legally" Jesus' father. Jesus' birth mother's genealogy reached back to David, but through Solomon's older brother Nathan. Solomon's disobedience made this promise void.

It is amazing that the Lord said this to Solomon, because by Solomon's idolatry (not mentioned in Chronicles) Solomon would begin the process that led the people into exile and led to the destruction of the temple.

2 Chronicles 8:1-10

Vs. 1-8 It's one thing to build buildings and a name for yourself. It is another thing to build character and build into the hearts of a nation. Solomon kept building stuff.

V. 2 Note that Solomon received a gift of cities from Hiram. In 1 Kings 9:11-13, Solomon gave Hiram cities too, but he didn't repay Hiram in kind and fancy them up. Solomon gave him raggedy, tired little towns that Hiram called "Kabul," worthless.

Since everybody knew how Solomon fell, it might be here that Ezra is beginning to use him as an example of self-absorption in leadership. As disciples our true devotion to following Christ in the harvest is seen not when it is our job or we're on a summer mission trip, but it's seen when the "mission" is over and we can do anything we want. This was Solomon's downfall, and why he never measured up to be the "man after God's own heart," that David was. Thankfully, the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable. We can desert God, but He remains faithful because He cannot deny Himself.

Romans 7:14-8:8

Romans 7:14-25

Enjoy reading this. This is the clearest statement in the Bible about the power of sin. This short section is like a theological "power bar."

Vs. 14-20 The flesh is our old nature which somehow is bound in and with this body. This is why the resurrection is such a great hope for us. It is not just that we will live forever in a body. It is, as said in Romans 6 and again in Romans 8, that we will be free of this body of death. For us as believers, the resurrection is our daily hope in Christ, only if we are sick of sin. If we have the attitude that sin isn't so bad, then the resurrection is just a carnival ride: thrilling but unnecessary. We need to grasp the deadliness of sin, every day.

Vs. 21-25 The main idea here is that the fight goes on. The new spiritual life of the Spirit allows us to desire what is right in our heads, but it is no match for our old nature. The situation in this body is wretched. The solution is the help of the Spirit in the next chapter.

Vs. 23 and 25 express the futility of this battle apart from Christ and the Holy Spirit. Jesus gives us forgiveness. The Holy Spirit creates the new spiritual life within us, yet, we can't do better without the Holy Spirit's help to live following Him. This help is explained in chapter 8, but chapter 7 ends without hope.

V. 24 is not a dramatic cry from an unbeliever. It is Paul expressing the depth of his present fight. If you don't understand how deep the need is, you don't correctly seek the help offered. That is true everywhere in life, and it is especially true here. As disciples working in the harvest following Christ, this understanding needs to be vital and important to us. We are not just weak; we are sick and hopeless without the resources God makes available to us. The world is filled with the wreckage of Christian men and women and marriages and families and churches. We have more media than any other generation that has walked this earth. We have more resources, yet sin doesn't seem to respond to podcasts and Kindles, to traditional or contemporary worship, to amazing missional vision and positive attitude. Sin is still winning. The fight is the same as it was in Paul's day, and the answer is the same. The tragedy is that the answer is right here in the Word, in these chapters and in the next.

Romans 8:1-8

Vs. 1-3 This is salvation in Christ. This is repentance, turning your back on your sin and turning to Christ to receive His forgiveness and His deliverance. It created a new nature, a new spiritual life in us. We are no longer responsible to the law. We are no longer under God's condemnation. God is satisfied and we are free. But that is not enough for now. If God took us to heaven we'd be fine, but we are left here for the harvest and we are still weak and need tons of help

Vs. 4-8 Now we follow the Spirit. Before we knew Christ, we tried to follow a lot of things - religion, good ideas, etc. Now, we say things like "following Christ," which is accurate in terms of following Christ as our Lord into the harvest (John 12:26). Yet in terms of daily guidance in working in the harvest, the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and we look to His impulses and guidance. To give credence to John 14-16 and what Paul and the Spirit are writing here, it is really the Spirit that we follow. And, this following is very intentional. It isn't an accident like something we instinctively do without thinking. We have to mindfully and intentionally surrender our will and willingly be aware of following. We have to do it actively, seeking the Lord, reading His Word, but all the time understanding that it is the Spirit who is given to help us through this life and lead us against this nature that is still alive within us.

As disciples it is all very simple. We surrender our will and our feelings and follow the Spirit. We realize that we have a desperate need and we live with it. If we were bi-polar, we'd live with it and take our meds. If we were terminally ill and treatments kept the illness at bay, we'd report for our transfusions and not pretend something different. The difference for us is our hope in our salvation and the resurrection of Christ. This body is terminal; but we will not only live forever with Christ, it will be in a new body without sin. Without sin! And all that makes our mission following Christ in the harvest more important than ever. We've found the cure for this sickness and madness.

We haven't quite gotten to *all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*. That's tomorrow. What is interesting to me is that the model for following the Spirit is actually Jesus. Read John 5:17-24 as Jesus talked to Jews. Jesus' entire argument is that He had to do what the Spirit was showing Him that the Father was doing. I don't believe Jesus woke every morning knowing what would happen; but He lived aware of God's working, and He was expectantly ready every moment to follow the lead of the Spirit.

Psalm 18:1-15

Today's reading is only about one-third of Psalm 18. We'll be in Psalm 18 for three days. The occasion of this psalm is probably sometime after David had become the king of the entire nation and after victories had been won against the Philistines. Only then was Israel secure and David at peace. This psalm is also 2 Samuel 22, placed there at the end of David's life as his personal testimony to God's deliverance from all that came against him. Placing this psalm at the end of 2 Samuel gives it the added significance of also seeing how God rescued David from his family, friends, himself and Satan.

For me the key verse of this portion is v. 6. It is not until we have exhausted all of our resources and ideas and "connections," and have realized that only God can help us, that we cry out. This is what Paul learned in his suffering as he says in 2 Corinthians 12:10, *For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.*

Vs. 1-3 This is the summation of years of distress and needing God's help. What a privilege it must have been to have looked back and to have been able to say these words.

Vs. 4-6 We know of David's crying out and distress, but it's interesting that God heard him in His temple. Since there wasn't yet a temple, David either meant the tabernacle or God's actual throne in heaven. Somehow, this all worked into developing a passion in David to build a house for the Lord.

Vs. 7-15 This is God's response to come rescue David as seen in David's mind and expressed poetically. I wonder if David had this imagery from being in the mountains and seeing storms sweep across the land.

Proverbs 19:24-25

V. 24 It is easy to put this one off as not applying to us, but I know that there are some areas in my life where I'm a workaholic, and some areas where I'm a sluggard. I think that's true of everyone.

V. 25 This looks like a challenge to interpret. Is the scoffer the simple one? Or is this saying that if you strike a scoffer, he doesn't learn because he's a fool at heart; but it's not wasted because the simple will take notice and learn prudence. On the other hand, if you reprove a man of understanding, he himself will learn and gain knowledge. I don't know, but I think this might be the best way to interpret it.

JULY 23

2 Chronicles 8:11-10:19

2 Chronicles 8:11-18

Vs. 11-15 It seems that Ezra is showing the short-term, good effect "being spiritual" had on Solomon. Notice in all of this, it was still the effect of David's devotion to the Lord that was directing people.

V. 11 This isn't quite correcting his mistake for marrying Pharaoh's daughter, but Solomon does remove her from the city of David. Ezra's people intermarried and then in repentance annulled those marriages.

V. 12 Solomon used to offer on the high places. Now he is only offering in Jerusalem in the temple.

Notice the two references to the commands of Moses and David.

Vs. 16-18 So, after the "mission" was complete, why did Solomon still need a lot of gold? You can calculate the tonnage by multiplying the talents by 75 (1 talent = 75lbs.). In 2 Chronicles 9:13 notice how much gold Solomon brought in yearly, even after the temple and his palace were finished.

2 Chronicles 9

Vs. 1-12 The visit of the Queen of Sheba showed that Solomon and Israel had international recognition and acclaim. I think Ezra's point in this story is stated toward the end. Remember, in building up the people's identity with the calling of God, Ezra is trying to show them that there was a time that the glory of Israel was beyond that of Babylon and Persia. Returning to Israel and to Jerusalem was not a "step down."

Vs. 13-21 This is meant to show the vast and lavish richness of Solomon's Israel. It would have been the vacation destination of the world.

Vs. 22-28 These would have been the verses to the generation of returnees.

Vs. 29-30 Notice that Ezra doesn't say anything negative about Solomon. This is the same as his review of the life of David. Ezra has focused on God's promises as established in David and in Solomon's dedication of the temple. The glory of Israel is in its God and in His promises. And there was a time when the glory of Israel excelled that of all kings and kingdoms on earth.

2 Chronicles 10

So, what do you see as the key verses in this chapter?

In writing this, Ezra has material to draw from. Certainly he has what is written in Samuel and Kings. We know also that there were other documents. (See 1 Chron. 29:29.) Ezra is putting them together to give this returning people a perspective on following God that will make them proud to return and make them watchful to remember to obey.

Vs. 1-15 And suddenly all the grandeur and blessing was lost. The history of what had happened here was already written elsewhere, but writing it like this would show the exiles how quickly sin can destroy everything. This king didn't obey the Lord for sure; but specifically, he didn't lead the people as David and Solomon had done. God withdrew His blessing, and disaster followed.

Vs. 16-19 Even in exile, there were probably hard feelings between tribes. Israel had been two separate kingdoms for hundreds of years. The people who went into exile never knew of a unified nation. How would they return and achieve that now? Here is the explanation of how God divided the kingdoms and why. The remedy to disunity would be seen in Ezra showing that if God was obeyed, there was blessing and unity.

Romans 8:9-21

Notice how often the Spirit is being mentioned. This chapter is that final link showing the redeemed how they can live a life of growth and fruit as a result of Christ. Since we've been left here to follow in the harvest, we can only grow and bear fruit as we abide in Christ and follow the Spirit daily.

Vs. 9-11 Paul is affirming that all believers have been reborn in the Spirit, and the Spirit is resident within us. There is no excuse for following the flesh as if the Spirit weren't there.

Vs. 12-13 Since we owe our sinful nature nothing, why should we obey it? But we owe the Spirit everything. This is written to believers. So how will you "die" *if you live according to the flesh*? I believe this is salvation from damage as in 1 Timothy 4:16, *Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.* If we choose to live by the urgings of the flesh (our old nature woven into this body), not

intentionally following the Spirit, we can live just as wrecked as everyone else. This gets proven every day and in every church. If a believer decides to step in front of a truck, he gets run over too.

Vs. 14-17 This is the privilege of our relationship to God. It shouldn't be duty to follow the Father who loves us. It should be our desire and passion. But this is also a choice.

V. 17 There are two things that this verse **doesn't** mean. First, it **doesn't** mean that a person can lose their salvation. Second, it **doesn't** mean that because a person has been saved, they fully share the glory of Christ on earth in the harvest, if they are unwilling to suffer with Him. If we deny Him, He will deny us and withhold the support He would have given our testimony.

There are rewards built into our relationship with Christ that are not automatic or equal with salvation. Our work on the foundation of Christ is judged...gold, silver, precious stone, wood, hay, straw...for example. Also, in the last verse of Isaiah 53, it says that Christ *shall divide the spoil with the strong*. Not everyone who comes to Christ decides to live for Him in the harvest; and therefore, they don't get the personal knowledge of Him here, and they don't get the rewards from Him there.

Living as a Christian in Rome wasn't easy. In a few years, Christians strapped to poles, standing soaked in basins of oil, would be used to light the city; and those who stood for the name of Christ would be entertaining the masses as they died in the coliseum.

V. 18 Paul is moving into another thought. We suffer in truly following Christ in the harvest, but is it worth it?

Vs. 19-21 We knew this, right? The entire creation is tied into our fall. We humans are the center of creation. Notice that in the creation in Genesis, the sun, moon, planets and stars were not created until the fourth day. And notice that they were made to serve us. The creation of man was the reason God created the universe. We didn't come from some cosmic spore or some alien life form. How silly.

If we really wanted to save the planet, we would all bow to Christ. When we who belong to Christ are resurrected in spiritual bodies, free of sin, then the creation will be set free from its bondage. That will be a day of great celebration.

On this point of suffering, when Roman persecution caught up to Paul, he was deserted by all his help except Luke. Paul was a needy guy physically. Notice how often Paul, writing from a Roman dungeon, has to tell a seasoned disciple like Timothy in 2 Timothy to be willing to suffer. If you're not in the harvest you can hide. To be in the harvest with Christ means that you will suffer, but that's cool, right? More on that tomorrow.

Psalm 18:16-36

Vs. 16-19 are the rescue.

Vs. 20-24 During the time David ran, he drew close to the Lord. His righteousness is shown in his desire to please God, and when he had the chance, twice, he spared Saul. David also showed fairness to his men in the situation at Ziklag. God rewarded David for his devotion.

Vs. 25-27 It is interesting. David states that God pays in kind. If you've been devoted, that's good. If you've been evil, that is not so good.

Vs. 28-36 David gave God all the glory for all he was able to do and for all that was accomplished through him.

This psalm was written by David, summarizing all of the help God gave him during the 10 years he was chased by Saul and after the 7 years of civil war as he reigned over the tribe of Judah.

After 17 years of uncertainty, fear, depression and waiting for God to fulfill the promise of becoming king when Samuel anointed him, this is David's debriefing on all that the Lord had done for him.

Again regarding suffering, you have to endure all of this to be saved from damage and get to the place of being able to give this kind of testimony. Jesus said to His disciples in Matthew 10:22, *and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved.* (from the damage of giving in).

Proverbs 19:26

Who would disagree? I wonder if this violence and chasing can mean something other than physical.

JULY 24

2 Chronicles 11-13

Ezra is writing this not just to record history, but to encourage, humble, strengthen and warn the new generation of Israelites returning to the land. There are important lessons here for these people. And of course, these things are also *written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.* So we'll look for those lessons.

2 Chronicles 11

What lessons do you think Ezra wanted to get across in this chapter? And what do you think the Lord is saying to us/you in terms of discipleship?

Vs. 1-4 Rehoboam listened this time.

Vs. 5-12 In a way, all of this fortress building was unnecessary. He could have asked the Lord if this was necessary and the Lord would have told him. What was beginning to happen was people were reverting back to the old motto, *Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*

Vs. 13-17 The natural reaction of the godly was to migrate toward Jerusalem and Judah. Jeroboam was so ungodly that this became the first test of those people who truly loved the Lord. At first I'm sure they kept going to Jerusalem to the feasts, but as time went on and the idolatry spread, people probably gave up their land inheritances and went to live in Judah. By and large, the people who migrated south were the people who could trace their tribal lineages under Ezra.

V. 17 seems to have an eeriness about it. What happened after *three years*?

Vs. 18-23 As a result of the people coming to Judah, Rehoboam was strengthened and blessed and actually became a decent king, for three years.

V. 21 I read this and think, "He wasn't like his dad. He showed some restraint."

2 Chronicles 12

This is a chapter of contrast. What would Ezra's point be here?

Vs. 1-4 Note these words. We'll find Ezra making similar comments on almost all of the kings. Notice that when Rehoboam was strong and established, he abandoned the Lord. Note how many Egyptians came against Judah and Jerusalem. Back in 2 Chronicles 11:1, it says that Rehoboam had gathered 180,000 men just from Benjamin. But now, because of Rehoboam's ungodliness, the blessing of God was gone and they were weak.

Vs. 5-8 *They humbled themselves*, but still, God punished them severely. I'm sure Ezra wanted to make the people see the connection between obedience and blessing, and disobedience and

punishment. At the time Ezra was writing this, that was exactly what was happening to the first wave of those who returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. They had begun to rebuild the temple, but gave up because of persecution. Then they took care of their own lives and forgot the Lord, and it still wasn't the life they wanted. Read the first chapter of Haggai. God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to motivate the people to obey. Meanwhile Ezra was writing this history. When Ezra finally arrived in Jerusalem, the temple was completed, but the lives of some of the people were in shambles. This now is a history lesson on why a nation gets a case of the "shambles."

Vs. 9-12 All that Solomon had gathered was taken. This is what happens if a people abandon the Lord, but in love, God didn't abandon the people.

Vs. 13-16 Rehoboam reigned a good long time and didn't love the Lord at all. Times were good, so why bother?

V. 14 What is it that God seeks? This would be one of those lessons for Ezra's generation, and for each of us.

2 Chronicles 13

Now if you want to get a taste for how Ezra is trying to make a point about the importance of following the Lord and of God's promise to David, you need to read 1 Kings 15:1-7. Those seven vague verses is all the space Abijah gets there. It is enough to say that he really wasn't a godly king, but putting that account together with this one, we can see that Ezra is showing God's faithfulness to the line of David, while showing that God punishes disobedience.

Vs. 1-20 Abijah began godly, and his short reign was a terrible judgment of God on Jeroboam. Look at v. 17. Can you imagine a battle in which Israel, the northern kingdom, would lose 500,000 men, in one battle? A half a million men. The lesson was that not following the Lord bites, and God will honor His promise to David.

A covenant of salt apparently meant that the covenant was enduring.

Read these verses (4-12) and look at the words the Lord puts in Abijah's mouth.

Vs. 21-22 So, when did Abijah go bad? I read an article once that said we are at our weakest after a victory. That happened to David; and once Solomon had no more "mission," the life of the wisest man on earth went to heck.

God has given us a mission to keep us strong, but our strength is seen in humbly following Christ as people who have been brought from death to life because of the sacrifice of our Savior. As we've seen in Romans, if not for the grace of God and the help of the Spirit, sin would ravage us too.

Romans 8:22-39

Vs. 23-25 All of creation is suffering, waiting for the close of the age, which has to do with our redemption. Do we really groan inwardly? We only do that if we understand the weight we are still under because of sin, and the deliverance that is coming our way, thanks to Christ and the love of God. We are closest to living in this realization when we are working in the harvest, seeking to reach the lost, who are under the wrath of God because of sin. It is in the harvest that we are seeking to make disciples who will go beyond us, making disciples, who make disciples.

V. 24 How does the *hope* of the resurrection save us? Again, living in a good-time society where everything is pretty easy doesn't help us here. The resurrection is our *hope*. Look back to those early verses of chapter 6. If we don't sense the weight of sin still in us, and if we don't bear this weight as we follow Christ in the harvest, then we will never emotionally experience the hope and joy of sharing His resurrection. The resurrection will only be this nice thing we're told of that

seems somehow unnecessary. Just beam me up, Scotty! The proper perspective is expressed by Paul in Philippians 3:7-15.

Vs. 26-27 *Likewise* seems to mean, "just as He helped us there, the Spirit also helps us here." So, in what other way has the Spirit been helping us? Go back to the beginning of this chapter. There is at least one thing mentioned that the Spirit does for us and there is at least one other that is implied. You might find a bunch.

The implication here is that the Spirit is interceding for us on a spiritual level. He isn't just adding something to our words that we're leaving out. He's completely communicating to the Father on His own level, possibly in opposition to our lives or our prayers. He really knows what we need.

V. 28 So, why is this verse here, in this spot? You see that the Holy Spirit is praying for us and then you've got this verse. The way this verse gets used on the street is that God will eventually work everything together, including a bowling ball on the head from a twenty-story building, to make you happy. Try to put this verse together with v. 36. That doesn't sound happy. The RSV states v. 28 like this, *We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.* I like the tone of this reading better and it fits better to v. 36. It would seem that in God's love and eternal purpose, He uses us for the purpose of His plan. It might hurt, but we trust His wisdom and love knowing that He is using us for good. And, at the same time He is working in us. We don't have to know how or why He uses us, or to what purpose in His plan. We only need to know Him and His love and trust Him. The fact that we even know Him and are saved is part of that purpose and working we don't understand. The final verses of Romans say, *to the only wise God be glory for evermore through Christ Jesus.* We trust ourselves to a wise, loving, sovereign God.

Vs. 29-30 I think the order is important here. I don't think foreknowledge means merit or works or takes away from the teaching of the depravity of man.

Vs. 31-39 This is Paul finishing this section of Romans with a flourish. These are some of the greatest verses in the NT and worth memorizing.

V. 32 If you only memorize one verse, do this one.

V. 33 Our justification is not based on our "doing," but on Christ's doing. So who can bring a charge against us or condemn us even when we sin, saying we are not worthy of salvation, since we didn't justify ourselves? Satan has been disarmed in terms of accusing us before God. God already justified us by the sacrifice of Christ and through our faith in Him. If Satan or anyone else has a problem, they need to take it up with God.

For us as disciples, these verses give us the assurance that we can give all we are for Christ. We are saved and safe and loved, but we are saved and safe and loved to work as hard as Paul did in the harvest, inspired by the great love and gospel of Christ. And even if God calls us to His presence by the violence of some act of a madman, we know it was allowed by God for the good working of His plan in the harvest. And for us, it would introduce us to the presence of Christ. That's not bad.

Psalm 18:37-50

This is David's conclusion of his "master" psalm, written after 17 years of running, hiding, fighting and hearing every possible threat and lie against him. God worked His purpose and worked all things for good for David and for His covenant people.

Vs. 37-42 In this very brutal, poetic section, David isn't boasting, but rather stating that he was able to do all of this because of God's help in answer to his prayers.

Vs. 43-45 This is how God elevated David after all those long years of David crying out and enduring hardship. Compare this to what Isaiah 55 says about what God did for David.

Vs. 46-48 And this is David giving God all the praise and the glory for everything.

V. 49 When Paul speaks of the Gentiles being saved and giving glory to God for their salvation, Paul quotes this verse in Romans 15:9, *and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written, "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name."* Note that the word for "Gentiles" and "nations" is the same word in Greek.

V. 50 Notice that David mentions God's *steadfast love*. This is something David would have arranged to have sung in all of Israel's worship because it was really what David had learned from all he went through. I don't know what this song would have sounded like, but it would have probably been pretty uplifting.

Proverbs 19:27-29

Amen, amen and amen!

JULY 25

2 Chronicles 14-16

These three chapters are all about Asa. He was a great king who we hardly got to know in 1 Kings 15. As you read these chapters, take care to think about the time markers that the Spirit is giving. What we're reading here is both amazing and awful. Asa, like David, is someone you would want to be like, or name your son after. Yet, like David, he fell. What is frightening is that the kings will all "fall" differently, and it will look like something we are just as prone to do. They will have great faith when they are young, but when they are older, established, secure and strong, something will tempt them and they'll give in. David gave into dishonesty and adultery. Solomon gave in to stuff, pleasure and finally idolatry. So here's your job. Figure out what it was that shook Asa.

2 Chronicles 14

Vs. 1-8 The mentioning of time and years is the key to understanding this section. They are not here by accident. This is Asa's first act of devotion and it established him as a godly king. Notice the mention of Asa leading the people to seek God and notice that it was God who gave him peace. You wonder why he spent so much of his energy fortifying the land when it was God who was helping him. Ironically, none of Asa's military strengthening would help him regarding the challenge he was about to face. This is good to consider.

What would you say is the strength of Asa?

Vs. 9-15 No other king ever faced an army this big. In spite of his military might, it was small compared to the million men who came against him. Yet, Asa's victory came through the Lord, and Asa had faith to cry out to God.

V. 13 I'll bet it was like Christmas, but the gift God gave Asa was a Wal-Mart.

2 Chronicles 15

Again, do you see what God required and what Asa did? (Vs. 2, 12-13) Asa was a great man and this is what defined his walk with God and his leadership. I'm sure Ezra wants Israel to see this.

Vs. 1-7 This is God's promise and blessing to Asa. Asa responded well because he was a man of deep faith. Notice that with God's promise there is also a warning. I'm sure Ezra wanted Israel to see this too.

It is sobering to think that in most of the places God has warned people, they did exactly what He warned them against. He knew they would fall in a hole. That should have given God's warnings an even greater significance.

Vs. 8-15 This is now the second time Asa cleansed the land. What is amazing is v. 9. People in the northern kingdom were drawn by Asa's devotion and by God's blessing on the land. I'm sure that this is what God always had in mind. The godly people of all lands would be drawn to Israel.

Vs. 16-19 This was Asa's third cleansing. Notice that v. 17 says that Asa was wholly true to the Lord all of his life. Hold that thought.

V. 19 This note is important, and in order to figure out what happens next, you need to understand how long Asa had lived in peace and blessing without a fight. How long was it between fights? Asa had peace for 10 years and then there was a huge challenge. Then there was peace until his 35th year, meaning that from one challenge to the next there were 25 years of peace. The question is, did his faith grow in that peace or did peace make him weak and sloppy?

2 Chronicles 16

Vs. 1-6 This seems like a shrewd move, but it wasn't. Asa was aggravated and threatened. He didn't seek God. This new threat shook him, irritated him and got him mad. He figured out a way to get even and it was sweet and tricky and it worked. And it was without God.

Vs. 7-9 This is the verdict and it scares me to read it because I can see me doing something like this. When he was young and the threat was great, Asa had outstanding faith and received a great reward. Now, 25 years later (or 15 if a scribe messed up), he reacts in rage and trickery and doesn't seek God. There are lots of possibilities here as to what motivated him, but the result is the same.

V. 9 is a famous verse. Who would have guessed it came as God's judgment on a formerly faithful king?

Vs. 10-14 Asa got mad at God, took it out on the prophet and hurt some of the godly people, I presume, who tried to get him to see reason. And then for at least two years nothing happened. God didn't punish him. Why not? It looks to me like God wanted to test Asa's heart. If there weren't an immediate punishment, would Asa come to Him, seek Him? Also, notice the prophet's name. You'll meet his son in 2 Chronicles 19.

Vs. 12 is a terrible commentary to Asa's anger and stubbornness. The seeking of God, that had been the mark and strength of his faith when he was young, was gone. When he was younger he had the faith to lead Israel against the largest army ever named in the OT. But after years of peace, when he was older, the frustration of a smaller, incessant irritation drove him to forget God and make an agreement with the ungodly to punish his enemy.

Now, knowing all of this, what did God and Ezra mean by saying that Asa remained wholly true all his days? It seems to me that although Asa got mad at God, he never went after other gods. He grew bitter and backslidden, but he never worshiped anyone but Yahweh.

As disciples, regardless of our acts of faith and obedience in the past, it is possible, in our comfort, to suddenly become enraged at something small and persistent that shreds our faith and our desire to seek God. I have heard of godly people saying and doing the most ungodly and unspiritual things to office clerks and family members over small, frustrating things. As disciples we need to keep our hearts before the Lord, always following and working in the harvest, aware of what the Spirit is showing us about ourselves. Sin is always dangerous. We always need to submit to God in the unexpected events that plague us and to seek God.

Romans 9:1-21

So, what is this change of topic all about? Did Paul think, "I'll write eight chapters about salvation by faith and then eight chapters about something else?" When you read this section today, you have to wonder.

It seems to me that all of Romans has to do with the redemptive plan of God. Chapters 1-8 describe one purpose of God and one way to salvation and completion in Him. Chapters 9-11 describe one plan of God involving two peoples, the Jews and the church, and how these are distinct and yet still one plan. God didn't make a first trial and then come up with a better idea. Chapters 12-16 don't present any problem. They are practical chapters dealing with issues in the Roman church.

Chapters 9-11 expose a misunderstanding in the thoughts of some people. How could God begin the plan of redemption one way and then finish another way? Paul will show it was always one plan, and that Israel, the nation, will fulfill its destiny. Chapter 9 presents the biggest problem to our understanding; because Paul gets in the face of those who are "large of brain" and argumentative, basically saying to them, "Who are you to try to out-think God and tell Him what He does is unfair?" Remember those words back in Romans 3:4b, *That you may be justified in your words and prevail when you are judged.* God will come out righteous and fair. In chapter 9 Paul and the Spirit sound hard, but this will soften by the end of chapter 11. These arguments here, though hard to understand at first, are God's way of smoking out the arrogant and telling them to submit themselves and their understanding of the things to a wise, sovereign God. That is the same argument God used on Job and his friends.

Vs. 1-5 Paul will show that God's plan with the Jews did not fail in spite of what people thought. Notice that when he uses the word *belong*, it is still the present tense. These things still belong to the Jews.

Vs. 6-13 This is an interesting argument. When I read it, I thought, "Yeah, that's right." Abraham had Ishmael and Isaac had Esau. They were all descendants of Abraham, but did not belong to the promise.

V. 13 You have to understand OT history to understand this. God didn't dislike Esau because he was hairy or chewed with his mouth open. This has nothing to do with "love" in the emotional sense. Actually the quote is from the first chapter of Malachi. Both nations sinned against God. Both were taken into exile. Only one nation returned. Guess which one. Why did it return: God was faithful to His purpose and calling as promised to Abraham. It was all a part of God's eternal plan of redemption. If you really want to see this up close and personal, go back to Genesis and read about Esau. He was his own raw kind of person, but God still blessed Esau. He just wasn't a man of faith in the promise.

This is not saying that the church and Israel are the same because of faith. As seen in chapter 4, a true Jew not only had the blood connection to Abraham, but also had the faith connection to Abraham.

V. 14 The question here has to do with unfairness in God's calling and use of people. This is definitely a deep subject. The immediate subjects are Esau and then Pharaoh, but it will extend to the nation of Israel in a few verses. The only real answer Paul will give is that a person ought to trust God and not question His integrity. In essence, this is the same answer God gave to Job.

Vs. 15-21 This break at v. 21 is unfortunate. Keep reading to v. 24 to keep the thought together.

Vs. 15-16 What is said here needs to be understood along with God's love and wisdom. There is no injustice on God's part, but there might be a lot we don't understand.

Vs. 17-18 Pharaoh hardened his own heart and God then hardened his heart. God used this arrogant man for His purposes.

Vs. 19-21 The key to understanding what Paul is saying here, and what balances this argument, is v. 20. This is exactly what Job did. He questioned God. We know from the book of Job that many things were going on around Job and behind the scenes. God's answer to Job is simply to trust His wisdom, and Job shut his mouth and declared God righteous.

The thought to keep in mind is that God doesn't create anyone just to go to hell, but God can use those who resist Him for His own ends. We have too much Scripture telling us that God is good and doesn't desire anyone to be lost.

I think the way to understand this is by God's foreknowledge, mentioned in chapter 8. God knows who will come to Him and who won't. (For an interesting thought on this read John 6:64.) Once this is known, God has the right to mold and make and use a person as He wills. We do something similar. For example, in the past presidential election, guess who the large prison population in the US voted for: no one. The guilty forfeit their rights. Why you need those next verses, 22-24, is to see that God uses these people for His purpose and still shows them incredible patience and kindness, knowing full well that they will rebel against Him until they die. That can't be pleasant for a holy, loving God to be scorned and spit on by those He made and is seeking to save.

A final thought: When we come to Christ and become disciples, we also give up our rights to control or to lead our own lives. We live for Him and His glory, right? We submit to His purpose and His will, knowing that He is wise and loving and knows what is best. Right? Romans 8:28, again in the RSV, *We know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.* The real issue is whether we really believe and trust that God is wise, loving and good. If so, then as disciples we can lay it all on the altar as we serve our Lord in the harvest.

Psalm 19

It's interesting being in Romans and then reading this psalm.

Vs. 1-3 sound like Romans 1:19-20.

Vs. 4-6 Believe it or not, Paul will quote v. 4 in Romans 10 to show that the Jews all heard the Word of God.

Vs. 7-14 Think of these verses in terms of what Paul is saying in Romans 9. Anyone who would accuse God of being unfair in His dealings with people does not understand God or this time of harvest.

Proverbs 20:1

To make anything an idol is dangerous. God brings trial, pain, and "pruning" into our lives to show us our need for Him and to make us stronger in Him. Putting our hope in wine or anything to "escape and ease the pain or make us forget or cope" is to be led astray. These things, like all things in submission to God, can be what He designed them to be. In Lewis' The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe, when Aslan brings the thaw and allows Bacchus (the Roman God of wine) into Narnia, Lucy remarks that if it were not for the presence of Aslan, she'd be afraid of Bacchus and his girls. The same should be true of us.

JULY 26

2 Chronicles 17-18

Unlike the writer of 1 & 2 Kings, Ezra is only interested in the kings of the Davidic line. Today we get far more information on Jehoshaphat than we did in 1 Kings. Again, he was an amazing man of faith, yet one who destroyed everything good that he had done. Actually, we will be reading about the fallout of one amazingly blind decision for the next few days. As you read these two chapters, learn from the good things he did, and then try to understand what it was that motivated him to make such grave mistakes.

2 Chronicles 17

Vs. 1-6 Notice that the kings are "graded" in terms of David, that is, of following Yahweh only. Jehoshaphat sought the Lord and he was courageous in following the Lord. I'm certain that one of the reasons many of the commands of the Lord were not followed is that it was hard, even for a king, to make the people obey and then to put up with all the resistance. Joe must have had a good way with people. He would have been reigning with his father Asa during the final years of Asa's bitterness, and therefore the people would have been looking more and more to Joe. The fact that everyone brought him gifts and wealth shows they thought he was a great administrator. One other note is that because Asa sent so much of his wealth north to bribe the Syrians, it might have been felt that Jehoshaphat needed it. It was the Lord who made Joe rich, not his own efforts. Keep this in mind.

Vs. 7-9 This was a very wise thing that Jehoshaphat did. You don't read about any other king doing this.

Vs. 10-17 Notice that the result of Jehoshaphat's godliness was that God brought this fear and respect. Notice again that God was making Joe secure and bringing him wealth. You wonder then why Jehoshaphat spent so much time building up the "might" of Judah. Ironically, it wasn't the southern kingdom's might that put them in this position. God honored Jehoshaphat for honoring Him. I wonder why this was so important to Joe. This pride and his military might well lead to the next event. Almost all of the godly kings did something silly when they became strong.

2 Chronicles 18

Vs. 1-3 Now that Jehoshaphat was strong and honored, he did something that was totally wrong. Without seeking the Lord, he made a marriage alliance with Ahab. I think he knew God would have said no. I think God is trying to tell us something. My only conclusion is that Joe thought he should work to unite the northern and southern kingdoms. This might have been motivated out of a good heart, seeing how God had blessed him, but we know for sure that he never asked God about this. Look ahead at 2 Chronicles 19:1-3. How sad and ironic. Notice that in 2 Chronicles 15:9 it was God's blessing that brought people to King Asa and began to unite the country.

Ironically, Ahab probably wanted Joe's help because of Joe's nice shiny army. This is just speculation, but since Ramoth-gilead had been a Levitical city of refuge, I wonder if Ahab used that to give the "righteous" Jehoshaphat a religious reason to join together with him.

Vs. 4-11 This is a sad portion. It appears that Jehoshaphat was being wise and godly, but Joe had already committed himself to helping Ahab. These words are condescendingly foolish at best. If Joe had asked God if he should even be there, God would have said, "No." Unknown to Joe, he was under the satanic influence that was bearing down on Ahab. We see this influence in the form of this false prophet Zedekiah. We find out in the next section what made Zedekiah so believable and persuasive.

Vs. 12-27 This story is rich with lessons. These kings had hardened their hearts to the Lord's will and so God was giving them up to the lies they wanted to hear. I think this principle is still one God uses today for those who seriously don't want to listen to Him.

V. 15 How funny. Apparently Micaiah had parroted or imitated the false prophets and Ahab saw the ridicule. Ahab actually tried to make it look like he was the spiritual man always having to deal with this foolish prophet.

V. 16 Just the change of tone should have given people goose bumps. This is an incredible portion of the Word.

Vs. 20-22 When we set our hearts to join those who are rebelling against God, we put ourselves under the same satanic influence that is working on them. In this case, Jehoshaphat was also falling under the judgment of God on Ahab. Even before they sought the advice of God, they had already made up their minds. You and I can do this too. You have to wonder what was going through Joe's mind when he heard this from Micaiah. He must have known he was wrong, but hardened his heart and still didn't back down.

Vs. 23-27 It is hard to imagine a godly man like Joe allowing this to happen. I'll bet he knew in his heart of hearts that this was a true prophet of God. And he just sat there and watched the abuse of Micaiah.

Vs. 28-34 What a bummer. Micaiah was right even though they tried to "trick" God.

V. 31 We see this formula all the time. We cry out and He hears us. Notice that Ahab didn't cry out. He is the perfect heroic unbeliever, dying in stubbornness for nothing.

We still have two chapters about Jehoshaphat, but he has shown here the mind and heart attitudes that will bring about tremendous ruin in his family and in Israel. I'm sure Ezra was hoping the returnees would take to heart how serious it was to mix in with the ungodly. As disciples we have this tremendous faith in us to follow Christ; yet, as Paul says in Romans, we have this deep sin within us that pushes us to ignore God at crucial points in our lives. We all have personal issues within us that are a challenge to our obedience and faith. When some idea or project tempts us to go forward and not seek God or hear Him, we need to stop. These details from the lives of such great men of faith are recorded here for no other reason than to warn us to be careful, as we walk before our Lord in His work in the harvest.

Romans 9:22-10:13

The editors who put in the chapter and verse breaks generally did a great job. Because of the tight logic of Romans, the editors did an exact job here. The chapters in Romans comprise complete thoughts, so, in the way we're reading it in The One Year Bible, it is a bit disjointed. I would recommend paging back or ahead and read the complete chapters.

Romans 9:22-33

Vs. 22-24 Read this as the conclusion of Paul's thinking from yesterday.

Paul is slanting the argument toward those who object to God's "use" of the disobedient. If God knows before a person is born that they will rebel against Him, why even let them live? Yet, God allows these people to live and enjoy life and raise heck and do all sorts of stuff that, if you think about it, is hard for God to watch. This is that perfect love of the Father who sends His rain on the just and unjust. Yet, in His divine wisdom and power, He also uses them for His glory and for the purpose of redemption. When it is all said and done, the lost will be lost because of their choices and their free will to reject God. God gives the rebellious chances, shows them love and grace, allows them to live and enjoy life; but in His wisdom He uses them for His purpose.

What we don't see yet is that Paul will say that God is using the disobedience of Israel so that the Gentiles can be saved. This is just "step one" of Paul's argument. In chapter 11 he brings it all together and gets the future nation of Israel saved too!

Vs. 25-29 Saul of Tarsus (Paul) was an intense student of Scripture. At his conversion, his world was shaken. Not only had he been wrong, but he had opposed God, cheered for those who killed the Messiah and had persecuted, beaten, and had part in the murder of many believers in Christ. After his conversion, Paul disappeared for about three years during his Damascus adventure. And after he visited Jerusalem, Paul disappeared again for 10+ years until Barnabas found him up in Turkey. During those years of silence, Paul must have reexamined the Word, trying to understand how he and the Jews missed it, and why salvation was now going to the Gentiles. This passage is evidence (actually all of Romans is evidence) of how thoroughly Paul searched the Scriptures.

Summing up these passages, Paul is showing that the Gentiles are now the focus of God's plan of redemption and that a remnant of Israel has been saved. The fact that Jews could be saved at all signifies that they are a remnant saved by grace; but the time is coming when the nation will turn to God.

Vs. 30-33 This is Paul's conclusion to this part of his argument. You say, "What argument? What's his point?" What is written here is Paul's point. As Isaiah and Jesus predicted, the Jews stumbled over God's plan and particularly over Jesus. The next chapter will support this point. Then chapter 11 will go further and show that in God's plan of redemption, the complete fulfillment of the promise of Abraham and the establishment of the believing nation of Israel is still future. The fulfillment of the promise to Abe is intertwined with the redemption of the Gentiles. Through Abe's offspring (Jesus) all nations (Gentiles) would be blessed. (Galatians 3:8)

Notice in this that the cornerstone was a person and that those who were to believe in that person would not be put to shame. The promises to Adam and Eve, Abe, and David all had to do with a Son, a Person who would win the redemption of man. This reminds me too of Isaiah's description of the Christ, a root out of dry ground. Not pretty or physically appealing, but He was the Messiah all the same and He is mighty to save.

Romans 10:1-13

This is a famous portion of the NT because of vs. 9-13. This entire chapter will show that Israel can only be saved through faith.

Vs. 1-4 The basis of righteousness was always going to be that promised child. The Jews in Jesus' day became lost in following the law and becoming righteous in their own estimation. That's interesting when you think of the Old Testament, since the major problem in most of Israel's history was idolatry and living as if Yahweh was just one of many gods. The Judaism of Jesus' day was a zeal for God, but without truly knowing or loving God.

Vs. 5-8 This is very interesting. It would mean that Moses' words in Deuteronomy were really describing following God in faith in the promise to Abraham. This is one of those portions that show how Paul worked through the OT, looking for salvation by faith. This is from Moses' final words to Israel in Deuteronomy 30:11-14. Look at these OT verses and imagine that the Spirit was really telling the people that rather than religious routine, from the very beginning the law could only be followed through faith.

Vs. 9-11 These are very famous and important verses. Notice, it all has to do with a confession, and the heart and a Person. It isn't just faith. It is becoming absorbed in a Person. In the OT, it was faith in the promise to Adam and Eve regarding her child. It was faith in the seed or

offspring of Abraham. It was faith in the eternal heir of David. And all of this “faith” wasn’t “faith” until it became confession and following.

Vs. 12-13 Think of all the crying out we have read from David. Think of all the mentions of kings who sought God. This is all the Lord has ever wanted and it is the only way that a person can be saved. Notice this isn’t belief in a god or a supreme being. It is calling upon the God of Abraham. It is calling upon the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The message in the harvest is very simple. God does the rest.

Psalm 20

You wonder if David wrote this in his early years as the king of Israel. There were still battles to be fought, but David was in Zion (v. 2) and he had the assurance that God had helped him (v. 6).

David might have written this before a battle with the Philistines or one of the armies hired from the north. But because of the years he had depended on the Lord during hard and uncertain times, you know that he was assured now that trusting in the name of the Lord, not armies (think of Jehoshaphat above), was his strength and salvation.

Vs. 1-5 David understood that victory had to do with personal integrity and devotion to the Lord. Notice the blessing that David invokes on those who follow the Lord.

Vs. 6-8 After all of David’s years of running and waiting, he knew he could trust the Lord,

V. 9 Now David was calling for help for the immediate challenge before him.

Proverbs 20:2-3

We don't really worry about "kings," unless we mean bosses, police or teachers. Maybe, it would be good to think of the Lord here. There is a very healthy fear of the Lord that keeps us safe, just like being afraid to put your hand on the stove or to speed past a cop. Sin needs to be kept in check, and fear sometimes does the trick.

V. 3 Along with this, I think of what Paul tells Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:23-26, *Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.*²⁴ *And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil,*²⁵ *correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth,*²⁶ *and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

It is good to fear and respect the Lord, and just to obey. It might feel like fun to be right and win an argument, but Paul tells Timothy what is really at stake. And above all, as disciples, we are the Lord's servants. We are not here in this harvest to serve ourselves.

JULY 27

2 Chronicles 19-20

2 Chronicles 19

Vs. 1-3 It isn't unusual to see God rebuke a king for doing wrong. What makes this interesting is that Jehoshaphat is rebuked and responds with humility. Now we'll see two further acts of faith and obedience that are not mentioned in Kings. It is good trying to understand God’s rebuke of Jehoshaphat. God is not against compassion and reaching out, but the gospel and seeking God should always stand between us and others. Locking arms with those who hate the Lord is not the way to win them to Christ.

Note also the name of this prophet. We saw his dad get thrown into jail on July 25th. Joe responded better than his father Asa had.

Vs. 4-11 This sort of godly organization is "typical" of the Davidic kings who loved the Lord. After the kind of rebuke he received from the Lord, you might think Jehoshaphat would try to "look" repentant. But these acts are very intelligent and sincere, aimed at keeping the heart of Israel focused on the Lord. This would be important for Ezra to show the leaders of Israel, that when rebuked, a godly leader humbles himself and keeps working to lead the people to the Lord.

Vs. 4-7 This was the civil law.

Vs. 8-11 This is what God had always wanted. In disputed cases, the people were to come to the priests and seek God through the Urim and Thummim. It is amazing that Jehoshaphat organized like this.

2 Chronicles 20

This is a very long account of Jehoshaphat's spiritual leadership. Ezra is showing that the heart of a leader of Israel should rely on the promises of God.

Vs. 1-4 What is interesting here is that Jehoshaphat sought the Lord and the Lord only. When he needed help, he didn't run to the northern kingdom or Ahab's house. Ezra is showing that a leader should also lead the people in seeking the Lord. How could a guy this good go so wrong?

Vs. 5-12 This is very godly leadership by Jehoshaphat, and what a great prayer. He focuses the people on the promise that God made to Abraham and then the promise to make the temple the place of His dwelling. Jehoshaphat knew of Solomon's prayer of dedication and God's eternal promise to hear this kind of prayer. What a model to the people and what a man of faith.

Vs. 13-17 So, the life of the nation is on the line. Jehoshaphat has prayed his heart out. Suddenly this guy stands up and says this. Now, Ezra mentions his pedigree, but still, it is just this guy, not a voice or a cloud out of heaven. The response to this prophecy shows great faith.

Vs. 18-19 Jehoshaphat knew that it was the Lord and led the people in obedience and worship. This is faith. Notice that Joe had the singers, the sons of Korah, ready to give praise to God.

Vs. 20-21 So then, under Jehoshaphat's leadership they get ready for battle and go out to the field, and they have a "praise" service. And look what they sing, the "Best of David." *Give thanks to the Lord, for His steadfast love endures forever* is the expression of David's faith that he commanded to be sung in all the worship of Israel. I doubt that they teach this "strategy" at West Point or in any military training facility today.

Vs. 22-23 And "Boom!" the Lord settled the matter for them.

Vs. 24-30 You've got to admit that this is an amazing thing and Jehoshaphat led them in it.

V. 25 Notice that like the battle that Asa fought, they were given the spoils by God. The lesson here for Jehoshaphat is that God can make rich without foul allegiances and chasing gold. He can save without having to waste time amassing a large army. Focusing their energy and endeavor on the spiritual would have saved many of these kings.

V. 26 Notice, too, that Jehoshaphat finished this event with praise to God.

V. 30 Normally this should be a note of blessing; but now that the Lord has given Jehoshaphat peace and he doesn't have a mission, what will he do?

Vs. 35-37 Actually, we know from Kings, that Jehoshaphat also joined together with Ahaziah in a battle and again came under demonic influence. That time the rebuke came from Elisha.

The lesson I see here is that as disciples, we need to make our following simple by doing what our Lord desires in the harvest. We don't need armies or wealth. God can supply what we need. We don't need big churches or a "voice." God gives those too. God never asked Jehoshaphat to build a bridge of unity to the northern kingdom. It might have been a "noble" desire on

Jehoshaphat's part, but it appears that he had some other motives too. Being a peacemaker sounds like a "god" thing, but not if it's not God's will, and not if it keeps us from honoring Him in the harvest.

What is interesting in both Asa and Jehoshaphat is that when they were simply honoring God, God brought them respect, and people from the northern kingdom were convicted and came to Jerusalem. Jehoshaphat didn't need to join with Ahab or anyone from the northern kingdom. When Jehoshaphat was honoring God, God put the fear and respect of Judah in the hearts of the surrounding nations. Jehoshaphat never had to build a good-looking army. When Jehoshaphat was building into the lives of his people and honoring God, he never had to do a joint venture thing to get gold and wealth. God just dumped it in his lap.

As disciples, our focus only needs to be on one thing, loving our Lord and following Him in the harvest. That vision and mission are more than enough. Seeing the lost saved and making disciples who make disciples is blessing enough on this earth. Paul's life was a living sacrifice to Christ and he put it like this in 1 Corinthians 9:23, *I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

Romans 10:14-11:12

Romans 10:14-21

Vs. 14-17 The question that jumps out to me in reading this section is, "What question or objection was Paul answering?" One other major difference between Judaism and Christianity was that Christians had a mandate and commission to be out and to be preaching and telling. It seems here that Paul is showing that sharing the gospel is not only logical and necessary, but is mentioned in the OT. It was part of the plan of redemption. We are left here on purpose, to proclaim the gospel so that people can believe.

V. 17 is another of those famous verses.

Vs. 18-21 I suppose the unspoken objection would be that Israel never really had a chance to hear and understand the message of faith from the OT.

V. 18 Paul's knowledge of the Word was vast when you think of all the Scripture he quotes and alludes to. This quote is from Psalm 19:4. Wouldn't it be great to have such a close walk with God and such a vast understanding of the Word?

V. 19 This quote will become important in the next chapter. The church is that foolish nation.

V. 20 Again, from Romans 3, no one seeks for God unless God takes the initiative in giving nudges. What happens after "the nudge" is up to us. In the case of Israel, God had given them His truth and promises, and they still didn't seek Him.

V. 21 This is what we know from reading the OT. On the one hand, we'll hear that God gave them a spirit of stupor; but on the other hand, reading the OT, we realize that each person and every king made their own decisions. It isn't the case that God "blinded" them, but rather (as in Rom. 1:18ff) God gave them up to their own desire to sin. There came a point when He would no longer throw pearls before swine. As we'll see, God will work in mercy to get them ready to receive truth.

Romans 11:1-12

This is a good chapter to read fully. If you don't, you could get caught thinking that the "remnant" is the only part of Israel that will be saved. If you read to 11:25 you'll see that there is a future redemption for the entire nation of Israel.

Vs. 1-6 This is an interesting argument by Paul. The remnant in Elijah's time was a small group of people in the northern kingdom God kept from worshipping Baal. After the time of Elijah and

after this remnant was gone, there were many prophets who wrote of the nation returning to the Lord. The remnant was preserved by grace during a very dark time for a specific purpose, but it was in no way taking the place of the nation or inheriting the promises of God to the nation of Israel. The present remnant of which Paul was a part, and of which Jewish believers today are a part, in no way takes the place of this future generation of the nation of Israel who will fulfill God's promises to it. This remnant is comprised of Jewish believers, who with God's help, have escaped the national blindness and have embraced their Messiah. And it is all grace and faith, without works.

Vs. 7-12 This is an unfortunate breaking point. I'd suggest reading the rest of the chapter.

What we find here is the description of God's punishment on Israel and His purpose of redemption for the Gentiles and Jews in that punishment. The hardening of heart, as with Pharaoh, was in response to their own hardening of heart. If a person rejects God long enough, God will intensify the blindness to fulfill His own purposes. That blinding will be lifted in the future when God prepares the hearts of the nation to receive His truth. In God's amazing wisdom and foreknowledge, He had already planned to use Israel's sin and rejection of Him to reach Gentiles. That is where we are now, but you can sense from how this is written, Paul is anticipating that the time for the Jews will come. They are being made jealous by the grace being given to those outside of Israel.

Psalm 21

This psalm has an evangelistic tone to it as David proclaimed the secret of his success. And if God will do that for David, we can trust Him too. What do we trust in as we follow Christ in the harvest? What can we be sure to receive from Him? Houses? Cars? Comforts? Verse 7 says it, *the steadfast love of the Most High*.

V. 1 This is David's praise and "boasting" in the Lord.

Vs. 2-7 This is the list of things the Lord had done for David. In giving David the desire of his heart, I wonder if David was referring to the ark of the covenant coming to Jerusalem so that David could dwell in the presence of the Lord.

V. 7 David's real confidence was in the Lord and His *steadfast love*.

Vs. 8-12 In a way, it wasn't just that God was protecting David and removing his enemies. God was furthering His plan of redemption and punishing those who stood against that plan.

V. 13 There is no other person in the Bible who was more committed to giving praise and testimony to God.

Proverbs 20:4-6

If v. 4 is read with the previous three verses, you have a picture of different behaviors.

In v. 5, the man of understanding observes all of this, knows that motives run deep, and he has the patience and wisdom of the farmer to draw out and understand these people.

Words don't show loyal love, but faithfulness does. Think of God's love for David. Verse 6 might belong to the proverb for tomorrow which mentions integrity and it being passed on to children.

JULY 28

2 Chronicles 21-23

These are very dark chapters. They are dark not just because bad stuff happens, but because all of this was launched by a godly king, Jehoshaphat. As you read all of this, think of it as the result

of his desire to unify Israel by uniting with those who didn't love God. Ezra is also including this history as a lesson to the returned exiles. No matter what they build in devotion to the Lord, they can plant the seeds of destruction by becoming "unequally yoked" with the ungodly.

2 Chronicles 21

Vs 1-7 Jehoshaphat had actually made it so that his other sons would be blessed and honored with their own cities and wealth. They would not have been a problem or threat to Jehoram. It should have been a big happy family. But alas, Jehoram's wife was the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel through a marriage alliance.

V. 4 When Jehoram was established, he killed all of his brothers. This would have included their families and anyone who might have had a claim to the throne. This was unprecedented in Israel and it was fueled by his wife, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, who Jehoshaphat made sure Jehoram married.

Vs. 8-10 Under Jehoshaphat the Edomites were allies. Now they were enemies.

Vs. 11-15 There is possibly a small problem here with this letter being from Elijah. We don't know when Elijah was taken into heaven, but it appears that it was before Elisha was in active ministry. In 2 Kings 3:13, Elisha spoke with Jehoshaphat. It may be that a copyist made the mistake of writing Elijah instead of Elisha. I get them mixed up all the time when I preach. When we see the original writings, I'm sure this will make sense. Another possibility is that Elijah was led by the Spirit to write the letter before he was taken.

This sickness sounds like how God took Herod out in Acts 12:23. Whatever it was, it looks like a nasty, painful way to die; but he deserved it. It is interesting that God didn't do this to the other ungodly kings who reigned in Israel, Ahab for example. Sometimes God judges quickly and sometimes not-so-quickly. But He judges.

Vs. 16-17 And in the middle of this wonderful illness, the country was weak and was being terrorized by the neighboring countries.

Vs. 18-20 What a statement against this man. Everyone was happy to see him go. In light of the fact that he killed his brothers and had a godly grandfather and a godly father, he was really a bad guy. It is interesting that God allowed Jehoram to reign so long, but made sure he died in agony.

As a result of all of this, and probably something that Ezra mentioned when he taught this, the Davidic line was now threatened, not only with ungodliness, but with extinction. All of Jehoshaphat's other sons and their families were killed; and all of Jehoram's kids, but one, were killed.

2 Chronicles 22

V. 1 The people must have hoped to find a godly king, but Athaliah, Jezebel's daughter, was still spewing poison into the land. This now is the second generation diseased by Jehoshaphat's poor decision.

Vs. 2-9 What's interesting is that Ahaziah was killed as a part of the judgment against Ahab. God said that all who were related to Ahab would die. Ahaziah was a grandson of Ahab. Unwittingly, Jehoshaphat had brought his family under God's curse on Ahab. Jehu, though not a real follower of God, knew of Jehoshaphat's godliness and therefore respected the burial of Ahaziah.

Vs. 10-12 This would have meant the extinction of the line of David, except for the actions of the godly priest Jehoiada. Jehoshaphat's misled actions now have brought the house of David down to (almost) the last man. Jehoshaphat's sin will now extend to three generations.

2 Chronicles 23

Vs. 1-7 You might wonder why all of this is given in such detail. Ezra was a priest and leader of the people, and maybe Jehoiada was his hero. More likely, the importance is that the line of David was almost extinct and it took great personal courage by many, especially the priests and Levites, to protect the line of David and the work of God. Notice that Jehoiada gathered the Levites so that there would be support for following God and for fighting to maintain the line of David. Both Ezra and Nehemiah fought hard to have the Levites live around Jerusalem to help teach the people and hold up a godly example for the nation. When you read Nehemiah, you'll see that this wasn't easy.

Vs. 8-11 Once the Levites were in place and the people of the city recognized that an heir of David had been placed on the throne, the tide turned in the city.

Vs. 12-15 Athaliah apparently thought she had support in the city.

Vs. 16-21 In the coronation of the king, notice the mentions of the Levitical priests and King David. This was the expression of putting Israel back in order. The promise to Abraham was manifested in the people learning the Word of God and being devoted to Him. David was the extension of the promise to Abraham; in that, from David would come the "Son of David."

The lessons here for those returning from exile would be obvious. It is worth giving your life in order to serve God and His people, leading them in the way of God's promised blessing. That is a good lesson for us too, to be making disciples in the harvest who will make disciples.

Romans 11:13-36

As you read this section, it is helpful to think of Gentiles and Jews as racial entities being addressed. Rather than speaking to individuals, Paul is speaking to groupings of people. Paul says here, and will say again in chapter 15, that he was an apostle to that group of people called Gentiles. So he is talking about a group, not individuals.

V. 13 This is one of those verses that tells you that the Roman church was a mixed church.

Vs. 13-16 The key here is in v. 15, when Paul talks about "their" acceptance. This refers to "the nation of Israel" during the time when that particular group is on earth and turns their hearts to Christ. It is not as if the church doesn't "need" the redemption of Israel. The working of God through the church is just one aspect of His plan. This has nothing to do with the equality of believers, Jew or Greek. Israel will still play a role. It is the redemption of Israel that will bring the plan of God for mankind to completion.

Vs. 17-24 Now, as with most illustrations, they make a point or two, but are not meant to be carried on to infinity. What is the cultivated olive tree? It appears to be Israel or maybe even the promise to Abraham. The line of the promise from Adam and Eve, through Abraham, through David was one continuous lineage. The wild olive tree is definitely the Gentiles. According to this illustration, we Gentiles have been grafted into this promise. Remember that when Jesus was talking to the Samaritan woman in John 4, He told her in a way that was very matter-of-fact, that *salvation is from the Jews*. Later in Romans 15 Paul will say that the Gentiles have become partakers of Israel's spiritual blessings. They are partakers, not owners.

V. 22 is a little problematic if you see this as individuals and not as groups. God has power to graft the believing Jewish nation into the promise. And if the Gentiles reject God's salvation, they will be excluded. On this note, it is interesting to think that in the Tribulation, the Jews will comprise the largest missionary force that has ever worked at one time on earth. (In the Olivet Discourse Jesus said the gospel would be preached to all nations.) If you count up all the members of all the mission organizations (not churches) today, you won't come up with a total of

144,000 missionaries. If I understand the dynamics of the time of "Jacob's Trouble," the nation of Israel will turn to Christ, and the Gentile world will be, for the most part, chasing a delusion.

Vs. 25-32 This is the conclusion of chapters 9-11. I find it hard to understand how people don't see a distinction between the church and Israel, holding that the promises to Israel will not be literally fulfilled.

So, which verses seem to put the plan of God together for you? How would you explain this to someone else?

Vs. 33-36 Benedictions are full of theology, and usually, every word is intentional. Notice that it isn't God's power and elective determination that are praised here, but rather His wisdom and knowledge and how unsearchable His judgments are. This was God's argument to Job. Paul's conclusion is that God does all of this righteously; and though it is so intricate that we could never understand it, we know and trust that His way is righteous and good, because we know Him through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Psalm 22:1-18

I was reading this morning how difficult it was for the disciples to understand that Jesus should suffer, be treated with contempt, die and on the third day be raised. For them, He had become the Holy One of God, the Christ, the Son of the Living God, the Son of Man. To hear then that, *so also the Son of Man will certainly suffer at their hands*, was utterly impossible.

This is a prophetic psalm talking about the suffering of the Messiah. David's experience mirrored what was to be felt by Jesus. Read this psalm from that perspective.

Vs. 1-2 If this psalm is what David experienced at the beginning of his decade of running from Saul, it makes perfect sense. David had been anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel. David was a hero. Everything David did had been blessed by God. Suddenly David lost everything.

Vs. 3-5 Here David is remembering the history of redemption and men like Abraham and Moses. He was now standing with them.

Vs. 6-8 David's reputation was ruined in a night. This was also the experience of Jesus on the cross. Compare verses 7 & 8 with Matthew 27:39 & 43. That's pretty interesting. I wonder later while hearing Psalm 22 read, if some of these guys said, "Wait, I actually said that."

Vs. 9-11 David held on to God's calling of him. This faith in the promise also made Abraham strong. Jesus, too, knew that He was the chosen, beloved and anointed Son of God.

Vs. 12-13 This seems to describe the power of the foes that faced David.

Vs. 14-15 This was the emotional effect on David, and I'm sure this mirrors some of what the Lord experienced in the garden.

Vs. 16-18 We clearly know what happened to the Lord. Here, David experienced something similar. When David ran from Saul he had to leave his house and possessions behind. Verse 18 might be how his former friends divided his possessions and decided who got the cappuccino maker.

Proverbs 20:7

If you put this with the verse before, it basically says that talk, even Christian talk, is cheap. Integrity by definition means that everything this person does is in keeping with his or her expressed love for God. Reality is seen in action, and in our case that means in the harvest.

JULY 29

2 Chronicles 24-25

2 Chronicles 24

Vs. 1-3 Jehoiada was Joash's uncle and really looked out for him. Joash only lived to be 47. That will make sense later. Verse 2 doesn't mean much now, but it will in a few verses.

Vs. 4-7 So far, so good. Joash looks like a model king. He got the Levites and priests working to repair the temple.

Vs. 8-14 This is all very cool.

V. 14 Twice in this section there is a curious phrase, *all the days of Jehoiada*. This points to another of those "weaknesses" that we are all prone to and have seen in the church. There are believers who look good as long as there are others around them. They are kind of like the seed sown on rocky ground. They pop up and look good, but when the godly influence leaves them alone, they have no "root in themselves," no genuine relationship with God. Church activities and even working in the harvest provided them with a purpose that was no deeper than the activity, and they never had "their own" relationship with Christ.

Vs. 15-16 This was a great honor. Not only did God grant Jehoiada a long life and influence, but he was buried among the kings. Jehoiada was used by God to save the Davidic line. Now there were surely other people roaming around who could trace their lineage back to David. You see this in the genealogies of Joseph and Mary in the NT, showing that Jesus' lineage went back to David two different ways. Still, Jehoiada showed great courage and faith in the promise of God to do what he did. Also, you realize that Jehoiada was no spring chicken. Humanly speaking, his goose should have already been cooked before this all began. He was at least in his 90s when the Lord moved him to save Judah and the line of David. As a result of God's use and purpose for him, he lived to be 130. That's older than Moses was when he died.

Vs. 17-19 Just the mention of the Asherim gives you an idea of how these princes enticed Joash. This was very sexual worship. How could you resist? It was immediately more fun than worshipping Yahweh. The Levites and the Sons of Korah were no match to the wild women of Borneo who served at the Asherim ("groves" or places of worship) in the worship of Astarte, the sensual Canaanite goddess. And being king, who could tell him to stop? Notice that there were many whom God sent to try to break through to Joash. The Lord gave him many opportunities.

Vs. 20-22 This is kind of cool that the Spirit *clothed Zechariah*. The reason why this rebuke went deeper is that it looks like it was public. Growing up, Zechariah would have been like a big brother to Joash.

Jesus refers to this murder twice, the last time being the Wednesday before He died. The fact that they waited until Zechariah came out of the holy place and was walking toward the altar adds a deeper irony to the ambush of these murderers. In the holy place Zechariah was standing before the Lord, interceding for the people. Verse 22 is Ezra's commentary on King Joash, the "fake" believer. This murder would be a foreshadowing of the murder of Jesus.

Vs. 23-24 Notice that this judgment didn't come the next day. God waited. The more you read the Bible, the more you see that "waiting" is almost an attribute of God. His waiting causes His people to grow in faith, and it causes the rebellious to think everything's cool so they keep on sinning. The result is that God's people get stronger and write psalms of praise, and the other guys get a rude awakening. Here, Jerusalem was taken, the army was defeated and all these princes were killed by a small force. It was a very obvious judgment on Jerusalem.

Vs. 25-27 Notice that Joash wasn't buried in the tombs of the kings. It is interesting, and probably just trivia, that the two assassins were both descendants of Lot, children from a forbidden relationship and an awful heritage.

2 Chronicles 25

This is a very strange story and you only hear half of it in Kings. This is now the great-great grandson of Jehoshaphat. Jehoshaphat's sin had now seeped into the 4th generation. Read this and try to figure out what could possibly have been going on in Amaziah's mind. It blows me away, but actually we saw this with some of the kings of the north who lived with Elijah and Elisha. God helped them, but they didn't grow in faith or follow God.

Vs. 1-4 As you read this, except for Ezra's note in v. 2, this guy looks pretty kosher and shows some genuine faith and obedience.

Vs. 5-13 This entire story will make you scratch your head. He obeyed God in not facing Edom with a large army of mercenaries. God gave him the victory, but he showed incredible cruelty to his prisoners. And then...

Vs. 14-16 What was going on? How did Amaziah view spirituality? Was it that he had this victory and thought that he had done this himself? Were the idols made out of diamond and incredibly valuable?

V. 16 is a pretty awesome verse. Notice that the prophet stopped arguing with Amaziah.

Vs. 17-24 This is the story we have already seen in Kings. Now we understand why Amaziah lost the battle and why he was so arrogant. In fact, his arrogance shows us what must have been going on in his heart when he won the battle with the Edomites. He really thought he had won the battle on his own. God made sure Amaziah was publicly humiliated by having the city wall torn down and the treasures taken.

V. 20 This is Ezra's commentary to the new generation returning to the land.

Vs. 25-28 It is amazing that God punished Amaziah, but didn't take him out. Actually, his ungodliness became a test of the godliness of the people; and they took care of him. Maybe this is also Ezra's encouragement to the people and leaders of Israel not to tolerate an ungodly ruler.

V. 28 He was still honored in burial as a descendant of David, the line of promise.

Romans 12

Vs. 1-2 One of the challenges in v. 1 is to be able to think through all the past 11 chapters and understand the impact of *I appeal to you **therefore**, brothers, by the mercies of God...* How would you summarize what Paul and the Spirit have said in such a way as to give you such a spiritual shot of adrenaline that you would live a supernatural life on earth, submitted to Christ and submitted to God's purpose of redemption in the world?

The spiritual "awe" of what Paul has been writing is going to be used to convince these people to take command of their lives on earth, so that they can work together as a mixed church, proclaiming the testimony of God's glory in a lost world.

V. 3 Do you detect that Paul is addressing a problem here? Verses 1-2, then, are to have the impact of getting them to see their own personal issues as insignificant in comparison to God's redemptive mercy, plan and calling.

Vs. 3-8 How do you think having a mixed "Jew-Gentile" congregation aggravated the problem with gifts? God assigns gifts according to His will, not our background or ethnicity. What do you see in these verses that gave them a spiritual understanding to help them get along together? It all began with God.

Vs. 9-13 How would you title these verses? If Paul kept referring back to vs. 1 and 2, it would sound something like, on the basis of the past 11 chapters, (insert vs. 1 and 2), and so now let us.... God is expecting our maturity to rise to the level of being able to do this in spite of what goes on around us.

Vs. 14-21 These disciples were to have lived like Jesus commanded in the Sermon on the Mount. The impact of chapters 1-11 and the summary of 12:1-2 were supposed to put these people in the spiritual frame of mind to serve with strength, humility and sacrifice.

What Paul is writing here is very similar to what Jesus told His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. If disciples are focused on Christ and the work in the harvest, their perspective on themselves and on life is supposed to lift them above themselves and give them a spiritual vision of how to live in this harvest.

Psalm 22:19-31

This part of the psalm still seems to be "messianic" in describing the aftermath of Christ's death and resurrection. The words here seem like something reflected from Isaiah 53:10-12.

Vs. 19-21 The deliverance has been from the irrational violence of men. Notice the "wild life." I grew up around these kinds of people.

Vs. 22-24 This seems like David is giving testimony to Israel of deliverance and praising God.

Vs. 25-26 This is David's praise to God and confidence in God's blessing on those who follow Him.

Vs. 27-31 This is the proclamation to the earth that there is deliverance in God. This is what we, as disciples, get to pass on in the harvest.

Proverbs 20:8-10

These all seem a little random. As I read this first one, I think of what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:15, *The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.*

V. 8 This was God's ideal for a king or a person who ruled others. David and Solomon were men like this, and were renowned for their judgments, until their unconfessed sin and its damage ruined them.

V. 9 We all have sinned, but that doesn't mean we can't judge. Verse 9 is true in that we cannot say we have made our hearts pure, but we can say that God in His Word, through His Spirit, is working on our hearts.

V. 10 The judgments, or the stuff that goes into discerning one thing from another, come from true weights and measures. The one who sets these weights and measures morally, and who sees the hearts of men, is God. It is on the basis of God's truth that we can determine right from wrong and make just judgments, even though we ourselves are needy. God's Word gives us the true "weights and balances."

JULY 30

2 Chronicles 26-28

2 Chronicles 26

Uzziah is one of the good kings in the line of David. He is especially well known for his mention in Isaiah 6:1, *In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple.* Uzziah reigned for 52 years. His father, Amaziah, was very unstable and it is suggested that the people made Uzziah a co-regent with him and that father and son reigned together for many years. Notice in v. 1 that it doesn't

mention the death of Amaziah, but rather that the people made Uzziah king "instead of" his father. It also doesn't explain how long Amaziah was away, hiding in Lachish.

Uzziah was the only king that an entire generation had ever known. Fifty-two years was a long time; and when he died, I'm sure for Isaiah, and for all of Israel, it was a very discouraging time.

V. 4 Note that Uzziah followed the Lord according to the way his father Amaziah had followed God for the brief time Amaziah followed God. It is interesting that Ezra doesn't compare Uzziah to David.

V. 5 Seeking God has been and will remain an important mark for someone following God. Notice that Uzziah began to seek God under the teaching of Zechariah, the man his grandfather King Joash had killed. Although it appears that the time references shouldn't work out, somehow Zechariah's influence was important in the life of Uzziah. Zechariah's godly example and murder continues into Jesus' teaching in Matthew 23:35 and Luke 11:51.

Vs. 6-15 This fits into what we should be getting used to. These are Uzziah's acts of faith and following God. In contrast to some of the other kings, Ezra isn't showing any great moment when Uzziah had to exercise faith. Probably the fact that he didn't worship other gods is remarkable enough. He is the first king since Jehoshaphat who didn't worship idols.

V. 16 Here is that verse of warning, *when he was strong*. It would be interesting to go through all the kings and write down the variations: When he was strong, when he was established, etc.

Vs. 16-23 It appears that for Uzziah the area of pride was thinking he should have the privilege to stand before God without needing a priest. This wasn't just disrespect for the priests and Levites, it was disrespect for the God who had given all of these instructions. As dirty Harry so sagely put it, "A man's gotta know his own limitations." The same is true for us in the church and in the harvest.

What is interesting about this punishment is that as a leper, Uzziah couldn't enter the temple or the company of God's people. On the other hand, Uzziah could still worship God in spirit, even if he had to live outside of Jerusalem.

As disciples, it is easy sometimes to disrespect the church or God's choice in gifting or even offices like pastor or elder or deacon; but God appointed these men and designated these offices. If they are important to the Lord for His harvest, then we need to work with them, not around them. If a local church isn't a good fit for us, then we need to find a church that does allow us to join with them in unity, following Christ in the harvest and making disciples, who make disciples. We can't give up on church or what God has planned and ordained. Uzziah didn't submit to God's decision to be served by the Levites, and he paid a price for it.

2 Chronicles 27

There is not much to say here. Jotham seems to have been a good, godly king. It is possible that Jotham was actually leading the country years earlier, since he had to represent his father Uzziah who was a leper. Notice again, that Ezra does not compare Jotham to David.

V. 2 It is important to note that the people were running out of control. Uzziah had not been a godly example.

V. 6 is probably the key thought that Ezra wanted to impress on his readers. It may be that Jotham was a mediocre king; but by the fact that he ordered his ways before the Lord, he became one of the few kings against whom there is nothing negative to say.

2 Chronicles 28

This is actually a terrifying story. The Davidic line and all of Judah came within a few words of extinction. The writer of Kings didn't let us know that, but Ezra is making sure those who have

come out of exile see this. Had it not been for the words of Oded in v. 9, and the favorable reaction of the men of Ephraim in v. 12, it would have been lights out. Judah was spared only by the grace of God, just like all of Israel was spared by God's grace during the Babylonian captivity.

Vs. 1-4 For whatever reason, Ahaz was deeply involved in idolatry. Remember that the idolatry back then was very sexually motivated. Sex is a great motivator. The fact that he sacrificed his infants to Molech suggests that Baal worship and sexually inspired worship were also in the picture. You had to do something with those unwanted babies that came through Baal and Asherah worship.

Vs. 5-7 Look at the carnage caused by Ahaz's sins. Notice that the defeat and massive amount of deaths were the result of not just Ahaz, but the nation following him in this sin. Ezra's point to the returnees of Israel would be clear. Leaders cause people to follow and can lead to massive ruin.

Vs. 8-11 Ahaz was defeated by Syria and then by the totally backslidden northern kingdom. Thankfully there was this prophet named Oded. In this it is obvious that God let things go this far in order to humble Judah. Otherwise it would have meant the end of Judah as a nation.

Vs. 12-15 This mercy and obedience by Israel was ironic and it was a message to Judah. In spite of all the godly kings they had had, God didn't spare Judah for allowing one ungodly man to ruin the nation.

Vs. 16-21 Ahaz had the gift of being unteachable, so the Lord kept using everything he tried against him.

Vs. 22-27 Ahaz actually became worse. It is interesting that the Lord didn't take him out; but again, this would all become a test to the people. During the Tribulation it says that the people on earth will understand that the natural disasters are from God; but rather than turning to God, they will only get madder at Him and intensify their persecution of His followers. It is the natural way that the sin within us reveals itself as it reacts to God.

Ezra's point is clear for those he was writing to, and for us. It only takes one generation to destroy everything that past generations have built. For us, that is why our focus on Christ, the harvest, and making disciples, who make disciples is so important. A church has lost its focus when it ceases to see people come to Christ and see people raised up who actually win others and make disciples. Ahaz was obviously sinful and idolatrous. In Jesus' generation those who opposed God were religious. The appearances may change, but results are the same. Anything that keeps us from doing the one thing we were left here to do, the Great Commission, has to be put aside until we are following Christ in the harvest and seeing fruit.

Romans 13

Remember that the first 11 chapters have been focused on God's redemptive purpose on earth. This chapter is a command of God to His disciples in the harvest. You can almost see how removed a person is from Christ and from the harvest by the amount of energy they expend blaming political parties. It is very interesting to me that this is the Spirit of God writing. At the end of the chapter He calls all of us to attention, to put our energy into the harvest.

Vs. 1-7 This section should raise a lot of questions, but the tone of what the Lord is saying is pretty simple. I'm sure there were lots of things to find wrong in Rome and with Nero; but even in that context, Paul told them to live above all that and to see God's redemptive mercy and plan. Another good portion to read with this is 1 Timothy 2:1-5.

V. 1 One thing I've heard that makes sense is that we are to obey the government, until obeying is a sin.

V. 6 Isn't this interesting that Paul and the Spirit get in the face of those who complain about paying taxes?

Vs. 8-10 Paul says that our true duty in this dark harvest is to love our neighbor. This is also an interesting way to tell these Christians to adjust their perspective to the spiritual realities of life. Not only was loving one's neighbor a way to fulfill the law, but it was a very natural way to begin leading your neighbor to Christ.

Vs. 11-14 I think these are great verses and show God's perspective on where our eyes should be. This is also pretty good discipleship stuff.

Psalm 23

We read this psalm earlier in the year before we read about David and his life. Reading this psalm now, do you have a different appreciation for what David went through and how this psalm came to be?

Vs. 1-3 Notice all of the things the Lord does for us as our Shepherd. This was David's experience in the wilderness, running from Saul. It was hard and there was no big deliverance; but daily, the Lord showed David faithfulness, small deliverances and kindnesses.

V. 4 David was under the penalty of death from Saul, but David sought the Lord daily and received His comfort and leading daily.

V. 5 In the middle of all of this, God blessed David and the community that followed him. Although these were hard times, I'll bet God made them memorable and provided seasons of joy. God confirmed His anointing and choice of David during the blessings that came during these hard days.

V. 6 Notice the allusion to God's mercy (ESV notes "steadfast love") and David's passion to dwell in the presence of the Lord. It's no wonder that David set his heart to bring the ark into Jerusalem and to build the temple. This verse makes me think of what Paul says in Romans 8:31-32, *What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

Proverbs 20:11

The past three verses had something to do with judging, discerning and measuring. How do you discern the heart of a child? By his acts. How do you understand what is a good or bad action? By the Word of God.

JULY 31

2 Chronicles 29

Hezekiah is one of the two greatest kings after David, rivaled only by Josiah. There are many parallels between Hezekiah and Josiah. Both served after their fathers almost destroyed Judah. Both launched incredible revivals. Both held Passovers that were so genuine that they are commented on as going back to the early days of Israel. Both kings faced the destruction of Judah and the people of God. Of the two, Josiah faces the greatest darkness, but Hezekiah sees the greatest visible deliverance.

Vs. 1-2 Note that Hezekiah's devotion is compared to David's. It is also interesting that although he reigned 29 years, he still died young. Also, his mother seems to have been related to Zechariah the son of Jehoiada. The use of the word "son" or "daughter" often meant a descendant, not the literal son or daughter. I think what Ezra is showing here is why Hezekiah was so much different than his father.

Vs. 3-11 Hezekiah opened the house of the Lord immediately. What a great “pep talk” by this 25-year-old king. Along with the motivation was the command to the Levites to consecrate themselves for the work in the temple and for leading the people in worship. This entire chapter displays Hezekiah’s godliness and faith by showing how he refocused the nation on worshipping God.

V. 10 Notice that Hezekiah wanted to make a covenant with the Lord. Only he and Josiah did this. As we have seen, many people of both kingdoms had been captured and led out of Israel. Hezekiah understood he was living in a very dangerous and important time in Israel. By this time, the northern kingdom had already fallen to Assyria and most of the people had been lost to deportation and exile. Most of these people would have been lost to Israel forever, being absorbed into other peoples with no sense of their genealogy or heritage. Deportation usually meant the "extermination" of an ethnic group by mixing them with other peoples.

Vs. 12-19 At Hezekiah’s command, the priests first consecrated themselves, and then they consecrated the temple. This was all under the direction of the king.

Vs. 20-24 Once the temple was cleansed, Hezekiah led the priests, Levites and people of Jerusalem and made sin offerings for everyone and everything, cleansing the sin of the land and the people. This was all done according to the books of Moses. Notice too (looking back at v. 2 and looking ahead to the next three verses), that David was also mentioned as being the model to follow.

Vs. 25-31 This time of worship was to complete the consecration of the temple. It was like a celebration. Although the priests and Levites did what only the priests and Levites were allowed to do, these kings, like David and Hezekiah, personally worshiped and led the people in worshipping God.

Vs. 32-36 Now they were ready to worship. This is an interesting note that the Levites were more dedicated to the temple worship than the priests, who were also Levites, but in the family line of Aaron. When God saw that the hearts of the king and the Levites were set to worship Him, He allowed them to make exception and to allow the Levites to participate where there were too few consecrated priests. Isaiah the prophet was present during all of this and I’m sure he was consulted frequently.

V. 36 They perceived that this had come from the Lord. And there's more to come!

As disciples, the lesson is to help people come close to the Lord. Working in the harvest and making disciples can never become separated from loving our Lord and being in His Word daily. To work without loving Him and seeking Him in the Word creates a work that cannot last. It is a contradiction that Satan knows he can easily exploit.

Romans 14

So, why would this be a huge issue? In a mixed church it is very likely that the Jews were the "weaker" brothers. There was more for them to stumble over, coming from the man-made, restrictive codes of Judaism. As anyone can tell you, "culture" creates incredible disunity in a church and it can keep a church from being able to reach lost people. A church with unresolved internal “cultural” conflicts does not work well in the harvest. It doesn’t make healthy disciples, and it usually becomes a bad testimony in its area.

There appear to be two issues here. One is that the conservative people in the congregation were judging the less conservative people. Then the less conservative, more “open,” people were publicly engaging in their "eating and drinking" without care, not for the strong judgmental conservatives, but for the weak believers who would violate their own consciences if they were to indulge.

Now, without reading too much of my own experience with this into these notes, I have a few observations.

Vs. 1-4 While "despising" and "passing judgment" seem like the same thing, I don't think they are. Notice that immediately in this chapter they are being linked to the attitudes of two different groups. The despising comes from those who were open to everything. Passing judgment comes from the conservative side of things. In most churches the greatest problem comes from the conservative side judging that the others are wrong. Usually the "open" people really don't care that the conservative people don't, for example, drink wine. They might just "despise" them by making fun of their silly scruples and hang-ups. But the conservative people really do care that the others drink wine and see it as a violation of Scripture and judgment follows.

Vs. 5-9 Regarding matters of conscience, we need to be firmly convinced in our own hearts and live to please the Lord, not others. This is a command. There shouldn't be any judgment toward one another for what the other prefers.

Vs. 10-12 At this point Paul is saying that all of us must give a personal account of ourselves to Christ. This is what Paul mentioned about the gold-silver-precious stone-wood-hay-stubble.

Vs. 13-19 Based on our own personal accountability before the Lord, we are not to judge one another regarding our preferences, but what about the weak? The strong are to refrain from their freedom publicly if it would cause the weak to fall into a trial of conscience.

V. 13 With this challenge in focus, each person was to focus on strengthening others for the harvest rather than contending about matters of conscience. To really understand the issues here, read 1 Corinthians 8, which is a very clear description of a part of the problem faced by believers in that pagan world. The fact that there were also Jews coming into Christianity was a problem too. They had many cultural traditions that could be held on to, but were not necessary in following Christ. Some Jews could shed these traditions in a moment and dive into the ribs and bacon; but others, while understanding the freedom, were still bound in conscience. Look at 1 Corinthians 6 and 10, and notice how Paul affirms freedom but condemns unbridled freedom, especially where it was destroying other believers.

Vs. 14-16 While Paul and the Spirit are declaring all things being clean, they are also saying that living as servants of Christ means living to please God and facilitating growth and unity. This is a very important portion of Scripture, and I think we'll see in chapter 15 that the point of this unity is to proclaim Christ. It is not to simply live peaceably in church. It is to facilitate proclaiming God with one voice.

V. 17 The focus for each disciple is not to express their personal liberty or their personal conservatism, but rather to live in a way before the Lord that reflects the "rightness" of following the Lord and experiencing the peace and joy that come from the Spirit.

V. 18 This kind of service is also expressed in 1 Corinthians 9:19, and it is done for the sake of the gospel.

V. 19 This sounds like 1 Corinthians 14:26. The goal of our interactions is to strengthen and encourage one another.

Vs. 20-23 God is commanding here that a person keeps his freedom to himself. I think that Paul and the Spirit are talking about a proud public display of freedom. Again, if you look at 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, you can see that the real violation occurred publicly, *for if anyone sees you who have knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, and if one of the unbelievers invites you to dinner and you are disposed to go, eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience. But if someone says to you...* Inherent in the abuse of freedom is that the person doing this has lost connection with his Lord and his Lord's mission on this earth.

Paul isn't done here. This "command" continues into chapter 15, where it ends at the unified testimony in the harvest. Keep in mind that living each day following God's redemptive purpose requires us to keep respecting the mercy we have been shown. This gives us love and humility as we follow Christ in the harvest and helps us overcome our "cultural" preferences. But today we still have churches fighting over "insider" cultural issues. The strongly conservative hold the church hostage to maintain strict and outdated cultural preferences citing these verses. Although they say the harvest is important, they deny what God desires - the lost being reached and disciples being made. On the other hand, you have people making everything so "contemporary," that there is hardly any substance to their message. In both cases the lost find it hard to find Jesus and disciples are not made who can make disciples.

The following verses are for everyone. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 *For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them.* ²⁰*To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law.* ²¹*To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law.* ²²*To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.* ²³*I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings.*

Psalm 24

When you read this, you can see why David's devotion and love for God became the measure of all things. Many of the songs we sing today in worship use words and ideas from the psalms he wrote. Also, since these are Scripture and given by the Spirit, David was one of those people who the Spirit used to inspire the worship of Israel back then, and he still inspires the worship of the church today.

Vs. 1-2 David establishes that God is God and His power and preference is what we bow to.

V. 3 So then, according to the Lord, who does He allow to approach Him?

V. 4 This is the answer, but this only makes sense as God defines these things in His Word. This person lives for God according to God's will, not his own desires.

Vs. 5-6 The blessing of the Lord is for all those who seek Him and call upon Him.

Vs. 7-10 These verses intensify and add to vs. 1 & 2. Why should the earth bow? Because *He is the King of glory*. What does that mean? It means He is our Savior and Protector.

Proverbs 20:12

I read this morning where Jesus said to His disciples, "Do you not yet perceive or understand?" We need to spend more time than we do straining ourselves to understand the Word, and to perceive what the Spirit is doing around us. And just like He gave us eyes and ears, He is willing to give to those who ask, show to those who seek and open to those who knock. This should be the pastime of disciples in the harvest.