

READING NOTES – SEPTEMBER

The One Year Bible (ESV)

SEPTEMBER 1

Job 40-42

Our last day in Job! This will be fun. Reading God's response to Job made me think of what Paul said in Romans 9:20, *But who are you, a man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, "Why have you made me thus?"* It finally made sense to me what Paul was saying. He is simply answering this question in Rome with God's answer to Job. It has nothing to do with justice or fairness. Both Paul and God are saying that knowing God means trusting His actions because of His love and wisdom.

One note regarding the wildlife that is described below, remember that after the flood, things changed slowly. There was a massive climate change that resulted in the decline in the age of people and the dying off of certain types of animals. There were few people after the flood, allowing wildlife to grow undisturbed. Some of the types of animals on the ark may have lived for a time after the flood, but the climate and conditions on earth had changed. There were woolly mammoths; but somehow, through climate or the increased needs of growing human populations, they were killed off, similar to buffalo in North America. People lived close to rivers or where there was a supply of water. Although no one knows what the Behemoth and the Leviathan were, they could have been a large variation of something we have today that lived in those rivers and were a constant threat and challenge to the people.

Job 40

Vs. 1-2 The root of Job's problem had been finding fault with God. He accused God of being unjust.

Vs. 3-5 This is the first of Job's two replies to God. In this response he only admits that he shouldn't have spoken. In the next response, Job is repentant.

Vs. 6-14 I think v. 7 is funny. "Gird up your loins" (and fight like a ...). Obviously Job couldn't contend with God. Really, God has just been asking Job questions.

Vs. 15-24 I have a couple of questions here.

First, what was the Behemoth? It appears to be something that isn't around anymore. It seems that the common opinion is that it was a variety of hippopotamus, sort of what the woolly mammoth was to the elephant. Who knows? Growing up I always saw hippos as docile, fat animals, living to get fat. Well here are some fun facts about hippos. Once they were common to all of Africa, including Egypt and the Nile, and Asia, including the areas around the Euphrates and Jordan rivers, and even Europe. No famous explorer of Africa was **not** attacked by a hippo. One explorer had his boat overturned and had his head and shoulders bit off. Apparently they are incredibly aggressive, and on land they can outrun a man, even weighing 4000 pounds (the hippo, not the man). Now that we can kill them with guns, howitzers and atomic weapons, they are in decline because the ivory of their teeth does not yellow like an elephant's ivory, making it highly sought after. George Washington's teeth were not made of wood, but of hippo ivory. So, if there was a variety of hippo back then that was a little bigger, had a bigger tail and was meaner (imagine that), it could well have been the Behemoth. And apparently their tail does get stiff when they are mad, which apparently is always.

Second, why does God even use this illustration? Well, one reason is that they were apparently a hazard to anyone living along rivers, which was a lot of people. Another reason might be to mention that God made this very formidable animal that gave hunting parties fits. But for me it

has more to do with the theme of the book: the hidden purpose of God. What was the purpose of that animal? Why did God make it? Who knows, but God knew and designed it as He chose.

Job 41

Enter the Leviathan. Apparently this was another river dweller, and again the identity is unknown. It is thought that this could have been a very, very large "mammoth," and arrogantly aggressive, variety of crocodile.

Vs. 1-11 This section deals with the Leviathan's inability to be tamed, caught or ruled. Notice expressions like, *can you*, or *will you*. This could be entitled "The Attitude of the Leviathan."

Vs. 12-34 This could be titled the "The Body of the Leviathan." This is how God made him.

Vs. 18-21 It is suggested that this could be poetic description of a crocodile coming up for air in the bright sun, the *light* in its eyes, the *smoke* coming out of its nostrils as it lets out air on the surface of the water creating a blowing of vapor that looked like smoke and fire.

Again, even a nature lover might ask God why He made the Leviathan. Would it really be a loss if they went extinct? Does anyone "miss" the T-Rex? If you had lived near a river, you would never have let your kids go play at the shore if these things were around. It would have always been on your mind, and trying to exterminate them would have been a generational endeavor.

In both of these animals God challenges Job with His power to create, to control and to determine the working out of lives and the affairs of men by what He did with these animals. In a way, Satan might be compared to these animals in his influence on mankind; but there too, God has a leash on Lucifer. God's love and wisdom simply need to be trusted.

Job 42

Vs. 1-6 Notice that Job quotes God twice; he confesses and repents.

Vs. 7-9 This is pretty interesting. God calls Job his servant four times. God says twice that Job spoke rightly of Him, but the others did not. It never says that the friends prayed for Job, but Job prayed for them. God was not upset with Elihu. It is interesting that God made Job forgive and intercede for his friends. It is amazing in the Gospels how often prayer and extending forgiveness to others are put together. *And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against any one, so that your Father also who is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses.* (Mark 11:25)

So how was Job right about what he said about God? He was right in saying that his suffering didn't come because of sin. He was wrong in charging God with judgment against him. For Job to say that God didn't care was careless. Job held on irrationally to what he had known to be true of God. His losses and pain pushed him, and his friends incited him; but Job never cursed God, so Satan was able to see that there was something in mankind that God could save. Job and his friends were able to see the Lord in a different light. Always trust the Lord. His love never fails and the wisdom of His will is guided by that love and by His incredible wisdom.

Vs. 10-11 Notice the "condition" in v. 10. It wasn't until after Job prayed for his friends that the Lord reversed Job's situation. Now the Lord brought on all of the comfort He had withheld. It was the Lord.

Vs. 12-17 Notice that it never mentioned any of Job's kids' names except these three daughters.

Tradition suggests that Job was 70 when this happened to him. And just as his prosperity was doubled after this event, so was his age. That is the suggested reason that he lived another 140 years.

As you read Job now, year after year, you will find new stuff each time you read it. Not only that, as you follow Christ in the harvest, as things happen to you and to others, what you've learned here will be used by the Spirit to teach you and to temper your heart. He will lead you to have a more eternal perspective on this life, and the Lord will lead you into more and more situations where you will learn to let go of expectations in this life on earth. As we follow Christ we learn to trust Him completely and to make Him and what we know of Him enough to guide us through anything that happens.

2 Corinthians 5:11-21

This is a very well-known and cool part of the Bible. And to think, all of this is being expressed like this because of Paul's suffering and a conflict he's having with a church. It was all designed by God's wisdom.

V. 11 Notice that Paul talks about their turmoil and its result as *the fear of the Lord*. In this context, I would say that this fear is Paul's deep respect for God. And, Paul understood that he was *known to God*. Paul would never violate God's trust and cheapen the gospel. This is their motivation for persuading others. The message of that persuasion, we'll see later, is for people to repent and be reconciled with God. Paul tried to remain invisible.

V. 12 Note that the criticism in Corinth that is against Paul and that was shredding the church is ever present in Paul's mind as he is writing. It was a weight that Paul constantly bore. Paul was not trying to promote himself. He was living to promote His Savior and to see men saved and made disciples in the harvest. The Corinthians should have known this and been able to counter those self-seeking super-apostles, whose main platform was criticizing Paul.

Vs. 13-15 This shows that Paul understood the necessity of God making them weak. But instead of being driven by concern for themselves or driven by fear, look what controlled them. And look what it made them do. A disciple is always oriented to the harvest, because *the love of Christ* is living in his heart and is revealed in the harvest. If anyone ever wants to know what the driving force behind our hearts and actions is, it is here. It is not a fear of hell or a desire for heaven; it is the love of Christ. Check your heart. This has to be or become what ultimately motivates you in your life.

V. 16 Paul once regarded Jesus as the enemy and His followers as heretics. That was before he understood what was happening "spiritually" in the world and in the plan of God. Now Paul said, *we walk by faith, not by sight* (2 Cor. 5:7). Our eyes are to be on the spiritual reality, and then we can understand the physical in terms of the spiritual. Another way to say this is what Paul says in Romans 8:14, *For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God*. We live on earth now understanding things spiritually, seeking spiritual direction, being led daily by the Spirit.

V. 17 Notice that this is a *creation*, something made. Salvation is not membership in a club, where membership can be revoked due to bad behavior. It is being made, created. At salvation something is brought into life. This is why once we are saved or "created," we are always saved. You can revoke someone's membership, but you can't "un-create" something. This spiritual life is created by the Spirit the moment we confess Christ as Savior and are forgiven. Then the Spirit comes to dwell within to "mentor" and nurture that new spiritual life, and to help us deal with that old nature that would destroy us.

Vs. 18-21 Two things here. Disciples are always oriented to the harvest. *Ambassadors* is who God made us. To deny who God has made us is to get ourselves into a life to which we were not called or equipped. Our joy and strength and purpose are found in following Christ in the harvest as His *ambassadors*.

Second, Paul is making sure they understand that this ministry is not something we grasp, but something that grips us. Paul wasn't putting himself forward, as if this were his career. Paul

describes this life following Christ and speaking out to the lost as the irresistible identity of anyone who has been seized by the love of Christ.

V. 21 This might have been a reminder to that Jewish audience and to those super-apostles that righteousness is not found in doing things Jewish, but in Christ alone. What a great truth and just like Isaiah 53.

Psalm 45

Now, I'm really not given to "spiritualizing" the meaning of the text, saying its real meaning is in something other than the physical event to which it was written. However, there is a prophetic element in lots of the Bible where a verse or event foreshadows something in the future. God shows us this is so. When we get to the NT and see some of the passages that Jesus or others used, we look back and say, "I would have never guessed that would also have a meaning for the future."

This psalm was apparently written for a wedding. But when you get to v. 6, you realize that this is quoted in Hebrews 1:8, *But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom."* God is saying that this verse has to do with Jesus being crowned king. This is also when He takes the church as His bride. So then, let's read the entire psalm as if it is referring to Jesus taking His throne and meeting with His church at the wedding feast.

Vs. 1-3 If you compare this with Isaiah 53 or Revelation 5:6 where no beauty is mentioned, it seems that Jesus' full glory will be revealed.

Vs. 4-5 That crowning of Jesus and the taking of the book will unleash judgment on the nations and peoples of the earth.

Vs. 6-9 This would be an appropriate image of Jesus, the Son of David, receiving His eternal throne.

Vs. 10-15 I have never grasped the "bride of Christ" except to know it is a special designation of purity and glory to the bridegroom.

Vs. 16-17 This is definitely imagery referring to Jesus. Look at the end of Isaiah 53 to see this shared reward and glory. I just read what Jesus said to His disciples the night He was betrayed. *You are those who have stayed with me in my trials,²⁹ and I assign to you, as my Father assigned to me, a kingdom,³⁰ that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Luke 22:28-30)

Proverbs 22:14

There really is no such thing as "getting away" with something. If God lets you kick against the door until you "succeed," you are just walking into judgment, not blessing.

SEPTEMBER 2

Ecclesiastes 1-3

After reading Job you probably didn't think things could get worse. But they can and they did, and we hear it from the mouth of King Solomon, the person God said was the wisest man who ever lived.

While Job has a great positive lesson, Ecclesiastes has a great negative warning. There are similarities between these two men and the despair they describe, and at times, they sound the same; but they couldn't be greater opposites. Job suffered because he was righteous. Solomon suffered because he became unrighteous. Job's trouble came from outside him. Solomon's trouble came from within. Job is used by God as an example of a godly man desperately holding on to

what he knew was true of God, and he was saved from personal ruin. Solomon is offered as an example of what happens to a godly man who lets go of what he knows is true of God and is then ruined. In this book we see what can become of a person who loves God and decides to ignore Him. How low can a person sink? What is notable here is that Solomon doesn't mention his idolatry. In my mind, that means that it hadn't occurred yet. I doubt that Solomon wrote anything after he became a server of pagan gods. What we see in Ecclesiastes is not how low one could go, but we see how a believer can progressively destroy his life.

Just like in Job, we know the background of what is happening here. Having read Kings, we know that Solomon ignored the warnings in the Word and did everything God said a king was not supposed to do. Read Deuteronomy 17:15-20. I doubt that Solomon wrote his own copy of the law and read it every day. God is not mocked, even by those He loves. If a man sows to the wind, he will reap the whirlwind. Solomon became like the seed planted among thorns. He became choked by stuff and drifted away from God. To hear that Solomon learned that life on earth is senseless should make sense to us. Just to put this in perspective and understand that this is still possible for any believer or disciple, look at what Paul wrote to the Romans.

Romans 8:12 *So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.*
¹³*For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

Since Paul is warning believers, you realize the issue is not loss of salvation, but damage of your mind and heart on earth. We can ruin it all if we try, and many believers today are ruining their lives for Christ. They are distant from the Word, absent from the harvest and they have lost their love and gratefulness to Jesus. They are lost on earth and living to die. Solomon "died," and God will show us how it happened, so that we can "live."

Ecclesiastes 1

Vs. 1-2 This is Solomon's message in the book. At this point you could stop reading, but it is worth going on to see how Solomon fell into the trap and to see his regret.

Vs. 3-11 It is actually amazing that Solomon grasped this. Many people never see that a life without God, just lived on this earth, is meaningless. But realize that Solomon is not teaching us as a warning, he is expressing his view of life. God is allowing us to see the heart of this once godly, but now hollow, man.

I'm going to suggest a progress in Solomon's decline to despair. Notice that he relies on his wisdom and position. He does not seek God to understand life and circumstances. All the godly kings sought God when they were following Him. Because Solomon was so smart, he sought to understand life without God. The poorest person in the world might not be that foolish. The simplest believer in Christ, in the most poverty stricken place on earth, would be richer and wiser than Solomon; because he would begin with Christ to understand life on earth and be dependent on the Word and the Spirit.

What we're looking for in this section is Solomon's description of what he did, and his own conclusion about what he did. This section shows a progression of looking into one thing and then looking into another, until Solomon finally hit bottom. The "bottom" will be total despair, hopelessness. After writing this book, Solomon broke through the bottom and fell into horrible idolatry.

Vs. 12-15 Trying to understand human life and activity by wisdom. Notice the words *applied*, *seek*, and *search*. I think this is Solomon's first step. It was a step without God.

Notice in v. 13 what Solomon did and what he learned.

V. 14 is his conclusion regarding this phase of his study. Here, Solomon's conclusion is marked by the word *vanity* (vapor or breath) and a descriptive phrase, *striving after wind*. Now look for the next.

Vs. 16-18 Can you see what he applied his heart to here? Can you understand how this is different than the thing he tried to find out in 12-15?

Notice at the end of v. 17 that Solomon says that this endeavor was as meaningful as chasing after wind. Solomon is slowly progressing to the "dark side."

Ecclesiastes 2

Vs. 1-11 This was a big phase of Solomon's "study" and it involved a lot of his life. How would you title this?

V. 1 Notice what Solomon applied his heart to and how he says this endeavor was *vanity* (meaningless, a vapor). It is important to note that here he says that giving himself to *pleasure* was vanity. Later in these verses he will say that what he found out was vanity too.

After Solomon built the temple, his "goal" in life was fulfilled. It seems that all of his godliness was aimed at building the temple and fulfilling his father's dream. I don't think Solomon had his own godly desires, so he began to build and try to fill the void. He followed his dreams. He had everything and everything ruined him. The size of his harem was not only a violation of Deuteronomy 17, but it was obscene and excessive. He was out of control. But he looked godly; he had a silver tongue and he paid the bills. Why disagree with him?

V. 11 Notice that he saw all that his hand had done. Compare this with Job 31:24-28, "*If I have made gold my trust or called fine gold my confidence, ²⁵if I have rejoiced because my wealth was abundant or because my hand had found much, ²⁶if I have looked at the sun when it shone, or the moon moving in splendor, ²⁷and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my mouth has kissed my hand, ²⁸this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges, for I would have been false to God above.*" It was happening to Solomon and no one stepped in his way.

Vs. 12-19 This seems to be the same thing Solomon sought as in 1:16-18. It seems like a way of stopping, after you've done something and trying to make sense of life. When he tried to make sense of life in 1:16-18, it led him to seek a meaning in life through pleasure and accomplishment. Here, it led him into a deeper evaluation of the value of life and wisdom, and the result is that Solomon hated his life. This is like a mid-life crisis on steroids. And again, there is no mention of seeking God.

Vs. 20-23 Solomon gave into despair. This means giving up the hope that there is a purpose to life. At this point, Solomon is ready for the "dark side" and for stepping into idolatry with his wild women.

V. 21 Notice Solomon's comment here. Giving into despair was not only vanity, but a great evil. I think this was the end of the road for Solomon. If you conclude, as Solomon did, that there is no lasting contribution in life, if there is no hope and no purpose, you have given yourself up to despair and living as you please. Now he was ready for anything worse that came along. At this point, Solomon is not wise, but incredibly bitter in his perception of life. Solomon had eyes only for himself and his incredible wisdom, not for God or God's redemptive purpose in the world. And look at what that did to him. I see this same thing in believers who are not in the harvest, making a comfortable life on earth.

Vs. 24-26 This is totally cynical, but interestingly, at the end of this tirade he says this observation on life is pretty meaningless too. Multiplying everything by zero (hopelessness) always gives you the same result.

Ecclesiastes 3

Vs. 1-8 The view of life from "hopeless heights." Simon and Garfunkel made a song out of this, and I didn't like it either.

Vs. 9-13 Based on the previous verses, this is what Solomon will say, over and over, is the point of life and as much as we should expect. For many people, this is enough.

V. 11 Solomon's observation that God has put eternity in our hearts was great, but because he didn't seek God, it was just a frustration to him. This is true of believers too. To know the truth and know there is something beckoning to us, and to not pursue it, makes for a frustrating life. This is why we are to follow Christ in the harvest, not just stand here in life or sit in church.

Vs. 14-22 As you read this section you'll notice that it sounds like some of the things Job said. This is worse than Job, simply because of the hopelessness. Job never gave up hope. He still thought that his Redeemer lived and that he would be vindicated in what he held to. Solomon gave up.

So what lessons do you get out of this? What does the Spirit say to you? I definitely appreciate God's mercy and love in giving us understanding of what is happening on this earth, and in the world of the spiritual. I'm thankful that our lives are defined by Christ and His love for us, and I'm grateful that we have a mission in life. We know what will last, and it is for the glory of God and not for us. Now, of course, we could deny all of this like Solomon did. Solomon could have lived for the redemptive purpose of God. God spoke to Solomon twice and probably would have spoken to him more if Solomon had asked, if he had sought God. The lasting value of our lives on earth is in the harvest, working with our Lord and His church to bear much fruit, glorifying the Father and so proving we are His disciples. And because of the resurrection we know that we will be raised and live with Christ forever. This earth is just a temporary, tragic prelude to the future. Here we work and bear Christ's suffering as we reach the lost and equip others to continue and make disciples. There we will rejoice with the redeemed and bear the glory of our Savior.

2 Corinthians 6:1-13

Vs. 1-2 This is a statement of Paul's office in life, but actually this is for all of us. We have been offered the opportunity of working together with God as His ambassadors. The idea of not receiving *the grace of God in vain*, I think, involves fruitlessness, a life that doesn't grow in Christ and reproduce in reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. I think we're seeing this in Solomon. The quote in v. 2 comes from Isaiah 49:8. If you read Isaiah 49 you will find a call to Israel to follow and be a light to the nations. They will fulfill their destiny. Although Solomon lived before Isaiah wrote, there was plenty in the Word to have enabled Solomon to live for the promise of God and the redemption of mankind. The key is that he never obeyed those words written to the king in Deuteronomy 17.

How do you *receive the grace of God in vain*? I think it is receiving salvation, then living for yourself, and not declaring your praise of God to the lost. The Corinthian church was becoming religiously lost in itself. *Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.* (Romans 7:4)

Vs. 3-10 This was Paul's commendation showing he was a servant of Christ. This is like a visual or an example of what Jesus told His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. Paul lived like a disciple is called to live in the harvest. Notice too that this is similar to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4. Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, *Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.* Paul was a model of both suffering for Christ and fruitfulness in following. He loved Christ and endured anything to show that love. What a guy to model.

Vs. 11-13 The conflict in Corinth is never out of view. Paul was their spiritual father (led them to Christ) pleading to them as his children. What an appeal. The ultimate end of what he was seeking is that they would love and follow Christ.

Psalm 46

I think this was written after the Lord destroyed the Assyrian army that came to threaten Jerusalem when Hezekiah was the king. This took place in 2 Kings 18 & 19.

Vs. 1 This is the declaration of faith and confidence in the Lord.

Vs. 2-3 This is the ultimate threat. The sea was like a devouring monster, relentless and untamable, and it was able to swallow the mountains.

Vs. 4-5 But on God's mountain, in Jerusalem, there is a supernatural calm. The stream brings an intoxicating gladness and peace. In confidence they know that God will answer in the morning after a night of rest.

Vs. 6-7 God made Assyria totter when the Assyrians woke the next morning and found 185,000 soldiers had died in their sleep.

Vs. 8-9 The people of Jerusalem went out to the Assyrian camp, and it was full of supplies and wagons and chariots. Apparently they used some of this stuff to burn in order to keep warm. At the end of the Tribulation and extending into the Millennial Kingdom of Christ, the people in and around Jerusalem will be doing this again. *Then those who dwell in the cities of Israel will go out and make fires of the weapons and burn them, shields and bucklers, bow and arrows, clubs and spears; and they will make fires of them for seven years, ¹⁰so that they will not need to take wood out of the field or cut down any out of the forests, for they will make their fires of the weapons. They will seize the spoil of those who despoiled them, and plunder those who plundered them, declares the Lord God.*
(Ezekiel 39:9-10)

Vs. 10-11 The people "trapped" in Jerusalem with Hezekiah didn't know what the Lord was doing or why He would allow Assyria to attack them. They were in distress and cried out and waited. God rescued them and gave them a message and song. God is telling us too, that we are to seek His shelter and not to fear as we wait for Him.

Proverbs 22:15

Amen, but remember, you'll get arrested in Sweden if you do this.

SEPTEMBER 3

Ecclesiastes 4-6

Job and Solomon were both rich men who worked hard in life. It would be easier to hear Job say what Solomon is about to say, since Job lost everything. As Solomon writes this he is still amazingly rich. It seems that everything Solomon says lacks any redemptive perspective in life and comes from the attitude that a man, himself, makes his life. Just like in Job, there is an abundance of truth here, but it is truth about life when you have lost the closeness to the Lord. Solomon's focus is on accomplishment on earth and lasting value. We know this earth must pass away, and only what is done for the Lord in the redemption and rescue of people will last or have meaning.

By now you know what to do to keep your interest sharp. Look for recurring words and phrases, and highlight or underline them.

Ecclesiastes 4

This chapter seems to focus on the foolishness of being alone.

Vs. 1-3 This definitely sounds like Job. As Solomon looked outside of Israel (I hope it was outside of Israel), he saw oppression that could not be remedied. In his mind, it was better for the oppressed never to have been born. He didn't know about the church in communist China. If the rule of Solomon had been about the glory of God and not the glory of Solomon, he might have brought the testimony of God's truth and holiness to others and the leaders of other nations.

Vs. 4-6 Verse 6 appears to be the godly goal, but what is said in v. 4 seems to be said from a bitter heart. Maybe some of what Solomon built came from wanting to be envied by other nations.

Vs. 7-8 Solomon appears to have had this work ethic, but without working for the Lord, one wonders for whom the work is done. That ought to be a message to us as believers. A disciple in the harvest lives knowing the answer to this.

Vs. 9-12 I wonder if Solomon said this from regret. I think that ultimately, Solomon was a lonely man without real friends. He apparently didn't have anyone with the guts to tell him he was wrong. Also, I think he was love starved. God designed that a man should have one wife to complete him. Solomon, the man who had 1000 wives, was really alone on earth and desperately incomplete.

Vs. 13-16 This story seems to describe the new king as alone, not accepted and not regarded for his achievements. This wasn't completely autobiographical, but the feelings might have been the same.

Ecclesiastes 5

Vs. 1-7 This seems to say that if you make God mad at you by not fulfilling the promises you have made to Him, He will make your accomplishments meaningless and your life pointless. I wonder if Solomon felt guilty for having fallen so far from those early days. It is hard to imagine that the guy who prayed that prayer at the dedication of the temple later wrote these words.

Vs. 8-9 Rulers will take the fruit of your toil.

Vs. 10-17 Ruin through the love of money and greed. Much of this sounds like Job, particularly v. 15; and much of it seems like it could be autobiographical, Solomon reflecting on his own life.

Vs. 18-20 This is the only point in life as Solomon saw it. Ironically, from everything Solomon says, I don't think he enjoyed this simple life. I think he was miserable. I wonder if he wished he could have had something like what he described here.

Since Solomon had wandered from God and was experiencing a lot of darkness of heart, these words have no eternal perspective. In a sense, this is Solomon saying, "let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." I have read a commentator who said the statement in verses 18-20 is actually a true statement coming from God, but I would say this is only, kind of, true in the sense that a simpler life is better and probably reflects what God intended life to be had there been no fall.

But knowing the rescue that God is making on earth, (and Solomon should have known God's plan of redemption), there is so much more to life. In a sense, this could be seen in what Paul says about godliness with contentment; but as a disciple, Paul's life was filled with meaning and activity because of the harvest and following Christ. IF this statement can be connected to living to follow Christ in the harvest, I'm all for it.

Ecclesiastes 6

Vs. 1-6 This seems to be autobiographical. Solomon might have already seen that his son Rehoboam would be a fool. We already know from chapter 1 that Solomon gave himself to pleasure and didn't enjoy it. Not only that, with all the wives Solomon had, you'd think he would have had more children than Rehoboam; but we never hear of them. We do know that Solomon later sacrificed/offered children (babies) to Molech. They would have been his own children, for that "offering" to have been meaningful.

Vs. 7-9 Without someone to pass things on to, Solomon says that our work is only for our own personal appetites. This is a good reason to invest our lives in reaching the lost and strengthening one another to make disciples, who make disciples. Our appetites need to conform to God's purposes and Word.

Vs. 10-12 This is why the existential philosophers love Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes. This is a great description of life on earth without God.

In reading this, we need to remember that what happened to Solomon could happen to any of us. Solomon was "destroyed" spiritually by living in the flesh and drifting from God. Here is what Paul said regarding former disciples. *For many, of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. ¹⁹Their end is destruction, their god is their belly, and they glory in their shame, with minds set on earthly things. ²⁰But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.* (Phil. 3:18-21)

The best defense is a good offense. Love Christ for His salvation and forgiveness; follow Him in the harvest. Stay in the Word, growing in the Lord; and make disciples, who make disciples. And did I mention staying in the Word every day? Many of us start well, but living on this planet has an eroding effect on our vision. Only love for Jesus can keep us alive. And that love for Jesus is kept alive by being in the Word daily and following in the harvest.

2 Corinthians 6:14-7:7

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

So who is Paul referring to here? Is he talking about marriage? I think Paul is talking about the Jewish super-apostles and other frauds the Corinthians had in their group. In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul told them, *For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame.* This is a good general principle, but here I think Paul is telling the Corinthians to distance themselves from those who said they were believers, but were not believers, or those who were believers, but were a problem to unity.

These factitious people were also setting the people against Paul. Here is what Paul says in Romans 16:17, *I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them.* Why Paul needed to appeal to the church in Rome and why he needed to say this to the Corinthians is that we resist doing this to those who are in the church, who keep the church from its mission by criticism and stubbornness. Our misguided thoughts of tolerance and love for one another need to be in conformity with the Word and to following Christ in the harvest.

These verses (vs. 16-18) are from Isaiah and Ezekiel and they have a point. We cannot be close to God and have Him reveal Himself to us if we are intimately mixed with those who have no love for Christ in conformity to the Word. Following the Lord has to be our first passion, and everyone opposed to Him and His Word cannot be in the innermost place in our hearts.

2 Corinthians 7:1-7

V. 1 Which promises are those? The ones Paul has just quoted from the Old Testament. Seeking the promises here will only make sense to the person who loves Christ. To all others it will sound too extreme or theoretical. This verse also sounds like Romans 12:1-2, offering themselves back to Christ.

Vs. 2-4 Paul is coming full circle to chapter 1. In this long explanation of his distress that began in 2:14, Paul is now making his final appeal to the Corinthians to accept him and his coworkers because of their sincerity and love. All of this is written because of his love and heart for the Corinthians. Notice that v. 2 is full of defense of his ministry among them, and everything else is a testimony of his love for them. Paul had the heart of a shepherd and maker of disciples.

Vs. 5-7 This continues the narrative from 2:13. Paul was waiting for Titus. He was anxious about the impact of the letter he sent with Titus. When Titus found Paul, he told him that the majority of the people saw what was happening and had tender hearts toward Paul. Notice all the mentions of afflictions and comfort. This all goes back to the first chapter of this letter.

One of the toils in the harvest is seeking to move believers back into the arena of following Christ in the harvest. This is discipleship too. It's not easy to do this when people have redefined Christianity as what they like to do and is comfortable for them. The goal suggests the strategy. They need to be in the Word every day; they need to fall back in love with Christ who saved them, and they need to give themselves to Him, following Him in the harvest. These are the basics of what it means to belong to Jesus Christ.

Psalm 47

I think this was written in the afterglow of God saving Jerusalem from the Assyrians.

Vs. 1-4 When God destroyed the Assyrian army, they had already ransacked many countries and cities. The entire world sat up and took notice of Jerusalem and Yahweh. It says that nations sent gifts to Hezekiah, because they were so thankful that God had humbled the Assyrians. (2 Chron. 32:23)

Vs. 5-7 This is a call for the nations, not just to rejoice, but to praise the God who did it, the King of all nations.

Vs. 8-9 Notice that in v. 9 the people of all nations gather as if they belonged to the promise of Abraham. Actually the promise of Abraham is a promise of redemption to all mankind. Through Abraham's seed, Jesus, all nations would be blessed.

This seems like a simple song of praise in worship. I wonder if the sons of Korah understood that God was working in the world and in Israel to bring salvation and redemption to all of lost humanity. If you miss this part, what really is the difference between Solomon dedicating the temple and Solomon writing Ecclesiastes? I'm so thankful that we are defined by Jesus and not by church or worship from any culture, or by perceived blessing. We follow Jesus as His disciples in the harvest.

Proverbs 22:16

Either on earth or after, Amen.

SEPTEMBER 4

Ecclesiastes 7-9

Get ready for another shock treatment, compliments of the wisest man on earth. When you read what Solomon says today it shocks you, realizing that at one time this man loved God and it says that God loved him. (2 Sam. 12:24) Much of what we'll read will sound like the book of Job, but

darker. Job was grieving the loss of his children, his life and his friends. Even more disturbing to Job was not understanding why God had allowed this to happen to him. Solomon is in greater danger. He *thinks* he knows what's going on. He has sunk deeply into the darkness of his own soul. That is a pretty bad place to be. Scripture shows us that he never found a friend to pull him out of this and God allowed him to stay like this. That is an interesting thought when you consider what God did to King Manasseh and how Manasseh turned to God.

Ecclesiastes 7

Vs. 1-13 Some of these are wisdom like in Proverbs, and a couple of these observations are just dark.

Vs. 4-5 These are wise advice.

V. 10 This is something to think about as each of us gets older. It is also good for congregations to think about. The best days for us as disciples always lie before us.

V. 14 This is a very interesting thought that is dark, but it has some truth to it. From this point on, notice that it really bothered Solomon that he didn't know what God was doing or that he didn't know the future.

Vs. 15-18 Again, this is very much like Job. It seems like there is a little truth here and a little darkness. We can all agree with v. 18.

Vs. 19-24 It seems that Solomon is beginning to say that in his wisdom he discovered that all men were depraved.

Vs. 25-26 Solomon is probably referring to some of his wives.

Vs. 27-28 I think that Solomon was gathering wives in disobedience to the Word and got what he wanted. I don't think godliness was the first thing Solomon was looking for as he considered who to add to his harem.

You notice that Solomon was not the guy who wrote about the Virtuous Woman at the end of Proverbs.

V. 29 If Solomon would have read Genesis 3, he would have known about depravity without having to ruin himself to discover it. Solomon could have written, "The Heart of Darkness;" in fact, that's what he's doing.

Ecclesiastes 8

As you read this chapter, the paragraphs are laid out for you, so try to title the paragraphs. What issues or observations is Solomon stating?

Vs. 1-9 It seems that Solomon is attesting to the wisdom of the wise and the power of the king; but then in vs. 6-8 he is saying that in spite of wisdom and power, man is limited. Man bears the weight of his trouble. He doesn't know the future and he cannot keep from dying.

Vs. 10-13 This seems to be saying that the prosperity of the wicked causes men to prefer evil. Still Solomon held that those who feared God came out better.

Vs. 14-15 Like Job, Solomon couldn't figure out the disparity of how the wicked and the righteous end up. Unlike Job, Solomon's answer was just to be happy with what the Lord gives you, *to eat and drink and be joyful*. Again, if this is saying to be content and enjoy the Lord's provision without having to have all the answers, I agree. I think Solomon is more on the side of "eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Vs. 16-17 This statement contains truth. We shouldn't try to understand everything. We should trust God because He is wise beyond our understanding. But I sense that to Solomon's darkened heart, this was a deep frustration to him and it made him want to give up seeking God.

Ecclesiastes 9

Vs. 1-6 This is an important summary statement on chapter 8. Notice the mentions of love and hate in v. 1 and v. 6. Since we just read Job, it seems that Solomon was really depressed that life ended in death, and that the same fate came to both the wicked and the righteous. He couldn't see any farther; and so it seems, he questioned why it was better to be wise.

Vs. 7-10 This was Solomon's grand conclusion. It sort of reads again like, "let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die." It doesn't mean that there isn't some wisdom here, but because Solomon couldn't see there was life after death, he valued only that which could be done on earth. And since nothing on earth lasted, this contentment was more like resolving to give in to the futility of life on earth and just enjoy.

Vs. 11-12 This is "What's the sense?" based on the fickleness of life and events. Notice that Solomon mentions again that man cannot know. This really upset him. For Job, the issue was that man could know God. That saved Job. Job kept appealing to God for an answer. Solomon, wise as he was, didn't think he needed anything but his wisdom.

Vs. 13-16 This is "What's the sense?" based on the fickleness of men.

Vs. 17-18 These verses are a contrast to v. 1 and end on a dark, but true, note.

For us as disciples, isn't it great to know the Lord? Knowing Jesus is enough, especially living in a fallen world and lugging around this body of death. We are motivated by His love and we follow with a purpose that defies all the damage this world may have inflicted on us. We know what we need to do every day in the harvest, and staying in the Word reminds us of His love, our mission and our sure hope of being made new in Him forever.

A fruitful, but battered, disciple shared his wisdom with a younger disciple. It is a little more positive than what Solomon has to say and it reflects reality in the harvest.

But godliness with contentment is great gain,⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs.¹¹ But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession,¹⁴ to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,¹⁵ which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords,¹⁶ who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.¹⁷ As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. (1 Tim. 6:6-17)

2 Corinthians 7:8-16

Paul is still debriefing himself and the Corinthians on the events that took place. He is showing God's purpose in all that happened. Look for words that repeat. This is a good section describing the heart of working through conflicts, and the purpose of God in chastening us and others.

Vs. 8-10 This was hard on Paul. It was hard on the Corinthians.

V. 10 The difference between depression and feeling grieved because of our sin is that the love of God is never forgotten when we are grieved in Him. Because of His love, we repent and are restored. Depression mis-understands God's power and sovereignty, and it focuses us on us, that we're stupid and disobedient and worthless. Paul was a violent persecutor of the church and responsible for the murders and imprisonments of men and women who loved Christ. He destroyed families. Paul never forgot this, but the love of Christ and the sovereignty of God moved him to repentance and service, not depression.

Vs. 11-12 Why does God allow conflict? Why does He let us, or others, melt down? To show us something and to reveal something about ourselves and about others. Difficulties, even conflicts, show us how He can use all things for His purposes.

Vs. 13-16 Paul, again, is affirming his love to them, and he is grateful and happy with the happy ending. God also used this situation as a good lesson for Titus in following Christ in the harvest.

Psalm 48

I think this psalm, too, was written in the afterglow of God destroying the Assyrian army that came against Jerusalem when Hezekiah was king. As I read a psalm like this, in the back of my mind I know that Jerusalem has been destroyed several times and today there is no temple. If this psalm is about the pride of having a great city or a great worship structure, then that was all, as Solomon would say, vanity.

So, let's assume that this symbolizes something that is still true and important to anyone who loves the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

V. 1 What shows God's greatness and shows He is worthy of praise?

V. 2 What do we point to that is beautiful and majestic, where God is found?

V. 3 What is it about God that shows what a secure refuge He is?

Vs. 4-7 What is it about God that confounds and humiliates all of the pride of man?

V. 8 What have we heard and seen and shows a hope that God has established forever?

V. 9 What makes you think of God's *steadfast love*?

V. 10 What praise of God will reach *the ends of the earth*? When you think of God's *right hand*, do you think of something/someone who is righteous?

Vs. 11-14 What one thing gives us joy, is our dwelling place, and *will guide us forever*? We could all answer this a little differently. Is it a place where you first found Jesus and learned of His love? Or maybe it is Jesus Himself.

Proverbs 22:17-19

Up to this point, all of the proverbs have been written by Solomon. The rest of Proverbs will be written by others, some of whom are named and others who are not.

These verses are reminiscent of those that begin the book of Proverbs. They are a call to the reader (or hearer) to incline their hearts and apply what they hear. Unlike the opening words of

Proverbs in chapter 1, here there is a very strong assertion that the result of this inclining and applying will be to move the listener to put complete trust in the Lord.

We should notice and be warned that the Solomon who is writing this in Proverbs is very different from the Solomon we read today in Ecclesiastes. Wisdom tells us that we need to be in the Word at Jesus' feet every day.

SEPTEMBER 5

Ecclesiastes 10-12

Our last day in Ecclesiastes, the dark diary of Solomon. As you finish this book you'll probably need to increase your endorphins by eating large amounts of chocolate, or by hooking yourself up to a tank of laughing gas.

Ecclesiastes 10

There are a lot of good "sayings" and good advice. Which ones speak to you? I like vs. 4, 10, and 17-20.

Vs. 1-4 I knew a guy in college who wrote a song to v. 1. It didn't make the charts, but it made everyone in the room laugh. The rest seems like good advice from the Lord.

Vs. 5-7 Solomon was taken up with the unfairness of seeing the wrong persons being given position or recognition. He didn't understand why God allowed such things. God is wise, so why would a wise God allow the unwise to rule?

Vs. 8-15 It could be that Solomon added these thoughts to say that although the wrong person was ruling, his foolishness would still catch up with him and there would be some sense of justice.

Vs. 16-17 This section, too, seems to reflect back on the thought of the wrong persons ruling.

Vs. 18-20 These are like three missiles directed at life under a ruler who doesn't belong in office. First, his foolishness will become obvious. Second, stay unaffected and happy. Third, watch your mouth. I wish I had learned to heed v. 20 when I was about 20.

Ecclesiastes 11

Vs. 1-6 These verses seem to talk about investing and work and have one general motto, "Just do it." It is interesting that as Solomon talks about God, there seems to be a sense of regret and confusion.

Vs. 7-10 I think these verses on youth are a part of the entire thought that is in the next chapter. Basically, Solomon is saying one should enjoy youth; but it is fleeting, and, in Solomon's mind, meaningless.

Ecclesiastes 12

V. 1 ...and remember your creator in your youth, because you will get old and wrecked.

Vs. 2-7 This is Solomon's poetic description of being wrecked by old age.

V. 8 Solomon's version of "bah, humbug!" I'll bet Paul didn't go out like this.

Vs. 9-12 I wonder if this is what they put on his tombstone. I think Solomon didn't spend enough time in the right book.

And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. ¹⁹And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, ²⁰that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and

that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel. (Deut. 17:18-20)

Vs. 13-14 This is all true, but still spoken from the dark heart of a former follower who got lost on earth. As they say, "a word to the wise ought to be sufficient." We are wise if we love the Lord, live in His Word and follow Him in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. Where Solomon is now, I know he now understands that what we are doing as disciples is wisdom and blessing, and I'll bet he wishes he had done that too.

2 Corinthians 8:1-15

This section today has to do with the offering for the poor among the churches in Jerusalem. Apparently there was a famine in Jerusalem. Corinth was one of the first churches to get behind this need (v. 11), but got stopped by something. What Paul is asking here is not that they should chip in, but that they should complete what they started. This all has to do with the conflict within the church and the presence of these false apostles. In the next chapters we'll see that these super-apostles were demanding to be paid by the church. As a point against the criticism of these false teachers, Paul never took any financial help from Corinth. This conflict goes back to 1 Corinthians 9, and those guys probably stopped the church from doing what Paul suggested in 1 Corinthians 16.

Vs. 1-5 The churches of Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica all contributed in spite of their affliction, because of their love for Christ and joy in knowing Him.

V. 5 Note that Paul is letting the Corinthians know this was the work of the Spirit and a response of love rather than apostolic pressure.

Vs. 6-7 It seems that Paul is saying that in the same way they knew that the Spirit was among them through all the gifts they had received, they should also prove the Spirit's power by allowing Him to help them finish what they had begun.

Vs. 8-9 So, what was the proof of their genuine love for Christ? It was their imitating Christ as His disciples. Those first words of v. 9, *for you know the grace of our Lord Jesus*, are so simple, and yet they are spirit and life. I don't think we are meant to ever recover from His grace. Paul had a unique and tender understanding of the grace of Jesus. Here Paul is seeking to re-open the hearts of these people with the reminder of our Lord's grace. In 2 Timothy Paul reminded Timothy of His grace, to strengthen Timothy to follow in spite of the fear of death. Nero's madness was heating up against the church and was about to send Paul into the presence of Christ when Paul wrote, *You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.* (2 Tim. 2:1) Our strength is in the grace of our Lord. If we know His grace, it gives us amazing strength.

Vs. 10-12 The benefit was not just finishing what they had begun, but they had been motivated out of a heart of love. The benefit was in giving full expression to the heart of Christ by imitating Christ.

Vs. 13-15 I wonder if this was a concern in Corinth.

What I appreciate so much about God's wisdom in the gospel and in salvation is that our response to Christ has nothing to do with position, culture, or education. The poorest, most childlike person on earth has as much (if not more) of an opportunity of grasping Christ as anyone has. How do we grasp and embrace the grace of our Lord? It is all in our hunger for Him and in our thanks for His salvation. What an amazing equalizer. How fair and just is the Father in hiding this from the wise and understanding and revealing it to babes. This morning I was reading about Jesus teaching His disciples, *Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.* (Matt.18:3) Following Christ is very

simple if you have the right heart in the harvest. We all have Bibles, but the hungry live in the Word because it brings them close to the heart and face of our Savior. Jesus is available for us all, but the hungry would rather starve than eat a meal without being next to Him.

Psalm 49

It is very fitting to have this psalm on the day we finish Ecclesiastes. This sounds like Solomon and deals with some of the same observations Solomon made in his darkness. The difference is the question and the answer. Unlike Solomon's words, there is hope here. The question is why should we fear in times of trouble. The answer is that God is in control and has determined a time of judgment for the proud. It seems that this could have been written, like several of the preceding psalms, after the salvation of Jerusalem in 2 Kings 18 & 19.

Vs. 1-4 This song and its message are for all nations. All the nations would have been interested after the way God delivered Jerusalem and a lot of other nations, by humbling the Assyrians.

Vs. 5-6 The riddle is in v. 5 and has to do with the pride of the rich and powerful.

Vs. 7-9 Man cannot ransom his own life from God. This suggests God's absolute power and that only God could do this. God solved the riddle of redemption on the cross. This also sounds like what Jesus taught His disciples in Matthew 16:26, *For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?*

Vs. 10-12 This is what happens to those who live life on earth only for themselves. This is how Solomon was seeing life because he had lost his contact with the Lord. Verse 12 has a subtle tone of irony and judgment since we were made in the image of God. But if we try, we can make ourselves like the animals.

Vs. 13-14 This will be the end of everyone who disregards God.

V. 15 Job had this hope living in him, helping him, giving him hope. Solomon couldn't see anything but life on earth and he faded into despair. Our strength and hope are in our redemption. I was reading this morning in Romans 6:5, *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.* We certainly shall. Praise God!

Vs. 16-20 Both men and nations come and go. There is wealth and power and abuse, but what happens before God is what really matters. These 70 years on earth do not occupy the space of a door's thickness in the entire vastness of eternity. These are vital years because in them we decide where we will spend eternity, but once we know Christ, these years take on an entirely different meaning for us. These are the years that we join our Savior in the harvest, striving on this lost planet to rescue the perishing and make disciples, who make disciples. The joy and glory of eternity, for all eternity, will begin after we are led out of the harvest over that thin, dark threshold into light.

What kind of worship song was this? I wonder if it had a good beat. But all things considered, the truth stated here is something we need to keep before our eyes as we follow Christ in the harvest.

Proverbs 22:20-21

These are introductory words for the next batch of proverbs. This makes me think of John 8:32, *you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.* Truth frees us to know and follow our Lord.

SEPTEMBER 6

Song of Solomon 1-4

It says of Solomon that he wrote proverbs about everything. In the Song of Solomon it seems that Solomon wrote a love song or poem regarding the events just before and just after his wedding. Most couples do photo albums; they did a song. Some of us might have a problem with this song simply because we know how Solomon's life ends. Solomon ignored God's Word and had 700 wives and 300 half wives, and they led him into idolatry. But in the beginning of his reign, like most of the godly kings, he was following the Lord and had a deep faith. It is thought that this might have been his first wife, an Israelite, whom he married before his first political marriage to Pharaoh's daughter. Or it might be that this relationship was the first where Solomon was genuinely in love and not marrying for what he thought, in his wisdom, would bring stability to the kingdom.

In the final event, God wanted this love song in the Bible. God created the union between man and woman and celebrated it in Adam and Eve in the garden. Every couple since Adam and Eve has experienced the wonder that God built into the relationship as it moves from the first attraction to marriage. And every couple has experienced the challenge of keeping that relation both romantic and healthy after marriage.

On the surface, the Song of Solomon is about raging hormones and poetic descriptions of bodies. Jewish men were not allowed to read this book until they were 30 years old. But apart from the raging hormones, you'll also notice some very significant, recurring themes that are signaled by repeated words and phrases. As you find them, underline or highlight what you see. They will give you some structure and there will be some interesting applications. Generally, we'll look at this song as a poem describing events, not as an allegory meaning something else. The [Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT](#) does a good job of describing what's going on in the Song of Solomon. According to the BKC, chapters 1-3 are just before the wedding, with Solomon personally taking her to Jerusalem for the ceremony. Chapter 4 is the wedding night and 5:1 is the afterglow. Chapters 5-8 are the "maturing" of their marriage, or I would say, some thoughts during the honeymoon. Who knows?

Song 1

This chapter describes their thoughts during the days leading up to the wedding and the couple's longing for one another.

Vs. 1-4 This can read as her desire and a request of longing, "*Let the king take me to his chambers.*"

Vs. 5-7 These verses seem to express some of her insecurity marrying a man like Solomon. Apparently her brothers were protective of her and kept watch over her, as we'll see later. The vineyard has a double meaning. She kept the literal, family vineyard, but didn't have time to cultivate her own beauty.

Vs. 8-10 In our culture, better, in my house, this comparison wouldn't do much for my wife. He apparently is saying that she is so beautiful that she stands out.

V. 11 The invisible chorus is saying that her beauty will be adorned richly. These people are being used as some sort of poetic device.

Vs. 12-17 These are lots of rolling hormones waiting for a wedding night. These thoughts and desires roll into the next chapter.

Song 2

Vs. 1-2 She compares herself to an uncultivated, wildly-growing lily and he uses the image to say again that her beauty is such that it stands out and lifts her above the crowd.

Vs. 3-17 This seems to be the bride's premarital musing about her future husband.

Vs. 3-7 She is feeling so in love with him that she feels overwhelmed, sick so to speak. You have to have been in love like this to appreciate the feeling. I think that in v. 6, she is imagining him making love to her. We will see this same phrase again when he does make love to her after the wedding.

V. 7 We will see this refrain again too, and it comes across as good godly advice from the Lord. In nature, the mating only takes place at times God has appointed. Her advice is to allow God to be the one who determines when the time is right. In our world we push sexual attraction through the media and create desire in people inappropriately. God and the bride are saying not to rush things.

If you ask me, if she had been Solomon's only wife and he had been a focused husband, Solomon might have been a truly great man. Instead, Solomon started well, like a ball hit hard to right field that looked good, but went foul.

Vs. 8-14 suggest imagery relating to the waiting, the maturing of their premarital love, and the strain thereof, that she and Solomon experienced before the wedding. The ripening fruits are the images of the time arriving.

V. 15 This is a verse of warning. Here and elsewhere, the vineyard is an image of a relationship or marriage. These *little foxes* are issues or problems that destroy the marriage and relationship. Apparently she saw things in Solomon's busy life and/or personality that gave her a sense of worry and insecurity. Every marriage has these; but two people, who are each independently in love with Christ and following Him, can kill the vermin and make the vineyard "foxproof."

Vs. 16-17 We'll see this again. Here, it is the declaration of her love and submission to him. Now, it is just longing. Later, it will be the prelude to a kiss (and more).

Song 3

Vs. 1-5 This is one of her two dreams of worry. Apparently she worried about losing him, and when she found him, she took him to the safest place she knew. A bedroom? Where she was conceived? I'd say she was ready to be married. Notice v. 5, and the advice again about not stirring sexual desire before its time. I think she was feeling the stirrings.

Vs. 6-11 This is Solomon collecting his bride and taking her to Jerusalem in a procession for the wedding.

Song 4

This is the wedding night. Notice that it is all Solomon. There are lots of comparisons, images, poetic descriptions, veiled requests, and, of course, hormones. The description of this night should also include 5:1. According to the BKC, her words at the end of chapter 4, his first words of chapter 5, and the words of the "others" (some say God) mark the consummation of their relationship (they make love).

In your discipleship group you might want to discuss how to keep romance alive in marriage. In today's climate this is a worthwhile thing to talk about. Christian marriages do fall apart; and for guys, even devoted disciples, the sexual temptations have multiplied with the media and internet. The sad reality is that as long as we've been on this planet, we still don't understand "sex;" and so it keeps harming us. People following Christ are just as liable to make mistakes that hurt themselves and their relationships.

Regarding the romance and health of the relationship, sex is never the issue; and the climax is often the enemy of real fulfillment. Generally speaking, for 98% of mankind, when the God-ordained time comes in marriage, God made the sexual side of being one flesh just as vital and irresistible to us, particularly to a man, as breathing, eating and sleeping. The goal is completion and connection, not desire and a climax. This is why Solomon was such a poor man. He was sexually saturated, but had no real completion. It was like drinking water and dying of thirst. Any man who has fallen into the rut of the typical "end of the night, for a few minutes," snuggle with his wife is primed to stay unsatisfied and liable to fall into sin. It is like drinking and still being thirsty and always needing something more.

I think that God has meant the event to take a long time, for her and for him. The husband needs to make sure it goes as long as possible and focuses on her, and he'll be surprised that the ending is actually anticlimactic in comparison to the fulfillment found in the entire process. And for both, the depth will go to the soul.

I've known couples that tried to read the Song of Solomon to one another and were seriously hurt when they both fell off the couch laughing at *Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, which looks toward Damascus* (Song 7:4). So, look for love songs. You can find them on YouTube and buy them on iTunes or somewhere. Here are some suggestions: "I Could Not Ask For More" and "A Real Fine Place to Start," by Sara Evans; "Now and Forever," by Richard Marx; "My Valentine," by M. McBride; "Looking in the Eyes of Love," by Alison Krauss; "Longer," by Dan Fogelberg; "We are Man and Wife," by Michelle Featherstone; "When the Stars Go Blue," The Corrs and Bono (studio version); "Then," by Brad Paisley; lots of stuff by Alabama; lots of country....just for starters.

Vs. 1-8 This could be Solomon describing her on the wedding night, seeing her naked for the first time.

Vs. 9-15 This sounds highly hormonal. Now she's a good smelling garden. Notice in v. 12 that there is a reference to her virginity. She was a locked garden until this night.

V. 16 I'm not sure what Solomon was saying here. I think his senses were completely overwhelmed by what he was feeling and saw and smelled. It almost sounds like, "Hi Ho, Silver, away!"

On the other hand, without a lot of interpretive energy, we can grasp what she was saying. She was unlocking the door to the garden. Read v. 1 of the next chapter to see the rest of the story.

Remember that this wasn't written "real time," as it happened. That would have been funny if it had been. "Hey, wait a minute, let me write that down." What this means is that the first days of the marriage were so extraordinary that they realized they had been deeply blessed by God. Too bad that Solomon didn't understand the true blessing of that relationship and that he would have to deny all others in order to keep it.

2 Corinthians 8:16-24

Vs. 16-17 Notice that Paul is telling the Corinthians that the heart of working for the Lord comes from the heart of God Himself. And in all of this conflict and distress for Paul & Co., God is the one who is creating that desire. Ministry is primarily not a work of man and the carrying out of plans. In all of these instructions you see God's heart in Paul's ministry.

Notice that Paul excluded himself from the carriers of the gift. In these verses Paul showed that Titus was the lead person who, himself, had a genuine love for the Corinthians. This would disarm the critics who were so focused on Paul. It is sad that an act of love like this gift had taken on such a political and controversial tone.

Vs. 18-21 Now Paul mentioned the brother who was a very good preacher. No one knows who this is. If it had been Apollos, Paul would have used his name. Notice that this person was not appointed by Paul, but by the other churches who were contributing. Even a man like Paul came under intense suspicion and was willing to step back and humble himself and submit to other authorities and opinions. This is an example of what he mentioned in 1 Corinthians 9:19ff.

V. 22 And to boot, they are sending that other "brother." Notice how this is all being done because of the immaturity of the Corinthian church and the critics.

Vs. 23-24 And again, Titus would be leading the organization around the collection and the group that would carry it to Jerusalem. Since Paul and others had taken this much care to insure that everything was done well under the scrutiny of the critics, Paul urged the Corinthians to finish well in completing what they had begun.

As disciples in the harvest, we need to be able to work with the immaturity of those who are not fully devoted to the Lord and are not totally willing to follow Him in the harvest. There is a sense of making disciples of the resistant, while we are working with the willing to reach the lost and make disciples, who make disciples. This is what we see Paul doing.

Psalm 50

This is an easy psalm to break into sections, so give it a try before you read below.

Notice the silence of God that is mentioned in vs. 3 and 21. People think God is silent today too. Interestingly, I just talked to a neighbor who missed driving through an accident last night on his way to work, because his motorcycle wasn't running right and had to come back and get his truck. He's the one who mentioned God. God isn't as silent as we think.

Vs. 1-2 God summons the entire earth to judgment and His throne is in the beauty of Zion. This sounds like the judgment of the nations after Jesus returns as the Son of Man and begins His millennial reign in Jerusalem.

Vs. 3-6 This is very "end of the age" imagery. God is no longer silent. He commands all of creation to come together, judging the nations and His people. In all of this, He calls His faithful followers to gather to Him. Jesus spoke of stuff like this.

Vs. 7-13 This is really interesting to think about. "Doing something for God" was never the purpose of sacrifice. It was a sign of faith that men understood they were lost, under judgment and needed to have their sins covered. God Himself never needed animals. He owned them all. I was reading this morning in Romans 11:33-36, *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.*

Vs. 14-15 This is all that God really wants. God asks us to praise Him in thankfulness and to make Him our only hope. I was reading this morning in John 14, "*If anyone loves me, he will keep my word.*" It begins with love and flows into obedience.

Vs. 16-21 You understand that the wicked here are the religiously wicked. These are those who use the name, but do not know Him. Verse 21 is a great indictment. God's silence doesn't mean He approves of our religion. How many people worship every week, totally in vain.

Vs. 21-23 This is interesting. Inherent in what God is saying here is that the sacrifice and worship should be according to His Word and in thankfulness to Him. The *sacrifice* of thanksgiving is giving testimony to God for His salvation and mercy. The ordering of our way in Christ involves taking a cross and following Him into the harvest. That is obedience to the Word and thanksgiving in action.

Proverbs 22:22-23

This really fits well to the psalm.

SEPTEMBER 7

Song of Solomon 5-8

I have to admit, I'm happy this book doesn't have 40 chapters. I doubt that many of us are going to get to heaven, run up to the Lord and say, "What were they *doing* in that verse?"

One thing to keep in mind is that all of the real events had to have taken place, before Solomon and his wife could sit down, compile thoughts, and put them in poetic form. So, in other words, the events here are not "real time," and artistic decisions are being made now to present their wedding and honeymoon. It is interesting in this to think that they included two very anxious dreams she had. Not only did this bride have anxieties, but she seems to have had some fears where things (foxes) were present that could ruin their relationship. Since Solomon wrote this, he must have known about the foxes too. Knowing truth doesn't make you immune to ruin. This is a very different Solomon than the one we just heard from in Ecclesiastes. I would say the deciding factor is that Solomon didn't write his own copy of the law and didn't read it every day as God had commanded. Had he done so, he would have avoided having 1000 wives; and maybe, if he had read in the law about Abe and Sarah every month, he would have understood this woman as the only one God had intended for him.

Song 5

V. 1 This (supposedly) is the consummation of their relationship.

Vs. 2-9 This is her second bad dream. Who knows when this happened? It could be this was her dream after they made love and fell asleep. Maybe it was sometime later on the honeymoon. There apparently was a lot on her mind that made her insecure. This entire reading today will be a kind of plea from her to Solomon.

Vs. 2-6 In her dream she is waiting and ready for him. I have heard this portrayed allegorically as Jesus calling to the church, but the church is too lazy to respond. Holy Moly! If you understand here, she is telling him through the door that she is naked and anointed, ready and willing. In those days, the doors had a hole so that a person from the outside could let themselves in. He was playing with her and she with him. Then she couldn't wait any longer and ran to the door.

V. 7-9 The fact that she searches for him again, but this time is beaten by the watchmen, signals an escalation in her fears. These daughters of Jerusalem are possibly the competition, or they are being used as a poetic device to move the poem along.

Vs. 10-16 Who knows what's happening here. Maybe she awoke and saw him lying next to her.

Song 6

Vs. 1-3 I don't know, maybe she woke him up and he's rolling over into the garden.

Vs. 4-10 I think he likes her. Verses 7-9 are interesting with the mention of queens and concubines. Since we don't really have much detail I wonder if this is a recollection of the wedding guests and these were queens and concubines of other kings, or if this was Solomon's current tally. Solomon would eventually have 700 queens and 300 concubines. (1 Kings 11:3)

Vs. 11-13 Somewhere in all of this it is suggested that during a day, on some day, they take a walk in a real garden. I find some of that hard to grasp, because his descriptions of her are not exactly what you'd see if she were clothed. It could be that he took her some place like a pavilion in the garden itself. I'm sure Solomon must have had places where he could relax and entertain

guests in the vineyards and gardens he had made. Or maybe it is all poetic imagery and they never left the honeymoon suite.

Song 7

Vs. 1-9 Apparently she was briefly wearing sandals. This might suggest they went some place.

Vs. 9-13 It seems that she suggested taking a walk and having a roll in the pomegranates.

Song 8

V. 1 I think the idea here is that in her insecurity, she wished the bond was stronger than marriage or the sexual. It isn't a wish for something perverse, rather, for a very permanent, unbreakable relational bond. Solomon had a lot of other women, many of royal descent, vying for his attention. Somehow I don't think this girl lasted long.

Vs. 2-4 These verses give me the idea that they are still in the honeymoon suite or in some enclosed garden pavilion and she is lying in his arms. Here again she is telling of the wisdom of waiting for the Lord's appointed time to fan the flame of sexual passion. Apparently she was glad she had waited.

V. 5 This could be those daughters of Jerusalem asking the question and Solomon saying where he first noticed her, in the apple orchard.

Vs. 6-7 This is a very bold appeal from her to Solomon to make this a very strong relationship. She wishes to be a seal on his arm and to be loved in a very loyal and fierce way.

Vs. 8-10 On the other hand, she had determined to wait for love and to be loyal to her husband, even before she met him. Her brothers watched over her. Would she be a tower, firm in her convictions, or would she be a door? They would take appropriate action. She was a moral girl, and so, she would bring her husband peace knowing she would remain faithful. Too bad Solomon wasn't that faithful.

Vs. 11-14 Somewhere in all of this I think she's inviting him for a rendezvous in the garden. Again, I wouldn't be surprised if they never left the room.

It is sad to realize that her insecurities proved to be right. Solomon was a hedonistic workaholic. His harem became his pleasure garden as he spiritually, relationally, emotionally, and personally died. Was the love expressed here genuine? I'll bet it was. Almost all marriages begin with an intense love. So, the lesson would be that what is genuine today could be dead tomorrow, if we allow it to happen. It is no accident that in Genesis and in Paul's recounting of the fall in Romans 1:18ff, after the breaking of the relationship with God came the fracture in the relationship between man and wife. I think any married disciple who is serious about following Christ in the harvest will work hard to protect and grow the "garden" God has given to him/her. Particularly for a man, his relationship and love to Christ is "tested" in his love for his wife. *Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.* (Eph. 5:25) If we really had it right, we would love the Lord our God with all our hearts and soul and mind and strength, and then make sure our marriage reflects the devotion, blessing and pleasure of God. Marriage should add a fulfillment to us that is second only to our fulfillment in Christ.

2 Corinthians 9

Vs. 1-5 The occasion of this gift was a big deal. As a result of this conflict, we get some great verses and we see Paul gently encouraging the people to grow spiritually.

V. 2 Corinth had been an example to other churches. Now they were in danger of becoming a negative example of what division and infighting can do for you. The point here is not Paul's boasting or their reputation. The reality is that if they did not see this through, it would signify a step backward in maturity and growth in the church, probably leading to further disappointment

and disunity in Corinth. If indeed they were healing from whatever malfunction they had had, finishing this project would be evidence of that healing.

Vs. 6-11 It is only through real faith that real giving occurs. We give for many reasons, but on the spiritual level it is because of our gratefulness to God and our total trust in Him. For the church in Corinth not to give, this would signify their disunity and then, too, their lack of gratefulness and their lack of trust.

V. 10 I think this is a reference to Isaiah 55:10, *For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater.*

Vs. 12-15 They would also be a blessing to others and bring glory to God.

There is a level of "material abandonment" that Jesus demands of His disciples. When Jesus told a man to sell all he had and give it away and follow Him, Jesus meant it. The man failed to respond because he was actually a slave to what he owned. Jesus also taught freedom from stuff when He told His disciples not to be anxious about food or drink or clothing, but to seek first the kingdom of heaven. Jesus doesn't demand every disciple to sell everything, but on the spiritual level He really does. Our home is in heaven not on earth, so our stuff and our money can go to the harvest and to all those people our Lord puts in our path who need His money.

Psalm 51

Reflecting on this psalm, what if it was still sung by David long after Ahithophel, Absalom, and the others were dead? What if David still labored under the guilt of what he had done? What if all the apologies had been made, but the memories remained? I wonder if this was a daily prayer for David. I wonder if Paul had this kind of prayer in those dark nights when he could close his eyes and see the faces of those he had beaten, those women screaming for their husbands, pleading for the mercy of Christ after Paul had them thrown in jail and had assented to their deaths?

Our guilt has a hard time dying, and many of us have prayers like this that we regularly bring before the Lord. Our hearts keep accusing us, but He is greater than our hearts. We are wholly accepted and forgiven in the blood of Christ.

Vs. 1-3 The desperate acknowledgement here is that David's sin was ever before him.

Vs. 4-6 Even after all the people were dead who could have been apologized too, David still had to deal with his heart before God. The effect of his sin had been devastating to his family and to his nation. More than that, it had to have made a deep mark on his heart. Only God could soothe his heart. Only God's truth could give him the confidence to follow every day.

Vs. 7-12 Notice all of the things David begs for here. Look at all the things that had been lost. David prayed for restoration.

Vs. 13-17 David vowed not only to give testimony of God's deliverance, but now he would be a teacher of transgressors, leading them back to the truth of God and to obedience. Verse 17 would be the greatest lesson he could give, and it was the deepest lesson he had learned.

Vs. 18-19 Maybe David had seen the damage he had done to Israel. This prayer was not for him or for the city per se. It was for the glory of God, God being exalted in His city and in the worship He received.

Proverbs 22:24-25

Amen, and beware of men who are given too easily to "righteous anger." God isn't fooled, but we are.

SEPTEMBER 8

Isaiah 1-2

Isaiah is THE great prophet in the Old Testament. Not that he made himself anything, but God just said a lot of massively great stuff through him. He is the prophet most mentioned by name and quoted in the NT. You could almost say he was the Billy Graham of his day, serving 4 to 5 kings over a period of 60+ years. Tradition has it that the guy in Hebrews 11:37, who was *sawn in two*, was Isaiah, when King Manasseh decided he really didn't need to hear Isaiah's message any more.

Isaiah is a very long book. It would do you well to underline words and phrases from the beginning. It would be valuable to keep track of the names of God. Also, the alternation between judgment and threat and future/eternal blessing might show you some things about God. Another thing to search for is passages from Isaiah that are quoted in the NT. There are lots of references to the Messiah.

In terms of a road map, I'll direct you to the outline that John Martin provides, "Isaiah, Themes and Theology," The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, pp. 1031-1032. Basically, judgment is spelled out in chapters 1-39, and restoration is offered in chapters 40-66. Dr. Martin breaks this down in smaller chunks, but this will be all we'll need for our purposes. (This outline is at the end of this document.)

Another way of looking at Isaiah is that chapters 1-35 are meant to inspire godliness and faith to save Jerusalem from the challenge of chapters 36 and 37. Chapters 38 and 39 show that that deliverance didn't go deep enough into the hearts of the people. Chapters 40-66 then will show the final deliverance and redemption of Israel and all of mankind.

Also, it might be good to have a chart of the prophets and kings to put this into perspective, so I'll include it at the end of this document as well. "Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets," The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, p. 513.

It should probably be a standard thought for any disciple who can, to memorize Isaiah 53 and Isaiah 55. There are some great verses and passages in Isaiah and many worth memorizing, but these two chapters are complete thoughts. Isaiah 40:31 is one of those individual verses.

Isaiah 1

V. 1 There are four kings listed. Manasseh isn't mentioned, but I suspect Isaiah had a very short ministry under Manasseh.

Vs. 2-9 There are four clear divisions in what the Lord is saying here. The ESV gives us some nice divisions. How would you title these sections?

Vs. 2-3 This is a call to creation to observe Israel's rebellion.

V. 4 God addresses the people and uses the title *the Holy One of Israel*.

Vs. 5-6 This is an image of the nation as a sick body. Verse 5 is a good question we could ask of anyone today.

Vs. 7-9 This was the present state of affairs in Judah. It is interesting to think that Isaiah was saying stuff like this during the reigns of some good kings and some bad kings. God was keeping a certain pressure on the people and leaders to warn them of what would lead Judah to exile.

V. 9 Here you have the title *the Lord of hosts*. Also, Paul quotes this verse in Romans 9:29.

Vs. 10-17 Notice that the people were still worshiping by the letter, but not the way God wanted, in spirit. This morning I read what Jesus said to the Pharisees in Matthew 15:7-8, "You

hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said: ⁸"This people honors me with their lips but their heart is far from me...."

Vs. 18-20 Verse 18 is one of those famous verses. God calls all people to reason with Him. If you don't have this memorized, it would be short and worthwhile. The reason God refers to scarlet is because of v. 15. Their hands were full of blood.

Vs. 21-23 What a strong charge against the leaders of the people. God really cares about how people treat the poor and disadvantaged; in fact, He uses them as a test of the hearts of the leaders. This section now will become the contrast to the next section.

Vs. 24-26 Notice that judgment is for a purpose and it has a promise. God never lost sight of His redemptive purpose or His covenant with Abraham. This is God's promise to make Israel what it was meant to be.

V. 24 Notice the names of God. *Lord of hosts* literally means *Lord of armies*. Why is it being used here? What is the significance of the *Mighty One of Israel*? The poor and needy need a mighty one.

Vs. 27-31 God will redeem Zion and He will gather to Him all who repent, but for the others there will only be judgment. I was just reading about unquenchable fire this morning, but it was Jesus who was talking about it.

Isaiah 2

Vs. 1-4 This is the kind of promise that shows you something of God's heart, spoken as He is pronouncing judgment. The punishment will be strong, but the hope of redemption is given. This is obviously a prediction of the 1000-year reign of Christ in Jerusalem.

Vs. 5-11 This is a plea to Israel to follow the Lord.

Vs. 12-19 There would certainly be a day of judgment in Judah's near future when the Babylonians would come, but this is also suggesting the day when God judges the entire earth. Notice the theme here of the high being leveled. We'll definitely see this again in Isaiah and it was a part of the message of John the Baptist.

Vs. 20-22 This day of judgment looks like what will be happening during and at the end of the Tribulation.

In these two chapters God's coming judgment and coming kingdom have both been referred to. That sounds like something that still needs to be mentioned today in the harvest. The coming of the Kingdom of God means that all men must be ready. They need to turn to God or there will be only judgment waiting for them. On the other hand, those who turn to God will be faced with amazing grace and blessing. Add to this that they turn to God by believing in and welcoming Jesus as their Savior, and you have the gospel that John the Baptist, Jesus, and His disciples preached.

2 Corinthians 10

Up until now, Paul has spoken to the main body of the church and leaders in a very gentle and self-deprecating way. He has shown that in all of what has happened, God has worked and led. Now, Paul needs to address the false apostles and the Corinthians' infatuation (spiritual immaturity) with them. O Weh!

V. 1 Paul is entreating the people and then quotes the super-apostles (SAs), who said that Paul was a wimp in person and was only bold if he hid behind a letter. Having proven, to this point, by his soft spoken writing that he loves these people, Paul now takes the role of an elder by facing the troublemakers.

V. 2 Notice again how Paul is talking to two groups, the people and leaders, and the SAs.

Vs. 3-6 This is something more than wisdom and apologetics. Paul worked on a spiritual level, understanding his warfare as spiritual and using the gospel as the power of God. This is what he mentioned back in 1 Corinthians 1-4. The power that Paul and his companions had was in the spirit and in the simple truth of the gospel.

V. 5 Paul mentions this in Romans as his commission from Christ, to win obedience from the Gentiles, the obedience of faith. How do you know if a person has this? They follow Christ in faith in the harvest.

Vs. 7-12 I keep thinking about Jesus' constant words to His disciples, *you will recognize them by their fruits*.

Vs. 13-18 Notice that Paul is showing the Corinthians that God commended Paul & Co. as His servants by allowing them to lead these people to Christ. The SAs had no fruit. They were parasites. How often have I met "self important" and "head" leaders in a church who have no fruit from Christ using them in the harvest, but have "taken over" another person's fruit. These SAs and the people I have seen in churches do not get people to follow Christ. They get people to follow them, to recognize them as authorities. Following Christ becomes defined as following them. Paul was not like this at all. Later, Jude will call such leaders waterless clouds.

The Lord commends us as we follow Him in the harvest by letting His love flow through us to produce fruit. We are always to be reaching out to the lost and strengthening believers to help them become stronger disciples in the harvest who make disciples, who make disciples. *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be my disciples.* (John 15:8)

Psalm 52

Living life by one's own craftiness, rather than trusting the Lord, is an ongoing problem for all of us. The bad guy here seems like a totally evil man and a real rat, but actually, he might look like some of us. We might like him and buy his book. The Corinthians apparently supported some men like this who said they were apostles.

It is interesting that David wrote this after Doeg had killed the priests and David was living in caves. David would live like this for 6-8 years and then 16 months in Ziklag. What happened to Doeg? Who knows? But David trusted in the Lord, and for him vs. 8-9 were all that mattered. God was enough, although he was living a very desperate, insecure, and Spartan existence, following and waiting on the Lord. It is also interesting to think that this psalm was sung in worship.

Vs. 1-4 King Saul had surrounded himself with wicked men like Doeg. This man was an evil opportunist who acted religious to fit into the culture of Israel; but when the opportunity came to win favor with Saul, he did what no one else would. He destroyed an entire village of priests and their wives and children.

Vs. 5-7 Not only was David confident that God would judge Doeg, but that He would use him as an example to all those who followed the Lord. We have seen over and over again that the Lord will judge the wicked.

Vs. 8-9 David had been the real goal of all that hatred of Saul that allowed this Doeg to have his day. Yet David was held in God's *steadfast love*, embraced in God's presence and cared for. David's normal response was to praise God and let the godly know that they could hope in the Lord.

Notice how the *steadfast love of God* opens and closes the psalm. It is a source of strength and hope for us, as we follow and work in the harvest, to know that His love is always with us and it is always enough.

Proverbs 22:26-27

These verses could be applied to pledging to pay the loans of another person, but it looks to me that it could also be going out on credit. This is not Larry Burkett or Dave Ramsey; this is God. Basically, I think it says that if you don't have cash on hand, don't buy it on a pledge to pay. I don't think this is referring to huge stuff like houses or cars, or to things that are really, really important. Rather this endorses a mindset of not living in debt and on credit. As Paul said to Timothy, both of whom were following in the harvest, *But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.* (1 Tim. 6:8) In the world at present we are watching the debt bubbles burst in almost every western nation. It was all foolishness, just as it says here.

SEPTEMBER 9

Isaiah 3-5

Isaiah 3

Notice the names of God here. Notice too that in the judgment, there is a complete destruction of and confusion in leadership. Everyone will need it, but it will not be found, at least not by looking down. It is an ironic justice since they should have been looking to God for leadership. So, He gave them what they had been seeking, life without His leadership.

Vs. 1-5 God will reduce the situation to where it will not be popular to lead. There will be no food, no soldiers and no leaders to rely on. Only the foolish or immature will want to lead. Obviously, there is no true shepherd who has a love for God who would lead in faith in spite of the dire situation. There is no one to stand in the gap.

Vs. 6-12 No responsible person will want to lead that rabble of wickedness. Notice the two times it says *woe*.

Vs. 13-15 This makes it clear that personal gain and comfort were the reasons that people led. That is why God said in v. 1 that He would take away the incentive. In order for these people to have lived well, they had crushed the poor. God is promising them judgment.

Vs. 16-17 This is another view of the abuse of the leaders. Their wives were part of the problem. These two verses are contrasts. Verse 16 is what they had, and v. 17 is what they will get. When captives were led into exile, sometimes they were taken and marched along naked.

Vs. 18-26 This is another "before and after" comparison. Verses 18-23 show what they had. Verses 24-26 describe their future. Notice the word *instead*.

Isaiah 4

V. 1 This should probably belong to chapter 3. It is similar to 3:6. Women will look for a leader and there will be none.

Vs. 2-6 Enter the Branch. Rather than this referring to the remnant of Israel, this most likely refers to the Messiah, who is called the Branch in other places in the OT. This is a picture of the Messiah rescuing His people and Jerusalem at the last minute at the end of the Tribulation, and then leading them in the Millennial Kingdom.

Several words for branch are used to describe the Messiah. The Jews would have understood the different words, but would have known they referred to one man called the Branch. In Isaiah 11:1 the word for branch is "nesar," from which came the word Nazareth and the prophecy in Matthew 2:23, *And he went and lived in a city called Nazareth, so that what was spoken by the prophets might be fulfilled, that he would be called a Nazarene.* Since there is no prophecy in the Old Testament that said this, this quote in Matthew probably should read, "He shall be called a Branch." When the people said, "Jesus of Nazareth," they heard the word "branch" in that title.

Those who were perceptive would have thought about it, but those with hard hearts wouldn't have made the connection.

Isaiah 5

Vs. 1-2 With the pictures of destruction and rescue in view, God now shows how He planted Israel as a vineyard and that this vineyard has become liable for judgment. What is interesting about this picture is that the description is very similar to the parable of the vineyard that Jesus used against the chief priests and Pharisees. *And he began to speak to them in parables. "A man planted a vineyard and put a fence around it and dug a pit for the winepress and built a tower, and leased it to tenants and went into another country."* (Mark 12:1)

Vs. 3-7 This is the judgment against the vineyard. Notice the use of *I will*. Verse 7 connects to v. 3 and gives the reason for God's anger.

Vs. 8-23 These are the things that ruined the vineyard God planted and they are signaled by the word *woe*. If you have time, write the focus of each *woe* in the margin of your Bible.

Vs. 24-25 God declares His anger with Judah and Jerusalem. Notice that they ignored the Word of the Lord, and also, this description of what would happen was still years away. A word to the wise should have been sufficient.

Vs. 26-30 These lions would be the Babylonians who would eventually destroy the temple and the city and lead Judah into exile.

As disciples in the harvest, it is noticeable that even in this description of judgment, the Branch was promised to bring salvation and restoration. We work in a harvest that is under God's judgment and wrath, yet even as it gets darker every day, the offer of salvation is still there for any who reach out and take hold of the Branch. Especially as it gets darker, those who come to Christ will have a clearer understanding of their salvation and will be willing to follow as disciples making disciples in the harvest.

2 Corinthians 11:1-15

Vs. 1-3 The proof of Paul's apostleship and the focus of Paul's ministry was to have the people in love with Christ, focused on following Him in the harvest. The battle going on in Corinth had people focused on personalities and themselves.

V. 4 What an interesting charge against the spiritual stature of the Corinthians. The *super-apostles* might have come from Jerusalem, from the circumcision party, claiming authority from the Twelve and showing that their Jewish background was superior to Paul's. But what they actually proclaimed, what they said and the tone of it, had nothing to do with the Jesus whom Paul had presented to them. The fruit these false apostles had grown was causing divisiveness and fighting.

Vs. 5-6 Paul obviously was giving new and inspired teaching. The super-apostles weren't bringing anything new or moving the Corinthians into the harvest. They were leading them back to the law and causing the Corinthians to be self-centered. By their fruits they were known.

Vs. 7-11 Paul's boast was that he did not put an obstacle in the way of the gospel. The Corinthians' shame is that Paul never accepted financial help from Corinth because of their immaturity. Paul wrote of this in 1 Corinthians, that he had never taken any advantage of them financially. The super-apostles turned this around after hearing from the previous letter (1 Corinthians), saying that Paul was a real tricky guy and had been robbing other churches. Poor Paul and what a silly, deceived group of believers.

Vs. 12-15 Paul has shown them a lot of love and patience in the first chapters. It is time now for him to deal with these troublemakers.

V. 12 If the super-apostles were just like Paul, they should work without pay, like Paul. Remember the verses we just read in Isaiah. When God took away the food and drink, no one wanted to lead Judah. If these false apostles couldn't be paid, they wouldn't stay. They were not shepherds sent by the Good Shepherd. As we'll see tomorrow, the mark of Paul's apostleship in Christ was suffering with Christ; that is, doing without and paying the price of following. These false apostles thought the church was a means of gaining a good living.

V. 13 is very clear and to the point.

Vs. 14 -15 These are very famous verses. Just like in the leadership of Israel, the leadership of the church in the harvest is critical. There are so many opinions, and there are so many personalities, and there are so many motives that try to direct the church; but there is only one Word and one commission. Our Lord came to seek and to save the lost. A servant is not greater than his master, nor is the one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If we know these things, blessed are we if we do them.

By the fact that God has included this conflict and these issues in Scripture, it is obvious that dealing with these issues and conflicts are an important part of helping the church keep focused in the harvest.

Psalm 53

Now everything is beginning to sound like Isaiah, although David lived before Isaiah. Oh, that's right, it really is the same Author. ☺

Vs. 1-4 Paul uses a lot of this in Romans 3. The fool feels confident in God's silence. The godly person knows that God is alive and working in the world every day.

V. 5 But God will judge. This seems like a hint of the Tribulation. There will be terror, but mankind will take it out on God's people. God, on the other hand, will protect His people and use them as a judgment on the earth.

V. 6 This longing will someday be fulfilled. The Messiah will reign in Zion and He will bring salvation not only for the Jews, but for all people.

Proverbs 22:28-29

V. 28 This says to me that there are some things handed down from past generations that we are meant to respect.

V. 29 Perhaps one of those things to respect is patient craftsmanship. The old craftsman doesn't do his work well in order to stand before kings. He does his work well, to do his work well. Paul said to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:15, "*Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.*"

It is hard to find anyone today who is willing to devote himself to one skill and do it with patience and excellence. We have been taught to multi-task, to demand that everything comes faster and to work for the acclaim of others.

SEPTEMBER 10

Isaiah 6-7

This is holy ground today. Today we get a couple of great portions of Scripture.

Isaiah 6

V. 1 Uzziah had reigned for 52 years. The only ruler that two generations of people had ever known was dead. The king who had kept peace and brought stability to the nation was gone. Humanly speaking, everything was shaken. Although Uzziah had messed up, his sin had taught

him humility and the fear of God. The world was growing very unstable. Now what? It may be that Isaiah was in the temple praying with this concern moving his heart. God had Isaiah just where He wanted him.

Vs. 2-3 This is the only time that Seraphim are mentioned by name in the Bible. The description is interesting since they have six wings; and the four living creatures in Revelation 4 have six wings and also say, *Holy, holy, holy...* It must be that they are the same kind of angels. The living creatures of Ezekiel have four wings. The Cherubim, like over the ark of the covenant, have two wings. Normal angels fly, like Gabriel, but it never mentions him or Michael having wings. I'm always amazed that these angels naturally declare God's holiness. They will do this in Revelation, too. Certainly this wasn't scripted; it was their natural impulse. Whatever is happening among the angels that we don't see, God's holiness is a very emotional and important issue for them.

Also, notice that they say, and see, that the whole world is full of His glory. They can't help but see it. We don't see this yet. Because of the body of death, we see as through a glass eye, darkly. (That's Mark Twain.☺)

Vs. 4- 5 I don't think Isaiah was any worse than any of us. Why would God have chosen to use him if he had had a vile mouth. Still, like Job, when Isaiah saw the Lord, he realized that much of what he had said was complaining, ignorant, untrue and unjust regarding the Lord. Think back to Job's words in Job 42:1-6.

Vs. 6-7 It is interesting that God wanted to use Isaiah's mouth, so we have this visual of cleansing. But really, the cleansing was of the heart, from which the mouth sometimes utters stupid stuff.

V. 8 This is Isaiah's commissioning.

Vs. 9-13 The basis of Isaiah's message to Israel will be judgment. He will become a testimony to them of their refusal to have faith in God, which will result in hard hearts, blind eyes and deaf ears. But judgment will also bring mercy.

V. 9 Jesus quotes this.

V. 10 Paul quotes this.

A remnant would be saved from the exile, and through that seed would come the Christ and the future nation that will fulfill God's will for Israel.

Isaiah 7

Vs. 1-9 The southern kingdom of Judah was almost always at war with the northern kingdom of Israel. The occasion of this distress is the alliance of Syria and Israel against Judah.

V. 4 Notice how the Lord tells Ahaz to chill. Ahaz was to show quiet strength without anger or pride. This is a good word to us. In 2 Kings 16:2 we hear that Ahaz was not a God-honoring king. It is amazing to think that God is going to make this kind of a promise to an ungodly king. But then, think of all the grace God showed to the northern kingdom through Elijah and Elisha. This should teach us something about loving our enemies.

Vs. 10-17 So it is the fear of the people of Judah facing certain destruction that brings the occasion of one of the greatest prophecies of the Bible. Think of that. How often have we seen impending danger be turned into praise for the glory of God? Unfortunately it is a part of living on this planet of death. Fortunately there is a Savior who loves us, who we can trust and follow.

V. 14 The word for virgin can also mean young woman, but what's the point? In order for this to have been a sign, it had to be miraculous. It had to have been miraculous back in Ahaz's day and then also surrounding the birth of Jesus. Somewhere, a virgin known to the community in

Jerusalem would have a child. Although it would be a miraculous event, it wouldn't be a child like Jesus, the Son of God.

Why this kind of sign? Well, prophetically, it makes sense; but in that day, it must have been a sign that although the world was falling apart and although the northern kingdom would go into exile under Assyria, this child would grow in peace. You know how you hear people say that they don't want to have children because of the world they would be bringing them into. God shows that the kingdom of Judah will be safe for this child; even though, at that point, everything looked like it was coming to an end.

Knowing Christ, we really know what the world is like, and it's far more dangerous than anyone could ever guess. Yet even so, the hope in this world is symbolized and personified by Immanuel, Jesus, God with us.

V. 15 The *curds and honey* will be explained below.

Vs. 16-17 The "razor" God will use to "shave" the kings of Syria and Israel will be Assyria. This event will be a landmark event rivaled only by the splitting of Israel into the northern and southern kingdoms. Assyria would take the northern kingdom into exile and those people would be lost to Israel forever. Remember that people of all twelve tribes were also living in the kingdom of Judah.

Vs. 20-25 I've heard the *curds and honey* explained as the way Assyria laid waste to the countries. Vineyards and crops didn't fare well, and the main source of food was from animals - milk and cheese (you didn't want to kill your cows for meat) and you spent a lot of time looking for wild honey. Remember too, Israel was said to be a land flowing with milk and honey.

Imagine what it would have meant for Isaiah to be commissioned seeing the glory of God, but commissioned to bring a message of impending judgment and salvation only being found in turning to God. We don't have to imagine that at all. As disciples, we were captured by the glory of Christ, His love and sacrifice; and we are commissioned to bring that same message to a dying world. *You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.* (John 15:16)

2 Corinthians 11:16-33

Vs. 16-21 These verses kind of explain themselves. Note that these super-apostles took the liberty of striking people, possibly thinking of Nehemiah at the end of that book. In order to show the Corinthians the ungodly mindset and attitudes of the false apostles, Paul would have to, uncomfortably, show how the Lord had worked with him. It will be a shock to see how the Lord confirmed Paul. In v. 21 Paul's words are very pointed.

Vs. 21-29 Paul wrote something like this before in his very famous words in Philippians 3, but here there is a little more attitude. Actually the tone here seems to be one of sorrow rather than sarcasm or irony. Paul seems to be hurt that the Corinthians hadn't defended him.

V. 22 This is how we know the super-apostles were Jews. Corinth was a very, very Jewish church, and so these people found it easy to show they were true blue Jews. Remember, Paul was born in Tarsus in today's Turkey, not in Jerusalem. So Paul lacked that qualification on his pedigree.

Note that in this catalog of sufferings and mishaps, many things are mentioned that are not in Acts. The shipwrecks are not mentioned, and the one at the end of Acts hasn't even happened yet. We know of one beating in Philippi at the hands of the Romans, but nothing of these five at the hands of the Jews. That means that Paul received 195 lashes. Paul sounds like they should have had an action figure made after him. His theme song could have been, "Man of Constant

Sorrows.” Even though Paul could have mentioned his triumphs, all he is mentioning as proof of his apostleship is his suffering for Christ. That is a very interesting mindset. You don't find too many people who see their sufferings as God's confirmation.

Vs. 28-29 And this alone would be enough to choke a goat. I'm sure the Corinthians understood that they were a case in point.

Vs. 30-33 This sounds cool, but I think the idea is that of being hunted like a criminal. I'm willing to bet that none of the Jewish super-apostles had anything like this happen to them. In fact, because they were trying to bring Christianity back to the law, they might have had some approval with the orthodox. Paul could have talked about the disciples made in Damascus, but Paul pointed to his suffering and humbling.

What is interesting here is that God did all of this to Paul. The Lord “made” Paul in the harvest; Paul did not make himself. Our ideas of our heroes, even today, are driven by the world we live in. Jesus said, *for he who is least among you all is the one who is great*. The Lord of the harvest made Paul the man he became. It wasn't Paul's education or guts. Few of us would be willing to suffer as Paul did. We should just look to following our Lord in the harvest and trying to stay the least of all and servant of all. And we might also need to view our "failures" and "weaknesses" as those things that confirm that we are on the right track following the Lord.

Psalm 54

These were still the early days of David running from Saul. David had 600 rag-tag men and their families following him through desperately rough terrain. There were many, many troubled days and ups and downs. Now, Jonathan came to encourage David in the Lord. He left, and then David heard that Saul was on his way and the Ziphites were telling Saul where to find him. It was time to run again.

Vs. 1-3 Notice that David needed salvation and vindication. Not only was it hard to stay alive, it was hard to be regarded as a worthy leader when times were tough and lies were being spread.

Vs. 4-5 God's faithfulness was in response to His promise to David and His promise to all who choose to acknowledge God's name. *So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven.* (Matt. 10:32)

Vs. 6-7 We have come to see how suffering and being delivered moved David to constantly promise to declare God's faithfulness and deliverance. We see David's commitment to praise the Lord clearly in Psalm 40:9-10. Here, we have to wonder if David was writing this in retrospect and had already been delivered, or if David knew from his experience following the Lord, that he knew deliverance would come. At this point David was still running, and so this was written by faith, following a God who was as good as His promise. We do that too, following our Lord in the harvest, facing daily uncertainties and challenges, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples. Yet in faith, we know the Lord will use us and use our suffering and emotional ups and downs. We just stay at His feet in His Word, following, and even now, we can praise Him for the victory to come.

Proverbs 23:1-3

I've actually applied these verses. There will be something similar in Proverbs 25. What I see in them is to be cautious in humility when you are in a place where you are to represent the Lord. This is sort of along the lines of what Jesus said about not taking the prominent place in a gathering, but rather taking a place in back. When we represent the Lord, we should be cautious and respectful and never lose sight of the situation. Too often we relax, laugh too loud, speak too openly, eat too excessively; and the result is that we are caught off guard and do not realize

we've gone too far and endangered our testimony in the harvest. An ambassador is always on duty representing his Lord.

SEPTEMBER 11

Isaiah 8-9

Today we have another prophecy concerning Jesus, delivered during desperate times. The situation in Judah would get even worse, but these prophecies would remind the people following God that He was still present with them. The same is true for us today. Regardless of who is in government, we know that until the coming of Jesus, things will get worse on earth. Yet, Jesus is Immanuel, God with us, guiding us in the harvest, giving us joy and fruit as we live under the radar doing His work, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Isaiah 8

Vs. 1-3 Although one child had already been foretold as a sign that God would stop the attack coming from Israel and Syria, now another child is foretold. The first child, Immanuel, would be born in this distress, but would live and thrive, being a symbol of God's presence and peace. But when would there be a breaking of the enemy? That time would be signified by this second child, a son of Isaiah and his wife, *the prophetess*.

So, if you follow the math it would be nine months of pregnancy and then the birth. Then before the child can say "dada" or "mama" (another year?), Assyria could take captive Israel and Syria. The people of Judah would have to wait patiently for maybe 18 months.

By the way, *Maher-shalal-hash-baz* is the longest name in the Bible. Surprisingly, it's not in my spellchecker.

Vs. 5-10 Because the northern kingdom didn't listen to God, they will be smashed by the coming of Assyria and the destruction will reach "Immanuel" (Jerusalem?), but Assyria will be shattered, proving that God is with them. This will happen in the years of Hezekiah.

You notice that v. 10 also has the name Immanuel (*God is with us*) in it. My German Bible has both as Immanuel.

Vs. 11-22 This is a warning to Isaiah to stand firm. Judah will prove to be utterly faithless and ungrateful to God. King Ahaz, rather than honoring God for this deliverance, will honor and revere the king of Assyria. In spite of the promises that God has made, the people, led by the king, will see deliverance as coming from Assyria. Isaiah is not to lose heart or stop following God during these years of sin and arrogance. This is where you understand Jesus' words from Matthew 13:5 as He quotes Isaiah 6:10.

Vs. 11-15 Isaiah was to fear the Lord and not give into interpreting truth as the people did. Living during Ahaz's ungodliness was going to be hard. Equally as hard would be watching people get swept into Ahaz's beliefs and lifestyle. Those who resisted God would be broken and taken.

Vs. 16-18 Isaiah and his children would be testimonies against the people. Remember too that his children had special names that would be signs to those who believed. Isaiah and his family would hunker down and wait on the Lord.

Vs. 19-22 The people would actually ask Isaiah to *inquire of the dead* on their behalf. God's argument here is, "Why call on the dead when you have a living God?" Since there was no good answer, all that was left for them was judgment.

Isaiah 9

Vs. 1-7 You will recognize these prophecies as having to do with Jesus. This is holy ground. The connection here is that destruction and threat always came upon Israel from the north. The two tribes mentioned here were northern, so they are the peoples who would feel the fear the greatest because they would be hit first.

Everlasting Father could be referring to the king being called a father to the people. This wasn't a heavenly designation, but how those whom he ruled over would regard Jesus.

Just as God gave Isaiah two prophecies dealing with children who would symbolize God's presence and His deliverance, now God is giving Isaiah a view of a coming child who would be the ultimate Savior of Israel. The darkness of the Tribulation would be the ultimate threat against Israel; but then, their ultimate Savior would come. In much of Isaiah, Isaiah did not see the gap between the first and second comings of Jesus, and so he went from the birth and coming of the Messiah to His physical reign on earth. This was obviously confusing during Jesus' time; but then, all they really needed to do was ask Jesus.

Vs. 8-21 The cause of this distress from the north, at that moment, was the northern tribes of Israel being joined to the kingdom and armies of Syria. There are three divisions in this section, all ending with the phrase, *For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still.*

Vs. 8-12 God had been sending word to the northern kingdom for years, most notably through Elijah and Elisha. The people didn't listen. Instead they thought, "Whatever." In v. 10 they just put a good face on things and said they would rebuild. But God promised His unfailing wrath in v. 12.

Vs. 13-17 The people didn't repent or turn to God either. As a result, God wouldn't bless them or allow them to prosper. He allowed them to weaken, to become corrupt and *His hand* was *stretched out still* against them.

Vs. 18-21 Over the years the land was consumed little by little, and the people were miserable. But they didn't learn or turn to God, and God kept His hand stretched out against Israel.

This reminds me of the verse in Romans 5:11, *More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.* Without being reconciled to God, there is no peace and there is no reason to rejoice in God. Jesus makes the difference, but people need to turn to Jesus. That is our message in the harvest.

2 Corinthians 12:1-10

You'll have a great time discussing this in a group. Having read Job and so much of the OT, this is an amazing passage on being a disciple and having the Lord own your life. I guess I'd be tempted to say what a great man Paul was, but the point here is what a great God we serve. Jesus talked about pruning the vines for fruitfulness. As if all the disasters Paul mentioned weren't enough, God allowed Satan to humble Paul.

One note here is that if you go back 14 years before this letter, you go back before Barnabas brought Paul into the work in Antioch in Acts 11. It is also possible that many of Paul's sufferings, beatings, and shipwrecks date back to that time before Acts 11. Paul was loved by the Lord and was a very devoted disciple; but God used Paul, and some of that use entailed abuse. We hear of this great vision, similar in some respects to Daniel, but what came before and after was lots of work and lots of suffering and lots of blessing. I think Paul's model for a disciple was Jesus, as described in Isaiah 53.

Vs. 1-4 Unlike Paul's opponents, Paul couldn't even show what he knew from the vision because he was forbidden by God to express what he had heard. So why talk about the vision in the first place? Here we go.

Vs. 5-7 As a result of this vision and the confidence it gave Paul, God allowed Satan to attack Paul and give him a permanent disability. This is very similar to Job. So the evidence that Paul had been honored by God was a disability brought on by a successful spiritual attack. What a thing to share. I'm sure the super-apostles didn't think this was something to share with others.

Vs. 8-10 Not only that, God didn't answer Paul's prayer. So how great an apostle was Paul if God didn't answer his prayer? How great a man was Job? They might be in the same category. Imagine finding your strength in *weakness*, because your weakness drives you to Christ and to His power. And then imagine being OK with that; I mean, really at peace with the disability from Satan and the weakness because you realize these are why you know *the power of Christ*. I'm sure this caught the false apostles off guard. After the reading of this section of the letter, I'll bet the false apostles woke up the next morning limping, saying, "Look what God allowed to happen to me because I'm so great."

I remember being a very little kid and my mother asking me what position I wanted to play if I was a baseball player. I said I wanted to be the batter. I understood much later that you had to work in the field before you earned the right to come up to the plate. I need to work a lot more in the harvest following Christ. It is the only place to learn the closeness of the Savior.

Psalm 55

The sense of betrayal in this psalm is very strong. It is hard to say when David experienced this. It might have been in his early years running from Saul. It would have been convenient for some of his friends to have turned their backs on David, not only to gain the position that David left vacant in the army, but also in feeding Saul information to gain status and show their allegiance to Saul. On the other hand, it could also be that this is referring to the time when David ran from Absalom. The mention of going to the house of God in v. 14 might suggest that the ark of the covenant was already in Jerusalem. Who knows, but we know that David faced betrayal and knew where he could pour out his heart.

Vs. 1-3 In David's cry for mercy, not only was he emotionally restless, but his enemies were angry with him and bearing old offenses. This would fit the situation with Absalom.

Vs. 4-8 If it was Absalom who was seeking David, David's old sins would be nagging at him too. The desire to escape and just flee would be natural. Even with David's past sins, he understood he could go to the Lord and would be accepted and receive refuge.

Vs. 9-11 This prayer could have applied to David's earlier flight as well as to his later flight. As a result of both events, Israel was weakened. Since the city is mentioned, it must be Jerusalem and this could point to Absalom's takeover.

Vs. 12-15 The friend here could either be Absalom in a figurative, but deeply emotional sense, or Ahithophel, David's close advisor. Both of these men had deep grudges against David, and unfortunately, rightly so. Yet, harboring hate and not extending forgiveness is an affront to God Himself. Regardless of the reasons for our pain, we are told to forgive.

V. 13 This looks like something Jesus could have experienced.

Vs. 16-19 David was a veteran of calling out to God and receiving God's deliverance. He was broken and knew how to present his heart and wait on God's answer.

Vs. 20-21 Again, this could have been either Absalom or Ahithophel. Probably as David thought of those last conversations before all of the betrayal came to light, he thought of how he had not suspected their brewing hatred for him.

V. 22 This looks like the lines for a very sweet song, yet behind this thought there is emotional and relational bitterness woven into the verse. Few things we endure are harder than relational betrayals. Even in Job, the most dangerous threat came through the accusations and pressure from his friends.

V. 23 This is the final appeal to God. David knew there would be judgment, but David would concentrate on trusting in the Lord.

Proverbs 23:4-5

Amen. The image of the eagle here adds a sense of certainty to what the writer is saying. The eagle was very strong and fast, and in this context, almost unstoppable. Earthly wealth is fleeting and doesn't deliver on what it promises. Trusting in the Lord and seeking Him is what brings real wealth in heaven, and we have confidence and strength on earth as we follow in the harvest.

SEPTEMBER 12

Isaiah 10-11

Isaiah 10

Vs. 1-4 are still talking about the sin and guilt of the northern kingdom. Notice the refrain, *For all this his anger has not turned away, and his hand is stretched out still*. That connects this to what we read yesterday. Also, just for trivia, notice vs. 1 & 2. Verse 1 identifies the oppressors. Verse 2 identifies their motives with the preposition *to* and then shows the results of their actions marked by *that*.

Vs. 5-11 In God's wisdom and purpose He uses the arrogance of the Assyrians, this lost, godless nation, to punish godless Israel.

Vs. 12-14 There would be an aspect of Assyria's victories that should have shown them that God was helping them. This would be an opportunity (like Pharaoh had) to come closer to the true God. But they attributed their victories to their own prowess. After God used them, He would judge them for their arrogance, but not until they railed against God Himself.

Vs. 15-19 God says how He would chasten Assyria before they could attack Jerusalem. We have read the account of this in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles, and soon we will see it again in Isaiah 36-37. That this event is mentioned three times in the Bible points to its significance.

Vs. 16-18 In one night God killed 185,000 soldiers. This shows us that the physical means was a sudden sickness, like a plague, brought on by the angel of the Lord.

V. 19 The survivors who returned to Assyria were so few that a child could count them.

Vs. 20-23 This is the remnant God will save from the northern kingdom. During Hezekiah's revival, he invited people from the northern kingdom to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. All those who came south survived. Paul quotes v. 22 in Romans 9:27, showing that Israel would be punished, but that a remnant would be saved.

Vs. 24-27 God compares this to how He saved Israel from Egypt. In light of all of this prophecy, the people of Judah, and Jerusalem in particular, should trust the Lord. This is exactly what happened when Rabshakeh stood outside Jerusalem in 2 Kings 18:27. The people kept silent and trusted the Lord by obeying Hezekiah's command.

Vs. 28-34 This is God's prophetic description of His judgment of Assyria.

Isaiah 11

Based on this coming miraculous deliverance and the judgment God is about to bring on Israel and its enemies, God gave Isaiah a vision of the ultimate deliverance at the close of the age when

the Messiah would reign and bring judgment to the earth. This is one of those great portions of prophecy, so take time reading this and making observations.

Vs. 1-9 This is the Messiah and the poetic tenor of His reign. These are great verses talking about Jesus. This is the Branch we talked about earlier. The Hebrew word for branch is "nasar," and it is where they got the name Nazareth.

V. 1 Even though there will only be a remnant, or stump, of Israel left, the Branch will still come forth and bear fruit. In talking about the necessity of His own death, Jesus said this in John 12:24, *Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*

V. 4 This is the justice the Lord will bring. There are some allusions to other portions of Scripture. Do you recognize them?

Vs. 6-9 This is the peace that He will bring. Some of those verses about the created world in Romans 8 make sense in this light. To a degree, things will revert back to a pre-fallen world. But those people born during the Millennial Kingdom will still have the fallen heart of man and will need to come to the very visible Jesus in faith and repentance. It may be a near perfect world under the Messiah, but Satan will still find hearts ready for rebellion when he begins his revolt after the 1000 years.

V. 10 Notice the phrase, *In that day*. Jerusalem will become the center of the earth, and Jesus will be the king reigning in the temple. This verse is quoted in Romans 15:12.

Vs. 11-16 In that final day of the Tribulation, the Jews will be gathered from every nation where they have been hiding and scattered during the Tribulation. *And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.* (Matt. 24:31)

For us as disciples, the coming kingdom, judgment, and blessing of God should always be before us. In the Lord's Prayer, the attitude behind all of our praying is to remember that His kingdom is coming. As we see here, however, His coming is always associated with the distress of this present darkness. He will be light and salvation for those who know Him, but He will be the opposite for those who don't. Our job is to herald His salvation and His coming. This morning I was reading that Jesus told His disciples to preach as they went saying, *The kingdom of heaven is at hand*. It's still a good message and it is essential to the gospel.

2 Corinthians 12:11-21

Vs. 11-13 When Paul said he was nothing, he meant it. Yet, what *God* did with Paul was the verification that he was sent by God; i.e., an apostle. We have no idea all of the miracles that Paul did in Corinth.

V. 13 This is a multidirectional jab.

Vs. 14-18 It seems so unfair that Paul should have to write this, but for the sake of the health of the church, to ward off the false teachers, Paul kept dealing with the situation. Even in Paul working with the Corinthians in a blameless fashion, the super-apostles found a way to twist his motives. Paul knew another visit was necessary.

Vs. 19-21 Paul makes the point here of saying that his goal was not to defend his apostleship, but to help them grow in Christ. Paul has done surgery on their sickness, not to exalt himself or defend himself, but to get the church back in love with their Lord. In Paul's final words here, it looks like the issue he addressed at the end of 1 Corinthians 6 still hadn't been corrected. Thankfully we know there was a happy ending, because the letter to the Romans was written on Paul's next visit to Corinth. Reading between the lines in Romans 16, Corinth seems at peace.

As disciples, with the amazing salvation that is offered to the world, and with the blessing of Christ's coming kingdom, you'd think that "church" might be easier, since the church is the group that's supposed to get the job done on earth in the harvest. Still, the church is what the Lord has decided; and it is our task as disciples, not to "do church," but to make church about making disciples in the harvest, following Jesus. True disciples are in love with their Lord and follow Him into the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. Get a group of those kind of disciples together, and maybe you'll have a great "church."

Psalm 56

This again was in those early days of running from Saul. Some of the desperation here might have been self-inflicted, since David never consulted God before he sought refuge in Gath. It just seemed like a good idea. In God's mercy, David escaped.

Vs. 1-4 David was learning some hard lessons. The son-in-law of the king was being pursued to be killed by the king. David obviously was beside himself, running first to the priests and lying, and then running to the king of Gath and lying. Like all of us, it took David time to settle his heart and go to the Lord.

Vs. 5-7 Like Job, David knew there would be justice, yet he still had to run for his life.

Vs. 8-11 David was entering into a 10-year education in waiting on the Lord. These verses are a very gutty and faith-driven declaration of what God meant to David. The distress was making David go to the Lord.

Vs. 12-13 David had been anointed by Samuel as a boy of 12 or 13. This reality was beginning to settle in. God had rescued him from Saul and from the king of Gath. David was realizing that the Lord had saved him and wanted him to walk before God, so David had made vows of trust and praise. He would learn over and over again to fulfill those vows of praise.

Proverbs 23:6-8

I think I've experienced something like this, even among believers. Better to live a simple life with simple people whose hearts are with you in the harvest. Trying to build things God doesn't want built and do things God doesn't want done creates a lot of insincerity.

SEPTEMBER 13

Isaiah 12-14

In Isaiah, it seems like every day we bump into a familiar, important passage of Scripture. Today is no exception. Hang on to your hat. The chapters we'll read today get interpreted differently by different men, so I'll suggest something that makes sense to me and seems to be in the mainstream.

Isaiah 12

Vs. 1-6 This is the celebration of God's salvation. When you think of how the Lord prunes us or disciplines us, the purpose is for our good. As a result of listening to Him and waiting on Him, He puts praise and testimony in our mouths and hearts. We don't have to "formulate" joy. He gives it in a memorable, real way.

I'm sure there was joy in Jerusalem as God destroyed the Assyrian army. There will also be joy in Jerusalem as Jesus returns in that crucial moment at the end of the Tribulation and establishes His kingdom on the earth. It is built into His eternal plan that He returns to Jerusalem, Zion. It is no accident that the nations will hate this city.

V. 4 Notice that *in that day* divides the chapter into two parts. So what is the difference in these sections?

Notice that there is a witness to the world in what happens here. God never loses sight that all this is being done for the salvation of mankind, Jew and Gentile.

V. 6 is a key verse. Two important things are mentioned here. First, Zion is focused upon. That will be important in the chapters that follow. Second, Zion is great only because of God's presence in it. You might know the song, "Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion city of our God." Although the people of Jerusalem and Judah abused this reality, thinking they could sin and God would still protect them because He claimed Jerusalem as His city, Zion was, and still is, the city of God. Woe to the nation that threatens or destroys Zion. We have already seen what happened to Assyria when they threatened Jerusalem. Now we'll see what happens to another nation.

Isaiah 13

V. 1 It gives some commentators fits because Babylon is mentioned here. I would suggest that although the events were still future, Babylon is mentioned here because they are the ones who would finally destroy Jerusalem.

Vs. 2-13 This description of the coming judgment of God begins with God's future wrath in the end times, against the nations that come to destroy Jerusalem before the battle of Armageddon. Look for all the images that are very "last day." You'll be surprised what you find. You would think you were reading the Olivet Discourse or the book of Revelation. The seven years of *the day of the Lord* will make any distress we're experiencing on earth now look like a picnic. Financial worries? As the Larry Norman song says, "A piece of bread could buy a bag of gold." Wars and natural disasters will seem small when the very physics of the earth and universe are shaken.

V. 12 According to the book of Revelation (6:8, 8:7, 9:18), possibly two-thirds of the earth's population will be lost in all of the judgments. Today we have 7 billion people. It is hard to say that people would be rare if there were still two billion, but that might be a high estimate of how many will be left when the Lord returns. We only know of how many people die in a given catastrophic event, not in the aftermath. Jesus Himself said in Matthew 24:22 that at the close of the age before He returned, *And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.* It seems that at that time, those who are left will just be hanging on by their fingertips.

Vs. 14-16 seem to be aiming lower at Babylon itself. One important reference here that shows that this is the nation of Babylon that destroyed Jerusalem, and not some earlier version of Babylon that the Assyrians destroyed, is the reference to dashing the infants in pieces. The Babylonians did that when they destroyed Jerusalem. This punishment is foretold in Psalm 137:8-9, which at this point in Israel's history, is also still future.

Vs. 17-22 The Medes took ownership of the palace and city of Babylon. After Daniel 6, you seldom hear of the city. Over generations, the Medes let it die and it became a desert ruin, as it is today. It didn't happen immediately, but God's punishment on the city Babylon came true. It was poetic justice. They destroyed Jerusalem, and the city of Babylon boasted having one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Jerusalem still exists today; Babylon doesn't. One interesting note is to look at what Nebuchadnezzar was saying in Daniel 4:30, when God temporarily took the image of God from him.

V. 19 When it says that Babylon is the glory of kingdoms, we tend to pass that off as an idle boast. When you read the prophecy of the nations in Daniel 2:37-39, God Himself says that Nebuchadnezzar was the golden head and that all the empires that were to come after Babylon would be inferior to it (until you get to the Rock). God Himself thought highly of Babylon. (He also used Babylon greatly for His purposes.) God saved His people in Babylon. (Egypt also had a

special place with God because they hosted Israel.) And, of all the rulers we get to know, it appears possible that Nebuchadnezzar might have become a worshipper of Yahweh.

Isaiah 14

Here we go.

Vs. 1-4 give the people hope for their future exile and enslavement in Babylon. This is one of the purposes of prophecy, allowing the people to know that the same God who ordained their punishment was promising their restoration.

A good question here is the identity of this king of Babylon in v. 4. There was a judgment against Nebuchadnezzar. God judged him for seven years. Belshazzar was the king of Babylon who was severely humbled and judged in Daniel 5. But as we know in Scripture and will see in v. 12, standing behind the pride and arrogance of this human government is another government and a being who says that human nations have all been delivered to him. So in the descriptions that follow, when the height of arrogance is described, Satan is described. What we are reading then will have an application to the human and spiritual kings of Babylon.

Vs. 5-11 I would say that these verses could and probably do apply to the earthly and spiritual rulers of Babylon. If so, this would also remove the misconception that Satan will rule in hell. He will be punished and helpless just like those he worked to corrupt.

Vs. 12-17 I think this is exclusively Satan. Although the description in vs. 12-14 is poetic, many people believe this is a description of Satan's actions and the pride that brought him into rebellion and judgment. Having been ordained to serve mankind, Lucifer saw himself as a ruler, wanting to be to mankind what God is to the realm of the angels. In 1 Timothy 3:6, Paul says conceit brought Satan into condemnation.

Vs. 18-21 This seems to say that this ruler will have a very "abnormal" reception into living death. The deceiver will be gloated at in his helplessness.

Vs. 22-25 Here, God declares that His wrath against Babylon and Assyria is totally certain.

Vs. 26-27 Notice here that now God is talking about the whole world and His purpose for the culmination of human history.

Vs. 28-32 The neighbors of Jerusalem would rejoice at the death of King Ahaz, as they would over the destruction of Jerusalem later. But God will pronounce judgment against the neighbors and raise Jerusalem from the rubble and bring His people back. Zion is still God's possession.

God is concerned for all people. Israel here is being shown in its disobedience. In a sense, they are representing all people, and we are being shown the power of sin in them resisting and rebelling against God. When you see all the effort God is making in Isaiah to warn and guide His people, we can imagine that God is doing that every day with people on this planet. As followers of Christ in this harvest, our job is to follow the Spirit's leading and be available to interact with people. We should anticipate that there are people we bump into every day with whom God is working and preparing to say "yes" to the offer of forgiveness in our Lord.

2 Corinthians 13

Our last day in 2 Corinthians.

Vs. 1-4 It appears that Paul was coming to Corinth to hold court. You sort of get the idea that some of the problems mentioned in 1 Corinthians were not yet taken care of.

V. 1 He reminds them that *two or three witnesses* are required to back up a charge against someone. Apparently there were some charges that might have to be made.

V. 3 *He is not weak in dealing with you* was evidenced by God actually removing people who had violated the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11. Paul knew that if he (Paul) needed to show spiritual power, God would allow him to do it.

V. 4 Paul shows that this principle of strength being shown first in *weakness* originated in Jesus Himself. I'll bet the super-apostles didn't like that illustration. After reading this and all of what Paul has said, I don't feel that bad about being beaten up in ministry.

Vs. 5-10 Paul asks them to honestly search their own hearts. This testing was also mentioned in 1 Corinthians 11, regarding Christians who were desecrating the Lord's Supper.

V. 5 I think the test is twofold here. Were they actually believers? And if so, were they following? While being saved is mandatory for knowing Christ, abiding in Him and following Him, with the intentional mindset that He is in us, is optional. Abiding in Christ is not optional for a disciple in love with Jesus, though it will always take work to allow this truth to control our minds. *Already you are clean because of the word that I have spoken to you.* ⁴*Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.* (John 15:3-4)

Vs. 6-8 The Corinthians were having a hard time realizing that Paul & Co. were dedicated to Christ and to making disciples. This wasn't about Paul proving himself, but having the Corinthians follow the Lord as lovers of Christ and as dedicated disciples.

Vs. 9-10 At this point, restoration was still necessary in Corinth between the people and God. Paul was hoping that this letter would spur them on to take care of their own problems. The good news is that it seems that the Corinthians, for a time, pulled things together. Paul wrote Romans on this future visit to Corinth some time before Acts 21, and in the letter Paul seems at peace. You get this sense of peace from chapter greetings he includes in Romans 16.

Vs. 11-14 Even in taking care of their internal problems, they were to aim at restoration and to live in the love and peace of God.

So, thinking about 2 Corinthians, what things come to mind when you think of Paul as a disciple? How does this letter to the Corinthians help refine and focus what it means for you to follow Christ in the harvest, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples? One thing that hits me is that Paul's trials benefited him, the Corinthians, and us. I need to understand that the things the Lord takes me through are not just for me; they are for others. And ultimately, God works things for good for His plan of redemption in the harvest.

Psalm 57

This looks like it would have been a beautiful song.

David was on the run. Notice the references to taking refuge in God and also the mentions of God's *steadfast love*.

Vs. 1-3 In all of this trial and crying out, David understood God had a purpose for him. That's a good thing to remember when you are faced with very dark times for a long time.

Vs. 4-5 Notice how David mentions the threat and then suddenly he mentions how high and *exalted* God is.

Vs. 6-11 This is the same kind of pattern as 4-5. Verse 6 is the challenge, but the rest of the verses are a declaration of David's faith, ending with a repeating of v. 5.

V. 9 In light of God's salvation, it is our privilege and duty to proclaim His deliverance. The word *nations* is the same word that means peoples or Gentiles. There is a redemptive message here, and a redemptive purpose in God putting David through all of this.

How much more should we, who know Christ, share the good news of His salvation with others?

Psalm 40:9-10 *I have told the glad news of deliverance in the great congregation; behold, I have not restrained my lips, as you know, O LORD. ¹⁰I have not hidden your deliverance within my heart; I have spoken of your faithfulness and your salvation; I have not concealed your steadfast love and your faithfulness from the great congregation.*

But as David learned over and over, God kept him in his distress, giving him small deliverances over the ten years he ran from Saul. The storm went on, but God taught David to praise Him in the storm.

Proverbs 23:9-11

These are two separate “words” of wisdom.

V. 9 This is either trying to debate with a fool or casting your pearls before swine, or any degree in between.

Vs. 10-11 Moving a landmark was the same as stealing land, and it looks like this specific act of stealing was toward a poor person, a widow or orphans. God may not judge immediately, but He will judge.

SEPTEMBER 14

Today you begin Galatians. Encourage yourself with some kind of treat. 2 Corinthians was the last long New Testament letter for a while. For a while now we'll read through some smaller but important letters. On the other hand, the next few Old Testament books will be long and weighty. This again is the joy of reading The One Year Bible. The Spirit can use the different parts of the Word to keep us fresh. And since we're doing this together we can share what the Spirit brings to heart. And don't forget, chocolate helps too.

Isaiah 15-18

From this point on it will be common to have judgments and prophecies aimed at the nations surrounding Judah. They hated Israel. They not only attacked their towns, but often joined with others against Israel. They rejoiced when Jerusalem was destroyed. The situation today of Israel being hated by its neighbors is nothing new. It was just as true back then. You could say they started it by taking over Canaan, but actually that was God's idea. He's the one who decreed the change in ownership because of the evil of those who lived there. In the final event, the real animosity is caused on a spiritual level, because Israel was and is God's instrument of bringing His redemptive purpose in life, to completion. The hatred of man for God needs a symbol and object, so we have Israel. I was reading this morning what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman in John 4:22, *You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews*. Like it or fight against it, but it is true all the same and the Son of God said so.

Isaiah 15

Vs. 1-9 This describes what will happen when Assyria wipes out Moab. After these wars and empires, you never hear of many of these people groups again.

V. 5 I'm not sure why God/Isaiah was saddened by this, other than that Moab was descended from Lot. It could be that this attack by Assyria, and being taken away in exile, would lead to the extinction of Moab.

Isaiah 16

Vs. 1-5 This is an offer for Moab to join Israel and take refuge in Zion. Jerusalem would be the only place that wouldn't be destroyed, but who would believe that? Because of the wording of the offer they were being given a chance to know the *steadfast love* of the Lord.

Vs. 6-14 So, as you read, can you see what it is that kept Moab from accepting this amazing offer? Those three years would have probably been just before the Lord destroyed the army of the Assyrians. There is no Moab after the Assyrians and Babylonians cleaned house. If Moab was saved at all, they were saved in one woman, Ruth, who gave herself to worship Yahweh and became a great ancestor of Jesus.

Isaiah 17

Vs. 1-3 This is destruction for Syria (and the northern kingdom). The glory of the children of Israel might be negative here since the northern kingdom had lost all of its glory. Notice that it doesn't say Damascus will be a heap of ruins forever. It will only be during this time of Assyrian domination. Some ancient cities have layers of ruins, having been destroyed and rebuilt several times. It was also common to rebuild a city on a different, nearby location. Modern Ephesus is two miles from the New Testament location, and in Jesus' time there was an old and new Jericho about two miles apart. I think today if they had to rebuild New Orleans, they'd choose higher ground.

Vs. 4-14 Notice the repetition of *in that day*. At one time, Damascus was ruled by Israel, and Israel and Syria had a very good relationship during the time of David and Solomon. You could imagine that there was the knowledge of Yahweh in Damascus, but just as in the northern kingdom, that knowledge was lost.

Isaiah 18

Vs. 1-6 The Ethiopians were called on as mercenaries to help when needed. King Asa faced an army like this. Here, they are being told to stay out of these battles or they would become food for the local wildlife.

V. 7 It is interesting that God has a soft spot for the Ethiopians and for the Egyptians. It is not an accident that the first Gentile we know of who was saved in Acts was an official from Ethiopia.

It is interesting as we read this to see that the knowledge of God extended to many nations. God has some nations that He will welcome because of their relationship to Israel. God's plan of redemption is very intricate and has some interesting surprises. He is working in places and in ways that would surprise us. Even in countries that are hostile to the gospel, people still recognize that followers of Christ can be trusted where their fellow religious brothers are prone to graft and dishonesty.

Galatians 1

Galatians has been called the cornerstone of the Reformation, because it was the short and clear declaration that salvation was by grace through faith alone. Luther called Galatians his wife. ([Bible Knowledge Commentary-NT](#), p. 587)

Galatians is Paul's first letter to a church, and it is one of the most shocking. They were quickly being persuaded to associate grace in Christ with acceptance through works. In Galatians we get some biographical information on Paul that is not in Acts. We get some inside information on meetings we don't see in Acts. And all of this comes as a result of Christians from the circumcision party in Jerusalem, who took it upon themselves to corrupt what Paul was teaching. Opposition to Paul, within the believing church in Jerusalem, apparently began very early. Church conflict, don't you love it? But God uses it. Again, as a result of conflict, we are given the letter that broke the church out of the dark ages. And again, we find Paul having to defend himself.

For the disciple in the harvest and those groups of disciples working together (churches) in the harvest, Galatians simplifies our mission from age to age and from culture to culture. We are to present salvation as by grace through faith in Christ alone. Forms and traditions serve the church

in a particular culture or generation; but often our traditions morph into laws that make us right before God, if we do them, and wrong before Him if we don't do things a certain way. This morning I read about Jesus rebuking the Pharisees, "*You leave the commandment of God and hold to the tradition of men.*" The commandment of God for us is very simple. It involves being a disciple in the harvest, reaching the lost, making disciples with a very simple, trans-cultural message, always remembering 1 Corinthians 9:19ff. A disciple should be able to move from one culture to the next, one language to the next, with "no bag for his journey." The disciple doesn't need "baggage." He carries with him a very simple message he can preach from whatever Bible is available, that we are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The harvest isn't that hard, but there are always groups that make it difficult.

Galatians 1

Vs. 1-3 Notice how Paul immediately begins defending his apostleship against the Jewish Christians who were turning the church in Galatia against Paul and what he taught.

Vs. 4-5 There are no wasted words here. Jesus gave Himself. That's enough, right? The present evil age brings to mind immediately the spiritual resistance to the truth of the gospel, in this case, the forces behind these "well meaning" Jewish Christians.

Vs. 6-9 There is no friendly transition here. Paul addressed the problem immediately. While this is unique for Paul, it isn't the only example. Look at 1 Timothy 1:3. It is equally as shocking. Something had ripped the church in Ephesus apart, and Timothy was on his way there to do emergency surgery. Here, the church was also in deep trouble.

This seems to connect to Paul's words against the Jewish super-apostles in Corinth, where he says that Satan presents himself as an angel of light. (2 Cor. 11:14) Interestingly, it would be years later that Paul would write 2 Corinthians. Paul was in this conflict his entire ministry. That was the price of following Christ in the harvest during that time.

Notice that Paul is repeating what he had already told the Galatians while he was there the first time. No one should be allowed to change the message of the gospel. Remember 2 Corinthians 11:4. *For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough.*

So, what is the gospel? I think even among believers it is kind of fuzzy. But the issues will get clarified in this letter.

V. 10 The charge against Paul by the legalistic Christians was that the message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone was "easy believe-ism." It was watered down to win approval. If you put the bar on the ground, everyone can walk over it and get into the church. The Jewish Christians wanted to "raise the bar" and make believers, Jews and Gentiles, have to do something that showed they really believed and were really following Christ.

Paul is saying that what he just said in 6-9 were not the words of a man who was interested in winning the approval of anyone other than God. No wonder Paul got all those beatings. But in a manner of speaking, if you look at how Jesus talked to the Pharisees, you could say that His mouth got Him killed. The reality is that some truth is worth going to the wall for. Or as Luther said as a result of the message of Galatians, "Here I stand. I can do no other."

Vs. 11-12 This is something we don't "see" in Acts. Paul was spoken to by the Lord and given his instruction and theological re-training. Opponents were saying Paul got his information from a bad source. Who knows where they said he got it from, maybe the apostles Thomas or Simon the Zealot. Notice what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:3, he *received* this information. Later Paul says that everyone was preaching the same thing. Here we see where Paul received his

information: from Jesus Himself. Also look at 1 Corinthians 11:23. Even the Lord's Supper was given to him personally from Jesus and from no other apostle.

Vs. 13-17 Do you see where Paul is defending his apostleship? He is showing he is as good, on a human level, as his opponents. If you want to read some hard words from Paul on this subject, read Philippians 3:1-6. But also, notice after those verses in Philippians, we have some of the greatest verses in the Bible.

Paul totally embraced the fact that God chose and called him to this ministry, along with the good, bad and ugly of his past. It was all incorporated into God's planning and timing.

Vs. 18-19 We have talked about this in Acts. Apparently Luke didn't mention that Paul left Damascus for three years, returned to Damascus, fled the city for Jerusalem and then met Peter. Acts 9:25 mentions that Paul had disciples who helped him escape, suggesting that some amount of time had passed since his conversion.

Vs. 20-24 Notice that Paul is concerned here also about his connection with Jerusalem and Judea. Paul is trying to show that his message wasn't given to him by some group, but rather by Jesus Himself. It was probably the case that his opponents were linking Paul's teaching to some person or group. It's kind of funny because critics always look for the influences on a person's views and beliefs. In the early 1900s there was a critical look at Paul as being a very conservatively influenced, pharisaical Jewish convert. Paul was way too "legalistic" for the liberals. J. Greshem Machen wrote a book to refute all of this liberal criticism called, The Origin of Paul's Religion. Oddly, Machen came to the same conclusion that Paul is making here. It all came from Jesus Himself, and everything Paul teaches is found in Jesus' teaching.

Notice in v. 24 that all the apostles glorified God because of Paul. They saw in him the grace of God and the truth of God. Paul didn't make himself. God made him. Paul may have been given great revelation, but he paid a price that no one would envy. He was given a physical disability from Satan, and Paul suffered like no other apostle we know of. And was Paul honored? Only among his closest circle of friends.

One discouraging thing in following Christ is dealing with the resistance and differences of working with other believers and churches. This is sort of a rite of passage for many people that proves their commitment to following Christ. There is no other way besides the church and working with others. God doesn't commission us to the harvest to become loners. The core of disciple-making is equipping others and working together to reach others for Christ. It is a process that brings maturity, keeping our focus on the harvest and learning how to find like-minded people with whom we can work. It is definitely not for the weak of heart. What we see in all of Paul's struggling is a solid commitment to make the church effective and useful for the Master, as we glorify the Father by bearing much fruit, so proving that we are disciples of our Lord.

Psalm 58

Vs. 1-5 This is an ode to the wicked. David is thinking of those who are after him unjustly. In v. 1, *gods* could be translated mighty ones, or rulers who thought of themselves as untouchable.

Vs. 6-9 This is the psalmist's inspired wish to see the wicked judged.

Vs. 10-11 I don't identify with v. 10, but I love v. 11. If you think of the wreckage that Saul and his followers were responsible for, the killing of a town of priests and their families, v. 10 is a call for them to be judged according to their own violence.

Proverbs 23:12

It's easy to say "amen" to this and go on, but I really think it is a command to us to sweat and strain to gain wisdom and knowledge. We give it mental assent, but really don't get it. On the

“disciples following Jesus” front we do this all the time, and therein is our problem. Thinking is not doing. The harvest doesn’t get in the barn by force of thought. You have to go into the harvest and get it. Here is something that Paul told Timothy in the context of following Christ. *Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.* (1 Tim. 4:15) In other words Paul is saying, “don’t just say, ‘yeah, I know, OK.’ You need to sweat and strain.” (in the joy and peace and grace and strength of the Lord, of course ☺)

SEPTEMBER 15

Isaiah 19-21

Isaiah 19

This is the coming war against Egypt. Everyone went to Egypt for help, but the truth is that Egypt never attained the power they had before they mistreated Israel and God broke them through Moses. They couldn't help.

Vs. 1-4 God is giving them over to a fierce king. I don’t know what Assyria did to Egypt, but after Nebuchadnezzar was done with them they were pretty much like what we see of Egypt today.

Vs. 5-10 Their confidence and economy was in their water and fertility, and the gods thereof.

Vs. 11-15 Their pride in their wisdom and leadership would also fail.

Vs. 16-25 Now tell me you’re not amazed at this. I have a couple of thoughts. First, immediately after these pronouncements of judgment, God shows how His grace will overflow for Egypt. Second, who is this written for? Did Egypt actually read this? Do they know about this today? Maybe, but primarily it was for Israel to know not to depend on Egypt in this war with Assyria, and then to know that God would still show faithfulness and blessing for the “cup of water” they gave to Israel long ago. When Jesus says that a person who lends aid will by no means lose his reward, He really means it.

Notice the repetition of *in that day*. These are very obvious predictions for the time of Jesus’ 1000-year reign on earth. Often we get hung on the Israel-church comparison regarding the end times, some people thinking that there will be no 1000-year reign because Israel failed and the church was given their blessings. Not only is that a poor understanding of the church and Israel, but it also fails to consider prophecies like these that are linked to Israel being blessed for those 1000 years and having its neighbors receive God's blessing.

Notice too that Assyria will be blessed. I have no clue why this is. The only thing that comes to mind is that the garden, the first home of mankind, if you will, was where the Euphrates and Tigris were close together. That would be the region of Assyria. That entire section of country, from the headwaters of these rivers down to Babylon, has been important in most of the Bible. At the birth of Jesus, this region is where the wise men came from. Anyway, who knows, but God says Assyria (Iraq) will be blessed by God. (Nineveh was the capital of Assyria and is in northern Iraq near the city of Mosul. The ruins of Babylon are also in Iraq.)

Isaiah 20

Not too many people know about this chapter. It is an object lesson to teach Israel not to depend on Egypt for saving help. When Assyria took Ashdod, a city directly west of Jerusalem on the coast, the people were probably thinking that Egypt would rise up and run up the coast and help.

Isaiah was ordered by God to walk around bottomless for three years, as a shocking sign to the people that as Isaiah was walking naked, they would see Egyptian captives being led up the coastal highway naked and humiliated by the Assyrians as a sign to others not to stand against Assyria.

Years later the people following kings Jehoiakim and Zedekiah would make the same mistake in depending on the Egyptians against the Babylonians. Egypt was defeated again.

So much for the glamour of being an important prophet in God's work. I'm sure this passage was well known to Paul as he yielded his life to Christ to follow Him in the harvest. And God did "humiliate" Paul often, but for His glory and to bear much fruit. As disciples in the harvest we have to be willing to yield up our lives too. And sometimes God uses us for His glory by allowing us to be humiliated.

Isaiah 21

V. 1 These visions have to do with the nations east of Jerusalem.

Vs. 2-10 Now Assyria did capture Babylon, but there is something strange in this vision. The Medes/Persians were the ones who captured Babylon in Daniel 5. Verse 4 would seem like the drunken party that was going on the night Babylon was taken. But the words *fallen, fallen is Babylon*, in v. 9 are repeated twice in Revelation 14:8 and 18:2. I think this vision sounds a little apocalyptic.

Vs. 11-12 Dumah is apparently Edom, the descendants of Esau.

Vs. 13-17 This is a warning to the clans of nomads living in Arabia. No one would be safe from Assyria except those who were living in Zion. That's the point of all of this. The place to have found shelter in this storm was in the presence of God. Ironically, Jerusalem didn't seem like a good place to hide. If you didn't like Israel you wouldn't want to go there. And if you were in a city under siege, you were trapped. The Assyrians thought they were threatening a walled city, but they were challenging the God, who at that time, was dwelling in Zion among the godly.

Ironically, during the final drama on earth, the safest place to be will be following Jesus, even though the wrath of man and hell will be directed at the followers of Christ. It is because Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. That is a great message and comfort as we go forward in the harvest.

Galatians 2:1-16

Vs. 1-2 This visit wasn't the Jerusalem council of Acts 15, but the famine visit mentioned in Acts 11:27-30. Imagine - fourteen years happened in there somewhere.

You will notice in Paul's writing that there is a tension regarding the authority in Jerusalem. I don't think Paul had a problem with Peter and the boys, as much as the false teaching that was coming from the circumcision party of the church in Jerusalem. This faction claimed that the "authorities," the Twelve, encouraged circumcision and other practices. It could be that Paul is also resisting an attempt by some Christians to create a church hierarchy of authority with heroes, bosses, costumes and action figures.

V. 2 Paul did submit his teaching for review by the disciples/apostles.

V. 3 This was telling. Titus was an uncircumcised full-blooded Greek, and no pressure was put on him to be circumcised. By the way, the reason Paul circumcised Timothy, and not Titus, was that Paul did a lot of evangelistic work in synagogues. Timothy had a Jewish mother and would be allowed into a synagogue, but Titus was fully Greek and would never have been allowed in a synagogue. Paul circumcised Timothy in order not to give offense to unbelieving Jews in synagogues and therefore to have an open door for the gospel. (1 Cor. 9:19ff)

Vs. 4-5 Here was the conflict. There were false brothers and there were the true brothers, who included Paul, Barnabas, Titus and the Twelve. The "we" means the other apostles were also against these legalistic Christians.

Vs. 6-10 Paul and Barnabas got the seal of approval, even though Paul didn't feel like he needed it, having gotten everything from Jesus. Humbling himself like this was a good way for Paul to build unity and peace.

Even though Paul had been a Pharisee and persecutor of the church, these apostles who were of the Twelve who had followed Jesus accepted Paul. What leveled the playing field wasn't just genuine faith. By this time Paul was a very scarred and battered follower of Christ. By this time Paul already had received several of those 40 lashes minus one and he had had some of those shipwrecks. Paul didn't look like a rich, prissy Pharisee anymore. He looked like a veteran, battle-worn follower of Christ.

Vs. 11-16 We definitely don't have this in Acts. It probably happened sometime just after Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem, and therefore, before the Jerusalem council in Acts 15. I've read that this might not have happened at once, but over the space of a few days. These men from Jerusalem brought fear and pressure with them, and eventually Peter and Barnabas were lured into separating themselves from the Gentile believers.

Notice that above all of this action, God supervised the situation into existence. He taught Peter and Barnabas; He exposed the political pressures and the men who came from James, and God gave us an amazing passage of Scripture that probably knocked Martin Luther right out of his sandals. The record of this event, even of Paul's courage, was a world changer if you consider the reformation a world-changing event.

I feel bad for Peter in this, but Peter was now an even humbler guy. I'll bet he smiled knowing that Jesus had put him in this position. As disciples, we need to have a quick response to our failures. We know that the Lord knew about them and allowed us to stumble and to learn from them. That is how we realize how much we need Him. And the Lord keeps working behind the scenes, doing all sorts of stuff we might not even know about. We need to learn the lesson, learn humility, then just chuckle at the fun Jesus just had with us and get back into the harvest.

Psalm 59

This could have been subtitled, "Howling like dogs." I like the German, "Howling like the hounds."

The event was when Saul sent to get David at his house and kill him. The soldiers must have been prowling in the shadows. What is interesting to me, knowing the story, is that David was very scared and did some really desperate stuff, from lying to the priests and getting them killed, to going to Gath for refuge where he did the crazy man act to get away. This is written some time later and David can see, in retrospect, that God had saved him, not he himself.

Vs. 1-2 David cried out for help against the evil and violence of these enemies.

Vs. 3-5 David pleaded his innocence and asked for God to rouse Himself and punish them.

Vs. 6-7 David must have seen them outside his house, watching and waiting, night after night.

Vs. 8-10 These are great verses to hold on to.

Vs. 11-13 David didn't want them killed, but to be used as an example to the people that God judges. As these evil men suffered in the sight of the people, the people would learn to trust and follow the Lord.

Vs. 14-15 Here is that refrain again.

Vs. 16-17 Here you have the hallmarks of David's faith. He is singing, taking refuge in the Lord and he is resting in the *steadfast love* of the Lord. David had been running blind. When David came to his senses, his heart settled on the one thing that would guide him all of his life: The steadfast, unfailing love of the Lord.

Proverbs 23:13-14

V. 14 reads slightly different in my German Bible and has a kind of ironic contrast to it. It's like, "you hit him with that piece of wood, but you'll save his soul from hell." It's interesting that the Father struck the Son "with" a piece of wood to save our souls from hell.

SEPTEMBER 16

Isaiah 22-24

So much of Isaiah has been about the coming invasion by Assyria. In chapter 36 we have the actual story of how God saved Jerusalem in one night. Until then, God uses the coming invasion as a test of the hearts of the people and He uses the present events to tell about the future Tribulation of the entire world. Ultimately God will work for the salvation of Zion and His people and bring the plan of redemption for mankind to fulfillment.

Keep in mind as you read this that the plan of God in the harvest is always being reflected. Sin brings judgment, but woven into everything is the offer of forgiveness. As chaotic as it may get on earth, Christ will reign, tears will be wiped away, and we will live forever with God.

Isaiah 22

Vs. 1-4 This is a vision against Jerusalem itself. The *valley of vision* is referring to Jerusalem. Apparently from Jerusalem's location, it commands a view of the valley through which the Assyrians would advance.

V. 4 Isaiah was moved to tears by the vision of the areas around Jerusalem (Bethlehem, etc...) being ransacked and people being killed and led away.

Vs. 5-8 The Assyrians brought all of their relatives to fight, including *Elam* and *Kir*, the Medes and Persians. These people would fill the valley and be at the gate of the city. The *covering* was removed because of the sins of the people.

Vs. 8-14 These were the actions of the leaders as the threat of war came. The idea here is that the leaders and people didn't put their hearts into seeking God. Notice that Paul quoted v. 13 in 1 Corinthians 15:32. You can make a list of what they did in preparation. Verses 12-13 have a contrast. God wanted one thing; they decided to do something else. God wasn't happy. It was only Hezekiah who led them to seek God, and then, only at the end. Ironically, one of the things they did in preparation was to hide the springs outside of Jerusalem and divert the water under the city. Hezekiah's tunnel was a feat of ancient engineering. This is only ironic in the sense that it really didn't amount to anything. God destroyed the Assyrians. The tunnel had no effect in keeping the people safe or secure. They could have saved all this preparation and trusted the Lord. A century later the Babylonians would destroy Jerusalem and that tunnel would be no help. As we see in The Psalms, if the Lord is not our help and our hope, we are just keeping ourselves busy. Only He can save.

Vs. 15-24 Now we have two leaders of the people who represented Jerusalem and the Lord in talks with the Assyrians. Both of these men are found at the great confrontation in 2 Kings 18:18 and Isaiah 36:3.

Vs. 15-19 Shebna represented the king in talks with the Assyrians. It is thought that his influence led to the loss of hope and the presence of a godless attitude in the city. Apparently he had a t-shirt that said, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

Vs. 20-24 Eliakim, on the other hand, was a godly man with a godly influence on the people. God would use him as a solid testimony in the city.

V. 25 This is a very interesting picture of leadership. God placed Eliakim as a nail in a wall, and apparently they placed a lot of weight on him. He was a godly influence. God allowed him to break as a punishment on the people. During the 54 years of Manasseh, there was hardly a man of godly influence who wasn't killed by Manasseh, who, God says, filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. Eliakim was probably one of those men who donated his blood to the judgment of Jerusalem.

Isaiah 23

Vs. 1-12 This vision is against Tyre and Sidon. What is interesting is the description of their pride and their influence in the world. Assyria's attacks against T&S hampered trade for 70 years, but it was Nebuchadnezzar who destroyed these cities. Their pride and destruction is foretold in Ezekiel; and in that description, there is the second passage in the OT that suddenly turns into a description of the pride and actions of Satan. This kind of pride and influence of the world was seen in Tyre.

V. 13 If even early Babylon was wasted by Assyria, what hope would Tyre have?

V. 14 The *ships of Tarshish* were trade ships from Spain. Tyre was their haven at the end of their journey.

Vs. 15-18 This description of the recovery of Tyre sounds very much like the description in Revelation 18 of the nation or city which is called "Babylon the whore." These are very interesting parallels.

Isaiah 24

And then from the apocalyptic note of the destruction of this nation that influenced the world, we have a very clear prophecy of the Tribulation.

Vs. 1-13 There are lots of things to observe here. Notice that this is a judgment of the entire earth. Note that in v. 6, few people are left on the earth. Also, in v. 13, this action of God on earth is likened to a harvest.

Vs. 14-16a The followers of Christ on earth will understand that this is the judgment of the Lamb on the earth. They will know that the kingdom is coming and that the days of tragedy for mankind are coming to an end. The *Righteous One* is coming.

Vs. 16b-20 Not everyone will be happy. In Revelation it says that when all this breaks loose and the earth and heavens are shaken, people will know it is God and still shake their fists at Him. In Matthew 24:10 Jesus said, *And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.*

Vs. 21-22 You have the judgment of Satan and the kings of the earth and Satan being locked up for a thousand years during the Millennium, followed by the Great White Throne judgment of God and the lake of fire.

V. 23 During the Tribulation, as the Lord comes, the power of the sun will be altered. Now you have the beginning of the new heavens and earth without sun or moon with Christ reigning in Zion. Notice again the importance of Jerusalem. This has been a major theme thus far in Isaiah.

With all we have read this year regarding suffering and waiting on the Lord, thanking God and learning through the small deliverances He gives us, I was touched by the thought of the people in vs. 14-16 above. They will be in the Tribulation with everyone else. They not only have to duck flying boulders and meteors like everyone else, but the hatred of mankind will be turned against them because they know Christ. Yet they still rejoice; they still follow, and people will still respond to their message in the harvest. Even in this Tribulation they still shout the praise of God to all directions and to all people. They must be filled with the joy and the love of Christ.

Galatians 2:17-3:9

Galatians 2:17-21

I found it hard to follow this reasoning, but here's what I came up with. So these are my thoughts.

In v. 16 I think Paul stopped talking to Peter, and now this is real time.

V. 17 The tension of following Christ against all they had been taught in Judaism caused this turmoil and sin on Peter's part. But, that didn't make following Christ wrong or the way of sin. There would definitely be some stumbling around here, sometimes being too restrictive, sometimes being too free, but it wasn't Jesus' fault.

V. 18 Back to Peter. If Peter built up again what he knew to be false, it showed he was sinning. If you boarded up a doorway that led to nowhere, so that in a fire people would have to choose the right door for escape, that would be good. But then, if in a fire, you reopened that other doorway causing confusion escaping the fire, that would be bad. In Peter walking over to the other side of the room, he was rebuilding what he had torn down, justification by works.

V. 19 The law said that everyone was dead. With this understanding given by the law, Paul and the others went to Christ, thus dying to the law through Christ, so that they could be alive to God.

V. 20 This is the declaration of every disciple. Tell me you already have this memorized. If not, sin no more and work on it. ☺

V. 21 This verse is easy to understand except in one thing. Paul and the Spirit understood Peter walking across the room as nullifying *the grace of God*. That is really powerful. After grasping this, it is no wonder that Martin Luther reacted so strongly to the teaching of the Catholic Church. If Peter's confused action meant nullifying the grace of God and making the death of Christ of no purpose, the works orientation of that church, or of any church, amounted to the same.

Galatians 3:1-9

Vs. 1-5 Take note of Paul's questions here and the given or implied answers.

Vs. 6-9 While the Jewish Christians of the circumcision party were focusing on the Law of Moses, Paul took the issue back further to Abraham and the redemptive purpose of God.

V. 6 This is Romans 4. Abraham was saved by faith *before* he was circumcised. The members of the circumcision party missed this.

V. 8 So, who or what preached to Abraham? This is a great verse. No wonder Luther loved this letter. Going back to the promise to Abraham, Paul not only showed that the law was inferior to *faith*, but he showed that God was always planning to include the Gentiles by *faith* alone.

V. 9 This shows that at the beginning of God's plan for Israel, as it began in Abraham, the focus was *faith* and the plan of redemption was for *all the nations*. Those who were trying to install pieces of the Law of Moses into Christianity showed they really didn't understand the OT or the heart of God.

As disciples in the harvest there is a kind of tension. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus. That is it. In this salvation we are totally accepted and we do not have one more thing that we need to do, to be accepted or loved. We could just sit and do nothing and that would be fine; but we don't, we follow. We know that obeying Jesus, following Him, knowing Him as Lord, has a commission attached to it. How do you put all of this together and still have grace? The answer is in Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and*

gave himself for me. The love of Christ does not beget compulsive slavery, but rather, a grateful response of love by those who have been made alive by His sacrifice and death. And to think, we'll be raised as He was raised and live forever and ever and ever and ever and ever, with Him. I think that's pretty cool, and worth sharing with others.

Psalm 60

When we read this psalm we need to remember that from Joshua to David the nation fell into disunity and was preyed upon by its enemies. Even though there were judges, they were very regional. The neighbors could rob any city they pleased, almost at will. As king of Israel, David, as a shepherd king, couldn't tolerate the flock being preyed upon. The neighbors either had to agree to peace with Israel, or David had to subdue them. Israel had had such weak leadership under Saul and a long 400-year history of being inept, why should anyone make peace with David? David was that rag-tag guy running around the country for 10 years living in caves. David had been trained by God to kill what preyed on the flock. David was anointed by God to do something no one had done before and God was with him.

The occasion for this psalm is that as David fought against the Syrians in the north, the Edomites in the south decided to go after Israel knowing that David was busy in the north. When they returned from fighting the Syrians, they had to serve justice on the Edomites.

Vs. 1-3 This is how Israel was as David began to reign. Israel had been easy prey and had seen tragedy after tragedy.

Vs. 4-5 This banner may be the promise to Abraham expressed in the Word. God's truth was their rallying point and salvation.

Vs. 6-8 God had already pronounced His ownership of the land and His judgment on all who would oppose Him.

Vs. 9-12 David felt that by God letting the Edomites do this, it was like rejecting Israel. David was humbled and still pursued the Lord. That was the last problem David had with the Edomites.

Proverbs 23:15-16

When I was reading this, I thought, "This is really true of how a parent responds to their kids following the Lord and saying what is honoring to God." Then I thought, "Hey, I'm somebody's kid too." And then, we have a heavenly Father, too, whom we need to honor.

SEPTEMBER 17

This is a good day to be reading your one-year Bible. There are a lot of great individual verses, and it is great to read them in the settings in which the Spirit set them. Also, there are some major high points of history, doctrine and theology in what we'll walk through. Grab a cuppa (however you interpret that) and enjoy.

Isaiah 25-28:13

There are a million things to observe and note today, so enjoy the stroll through these verses, knowing that next year and the year after, you'll see more and more. Basically, today Isaiah 25-27 is talking about the future blessings to Israel. Chapter 28 begins chapters full of woes, but even there we'll find a verse that will launch us right back into 1 Corinthians 14.

There are two things to keep your eye on in Isaiah. First, God is focused on Jerusalem. Since His promise to David and Solomon to dwell in Zion in the temple, He has set the city apart for Himself. Even though He has destroyed the city because of the faithlessness of the people, God shows over and over again, that He will restore. Second, in Isaiah we see how God uses the near events to talk about the final events. The near judgment of the nations reflects the future

judgment of nations. The near deliverance of Israel and Zion will reflect the future deliverance when the Messiah comes. Humanly speaking, it is no wonder the people were confused in Jesus' time, thinking the Messiah would stay. But woven into Isaiah is also the sin of man and the suffering of the Christ.

Isaiah 25

Vs. 1-5 This is Isaiah's praise to God as he sees the arrival of the millennial blessing. One purpose of prophecy is to give hope in hard times. In essence, Isaiah sees how the plans made from the time of the fall and in the promise to Abraham (v. 1) bring to an end the kingdoms of man (v. 2), and lead all men to worship God (v. 3), which fulfills the promise to Abraham.

Vs. 4-5 Even in the oppression of the Tribulation, God will extend grace and *shade* to those who follow Him.

Vs. 6-9 Verse 6 sounds like the beginning of the Millennium and the blessing all nations will find under the rule of Christ. Verses 7-8 could signify the beginning of the Millennium and also the ending when everything is made new. If you look in Revelation you'll notice that verse 8 is quoted twice, once near the beginning of the Millennium (Rev. 7:17) and once at the end (Rev. 21:4). Look at Revelation 7:17 and you'll see some similar imagery, particularly having to do with heat.

Vs. 10-12 The pride of Moab is used here as an example of how God will bring down the proud who oppose the Lord, Israel and Jerusalem.

Isaiah 26

Vs. 1-6 This is a song of praise to God in the future Millennium and beyond.

Vs. 1-2 This is the praise of Zion.

Vs. 3-4 Verse 3 is a famous verse and I've heard it quoted often, but I could never have told you this verse was in Isaiah, much less *here* in Isaiah. This is the testimony of trusting in the Lord. This would be important in the days when the Assyrians tried to take Jerusalem, and it will be important during the years of the Tribulation.

Vs. 5-6 Apparently the Lord will bring humility and use *the feet of the poor* and *needy* to trample pride under foot.

Vs. 7-10 It is God's judgment that will level everything, showing His righteousness in this judgment. This sounds like John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Lord, making the high low, the crooked straight and the rough ways smooth.

Vs. 11-19 Notice the repetition of *O Lord*. The salvation of Israel will come from the Lord.

V. 15 sounds like the prayer of Jabez.

Vs. 17-18 Although Israel was ready for deliverance, by their own efforts they only birthed air.

V. 19 sounds like the resurrection.

Vs. 20-21 God tells the people to find shelter in the Tribulation as He punishes the earth. One of the things mentioned in Revelation is that the nations will put to death those who follow Christ. God will use the blood of His people to prove the guilt and sin of the world, and the righteousness of His judgment of the people on earth. *For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink. It is what they deserve!* (Rev. 16:6)

Isaiah 27

Notice the marker, *in that day*.

V. 1 Some say this is God's judgment on a mythical creature representing all that was chaotic and against God. Others say it looks like that old serpent, the devil. I think it's Satan. This dragon is in Revelation too.

Vs. 2-5 This is the Lord making an invitation to come into His vineyard.

Vs. 6-11 This seems to be God cleansing His people through hardships and exile.

Vs. 12-13 Now He is calling them out of exile to Jerusalem. This gathering of Israel to Zion will be true after the Babylonian exile and at the end of the Tribulation.

Isaiah 28

Vs. 1-8 The word the ESV says is *Ah* is actually, "Woe." In Hebrew it is "OY!" Isaiah is beginning here with the northern kingdom, represented by Ephraim. The northern kingdom had experienced prosperity; but as a result of that prosperity, they didn't come to the Lord. They are called *drunkards* identifying their excess, but they were also drunk with idolatry. We have seen all of this during the ministries of Elijah and Elisha, grace upon grace, miracle upon miracle, and still they wouldn't follow God.

Vs. 9-13 After Isaiah pronounced judgment on the northern kingdom, apparently the leaders of the northern kingdom got wind of his prophecy against them. Verses 9-10 were their words back to Isaiah. Basically they are making fun of Isaiah for treating them like children. The words of v. 10 are actually mocking to Isaiah, because in the Hebrew it is the equivalent of sounds like, "blah, blah, blah, whatever, whatever, whatever, yakity, yakity, yak."

Vs. 11 Paul quotes this in 1 Corinthians 14:21. God is saying that since the people would not listen to Him and His prophets, He would speak to them through the babbling mouths of Gentiles to get His point across. In Isaiah's day, it would be the Assyrians leading the people into captivity. In Paul's day, the strange tongues were telling the Jews that the word and ministry of redemption was going beyond them to the Gentiles. It is interesting that Paul, via the Spirit, saw this verse as showing the meaning of the gift of tongues. Jesus said this to the Pharisees in Matthew 21:43, *Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits.* According to Romans 11:30, this people is currently the church; and according to Romans 11:31, it will change back to the Jews. The gift of tongues was to show the Jews that the gospel was being given to the Gentiles.

V. 12 God offered them rest and they would not hear it.

V. 13 So now, because they hardened their hearts, the Word of God (and the gospel of Christ in the future) will sound to them like "blah, blah, blah, whatever, whatever, whatever, yakity, yakity, yak." And in their pride they will not accept it until the arrival of that future generation of Jews that enters the Tribulation. Then Romans 11:31 will kick in.

Galatians 3:10-22

Vs. 10-14 Did you get that? Good! Notice that Paul mentions the Holy Spirit here. Following Christ in this body is extremely difficult as it is, but without the Holy Spirit to strengthen and guide us, it would be pretty ugly. What a wonderful gift from God.

Vs. 15-18 Did you get that? Good! God is saying that the promise to Abraham pointed to one individual, to Jesus. Even in the Davidic covenant, it pointed to one son, the Son of David - Jesus. Since Jesus was the fulfillment of all of these things, faith had to be the only stipulation.

Vs. 19-20 The reasons for the law were several. Here Paul gives the obvious reason: because of the sin of man. The law was like the markings on a highway to steer us in the right direction, waiting until Christ came, when we could understand God and follow Christ by the Spirit as new creations.

V. 20 This is a contrast between the law through Moses and the promise to Abraham. Apparently, Moses received the law from God but also through angels. This meant more than one intermediary. Abraham received the promise directly from God. The law was a covenant, based on the agreement of both parties, God and Israel. If you look at the promise to Abraham, although the covenant ceremony was set up with pieces of animals on both sides with a path through the middle, God was the only one who walked that path, making God solely responsible for keeping this covenant. Abraham's only "responsibility" was to believe. The Mosaic covenant required two parties to make the agreement. The Abrahamic covenant is really a promise made by grace to Abraham, and so only one person is required. And, God is one. And like Abraham's righteousness, the fulfillment of this greater promise would only require faith.

Vs. 21-22 The law isn't contrary to the promise, anymore than a temporary splint put in place until you get to a doctor is contrary to being healed by a doctor. It was necessary for a time, but only for a specific purpose. It couldn't fix the problem.

This is coming close to what Paul says in Romans 5:20, *Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.* In Romans 11:32 he says, *For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.*

I know this is all pretty tight theology, but remember the issue Paul was dealing with in the harvest. What must a person do to be saved and become a follower of Christ? The cry of the reformers was "only faith in Jesus." A person is saved and sustained in their walk with Christ by grace through faith. Grace and faith are both things we grow in our understanding of, as we follow Christ in the harvest reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 61

The more I experience living in uncertainty, the more I appreciate how the Lord drove David to his knees to burn these words on his heart. All I can say is "amen."

Vs. 1-3 We have seen David crying out so many times, but this is classic. He asks God to lead him to the Rock that is only able to be reached by God Himself placing him there. God was all those things to David that we have heard of, a refuge and a strong tower.

Vs. 4-7 David's only wish was to dwell with the Lord. I was reading today where Jesus promised His disciples in John 14:23, *Jesus answered him, "If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."* Dwelling with Christ is still an offer that is extended to those who will strive for it.

V. 6 David had been anointed when he was 12 or 13; and since then, although David had been persecuted and pursued, David was still surviving because of God's promise. That is why David could say this.

V. 8 This is typical David, promising to praise the Lord to all of mankind. Oddly enough, this is immortalized in Scripture and is exactly that, praise to God from David that is meant to inspire our faith.

Proverbs 23:17-18

Boy, do I need to hear this every day. Between this and the psalm, I guess the Lord is telling us to keep holding on.

SEPTEMBER 18

Isaiah 28:14-30:11

One of the things that hit me this year reading Isaiah is how the first 39 chapters all revolve around the coming of the Assyrians to the gate of Jerusalem. We'll finally get to that event in

chapters 36-39. These first 35 chapters are looking at where the people were going for hope and where they should have been going for hope. Now they had Hezekiah and Jerusalem. In the future they would have the Messiah and a new Jerusalem. When the Messiah would come that second time, once again, the city would be surrounded; but that generation of Jews would have their hearts turned to Him. Their hope would be rewarded, and the hopeless situation would give way to peace and fulfillment of the plan of redemption for all men. This is why we have the constant back and forth between their present situation and the future situation.

This is just to say that as you read your Bible year after year, unexpectedly, the Spirit will suddenly make sense of something you've read 100 times before.

Isaiah 28:14-29

Vs. 14-22 Now the "woe" from yesterday is directed to the leaders of Jerusalem who scoffed at Isaiah. Notice that vs. 14 and 22 both have "scoffing" in them, showing this is a unit of thought.

V. 15 In their arrogance, some leaders quipped that Jerusalem was impervious to attack because they had made an agreement with death. This was somewhat pagan and totally dumb.

V. 16 In contrast, God pronounces His power and His future blessing on Zion. They should have been hoping in Him. It is that hope and promised Savior that is the measure of men and a stone of testing. Isn't it interesting to see how the present problems were tied to future promises? Hope is future and is in God. Paul quotes this verse twice in Romans, at the end of chapter 9 and in Romans 10:11, one referring to the future blessing of Israel in Christ and the other talking about faith in Christ. So guess who that cornerstone is. Isn't it interesting to read the actual context in which some of these things said about Jesus were first mentioned?

Notice here it says, *Whoever believes will not be in haste*. In Romans it says not be *ashamed*. I think the idea here in Isaiah is to act shamefully, in haste, seeking help everywhere, but in the Lord.

V. 17 This is clearly talking about the future under the Messiah.

Vs. 18-22 This shows God's judgment on these leaders. There will be no rest, relief or comfort.

Vs. 23-29 After judgment will come restoration and blessing. Notice in v. 23 how insistent God is that they hear. It made me think of the charge against the people in Isaiah 6:9-10, that their ears were heavy and they chose not to understand. And then Isaiah 53 begins, *Who has believed what he has heard from us?* Just as things are sown, reaped and prepared differently, God will work judgment and restoration according to His plans and procedures.

V. 28 means there will be a remnant that will be preserved.

V. 29 sounds like Paul speaking about the same subject in Romans 11:33, *O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!*

Isaiah 29

Vs. 1-8 The *Ah* is really "Woe." *Ariel* is another word for Jerusalem or Zion (v. 8). The gist here is that in the near future for the readers, and in the distant future for a special generation of Jews, Jerusalem will be hopelessly confronted by foes. Then, like a bad dream, they will be gone. This happened when the Assyrians came against Jerusalem. The next morning they were gone. At the end of the Tribulation, the nations will invade Israel; and Jerusalem will be ready to be destroyed, when suddenly, "Hey did you see that strange lightning, and that cloud, and what's that coming down from the cloud?" And it will all be over, that quickly.

Vs. 9-16 This passage is full of references used in the NT regarding Israel's blindness and the illustration with the potter. They have blinded themselves through disobedience and rebellion;

and so, as a result, God has laid upon them a spirit of stupor, reminiscent of Romans 1:24. This is all in Romans 9-11.

V. 14 This reminds me of the warning for intentional ignorance and disobedience mentioned by Jesus in Luke 8:18, *Take care then how you hear, for to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he thinks that he has will be taken away.*

V. 16 This sounds like Paul in Romans 11:8-10, but Paul put a different twist on it.

Notice the progression from v. 11 to v. 16. They say they are blind, and then the reason is given. First it is seen in their heart toward God and then in their actions. In v. 15 the desire they were hiding was to seek help from Egypt rather than from the Lord.

Vs. 17-24 Here comes hope and restoration again. Notice *in that day* in v. 18 and opened eyes. Notice too that it is the promise to Abraham that is in focus, not the law.

Isaiah 30

Vs. 1-5 *Ah* is really, "Woe." This is their lack of trust in the Lord and going to Egypt for help. Remember Isaiah 21 and what his nakedness symbolized?

Vs. 6-7 In order to get from Jerusalem to Egypt you had to go through the southern desert, the Negeb. This is basically saying it is useless to get help from Egypt. Rahab is a "monster" that rivaled the Leviathan. In Job, this would have been the Behemoth. Now, a thousand years later, this "monster" is not that variety of super hippo, but from the description of its inactivity, a run-of-the-mill-float-in-the-water-and-do-nothing hippo.

Vs. 8-11 Again, this is Jerusalem, seeking their own will rather than the Lord's. In vs. 10 and 11, notice the words of Jerusalem. I don't know if these were actual words and/or an attitude of heart, but the Lord heard this and He definitely wasn't happy. Sometimes God gives you what you want. During this time that the church is working in the harvest, Israel is under the blindness they have called upon themselves.

Galatians 3:23-4:31

The Galatians were not Jews; they were Gentiles. When these Jewish Christians came to them, they had no way to refute what must have sounded like a very smooth connection between rites from the Law of Moses and following Christ. In this section, Paul (and the Spirit) calls on all of his creativity to show the Galatians that the law and faith do not mix in Christ.

Galatians 3:23-29

Vs. 23-25 The *law* was a strict *guardian*. Even though people couldn't be saved by it (although many found salvation through faith in it if they focused on the promise to Abraham), it protected those who followed it from the paganism of the surrounding world. When we read of the very sexually oriented worship of Baal and Asherah in the OT and the worship of Molech, it shows what God was trying to protect the people from. It will get worse when we get into Ezekiel and see what the leaders were worshiping. This protection was a part of the purpose of the law and that didn't even work in the OT. This guardian was there until the coming of salvation through faith in Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Vs. 26-29 This would have been a major problem for these legalistic Jewish Christians. The baptism in the Holy Spirit creates an equality before God that destroys earthly designations. We still have these differences on earth, but not before God as He sees us in Christ. The message then is that in Christ you don't have to be a Jew or act like one.

Galatians 4:1-31

Vs. 1-11 This illustration is a little different than the one above. As before, until the heir "comes of age," the heir must be ruled by a guardian (the law). The elementary principles, we'll see, have to do with following religious superstition or practice to appease the supreme being or beings. Somewhere in this illustration, I think, is also an illustration of why Satan has power over mankind. Since mankind sinned, I think his service to mankind became this kind of guardianship. When Jesus died and was raised, God proved that forgiveness and salvation were available, proving Satan wrong. Jesus said that when the Holy Spirit came, one of the things He would convict the world of was that *the ruler of this world is judged (John 16:11)*. The children have come of age through Christ.

Vs. 4-7 These verses have freed a lot of people. Paul says in Romans 2 and 3, that all of humanity is under the law, even the law written on their hearts. That the Gentiles could be equal sons of God was hard for these Jewish Christian teachers to swallow.

Vs. 8-11 Now, Paul comes out of the illustration into the present situation. The *elementary principles* mentioned in vs. 8- 9 are explained in v. 10. The gods could not be known so you tried to make them happy by doing stuff, hoping you were doing the right amount of the right routines. Knowing God is much different. Notice that the Galatians were beginning to follow Jewish holy days hoping to make points with God.

Vs. 12-20 This is a very personal section.

V. 12 Paul had been freed from the law as a Jew, so he could reach the Gentiles. Paul became like them. Now Paul is asking the Galatians to become like him, free from the law and alive to Christ.

V. 15 Some think that the thorn in the flesh was some degree of blindness.

Vs. 17-20 Notice that the false teachers wanted to shut the door of freedom in Christ to make the Galatians dependent on them as teachers. The focus of Paul's ministry was to lead them to love Christ, not him.

Vs. 21-31 This allegory stays very close to the physical circumstances and compares the two wives and the two sons.

V. 23 Hagar's son was naturally conceived and his birth was not according to the *promise*. Sarah's son was a miracle from conception to birth, all according to the promise.

Vs. 25-26 Hagar represents *Mount Sinai* where the law was given. Sarah represents the future *Jerusalem*. Since we're reading Isaiah, we're hearing of the promises that are aimed at Zion that have yet to be fulfilled.

Vs. 28-31 Paul is telling them to get rid of the influence of the law, just as Abraham and Sarah had to get rid of Hagar and Ishmael because of Ishmael's animosity and ridicule of Isaac. The law is hostile to grace. Law causes our sin to react against God, but grace is moved to respond in gratitude and love to the love we have been shown in Christ.

To think, this book helped launch the Reformation. What did this letter really do? It showed that the church of Luther's day had bound itself to the law. The church had lost Christ and found ways to earn God's favor. Galatians opened Luther's eyes and brought him to faith in Christ alone. Galatians brought freedom for generations of people who were in bondage to sin and to religion and made them alive to Christ. As you read this, remember, it's all about freedom from sin found in the love of our Lord.

Psalm 62

As you read this, your heart will latch onto the verses that speak to you. Verses 1 & 5, which mention silence before God, mean something to me. When we hope on the Lord in very hard situations, we cannot defend faith in following. We simply follow regardless of what others think. We set our hope on God and wait and trust Him and hide in Him. Read Isaiah 30:15.

Vs. 1-2 Just like our reading in Isaiah, our hope and salvation can only be in God. Waiting on Him steadies our hearts and keeps us from shameful decisions.

Vs. 3-4 These are the enemies. They may have been religious too, because it says they blessed with their mouths but cursed inwardly.

Vs. 5-7 What a declaration of David's hope in God.

V. 8 And here is David teaching the people. This is why the people loved David.

Vs. 9-10 seem to say that being of high or low estate come from the God of power. Those who pursued David might have been seeking his former position, or they wanted favor and position by lying and political posturing.

Vs. 11-12 David's sight, in all of this suffering and confusion, was set on God, His *steadfast love* and His justice.

Proverbs 23:19-21

On the one hand, you might look at this and say that anyone who has their eating under control and doesn't get drunk is in good shape. But I think the idea here is that the comforts of life can put you to sleep. There are plenty of things here that could also be put into these verses, like TV and computers, social networking, games, shopping, etc.

V. 19 says to *direct your heart in the way*. That sounds like following God, being intentional, being focused, knowing what you are supposed to be doing and where you are going. Knowing *the way* is important and plays an important role in living before God on this planet.

For us as disciples in the harvest, following Christ in this world, we can still enjoy what the Lord gives us; but we know why we need to live intentionally and to stay alert. We know the Way, the Truth and the Life and we are left here to tell others of Him.

SEPTEMBER 19

I know your head is probably swimming in all of this reading in Isaiah and in Galatians. If so, I would suggest not reading with any other expectation than what the Spirit just surprises you with. Today we'll read, *in quietness and in trust shall be your strength*. Let the Lord speak, and just read. After you've read these books year after year, you'll be surprised at what the Spirit keeps showing you. So, don't worry about getting everything now. Also, remember that a frappuccino and some chocolate can be used by the Spirit to sweeten the experience.

Isaiah 30:12-33:12

Regarding Isaiah, what general impressions are you getting? God seems to be saying a lot about the city of Zion and the Messiah, about the coming armies, the coming judgments, the coming salvations, and the final state of His people. God takes the near events that will show judgment and salvation, and projects them to the end of the age to a final judgment and final salvation. The faith of God's people is shown in those who wait, trust and hope in Him, as opposed to those who go running for all sorts of other help. These are good lessons for us as we work now in the harvest. Our hearts are strengthened by looking forward to our Lord's return. *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, ¹²training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,*

¹³*waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ. (Titus 2:11-13)*

Isaiah 30:12-33

Vs. 12-14 These people that spoke to God as they did in vs. 10-11 will be punished. Jesus said men would be judged by every careless word they utter. For those who don't know the Lord, the "record" button is down. For those of us who know Christ and keep asking for forgiveness for our mouths, He hits "erase."

V. 15 This verse stands alone between God's judgments, as an encouragement to those who wait on Him. And what a great verse it is. God is the Holy One of Israel. All of the preparing that the people did in their anxiety was wasted. They dug tunnels, ran to Egypt for help, gathered stones for throwing; but when that night came, when they realized that God was their only hope, they were quiet. God saved them without their effort.

Vs. 16-17 This will be the fate of those who seek help, other than the Lord.

Vs. 18-33 This all has to do with the restoration of the people and God's fighting for Jerusalem and His people. Remember that the immediate threat and deliverance has to do with Assyria, but you can see that God often gave Isaiah words that can only be understood in terms of the future Tribulation and their final deliverance. God will show the world that this is His people and His city. Remember, too, that Israel is being used for a purpose for all of mankind. In terms of the drama on earth, their purpose and position is important. When we are all with God, according to Galatians 3:28, *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

V. 19 Notice again, that Zion is in the focus of this promise.

V. 21 If this is the Tribulation, God will be very quick at this time to respond to His people.

V. 22 As a result of the amazing deliverance of God, people will trash all those things upon which they had depended.

V. 23 This is freedom from fear. I would imagine that Israel today is not this relaxed and open.

V. 26 In Matthew 24:29, Jesus said that near the end of the Tribulation the sun would be darkened. It could be that the light of the sun will be diminished during the Tribulation (meteor hits, volcanoes, dust clouds), and when the Lord sets up His kingdom He will clean up the atmosphere. Or, it could be that the sun itself will finally start running out of gas. In any case the Lord will correct this and the sun will shine brighter than normal, but not to worry, those people in the Millennium won't need sunscreen.

And there will be healing. We'll see this more in Ezekiel and in Revelation.

Vs. 27-30 But before the Millennium fully begins, there will come the judgment of the nations.

Vs. 31-33 Back in the present day, the judgment on the Assyrians will soon be fulfilled. After the Assyrians left 185,000 corpses, I'm sure they had to burn them. It also makes you think of the final judgment and the lake of fire.

Isaiah 31

Vs. 1-3 God really wanted the people to trust Him and not to go to Egypt. Notice here that their desire was so set to seek this help from Egypt, they decided not to consult the Lord at all. If you want to see the real heart of this, look at Jeremiah 42 where the remnant asks Jeremiah to seek the Lord for them and they will do whatever He says. God tells them not to go to Egypt for help. *Azariah the son of Hoshaiiah and Johanan the son of Kareah and all the insolent men said to*

Jeremiah, "You are telling a lie. The LORD our God did not send you to say, 'Do not go to Egypt to live there.'" (Jere. 43:2)

Vs. 4-5 God's coming will be without hesitation. Notice the references to Jerusalem and Zion.

Vs. 6-7 This is the appeal for them to trust Him. When they see what God will do, they will know their idols are all worthless.

Vs. 8-9 We've read before how the Lord slayed 185,000 men in one night. God made Zion like a furnace which they came too close to and it consumed them.

Isaiah 32

Here we have the promise of blessing interwoven with the promise of judgment.

Vs. 1-4 This is the Messiah in His kingdom and the people will finally hear and understand. Verse 2 is pretty famous. Notice too in v. 4 that being *hasty* is synonymous with foolishness and a lack of faith. There seems to be a link between what is said here and what was said in Isaiah 28:16.

Vs. 5-8 True nobility will be honored, but there will be no room for fools or the wicked.

Vs. 9-14 Those who are proud and live for comfort and commerce will be humbled. Apparently the women were a reflection of their husbands. That is interesting if you think about Ephesians 5:25-26.

Vs. 15-20 But the Spirit will be poured out in the Millennium. Isn't the progression of vs. 16-18 cool? Verse 19 seems to talk about the distress of the Tribulation that leads up to that time. Verse 20 seems to say that even in that great time of distress, those who have the Spirit and trust in God will be blessed. The waters sound like those of Psalm 1, and the ox and donkey running loose indicate there is no care or anxiety for commerce and comforts, indicating that these people have their treasure in heaven, not on earth.

Isaiah 33

V. 1 This woe appears to be against Assyria.

Vs. 2-6 Notice again that God will keep the people safe who wait on Him regardless of the turmoil around them. Notice the two mentions of Zion, His city.

Vs. 7-9 In contrast, those who hoped in treaties and promises are distressed with everything.

Vs. 10-12 God will consume everyone, Jew or Assyrian, who does not honor Him. Everything they have worked for was flammable and it produced what was burnable, so God will burn it. Doesn't this sound like *wood, hay, straw* from 1 Corinthians 3.

One of the great things that came from Solomon was the promise God made to dwell in Zion in the temple. Those who truly loved God and understood that promise, along with the promise to Abraham, understood why God had protected Jerusalem and then had allowed Jerusalem to be destroyed. They also understood that God would be faithful and fulfill His promise to dwell again in Zion. And so it will happen. But until God fulfills those promises, we are told to trust and wait patiently on the Lord. So much of what we are reading in The Psalms has exactly the same message. Look again at Isaiah 30:15. What do you think the Lord is saying to us as disciples?

Galatians 5:1-12

V. 1 This is now the theme of the rest of the book. Paul has established that salvation is only by grace through faith in Christ. So what about the rest of the Christian life? If works are presented first, there is no salvation; but what if you are already saved and now link following Christ to

works? Is that really bad? This verse seems to say that gathering works into our lives is not why Christ set us free. Just to get another angle on this, I was reading Philippians this morning and came on 3:1-10. If you read this you'll be amazed how close it is to what we are reading here. In Philippians, Paul says that works keep us from knowing Christ and experiencing the power of the resurrection. Works focus us on us and trying to win God's approval. Faith focuses us on pursuing and knowing Christ in His love and grace, and the power of His resurrection in us.

Vs. 2-6 The power of following Christ is found in faith working in love. Our worth, our motivation, our joy, our mission, everything is linked to that love that is poured into our hearts. That's why we follow by faith. Adding anything to our relationship with God hinders our following and adds weight and encumbrance to our walk, like David trying to put on Saul's armor to face Goliath. *Fallen away from grace* means understanding ourselves in a way other than being fully accepted and complete in God's grace. Look again at Romans 5:1-5.

V. 4 Did you catch Paul being "cute" here by using the word *severed*? Those who desire to be cut in circumcision will be cut off from Christ (disconnected from experiencing His grace).

Vs. 7-12 Paul and the Spirit are upset. Verse 9 is important. Once you begin to define yourself by works and not by grace, like yeast, it spreads through everything, to every part of your relationship with God. It might begin with one act, but then doing works becomes linked to everything, even your schedule and habits. It is easy to fall into condemnation, if you are justified in your life by doing certain things and repeating certain behaviors. Your life and God's relationship to you becomes measurable in terms of those acts and works.

V. 10 Paul was very bold in saying this other person or persons were wrong.

V. 11 If Paul was teaching religion, he would have been passed off as harmless. That Paul preached Christ was a serious threat to the Jews, in that Jesus fulfilled the law and made Judaism kaput. When Paul preached Christ to the Gentiles, they understood that all men had to come under the power of Christ. They didn't like that either.

V. 12 Remember, the Spirit wrote this. That's pretty scary. ☺

Paul's opponents were worried about cheap grace and so they brought in works. But following Christ must always be based on His grace and love understood by faith. Mixing works to our walk becomes toxic to our hearts and defines our worth and His love for us through our doing. Doing works becomes about us. We are never loved more or less, and His grace is still our joy. His Word constantly washes us in the undeserved grace and love we have been shown in Christ. We should never recover from the undeserved love Jesus has shown us. And following Christ is purely expressed in Galatians 2:20, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Once you have love and grace down, you truly work like crazy in the harvest, without pride and without comparison. You are always pursuing your Lord whom you love like no other.

Psalm 63

It says that David wrote this in the wilderness of Judah. Immediately I thought of the words, *the Word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness*. That was in Judah, too. And Jesus was led into the wilderness. That's a funny place to find God or to be led and tempted, but it seems like God consistently does this for those to whom He wishes to prepare for His harvest. This is a wonderful song from David. It cost him something to be able to write this, and it costs us something to truly enjoy it.

Vs. 1-4 This is David's heart. It is like his signature. We don't read until v. 9 that he is in distress. What we see here is the great longing of his heart to be with the Lord. David drew deeply from God's *steadfast love* and was always ready to *praise* God.

Vs. 5-8 I wonder when this was written. David seems to be proven and secure in distress, meditating on the Lord, full of praise and clinging to the Lord.

Vs. 9-11 Here is the tension and the contrast. Men sought David to kill him, but God loved David. Who do you think would win? David knew, but he still humbly cried out to God.

Proverbs 23:22

In every generation there have been parents who were evil and not to be trusted. So putting those examples aside and realizing that there might be an exception here or there, here is the rule and the caution spoken to us by the Lord. A person will be blessed by listening to his father and by respecting the words and values of his mother when she is old. Amen.

SEPTEMBER 20

Isaiah 33:13-36:22

Today we have read more than half of Isaiah. Not only that, we are coming to the close of the first half of the book. The first half had to do with the coming attack by Assyria and how God would protect Zion. The Assyrians will be defeated tomorrow. The second half of Isaiah has to do with the coming of the Babylonians. They will eventually destroy Jerusalem and the temple. Through Isaiah, the Lord will be talking about this judgment of Israel. He will tell of the reasons for the judgment and how He will restore His people. That restoration will not only be at the end of the Babylonian exile, but Isaiah will look ahead to the final restoration when the Lord brings Israel back to Zion in the millennial, and eternal, kingdom of the Messiah.

Isaiah 33:13-24

V. 13 So, the day the people have been fearing for years is coming. Some have trusted the Lord; some have trusted political strategy, and some have been burning incense secretly and praying to a piece of wood coated with gold or silver.

V. 14 Guess which group this is? Notice the use of *who*. *Who* will be answered in the next verses.

Vs. 15-24 This is the blessing and these are the promises for those who fear and trust the Lord, now and in the future in Zion.

V. 23 This is an image of a wrecked ship, a picture of the Assyrian army after God takes care of them.

V. 24 These are the inhabitants of Jerusalem, looking to the near deliverance and to the future and final deliverance.

Isaiah 34

This is apocalyptic imagery regarding the final battle and flows into an eternal punishment. It is also a warning to the surrounding nations that might rejoice over the hardship of God's people and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Vs. 1-4 Notice how this points to the end times.

Vs. 5-17 So why this curse against Edom? I believe it is a future warning, both for Edom in the not-so-distant future and for all the nations present at the time of the Tribulation.

Zion would not be overthrown now, but it would in about 100 years. This was fair warning to Edom. After Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city and the temple, after the smoke cleared, the Edomites went up on the temple mount and held a drunken celebration. There was more, but this was the main stroke. The book of Obadiah (only 21 verses) and a chapter of Jeremiah are devoted to this future judgment of Edom. When you get to the book of Malachi, these actions by Edom are the explanation of *Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated*. God put both nations into exile because of their sins. Edom's sin was what they did in God's city. Jacob was loved, in that Israel returned and Jerusalem was restored. Esau was hated, in that the Edomites never returned and they ceased to be a people. Now imagine, those actions and judgments are still over 100 years away. You can't say they didn't see it coming. Regardless of how God judges His own, He still loves His people and His city and they will become a stumbling block for all nations who mistreat them.

Anyone who has ever visited Petra has seen that what God foretold has come to be. *If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," the LORD of hosts says, "They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called 'the wicked country,' and 'the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.'"* (Malachi 1:4)

Vs. 16-17 are the restoration of Zion. You'll see this if you look at the end of Obadiah, v. 21.

Isaiah 35

This is a chapter of millennial blessing as God restores His people and Zion.

Vs. 1-2 This is the declaration of hope.

Vs. 3-4 Based on the hope that is promised, the people should be strengthened and be without fear. Notice how similar this is to Hebrews 12:12.

Vs. 5-7 I guess this is the blessing of health to the people and to the land. Notice how vs. 5-6 sound like Jesus' ministry as the Messiah. *And he answered them, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them."* (Luke 7:22)

Vs. 8-10 The way of return to the Lord will be holy and safe, and the saints will be singing.

This ends the prophetic section of how God prepared the people and the city for the attack from Assyria.

Isaiah 36

This is the third time this event is mentioned. It must have been very important.

Vs. 1-3 Back in Isaiah 22:15-25, God spoke about both Shebna and Eliakim. One was a practical, political animal and the other was a man of God. The heart of Shebna is described in Isaiah 33:14. Eliakim is described in Isaiah 33:15-24.

Vs. 4-10 When I read these words of the Rabshakeh (officer), I can hear in the background Satan shaking Eve's confidence and trust in God. This is why we always need to stay in the Word and allow God and His love in Christ to be enough for us. Remember that last line of the Lord's Prayer, *And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil* (NIV - the evil one). Since we never hear what this guy's name was, maybe he was inspired by Satan.

Vs. 8-9 Notice his boasting of the Assyrian army. God would strike him in this area of his pride.

Vs. 11-12 It is interesting that this guy spoke Hebrew. It is also interesting that he is offering the people a culinary choice between this and what he offers in vs. 16-17.

Vs. 13-20 The attack on Hezekiah and God is very strong and must have been emotionally overwhelming.

Vs. 21-22 It is amazing that the people obeyed Hezekiah. God was right. *For thus said the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."* (Is. 30:15)

As disciples we will eventually be called on to hear this kind of strong antagonism and arrogance. Our strength is not in having a good answer; it is in the Lord and His Word. *These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* (John 15:11)

Galatians 5:13-26

In Paul's letters he frequently had to address two extremes. We find some mention of both of these extremes in Galatians. We've already seen Christians becoming enslaved to religious works to gain discipline, guidance, approval, love and favor from God. The other extreme was to misuse their freedom in Christ. We saw this very clearly in 1 Corinthians. The Jewish teachers were trying to correct this "misuse" of grace by moving people back to the law. The false argument against grace was that if God's love was totally unconditional, you could do whatever you liked and still be forgiven. And apparently then, as today, some of the Galatians allowed their conduct to slip, using grace and forgiveness as a "get out of jail free" card. The real response to the freedom of grace and love is the freedom to be grateful and lovingly obedient in following the Spirit.

Vs. 13-15 The key "directive" here is to love. Knowing the love of Christ, our primary response is to love God and our neighbor and use that love in following the Great Commission. In dealing with some who were trying to bring the law into the rebuilding of the church at Ephesus, Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:5 (RSV), *"...whereas (in contrast to them) the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith."*

Vs. 16-26 The phrase, *walk by the Spirit*, is the key to life as a Christian. We can understand following the impulses of the flesh, but what are the impulses of the Spirit? Walking by the Spirit is what we don't sense. It is not the same as walking by the thoughts of your head, just like following sinful desires isn't necessarily following your head. The sense of impulse and leading is important. We are pros at the one and very "kindergarten" regarding sensing or following the Spirit. Freedom in grace means following Christ and being able to respond to the Spirit in every situation. If we are exposing ourselves to the Word to learn the mind and heart of God, we have the maturity to ask Him to direct us and show us what He is doing. We don't have to live by following religious rules. Since Christ is in us, we follow Him as He leads. Jesus followed the Spirit as He led Him every day. Jesus didn't live guided by works or a religious routine. That isn't how we should walk in Christ either. We are free to know Him, surrender our hearts to seek Him and follow as the Spirit leads.

Psalm 64

Reading this I was caught by the opening requests to God: *Hear my voice, preserve my life, and hide me.* I guess that sums up what I need most days.

Vs. 1-6 This is a fairly long complaint at the beginning of this psalm. Apparently David was moved by the relentlessness of these people, thinking that God would not see.

Vs. 7-8 I was reminded of what Paul told the Romans in 12:19-21. Let God take care of it.

Vs. 9-10 David was already saying this before God had delivered him. He knew that God would judge in His time. For us, as disciples, we need to wait, but still be doing what Paul suggested in those verses in Romans.

Proverbs 23:23

It is interesting that we expect this stuff to just come to us as a consolation prize or byproduct of life. God is saying to make it our aim, and everything else becomes the consolation prize.

SEPTEMBER 21

This is a big day. We will see the defeat of the Assyrians, which is a major event in Isaiah. Also, we will finish Galatians. This might be a good day to get some fall air and something hot with pumpkin spice from your favorite coffee establishment.

Isaiah 37-38

It is too bad that chapters 36-39 are broken up like this. Chapters 36-37 show the faith of the leaders as they trust God against the Assyrians. In chapter 37 God destroys the Assyrian army. Chapters 38-39 show why and how Hezekiah stumbles in faith as he faces death and then basks in the glory of God's victory. In chapter 39 Hezekiah basically betrays the future generations of the people, and God promises that the nation will go into exile in Babylon.

Isaiah 37

There are a lot of things for the Spirit to point out to us here. What impresses me is that all of what God said regarding this event was foretold years earlier. We have been listening to Isaiah prophesy and prepare the people for this event for over 50 years. Some people listened. Hezekiah listened and the Word of God bore fruit in him as he led the people through this. His faith was genuine and deep.

Vs. 1-4 Hezekiah led the people in humility and in seeking God. It is interesting that Isaiah wasn't there and had to be found.

Vs. 5-7 Notice how short God's answer through Isaiah is. God knew the situation wasn't over.

Vs. 8-13 Lachish was where the camp of the Assyrians was located. It was their base of operations and was about 25 miles south, southwest of Jerusalem. Today 25 miles is nothing. If you were driving 60 mph that would only be 25 minutes. But back then that distance was hours. A fast jog is about 8 mph and I'm sure they didn't do that with their foot soldiers, so it probably took this army 4-6 hours. I'm sure this was a frustration for the Rabshakeh and it seems like his anger and arrogance got the better of him. The moral of this story is to be careful what you say to God.

V. 9 This king of Cush is really the king of Egypt. The Egyptians were slowly taken over by their relatives from the south of them.

V. 10 This is the Rabshakeh's pride speaking. He had probably expected to immediately begin a siege of Jerusalem. Now with this delay, Rabshakeh gave free expression to his pride and frustration. Notice that now he is accusing Israel's God of deception.

Vs. 14-20 What a prayer. I can almost visualize Hezekiah coming in and spreading this letter out before the Lord.

Vs. 21-35 This is God's response to Hezekiah. Notice that this time Hezekiah didn't have to send word to Isaiah. God spoke to Isaiah and Isaiah sent this message to Hezekiah. Notice too, that it is longer than the last response.

V. 21 Notice why God makes this response. I guess He's trying to teach us something, although it is a very deep lesson if you think about it.

V. 22 Here and in v. 35, notice what God is defending.

V. 26 In his ranting, Rabshakeh said God had sent him. He was so "right" he should have listened to his own words and been humbled. Now it's too late.

V. 29 Hooks were used by the Assyrians to lead people away into captivity.

Vs. 30-32 God is promising Hezekiah that life in Jerusalem will resemble a time of peace and would slowly get back to normal. Since they would be eating what the land naturally provided, God would provide for them. Also, I think God had a surprise in store for them.

Vs. 33-35 Amen. For all of their arrogance, the Assyrians wouldn't be allowed to even spit against the wall of Jerusalem.

Vs. 36-38 Notice this happened in one night. By now, you should know "who" *the angel of the Lord* is. We have seen the result of having a large army defeated by both Asa and Jehoshaphat. The gold, food, materials, and animals they found in those camps fed and provided for the people for a long time. I'm sure the Assyrians left a lot at Lachish, and Jerusalem was well supplied for the months ahead.

V. 38 According to history, this actually happened 20 years later. Assyria was still a world power but very much toned down. In about 50 years the Assyrians would lead King Manasseh by hooks to a prison in Babylon. But like God's humbling of Egypt years before, they never reestablished their might; and more importantly, they were never a real threat again to Judah and Jerusalem.

Isaiah 38

We have read this before in 2 Kings 20 (on July 2). God is very gracious. I think this shook Hezekiah's life and bent his faith a little. We'll see this more tomorrow. What we read here and tomorrow is a warning for us.

Vs. 1-3 Some suggest because of v. 6 that this happened before God humbled Assyria. But Assyria was still a world power. God didn't create a vacuum in world politics. Yet, Judah wouldn't have to worry about revenge or having any more problems with Assyria. So then, in my opinion, this happened chronologically after the events in chapters 36-37.

Vs. 4-8 I'm still amazed that God made the earth go backwards and it was "no sweat" for Him.

Vs. 9-20 So Hezekiah wrote a song of praise to God. I guess we can't blame Hezekiah for thinking that life is only worth living if it is on earth, but maturity in Christ says we need to have the same outlook as Paul did when he said, *for to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*.

V. 17 Notice Hezekiah's recognition of his bitterness for himself, contrasted with the Lord's mercy.

Vs. 19-20 This is Hezekiah's promise to praise God for His deliverance.

V. 21 I don't know if this procedure is widely recognized in medical circles.

V. 22 Remember that over 20 years earlier when Isaiah told Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, to ask for a sign he wouldn't. The sign given then was Immanuel. Hezekiah trusted God and asked for a sign.

We'll leave Hezekiah in his health and glory. Tomorrow we'll see that something happened to him in all of this that affected his faith for the worse.

Galatians 6

Vs. 1-5 Is this what Paul did with Peter? *Restore* is the same word for "equip" in Ephesians 4:12, to set in order, to make useful, to mend.

So, what is happening in vs. 2 and 5? In one we are to *bear one another's burdens*, and in the other we each *bear our own burdens*. It seems to me that v. 2 is helping one another in times of grave weakness, falling and temptation. This is what happens to a fallen brother or sister, and

maybe what happened to Peter and Barnabas. Verse 5 is the reality of our walk with Christ. We need to mature to the place where we maintain our own walk in following Christ in the reality of the life God has given us.

Vs. 6-10 This is generosity, beginning first where we find spiritual equipping and strengthening: the local church and pastor. Verses 9 and 10 express our faith that God will reward the giving of our lives and resources for others.

Vs. 11-18 Just like the opening of Galatians dealt with the problem, Paul ended here with a final jab. I think what started this again was the mention of his signature. It was proof of the authenticity of the letter. I'm also willing to bet that it had to do with Paul's sight, and that this might have been his "thorn in the flesh." It might have come from one of Paul's beatings. Paul paid the price to keep the gospel free and authentic for them. These Jewish teachers didn't bear fruit and were not willing to face persecution in order to serve churches like Philippi.

V. 17 really brings Paul's credentials into focus. They were borne on his body, as our Lord's were borne on His body. Literally, Paul was branded, showing who owned him. He had the marks of a disciple in the harvest, because he was willing to suffer with Christ to bring and protect the good news of the gospel.

The mark of a church is the love of Jesus Christ. How do you know if they have that love? They are in the harvest, reaching the lost, making disciples, loving one another. The Galatians and the Corinthians were missing it. Many churches miss this. In our work in the harvest we need to keep an eye on our church, so that we keep our hearts and our eye clear to follow Christ. Mixing our relationship to Jesus and our mission for Him with traditions becomes dangerous. We easily come under the bondage of doing things the same way. When we become a socially active, politically complaining church, we become so much like the world that you can't tell us apart. In both cases we are no longer living in the daily grace of Christ and we become ineffective. We need to guard the truth and keep moving forward, motivated by the love of our Savior, reaching the lost and making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 65

For whatever reason, when I read this psalm, I thought of the celebration of the grace of God from Romans 8, *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?* What amazing hope we have. We are eternally secure and blessed by the God of our salvation. Is it works or duty to tell about Him? It is a privilege we don't deserve.

Vs. 1-4 Notice David's mention of Zion, the courts of the house or temple and his desire to dwell there. At this point David only had a tent set up, but he was collecting huge amounts of everything for the building of the future temple.

Vs. 5-8 Notice that God is not only sovereign over all creation, but also over all nations. That points to the plan of redemption. He will bring salvation to all.

Vs. 9-13 God not only blesses the earth, but as a result of that blessing, all mankind is cared for.

Proverbs 23:24

God says it, so it must be true.

SEPTEMBER 22

Today we are beginning Ephesians and entering into the second part of Isaiah. This part of Isaiah is filled with some amazing verses and, of course, great chapters like Isaiah 53 and 55; both of which are worth memorizing. In fact, Ephesians 1-3 are good memorization material too.

Isaiah 39-41:16

Isaiah 39

I believe these guys came after the humbling of Assyria. We have seen that Hezekiah showed them everything. There might be a thought that Hezekiah should have had nothing to show them; because he had sent tons of gold, silver, and anything that wasn't nailed down, to Assyria to keep them from attacking. Of course that didn't work, and God told them it wouldn't. But after God destroyed the Assyrian army, their camp was full of loot they had taken from everyone else, and there would have been tons of precious metals there too. I'm sure Hezekiah got some of that. In essence, what Hezekiah was showing them had been a gift from God. It was nothing that Hezekiah had earned or had reason to glory in. But he did.

Vs. 5-7 There is no expressed condemnation of Hezekiah, but it is implied.

V. 8 This does not have a complimentary ring to it. This judgment was about 100 years away, so why get so worked up? We could understand Hezekiah. Would you get worked up about something that will happen in 100 years from now? But because of this attitude, Hezekiah had a hand in bringing the nation under that judgment.

Here is the view of what Hezekiah did from God's perspective:

2 Chronicles 32:24-25 In those days Hezekiah became sick and was at the point of death, and he prayed to the LORD, and he answered him and gave him a sign. ²⁵But Hezekiah did not make return according to the benefit done to him, for his heart was proud. Therefore wrath came upon him and Judah and Jerusalem.

2 Chronicles 32:31 And so in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart.

All of the kings faltered when they found success, but the way they faltered was specifically unique to each king. They showed a weakness and unwillingness to fully trust God in some area of their lives. With Hezekiah, I have to believe that it began when he thought he was going to die. The attack by the Assyrians was bad, but Hezekiah stood. Hezekiah got sick and he wept bitterly. After this, even with God saving him, his heart was not fully the Lord's. Hey, nothing would happen for 100 years. Hezekiah would be long gone. But in those extra 15 years that God gave him, Hezekiah had a son, Manasseh, who was the worst and most godless king of Israel, and who is credited by tradition, for putting Isaiah to death.

For us the warning here is obvious. Some of us are like a rock in some areas; but it is our anger, or worry, or our sexual needs, or our need to be secure or to be liked, to be financially comfortable, that can shred our faith and get us irrationally focused on ourselves. Some unexpected scare or attraction or frustration can enter our lives, and suddenly we're faced with a temptation that could erase all the faith and devotion for God we have shown over the past years. This story is a warning to us from God.

We need to be in the Word every day, washing ourselves, refreshing our faith and trust. More specifically, the Word focuses us on our Lord, our mission, and our life of following Him through this harvest, glorifying the Father until we are home. This world is not our home, and neither is this particular body.

Isaiah 40

Now with chapters 38 & 39, particularly 39, we have the Babylonian exile clearly stated. Exile meant the extermination of a people. People were forced to worship other gods, speak another language, take new names; and they were removed from their land and culture. Most nations taken into exile never recovered. Judah would not only survive, but thrive because of God. So

now, in the shadow of this dark threat of death to the nation, God breaks out with some of the brightest and most magnificent declarations of hope and restoration ever given to man. Isaiah 53, located in the middle of these 27 chapters, is stirring, and something every disciple should memorize. I wish I had done this sooner.

Get ready to meet some very well-known verses.

Vs. 1-2 The strength of this declaration is in proportion to what Israel has suffered on this planet since the time God formed them. Israel has been an object lesson and they have represented mankind.

Notice that Jerusalem is mentioned.

Vs. 3-5 The context here is the same in the NT regarding John the Baptist. The Deliverer and King was coming.

Vs. 6-8 A warning to all mankind. And our hope: *The Word of our God will stand forever.* Amen. It is vital to know the Word of the Lord and let it wash you daily.

Vs. 9-11 The King is coming in His kingdom. If you look at the gospel that John, Jesus and the Twelve preached, this is it.

Vs. 12-20 This section is about this king and is organized around the question of who He is.

V. 13 Paul quotes this in Romans 11.

Vs. 19-20 We will see this description of making an idol repeated. The process itself, dependent on man, shows how insane it is to worship an idol of any kind. Particularly funny is the need to nail it down so it won't fall.

Vs. 21-26 Here, in the 3rd and 1st person, God declares who He is.

Vs. 27-31 In light of who God is, Jacob-Israel (the unified people of Israel) can trust that the Lord will deliver and restore them. He will give them strength as they wait to return from Babylon and as they wait for the Messiah during the Tribulation.

Vs. 29-31 are some amazing verses and, if you have time, they are worth memorizing.

Isaiah 41:1-16

Vs. 1-7 are a warning to the nations that nothing will stand in God's way or stop His predetermined plan.

V. 4 This is what Jesus says three times in the book of Revelation. Linking this declaration with v. 2, the world should understand that they are defenseless in their rebellion to stop the Lord. The proper response would be to turn to the Lord and submit.

Vs. 8-16 In these verses you get an idea of how God has used Israel as a servant, and how He will use them in the future. Their failure has been an example to all of mankind, and as they represent the redemptive purpose of God in the world, they have been the object of human and spiritual hatred. These are absolutely great verses.

V. 10 This is another one that is good to memorize.

V. 16 Just as the Assyrians smashed themselves against Jerusalem - in the Tribulation, the world will smash themselves, fighting against God's people. When the Lord returns, Israel will rejoice and glory in their Messiah and His kingdom.

Ephesians 1

Ephesians is a great letter. After Galatians, where grace was mentioned as being so important, in Ephesians grace is painted for us in the person of our Lord. God's love, kindness and delight in

those who know Him is described, so that by the time you get to chapters 4-6, you just know that obeying and following are the only logical things to do since He loves us with such reckless abandon. So, let's go. I would suggest reading this slowly and trying to drink this chapter in. Speaking of which, a good latte wouldn't hurt either.

Vs. 1-2 We often see Paul stating that it was God's fault, I mean His will, that made Paul an apostle. In some places this came to Paul's defense. In this letter we'll see that Paul never got over the wonder of being chosen to be used like this. Apparently it was noted after Paul wrote this letter that it was sent to Ephesus and the words, *To...in Ephesus* were added. It was probably the case that churches had sprung up around Ephesus after Paul's years of ministry there, and this letter was meant to circulate around this area. It seems like some of the recipients of this letter hadn't met Paul. This letter was written from Rome during the time of Acts 28, and before he wrote 1 Timothy.

By the way, vs. 3-14 are all one sentence. Read it slowly and enjoy. Notice the phrase *in the heavenly places*. We'll see this again. Also, see if you can find the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in this entire process.

Vs. 15-16 *For this reason*. What reason? Why is Paul saying this? How does this connect with what he has just said? This is a hinge verse, swinging from what Paul has just said, and going into the prayer. Because this is true of them and they have received this, Paul as a maker of disciples is praying for their deepening in this new life of blessing and privilege.

Vs. 17-23 is Paul's prayer for them. It is the first of two great prayers in Ephesians. Think slowly through what Paul is asking for them, realizing it is what God wants for you too. Notice that this is personal growth in Christ that is dependent on our following as disciples. Salvation and new life in Christ is in 3-14, but the next steps of growth are in these verses.

Notice that vs. 20-23 read like Jesus' prelude to the Great Commission. *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* (Matt. 28:18-20)

All of this is not only what God has done for us personally, but there is a great emphasis on the church. Someone has said that Ephesians is not about "me and my God," but rather about "us and our God." Those famous verses in Ephesians 4:12-16 are dependent on all of us growing together in Christ and working together in the harvest. Paul, in Ephesians, describes how glorious the church is because of God's plan of redemption and Christ's blood in saving us to be His church.

Psalm 66

This psalm doesn't say who wrote it, but I did notice a couple things that reminded me of David. Notice in vs. 17-20 that the writer, himself, cried out and experienced deliverance. This would lead me to think it was David.

Vs. 1-4 This call to all nations is very typical of David. Whoever wrote this understood that all of what God was doing through Israel was meant to bring the world to worship God. I was reading about Jesus' second cleansing of the temple the week He died in Mark 11:17, *And he was teaching them and saying to them, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."*

Vs. 5-7 This describes something the Lord had done, some great deliverance that showed that the nations were silly to rebel against God. This event could have been the destruction of the Assyrian army, or it could have been some great victory God gave to David after he became king of the entire nation. But Israel was always to have been reviewing and remembering God's

deliverance as He led them out of Egypt. The writer seems to be referring to God's power in making a way through the Red Sea. The nation should remember that God can do the impossible to rescue His people.

Vs. 8-12 All nations are called upon to bless God because of His grace and deliverance. Coming to God, God would extend to them the same salvation. Yet, as you read this, it was a wild ride until God delivered them. They had to hang on, hoping in the Lord and waiting for Him.

V. 9 Do you notice how often David talks about God setting our feet upon a rock and giving us firm footing. In the wilderness, on the side of hills and mountains, broken rock and dirt made for treacherous footing. David must have seen instability in walking as a symbol of this time of his life.

Vs. 13-15 Again, this sounds like David. His desire was to live in God's presence; and once he became king, his only desire was to bring the ark to Jerusalem, to set it in the tabernacle and to fulfill all that he had spoken to God in those years of living on the run.

Vs. 16-20 Since this is written in the first person, telling personally of what God did for him, I really think this is David. Here again is the testimony to all of God's deliverance and David's claim of knowing the *steadfast love* of the Lord.

Proverbs 23:25-28

Vs. 25-26 These are God's words to heed your "godly" parents. They don't have it all wrong.

Vs. 27-28 This is very similar to what Solomon wrote at the beginning of Proverbs. The *pit* and the *well* might have some double meanings, but the main idea is getting caught and being unable to save yourself.

You wouldn't get any of this advice from evening TV or our movies, but we still know this reality in our hearts. Even in the secular world, politicians and leaders who are caught with a prostitute or caught in adultery are not looked upon graciously. Written in our hearts is still the manufacturer's design that one man should love one woman in marriage forever.

SEPTEMBER 23

Isaiah 41:17-43:13

One thing we'll see in these verses is a promise for those who trust God, and a challenge to those who don't. Also, God begins more and more to show us what the purpose of prophecy is. Why does God say in advance what He's going to do? Is it like a magic trick so we'll be impressed? The strange effect of sin in us is that we are not impressed by anything God does. For the unbelieving the fulfillment of prophecy is a testimony to their stubbornness and sin. God has said what needs to be said, in advance. For the believing, prophecy gives hope. We might be awed by God's character and attributes and power, but the purpose is hope. That will be clear in all we are reading from here to the end of Isaiah. Paul also says this in Romans 15:4, *For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.*

When you see what God is saying to Isaiah, you understand that some of that hope was for those people receiving the prophecies as Isaiah spoke. Some of that hope was for the godly people in Jerusalem as the city was being besieged by the Babylonians, and some of that hope was for those who were taken into exile, for those who returned to a shattered land after the exile. Some of that hope was for the people living in the time Jesus was on the earth. Some of that hope is for Jews now, and then later for the Jews during the Tribulation. There is one message of this prophecy: God will redeem His people. Yet this message is applied to many generations of followers of God.

We should be able to identify with the challenge of living in present circumstances, but knowing, as Paul says in Ephesians 2:6-7, that God has *seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*,⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Even now, working in the harvest, lugging around this body of death, having to cry out to God for mercy and strength as we take up our cross every day to follow, we have a future blessing promised to us to give us hope today. In faith we draw near to God and draw strength. Those who trust in themselves just go, "Yeah, nice verses."

Isaiah 41:17-29

Vs. 17-20 God will answer those who repent and are faithful in calling to Him. Notice that this prophecy is given so they may see and know and understand that this was the hand of the Lord.

Vs. 21-24 This is the challenge to those who pursue other gods or human means.

Vs. 25-27 God declares that He is the one who is foretelling and determining the return of the people to Jerusalem.

One note here: Because of where Jerusalem is, everything came from the north. To the west was the Mediterranean Sea and to the east was the great desert. No one came over the desert. So even though the Babylonians and Persians were east of Jerusalem, they had to travel north along the rivers and then south to Jerusalem. They called this route "the fertile crescent," because of the arc the river takes. Therefore, most of the threat that Jerusalem faced came from the north.

V. 25 This *one* is thought to be Cyrus, the Persian king who sent the people back to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple.

Vs. 28-29 Again, those who follow or worship anything but the Lord are only fooling themselves.

Isaiah 42

There are two servants in view. The one *servant* was the nation that was supposed to give testimony to the world. They failed. So, God sent the other *Servant*, the Messiah, who was successful. God always knew the first servant would fail their first mission, and Jesus was appointed before the foundation of the world to be the Savior of the world. The Jews will get another chance, and they will fulfill their destiny.

Vs. 1-16 are about the Messiah. Some of this was fulfilled and mentioned in the Gospels and some of this will still be fulfilled in the Tribulation and in the Millennial Kingdom.

There are a lot of things in these verses. Look for structure and commands. *I am* is used to help follow the flow of the passage. Notice how often God bases His promises on the fact He is the creator. It is almost as if He is using creation as a symbol of hope, saying, "Just as I made this, you can be sure of that."

Vs. 1-4 are quoted in Matthew 12:20, and they are great verses. Since this is said of the Lord, we as His followers should see some of this as our mode of operation. You didn't see Jesus yelling on street corners or in angry debate. To those who were leading the people astray, He was hard, but then only at the end of His ministry after He had given them many opportunities to believe Him. Jesus allowed the word the Father had given Him to attract or repel people. He didn't yell or demand.

Vs. 5-9 These words could be from the Father to the Son, His Servant. They might also apply to the nation and their ministry to the nations. Yet, these words remind me of what Jesus quoted when He taught in Nazareth and almost got thrown off the cliff. What He quoted was from Isaiah 61 and from Isaiah 58. But it is close to this too. It was a summation of Jesus' ministry.

Vs. 10-13 In light of the coming of God's Servant, there will be victory and restoration. The believing should rejoice. What follows shows that this peace and redemption will come through victory, and victory means there is a coming conflict and judgment.

Vs. 14-16 The conflict will end with those in darkness receiving light.

Vs. 17-25 This is the failed servant Israel, as opposed to the Messiah. But Israel will not end its service as a failure.

Isaiah 43:1-13

Vs. 1-7 These are powerful words of encouragement to the repentant and faithful among the exiles back then and in the future. Verses 1-2 are great comfort and great verses to memorize.

Vs. 8-13 Yet there will always be people who will worship and trust something or someone other than God.

Notice God's own declaration to His greatness and power and sovereignty.

The height of sin and insanity is to deny God's existence. And for those of us who say there is a God, our insanity is in not trusting Him and following Him. If you read the Upper Room Discourse, John 13-17, note how many times Jesus says the people of Israel did not know Him. They were this blind servant. In the future, they will know Him and serve Him and lead many in every nation to salvation during the Tribulation.

Ephesians 2

Just like yesterday, go slowly through these first 10 verses. There are some thoughts in these verses that are capable of changing a life.

Vs. 1-7 In the Greek, these verses are one big, happy sentence without punctuation. If you are a former grammar teacher, you might want to hunt down the main verbs and the subject and then graph all the subordinate clauses. This explains why some translations begin with the phrase, which isn't there but is referred to later, "And you He made alive when." This introductory phrase is implicit in what Paul is saying. Putting that phrase first puts the opening words in context quickly. Grammar is fun.

V. 4 God is the subject of this sentence.

V. 5 *By grace you have been saved* is a parenthetical, emotional outburst on Paul's part. Can you see from the sentence why this is? We, as described by the past four verses, were made *alive together with Christ*? The dirty and the dead are linked to the divine? Paul is saying, "Whoa, dude! By grace we have been saved."

V. 6 is positional. We are physically not yet there; but in reality, in God's sight, our future is secure.

V. 7 This thought is pretty unbelievable, and really, more than the mind can grasp.

Vs. 8-10 The *this* in v. 8 is the entire process of redemption. It is not a question of grace or faith, per se, saving us. God did it all. Some people think to have faith is a work. That is no more a work than putting a pill in your mouth. You didn't make the pill or build the manufacturing plant or engineer the formula. God did it all. Faith is mere trust in what God has accomplished and is offering. This opportunity and the offer are not necessary on God's part. It is amazing grace. Obviously then, *good works* are not how we are saved. They are what God gives us to do as "keys" that open doors in the harvest. When we get to Titus, we'll see good deeds are mentioned quite a bit. Conspicuous by its absence in Titus is any mention of sharing the gospel. I think good works to the person next door is what God has given us to open the door next door for the gospel. It's loving our neighbor.

Vs. 11-17 This isn't just an explanation of how God united Jew and Gentile. It is an explanation of how God brought all people together in Christ to make a people for Himself during this time. There is no contradiction between Judaism and Christianity. Christ fulfilled the law in His sinless life and became the payment for all humanity (for *all* had violated the law). He became a curse for them, thereby satisfying the justice of God. Now, as said in Galatians, there is just one man in Christ. Paul is actually beginning to describe the creation of the church... a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Notice that in those last verses the pronouns are plural. *You* means *all of you*.

These verses may contain a hint of a problem where some might have said, as in Galatians, that being a Jew was better. Paul is not only laying that to rest, but he is also about to talk about the mystery of the gospel; that is, that God would create a people for this "dispensation" (administration of time) who would carry the message forth until it is time for the Jews to fulfill their calling.

Vs. 18-22 This is another way of saying the wild olive tree was grafted into the cultivated olive tree. (Rom. 11:24) The entire focus is on Jesus. He is the Cornerstone and He is the one we are built into as a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.

Just so you don't get lost "in the Spirit," if you read John 16 or Acts 1:8 you'll see that it is the Spirit who gives us our pizzazz in the harvest. He is all about the harvest and if you want to see the Spirit do His stuff, you have to be in the harvest following Jesus, reaching out and making disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 67

Vs. 1-3 This psalm begins with the blessing which God gave to Aaron to bless the people of Israel in Numbers 6:24. What is interesting, then, is that the writer goes on and expresses God's purpose in blessing Israel, to make Israel a witness to the world that all people might be saved. Notice that all the nations and peoples are to praise God.

V. 4 This expresses relationship. While praising God could be an obligation, having gladness and singing and expressing joy means the nations know the Lord.

Vs. 5-7 This is a great song about the fulfillment of the promise to Adam and Eve, to Abraham and to Israel. It is what the Millennium will look like as Jesus reigns.

This is now the mission of the church, to bear testimony in the harvest. The day will come when Israel will turn to their Messiah and bear the light of His Word in the world's darkest hour. There will be joy in every nation and gladness among all people, and they will praise the Lord, that He reigns.

Proverbs 23:29-35

There are few things on earth that lend themselves to greater misuse than "drink." It is obvious from Scripture that God made wine, and wine is spoken of as a sign of His blessing; but in a fallen world it has become a danger. Here, without God, we seek the relaxation it gives as an escape and we get lost in being lost in our escapes.

As disciples we need to look to our own hearts on this one. Is this something God has given us liberty to enjoy? Can we control it? Jesus drank wine, but Jesus controlled it. Paul probably drank wine and was against those who forbade it on legalistic grounds, but Paul was against drinking wine around the weak, flaunting personal freedoms. Paul told Timothy to drink a little wine to deal with the stressful effects that ministry was having on his stomach.

It might also be true that many people don't drink wine, but the warning of excess is still here. Everything that is good can be twisted: games, TV, following a favorite sports team, shopping, computers, sex, everything. We each need to see what we can control, what we might need help controlling, and what we might just need to eliminate.

SEPTEMBER 24

Isaiah 43:14-45:10

Reading these portions of Isaiah, we can see why everyone who has loved God has loved these verses. There is something that wells up in you spiritually by reading what God confirms about Himself. So imagine being a Jewish leader who was familiar with this section of Isaiah and being very aware that Israel was the nation chosen by God to take the Word to the nations. And then you hear a man named Jesus say this, *Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.* (John 8:58) As you read today look for *I am*, and you will understand why the Jews were angry when Jesus said that. Not everyone was angry. Some people understood, and love for God began to well up in their hearts.

Isaiah 43:14-28

Vs. 14-21 Even as God speaks to the people of Judah who will be going into exile, and to the generation in exile, note how God affirms His love for them. His names reflect His care and His sovereign control. Notice the assurance in vs. 18-19. With a history like Israel's, they could easily sink into despair because of their failure. God said He was doing something new. Even the wild and barren wilderness would answer God's call and provide a way, and water, for God's chosen people.

Vs. 22-24 In contrast to God's promises and affirmations going back to Adam and Eve, this people disregarded God. Even though there were laws to follow after Moses, God didn't burden them in that they never really honored God; but they burdened Him by their rebellion and sins.

Vs. 25-28 Isn't v. 25 great? God will forgive their sins in spite of their sins. God made a promise to Adam and Eve and to Abraham. And before the foundation of the world, He had already ordained a Savior. That is why God can state v. 25 like this. That's not just mercy, that's grace.

Isaiah 44

Vs. 1-8 This is an amazing declaration of God's love for His people. Much of this will not happen until Christ returns. Take note of what God says here. There are some great verses, and notice again the purpose of prophecy.

V. 3 This mention of pouring out the Spirit would eventually make sense on the day of Pentecost as proof of the salvation offered in Christ. In Romans 5:5 Paul says that the love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Spirit. I'll bet Paul was thinking of a verse like this.

Vs. 9-20 In contrast to God and the hope presented in vs. 1-8, this is the brilliance of making idols. In our case, it would be finding security and hope in anything but God. It would be finding fulfillment in any life other than following Christ in the harvest. Before the Babylon exile, Israel and Judah were full of idols. When the Jews returned, idolatry was never a big problem. But they did develop other problems. Sin without God's cure and help remains sin and finds something other than God to occupy it.

Vs. 21-28 This is an amazing expression of God's love.

Vs. 21-22 These two verses comprise the beginning and the future fulfilling of Israel's purpose. God made them, and in essence, has redeemed them. Based on all of the promises and God's faithfulness, their future is absolutely secure.

V. 23 Since God owns the future, they could have sung this back then. It will be sung in the future as Jesus returns to Jerusalem.

Vs. 24-28 Just follow the word *who*. And, looking at v. 24, can you sense the impact of Jesus saying "I Am?"

V. 28 This mention of Cyrus will be expanded on. Since it will be a dark day when Jerusalem is destroyed and the people go into exile, God is giving them hope. God names by name the king who will order the Jews to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple. The miracle of this will slowly begin to unfold the day that Nebuchadnezzar takes the first Jews captive. That begins the book of Daniel. The chapters in Daniel make great kids' stories, but as we go through Daniel it will amaze you to see what God is doing. It is amazing love.

Isaiah 45:1-10

Vs. 1-4 These are good words for Cyrus because of how God will use him. Actually, it says more about who God is. Cyrus' claim to fame is that He commanded the Jews to return to Jerusalem. Other than this, we don't know five other words he spoke. On the other hand, we have far more dialogue from Nebuchadnezzar, who God called a great king and who might have been saved. Darius the Mede was a great king and loved and feared Daniel. Darius gave the command that the Jews be protected and permitted to worship their God only. When Cyrus heard of what happened in Babylon (Daniel 6), he commanded the Jews to return. There is a good chance that Cyrus knew Daniel personally and knew all of what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar. What you see in Nebuchadnezzar and in Darius might give you hope that those men were saved. Who knows about Cyrus?

Vs. 5-8 Who is a God like this? There is no other God. Notice that God doesn't just give light. He forms it. Edison made the light bulb; God made light.

Vs. 9-10 Faith doesn't strive with God; only unbelief contends with God.

It is hard to read all of this and not be affected by the love and greatness of the Lord. We are so undeserving, yet we should be so grateful that He has reached out to save us.

Ephesians 3

If this reading in Isaiah wasn't enough to inspire you, this might do the trick.

V. 1 Now this chapter is a major digression of sorts, but never has so much cool stuff been said on a rabbit trail. Some say Paul gets back to the subject in 3:14 where he begins to pray. I think the entire chapter is a Spirit-inspired interruption, and that Paul gets back to the point in 4:1. You can judge for yourself.

Vs. 2-13 These verses make up one wonderful sentence. As you read this and glean what you can, it is good to think of what the mystery is (vs. 4-6). The mystery is not that the Gentiles would be saved. It says that the Gentiles will hope in the Messiah, when Isaiah is talking about the Millennial Kingdom. The Psalms say the nations will worship God. The mystery that was hidden was the church; that is, that group of people from the Gentiles (with those few believing Jews) who were now taking the gospel to the world. Up to now, that had been Israel's job. The Gentile church was totally unforeseen. This is what the principalities and powers (satanic also) did not see. According to God's purpose in the OT, if only Israel could be a witness to God in the world, then all you had to do was to get the Jews to kill their Messiah and the plan of God would stop. But as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 2:8, *None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

The death of Jesus didn't mean the end of Israel's ministry to the world. It meant the beginning of the church, formed not of a people with a nation and a language and geography, but of those saved by grace through faith and united in Christ. Satan never saw that coming. That was the mystery. After the church does its work in the harvest, then God will put believing Israel in center stage and bring His purpose of redemption to completion.

Vs. 7-8 This was Paul's understanding of his life in God's plan. In our own place in the harvest, reaching out to those whom God has put around us, we have the same mission and calling.

V. 10 Note again the rulers *in the heavenly places*. These *rulers and authorities* are mentioned again in Eph. 6:12 as the evil spiritual forces we wrestle with.

Vs. 14-19 In light of what Paul has just said regarding the unfolding grace and revelation of God's plan of redemption, he has to thank God and pray for these people.

Vs. 16-19 Think through this prayer. This is what God wants for each of us.

V. 16 This strengthening comes as a result of internalizing the riches of God's glory and it is a requirement for v. 17 to be possible. When you look at the glory of what God has done in creation, there should not only be a sense of awe, but also a sense that this wise God is watching over us and in control of all things. This was God's argument to Job. The glory that Paul is pointing to here is particularly in how God has engineered redemption since before the foundation of the world, shrouding it in mystery and suddenly revealing it fully in Christ. This is something it might take us a lifetime to internalize and appreciate, but there are pieces of it, right now, that should cause awe, gratitude and trust to rise up in us. This is designed to give us an unwavering hope so that, as v. 17 says, Christ can continually *dwell in your hearts through faith*. Fear drives faith from our hearts and keeps us from abiding in Christ.

V. 17 Christ dwelling in our hearts through faith is dependent on us standing strong in the Spirit. This abiding in Christ goes beyond just being a believer. The Ephesians were already believers. This process of being strong in the Spirit so as to abide in Christ takes place in the harvest and gives us a sense of joy, a sense of mission and sense of destiny. It is being a disciple in the harvest in every sense of what Jesus taught His disciples to be.

Vs. 18-19 Laura's comment here was that one knowledge is traded for another. Knowing Christ is greater than all knowledge. Knowing Christ is greatest and it is the relationship of being saved, abiding in His world and following Him. Following Christ in the harvest on this dying planet begins and ends with knowing *the love of Christ*. What opened our eyes? *The love of Christ*. Why do we forsake all else and follow? *The love of Christ*. Why are we willing to suffer and give our lives for Him that others might be saved? Guess. What is our joy in all circumstances and our confidence for the future? *The love of Christ*. The more we follow in His Word and in the harvest, the better we know our Lord and abide in Him.

Vs. 20-21 This is the benediction to the people and the close of this very amazing prayer. Notice that what God can do is tied to the harvest by His glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations. That's where the power is. *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples*.

So what is the love of Christ? It is not just some feeling. God expressed His love in a lot of planning and doing. It is messy. It involved time and birth and sweat and tears and conflict and blood, lots of blood. Without all of God's planning and work, we have no love and would not know love. With all of what God has done, we are alive in the love of Christ and have a model to follow and a commission to fulfill.

Psalm 68:1-18

I guess this is David's version of, "If God is for us, who is against us." Following Christ doesn't always appear to make sense, but God can open windows in heaven in a night, or decimate an army while they are sleeping. He can certainly protect us and we can't be more secure in life than when we are standing with Him. Faith knows this.

Vs. 1-3 David had seen this over many long years. This is an encouragement to those looking to God. It reminds me of Jesus telling His disciples that they would have sorrow, but that their sorrow would turn to joy.

Vs. 4-6 God leads the faithful to His own habitation, but the rebellious get to live somewhere else.

Vs. 7-10 David is recounting God's provision and love for Israel as He led them through the wilderness. Isn't it interesting that we just read in Isaiah about God leading his remnant through the wilderness?

Vs. 11-14 The key here is that God gives the Word. This sounds similar to things God is saying in Isaiah.

Vs. 15-18 Mountains are looked upon figuratively as being proud. That's why in Isaiah it says that before the coming of the Lord, the mountains will be leveled. There will be humility in His presence.

In this case, the humble mount that God has chosen, Jerusalem, is full of His power and glory. In fact, He would have a victory outside of Jerusalem and lead captives free. *Therefore it says, "When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men."* (Eph. 4:8)

Proverbs 24:1-2

So much for desiring to hang with the cool, the celebrities, the rich and the beautiful.

SEPTEMBER 25

We have a special day today. We will meet some passages regarding our Lord and His working to reach the world. In Ephesians we are entering the practical half of the letter, and again, some famous verses. You may not feel it, but the Lord is using all of this to strengthen and renew your heart as you follow Christ in the harvest.

Isaiah 45:11-48:11

By now you are noticing again and again how often God repeats that He is the Creator, and the One who declares things from long ago. This is set in contrast to idols and those who make them and depend on them. Over and over again God declares Himself to be the only Savior for mankind and the gracious forgiving God of Israel.

Vs. 11-13 This seems to be talking about Cyrus as a representative of the Persian Empire. As a result of Daniel, God moved Cyrus to send the people back to rebuild the temple; but the city wasn't rebuilt until Artaxerxes sent Nehemiah years later. The focus here isn't Cyrus or Persia; it is the Holy One of Israel who stretched out the heavens and moved nations. It mentions that God stirred him up in righteousness. If you look at how God worked with Pharaoh and with Nebuchadnezzar, you see that the only difference was how the two men responded to God. Everything that God did to Nebuchadnezzar became a lesson to the young Persian prince, Cyrus.

V. 14 What a long verse. The blessing here seems to be people coming to Israel to seek God.

Vs. 15-19 It is interesting that it says God hides Himself, yet He is a savior. In v. 19 He says that He didn't speak in secret. The point is that God needs to be sought in a spirit of truth and sincerity. God remains dark to those who really don't want Him. There is so much in these verses.

Vs. 20-25 This looks like a call to the entire earth to come to God for salvation. These are incredible verses. Notice how God mentions again that He has been saying all of this from the beginning. Since the earliest parts of the Bible were written down by Moses, it is safe to say that mankind has had a written record of God's words for most of recorded history. That would mean we are without excuse. The words are there to be read and believed.

V. 23 This is a rather famous verse in the NT. *Every knee shall bow* and every tongue shall confess, regardless of race, language or religion. Because there is only one God, there is no

religion other than knowing God through Jesus Christ. These verses in Isaiah are good evidence, if anyone should need it, that there is one God and there is only one way to come to Him.

Isaiah 46

Vs. 1-2 This is judgment on Babylon for their idolatry. Notice the irony of having to have their livestock haul their idols. Their idolatry made Israel sick of its own. Just for trivia, these two names of their gods will come up again. *Bel* we'll see in the renaming of Daniel to *Belteshazzar*. *Nebo* we have already seen in *Nebuchadnezzar*.

Vs. 3-7 God calls Israel to listen to Him regarding the madness of making idols. Notice how tender vs. 3-4 are. God has borne them and promises to keep bearing them.

Vs. 8-11 God tells them to remember the words of prophecy He spoke and how He determined events. Ironically, the people who went into exile would have been reading these very words, over a hundred years later, as the events were happening to them; and they still didn't believe.

Vs. 12-13 God tells them to *listen*, for as surely as all this other stuff has happened, God will put salvation in Zion. This blessing is for the Millennium.

Isaiah 47

Vs. 1-7 Now God pronounces judgment on Babylon for its pride and comfort. Nebuchadnezzar was humbled by God, but the other Babylonian kings had no regard for God.

V. 4 Even though the people were in exile, they still had a strong redeemer who was working for them.

V. 7 You could make a case that Nebuchadnezzar "laid to heart" the position he was in as God's sword to punish Judah and Jerusalem. The kings who followed Nebuchadnezzar did not have this respect for God or Israel. In fact, look at what happens in Daniel 5. The entire judgment on Belshazzar was that he should have known better and should have "laid to heart" what God had done to Nebuchadnezzar.

Vs. 8-11 Notice the alternating between vs. 8 and 10, and 9 and 11. Verses 8 and 10 talk about how indestructible the people felt. Verses 9 and 11 talk about their dependence on sorcery and enchantment.

V. 9 It happened to the city on one day, in a few hours one night. This is Daniel 5.

Vs. 12-15 Being seated in the city of Nimrod, the Babylonians thought they were strong because of spiritual power. In Daniel 2 when Nebuchadnezzar couldn't get the wise men, magicians and enchanters to figure out his dream, he was shaken. He depended on their power. The same would be true of Belshazzar on the night the Babylonian Empire fell. The wise men couldn't help so he had to call Daniel.

Isaiah 48:1-11

Vs. 1-2 God is rebuking Israel for calling themselves by God's name, but not being faithful to follow Him and live for His glory.

Vs. 3-8 Again, God uses prophecy to defeat their idols and their pride.

Vs. 9-11 Yet for His glory and for His name's sake, God will save Israel and obtain glory through them.

It is interesting that in Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9, he pleads with God at the end to answer the prayer for His own name's sake; because the people are called by His name. I wonder if Daniel read this portion of Isaiah.

This morning I read where Jesus said in John 7:18, *The one who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but the one who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood.* Jesus was speaking about Himself, living to give glory to His Father. Jesus said that He has given His glory to His followers so that we may be one with our Lord and the Father. Clearly, we are to walk and work in the harvest, reflecting His glory as we reach out and make disciples, who make disciples.

Ephesians 4:1-16

This chapter has the blueprint of church ministry in the harvest.

Vs. 1-3 This is what Paul wanted to say at the beginning of chapter 3. The church can't bring the message of redemption if they can't work together. Living worthy of our calling is the same as living to bring glory to Christ for what He has done for us.

Vs. 4-6 The unity of the church is found in all of these factors.

Vs. 7-10 Once again, the issue of gifts rises. God gives the gifts. We don't choose them. Paul seems to be mentioning gifts, because they caused some disunity here as they did in Corinth. Notice how Paul ties the giving of the gifts to the victory of Christ and our redemption. My observation is that if each person isn't deeply in love with Christ for their salvation, and if the church is not primarily focused on being in their local harvest, either the gifts become irrelevant in that church, or they become a point of fighting and envy. The church unites in the love of Christ to work in the harvest, and then the tools make sense.

V. 8 Look at Psalm 68:18 from yesterday's reading. Pretty cool, huh?

Vs. 11-16 The gifts of these leaders are to be used to equip the church, making it ready for use, like mending a fishing net, so it can catch stuff.

Mentioned is the equipping *for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.* In a couple of verses this building will be described as *makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.* This is both bringing in from the harvest and making disciples, who make disciples. In this entire process the leaders are bringing the group to maturity in Christ. This also has a protective function in the church and in preserving the truth for the next generation. In this maturity and unity in Christ, the church works as a team, each part doing its job without rivalry or envy, working toward the harvest. This is taking the love of Christ to their area, bearing fruit that brings bodily growth and strengthening themselves in the love of Christ.

Notice too that bringing the church to maturity is unity in the faith and knowledge of Jesus. Unified in Jesus we imitate Jesus and follow Him in the harvest. The winds of doctrine and lies keep us from growing in Him, keep us from unity, and make us unable to bear fruit in the harvest. Churches that do not bear fruit, regardless of their reasons, have usually gotten off on some point of doctrine or practice that has neutralized them.

Psalm 68:19-35

I know it says that this was written by David, but it sure has a "post exile" ring to it. During the time of the Judges to David, Israel fell prey to its enemies. It was not a respected nation and people were captured and taken as slaves. That might be a possible explanation for v. 22.

Vs. 19-23 As David was beginning to rescue the nation as their new king, he could assure them of God's help and salvation, because he, himself, had been experiencing that salvation and help every day for the past 10 years.

Vs. 24-27 In David leading the people, he led them to the Lord and led them in worship. Significant here is the mention of Benjamin. This was important because Saul had been from the tribe of Benjamin. When the nation split, Judah and Benjamin remained together as one nation.

Also, Zebulun and Naphtali would have been the northernmost tribes. For me it is interesting because this area is where the "Son of David," Jesus, was raised. When he began His ministry, these tribes saw a great light.

Vs. 28-31 It seems that David was looking forward to the day when there would be a *temple at Jerusalem*, where all the nations would come to honor God. In Psalm 27, David refers to the tabernacle as the pavilion, sanctuary and temple.

Vs. 32-35 David, as usual, is giving testimony to the nations and praising God. During David's years people came to Jerusalem to seek God because of the grace poured on David and the people. In the future there will be another call to the nations of the earth to sing praises to God. That will happen someday, and in the meantime, we're working in the harvest until we hear the dinner bell.

Proverbs 24:3-4

It is amazing how many people begin marriage and a life together without having a goal or a plan. God is better than a plan. He is someone who guides us daily in His Word and gives our lives a goal and a purpose bigger than marriage that draws two people together.

SEPTEMBER 26

Isaiah 48:12-50:11

Isaiah 48:12-22

Vs. 12-13 Isn't it interesting that God declares His eternal nature and power as Creator to comfort His people, not to threaten them? Who does that? Our Father does. As God calls the creation and it obeys, so will it be when He calls His people out of exile.

Vs. 14-22 This is God's promise to free His people from Babylon. Notice all of the love and comfort being spoken to Israel. And some people really insist that the God of the OT is a god of wrath?

V. 16 This sounds like it is the Messiah.

V. 18 Doesn't this sound a little like Jesus crying over Jerusalem? Anyone who says there is no love in the OT hasn't read it and doesn't understand the heart of God. Isn't it amazing to be able to say that we can understand the heart of God?

V. 22 There is no rest for the wicked; and then somebody said, "and the righteous don't need any." Not true.

Isaiah 49

The past nine chapters have been focused on giving the people hope. They would be scattered and punished in the world, in Babylon, and in the times that precede the coming of Christ in His kingdom. These next nine chapters will focus on the Messiah. Read these chapters with that understanding, and you'll see how some of these verses will pull at your heart.

Vs. 1-4 This is the Messiah introducing Himself.

V. 2 This sounds like what the apostle John witnessed, when he saw Jesus in the book of Revelation.

V. 3 The Messiah is called "Israel," because chronologically on earth, He takes over for Israel as the servant of God.

V. 4 This sounds a little "un-Messiah" like, but as a man, Jesus did cry out to His Father.

Vs. 5-6 This is the Messiah's job. He will bring Jacob back to the Father and He will be a light to the nations.

Vs. 7-12 Amazing verses. Because of the Messiah, nations come to Israel and the people will be saved. Jesus Himself will be a covenant for the people. It is clear that this will apply to a future generation of Israel.

Vs. 13-14 Because of the Messiah there should be rejoicing from all of creation, but Israel felt forgotten. They have paid a hard price for their disobedience, and now God has used them as an object lesson. The future will take away all of Israel's anguish.

Vs. 15-18 God will not forget His promise to Israel. Paul and the Spirit say this in Romans 15:8, *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs.* The church didn't supplant Israel or take their promises. Israel's promises were confirmed by the Messiah and they will be fulfilled in the future.

Vs. 19-21 When the Messiah brings everything to fulfillment, Israel will feel like the land is too small for them because of all the blessing.

Vs. 22-26 At the Messiah's coming Israel will be exalted among the nations. This will not just be because the King is in Israel. It will be because of the role Israel plays during the Tribulation, risking their lives to get out the word of the kingdom to the people of the earth as the storm rages. Verse 23 confirms that those who wait for the Messiah will not be put to shame.

V. 25 This sounds like what Jesus said about binding the strong man and looting his house. In this case, the loot is people. Jesus would free people from bondage to death and the power of Satan. He will also redeem Israel, allowing Israel to be the servant of God in the Tribulation and during the Millennial Kingdom.

Isaiah 50

Vs. 1-3 Although God had "divorced" Israel because of her "adultery," the Messiah has the power to bring them back.

Vs. 4-6 This introduces the price the Messiah will have to pay to redeem Israel and mankind.

V. 5 He put His hand to the plough and didn't look back. He was obedient and humbled Himself even to die on a cross.

V. 6 This is exactly what happened to Jesus before the cross.

Vs. 7-9 The Son walked by faith and sought the help of His Father. As His disciples we do the same. He is the perfect example of what abiding means.

V. 7 I was reading this morning in John 7, *When the days drew near for Him to be taken up, He set His face to go to Jerusalem.* That is the context of this verse.

Vs. 10-11 There are two lights here. One light is in trusting in the Messiah. The other light is one's own trust in himself or in whatever. One light leads to the peace that passes understanding, and the other light leads to torment in this life, and in the life to come.

I was just reading in John 17 how Jesus said He would send us into the world. Because of that assignment He would consecrate Himself, so that we would also be consecrated in the truth. Jesus was already laying everything down for us, for our forgiveness and to pay for our sin. Now, in the context of our mission in the harvest, He was saying that His commitment would redouble to guide us during this time. If Jesus is this committed to us and to the harvest, it means that we should be committed too; but more, it means that we have all of the power and authority

of heaven at our back, enabling us as we follow, reach out, and make disciples, who make disciples.

Ephesians 4:17-32

With all of the grace that is described in chapters 1-3 and with the inclusion of us all in the mystery of the revealed church, Paul makes his second strong appeal in this chapter. The first appeal was to live a life worthy of our calling in Christ and our inclusion in the work of the church. This appeal is even stronger. Now that we bear the name of Christ in the world, we are to live and work as one. This sounds a lot like John 17.

V. 17 This verse ought to be stunning. As Christians we can still live in the futility of our minds. This is why church often doesn't work. The love of Christ becomes replaced by routine and by our agendas. The love of Christ is supposed to drive us together in the power of the Spirit into the harvest.

Although the next verses will describe the darkness of the lost mindset in terms of ethical malfunctions, the futility of mind that Paul mentions here is living and thinking without being filled by God's Word and Spirit. There is nothing "intuitive" about the spiritual life. We can't get it from ourselves. We need the solid input of the Word every day in our hearts and minds. Then, rather than relying on our feelings, desires, and agendas, we must rely on the leading of the Spirit. That old life is lived in our imagination, in our desires, in our gut, in our resources and in our intellect. The sin within us still permeates everything. That old life never worked before and it doesn't work now. The new life is bound to the Word and our salvation in Jesus. Now, we are to follow Him and to walk by asking the Spirit to guide us in all situations, expecting that He is doing it. It's a wilder ride than we think.

Vs. 18-20 This is the darkness of the lost mind and the reason for it. This is the world at present, and since this is written to a church, it means that we are still capable of doing it.

What do we (did we) learn in Christ?

Vs. 20-24 So, what are we being renewed in? What is it that is constantly making us over and guiding our thinking and attitudes and actions every minute and hour? That would be everything Paul said in chapters 1-3. Based on that, following the Spirit into the harvest with a loving, supernatural, humble mindset should be a given. This continual renewing will only happen if we are in the Word every day and taking up our cross every day to follow Christ in the harvest.

Vs. 25-32 Oh, yeah, how does all of that relate to this people in this "divine" organization? If the church is a team, reaching the lost, making disciples, who make disciples into the next generation, it has to function like a team. Unlike any other "team" that might work together, but not really like each other, we are supposed to love one another because of the special bond we share in the love, blood and salvation in Jesus Christ. Again, read the context of John 16-17. In John 17 Jesus says that His followers will be hated by the world but are sent into the world to proclaim His message. So Jesus appealed to the Father to protect His people from the evil one and prayed that His followers might be one with Him and the Father. Loving one another and being one in Christ is the only way we can succeed in this mission. Too many believers have lost the mission, and too many believers strive to make church what they want. The church is about what Jesus wants in this time of harvest.

V. 32 I've seen this verse abused by Christians. God does not forgive us if we do not repent and say we're sorry. To force others to forgive when a lie still exists in the room is not being like God; it's just trying to get someone off the hook or sweep the matter under the rug in the name of "forgiveness."

Psalm 69:1-18

Before you begin reading you should know that this psalm is full of references to the Messiah and some of this is fulfilled in Jesus. Whatever David experienced would be mirrored in the life and suffering of our Lord, both before the cross and while on the cross.

Vs. 1-4 It must have made David wonder why so many people wanted him dead. He had done nothing to Saul to deserve that. *But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'* (John 15:25)

V. 5 I can identify with this. This would have been David, but not Jesus.

Vs. 6-8 In some respect, this portion reminds me of John 17. And imagine, David had all of these people joining him, following his faith in God. I can sense the weight of that. If you lead people in faith, it is often your faith that they hang on to. This is why Jesus said in John 17:19, *And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.*

V. 9 The first half of this verse is quoted in John 2:17, when the new disciples of this new rabbi watched Him go "postal" in the temple (maybe they watched Jesus and came up with the expression, "going temple"), chasing animals, overturning tables, telling people to leave. *His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."*

Paul quotes the second part of this verse in Romans 15, telling the Romans to live for others because Jesus did not live to please Himself, *but as it is written, 'the reproaches of those who reproached you, fell upon me.'*

Vs. 10-12 I know this applied to David, and it certainly applied to Jesus. And Jesus endured this for us.

Vs. 13-18 David appeals to God's *faithfulness* and His *steadfast love*. Verse 13 is also interesting in that David apparently knew that God had a plan and a time in mind for everything that was happening.

Could this portion also have been true of our Lord? *In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.* (Heb. 5:7)

Proverbs 24:5-6

Verse 6 explains the *full of strength* and the *enhances his might* of v. 5. The *wise man* knows how to go to the right people and get the counsel he needs. In the harvest, we need to learn to seek wisdom and counsel from others, but we often learn this by first having to learn who to go to, or not go to. Not all believers live by faith, and not all are disciples. Finding kindred spirits who are able to help and give good advice is priceless. Sometimes it might seem wiser to go it alone, but that should be the exception. The wisdom from God given here is to seek godly help. If God wants you isolated and alone in the wilderness, you'll know it.

SEPTEMBER 27

Today's reading has two very important sections of the Bible. When we realize that God has crafted His Word to strengthen and lead us, we realize how He loves us. Being able to be in His Word every day is a privilege we don't deserve, and yet we can enjoy it if we want to. Jesus promised to speak to us in John 16:12-15, *I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.* ¹³*When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.* ¹⁴*He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* ¹⁵*All that the Father has is mine; therefore I said that he will take what is mine and declare it to you.* Time to have a talk.

Isaiah 51-53

When we read this section today, it is easy to see how the people in Jesus' day thought the Messiah would bring the kingdom and eternal deliverance at His first coming. They didn't understand that the purpose of His first coming was to present Himself as an offering for sin. They didn't understand the Scriptures, that they would reject Him. They didn't see the church age, but then no one did. The church was hidden.

We will read today that God will deliver the people by the hand of the Messiah. There was a hint of that final deliverance in their release from the Babylonian captivity, but the way this final deliverance is described, it is certainly focused on the second advent of Christ, when He comes to reign in Zion for a thousand years.

Isaiah 51

As you read this chapter circle the commands to *listen*, *look*, and *awake*. Try to understand what unique thing God is saying in each of these sections. There are lots of words that are repeated.

Vs. 1-3 The people of promise are really from the promise of Abraham. The law showed their inability without faith to follow God. It revealed sin. They were born in the redemptive plan of God. Israel had been barren because of their sin, but God would lead them to blessing as He used them to fulfill their destiny.

Vs. 4-11 Notice the mentions of God's *righteousness* and His *salvation*. God will not only save and bring people to Himself, but it will be done with righteousness. All of mankind, bowing their knees before God, will have to admit to His justice and righteousness. All those who are judged will know they deserve it. All those who are saved will know that it was grace and that God did it righteously.

V. 5 Notice the mention of God's *arms*. When Mary praises God in Luke 1:51, she says, *He has shown strength with his arm; he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts*. She and the Spirit clearly saw the coming of the Messiah in this show of power and regard for the weak.

V. 11 In Isaiah, there has been a continual focus on Zion.

Vs. 12-16 This section seems to be God declaring that it is He who *comforts* the people. He says *to Zion, "You are my people."* This is interesting when you think that Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The people were living in fear because they trusted in other things.

Vs. 15 and 16 are God's declaration of His love and power to protect. This is a very tender reminder to the people that God wants them to embrace Him. It speaks to me too.

Vs. 17-23 Here it seems, prophetically speaking, judgment has been passed on Israel, and God again will redeem and restore His people. Then, God will take the cup of judgment given to Israel and pass it around to the nations who have oppressed Israel.

Isaiah 52

Vs. 1-6 Jerusalem is to rejoice in its restoration from captivity. But v. 6 indicates there will be a future recognition of the Lord. That would be when the Messiah comes and they truly have God's law written on their hearts.

Vs. 7-10 This is definitely when Jesus comes again to Jerusalem.

V. 10 is pretty cool. CNN will probably carry this live. On a more serious note, Jesus doesn't say what the sign in the sky will be that heralds His coming, but all nations will see it at the same time, and they will mourn. Everyone will know that Jesus is the Messiah and God has come to set up His kingdom. Israel will not mourn, and Jerusalem will be a very exciting place to be.

Vs. 11-12 This is safety for those who trust God in those final hours before the Messiah comes.

Vs. 13-15 When the world sees the Messiah come, there will be some surprises and some shut mouths. I wonder what the ACLU and those voices for religious pluralism and tolerance will say.

Isaiah 53

These verses answer the shock of the past few verses. They should have believed but didn't. This chapter is spoken from the perspective of Israel, the failed servant, speaking in repentance about its Lord, the Suffering Servant and Savior of man. At the end, the voice is from the Father.

This isn't "law," but I would suggest that every serious disciple memorize this chapter. I wish I had done it earlier in my walk with the Lord. I have a feeling that this chapter will be very important to the Jews in the Tribulation.

V. 1 The initial question is regarding *who has believed* and why they should have believed.

V. 2 There was a contrast. Those who sought the Lord saw Him. For the others, Jesus had as much desirability as looking at a root of a tree exposed above the surface of the ground. That is still true today.

V. 3 Humanly speaking, Jesus was a jobless man from a poor background with nothing going for Him.

V. 4 Some may have sensed that He was bearing our sin, but it looked like He was having a lot of bad luck, like God was against Him.

V. 5 But the reality was this.

V. 6 This is their confession of sin.

V. 7 This was true at His death, and even when you read what Jesus said in conflict with the Pharisees, He could have said so much more. I was reading today when Jesus told Peter He could have asked the Father for 12 legions (12,000) of angels, but His thought was for us. He said to Peter in John 18:11, *Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?* Matthew 26:54 says, *But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?* Being quiet was important and it took commitment and strength.

V. 8 At the point of Jesus' death, not even His disciples understood.

V. 9 Jesus was killed with two thieves; and Joseph of Arimathea, *a rich man*, placed Jesus' body in his own tomb.

V. 10 This is the Servant as commissioned by the Father. Notice that Jesus not only had to submit, but also had to actively make Himself *an offering for sin*. And look what happened after He did this.

V. 11 I like the RSV here; *He shall see the fruit of the travail of His soul and be satisfied*. By His knowledge of God's plan He obeyed and we are saved. As His disciples we have this knowledge too. Do we live by it?

V. 12 As a man, Jesus is the greatest man who ever lived. No one has ever accomplished for mankind what Jesus has.

Notice that He (Jesus) *shall divide the spoil with the strong*. I associate this sharing of spoil not as giving eternal life to believers, but in the harvest, sharing richly with those who labor with Him. You see this in Ephesians 4:8. Jesus also said to His disciples, *the one who endures to the end will be saved*. (Matt. 10:22, 24:13) In that context, being "saved" isn't salvation, it is preservation from damage. A person who endures will maintain a clear attitude of faith. It is no news to us that trouble is coming. In the song that Paul quoted to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:11-12, he says, *If we have died with Him, we will also live with Him; if we endure, we will also reign*

with Him. I think there is a special sharing of strength and blessing with those who are working strongly in the harvest with Him.

Ephesians 5

Vs. 1-2 This is like striking the tuning fork to focus us again on the correct tone. That tone is the love of Christ and the example of Jesus for the church. It is interesting that we just read Isaiah 53.

Vs. 3-6 Our lives are to be different, following the example of Christ. This is a dying world with all sorts of people being deceived and needing the truth. The church in the harvest shouldn't treat this stuff lightly within her walls. We should extend forgiveness, but as disciples we need to be focused on our Lord and the harvest.

Vs. 7-14 Living our lives for Christ in the harvest, connecting with people near us, will cast enough light to be used by God in His purpose for us. But, we need to live for Christ. We need to allow His change in us, following Him and praising Him, to make us distinctly His. If we lie and complain and do what everyone else does, what good is that? Jesus told His disciples to be salt and light. If you read those commands by Jesus in Matthew 5, you see that they are very strongly stated.

Vs. 15-21 This is the nature of our walk with Christ.

Notice that we are to be alert, walking like a super spy, observing everything. That is why this is linked to not being foolish (walking unaware) but instead understanding *what the will of the Lord is*. This is like in John 5, where Jesus observed what the Father was doing and did it. We are to walk observantly and expectantly, knowing that the Lord is around us working; and once observed, we should join in.

Vs. 19-21 This sounds like a worship service, but this is still our walk. So, how do you define being filled with the Spirit? Here it is:

- *Addressing one another* to strengthen and build each other up for our walk as disciples.
- Having our lives focused in the reality of our salvation (chapters 1-3), as we walk in the harvest.
- Always and for everything, *giving thanks*.
- *Submitting to one another* (in accordance with Christ) *out of reverence for Christ*.

Vs. 22-33 It is funny, that when God points to us being salt and light, following the Spirit, He addresses marriage first.

Vs. 22-24 I didn't write this, but it is still in force.

Vs. 25-33 Husbands are to love their wives in two ways -

Vs. 25-27 First, by showing the love and leadership of Christ to their wives. This is a test of a man's understanding of this spiritual truth. If you know how Christ loved the church, it will be visible in your marriage.

This section says that Christ sanctified the church by the washing with the Word. So how does a husband imitate this with his wife. I would say that it is by him being connected to God, and in the Word daily himself, and then sharing what the Lord says to him with his wife. Many women suffer from franticness and insecurity, and it is the husband's responsibility to share the comfort of the Word with his wife. It is sort of like washing her feet, to take away the dust of the day.

Vs. 28-33 Second, husbands are to love their wives by showing their understanding of the physical and spiritual unity of man and woman, which reflects the unity of Christ and the church.

There is something extremely spiritual about the bond of a man and a woman, and if a man ignores this, he ignores it to his own harm.

The marriage relationship is not only salt and light in a dying world, but I think too, it comes under the command to be very careful how we walk on this dying planet as we follow Christ in the harvest.

Psalm 69:19-36

It really is interesting to read this psalm and to also be reading about the Messiah in Isaiah. I know this was written by David and he experienced all of this; but having read Isaiah 53, and knowing that the psalm has application to Jesus, it is easy to see how it reflects what Jesus suffered for us.

Vs. 19-20 I was just reading today how Jesus asked the disciples to watch with Him, but they fell asleep. Finally the Father sent an angel to strengthen Jesus during that moment when He was praying in agony and sweating like a dying man.

V. 21 is quoted when they offered Jesus vinegar on the cross to keep Him alive long enough to see if Elijah would come and rescue Him.

Vs. 22-23 are quoted by Paul in Romans 11:10, describing God's judgment on Israel for their self-imposed blindness and rebellion.

Vs. 24-28 Although many were saved after Jesus' resurrection, the nation of Israel, its leaders and people, were judged by what they did to Jesus. This happened in 70 A.D., as the Romans destroyed the temple and the city.

V. 26 Think of this in terms of what you just read in Isaiah 53.

Vs. 29-36 These are not only the blessings on the Messiah for giving Himself, but the redeemed will share this blessing with Him in Zion.

And it all works together in praise to God.

Proverbs 24:7

In the gate is referring to the place of the judges and the elders of the people. It is not that the fool is suddenly wise and knows to keep his mouth closed; it is that he is not invited in, to give his "wisdom." Because it mentions the "gates" here, I automatically think of the elders of a church. There is some wisdom necessary and some dues to be paid in order to lead a church to work in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples. Too many of the wrong men are often invited into the gates, having neither reaped nor sown in the harvest. They have made no disciples, and therefore, really have nothing to model or say, regarding the church and its mission of making disciples.

SEPTEMBER 28

We have some great portions of Scripture today and we finish Ephesians. It is a little awe inspiring to think that as these words were written to men and women generations ago, God knew you would be reading this today. Wait until you see how the Lord will touch your heart with some of these words.

As a reminder, remember it is more important to be reading your one-year Bible than to be reading these notes. If you have missed some days, weeks or months, just dive in today. It will give you confidence in telling others to do the same, and you will feel good about rebuilding your routine. If you mark the pages, you will be able to go back and catch up if that is important to your psyche, as it apparently is to mine. I put a number for the year at the top of each page.

This year (2015), I put a "5." After the number of years I've been doing this, I have a string of numbers along the top of each page. If I miss a day, I know where to go back and read.

Remember, this isn't a religious routine. You are trusting the Lord in faith that He will take the Word and feed your heart. It is spending time with Him. Today you have Isaiah 55, and in it is one of the greatest promises in the Word about the power of the Word. Grab a latte and settle in with the Lord.

Isaiah 54-57:13

Isaiah 54

This blessing is being spoken to all generations of Israel, but is focused on the generation alive when Jesus returns as the conquering king to save and restore Israel. When Jesus reigns, they will multiply in peace and no enemy will threaten them.

Vs. 1-3 Because of sin and paying the price of being an example to mankind, rather than being fruitful, Israel has been desolate. The promise to Abraham will still be fulfilled. They will be like the sand of the sea, and all nations will be blessed through them.

Vs. 4-8 God will bring them to fulfill their destiny with great compassion and love. Cool.

Vs. 9-10 The *days of Noah* probably refers to the year that Noah was on the waters. Afterward God made a covenant that a world flood would never come again and gave a sign for that covenant. God has sworn to Israel that there will be a fulfilling of His love for them.

Vs. 11-14 God will establish Israel in righteousness and with style.

Vs. 15-17 And woe to anyone who picks a fight with Israel. That will be particularly true the last seven years before the Lord returns.

Isaiah 55

As a result of the Savior who will come (Ch. 53) and because of the great promise made to establish and glorify Israel (Ch. 54), now God gives an invitation to come to Him.

This is a great chapter to memorize. Isaiah is speaking to his people in the current day, but it will apply to any generation of Israel. And it applies to you and to any other person on the planet.

V. 1 Jesus stood up in the middle of the Feast of the Tabernacles on the great day at the great moment of the procession and yelled this out. How embarrassing. No, how urgent the time was for Israel. Israel was the failing servant, who needed to grasp who Jesus was. He was their King and Servant of God who would pour out His life for the sins of the world. This was mentioned in John 7:37-39.

Notice that the call is made to all, but will only be heard by those who are thirsty. Actually, we are all dying of thirst, but only some people know it. Notice too, that what God promises is lavish, wine and milk. And it is affordable for 100% of humanity.

V. 2 This is what Jesus told the crowd in John 6:27, the day many of His disciples left Him. It is a good question for all of us, and notice again that what God offers is lavish.

V. 3 Not only does God promise life for those who come to Him, He promises commitment and love. This covenant with David isn't the promise that a son would sit on his throne; rather, it is the promise of God to be with David and to use him. This is what helped David the ten years he was running from Saul.

Vs. 4-5 God did two things with David. First, He used David to give testimony and praise to all the nations. Think of all of the psalms we've read. Second, God brought many nations to David.

They were not just in submission to Israel. There were nations that came to David to seek God, because of his testimony for God.

If Israel would turn to God, the nations would come to them too. God would do that because He had raised them up and exalted them. This will happen in the Millennium. For us, once God's light is shining in us and through us, He Himself begins to draw people to us.

Vs. 6-7 This invitation is interesting. God can always be found and He is always near, but it is our need and our sense of needing help that makes a person seek God. If the wicked man is tired of his way, he will turn to the Lord. If the unrighteous man is tired of his thoughts, he will seek the Lord.

Notice the amazing grace, forgiveness and compassion that is offered if people will only turn to the Lord.

As disciples this even applies to us. We are never to stop seeking God or calling on Him. But we are not wicked or unrighteous are we? Do we still need the Lord's help? I only need to think of my driving this past week and the random thoughts that I have caught running through my head this week, to know this applies to me. How can God change all of this?

Vs. 8-9 Not only does God present us with new ways and thoughts by showing us His ways and thoughts, but He knows how to change us. His ways of working and the depth of His wisdom are totally beyond us. How can God effect change and transformation that will make us like Him and make us a testimony to His grace?

Vs. 10-11 Change comes to the heart through the Word of God. Notice that this isn't a cloudburst. It is daily, gradual, persistent rain. This is why we need to read the Bible every day. It waters the earth; it moistens the hard resistant ground through and through. It gives seed for the sower (the harvest) and it gives the sower life and nourishment. Notice too that it *makes* the earth bring forth. The working of the Word is irresistible. We don't have to force it. It naturally produces its fruit in us over time, little by little, as we live in the Word.

V. 12 Going forth in joy is understandable, but notice that they or we will be led forth in peace. There is no sense of being alone or forgotten by God. Just as we go out into the harvest, we are following, and therefore, being led. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who goes before and leads those who are His.

The image of the mountains singing and the trees clapping their hands sounds like something out of a Looney-Tunes cartoon, until you think of what Paul and the Spirit say in Romans 8:19-21. When Israel turns to their Messiah, or when a person turns to follow Christ, it signals the future event of the creation being set free from bondage; therefore, there is singing and clapping in anticipation of that coming event.

V. 13 Regardless of what has been planted in the past of a nation or of a person, God will turn thorns and things that bring injury and pain into cypress trees giving shade and comfort. He will turn briars and agitations into beautiful myrtle trees.

And when God does this, it will bring glory to Him. Why? Because the world can see what He can do, and this change He brings to a nation or a person will not end. It will carry into eternity.

Isaiah 56

Isaiah is saying this to his people, present at that time.

Vs. 1-2 It is hard to wait on the Lord, but God promises that He will do what He promises. In the meantime, those who love and follow the Lord keep obeying and following.

Vs. 3-8 These blessings are spoken to Israel and to Gentiles. Anyone could join themselves to Israel. That was the purpose of Israel as God's servant. As hinted at here and seen later, Israel will again be God's restored servant; and all nations will come to the Lord through them.

V. 3 Eunuchs were excluded from temple worship under the law, but God never, ever excludes anyone who loves Him. It is possible that both Daniel and Nehemiah were eunuchs.

The mention of the Sabbath during the time of the law was really a sign of faith. It took faith to keep the Sabbath when others might have been working on the Sabbath, taking your jobs and making more money than you. It was easy to look around, be jealous of the ungodly, and give up keeping the Sabbath.

Notice that Jesus quoted a part of v. 7 when He cleansed the temple the second time in Matthew 21:13.

Read v. 8 and then compare it to what Jesus said in John 10:16, *And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.*

Vs. 9-12 This punishment is on those in Israel who won't listen, but instead reject the promises God has made in these chapters. This discourse will continue to v. 13 of the next chapter.

Isaiah 57:1-13

Vs. 1-2 Notice that the righteous live alongside the ungodly, and though faced with the same circumstances, they take refuge in the Lord and lie in peace in their beds.

Vs. 3-13 These people seek help in idols and have given themselves to the passions of their flesh. This sounds like the beginning of Ephesians 5. Notice the alternation between idolatry and immorality. Man made gods who allow what man likes. What a great system...not.

V. 11 Their fear was senseless and was a result of not fearing God. What irony.

V. 13 This is a great contrast. Those who cried out to idols would be blown away. Those who took refuge in the Lord would possess the land.

Ephesians 6

Get ready for some great verses and thoughts.

Vs. 1-4 This is walking as saved kids and saved parents.

Vs. 5-9 Imagine being a slave and coming to Christ. This would require a lot of faith. Laura and I saw the movie, "The Help." Just watching the injustice and treatment of these people was jarring. I don't think you can imagine the faith needed to follow Christ in those kinds of circumstances, unless God places you there. Believing masters were to walk by faith in Christ also.

As disciples, the kind of service mentioned here is the least we can do in following Christ in light of what the Lord has done for us.

Vs. 10-18 Putting on the armor in vs. 11 and 13 is commanded, not suggested; and it is used to withstand, not to attack. We don't attack them; we walk, following Christ in the harvest, focused on lost people and making disciples. There is no hint of an idea of being preoccupied with the spiritual battle. Our job is the rescue, turning our attention to this battle only as we are attacked and they stand in the way. The battle is all around us, so we wear the armor; but our goal is something different. We are to be reaching out to the dying and making disciples, who make disciples. The command to stand in v. 13 has a sense of urgency.

V. 11 Notice the word *schemes*.

V. 12 This adds definition to every other time we have heard the words, *heavenly places*. According to the book of Revelation, Satan doesn't get kicked out of heaven until the middle of the Tribulation.

For my take on the importance of the shoes, you can look at: <http://fencerail.blogspot.com/2010/10/no-shoes-no-service-no-harvest.html> . This article also appears at the end of this document.

V. 17 I know that all of the pieces of the armor could have books written about them, but I really think being in the Word daily is necessary for all of them. For example, look at *the helmet of salvation*. Think of what we have been reading in Isaiah, how God is our Creator and Redeemer, linking the work of His hands to the love He has for us. I have read that several times, but this last week it has been sinking more and more into my thinking and my heart. That definitely strengthens *the helmet of salvation*. Actually, we have read Ephesians 1-3, and that strengthens our understanding and awe of our own salvation.

We are all too spiritually bi-polar to go a day without the Word. We only kid ourselves if we are not reading it daily, drawing near to God. Without the Word and the Spirit's constant work in our hearts, all of this armor is meaningless and we're just sitting ducks.

Vs. 19-20 This is Paul's present struggle waiting his trial in Rome at the end of Acts.

Vs. 21-22 Paul was always working to strengthen others.

Vs. 23-24 There's a lot of love in these verses. Love and faith are often connected in Paul's thinking; for example, in 1 Timothy 1:14 and 2 Timothy 1:13. Isn't it interesting that Paul makes this last blessing conditional? *Grace be with all who...* These are the ones who live in and truly experience the grace of Jesus Christ.

The word *incorruptible* sounds moral, or maybe industrial, like "rustproof." It is a good word, but doesn't clearly say what it means in this context. I like the RSV and NIV, "undying."

Thinking about undying love, doesn't it seem like that is what God is saying through Isaiah? Finishing up this section of Isaiah on the poured out love of the Messiah, and finishing Ephesians and the limitless grace and love of God in Jesus, what other response should there be from us as His disciples, but undying love and a poured out life, telling of His love in the harvest?

Psalm 70

It's interesting to me that most of the time we don't panic; but when panic comes, even though it is really only in our heads and hearts, all of life seems to be full of desperation and stress. If we really could see the spiritual reality around us, we would all be wrecks. If we could see the dark spiritual forces around us, manipulating us and those around us, taking lives, we would probably lose our minds. But at least we would cry out with real urgency. We would cry out like David does here.

Vs. 1-3 David seems to have been close to those who were threatening him.

Vs. 4-5 God is our great hope, but we are always needy and always in need of His help.

We will always face desperation, so we need to make our hearts submit in faith to the love and purpose of our Father. He proved His love and commitment to us by sending His Son and giving us His Spirit. If He is our refuge and love, we will live forever with Him and can sleep now in peace. (Is. 57:1-2)

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world. (John 16:33) As they say, "It's not what you know. It's Who you know."

Proverbs 24:8

You remember what you just read in Ephesians 6:11, right? I'd say that was an interesting coincidence. ☺

SEPTEMBER 29

Today you begin Philippians. You may want to celebrate with your favorite latte.

Isaiah 57:14-59:21

Isaiah 57:14-21

Having described the Messiah as the Servant of the Lord who will redeem both Israel and the Gentiles, this section concludes with a call to the people to prepare the way for the Messiah.

Vs. 14-15 This sounds like the message of John the Baptist. Notice that this leveling is described by God as humility that welcomes His blessing.

Vs. 16-19 As the Lord's servant, Israel failed, but in the future God will heal and restore them. I think the humility of that future generation will be the key.

Vs. 20-21 But this is a warning to all who resist God.

Isaiah 58

Chapters 58-66 are the last of three, nine-chapter blocks. This group of chapters looks at the sin of the people in Isaiah's day, and the coming of peace and prosperity to Israel and the entire earth, under the Messiah.

Vs. 1-2 This could well have been the people of Hezekiah's day. They were following the rules, but they were worshiping for their own benefit.

Vs. 3-5 They thought God should have regarded their fasting. This is God's commentary on their fasting. It makes you think of Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman that those who worship the Father must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Vs. 6-12 This is what God really wanted. Loving God with all one's heart was to turn into an outpouring of compassion for one's neighbor.

Vs. 13-14 The Sabbath was a day to delight in the Lord. It wasn't just a day off.

Isaiah 59

This sounds more like the early years of Manasseh.

Vs. 1-2 These verses state the real issue between God and man.

Vs. 3-8 I'm sure Paul had this section of Isaiah in mind when he wrote Romans 3:10-18. What Isaiah is describing here seems to indicate there was an ungodly king leading the nation.

Vs. 9-15 This is why God could not use Israel as a light to the world. Sin had infected everything about them. This is true of every man and woman on earth without Christ. All would be lost for us, *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ--by grace you have been saved--⁶and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.* (Eph. 2:4-6)

Vs. 16-21 So, with Israel failing as God's servant, God chose another to intercede. This is all about Jesus.

When I read this, I realize how well Paul knew these verses. Verse 17 sounds like the spiritual armor. Verse 20 is quoted in Romans 11:26 as proof that God has a future plan for Israel to fulfill its calling.

V. 21 is the future covenant God will make with Israel because of the work of Jesus.

When I read v. 16, I thought of the fact that Jesus isn't "named," but you know it is Him. Who is this guy? Then I thought, "Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is He." You might want to think of these verses as you listen to the second verse of this song, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Philippians 1:1-26

Philippians is another of those amazing letters from Paul where we find great statements of what it means to walk as a disciple of Jesus in the harvest. These statements like, *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain*, and *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God...he humbled himself...*, and *that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection*, stand alone as great teaching. But in the flow of Paul's encouragement and warnings to this church, they are expressed as the mature desires of a disciple totally in love with Christ. As we'll see, these expressions are meant to be our desires, too, as we follow Christ in the harvest.

Like Ephesians, Paul wrote this while he was being held in Rome awaiting trial. This is where we left Paul at the end of Acts. It was a polite imprisonment. Later, Paul was heard by Nero and released. Epaphroditus (a pastor or elder at Philippi) had brought a collection from the church to Paul. While there, "E" must have shared the general state of affairs in the church. He also got really sick for a while. Now that "E" was back on his feet, Paul was sending him back with this letter. As the spiritual father of the church, Paul not only thanks them for the gift, but he expresses some concern and suggestions. The biggest of these concerns is with those Jewish Christians trying to get people to obey the law to get saved. The other concern is that there seems to be a growing persecution of the church. Philippi was a very special Roman town. The people there had privileges as if they were living in Rome, but that meant that Rome had a very strong control of the city. About seven years after the writing of this letter, Roman persecution would take the lives of many Christians, Paul included. There is just a hint of it now. Generally, this letter is a thank you to a church that was very close to Paul's heart.

Vs. 3-6 The key phrase here is *partnership in the gospel*. The church at Philippi is the only church we know of that Paul planted and immediately, on their own, began supporting Paul financially. It wasn't just that they wanted to help the kind old man who helped them. They caught Paul's passion for following Christ: to be partners in the blessings of the gospel, reaching the lost and making disciples for Christ. They are now supporting Paul ten years after his work in Philippi.

V. 7 This is what a true partnership in missions gives the people back home. The people see what has been done by God's grace and become partakers of that grace and those blessings.

Vs. 8-11 Paul's prayer is that their *love* would *abound more and more*. The rest is important and descriptive, but don't lose sight of the focus of Paul's request. Love for Christ and others grows in the harvest, and Paul wanted it to grow in a certain way. If this love grew, the end product would be *the glory and praise of God*.

Vs. 12-18 This is like Job writing why it is good to suffer. Paul couldn't control the attitudes of the Christians who were trying to make him feel bad, but he was happy that the unbelieving public was hearing about Christ. God would take care of that other stuff.

V. 19 Paul had a good feeling that he would be released. We'll see this expressed again in chapter 2.

Vs. 20-21 The thought of being ashamed, I think, came from those bratty preachers trying to make Paul look small. But the real issue was that Paul was where he was, to give testimony of Jesus Christ to the Roman authorities. In this sense especially, he knew he wouldn't be ashamed. I like that line, *but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death.* Amen!

V. 21 Many Christians would say "amen" to this, but their treasure is really on earth. If they were to die they would be losing everything.

Vs. 21-26 The life that Paul describes here seems like discipleship on steroids. If you read what Paul wrote after his even bigger declaration in chapter 3, you'll see that Paul and the Spirit mean this to be normative thinking for the disciple of Jesus on earth. Why else are we here except to follow in the harvest, reaching the lost, and making disciples, who make disciples? Being with Jesus will be so much better, except this life isn't about us and what would be better for us? It is about following Jesus and reaching those He died to save.

Psalm 71

This psalm doesn't have information regarding the author; but reading it, I say, "You can't fool me. This is David." Just an older version of him, possibly before and after the civil war with Absalom. I see a lot of Psalm 40 in here, but really, it echoes all of David's praying and crying out and celebrating. The only thing that's missing is a reference to God's steadfast love.

Vs. 1-3 If this is David, the years had passed and now there was a new threat. David had been forgiven for what he had done regarding Bathsheba and Uriah, but there were many who were unwilling to forgive. David's hope was in the Lord, and again, he was looking to the Lord to vindicate him.

Vs. 4-13 This alternates between David's plea for help and the threat of his enemies.

Vs. 14-24 The one thing that strikes me is the long celebration of hope in these verses. The writer was now old and had been following God from his early years. He had seen adversity, and yet, he had known so much deliverance. He knew God.

Proverbs 24:9-10

I guess these are good general truths. But in the context of yesterday, seeing Satan referred to as a schemer, I guess you could take that application into today. You should have a note that *devising* can be read "scheming."

Adversity often comes from the human and spiritual side of scheming or devising sin. To scoff at God, His existence, His holiness and justice, is an abomination. That spiritual origin of these things is literally an abomination to mankind. It degrades mankind.

So what does God do for us? He gives us the Word, the Spirit, and insight into what's really happening in life. He gives us a place in the fight, in the harvest, winning the lost, turning them into disciples. We have seen everywhere that God makes us strong through adversity, but only through that adversity that is somehow linked to the harvest. Remember that verse from yesterday about Jesus sharing the spoil with the strong? Can you see some connection to that verse and v. 10 here? The work makes us strong. To hold back makes us weak, because our strength is in the Lord and in the Spirit; and they are both active in reaching a lost world. We all need to be in the Word in the harvest. That is where we draw close to Christ; use the armor and develop spiritual strength.

Even a seasoned disciple like Timothy was shocked into fear by the sudden aggression of Nero that had risen. Paul, facing death in a Roman dungeon, wrote to Timothy to remind him to be strong in Christ in the harvest.

2 Timothy 1:7-10 *For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.*

⁸*Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God,* ⁹*who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,* ¹⁰*and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*

SEPTEMBER 30

Isaiah 60-62:5

When I read these verses, I thought what it would be like if Israel today believed this stuff. They would all call on God and say, *blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord*, and the Messiah would come. And He will come someday, and they will call Him; but it will be in the darkness of the Tribulation.

As you read today remember that Israel was chosen to represent God in His plan to redeem the world. As a result, every power of hell rained upon them to stop them. Israel failed and became a visual aid of the sin of man rebelling in the presence of God's help and love. God has shown us how desperately hopeless we are without Christ and a new birth. In the Tribulation, Israel will carry God's Word to a visibly dying world and will pay a high price for that. So, we shouldn't wonder that when the Messiah comes, all nations will understand what Israel has "borne" for the world. Jerusalem will be in ruins and the throne of Jesus will be in the temple. The nations will come, and in gratitude to God and to Israel, they will help rebuild and console this battered servant/nation of God.

Isaiah 60

Vs. 1-3 This sounds like the Tribulation and the coming of the Lord. The Lord will rise upon the Jews at the beginning of the Tribulation and they will become His servant again. At the end of the Tribulation, when Jesus returns visibly and bodily to Jerusalem and ends all the fighting, all eyes will be on His people and His city.

Ironically, as darkness covers the earth, their fearless devotion to Christ will become a light of salvation for many people on the earth.

Vs. 3-7 This looks like the nations coming to Israel to beautify the temple where Jesus will have His throne.

Vs. 8-9 This looks like nations bringing wealth to honor Israel. Notice the last part of v. 9. These are the same words found in Isaiah 55:5. This verse shows the future fulfillment of the promise made in Isaiah 55:5. These will be spectacular days in the future.

Vs. 10-14 Notice that, as in all of Isaiah, the city is still a major focus of God's attention. This is the rebuilding of Jerusalem after the Tribulation. It will become the joy of the nations to rebuild Zion.

Vs. 15-16 What strikes me here is the phrase, *from age to age*. Those thousand years of the Millennium will be a long time, but then comes a new heaven, a new earth and a new Jerusalem.

Vs. 17-22 This is a grand summary of blessing on the city and on the people. Verse 19 is also described in Revelation 22:5.

Isaiah 61

Vs. 1-2 There are words similar to these a few chapters back, but this is the portion that Jesus read in Nazareth in Luke 4:17-21. He told the people as He read these words, that they were being fulfilled in their hearing. And they took offense at Him, meaning, they didn't believe that Jesus the carpenter could be this person. In fact, these people that Jesus grew up with tried to murder Him after He read this.

Jesus only read to the word *favor* in v. 2. *And the day of vengeance of our God* and what follows will be fulfilled at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus returns to rescue and restore Israel. In this one verse you see the gap of time that is now the age of harvest for the church.

It is interesting that it mentions that comfort will come to those who mourn. Choosing to mourn now shows an understanding of the dire situation the world and mankind is in. I wonder if Jesus had these verses in mind in Matthew 5:4 when He said, *Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.*

Vs. 3-9 This is what Jesus will do for His people.

Vs. 10-11 This will be Israel's praise of God.

Isaiah 62:1-5

V. 1 Zion and Jerusalem again. It seems that God is determined to keep preaching this in spite of the darkness of the times and the sin of the people, because this future glory and blessing is coming to Israel.

Vs. 2-5 The unity between Israel and God will be complete.

As disciples working in the harvest, we need to keep the vision of the end clearly before us. God is saying all of this for a reason. It is to give us hope and strength. In spite of what today looks like, we are to keep working in hope and joy because we know what the end will look like. I believe this is what made Paul able to do what He did in following Christ as a disciple in the harvest, making disciples, who make disciples.

Philippians 1:27-2:18

Philippians 1:27-30

Vs. 27-30 So why this call to unity? I think disunity and each man becoming absorbed in his own problems was the effect that the persecution was beginning to have on them. People may have been threatening them and they may have been very frightened. Some people might have wanted to draw back and give in.

Vs. 29-30 These are pretty big verses for a disciple. Staying out of conflict is not a part of our call to follow Christ. In fact, Jesus said that following Him would bring conflict. (Matt. 10:34 and Luke 12:51)

As we have just read in Isaiah, God will bring things to a glorious end. In light of that, the sufferings now are slight and momentary, and worth enduring, so that men and women can reach out to Christ while there is still time.

Philippians 2:1-18

Vs. 1-11 These are great verses. Songs have been written about these. So, I wonder how this call to unity above fits to the call of unity in vs. 1-2 and rolls into this description of Jesus.

It seems to me that the unity of the church is dependent upon a deep connection between members as they serve together. Especially in this stress the church was facing, with all sorts of fears and emotions flying around, it couldn't become "every man for himself;" but rather

everyone had to bind together. But that binding had to be around the same mindset, which I think had to do with following Christ in the harvest.

Jesus Himself was the model for the disciples and is the model for all of His followers. In light of our salvation and the need of mankind to be saved, each disciple is called upon to serve one another as we serve in the harvest. *For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.* (Mark 10:45)

Vs. 12-13 This unity would take some work and be a matter of obedience. They needed to remember that God was still working, inspiring them, and using them in the harvest.

Vs. 14-18 At first, the command to *do all things (everything) without grumbling and disputing* seems like a general duty; but it is related to their witness in the harvest. Since the grumbling and questioning do not have a clear object, I think it has to do with each member understanding that what was happening to them (like Job) was from God, for His purpose. Since they could never be outside of God's control, the situations they faced were sanctioned and allowed by God. If they followed Christ in love, those circumstances would put them into situations where they would be lights as they held fast *the word of life*.

Vs. 16-18 I take this to be Paul's hope as a maker of disciples that those for whom he had risked so much and for whom he had worked so hard would follow Christ in this time of stress, bear fruit, and make disciples, who make disciples.

V. 17 Paul seems to have understood that he might not be released but would be put to death. When Paul talks like this again at the end of 2 Timothy, he has no doubt.

Psalm 72

Verse 20 says this is a prayer of David. David was asking God to bless his son. With that in mind, I'm seeing David talking more about Jesus than Solomon. God did bless Solomon. But God really blessed the Son of David, God's own Son. Just for exercise in Bible study, circle each use of *may*. Also, look at what this *king* does. You can't fool me (especially after reading Isaiah), this is the Messiah.

Vs. 1-4 This is a call for God to bless the Son with righteousness and the power to deliver the needy.

Vs. 5-7 As the people fear and follow, He will be to them life and righteousness and peace.

Vs. 8-11 This is asking for God to give the Son of David dominion.

Vs. 12-14 This almost sounds like Isaiah 53:12, *Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.*

Vs. 15-17 His name will *endure forever*. How did David know?

Vs. 18-20 *Amen and Amen!*

Proverbs 24:11-12

Did you get this? This is a very strong warning, but it is nothing a disciple in the harvest needs to fear. That's why we are in the harvest and it is what the love of Christ compels us to do. We who have been saved know the peril of those who do not know Christ. Out of love, we know we have to do something, and that particular "something" is working in the harvest following our Lord. The last thing a disciple should say or feel is, "Who cares?"

No Shoes, No Service, No Harvest (September 28, Ephesians 6, p. 70)

More and more I think of the spiritual protection of having our feet shod with the equipment of the gospel of peace.

When you look at the armor in Ephesians 6, everything is vital and has a function. We think we are good regarding truth and righteousness, and let's say we are. What do those do for you without the readiness to share the gospel? It leads to harmless, self-absorbed, defensive, aloof Christianity. I know there will always be a tendency toward imbalance and there is much more to say regarding abiding in Christ's love, in His Word, being led by the Spirit, but the armor is meant to protect us. If a piece is missing, that should matter.

As disciples, the warning is against the "wiles" of the devil. The danger is trickery, deception, cunning attacks. Obviously if Satan could kill us, that would leave him unhindered room to work. That isn't an option, so we have to be rendered harmless. Attack our adherence to the truth or righteousness and we have no credibility. How much better to let us have these, as long as we're silent.

At the end of the armor Paul talks about prayer and alertness and it seems this is just general intercession, but Paul adds himself to the list and asks for continued boldness in proclaiming. The credibility of our witness can be destroyed, but Paul's concern and need was for declaring the gospel. In Philippians, Paul refers to giving the gospel three times, and fear is mentioned twice. Even Timothy, in Paul's last days, had come into danger of being ashamed to testify to Christ or to identify with Paul (2 Tim. 1:8).

If we remove "feet" from the armor, we have no problem. Our lives and our churches go on for the pastor, the elder, and for the run-of-the-mill Christian. Take the feet out of this (and we all do mentally), we are still protected and able to please God. But just from the logic and truth of God's Word, this has to be impossible. How can we remove one of the first three pieces and say we're OK?

If our feet are not shod, what would be missing in today's church and in the heart, mind and life of Jesus' disciples? What do we gain when our feet are shod with the readiness of the gospel of peace. (No particular order and you can add to it.)

We live in concern of His coming judgment on the lost.
We live with an eternal perspective.
We understand God's working in the world.
We value the heavenly more than the earthly.
We cry out to God for lost people.
We know that nothing will be saved from this planet but people.
We live knowing this life is temporary.
We live knowing we've been commissioned with a vital message.
We know we have a tremendous privilege.
We know we have a tremendous responsibility.
We know we have to say something.
We know people need to be told.
We know this life is about the mission, not heaven on earth.
We know sacrifice.
We know His power.
We know His suffering.
We know His heart.

We know His joy.

We abide in Him.

The list goes on, and these are things that can only happen if we are ready with the gospel. And this readiness protects us.

Every other aspect of the armor can be done in the living room, alone, without ever having to talk to another person. Without the readiness with our feet and our lives and our mouths, we are tricked into believing that this walk with God is simply about us living clean lives before God.

Do we believe John 15:8, *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples?* What part of this statement can we ignore? Fruit is defined earlier in context in John 12:24. Now, Jesus says there is sowing and reaping, and Paul adds watering, but still it is a life focused on the harvest, every person ready to share and work. The fields are still white. Are we ready?

If our feet are not shod with readiness to give the gospel, our understanding of Jesus is crippled, and our lives sag inward into a stagnant, self-absorbed spirituality. The lost trample us underfoot on their way to hell, and here is Satan's biggest achievement - our Father is not glorified and we do not prove to be Jesus' disciples.

Isaiah, Themes and Theology

The Bible Knowledge Commentary-OT, pp. 1031-1032.

(*'ādōnāy* or the shortened form *'ādōn*) suggests God's dominance over His Creation and is used numerous times in **Isaiah**, many of them in chapters 1-39. "The Lord Almighty" (*Yahweh š[ḥ]ōf; kṣv*, "the LORD of hosts"), the most common compound name for God in the Book of **Isaiah**, appears 46 times in chapters 1-39 and 6 times in the remainder of the book. This compound title links the covenant name of God (*Yahweh*) with His sovereignty over all heavenly powers.

God is also called "the Lord, the Lord Almighty" (*'ādōnāy Yahweh š[ḥ]ōf*) 10 times. He is referred to as "the God of Israel" 12 times, and "the Holy One of Israel" 25 times. "Redeemer" is used of God 13 times, all in chapters 41-63, which stress God's redeeming work for Israel, and only one other time in the rest of the Old Testament. Certainly **Isaiah** centered his **theology** and his book on God and the work that He was doing and would continue to do in the world.

OUTLINE

- I. The Retribution of God (chaps. 1-39)
 - A. The Lord's indictment of the nation (chaps. 1-6)
 1. The heading for the book (1:1)
 2. The Lord's lawsuit against the nation (1:2-31)
 3. An affirmation of restoration (2:1-5)
 4. The present condition and future consequences (2:6-4:1)
 5. The holy survivors (4:2-6)
 6. The worthless vineyard (5:1-7)
 7. An indictment on sin (5:8-30)
 8. Isaiah's commission (chap. 6)
 - B. Prophecies of deliverance (chaps. 7-12)
 1. The birth of Immanuel (chap. 7)
 2. The coming Deliverer (8:1-9:7)
 3. Exile for the Northern Kingdom (9:8-10:4)
 4. Assyria's fall and the great

- kingdom's rise (10:5-12:6)
 - C. Judgment on the nations (chaps. 13-23)
 1. Babylon (13:1-14:27)
 2. Philistia (14:28-32)
 3. Moab (chaps. 15-16)
 4. Damascus (17:1-11)
 5. The land of whirring wings (17:12-18:7)
 6. Egypt (chaps. 19-20)
 7. The desert (21:1-10)
 8. Edom (21:11-12)
 9. Arabia (21:13-17)
 10. Jerusalem (chap. 22)
 11. Tyre (chap. 23)
 - D. Punishment and kingdom blessing (chaps. 24-27)
 1. A time of judgment (chap. 24)
 2. A time of blessing in the kingdom (chaps. 25-27)
 - E. The woes (chaps. 28-33)
 1. Woe to Ephraim and Judah (chap. 28)
 2. Woe to Jerusalem (chap. 29)
 3. Woe to the obstinate children (chap. 30)
 4. Woe to the Egyptian alliance (chaps. 31-32)
 5. Woe to the destroyers (chap. 33)
 - F. Vengeance and blessing (chaps. 34-35)
 1. The Lord's day of vengeance (chap. 34)
 2. The Lord's day of blessing (chap. 35)
 - G. Historical interlude: Judah to be in captivity (chaps. 36-39)
 1. God's superiority to Assyria (chaps. 36-37)
 2. Judah's captivity in Babylon (chaps. 38-39)
- II. The Restoration by God (chaps. 40-66)
 - A. Deliverance of God's people (chaps. 40-48)
 1. The majesty of God (chap. 40)
 2. A challenge to the nations (chap. 41)
 3. The individual Servant contrasted with the servant nation (chap. 42)
 4. A promise to regather the unworthy servant (43:1-44:5)
 5. The Lord's uniqueness as

Isaiah

- the only God (44:6-45:25)
6. The Lord's superiority over Babylon (chaps. 46-47)
7. An exhortation for Israel (chap. 48)
- B. Restoration by the Suffering Servant (chaps. 49-57)
 1. The Servant to be rejected (chaps. 49-50)
 2. The remnant to be exalted (51:1-52:12)
 3. The Servant to be exalted (52:13-53:12)
 4. Salvation to come from the Servant (chaps. 54-57)
- C. Restoration realized and completed (chaps. 58-66)
 1. The restoration to come by God's initiative (chaps. 58-60)
 2. The coming of the Messiah and the coming of the Father (61:1-63:6)
 3. The nation's prayer and the Lord's response (63:7-65:25)
 4. The Lord's fulfillment of His promises (chap. 66)

COMMENTARY

I. The Retribution of God (chaps. 1-39)

In this first major division of the book, **Isaiah** wrote much about the judgment that was to come on Judah because of her failure to follow the Mosaic Covenant. God's punishment would prove to the nation that He fulfills His Word. This section also speaks of judgment which is to come on the whole world (chaps. 13-23). All nations of the earth stand guilty before the Holy One of Israel.

In this section on judgment **Isaiah** also emphasized blessing which will come to the nation because of her covenantal relationship with the Lord. For example, in the Lord's indictment of Judah (chaps. 1-6) 1:24-31 refers to the nation's restoration, 4:2-6 speaks of a remnant of survivors, and 6:13 refers to a "holy seed" or a remnant. In the prophecies on deliverance (chaps. 7-12) Judah, **Isaiah** wrote, would be delivered from the Aram-Israel alliance (7:3-9; 8:1-15; 9:7-10:4). But also God's glorious empire, the millennial kingdom (Rev. 20:1-6) will rise (Isa. 11) and the regathered people will sing a song of salvation (chap. 12).

Kings of Judah and Israel and the Preexilic Prophets

JUDAH				ISRAEL			
Kings*	Dates	Years	Dynasty†	Kings	Dates	Years	
Rehoboam	931-913	17	1st Dynasty	Jeroboam I	931-910	22	
Abijah	913-911	3	"	Nadab ‡	910-909	2	
Asa	911-870	41	2nd Dynasty	Baasha	909-886	24	
Coregency † with Jehoshaphat	873-870	(3)	"	Elah ‡	886-885	2	
Jehoshaphat	873-848	25	3rd Dynasty	Zimri	885	7 days	
Coregency with Jehoram	853-848	(5)	—	Tibni	885-880	6	
Jehoram	OBADIAH**	848-841		Overlapping reign † with Omri	885-880	(6)	
Ahaziah ‡	841	1	4th Dynasty	Omri	885-874	12	
Queen Athaliah ‡	841-835	6	"	Ahab	874-853	22	
Joash ‡	JOEL**	835-796	"	Ahaziah	853-852	2	
Amaziah ‡	796-767	29	"	Jehoram (Joram) ‡	852-841	12	
Azariah's vice-regency under Amaziah	790-767	(23)	5th Dynasty	Jehu	841-814	28	
Azariah (Uzziah)	790-739	52	"	Jehoahaz	814-798	17	
Coregency with Jotham	750-739	(11)	"	Jehoash (Joash)	798-782	16	
Jotham	750-735	16	"	Coregency with Jeroboam II	793-782	(11)	
Ahaz's vice-regency under Jotham	744-735	(9)	"	Jeroboam II	JONAH AMOS	793-753	41
Coregency of Jotham with Ahaz	735-732	4	"	Zechariah ‡	753-752	1/2	
Ahaz	732-715	16	6th Dynasty	Shallum ‡	752	1/12	
Hezekiah's vice-regency under Ahaz	729-715	(14)	7th Dynasty	Menahem	752-742	10	
Hezekiah	715-686	29	"	Overlapping reign with Pekah	752-742	(10)	
Manasseh's vice-regency under Hezekiah	697-686	(11)	"	Pekahiah ‡	742-742	(2)	
Manasseh	NAHUM	697-642		Overlapping reign with Pekah	742-740	(2)	
Amon ‡	642-640	2	8th Dynasty	Pekah ‡	752-732	20	
Josiah	ZEPHANIAH	640-609	9th Dynasty	Hoshea	732-722	9	
Jehoahaz	609	1/4					
Jehoiakim	HABAKKUK	609-598					
Jehoiachin	598-597	1/4					
Zedekiah	597-586	11					

M I S A I A H
C A I A H
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J E R E M I A H

E L I J A H

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