

SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
2015

HANDBOOK FOR MODERATORS OF
THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL

Subtitled: *Eat the Bread of Life in 52 Weekly Bites*

A Bible reading calendar with weekly assignments for small group discussion with downloadable journal page and prayer journal tools at www.thisislifeeternal.org

Dedicated to the memory of Roy Edward Griffin, Evangelist

April 4, 1904 - July 29, 1948

'Til Jesus Comes

WRETHA GRIFFIN LANG

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APPRECIATION

I'd like to thank my husband, **Bob Lang**, for his patience through the last 16 years since God placed this new ministry on my heart. He has more computer skills than I, and I have appreciated those skills many times! Previously he endured over 30 years of the sacrifices that families of music ministers have to make and we were both looking forward to the time when we could truly retire and be free to travel this globe. But the cosmic reality may be that we will be able to travel many globes throughout eternity! "Delayed gratification" comes to mind. That day is coming soon, I believe. Hallelujah!

Looking back on the development of the This is Life Eternal (TILE) Bible Reading Plan, subtitled "Eat the Bread of Life in 52 Weekly Bites," I am grateful to those who made significant contributions toward the current user-friendly format of the materials available online or by mail.

Judy Williams (Mrs. Marvin Williams) suggested subtitles. It has added interest to the entire project and some people who received copies of the plan have literally "oo-ed and ah-ed" over them!

Our son, **Chris Lang**, told me that I needed a website that would provide around the clock/around the world accessibility to This is Life Eternal (TILE) materials. He suggested hiring **Mark Bond** to design the website. Then he offered to bring his own recording equipment to our house to record some of my original piano arrangements, and added them onto a page entitled "Musical Meditation." Look for it on the sidebar of the home page. On one of the songs ("The Longer I Serve Him") Chris sang and recorded all four parts of a male quartet! Also, **Larry Culey**, a well-known accompanist and performer, recorded his own keyboard arrangement of the same song.

Mark Bond, designer extraordinaire, created a website with eye appeal and spiritual appeal. He added squares for readers to track their progress reading the segments of the weekly assignments, and another square to check when the entire week was completed. Mark's wife, **Conna**, worked with him, and together they refined the downloadable journaling pages. Their desire to create a website that honors the Creator warmed my heart.

One more comment about Mark. The captivating feature of the logo for this ministry is a stand of wheat, beautiful in detail and color. He didn't just Google "Images" and find a picture to use – no! He drove through Montana where they were living at the time until he found a stand of wheat, took a picture at the exact angle he envisioned, and that is what you see at the top of the home page on my beautiful website, on my business cards, and on the ads. Thank you, Mark and Conna, for caring about beauty, quality and spirituality.

Roger McQuistan, now one of the pastors of the Loma Linda University Church, in California, who use to be associated with the Review and Herald marketing department, suggested carrying business cards to hand out when traveling as a promotional aid. They

have been a wonderful way to alert people to the existence of TILE! I also put them in the envelope when I pay bills, and pray over them as I mail them. Some of the members of my small groups have also carried my TILE business cards when they travel.

About the time I was developing the website, **Paul and Gail Pelley** visited our home. They made a contribution to this ministry that was very helpful, covering part of the cost of the website production. Jesus said we can't see the Holy Spirit, but we see His effects. It was like the Spirit blew a fragrant approval over this project and the message I sensed was: "Do not be afraid. Go for it!"

Amanda Dady saw something I didn't. She made the connection between my excitement over reading Scripture all the way through and *thoroughly enjoying* doing so, to forming a small group! Without her suggestion, I'm not sure I would have thought of it. She called six people and they came to my home to digest God's Word "TILE style"!!

Rachael Selent was in the original 1999 group, and about ten years ago she initiated a TILE small group of her own. This is a wonderful example of how the joy of the Word can spread and bless many through small groups. Through Rachael and Harry's business, they meet many people and Rachael invites clients (churched and unchurched) to come to the Bible study group which currently meets in their office building. God has greatly blessed her efforts! **Rachael** is one of three individuals (**Tracy Morency** and **Barbara Huff**) who have proofread this handbook for me and made some fine suggestions that improved it a great deal. **Thank you all** for taking the time for this project!

My Almighty Father has been right beside me all the way. I sense it and want to thank Him for giving me the insight to apply for copyright coverage for TILE. If He had not guided me in that, the Review would not have published the TILE calendar on their website. I had no idea that a copyright was the vehicle that would qualify this plan to go places I never dreamed it would!! But God knew all along. What a Friend!!

Finally, I must thank **all members of the various TILE small groups who have been meeting in Port Charlotte, Florida since 1999**. The joy and spiritual energy we shared was so reviving. We tried to tell others what they were missing – but the truth is there is no substitute for being there!!!! I wish I had kept record of who attended for I would like to affirm them all. We had some who moved away, some who had health problems and it's difficult to remember them all. But I'm going to attempt to name the faithful ones: Adell Claypool, Bo James, Bob Lang, Joan Flynn, Sandee Lawrence, Prudence Grayman, Flora Ashley, Pearl Boyd, Donna Judy, Art and Susan Brooks, Susan Paulson, Carolyn Goff, Toni Vollberg, Darrell and Amanda Dady, Jerry and Connie Sommerville, Gary and Megan O'Connor, Patti Gant, Rachael Selent, Narissa Selent (11 years old when she started coming!), Rita Collins. Those who have attended Rachael's group are Barbara Huff, Wendi Hack, Dakota Hack, Betty Pierson, Esther Ryan, Rachael's mother, Janie Hillock, and Eileen, and others.

In 2005 I started placing ads in church magazines for people who have no computers to request the calendar by mail. Requests for the Bible reading calendar have come by mail

from all over the United States from teachers, medical people, retired folks, and from prisoners. I suggested to them that they are in a prime situation to invite their friends to attend weekly sessions! One lady requested 50 copies of the calendar for her pen pals! Please join me in praying for those who are seeking to know God better through this manner of reading Scripture. If you go to the Testimonial page in the TILE website: www.thisislifeeternal.org you will get a feel of how this ministry has grown. Praise the Lord!

INTRODUCTION TO THIS IS LIFE ETERNAL

God's timing is amazing! Ideas and impulses are planted in our minds at *just* the right time. One cannot read Ps. 139 without coming to that conclusion. My entire life was spent in preparing music for worship services, whether for evangelistic meetings while very young, or directing church choirs or community groups beginning at 17 years of age. Until 1998 at the "elderly" age of 62, I always believed that God's greatest calling for me was the music of the church. That changed in 1998 when God gave me a unique Bible reading plan!

My parents were firm believers in church schools, and I have followed in that tradition. Our four children attended parochial schools until their education continued into areas of postgraduate study. Therefore being acquainted with and "in" Scripture was part and parcel of my life and that of our children! In grade school we learned stories from the Bible and in college we studied "Bible Doctrines." In family worship at home we felt the warmth of the presence of God. Not every time, but frequently enough that the children never complained or balked about gathering for these golden chances to bond together with our heavenly Father.

While a college student I taught a Sabbath School class, and then when my husband entered a medical internship at Florida Hospital I walked up and down our street inviting people to come to our house for Bible study. They came! And we had a great time. Most of our neighbors were employees of Florida Hospital.

During all my maturing years, I made New Year's resolutions which included reading my Bible "cover to cover." But inevitably I failed in Chronicles or Isaiah and felt guilty about not keeping my resolution! Most Bible reading calendars had hundreds of little tiny squares to be checked off. For some reason, seeing how many tiny boxes I had missed was most discouraging to me. From time to time I would say to myself, that I wanted to design a Bible reading calendar that WORKED for me.

When we moved to Punta Gorda, Florida, in 1970, our church had about 35 people attending. There were only one or two other young families in the church and so I found myself looking to the community for friendship. Many fine Christian people lived there and in 1972 I was asked to develop a community chorus. It was delightful meeting the pastors in our county and performing in many of their churches, as well as in the

auditoriums. We traveled across the state to sing at camp meeting, conventions and Disney World, as well. That chorus functioned for 30 years! I retired as Executive Director in 2002. These friendships in the community continue, and have enriched my life tremendously! AND motivated me to study the Bible with a new perspective.

As I said, 1998 was the year when my core purpose in life shifted beyond music and parenthood! So that you can re-live it with me, I need to give some details. ... In the spring of '98, after reading an article in the magazine, *Women of Spirit*, in which “*a clinic in Dallas*” was mentioned, I journeyed to Texas to seek treatment for a speech problem that surfaced some 20 years previously. My soft whispery voice made directing groups of singers and orchestras difficult and frustrating. Trying to communicate by telephone became extremely stressful. Prior to that I had seen specialists nearby in Florida, then in southern California in the early '80s. In '87 I spent about three months going to and coming from Philadelphia to see Dr. Robert Sataloff. His practice was restricted to the care of “professional voice users.” The only way a person could be accepted as a patient was by doctor referral or by a previous patient. The way God networked to get me accepted is a very long story. I'll just say that God worked it out, and during the several 2-3 weeks at a time that I was present and in the care of his team of professionals, I seemed to make good progress.

It was very expensive paying for hotel services as well as doctors' fees, so when a speech therapist who interned with Dr. Sataloff moved to Sarasota, I continued treatment with her for about three years. Producing clear speech was possible when I was alone, doing speech exercises and concentrating intensely. But remaining in that kind of environment is not possible in this world. So I gave up on that. I learned in Philadelphia that there was nothing wrong with my vocal cords! That was good news.

In Texas, according to the story in *Women of Spirit*, was a place where *emotionally based symptoms* were cured! (If I come close to crying – or get very angry – my voice seems to bypass an invisible barrier and projects quite normally!) When I went, I had no idea I would be seeing Dr. Paul Meier who has founded well over 100 counseling clinics across this nation and staffed them with Christian counselors, and is a very spiritual man to whom quoting scripture is as natural as breathing. He has also founded two day hospitals and three in-patient facilities, and written over 50 books. He is a frequent guest on James Dobson's *Focus on the Family*. I saw miracles happen there. It was my privilege to see Dr. Meier Monday through Friday. On our second appointment in which he evaluated my response to medications given to rule out certain conditions, he said that he had never seen a case like mine and that his outlying clinics send him their unusual cases for his review: some 4,000 cases per year. He said “In all our testing on you, we have found nothing clinical to indicate how to treat you. I do not know what the answer is, but there is One who knows. Would you mind if we pray together?”

It is hard to describe my feelings as I fell to my knees and listened to my doctor begging God to give him wisdom. I had NO doubt that God had sent me there. The “voice” story of my life is on-going. Not cured, but comforted by a God who knows just how to cure

me – OR give me tasks to do that are tailor-made for my limitations!

When I returned to Florida from Texas in early May, I decided to cancel all my teaching and directing obligations for a six-month period and spend as much time in speech work as possible, hoping that muscles that seemed to have absorbed stress, which could possibly prevent normal action, would return to normal speech coordination. *It was during this period that God significantly moved in my life.*

My husband, Bob, who was leading out in a small group at the time, had just finished a reading project and needed some fresh material to present as an option. He knew I had commented that I wanted to design my own Bible reading plan using weekly assignments, so he asked if I would produce four assignments for a group evaluation. I sat down at our electric typewriter (can you believe that?), got my Nelson's King James Study Bible, asked for Divine Guidance, and went to work.

When I completed Week 4, *I could not stop!* Over the next three days and nights I hardly slept or ate. I finished Week 52, took my Bible and sat in my living room. Sometimes I read without moving a muscle for three or four hours! The clock just rolled around without my notice! In less than 3 months, I had read the Bible completely through! Not exactly "cover to cover" – like straight through, but *nothing was left out.*

I was so excited. God had given *me* a Bible reading plan that worked for me! I thought, how good God is to me! Never imagining what would happen next...and next.

I shared the news of this reading plan with my friend, Amanda Dady, who *immediately* asked if she called people to come, would I lead out in a small group. I responded "That's why I was born!" And there it was! I had a new "core!"

Through the last 17 years, these are the milepost experiences I had with the This is Life Eternal (*acronym: TILE*) calendar:

1. TILE groups have formed in the Port Charlotte SDA Church, with a number of individuals using it on their own.
2. In 2002 I felt strongly impressed to put the calendar under copyright.
3. In 2003 I submitted it to the Adventist Review. They purchased the rights to publish it on their website. It was reviewed by all eight *Adventist Review* editors and the religion department of Washington Adventist University. I kept expecting someone to say there were already existing plans like TILE. But they didn't! You can view it by clicking on a link within the "About the Plan" page on my website at www.thisislifeeternal.org
4. In 2004 the president of a southwestern conference presented the TILE calendar to every pastor, elder and conference leader. The next year tithe increased and new baptisms increased! Dear friend, there is power in the Word!

5. In 2005 the website www.thisislifeeternal.org was completed. Praise the Lord!
6. In 2006, Ashville NC, TILE was used with a group of 20 young married couples.
7. In 2006 I contacted *Southern Tidings* and arranged to run some ads including an invitation for those without computers to request the calendar by mail. With limited funds, I can only work with one union Conference magazine at a time.
8. In 2007 my ads were moved to the Lake Union Conference. And that's when the website started getting visitors from 56 countries around the world. Very exciting to see!
9. In 2007 *Florida Focus*, our conference magazine, printed the entire calendar.
10. In 2008 in Rochester NY the calendar was printed and inserted in the church bulletins during the month of December.
11. In 2008 ads went to the North Pacific Union magazine.
12. In 2009/10 the ads were published by the Southwestern Union Conference magazine.
13. Since 2009 I have gotten news of small groups meeting in Tennessee, California and Arizona.
14. In 2009 the Shepherdess for pastor's wives in the Southwestern Union Conference presented copies of TILE at a union-wide meeting.
15. To see developments since 2010, read the testimonials recently posted on the TILE website: www.thisislifeeternal.org Click on "Testimonials" on the home page.

My 2008 TILE group was made up of very intelligent, multi-gifted people. I encouraged them all to invite some people and start their own groups. All but two made lists of people they might invite and dialogued quite a bit about this "opportunity!" I wish I could tell you that they all succeeded. Only two out of six did indeed start a group. And for that I'm excited!

Since Feb. 2009 when my TILE group completed the calendar, I've given much thought to what might have given more "graduates" courage to bring TILE'S biblical excitement to more and more people by starting their own groups. By writing this handbook, I hope to put an encouraging tool in the hands of those who wish to moderate TILE groups: engaging introductions to spawn discussion are provided for each week's assignment and closing remarks that will pique interest for the next week's assignment. The reward is that your participants return the following week, bursting to share the gems of spiritual discovery with the group and perhaps news of some personal victories as

well. A natural phenomenon occurs with a growing acquaintance with God—we become more like Him and closer to each other! Faces actually take on more beauty! It's true!!

Journaling frequently does not happen the first time through the Bible. But as the facets of God's beautiful character surface in our study, one feels a need to record the verses and the thoughts that have flashed into our minds directly from the Word of God, so that we can recapture *and share* the awesomeness of learning to know God better. Therefore, I have included a chapter regarding journaling as an integral part of the TILE experience.

There are downloadable forms on my website: www.thisislifeeternal.org Pray that God will guide many to an excitement about His Word, that lives may be changed into His likeness.

TESTIMONIALS

May 20, 2010

Following This is Life Eternal (TILE) Bible reading plan is a refreshing way to keep in touch with God. For the past three years I have followed this plan, using a different version of the Bible each year. Currently I am using the "Clear Word" and really enjoy this easy-to-understand translation.

In 2010 my sister joined me in the TILE Bible reading plan; now we share thoughts and encourage each other. I recommend this innovative Bible reading plan to everyone who chooses to experience the blessings of daily Scripture reading.

Gerre St. Clair, writing from Michigan

April 19, 2010

Now that I've completed my third year of this Bible study calendar, I can truly say I know God better and recognize His love quicker and more deeply. Reading the Bible in this plan ties all 66 books together into one *Big Book*, instead of individual books or subjects. Rather than reading from Genesis to Revelation (and getting bogged down in Numbers or Chronicles), it becomes a deeper spiritual experience to read New Testament writings concurrently with subject counterparts in the Old Testament.

Following this plan in a small group—perhaps six?—helped me be accountable to others when keeping up-to-date with the calendar. Because most of us in the group were using a different version, we were enlightened by making translation comparisons. I've been greatly enriched with this plan. Thank you, Wretha.

Adell Haughey Claypool, (retired) College Music Professor, Band director and Instrumental Instructor, writing from Florida

February 20, 2010

This is my third year of going through the TILE Bible study guide with basically the same group of women. During the first year, I was enriched by discovering the context of certain Bible stories and Bible promises. There were many AHA! moments for me. Each week I try to remember to look for inspiration and not just for information. My growth continues. This year I am especially finding new truths in old, familiar promises.

Barbara Huff, a member of the Port Charlotte, Florida Seventh-day Adventist Church

January 5, 2010, received through the TILE contact page:

Feedback@ThisisLifeEternal.org

I am on my third journey through the Bible using Wretha's *This is Life Eternal* study guide and what a blessing it is. Each year I have chosen a different version of the Bible and it is interesting to see how the various translations compare with the King James Version.

Many times I have started to read the Bible through but have given up about the time I reached Judges or Chronicles. Now that I am finally "getting it" those books aren't so daunting and I can understand why they are in the Bible.

I pray that as we start the New Year many will be encouraged to try this plan. It has brought me closer to God in ways that I never thought possible. It doesn't matter what is going on in my life now, because God has promised to be with me at all times and to go before me in the difficult times. What an awesome God! What a privilege to know Him better!

God bless you as you join His team!

Joan Flynn, (retired) Executive Assistant, Adventist Health System, Florida

September 1, 2008, received through the TILE contact page:

Feedback@ThisisLifeEternal.org

I am gaining so much from using this plan. I've read the Bible through many times but this is the best plan I've found so far. It keeps me motivated to keep going, because it is all in chronological order. And you don't have to finish as many pages per day. Thank you so much for figuring this out. Am dating my weeks as I go, so that I know when I finished. Some weeks I finish in only a few days.

God bless you,

Beth A. Stephan (location unknown)

April, 2005 Letter to the Editor, *Adventist Review*

“Thank you for sharing... Wretha Lang’s outline for Bible reading. Through the years I have been richly blessed as I have read the Bible through from Genesis to Revelation. Sometimes I have taken more than one year, so that I can take my time and savor the depth of meaning. This year I decided to try Lang’s challenging outline and what an exciting and inspiring journey it is proving to be.

“For example, I found it so refreshing to go from the first few chapters of Genesis to Ecclesiastes and then back to Genesis again and then on to some of the Proverbs or some of the Psalms. I have also found it interesting to change from one version of the Bible to another. Truly, as Ellen White wrote: ‘The Word of God is a leaf from the tree of life.’ (Testimonies for the Church, Vol. 8, p. 53). I encourage all to partake of it.”

Mildred J. White, Hayden, Idaho

MY EXPERIENCES WITH “TILE”!

TILE ON THE HIGH SEAS

In 2004 Bob and I traveled on the Norwegian Cruise Line to Alaska. It was a “first” for both of us and we looked forward to the adventure. It has always been my practice to take a pocket-size New Testament that includes the Psalms in my purse when we travel. After some thought, for the trip to Alaska, I decided instead to make room in my luggage to take my favorite Bible and my journaling 3-ring notebook, and I said to the Lord, “I’ll take along some copies of the TILE calendar *in case anyone ASKS for one.*” I felt a bit silly – because who would want a Bible reading calendar on a cruise ship?!!! We boarded the ship in Seattle on a Sunday at 4 pm and sailed at about 6 pm.

On Monday I spent about 4 hours “in the Word,” specifically in the book of Acts. Bob was checking out all the features of the ship, it was quiet and my mind was “in the groove,” spinning a movie starring Peter, preaching at Pentecost, then Stephen, who bravely and eloquently defended his belief in Christ, saw Jesus at the right hand of His Father, and was stoned to death -- while Saul helped the men who killed him by holding their coats! (Periodically I made laps on the deck to prevent *rigor mortis* from setting in!)

Saul was eager to destroy the Lord’s followers and sought letters from the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem addressed to the synagogues in **Damascus** requesting their cooperation in arresting any followers of “The Way.” He wanted to bring them back to Jerusalem in chains – both men and women. As he neared **Damascus**, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! He fell to the ground and God asked: “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting Me?” Saul said: “Who are You, Sir?” And the

voice replied: "I am Jesus, the One you are persecuting! ... Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what to do."

Saul was blind for three days and had to be led by the hand into **Damascus** to the home of Judas on Straight Street. He ate nothing and drank nothing for three days. Then the Lord sent Ananias, a believer, to lay his hands on Saul so that he could see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

You remember the stories. Saul went from persecutor to believer in just a few days! He changed from hunting down Christians to arrest them – or kill them, to preaching in the name of Jesus to save unbelievers so quickly that it was difficult for the Christians to accept what he was saying! But Barnabas explained Saul's situation to the believers and they accepted Saul. ... (I had a dramatic day with the Lord in Damascus!)

Tuesday morning yielded some more Bible reading time and in the afternoon we went on a land excursion to see a mountainside of beautiful views and lush flowering plants. There were oversized vehicles similar to golf carts. We happened to enter a six-seated cart with an attractive young couple.

That evening back onboard we sat at a table for four with the same couple we had met that day! We learned they were both of Syrian descent. His hometown where his family has operated a chocolate factory for generations was...**DAMASCUS!** The husband, Ayman Ghraawi, is now a doctor practicing in Corpus Christi, immigrated to the US for college and became a citizen. Sohair was born in the States, but obviously her family maintained customs from the "old country" including talking their mother tongue because she had a distinguishable accent, as well. She works in Ayman's office. We enjoyed their company.

There were some 2,000 passengers plus 1500 crew members onboard the *Norwegian Dream* which had some engine trouble and gave us more time at sea than expected! With that many people on board it is rare to see the same people repeatedly.

On Wednesday at lunch, we met a nice couple who teach school in California. Tom and Francine. We agreed to sit together for the evening musical in the auditorium.

At the evening meal, the same day, we met a couple who were both New York policemen, and Tina and George, a retired couple who were newlyweds. Tina works with troubled teen girls. I was so impressed with her. Toward the end of the meal, she leaned over to me (by that time she had learned that if she wanted me to talk to her, she had to get close) and said "I've told you all about me, now tell me what you do." I very briefly said, "I've been a musician most of my life, but God recently gave me a unique Bible reading calendar – " She doubled up her fists and pounded the table: "I knew it, I knew it!" she chanted. "I knew the minute you sat down here that YOU are a Christian." She said she wanted a copy of the calendar. And, could she have one for her daughter, and the female cop at our table *really* needed it! I said I would bring them to her state room following dinner.

When I reached their room and knocked, Tina opened the door, pulled me inside and gave me a big bear hug. She looked at the calendar and excitedly said to her husband, “Look at this, George, she’s got **subtitles** on it. This is GREAT!” She had thought of two more people who really *really* needed the calendar. She was probably the most appreciative recipient of the TILE calendar that I’ve experienced. As I left the room, I realized that she had hugged me three times! I thanked God that I had included those copies at the last moment of my packing. I frequently pray God will bless all who are using the TILE calendar, with a special blessing to those I met onboard the *Norwegian Dream*.

Ayman and Sohair, Tina and George, and Tom and Francine seemed to be everywhere we went. And every time we saw them, I got huge hugs. At one meal, Sohair zig-zagged her way across the huge dining room to where we sat –just to give me a hug! Later, walking down the passageway of shops we saw Tom and Francine – another hug for me.

Finally, my husband said quizzically: “What’s going on??!!” It wasn’t until the last day or two on the ship that a quote from Christ’s Object Lessons came to my mind. Ellen White says that when we spend quality time in the study of the Scriptures, there is an aura about us which affects all we meet. That’s Power, my friends! There is Power in the Word! What an awesome God we serve!

ANITA

It was late 1998. I had just finished reading my Bible through completely for the first time in my 62 years!! I was very excited for I had thoroughly enjoyed it, had been mightily blessed, and had finished it in 3 months. When I shared this with a friend of mine, her instant response was to offer to call people to join a study group and requested me to be the moderator. My instant response was “Of course! This is why I was born!”

Amanda made her calls and in early 1999, a group of six ladies, and an 11-yr. old girl, came to my home. Every Tuesday evening found us sitting around my dining room table where we had plenty of room for our Bibles and notebooks. Among them was Anita (a pseudo-name), an attractive woman in her late ‘50’s, who had been brought up in the Seventh-day Adventist faith, had been a school teacher, and subsequently worked in medical records at a small hospital.

When Anita was three or four years old, she picked up an ax which slipped out of her little hand and fell onto her left hand, severing parts of her third, fourth and fifth fingers. She had a love for music and accomplished amazing things with fewer digits than most of us have to play full chords on the piano or organ. I never heard her complain about that. She seemed content to be her husband’s favorite accompanist as he sang tenor solos or duets, and she frequently played beautifully for entire church services.

She was so friendly that it was a very long time before I even noticed that her left hand was sadly missing some fingers.

Although she was an avid reader and had attended church schools where Bible subjects were required, she had never read the Bible through before. She faithfully read the weekly assignments before we met each week, but was rather quiet as the discussion swirled around her. About mid-way through the calendar, Anita shared with us that she had been diagnosed with cancer! We knelt in a circle to pray for her. Many tears were shed over the next year and a half. At first doctors gave her a few months to live, but she surprised all of them by living a pretty good quality of life for much of another 18 months.

We finished the Bible and started over immediately. Some of the husbands started attending. Looking back, I'm sure the Holy Spirit was constantly making up for my inadequacies. Now, in retrospect, I'm sure as a novice moderator, I missed many golden, teachable moments. But the good part is that God carries us in his arms (Psalm 68) every day and blesses our efforts to grow in His grace. The exciting part of this story for me is that God gave me this plan just in time for it to strengthen Anita as she faced the biggest challenge of her life.

As the months passed, Anita would sometimes be in pain during our time together. But then some new treatment, or nutritional boost, would seem to alleviate the pain for another period of pretty good quality of life. She was walking every day and doing all she could to enable her body to heal.

Occasionally she would ruefully say that her favorite lunch during her more than 15 years working at the hospital was a piece of pizza from the Circle K convenience store not far away and a Dr. Pepper big enough to last her all afternoon! She said she knew that was a terrible diet, and feared that she had opened the door for illness to invade her life.

Anita began to energetically participate in our discussions more and recognize scriptural passages that seemed to be just for her. Her courage in the Lord never seemed to falter and her witness to the rest of us was huge. When she was hurting, we would again kneel in a circle and shed tears as we pled with God to heal her and relieve her pain. She did not miss her Tuesday evening appointment with God and His Word even when her pain increased.

But there came a time finally, when our dear friend could not come. I think she missed only two weeks when we decided that if she couldn't meet with the group, we would go to her house to have sundown worship with her as the Sabbath began. Her husband showed us her liver tumor that was visible through Anita's skin. It was amazing and terrible to see. He had literally tried to move heaven and earth to save her. We prayed to the God of the Sabbath, the Creator who designed the liver, and begged once more for healing. But it was not in His plan. She passed away peacefully in her husband's arms the next week, remaining steadfast in her faith until her last breath.

Psalm 139 reveals the intimate plans God has for our lives. Sometimes God does not intervene when sickness comes. But He declares His infinite love for us, and offers eternal life with Him, if we only believe. He is the God of forgiveness and cleansing. I have every faith that we will see Anita again in the great resurrection. Anita has a son and daughter and grandchildren for whom she prayed often and fervently. Won't you join with me to pray for Anita's family, too?

FORMULA FOR SUCCESSFUL TILE GROUPS

SIZE OF THE GROUP

For a first-time moderator, a group of six to eight people is ideal. For two reasons: Each member needs to have time to share the blessings they experienced in the Word, and the moderator needs to learn to know each person. The personality of each member of the group is custom-designed by the Almighty God! (Ps. 139) A moderator will be rewarded when he/she prays for the Holy Spirit's guidance in understanding the needs embedded in the hearts of his/her members. If one wishes to be an effective leader in sharing the Word of God, guidance from the Holy Spirit is essential! It is a promised gift from God, to those who seek Him, that where two or more are gathered, He WILL be present. What a Comfort!

Our goal is to learn to love others as Christ loves. That is to respect and love others unconditionally, granting each individual the "space" to express what they have understood from each week's study, and not be critical. Some members of the class may be experiencing the Biblical journey for the very first time. Others may be seasoned in their ability to express spiritual truths (Luke 11:13, John 14:26). Every one needs to recognize the need to be encouraging to each other, granting to all a safe place where thoughts are NOT negatively criticized, nor are they repeated outside of the room, but are accepted as their best effort, knowing that the Holy Spirit will, in His own time, equip them with the eloquence of angels to spread the Good News. (Ex. 4:11, 12; Rev. 12:11)

Sometimes the moderator will need to encourage spiritual expression and gently nudge all to grow up in this freedom to testify to the deeply personal rewards found in seeking to know Christ and His Father more clearly each week! (See Rev. 12:11 & Mal. 3:16-18) Our "testimony" is our own witness of experiencing God's presence either in the Word or in day-to-day experience. If the devil had his way, every child of God would be silenced. Only by God's grace and power are we kept safe to continue in the pursuit of a deeper relationship with Jesus and sharing that experience with others.

I have found that within a 90-minute period of time, there is barely enough opportunity for each member to share the beauty and blessings found within any week's assigned reading. Usually we run out of time before all six or eight people have shared the texts that reveal God's personality with the others. It just may be the fastest moving, most engrossing 90 minutes of the entire week!! Because the time always seems short, each member needs to honor the reading assignment each week; that is, do not bring up discussion from unrelated passages beyond or outside of the current assignment. That includes personal anecdotes (this particular aspect seems to need frequent reminders!), unless there is a definite connection with that week's assignment. The moderator needs to bring discussion back on track if necessary. In fairness to those who have read the assignment and want to share their personal discoveries in the Word, leaders must gently guide the direction of the discussion. When a member brings up unrelated topics, it is usually a clear signal that they have not read that week's assignment at all!

WEEKLY SESSIONS

The TILE program features weekly assignments which vary in length with little boxes to check for each portion of the study and one box that indicates an entire week has been completed. Weekly assignments that are topically related (as TILE's are for the most part), are easy to track and finish at a later date if necessary.

MEMBER ORIENTATION

The following parameters for members of TILE groups is based on 16 years of learning what works. The first time the group meets together will be at the time specified by the leader. However, once they are seated together, the leader needs to verify if another day of the week or different time of day is better for the group. Do everything in your power to make the group user friendly for as many as possible.

In my first two years moderating a TILE group, I was impressed that whether the members are professors, nurses or in management, or self-educated people, one of the most difficult things for them to accept and understand is: "The Bible explains itself!" Is that not what preachers and teachers have told us all our lives? We don't need additional resource books. In fact, the focus of learning to know Jesus better solely from reading the Bible with the Holy Spirit's guidance, completely occupies every minute of our weekly sessions.

Over and over I have had to request that the members of my groups not bring any resource material other than their Bibles. But wouldn't you know – in the last decade publishers of Bibles have started including copious notes to accompany the Scriptures. Many people assume those notes are God's truth, because it's "in the Bible." But, that is not always true. They can still be duped! For example, The New Living Translation was coordinated and reviewed by 13 experts after it had been translated by 87 Bible scholars who were given small portions of the Scriptures to translate. Do you think they could perceive the impact of gathering truth on the "here a little, there a little" principle? I

treasure and protect truth that comes to us by personally reading the entire Word, always with prayer for the Holy Spirit to teach us and lead us into ALL truth “line upon line.” (John 14:16,17)

There is not space here to share a truth that was gradually unfolded to me as I studied over a six-year period. I discovered related texts in both Testaments (“here a little, there a little”) to confirm my belief. Only then did I present it to my group. It was challenged by one of the group members and so for the first time in nine years, I myself, consulted a source outside of Scripture: the *Desire of Ages* and there found a very short passage which confirmed what had been Biblically revealed to me. Having *first* found that truth in *scripture* has crystallized all the related texts. I will never forget them. Had I looked up a “source” trying to find a quicker answer to my question, I would not have found the rich layers of related texts that connected the dots of that truth. (I am hoping these words are making sense to you, my readers.) I wrote about that discovery on the blog page of my website: “*The Twenty-four Elders – Who are They??*” Go to www.thisislifeeternal.org (click on URL holding down ctrl), then click on “Journal (blog),” look to the right side of the page and click on “September 2007”.

There are people who read Scripture to memorize key texts and be able to defend the pillars of our faith. A very worthy activity! There are those who follow archeological discoveries to prove the dates as the Bible presents them. There are those who read it to get a good grade from a teacher, - or from God. All good reasons. But if you search with all your heart and soul ” to know Him better,” you WILL find Him. (Deut. 4:29, second part, and John 17:3) It is possible to read scripture as the Jews did: thinking we are in need of nothing “new.” Beware! Let us read to know and love our Saviour more and more.

Jesus prayed a beautiful prayer for His disciples (in their presence), and in John 17:3 He said that to receive eternal life we will “need to *know* God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” This verse is the foundation and pillar, if you will, of the *This is Life Eternal* approach to Bible study. Exercise your own mind *to recognize* characteristics of God as you read Scripture, with prayer to the Holy Spirit to assist you; and He will light up your life with a growing acquaintance with Him. This group studies solely to get to know God better and better. Let us finally have that end-time experience spoken of in *Desire of Ages*, p. 668 paragraph 4, line 4, last third to end of paragraph which says that God will whisper His messages to us *personally* even as He did to Enoch and Elijah. But read the entire fourth paragraph. It is reassuring!

We cannot dictate what version of the Bible people bring to the group, but we can suggest that their learning curve will be more effective without marginal notes in their Bibles. But most definitely it is counter productive if they start bringing history books, or even Rick Warren and Ellen White books. A burden I believe the Lord has laid on my heart is to awaken a love for Scripture reading within the Christian world! For Adventists, this would mean that when they wanted spiritual food, they would embrace Scripture above ALL other books.

Ellen White stated that her writings were the “lesser light” to lead us to the Greater Light. I have no doubt that she was a prophet sent from God and without her guidance which often she quoted as being straight from the Lord, the global humanitarian and medical work, and the educational system as well, of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church would not have the impact for good, that it does.

But when it came to doctrinal pillars of the church, it was not her writings that guided the leaders of the Adventist church in the development of a belief system. Those pioneers sometimes studied their Bibles all night, praying for God to help them recognize the nuggets of truth they sought. AFTER it was revealed to them, THEN God sent visions to Ellen White to verify, confirm, or deny the validity of the fruits of their diligence.

My point is that when we study Scripture with a focus and seek help from the Holy Spirit, God will reveal Himself to every sincere seeker. It is the most awesome experience a human being can have – to learn new dimensions about God that will light up the mind with God’s truth. There is a warm glow internally when knowledge of God is revealed to us. Those are the moments that we want to share within the group each week. Every week the focus is: **WHAT DID I LEARN THIS WEEK ABOUT JESUS THAT HELPS ME TO KNOW HIM BETTER???** Our goal is to know Him on an ever ascending path of knowledge that is totally and purely Scriptural. New leaders and new members need not be discouraged if this experience does not occur immediately. Trust me, *keep reading and praying and sharing* and God **will** light up your life!

Here is Jesus’ own simple formula for eternal life: we must know God and Jesus Christ, and that will = eternal life! It is simple! Simply exciting! (John 17:3)

Give **Orientation suggestions** in writing (if possible) to new members before the first meeting:

- #1 Please bring only your favorite version of the Bible and 3-ring notebook for your TILE calendar, your TILE prayer journal pages and for taking notes.
- #2 For optimum blessing for the whole group, read each week’s assignment before the group meets.
- #3 If you have questions as you read, resist seeking to find answers outside the Bible. Write your question down, bring it to the group, and keep reading and most questions will be answered. Let’s experience the fulfillment of the principle we’ve always held to be true: the Bible explains itself! Keep in mind that the Bible states that many things are opened to our understanding, but God does not reveal everything. For example, only the Father knows the day and hour of Jesus’ coming. Some questions might be answered only in eternity! (Matt. 24:36; Deut. 29:29)
- #4. Treat the words that are said during the sessions as being strictly confidential. As time goes on and bonding occurs, there is a trust that frees people to share personal concerns. We must never break that confidence.
- #5. Our group will meet from 5:30-7:00 pm. on Tuesdays in room #____ at the church. (Contact pastor/church secretary for room availability. OR conduct the sessions in your

own home. However, there are more distractions doing this in a home. Try for neutral ground-at the church.)

#6. Bring water if you wish. No food (unless you have a medical condition of some kind).

#7. There is a productive group dynamic that changes when even one member is absent.

Please make this weekly appointment a *top priority* on your calendar. A group leader appreciates knowing if someone has to be away so do communicate!!!

#8. Because the time goes so fast when we are together, it's important that personal anecdotes that are not directly related to the weekly reading passages should be saved for sharing at social gatherings scheduled by the group.

#9. Journaling is a way of giving our minds a point of reference when we want to share an illuminating experience with the group. It is surprising how writing it down is helpful in recalling it.

#10. Social occasions every three months or so outside of the weekly sessions are encouraged. Schedule a potluck meal and enjoy each other on a different level. Or plan a pop corn and game night. Possibilities are endless!

JOURNALING

Journaling is “an acquired taste.” If your members are not inclined to try it the first year, that's OK. As I recall, the first time I read through the TILE calendar, it was what a college manual might identify as: “SURVEY OF THE SCRIPTURES.” It was like getting a grasp of the broad panorama of biblical history. Even for many life-time Bible Christians who have been busy being leaders in the church, reading the Bible completely *with a specific focus* has never been an assignment or even on their radar. It is such a joy to watch even people “of the Book” get *excited* about meaningful verses they had never noticed before.

Once the Bible panorama has been painted on the canvas of their minds, then they can perceive topics that they would like to track through Scripture and create their own resource: *their own journal* which they can refer back to for the rest of their lives! (Some people comment that they feel journaling will take too much time. But truthfully, it takes only a few seconds to just jot down a text under a topic.) They can then recapture texts revealing music in the Bible, for example, and put together a narrative that will be very valuable to them – and maybe to others, as well.

I currently have a decade of journaling waiting for review topic by topic. When God directs me to take that step, I believe it will give me a sense of how my own observations have developed during these years of study. But, since beginning this ministry, I've been constantly involved in maintaining a group myself, and then mentoring a second group which branched off of mine.

If I had never journaled, I would have no references to collate and I probably would lose my moments of inspiration forever! If one has topics of interest written in to numbered boxes on a journaling page, they are user-friendly for the next step of revealing

what God says in the entire Bible on a specific topic, as *you read the Bible through for yourself!*

I refer you to the downloadable journaling page on my website. There is also a “Sample” journaling page to demonstrate how it works. There is an area on the page below the topic boxes, where one can write comments on the most meaningful texts. And sometimes in my own journal, my prayers are mixed in with comments (sometimes tears) as the significance of texts awaken spiritual needs in my own life and that of our children and grandchildren!

Encourage your group members to take a look at those pages on the website, to download them and at least be aware of the journaling step; which as I said may not become a part of their system of study during their first year in the program. Most of my group members began journaling in their second year. Some never did. And that’s OK, too.

PRAYER JOURNALING

Each member of the group should maintain his/her own “This is Life Eternal Prayer Journal Page.” It is available at www.thisislifeeternal.org on the downloads page now. Contents of the 3-ring notebook should be: 1. a copy of the TILE Bible Reading Calendar, 2. TILE Prayer Journal page, 3. A copy of the group’s Orientation information, and topical journaling pages.

During the last 15 min. of the weekly sessions, turn the group’s attention to the power of prayer and let your personal needs and those of your friends ascend before the throne of God where He is “looking down” eager to receive the requests we bring. It has been most meaningful if each member has their own prayer journal page. That way they can pray over the requests throughout the week, as well.

Each week ask for updates on the status of their requests. When a prayer has been answered write the date. Many times God answers in degrees. Have you ever noticed that? If that’s the case, the date under PRAISE might not be the same as the date of “answer.” We acknowledge the first indication of the answer, but need to continue to pray until it is fully answered and THEN place that date under PRAISE.

It is so exciting to glance down the prayer journal pages and see those dates written so joyfully under PRAISE. Truly our prayer time is PRAISE time. Actually, I should write a blog on my website describing the wonderful answers to prayer we have experienced during my years working with TILE groups. So much to do, so little time! ☺

RESOURCES

King James Version
New King James Version
The New Living Translation
New American Standard Bible
New International Version
New Revised Standard Version
The New English Bible
Amplified Bible
Qwik Scan Bible

Any version of the Bible that has a good set of maps included.

For other sources of spiritual enrichment visit the following websites:

www.3abn.org	www.hopetv.org
www.amazingfacts.org	www.lluc.org
www.biblegateway.org	www.hopeonfire.org
www.iivw.org	www.pioneermemorialchurch.org
www.adventistreview.org	www.forestlakechurch.org
www.lifestreamsmedia.org	www.egwhiteestate.org
www.adventsource.org	www.flocktok.org
www.thisislifeeternal.org	

EAT the BREAD of LIFE in 52 WEEKLY BITES

You will find that every week is an exciting week when the assignment is **read BEFORE the meeting by all members**. The supreme goal of this exercise is to KNOW GOD BETTER each week, but most folks need someone to guide their minds to even begin to recognize revelations of God's character. These notes are not intended to take the place of your own reading of the assignment!

Many of us have lived our lives hearing Scriptures droned in a perfunctory way, when in truth it is both exciting and deeply moving. Satan would like us to keep on droning, for that masks the awesomeness of God's Word. Encourage good expression when portions of Scripture are read aloud.

What follows are suggested thoughts or comments for each week's assignment to get minds primed to share the flashes of understanding the Holy Spirit has brought to them. Each leader will, in time, learn to lead with original thoughts borne out of personal study. Perhaps you are already to that point. But, if not, consider this book a tool that could help to hasten the ability to share your own awakenings. (Rev. 12:11)

WEEK 1 Ecclesiastes; Psalms 8, 19, 65, 77; Genesis 1-11:9

WELCOME We want to begin right on time each week. Hopefully some will come a little early each week. While waiting for start time, you will have time to learn who is comfortable offering prayer, etc. Assure them there is no pressure on this – we just want to effectively use the talents among us.

OPENING PRAYER (2 min.) – Begin right on time. Set the pattern for coming weeks. Plead for the Holy Spirit’s guidance. Short prayers are as effective as long ones. You can offer it yourself until you learn who is comfortable praying in “public.”

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

We are embarking on what may be the most thrilling journey of your entire life. It is, in fact, a journey that never ends, for we know that there are some things that will be our study for eternity! But once we are struck by Truth “from above,” by the beauty of our Lord and Savior, life becomes unbelievably exciting!

ECCLESIASTES (5 min.)

The book of Ecclesiastes, written by Solomon, the son of King David and Bathsheba, is poetic in nature. When we get to Kings and Chronicles you will see that Solomon was a wise king who “had it all together.” Then as he got older, his father died, and eventually he started marrying wives from surrounding kingdoms. He was warned that by marrying unbelievers he would be tempted away from his God. Eventually he had hundreds of wives! It’s no wonder he had to do some “research” to recall what it means to be wise and productive on this earth.

Solomon says in Eccl. 3:11 that “God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart.” See Rom. 1:18-20 which says of the wicked: “The truth about God is known to them instinctively. *God has put this knowledge in their hearts!*” And so those who do not know God, but observe nature, do already know a LOT about God, but not well enough to worship Him. Therefore God brought prophets into the world and the Bible to be available practically across the globe; in most hotels, they can be found in night stand drawers right beside the bed.

Learning to “know” God (it’s not a casual friendship He wants!) is like putting a very big puzzle together. As we learn to recognize evidences and share them with each other, the picture of God gradually comes into focus. Not all at once, but little by little, here a little, there a little. Do you “see” it emerging? To “see” Christ changes us into His likeness! Praise God! Look for verses that reveal God’s likes and preferences and determine to incorporate those characteristics into your life. **WRITE THEM DOWN** to share with the group. (Allow 7 min. for sharing what they found!)

PSALMS 8, 19, 65, 77 (7 min.)

Our chapters in Psalms are related to the creation story – all except one of them, and while this reading plan was diligently designed to be topical and chronological in nature, occasionally there is a passage that simply falls out of the stream. When that happens, just enjoy the beauty and blessing of that “stand alone” Scripture. Psalm 77 is one of those worthy stand-alone scriptures.

****Discuss the enrichment derived from the “creation” Psalms as they help to “unpack” the Creation story and reveal additional “shades” of God to us.**

GENESIS (50 min.)

Let’s go to Genesis now and experience God’s awesome, creative power as He creates life upon an earth that was dark and wet and had no form.

If the mind actively “sees” creation week unfold, there are totally awesome things about God that surface. For example, Jesus was given the work of creating (John 1), but the Holy Spirit “moved upon the face of the waters.” And when man was created, God said, “Let Us make man in OUR image.” So “God” must look something like us – although he is not limited to one form, it seems logical that His primary image is like us! We are His “spittin’ image” as human beings say. He appears in Scripture in the likeness of an angel, sometimes like a “man” (e.g. visiting Abraham). Truly He is not bound by the dimensions we are. But He has given us the creation story in words that we can relate to and know that they are Truth.

The Father, Son and Holy Spirit worked together in creating our world. There are not many places in Scripture where we see Them working side by side, but clearly They work in agreement. We see Them in John 14, 15 & 16 as totally “in sync.” They don’t know what it’s like to have friction in the Family. Our frictions are painful for God to watch, I’m sure. There are places in Scripture where God says that His heart is breaking because of humanity’s sinful ways. Did you see that in Gen. 6:6?

Then there’s God, the Sculptor God, the Anesthesiologist and the Surgeon, God, the fashion designer.... When Adam and Eve attempted to cover themselves with leaves when their sinless attire was gone, God clothed them with garments made out of animal skins. How painful for the Creator of those animals to have to demonstrate to Adam and Eve the sacrificial protocol pointing forward to the death of Christ which they would have to follow for thousands of years until Christ came. Gen. 3:15 is a very important prophecy regarding the sin problem and it’s resolution. **(Please read *Baby Jesus’ Inheritance*, which is based on Gen. 3:15 at <http://www.thisislifeternal.org> (Hit “ctrl” button along with the web address click. Then click on “Journal (Blog), then click on September, 2006 on the right side of the page.)**

Now I want to hear from the rest of you. What did you learn in these chapters of Genesis that revealed God to you? **See Gen. 6:5,6 (–the animals coming 2 by 2 –the Flood –people wanting inside the ark too late – the 12 ½ months cooped up in the**

ark (Gen 8:13,14) – the rainbow (Gen 9:12-15)--Tower of Babel --God’s trip to earth to check it out!

Noah lived 350 years after the flood and died at 950 years old. Many children were born to Noah’s sons and from them came all the repopulation of the earth!!!!

(Encourage each member to step out in faith and attempt to share inspirations that usually seem to defy expression – Sharing becomes easier and more eloquent with practice! Sometimes there is not time to finish discussing the entire assignment. Allow 10 min. for Eccl, 50 min. for Genesis, 10 min. for Psalms, 5 min for promotional comments, and 15 min. for prayer requests, praise and praying. Total: 90 min. Timing is important because if discussion goes too long on Eccl. then the time will be gone and Genesis, which is so foundational to understanding God, will barely get touched! However, the Holy Spirit will guide if we remain in touch with Him!! But finishing on time and starting on time is very important to the longevity of your group. Skip whatever you have to, to quit on time.)

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS for Week 2

Genesis 11:10-25:8; Psalms 61, 62, 66, 67, 73, 103

Next week the Genesis story will unfold with the repopulation of the earth following the flood. Following Noah’s death at 950 years old, Shem became the next patriarch. Within 7 generations from Noah the lifespan shortened to 149! God explained that their lives were shortened so that mankind would have less time to practice wickedness. Beginning in chapter 12, watch carefully for the times that “the Lord” appeared and dialogued with human beings. Make a note to read I Cor.10:4 during this week and meditate on the pre-incarnate Jesus. Who was the God of the Old Testament!? For many Christians this fact immediately opens their minds to a clearer vision of how much Christ has loved us since before the creation of the world and how constantly He has been involved in affairs of earth!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS 15 min.

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 2 Genesis 11:10-25:8; Psalms 61, 62, 66, 67, 73, 103

WELCOME

As soon as members begin arriving ask them about their week and any ongoing medical or family issues. When time comes to start (on time), choose someone to offer a brief prayer.

OPENING PRAYER Always request the Holy Spirit's guidance (John 14:26)

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

Genesis 11:10-25:8

The reading for this week dwelt on "The Family of Terah." His sons were Abram (who later was called Abraham), and his brothers Nahor and Haran. They lived near today's Iraq in a land known as "Ur." Haran had a son named Lot – but while still young, Haran died. Abram married Sarai and Nahor married Milcah, who was the daughter of Uncle Haran! Sadly, Sarai was barren. But later, after having Isaac, she was called "Sarah," and Abram was called "Abraham." Biblical names are significant!

Terah took his family, including Lot, on a journey to Canaan. But on the way, at the northern arc of the "crescent" which circumvented the dangerous desert, they stopped at the village of Haran and settled there. Terah lived an additional 205 years and died while still at Haran. Abram became a great patriarch, spiritually (though not perfect!) and militarily, for his household had 318 men available to fight when necessary. (Gen.14:14)

As we read through the OT, it is enlightening to know that "kings" in the land of Canaan were more like mayors of the larger cities, and they had armies. Gen. 14:8 says that the "kings" of Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, and Bela prepared to fight against the king of Elam, Goiim, Babylonia and Ellasar – 4 kings against 5! The 4 kings dominated the battle and took Lot captive. ... But let's begin our discussion from where Abraham takes Lot under his wing after his father's death.

God called Abram to leave the place where they had lived for 205 years, and made promises to Abram – what were they?? **(If the group moves too slowly, you tell the promises. Your group response tempo will develop – but it could take 3-4 weeks.)** 1. God promised to make Abraham a great nation. 2. Abraham would be famous. 3. He would be a blessing to others. 4. God would bless those who were good to him and curse those who were not! 5. ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH WOULD BE BLESSED THROUGH Abraham!!!! (WOW!!!)

Their destination was between 250 and 300 miles away! Abram was 75, Sarai was 65 and Lot, probably in his 40's when they left Haran. They took livestock, and the

hundreds of people who had joined his household at Haran and they all finally arrived at Shechem and set up camp beside a big oak at Moreh.

The Lord appeared to Abram and made the promise found in Gen. 12:7 that was to be repeated many times in the Bible: God was going to give the land of Canaan to Abraham's offspring (literally: Seed). Read Gal. 3:16 which shows that the promise of inheritance was first and foremost to the baby Jesus, Who indeed was born in Abraham's blood line!!!

(Because time literally flies in these sessions, there is not time to discuss personal stories falling outside the assigned reading unless there is a direct correlation. Be vigilant AND tactful. Wasting time sharing personal stories which are unrelated to the topic robs the whole group of time to "milk" the assignment to absorb God's character.)

Other important points to discuss:

- 1. Abraham gave Lot first choice of where he would like to live and when trouble over water sources arose, he chose the region of Sodom**
- 2. Abram rescues Lot – pays tithe to Melchizedek, King and Priest of Salem**
- 3. God is a prophet! - regarding 400 years slavery for Abraham's descendants**
- 4. Ishmael is born – Abraham is 86.**
- 5. At 99 years of age Abram is called Abraham and he laughs (Gen. 17:17) at becoming a father at 100!**
- 6. The Lord, appearing as a man, came to visit one day!!! (Gen. 18) He tolerated Sarah's laughter, had lunch, and negotiated with Abraham over Sodom's destruction. Awesome God!**
- 7. Sodom – God punished Lot's wife as she looked back.**
- 8. Abraham told a white lie to King Abimelech. How did God protect Sarah?**
- 9. The Lord did as promised: Isaac is born! Sarah said "God has brought me laughter! All who hear about this will laugh with me!"**
- 10. God tests Abraham by asking him to sacrifice Isaac. Faith and obedience are a symbol of the Son of God's sacrifice in giving His life for us.**
- 11. Sarah dies at 127. Isaac marries Rebekah and is comforted. Abraham gets married again and has 6 sons and grandchildren. He dies at 175.**

PSALMS 61-62, 66-67, 73, 103

In Psalm 61 is pictured a relationship with the Lord that I wish to achieve. David seeks to live forever in God's sanctuary, safe beneath the shelter of "Your wings!" Ah! Comforting thought!

Ps. 62:5 shows David waiting quietly before the Lord, urging us to trust in God at all times. POUR OUT YOUR HEART TO HIM for God is our refuge. Treasure these evidences of the powerful relationship between David (again, not a perfect man) and his God – v. 11 says "God has spoken plainly, and I have heard it many times: Power, O God, belongs to You; unfailing love, O Lord, is Yours. ..." Oh, Lord, we long to know Your voice and Your plainly spoken Words. We want to cling to You consistently.

(Ask the group to share the nuggets of a relationship with God in the other Psalms in this week's assignment that we should seek, and also language that we can learn to use in our prayers to God. If David was a "man after God's own heart" then I believe it is a valuable exercise for our mouths to use similarly eloquent language that draws us closer to the King of the universe.)

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 3

Gen. 25:9-36; Proverbs 3; Psalms 1, 3, 68-70

Isaac and Ishmael peacefully buried their father in the cave where he had buried Sarah. Abraham asked his trusted servant, Eleazer to travel about 250 mi. to find a wife for Isaac! God worked out the details. So awesome! Isaac got married at about 40 years of age – that is, he took Rebekah into his mother's tent, and she became his wife. He loved her very much, and she was a special comfort to him after the death of his mother (isn't God good?). Rebekah had twins: Jacob and Esau. Jacob was a 'momma's boy' and Esau was a man's man, hairy and outdoors a lot. They weren't very close. But watch Jacob mature under his Uncle Laban, and see Esau who threatened to kill Jacob, finally reconcile with him.

Then enjoy a chapter in Proverbs and several of the Psalms.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

PRAYER TIME: Each week ask each of the "petitioners" if there is news of progress on their prayer requests. Frequently there are grieving parents whose young people are out of the church and they desperately need prayer and the support of the group. Eventually members will ask for prayer for overcoming weaknesses – whatever the request, *try not to forget about these requests*. Write them down on the prayer journaling form (each member should have their own form) and *follow up faithfully*. Go to www.thisislifeeternal.org (Click on URL while holding down ctrl), click on "Downloads" and then choose download the prayer journaling form title page and second page for your group. Print out and place in your 3-ring notebook.

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 3 Gen. 25:9-36; Prov. 3; Psalms 1, 3, 68-70

WELCOME Check your notes regarding your members. When we remember remarks made on a previous week, it helps to build personal connections.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

GENESIS 25:9-36

You will recall that Jacob liked to cook and was a shepherd. Esau liked to hunt. One day Jacob had his best lentil stew on the stove and when Esau came in the delicious aroma was filling the tent – he said he would give his birthright for some of that stew – and a binding legal transaction was casually enacted over his meal!!!

Isaac was getting old and his eyesight was poor. God had told Rebekah that Jacob would receive the birthright blessing and become the next patriarch (see Gen. 25:23), but she was afraid God might not take care of bestowing the birthright on her favorite son before Isaac died! So what did she do???

This was a dysfunctional family. Esau not only hated his brother, but when he learned that his parents despised the Canaanite women (Gen. 27:46 and 28:8), he married Ishmael's daughter just for spite! That would be Abraham's granddaughter!

Rebekah asked Isaac to send Jacob to her uncle in Paddan-aram, her homeland, to find a wife and get Jacob away from Esau's murderous anger. Jacob left immediately and traveled hundreds of miles to Paddan-aram. Tell me the events of Jacob's journey. What awesome characteristics of God's nature were revealed along the way. (The dream of the ladder, its significance, the promises God made to Jacob, etc.)

Laban gives the wrong daughter for Jacob's first wife after working seven years. But then lets him have Rachel as well with the promise of working another seven years. Jacob remains another seven years and builds up Laban's herds of cattle and tries to build his own in preparation for moving back to where he grew up.

Now share what happened on Jacob's return home. He didn't go any faster than the small children and young animals could travel. Compassionate man. **(Laban chases them down and accuses them of stealing his idols. Rachel lied to keep them. He finally leaves them and pronounces the Mizpah blessing over Jacob and his family!!!)**

If you allow your imagination to spin a movie of this story, it is phenomenal! **(Talk through the night-time battle with the "mysterious Stranger" when Jacob was**

alone on the river bank. He had sent his family on across the river while he awaited Esau's arrival which might bring a possible attempt to kill him – by his own brother!) In Gen. 32:22-32 Jacob wrestles Someone until dawn. He asks Jacob to let Him go “for it is dawn.” Then Jacob says the meaningful words: “I WILL NOT LET YOU GO UNLESS YOU BLESS ME!” **(Jacob held on all night – he wanted God's blessings so sincerely and he was determined to milk every benefit from the night of struggle. See Heb. 4:12; Deut. 10:20; 11:22; Jer. 13:11. God wants us to CLING to Him!)** How fervently do we want God's blessings???? What does it tell you about God that He came to wrestle with Jacob? Does He not go the second mile many times?

Esau is visible coming in the distance as the dawn lights the sky. He has 400 men with him!!! Jacob has joined his family across the river and arranges his family to meet Esau, placing Rachel and Joseph last where they had the most protection in case there was bloodshed. But Esau was eager to hug Jacob, met the entire family and said he didn't want to take any gifts. But Esau finally accepted Jacob's gifts and offered to stay with Jacob and family as they traveled. But Jacob said they had to go slowly, so not to wait for them. So Esau started back home. **Reconciliation, to be “at one” is God's miracle.** The truth was that Jacob was grateful for Esau's compatibility, but did not trust him.

Jacob, who has been gone for 21 years, returns to Canaan with his family. His children have never seen Canaan nor have his wives and their servant women.

As Jacob and his family travel toward their final destination they stop at Shechem where Jacob bought a piece of property just outside town for 100 pieces of silver, and built an altar.

Dinah, Leah's daughter, went looking for friendship among some of the local young women, and was spied by Shechem, son of Hamor the Hivite, who raped her and loved her at first sight! What did Simeon and Levi do??? They made Jacob stink among the neighboring nations!

So they moved on to Bethel at God's direction, and then He said, “Build an altar there to worship me—THE GOD WHO APPEARED TO YOU WHEN YOU FLED FROM YOUR BROTHER ESAU!!!!” Clearly Jacob DID see God and live! Awesome God!

Jacob acts decisively telling everyone to destroy their “idols!” Then wash up and put on clean clothes to prepare for worship. The NLT Bible then says in vs 4: “So they gave Jacob all their idols AND THEIR EARRINGS...” They were buried beneath a tree near Shechem and then they left for Bethel. As they traveled south, terror FROM GOD came over the nations and no one attacked them. **(There's not time here for a debate regarding jewelry – just point out that earrings appear to be included with “idols”!)**

God appears to Jacob again when he arrived at Bethel after traveling from Paddan-aram. God reminded him that his name was changed to Israel. God told Israel to

multiply and fill the earth! And God would give him the land promised to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob set up an altar, anointed it and called the place Bethel – “house of God” – because God had spoken to him there.

Rachel dies during Benjamin’s birth. Poor Jacob! Then Isaac dies at 180 years old. Jacob and Esau bury him together just as Isaac and Ishmael buried Abraham.

Esau’s descendants became the Edomite nation.

PROVERBS 3 Pick out a favorite verse from this chapter around the circle.

PSALMS 1, 3, 68-70

Psalm 1---- vs. 6 God watches over the path of the godly, but the path of the wicked leads to destruction. It appears that God’s watch care is given to those who ask for it. Thank You, God!

Psalm 3 – For many years, I had a hard time personalizing many of the Psalms because David always seemed to have so many enemies! But I have come to relate closely to David’s struggles with “enemies.” We, too, have battles with the devil and his angels – but what does God do for us? What did he do for David? And won’t He treat us the same way if we are faithful to Him?

Psalm 68:5,6 describes a loving God who is a Father to the fatherless, defender of widows, places lonely in families, sets prisoners free and GIVES THEM JOY! I want to be near this God!!!

V. 19 God carries us in His arms every day.)

Vs.16-18 and 24, 25 and 35) These vs. will come up later in relation to other passages. Notice that there is percussion (tambourines) in a processional leading into God’s sanctuary. Interesting.

Psalm 69:9, 19-21 David hears Jesus speak these words many years before the fact!

V. 28 The worst curse David can call up is “Erase their names from the Book of Life...” **(This is very interesting in that it appears that all people are written into the BOL until they decide they don’t want God!)**

Vs. 29-31 What pleases God? HOW CAN WE PLEASE HIM? Read on and meditate on these words.

Psalm 70:4 **As this group meets together seeking to know God better, take special note of texts that clearly state the kind of worship that draws God near to us.**

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 4: Next week's reading is Genesis 37-50, Proverbs 5-8 and Song of Solomon

GENESIS 37-50

Marvelous stories. Too many to discuss all of them in detail. In your reading through these chapters, look for God's action, His networking – WRITE THEM DOWN – with your thoughts and share only those texts next week.

PROVERBS 5-8

Prov. 5 speaks of the harmful effects of illicit love, sprinkled with encouragement to be faithful to your spouse.

Prov. 6&7 warn us of immoral women. Do you know any??

Prov. 8 Wisdom is "personified." See v. 22 where "she" says: "The Lord formed me from the beginning, before He created anything else, I was appointed in ages past, at the very first, before the earth began!" So WISDOM is very, very important. When we hear wise advice, we should have the common sense to follow it!

SONG OF SOLOMON

This is a unique book of Scripture which some people say should have never been included in the Bible. But God Who invented the act of love, places a deeply intimate story in the Bible to help us be balanced people. Intimacy is more than OK, it's necessary to a healthy life. Look at how God provided Rebekah to be a comfort to Isaac after his mother died. Look at how Moses found a wife in the desert. ...and keep on looking as we go on through the Scriptures at God's ways of taking care of all our needs.

The way it's written, it could almost be a script for a musical. It is a delightful departure from desert wanderings and battles, don't you think? Saying complimentary things to our spouses is something we could all emulate as we grow more like our Maker. And finally, God wishes an intimate relationship with his children, individually and collectively (as a church, or study group).

NOTE: Don't forget to bring your prayer request journal to be added to everyone's list. Let's faithfully pray over this TILE prayer list. God bless you as you read this coming week preparing to participate in the prayer life of this group and also the scripture assignment for Week 4!! Please review the Small Group Orientation in the introduction to this book.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER (15 min. for Requests, Praise and Closing Prayer)

WEEK 4 Genesis 37-50, Proverbs 5-8, Song of Solomon

WELCOME This group should be considered a “safe place.” Whatever is shared in prayer requests, or personal comments of any kind should NOT be repeated outside this room.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

Genesis 37-50 (Time frame for Genesis: 55 min.)

When Joseph was 17 he tended sheep with his half brothers whose mothers were Bilhah and Zilpah. Between his tattling on his brothers’ bad behavior and Jacob’s giving Joseph a special gift, the brothers hated his guts. To add to the dysfunctional vibes, Joseph has dreams!!! Turns out they were accurate prophetic dreams. The brothers wouldn’t listen, and Jacob gently scolded Joseph about picturing himself and Rachel bowing down to little boy Joseph, but in his heart, Jacob pondered what it all meant.

Jacob told Joseph to look for his brothers at Shechem, see how they’re getting along and then come back “and bring me word.”

Note that Joseph requested that his bones be buried with his relatives in Canaan. It was hundreds of years later, after Israel’s 400 years of slavery when his request was fulfilled.

(Open the floor for them to tell the story from here on. When they make a point that shows God’s love, or His intervention, point it out to them. Listen to them with that focus.)

PROVERBS 5-8 (10 minutes) Invite the group to share the texts which revealed God to them, for example: Prov. 6:16-19 reveals 7 things God hates. Does that help us to “know” Him?

SONG OF SOLOMON ... (10 minutes)

A unique book of Scripture which some people say should have never been included in the Bible. But some wonderful facets of God’s personality shine here. In the Garden of Eden God gave two sacraments: the Sabbath and Marriage. The purity, beauty and benefit of physical love as God designed it has been perverted and almost hidden. It appears that saying complimentary things in today’s vernacular within marriage is most appropriate and modeled for our benefit.

If this book were not in Scripture, how would we know the softer, more intimate parts of God's nature. And how marriage, ideally, should reflect the love of Christ for His people.

As you read the book, is it not arranged for a musical?? And finally, God wishes an intimate relationship with his children, individually and collectively.

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 5 Ex. 1-18; Psalms 11, 20, 78; Lev. 1-17

EXODUS 1-18

Exodus reads like a fascinating story as Moses eventually develops into a valiant leader of Israel! That God is a very particular and personal God is clearly revealed. God gave all the building plans to Moses down to the last nut and bolt.

God is a lover of the beautiful. The descriptions of tabernacle interior design are breathtaking.

PSALMS 11, 20, 78

In Psalms 11 and 20 the tabernacle is referenced and in the 78th Psalm of Asaph, one of the musicians David appointed, shows his composing skills giving a history of the Jewish nation, and admonishes parents to talk to their children about God's great miracles. Don't you hear that as still being a requirement for modern parents? Not only to tell the stories found in Scripture, but to share what God is doing in our lives TODAY!!! Praise His holy name!!

LEVITICUS 1-17

Try to picture the scenes as sacrifices are offered before the Lord – And Leviticus throws much light on the services that were to take place in the tabernacle. If you think this is a long assignment, please consider the repetition which occurs especially in Leviticus.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER (Remember to praise and thank Him for His answers to your prayers! He ALWAYS answers sincere prayers.)

WEEK 5 Exodus 1-18; Psalms 11, 20, 78; Leviticus 1-17

WELCOME Start talking about a social event outside of the weekly sessions. Set a date a month in the future so that the entire group has time to plan ahead.

OPENING PRAYER Start on time each week with prayer for the Holy Spirit's guidance.

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

Exodus 1-18 (Time frame: 30 min.)

God told Abraham the future (Gen.15:13). So Abraham knew that his descendants would be slaves in a foreign land for 400 years. In today's reading we see the fulfillment of that 400 year period and the leadership of Moses (See Acts 7:37, 38.) in the deliverance of God's people from slavery. These two men had special friendships with God. One man knew the prophecy of the exodus and the other was used of God to fulfill it.

Jacob arrived in Egypt with 70 "direct descendants (Ex. 1:5)." Pharaoh granted them the land of Goshen as their home, Joseph took care of them, and they prospered and multiplied!! (1:7) Joseph died and a new king viewed this foreign nation as a threat to Egypt so cultural attitudes changed, and they were made slaves and treated brutally.

Pharaoh told the Hebrew midwives to kill the newborn boys but let the little girls live. Moses was 3 mo. old when his mother placed him in a basket which was waterproofed with tar and pitch and floated him on the Nile. An Egyptian princess found him and adopted him but let him stay with his own mother until he was 12. By then he knows his purpose in life, saves a Hebrew by killing an Egyptian and then fled to Midian for fear of being brought to trial. He meets a man with 7 daughters, marries Zipporah and has a son who he named Gershom, for he has been a stranger in a foreign land. (Exodus 2:22)

While out tending sheep, Moses sees a burning bush which refuses to burn, investigates and comes in close contact with the great I AM. God wants Moses to lead Israel out of Egypt. What was Moses' response and why was God so patient with his recalcitrance?

Ex. 3:14 and 15 I AM reveals his forever relationship to the human race – our Source of life.

Ex. 3:19, 20 As the story unfolds, remember this text which explains how God knew that Pharaoh's heart would be hardened.

Ex. 9:28, 29, 33 Moses makes supplication to God at the request of Pharaoh raising (or spreading) his hands and receiving responses from God. Cf Lev. 9:21 and 10:15 – examples of lifting up sacrifices to the Lord. Cf Lev. 23:11 the high priest lifted up the first fruits before the Lord. Compare: Rev. 5:9, 10 (KJV); Mt. 27:51-53; Ps. 68:18, 25; Ex. 15:13, 17.

Ex. 12:40-42 The people of Israel had lived in Egypt for 430 years. STOP! In Gen. 15:13 God told Abraham his descendants would be slaves for 400 years. A discrepancy? Never! Consider that the 430 years might span from when Joseph died, while the 400 years would cover the number of years Israel was actually in slavery. Read v. 40 carefully because it cites the accuracy of the timing of the Exodus! God always knows when to tie all the loose ends together to fulfill prophecy!!!! This is a big revelation of the character of God. He keeps His promises—ON TIME!!!

Ex. 13:8, 9 Moses tells the people that they must explain to their children the reason for the Passover celebration. It will be like a “mark on your hands or your forehead!” (Rev. 14:9-12). So, when God ties up “the loose ends” of the final end of this earth as we know it, will this Passover language apply to our exit from earth and entry into Heaven?? I think so. We need that “mark” so that it is clear to the entire universe that we are approved as citizens of a better country!! Praise God!
Is it important for us to know and love the God of the Old Testament? What do you think??

Ex. 14:19, 20 The “Angel of God” was in the pillar of cloud which moved from the front to the back so that it came between the camp of Egypt and the camp of Israel. The side toward Israel was light, the side toward Egypt was dark so that they could not see Israel at all! See I Cor. 10:4

Ex. 14:21, 28 God responded to Moses’ stretched out hand. He didn’t really NEED Moses’ hand in order to work the miracle, but it is so like God to give people jobs to do so that they can be a part of the process and in this case God was building respect for Moses among the people!

Ex. 17:9 Esau’s descendants are documented. Jacob gave Esau as much of a blessing as possible. Several wives and many children. Gen. 36:7 states that the riches of the twins, Jacob and Esau, were more than could dwell together; and the land could not bear them because of all their cattle!

Ex. 18 Moses appreciates his father-in-law’s advice and organizes groups and leaders.

PSALMS 11, 20, 78 (15 min.)

Ps. 11:4, 5 The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord’s throne is in heaven; the Lord tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates!

Ps. 20:1 “....May the name of the God of Jacob set you securely on high!” I Cor. 10:4 – cf - Acts 4:12. The “name of the God of Jacob” refers to the same Person as Jesus Christ.

Ps. 78 Some awesome pictures of God Vs. 38, 39 He restrained His wrath against Israel when He remembered that they were but flesh, (He understands us!!!) a wind that passes and DOES NOT RETURN. V. 69 He built His sanctuary like the heights. Like the earth which He has founded forever!!

LEVITICUS 1-17 (30 min.) **NOTE:** For the notes below on the book of Leviticus whether the type is bold or light, makes no difference. Use in any way that fits your thinking or the time frame. But the thoughts on Leviticus are more extensive than usual to give the moderator clear understanding of some parts. I have endeavored to insert “proof” texts to clarify some issues.

Lev. 1 WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS

Lev. 1:4 Lay your hand on its head, confessing your sins, , so the Lord will accept it as your substitute, thus making atonement for you. See notes under Exodus 9:28,29,33 above.

***Whole bull burnt offering from herd for atonement Lev 1:5-9.** Slaughter in the Lord’s presence. Skin animal, cut in pieces, build wood fire on the altar. Put pieces of the animal, the head, fat (no washing), internal organs and legs (wash with water) on the altar. It is a whole burnt offering, very pleasing to the Lord.

***Whole male sheep or goat burnt offering from flock Lev 1:10-13.** Slaughter on the north side of the altar in the Lord’s presence, and sprinkle its blood on the side of the altar. Cut animal in pieces, and continue as above.

If offering a bird: turtledove or young pigeon: Priest will wring off its head, and burn it on the altar. Let blood drain out against the sides of the altar. Remove the crop and the feathers and throw them to the east side of the altar among the ashes. Then, grasp the bird by its wings, tear it apart but not completely. Then he will burn it on top of the wood fire on the altar. It is a whole burnt offering made by fire, very pleasing to the Lord.

***Must have no physical defects.**

Lev. 2 GRAIN OFFERINGS

Lev. 2:1-3 A grain offering had to be of **choice flour**. Pour **olive oil** on it and sprinkle it with **incense**. Bring to one of Aaron’s sons, and he will take part of the flour and all of the incense and burn this token portion on the altar fire. It is an offering made by fire, very pleasing to the Lord. The rest of the offering will be given to Aaron and his sons, a most holy part of the offerings given to the Lord by fire.

Lev. 2:4-7 If you present some kind of baked bread as a grain offering must be made of **choice flour** and **olive oil** without any yeast. Can be presented in cakes or wafers spread with olive oil. If the offering is cooked on a griddle, must be **choice flour and olive oil**,

and must contain no yeast. Break it into pieces and pour oil on it; it is a kind of grain offering. If the offering is made in a pan, it also must be made of **choice flour and olive oil**.

Lev. 2:8-10 No matter how the **grain offering** has been prepared, bring to the priests who will take a token portion and burn it on the altar as an offering made by fire and it will be pleasing to the Lord. The priests will eat the remainder and it will be considered a most holy part of the offerings given to the Lord by fire.

Lev. 2:11-12 A reminder: do not use **yeast** in any of the **grain offerings** you bring to the Lord because no **yeast** or **honey** may be burned as an offering to the Lord by fire. You may add yeast and honey to the offerings presented at harvesttime, but these must never be burned on the altar as an offering pleasing to the Lord.

Lev. 2:13 Season all your grain offerings with **salt** to remind you of God's covenant. NEVER FORGET TO ADD SALT TO YOUR GRAIN OFFERINGS. ☺

Lev. 2:14 If you present a grain offering from your early harvest, bring **kernels of new grain** that have been roasted on a fire. Put olive oil on it and sprinkle it with incense. The priests will take a token portion of the above and all of the incense and burn it as an offering given to the Lord by fire.

PROCEDURES FOR THE PEACE OFFERING

Lev. 3:1-16 (Summary) If the **Peace Offering** is from the **herd**, (either a bull or a cow), or from **the flock** (either sheep or goat, male or female), **with no** physical defects: lay your hand on the animal's head, and slaughter it at the entrance of the Tabernacle. Priests will sprinkle blood against sides of the altar. Part of the offering must be presented to the Lord as an offering made by fire: the fat around the internal organs, the two kidneys with the fat around them near the loins and the lobe of the liver, which is to be removed with the kidneys (with the **sheep** offering, the fat in the tail near the backbone is to be removed as well). The priest will burn them on the altar as food, an offering made by fire, very pleasing to the Lord. Remember! All the fat belongs to the Lord.

Lev. 3:17 Israel was warned many times: "never eat any fat or blood."

Leviticus 4 PROCEDURES FOR THE SIN OFFERING

Lev. 4:1, 2 The following instructions deal with those who sin unintentionally by doing anything forbidden by the Lord's commands.

Lev. 4:3-12 IF THE HIGH PRIEST SINS, bringing guilt to the entire community, he must bring a perfect bull to the Temple entrance, lay his hand on the bull's head, and slaughter it in the Lord's presence. The priest on duty will take some of the blood into the Tabernacle, dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before the Lord in

front of the inner curtain of the Most Holy Place. He will put some of the blood on the horns of the incense altar and the rest of the blood must be poured out at the base of the altar of burnt offerings at the entrance of the Tabernacle. The fat must be removed around the internal organs, the two kidneys and the lobe of the liver. Then he must burn them on the altar of burnt offerings, just as is done with the bull or cow sacrificed as a peace offering. But the rest of the bull—its hide, meat, head, legs, internal organs, and dung—must be carried away to a ceremonially clean place outside the camp, the place where the ashes are thrown. He will burn it all on a wood fire in the ash heap.

Lev. 4:13-21 IF THE ENTIRE ISRAELITE COMMUNITY does something forbidden by the Lord and the matter escapes the community's notice, all the people will be guilty. When the sin is discovered, the leaders of the community must bring a young bull to the entrance of the Tabernacle. The leaders must then lay their hands on the bull's head and etc. The remainder is the same as instructions given for a High Priest's sin (above).

Lev. 4:22-26 IF ONE OF ISRAEL'S LEADERS **does something forbidden by the Lord his God**, he will be guilty even if he sins unintentionally. When he becomes aware of his sin, he must bring as his offering a male goat with no defects. He is to lay his hand on the goat's head and slaughter it before the Lord in the place where burnt offerings are slaughtered. This will be his sin offering: the priest will dip his finger into the blood, put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offerings, and pour out the rest at the base of the altar; burn all the goat's fat on the altar, just as is done with the peace offering. In this way, atonement will be made for the sin, and he will be forgiven.

Lev. 4:27-31 IF ANY OF THE CITIZENS OF ISRAEL **do something forbidden by the Lord**, they will be guilty even if they sinned unintentionally. When they become aware of their sin, their offering should be a female goat, with no defects. The rest is the same as for the male goat offering for a leader's sin, except that the guilty person is to remove the fat.

Lev. 4:32-35 IF ANY OF THE PEOPLE BRING A SHEEP as their **sin offering**, it must be female with no defects, lay a hand on its head and slaughter. The rest is the same as for the female goat offering above.

Leviticus 5 SIN OFFERINGS

Sins necessitating offerings

Lev. 5:1-13 Reasons to bring a sin offering: if a viable **witness refuses to testify**, or if they **touch something ceremonially unclean**: a dead animal, or if they come in **contact with any source of human defilement** they will be considered guilty as soon as they become aware of it. If they **make a rash vow** of any kind.

Procedures for Sin Offerings

When any of the people **become aware of their guilt in any of these ways, they must confess their sin** and bring to the Lord as their penalty a female from the flock, either a

sheep or a goat. This will be a sin offering to remove their sin, and the priest will make atonement for them.

If people are too poor to bring a sheep they must bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons. One will be a penalty for their sin, the other will be a burnt offering. They will be offered according to procedures already prescribed.

If the turtledoves or pigeons are too expensive, then the poor sinner may bring two quarts of choice flour for their sin offering. Since it is a sin offering, they must not mix it with olive oil or put any incense on it. They must take the flour to the priest, who will scoop out a handful as a token portion. He will burn this flour on the altar just like any other offering given to the Lord by fire. This will be their sin offering. In this way, the priest will make atonement for those who are guilty, and they will be forgiven. The rest of the flour will belong to the priest, as before.

Procedures for Guilt Offering

Lev. 5:14-19 The Lord said to Moses: If any of the people sin by unintentionally **defiling the Lord's sacred property**, they must bring to the Lord a ram from the flock with no defects as their guilt offering. It must be of proper value to make restitution for any holy items they've defiled, plus an added penalty of 20 percent. When they give their payments to the priest, he will make atonement for them, and they will be forgiven.

If any Israelite **sin by doing something forbidden** by the Lord, even unintentionally, they'll be responsible. The offering is a ram without defects, and of the proper value. This is a guilt offering, for they have been guilty of an offense against the Lord.

Lev. 6:1-7 **Sins requiring a guilt offering:** lying, stealing, extortion, lie under oath
A person might not recognize their guilt initially, but when they do, they must restore the value plus 20 percent to the person they have harmed. **Then** they must bring a perfect ram, or the ram's worth in silver to the priest, who will offer it to the Lord. The priest will make atonement for them before the Lord, and they will be forgiven.

Lev. 6:8-18, 24-30 Further instructions for burnt offerings and grain offerings and Sin Offering

Lev. 6:19-23 Procedures for the Ordination Offering

On the day Aaron and his sons were anointed, they were to bring to the Lord a grain offering of two quarts of choice flour, half to be offered in the morning and half in the evening. It must be cooked on a griddle with olive oil, and it must be well mixed and broken into pieces. It will be pleasing to the Lord. As the sons of the priests replace their fathers, they will be inducted into office by offering this same sacrifice on the day they are anointed. It is the Lord's share and must be completely burned up. **NONE MAY BE EATEN.**

Lev. 7:1-21 Further instructions for the Guilt Offering and the Peace Offering

Lev. 7:22-27 **Forbidden Blood and Fat** Anyone who “eats” blood or fat will be cut off from the community! If a wild animal is found dead or killed, its fat can be used for other purposes, but never eaten.

Lev. 7:28-36 **A Portion for the Priests** (instructions-God speaking) When presenting a peace offering to the Lord, bring part of it as a special gift to the Lord. Present it with your own hands as an offering given to the Lord by fire. Bring the fat of the animal, together with the breast, and present it to the Lord **by lifting it up before Him**. Then the priest will burn the fat on the altar, but the breast will belong to Aaron and his sons. You are to give the right thigh as a gift to the priest who sprinkles the blood and offers the fat of the peace offering. For I have designated the breast and the right thigh for the priests as their share – set apart for Aaron and his descendants – from the time they were appointed to serve the Lord as priests. This is a permanent regulation.

Lev. 7:37-38 This completes instructions for whole burnt offering, grain offering, sin offering, guilt offering, ordination offering, and the peace offering which were given to Moses on Mount Sinai when he commanded the Israelites to bring their offerings to the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai. See Exodus 19 – 31

Leviticus 8 and 9 Priests ordained and begin their work – the detail reflects the instructions given them.

In Lev. 9:24 it says “Fire blazed forth from the Lord’s presence and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When the people saw all this, they shouted with joy and fell face down on the ground.”

Leviticus 10 **The Sin of Nadab and Abihu** Aaron’s sons put coals of fire in their incense burners and sprinkled incense over it. But it was a different fire than the Lord had commanded and so fire blazed forth from the Lord’s presence and burned them up and they died there before the Lord. Moses said to Aaron “This is what the Lord meant when He said “I will show Myself holy among those who are near Me. I will be glorified before all the people.” And Aaron was silent.

Lev. 10:6 Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron’s sons, took Nadab and Abihu’s place in the priesthood . God commanded that Aaron and his sons were not to show signs of mourning. But anyone else could mourn without penalty from God. It would take 7 days to complete the ordination ceremony and the priests were not to leave the entrance of the tabernacle during that time.

Lev. 10:8-11 God gave a permanent law: Aaron and his descendants must never **drink wine nor any other alcoholic drink before entering the Tabernacle or they would die**. They needed to distinguish between what is holy and what is ordinary, or common, and between what is ceremonially unclean or clean. These things must be taught to the Israelites with all the laws given through Moses.

Leviticus 11 **Clean and Unclean Animals Defined, and Ceremonial Rules**

Leviticus 11:46-47 These are the instructions regarding the land animals, the birds, and all the living things that move through the water or swarm over the earth, so you can distinguish between what is unclean and may not be eaten and what is clean and may be eaten.

Leviticus 12 Ceremonial Rules for Post-partum Women

Lev. 12:6-8 When the time of purification is completed (33 days for a son, 66 days for a daughter), the mother must bring a year-old lamb for a whole burnt offering and a young pigeon or turtledove for a purification offering. If she cannot afford a lamb, then she can bring two turtledoves or two young pigeons. One is for the whole burnt offering, and one for the purification offering.

Leviticus 13-14 Contagious Skin Diseases-Priests Examined, Diagnosed and Treated! Including infected homes!

Leviticus 15 Bodily Discharges – Instructions for the Nation

Lev. 15:31-33 (Purpose of this chapter) God speaking! “In this way, you will keep the people of Israel separate from things that will defile them, so they will not die as a result of defiling my Tabernacle that is right there among them. These are the instructions for dealing with a man who has been defiled by a genital discharge or an emission of semen; for dealing with a woman during her monthly menstrual period; for dealing with anyone, man or woman, who has had a bodily discharge of any kind; and for dealing with a man who has had intercourse with a woman during her period.”

Leviticus 16 THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

Each year on the Day of Atonement the High Priest is to follow God’s instructions: a young bull is to be brought as a sin offering and a ram for a whole burnt offering. Then he must wash his entire body, put on his linen tunic and undergarments worn next to his body. He must tie the linen sash around his waist, put the linen turban on his head. These are the sacred garments. Then the people must also bring him two male goats for a sin offering.

Aaron first presents the bull and the ram to make atonement for himself and his family. Then, after casting lots, he will offer the goat chosen to be sacrificed to the Lord as a sin offering. The blood from the sacrificed goat will be used in the cleansing of the sanctuary. Then Aaron will lay his hands upon the head of the second goat (vs. 21), and confess over him all the iniquities, all the transgressions, and put them upon the head of the goat and release him in the wilderness, never to return.

The first goat sacrificed to the Lord represents Christ who would die on Calvary. The *confessed* sins of God’s people are covered with the blood of Christ both pre and post Calvary. It is the blood of this goat that is used to sprinkle over the altars and sacred objects in the Holy and Most Holy apartment.

Aaron then puts his hands on the head of the second goat (Lev. 16:8, 21) which represents Satan, and confesses over him all the sins of Israel, transferring them to the head of the goat. This service symbolizes the end of the great controversy when the sins of all of God's people from Adam and Eve, to the last sins confessed before probation closes at the end of time, will be placed on Satan! He will be chained to this earth for 1000 years (Lev. 16:22; Rev. 20:1-3) to experience the results of his rebellion. Wandering in a dismal heap of devastation Satan will feel the weight of all the sins that he has caused to be committed.

Symbolically, annually, the Day of Atonement service represented the final cleansing of the heavenly Sanctuary. For at the end of the millennium the universe will be cleansed and made new.

Every time we hold a communion service (both a mini-baptism and Day of Atonement), we are admonished (I Cor. 11:26-29; I John 1:8, 9) to search our hearts and confess all known sins before we gather together. Then we celebrate the blood of Christ which washes away all our sin! *Before the cross*, confessed sins were covered symbolically by the blood of animals. *Now looking back to the cross*, our sins are processed in *the heavenly* Sanctuary (Hebrews 9:11-28), covered by the blood of the Lamb of God. As Aaron (and subsequent High Priests) placed the sins confessed by God's people onto the head of the scapegoat, so Christ, now our High Priest for eternity, will cleanse the heavenly sanctuary by removing ALL confessed sins onto the perpetrator of all sin, and leave him on earth for 1000 years, while the righteous experience the joys of heaven. Hallelujah! Finally, the type (earthly) will meet antitype (heavenly) and the sin controversy will be ended and understood throughout the universe.

Leviticus 17

Laws Concerning the Location of Sacrifices vs. 1-9 These verses throw light on the reason why Israel got upset over the eastern tribes across the Jordan building their "own" altar. (Joshua 22:11-29)

Use of blood vs 10-16 Blood represented life (vs. 11) and God forbid that blood should be eaten in any manner of flesh.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 6

Exodus 19-40, Lev. 18-27, Malachi 3

If you don't see new dimensions of God's character in the chapters from Exodus, it will be surprising. I can promise you that there are some incidents that are awe inspiring! Leviticus continues to be the framework for the daily lives of the Israelite nation. And Mal. 3, especially the second half sheds much light on our relationship to God.

REQUESTS FOR PRAYER AND PRAISE SHARE ANY ANSWERS TO PRAYER DURING THE PAST WEEK AND PRAISE GOD FOR THEM!!!

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 6 Exodus 19-40, Lev. 18-27, Malachi 3

WELCOME Finalize your plan for a social occasion.

OPENING PRAYER Dear Jesus, Today's reading, of all 52 weeks, is most fragrant with revelations of God's love and truths. O Lord, send the Holy Spirit to guide our minds as we seek to know you better. Thank you, Father, for keeping your promises. We have asked and You have promised to send help for this purpose. We love You, Lord, Amen

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

Recent chapters in Exodus have shown us that God is "jealous" of how we spend His Holy Sabbath. In Genesis we learned that there are terrible consequences when one human being kills another. The 10 commandment laws were in effect when Satan's pride caused him to place himself before God in Heaven, revealing the first commandment. There are many today who say the Old Testament laws were just for the Jews. It's important that we recognize the eternal nature of God's laws! Remember Jesus said that heaven and earth would pass away before He would change one dot of punctuation in the law! (Matt. 5:17-19) A way of saying "That just ain't gonna happen!!"

Psalms 119 says that God's very character is revealed in the commandments! Why do you think God chose to reveal His 10 Commandment Law in such a powerful way? And what did you think of the way God required Israel to prepare to meet Him at Sinai?

(The following comments are for your reference as the discussion ensues. –Your tool. Not to steer the discussion, but ready to offer Bible texts that might throw light on discussion. I pray as I write this "lesson plan" that I may be given insight as to what texts might be helpful to you.)

Did you notice the dialog between Moses and God? Look at Ex. 19:23. Moses almost appears to be balking! In vs. 24 God tells Moses to give the instructions *again* and tell the people of punishment for disobedience.

Ex. 20:18-21 The people do not want to hear God's voice again and request that Moses get the message and relay it to them. Moses says to them "Do not be afraid for God has come in this way to show you His awesome power. From now on, let your fear of Him keep you from sinning!" It might be a good exercise to meditate on the description of the fire and smoke on Sinai, and God's awesome voice, to impress us with God's greatness which surpasses anything Hollywood can muster.

Movies like The 10 Commandments, or The Passion depicting Biblical themes have no attraction for me because there is NO WAY to approximate God's majesty and power. No – I would rather read scripture and ask the Holy Spirit to help me "see"

the events as they unfold and ask that it will be a life changing experience for me, changing me more and more into a likeness of the lovely Jesus.

Ex. 20:24b “Build altars in the places where I remind you Who I am! And I will come and bless you there.” This is an awesome instruction from God. Remember how Abraham and Jacob built altars? Is there a place you could build an altar??? It’s important that we recognize Divinity working in us and for us throughout our lives. God recognizes and honors human efforts to glorify His name!

Ex. 21-23 contain instructions on how to be good citizens in the promised land. Some outstanding texts are:

Ex. 22:26, 27 reveals a tender, merciful God. Read it!!!

Ex. 22:29 We should have no reluctance when paying our tithe! God loves a cheerful giver!

Ex. 22:29b They were to “redeem” their firstborn sons. –This is the legal change for the spiritual leadership of Israel. Up until Egypt, the oldest born son was suppose to be the patriarchal, spiritual leader of a clan or family. But now the nation was too big for that format, so God changed the organizational flow chart! The top authority would be God, under Him would be Moses, then Aaron and all the Levites as priests to serve the entire nation. We will cover this issue at a later time. But it is an important example of God’s flexibility and knowledge of when change should be made!

Ex. 23:29, 30 God has reasons for everything He does: He would not destroy all the Canaanite nations in one year, because the land would become a wilderness, and the wild animals would become too many to control. “I will drive them out a little at a time until your population has increased enough to fill the land!!”

Ex. 23:19 God wanted a choice sample from the first day of harvest. *** It must be offered to the Lord – see Lev. 23:9-13; Matt. 27:50-53; John 20:11-19; Ps. 68:18, 25, Eph. 4:8; Rev. 5:7-10 (NKJV, or KJV) Those chosen by God to be resurrected with Christ, were the fulfillment of the Festival of the First Fruits in the Old Testament. The 24 (probably a symbolic number) elders and the 4 “living beasts” who appear several times in Revelation, sing a song that the angels do not sing, and they must have been presented to God the Father on the day of Jesus’ resurrection. That was the very day on the Jewish calendar on which the First Fruits were to be offered to God. Jesus fulfilled ALL Old Testament festivals! He returned, however, in time to walk to Emmaus and meet with the disciples!

*** This truth as revealed in the sequence of texts above was shown to me over a period of several years. As the Holy Spirit led my mind, the picture became clear. See me if you need a quote from Ellen White’s writings to accept the above conclusion. Having this understanding opens up new dimensions in my communications with my loving Savior.

AWESOME GOD!

Ex. 24:9-18 tells of God's banquet for 70 leaders and Moses, Aaron and Joshua part way up Mt. Sinai! After the banquet the Lord told Moses to come up on the mountain. Moses told the other leaders to remain and wait for Moses and Joshua until they come back. "If there are any problems, consult with Aaron and Hur who are here with you." It appears that Moses and Joshua were another level up the mountain for 7 days and then continued on to the top of the mountain for another 40 days and nights! - CHECK IT OUT!!!!

Ex. 25:8, 9 (compare Heb. 8:1, 2, 5) The "real" sanctuary was in heaven! During that time on the mountain God talked about offerings for the tabernacle, burnt offerings, clothing for the priests, construction of the courtyard of the tabernacle, dedication of the priests, recipes for the incense and anointing oil, assignment of individual craftsmen, and instructions regarding Sabbath keeping!

Ex. 28 is awesome information from God regarding the breastplate, it's precious stones and the communication set up between God and man. (NOTE: Just want you to be sure to know that if I don't comment on every passage, whatever I skip is germane to the story and to the search to KNOW God. Be SURE you read every word.) Deut. 8:3b NLT says "real life comes by feeding on EVERY word of the Lord." Sometimes if the scenes are awesome and the commentary gets extensive, I choose to eliminate some things from this book if they are an "aside" from a specific story line. I hope you know how very important each word of Scripture is to following the redemption story. See John 21:25 "And I suppose that if all the other things Jesus did were written down, THE WHOLE WORLD COULD NOT CONTAIN THE BOOKS."

Ex. 32 Now comes the sad ending to Moses' awesome 40 nights and days with God – the story of the golden calf. Moses perceives that Aaron has let the people get completely out of control to the amusement of their enemies (v. 25). So he stood at the entrance to the camp and shouted: "All of you who are on the Lord's side, come over here and join me." Then he told the Levites to strap on their swords and go back and forth from one end of the camp to the other, killing even your sons, brothers, friends and neighbors.

There was no room for neutrality in this situation! By not objecting to the worship of the golden calf, a person automatically joined them in their sin! Even Aaron appeared to approve it because he didn't try to stop them. Certainly he got more than his share of mercy that day. But Moses intervened for these people (vs. 31-32), and God made an interesting statement – He would forgive them, but would call them to account for and punish them for their sins. Again, the sad truth that there are always consequences for choices on the side of the devil.

Ex. 33:1-6 The Lord declares Israel to be such an unruly people that He will not travel with them – He will send an angel to drive out the nations however. When the people heard these words they went into mourning and refused to wear their

jewelry and ornaments. For the Lord had told Moses to tell them “...REMOVE YOUR JEWELRY AND ORNAMENTS UNTIL I DECIDE WHAT TO DO WITH YOU. *So from the time they left Mt. Sinai, the Israelites wore no more jewelry!”**

*****Is God deciding what the fate of His people should be today? Peter said the judgment should begin at the house of God! I would like to make an in-depth study of this passage to see if it has relevance in regard to jewelry in our church today!**

Ex. 33:7-11 Awesome account of Moses’ communication with the Lord – esp. vs. 11 –Moses spoke with God “face to face, as a man speaks to his friend!” Beautiful! Moses would return to the camp, but Joshua, son of Nun, stayed behind in the Tent of Meeting. Interesting. A future leader “in training!”

Ex. 33:12-23 and chapter 34 are absolute must-reads!! Please feast on them.

Ex. 34:21 is an important text regarding Sabbath keeping: it states that we have six days to work, but on the Sabbath day we “must rest even during seasons of plowing and harvest.” How easy it must be for farmers to reason that if storms are threatening on Sabbath, they should get out in the field and save the crop!

Ex. 35-40 picture the construction of beautiful furniture and hangings for the dwelling place of God in the desert! When all the pieces were finished they were placed within the tent. Moses put the stone tablets inscribed with the terms of the covenant inside the ark, placed the staves on the ark and put the mercy seat above upon the ark. Then he placed the ark in the tabernacle, with the vail obscuring the ark of the testimony as the Lord had commanded. All the items were full of significance regarding the coming Messiah: the “showbread” (The Bread of Life), the “candlesticks” (The Light of the World), the “mercy seat” (God’s dwelling with men), the Alter of Incense (the prayers of the saints) etc. were in place and the Lord’s glorious presence filled the Tabernacle. Israel moved when the Tabernacle moved. They wanted God to travel with them.

Ex. 35 begins with instructions for the Sabbath: Now Moses called a meeting of all the people and told them, “You must obey these instructions from the Lord. Each week, work six days only. The seventh day is a day of total rest, a holy day THAT BELONGS TO THE LORD. Anyone who works on that day will die. Do not even light fires in your homes on that day.”

LEVITICUS 18-27

This is important reading. Encourage your group to read the entire assignment, so that they glean every evidence of what God is like. It is very clear what things are pleasing to God, and what is worthy of death.

For example, every imaginable perversion of sexuality is condemned by God. And disrespect for the Sabbath is also roundly condemned. One can see how Satan has

tried to erase the spiritual benefits God originally infused into both of these rites: marriage and the Sabbath.

The priests were to be knowledgeable about health issues and what constitutes worth or unworthy offerings!

Lev. 23 has valuable information regarding the festivals – keep in mind that Jesus fulfilled all of them in the life he lived here on earth!

Lev. 24, 25, & 27 have legal information about property rights, the Year of Jubilee redemptions, redemption of the poor and enslaved, and redeeming gifts offered to the Lord.

Lev. 26:2 says: You must keep my Sabbath days of rest and show reverence for My sanctuary. I am the Lord (Lev. 19:3, 30 say the same thing! – must be important to God!!!). V. 44 says that despite Israel's rejection of God's regulations and laws, He will not reject or despise them while they are in exile in the land of their enemies. I will not cancel my covenant with them by wiping them out. I, the Lord, am their God. I will remember my ancient covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of Egypt while all the nations watched. I, the Lord am their God." I wonder if Moses "lobbied" with God to include a promise not to cancel His covenant with Israel by wiping them out. Remember that Moses intervened when God threatened to destroy them and start over with Moses!

MALACHI 3

Vs. 1-3 speak of the coming of the Messiah, and a judgment.

Vs. 6-12 state "I am the Lord, and I do not change!" (See Heb. 13:8) Then He states that Israel has been cheating God of tithes and offerings due to Him. Then comes the sweeping promise of opening the windows of heaven to pour out blessings on those who faithfully bring all the tithes into the storehouse.

*****Vs. 16-18 picture God listening to what those who love Him are saying about Him. In His presence, a scroll of remembrance is written to record the names of those who fear Him and love to think about Him. They will be My people, says the Lord Almighty. On the day when He "acts" we will see how differently God treats those who love Him and those who do not. (This passage is written for those who love to talk about Him - doesn't that describe our TILE small groups? God states that He can hear us and He's writing down what we are saying in the Book of Remembrance! Praise God!)**

**PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK #7: Numbers 1-10:10;
Hebrews 3; Proverbs 1 and 2**

Numbers 1-10:10 reveals awesome organizational skills by Moses. Picture yourself preparing a campsite for two million people! What kind of “facilities” would be absolutely necessary and how would you see to it that the people used them as planned?

HEBREWS 3 speaks of Israel in the wilderness. Awesome stuff.

PROVERBS 1 AND 2 both extol wisdom as a worthy pursuit. See it. Search for it. Prov. 2:6 is a pearl “For the Lord grants wisdom! From His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” We need to ask the Holy Spirit regularly to give us wisdom “from above.”

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 7 Numbers 1-10:10; Hebrews 3; Proverbs 1, 2

WELCOME - brief reality check – on a scale of 1-10, how do you feel about your journey toward knowing God better this week? There is no “right” or “wrong” answer. This will give you a barometer of how well their minds are staying focused on their Best Friend! Remember to do this valuable exercise at least once a month – -- if you wish. ☺

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

The great controversy is full of legalities, it seems to me. For example, the Jews had to have legal proof of their bloodline (circumcision). Or if a widow found an eligible husband within her in-laws, it would have to be determined if there was a closer relative who should be the one to marry her if he so chose – but if he cannot do so, the first man would remove his sandal signifying that legal arrangements had been made.

In this week’s reading we see God requesting different kinds of censuses: all males in Israel registered by clans; all men in Israel twenty or older and able to go to war were registered one by one; and counting all males in the Levite tribe one month and older. Then counting the first-born males, one month old and older, in the other eleven tribes, registering them by name!!! The outcome showed a minimal difference: there were only 273 more *first-born* males (22,273) in the general population than there were males in the tribe of Levi (22,000)!

In Num. 3:11 God says to Moses: “I have chosen the Levites from among the Israelites as *substitutes for all the firstborn sons* of the people of Israel. Therefore, the nation had to “redeem” 273 first-born males by paying a “price” of five pieces of silver per person. It came to about thirty-four pounds in weight and Moses gave the money to Aaron and his sons as the Lord commanded (vs. 49-51).

You see, the first born sons had been the spiritual leaders (patriarchs) for thousands of years. During the period of slavery, because of demands made on them, the spiritual leadership so plain to see prior to the years in Egypt, became blurred. In the book of Numbers we see God taking steps to organize this nation so recently emerged from slavery. By “redeeming” 273 males, there was some funding to purchase items needed for the tabernacle services. The 22,000 Levites all had specific functions in and around the temple. And all the first born males, while required to lead out their own families with timely sacrifices taken to the tabernacle, were no longer expected to be spiritual leaders to large groups of people (e.g. you may recall that *within* Abraham’s “house” were 300 men capable of fighting wars).

As God initiated this change in the way Israel was to worship God, it was important that every aspect of the great controversy was considered, including Satan's constant accusations against God. So God provided "the numbers" which were available to anyone in the universe if there should be any question of the fairness of God's ways.

(Discussion may flow out of the above remarks and by all means the Holy Spirit will be in control because we have asked Him to guide our minds. I would just suggest that you be well acquainted with the above material so that if questions arise that appear to be loosely wandering, suggest that it might save time to first hear the above commentary in its entirety. THEN questions might be stated more coherently. – If you come to a place where you are not sure of the answer, suggest that the group write the question down where it will be seen occasionally. Answers surface in the most amazing places sometimes! We all would like instant answers, but rest assured, all questions are not answerable in this world. The answer is, keep reading, and praying! If God means for us to find the answer and we seek Him, He will show it to us! Deut. 29:29)

Num. 4:49 This is so like the God I have come to know and respect so much. "Each man was assigned his task and told what to carry, just as the Lord had commanded through Moses!" There is a blog on my website: "*The 24 Elders – Who are They?*" **Go to <http://langsport.wordpress.com/page/2/> (Hit "ctrl" button along with the web address click. Then click on September, 2007 on the right side of the page.)**

Paragraphs 5 and 7 especially refer to God the great Job Giver! But I'm hoping you will read the entire blog. See how the heavenly sanctuary is just as organized as the sanctuary on earth was! God is the same yesterday, today and forever!

Num. 5 shows God's plan is to keep the marriage unit TOGETHER.

Num. 6 begins with details regarding the Nazerite vow – which appears to be an opportunity for those who wish to deny themselves some things in order to clear their minds, overcome habits, and/or be closer to God. As long as they are set apart to the Lord (v. 8) certain foods and practices were to be observed. It sounds like a person could set the time to begin and end the vow as they saw fit. Whatever vow may be made to the Lord beyond what is required for the Nazerite vow normally, must be kept. Remember Eccl 5:4-6.

***Num 6:22-27 is one of the most beautiful treasures in scripture tucked away at the end of a chapter in the middle of Numbers. Feast on it! What a God we have!

Num. 7 lists Offerings of Dedication made by all the tribes.

Num. 8 describes the dedication of the Levites. V.24 says the Levites must begin serving in the Tabernacle at the age of twenty-five, and retire at age fifty. After that age they may serve in lesser duties, but they may not officiate in the service. Can you imagine that the lifting of various animals and offering sacrifices might have been work that was too demanding of older bodied men?

Num. 9 is an awesome occasion. Read watching for symbolisms. Watch for the God of love who has such good plans for the people – and for you! V.23 sounds like this was a period of obedience in the house of Israel! Praise the Lord!

Num. 10:1-10 How does one move two million people? With the sound of the trumpet! List the activities that could be determined only by HOW the trumpet was blown!

HEBREWS 3

The book of Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians. In chapters 1 and 2, Paul established the superiority of Christ to angels or Moses or even Abraham. In chapter 3, he continues to establish Jesus' superiority to Moses. Moses was faithful in the house of the Lord, but Jesus was in charge of the entire household. V.6 says that we are God's household if we keep up our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ. No matter what the situation is, do not ever lose your belief in Christ and His love for us!

PROVERBS 1, 2

These chapters encourage us to seek wisdom over any temptation. V.2 says "...Incline thine ear unto wisdom and apply thine heart to understanding! Prov. 2:4 says we should search for wisdom even as a miner searches for silver or hidden treasure. V.5: "Then you will discern the fear of the Lord *and discover the knowledge of God.*" HALLELUJAH! We've found one of the keys to knowing God!!!

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR LESSON 8

Numbers 10:11-25; Hebrews 4

God says in Numbers 11:23, 24: "Is there any limit to my power? Now you will see whether or not my Word comes true!" These stories in Numbers identify God as One whose wisdom is endless and whose abilities were without failure! Hebrews 4 recounts the reasons why there was a lost generation left in the desert south of Canaan! And tells us the reason God didn't just simultaneously wipe out all the resident nations so the Israelites could inhabit their land.

Hebrews 4 continues to teach us how God led Israel even for thousand years after Numbers was written!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 8 Numbers 10:11–25; Hebrews 4

WELCOME – As members arrive, catch up on personal needs currently on the prayer list: medical needs, family developments, etc. Ask if they felt they learned to know God better this week!

OPENING PRAYER and special message. A few times in this book you will be invited to “go” to the following link: <http://www.thisislifeeternal.org> both click and hold down “ctrl,” which will take you to the home page. Click on “Journal (Blog)” look to the right of the page and click on the date mentioned. If you give this URL to the group, then they will be able to more efficiently search to KNOW God. All blogs at this URL are written by the author of this book.

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

Two years and two months, on the 20th day of the month after reaching Sinai, the “Cloud” in which Divinity resided (Ex. 13:21), lifted and Israel moved on to the wilderness of Paran. Num.10:11-13 says this was the first move according to the commandment of the Lord through Moses:

- i. The standards of Judah, Issachar and Zebulun left the camp in that order with the Ark leading ½ mi. ahead!
- ii. The Tabernacle was taken down and Levi’s sons Gershon and Merari set forward, bearing the tabernacle.
- iii. The standards of Reuben followed with Simeon and Gad.
- iv. The Kohathites set forward bearing the furnishings of the interior of the sanctuary which would already be set up at their arrival at their destination.
- v. The standard of Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin followed.
- vi. The standard of Dan took up the rear of the processional, followed by Asher, and Naphtali.

To get some sense of what the processional looked like, remember that Moses was dealing with an estimated 2,000,000 people. Which would mean that under each of #’s i, iii, v, and vi about 500,000 people moved!! Scholars say that it took a week for all 2,000,000 to get “on the road!”

Each family had their cattle and their tents, their wives and their children to move. I can imagine that the processional sprawled out over enough territory that it was frightening to the heathen kings of Canaan! Num. 10:28 (NASB) suggests that Israel’s armies marched along with the standards of their own tribes.

In front of the #i group with the Cloud hovering, was the Ark of the Covenant, (Num.10:33, NASB) showing Israel the way and when to stop and when to go on the

three-day journey to their destination. In spite of these awesome signs from God that they were being guided and protected, the people complained about the food. Isn't that just so typical of human beings? Moses intervened when God punished them.

We find Moses repeatedly interceding for Israel with God to minimize or avert punishments from God. Hebrews 3:5 (NLT) says "Moses was certainly faithful in God's house, but only as a servant. His work was an illustration of the truths God would reveal later!" It is helpful to add these New Testament passages to our thinking when studying the original events in the Old Testament. In Deut. 18:15 Moses himself told the people that God was going "to raise up a Prophet like me from among your own people!" Stephen spoke eloquently regarding the work of Moses in Acts 7:37-39 during his defense to the Jewish high council.

So as you read the Old Testament stories of this mighty worker for God (Moses), keep in mind that almost ALL that he did was to provide real-life illustrations (Heb. 3:5) of what God is like: he preferred to have his own life taken rather than to eradicate the nation of Israel; he was a mediator between sinners and God; he loved the complaining, nagging, drama king and queen Israelites even though they tried his patience to the limit. THAT'S unconditional love! Can you apply the illustrations taken from the life of Moses to your basic knowledge of God? I hope so.

HEBREWS 4

The end of chapter 3 of Hebrews states that it was "unbelief" that kept Israel from entering "His rest." In the last century Christian Bible teachers and many pastors have believed that "His rest" meant the land of Canaan. I would refer you to Heb. 4:8, 9 (NASB) where it states: "For if Joshua had given them rest, He (God) would not have spoken of another day after that. So there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God."

The New Living Translation (NLT) of the same verses reads: "This new place of rest was not the land of Canaan, where Joshua led them. If it had been, God would not have spoken later about another day of rest."

This chapter is a beautiful reference to use for meditation regarding Sabbath-keeping – the kind of "keeping" God did! True rest. And it's been prepared for us "from foundation of the world!" See verses 3 and 4. The chapter ends (vs. 12-16) with a declaration of the power of God's Word and the awesome privilege that is ours to have a High Priest in heaven Who listens to our confessions. So let us draw near to Him and find mercy and grace in our time of need.

One final thought: if "His rest"-- or true "Sabbath rest" has been prepared since the foundation of the world, then, most definitely, it was not just given for the Jews!!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 9

Numbers 26-30; Hebrews 5:1-4; Proverbs 4, 9; Psalms 95

NUMBERS 26-30

NUMBERS 26

The Lord orders another census to find out how many of each tribe are of military age. Israel is camped on the plains of Moab, beside the Jordan River just across from Jericho. Must have been a scary time for those heathen nations who watched them.

Vs. 64, 65 “Not one person that Moses and Aaron counted in this census had been among those counted in the previous census taken in the wilderness of Sinai. For the Lord had said of them: ‘They will all die in the wilderness.’ The only exceptions were Caleb, son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.”

NUMBERS 27

Some women gain recognition that was only fair. Watch for these ladies to surface quite a few times through our Old Testament journey!

As you read of festivals and various types of sacrifices, keep in mind that Jesus fulfilled them all!

HEBREWS 5:1-4 Definition of an earthly high priest

PROVERBS 4, 9 Many gems are in these chapters, especially 9:10 “Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in understanding.” (NLT)

PSALM 95

David truly was a prophet of God. He would have had to be inspired to write this Psalm revealing so accurately the history of the Jewish nation! Sometimes the Psalms of David revealed future events such as the Roman soldiers behavior at Christ’s crucifixion, and sometimes depicted ancient times with details that are not revealed in the Books of Moses!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 9 Numbers 26 – 30; Hebrews 5:1-4; Proverbs 4, 9; Psalm 95

WELCOME

While waiting for all to arrive, find out if your group is sensing God's presence as they study. On a scale of 1-10, 10 being the most "radiant" response to knowledge of God and His ways, that warms your heart. What was your illumination score this week? Think of 1 being little sensation, increasing by degrees to 10.

OPENING PRAYER

Choose a volunteer to ask for the Holy Spirit's presence.

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

NUMBERS 26-30

Camped on the plains of Moab in full view of mesas or peaks, the scene must have struck terror to the Canaanite kings. That was why Balak, king of Moab, sought help from Balaam, but as you recall God was in control. Taking a census was a major undertaking as you must imagine. They must have used processed papyrus weeds, or rolled up animal skins, and dye from berries to maintain records. The original census revealed that there were 603,550 men 20 years and older capable of going to war.

Forty years later, in the second census there were 601,730 men, very close to the first census! Num. 26:64 says that not one person counted in this census had been among those counted in the first census taken at Sinai. "For the Lord had said of them, 'They will all die in the wilderness.' The only exceptions were Caleb son of Jephuneh and Joshua, son of Nun" (Vs. 65).

The results of the census gave Moses the information he needed to divide up the land of Canaan into areas that fit the size of each tribe of Israel.

There was a man by the name of Zelophehad who was blessed with five daughters! I think he must have agonized as each baby was born praying, wishing for a son, but having to accept and love girls. It was always the first born SON who received the "birthright" or "inheritance." So these young ladies, who were descendants of Joseph, presented themselves before Moses and requested to receive the inheritance promised to their father. "So why should the name of our father disappear just because he had no sons? Give us property along with the rest of our relatives."

Moses presented their unusual request before the Lord and God declared that the women were right; furthermore, He set up a precedent to be followed in all cases such as this one (Num. 27:5-11). God ends the precedent by saying: "The Israelites must observe this as a general legal requirement, just as the Lord commanded Moses." Later we will come to a situation that required some refining of the above. Such as, when the daughters

of Zelophehad chose husbands, they would have to choose from the relatives of their father, so that there would be no diminishing of the acreage assigned to the tribe of Manasseh.

After a near perfect record of following God's leading, Moses obediently dies as Aaron did. But first he publicly transfers authority to **Joshua** who has been in training for a very long time, and receives instruction from God regarding offerings: the daily, the Sabbath, the monthly, and then the offerings for all the festivals.

Num. 30 shows Moses summoning the leaders of the tribes of Israel to give them God's instructions regarding promises! Remember Eccl. 5:4-6? It is important that we treat promises, whether directly to God or to other human beings, in a way that is pleasing to God. Write it down – does this not tell you what is important to God?? Does that help us to know Him better – that He is the Champion of Promise Keeping!! I want to know ALL His promises.

HEBREWS 5:1-4

These few verses show us that God appoints us to our work for Him. The high priests in Old Testament times had to be chosen by God. It wasn't that they assessed their own abilities and decided to seek the highest position in the spiritual leadership of Israel. NO! God made that decision. Paul continues to make the point that Jesus did not have to offer a separate sacrifice for forgiveness of His own sins because He didn't have ANY!

PROVERBS 4, 9

Proverbs 9:10 "Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Knowledge of the Holy One results in understanding." Look for the Proverbs that support the reason we are studying the Word of God – I should speak for myself I guess, but if Jesus said that knowing God = eternal life, then the desire to really know Him should be the fuel that energizes my entire life! Discuss the verses in Proverbs that guide us toward our goal!

PSALM 95

What an honor to know God! What parts of this Psalm relate to ancient Israel AND which to latter day Israel??

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 10

Numbers 31-36; Acts 6:8-15, 7; Proverbs 10-15

NUMBERS 31-36

Numbers 31 reveals more about Balaam (vs. 15-18) and the sad situation he caused. The spoils of battle were amazing! You know, they may have been in primitive living conditions, but they must have been very rich people. You may want to consider

that some people in their “smarts” have decided that Adam and Eve weren’t real people, and because Jesus speaks of them with reality, then He must not have been very bright! Can you imagine? This type of mentality mocks the size of the spoils of battle. But I would like to go on record saying that I believe what is written in the Book and I stand on it.

Note the events that caused some consternation throughout Israel and how it was resolved.

Talk about record keeping. Before Moses died (Num. 33), God told him to list the places they had camped! Then God told Moses to form a committee to divide up the land: the high priest, Joshua and one man from each tribe and GOD APPOINTED the leader from each tribe. Yes, my God appoints the right people to jobs!

Towns were assigned to the Levites and Cities of Refuge were determined, as well.

We see the daughters of Zelophehad once again in Num. 36. Awesome stuff!

ACTS

Acts 6:8-15, 7 Soak up every word. You will be enriched.

PROVERBS

Proverbs 10-15 Continue to seek every word that **reveals God** to you.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 10 Numbers 31-36; Acts 6:8-15, 7; Proverbs 10-15

WELCOME

(As the group enters: Ask about their families – Find out if they’ve recovered from that bump they had last week on their bicycle, e.g.)

PRAYER

Include in the prayer other TILE groups studying in this country and around the world! Pray that their hearts- and our hearts will be open to the **teaching** of the **Holy Spirit**.

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

NUMBERS 31 - 36

In today’s reading we are going to see some characters who have accomplished a lot for us. First, there are the 5 daughters of Zelophahad who dared to request an inheritance like the men received. These young women established a precedent set by God Himself that assured women’s rights! We will see them again. Truly they were awesome people.

Also, we see Baalam who met his just punishment for telling the Moabite king how to defeat the Israelites! (Num. 31:7) He didn’t curse Israel verbally, but he betrayed God’s people to a heathen king. (See Rev. 2:14)

At God’s direction, Moses led 12,000 men into battle against the Midianites, whose women had invited Hebrew men to attend their idol worship ceremonies. There was a plague. What did you think about the way the spoils of war were divided?

God told Moses to keep a record of Israel’s travels (Num. 33:2), and here is their itinerary! Amazing, isn’t it? And now (Num. 34) God declares detailed boundaries of portions of the land. By sacred lots, tribes would settle in the territory that fit the size of their clan the best. In v. 29 it says “These are the men the Lord *has appointed* to oversee the dividing of the land of Canaan among the Israelites.” Notice that GOD gives everybody jobs to do! Being a follower of Christ is not sedentary!!!!

Towns were chosen for the Levites with pasture acreage etc. And towns of refuge – God even made provision for legal rectitude when His people get into trouble?

Num. 36 Zelophahad’s daughters find husbands within their ancestral tribe. Everything is working out well!!! And a legal precedent was set to cover women who grew up without any brothers to receive the birthright. Women’s rights. God was for it!

ACTS 6:8 through chapter 7.

Stephen was one of seven dedicated deacons in the early church. He was a preacher, along with the Apostles and other new leaders in the church. But Stephen appears to have developed a very close relationship with God, for Acts 6:15 says that his face looked like the face of an angel. And when, at the end of his defense, he was stoned, he prayed that God would forgive them. How Christ-like he had become!!

For his defense he chose to present a dynamic history of Israel. Moses was a very important part of the story taking up verses 20-44! In v. 37 Stephen declares that Moses had said to Israel “God will raise up for you a prophet LIKE ME from among your brethren!” How did Christ “exemplify” Moses? Vs. 35 says that God sent Moses to be both ruler and deliverer – and I would add, intercessor!

Stephen gazed intently up into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. He told them “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!” They began stoning him, and continued as he called on the Lord and said “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!” Then, as he fell on his knees with the blows of the stones, he cried out with a loud voice, “LORD, DO NOT HOLD THIS SIN AGAINST THEM!”

Having said this, he...fell...asleep.

PROVERBS 10-15

Prov. 15:3 “The Lord is watching everywhere, keeping His eye on both the evil and the good.”

II Chronicles 16:9 (companion text to above text): “The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him.”

Proverbs 14:26 “Those who fear the Lord are secure; He will be a place of refuge for their children!” What an awesome comfort!! There is no other friend like Jesus!

Proverbs 15:8 “The Lord hates the sacrifice of the wicked, but He delights in the prayers of the upright.”

Which other Proverbs are meaningful to you? Do they reveal God to you? In the above texts I see a God who cares about all four of my adult children AND my grandchildren!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 11

Deuteronomy 1 – 4:43; Psalms 74, 76, 103, 105, 144-150

Deut. 1-4:43

Moses is soon to die, the boundaries for the tribes have been laid out by God Himself, but lots will be cast to decide where the tribes will settle down. Moses cannot enter the promised land because he struck the Rock - in anger, which represented Jesus, instead of the command to SPEAK to the rock (Num. 20:9-11). He shares wisdom and history with his people before he climbs Mt. Nebo to die.

Moses also set apart three cities of refuge east of the Jordan as God had commanded.

Psalms 74, 76, 103, 105, 144-150

The Psalms for next week refer often to the history of God's people. Please observe all the texts that reveal something special about God – learn to know your best Friend!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 11 Deuteronomy 1-4:43; Psalms 74, 76, 103, 105, 144, 135, 144-150

WELCOME

Take a survey today. On a scale of 1-10. how is this spiritual journey toward knowing Christ generating some healthy excitement in your life? God gives us information sufficient to bring to us a closer relationship with Him, but He lets us know that it's like digging for pearls. Remember when He said the Kingdom of Heaven was like a man purchasing a field in which he was told were pearls. He gave everything to find those pearls (of Truth). It is the most satisfying of all relationships known to man! And for us, today, that relationship brings growing faith!

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

DEUTERONOMY 1-4:45

1. Almost the entire book of Deuteronomy is a review of Israel's choices during the 40 years of wandering. Now was an exciting time of clarifying a new chapter: how to be good neighbors to other Jews, but also to surrounding nations. Remember when God told Moses that He would not destroy all the Canaanite nations at once because Israel was not big enough yet to occupy the entire country. He said that wild animals would come in and ruin the land, if there were not enough people to control them and protect the land
2. In Deut 1: 26-33 God's loving guidance is described by Moses. Read it carefully. Doesn't it make you trust Him more? But then in v. 34 we see another side of God's character. He does get angry! In v. 37 Moses says that God was angry with him "because of you!" The griping and complaining must have been stressful for Moses in particular, but also to Aaron who carried the next amount of responsibility for the people.
3. Scouts were sent out to map the land and found giants in the land. Moses said to them "Don't be afraid!" Those words were said literally hundreds of times in the scriptures. Truly God DOES NOT WANT YOU TO BE AFRAID! (Deut. 1:29)
4. Moses, that great prophet, was a type of Christ (see Acts 7:37,38). Stephen said that Moses was a savior and mediator, and in that position he did the work of Christ. But he did not get to enter Canaan with the millions of people he had shepherded through the wilderness. Just once (that we know of), he failed to carry out God's instructions, and, in anger, struck the rock. In Num. 20:9-11, God tells Moses that he did not represent the holiness of God when he disobeyed angrily, not following God's orders. What feelings did you have when you read Deut. 3:21-27? That Rock represented THE ROCK.

5. When you are tempted to judge God's actions, review Eccl. 5:2: "God is in heaven. So let your words be few!" We are so not capable of "judging" God, yet people do it all the time. But let this group understand, seeking knowledge of God is a worthy pursuit, and only in that frame is it OK to ask questions regarding His decisions. Remember His unfailing love in this whole process! ☺

6. The journey which could have taken 11 days, ended up being a 40-year series of camps in the wilderness, because Israel was afraid to fight the giants, **EVEN WHEN THEY KNEW GOD WAS ON THEIR SIDE**. Are we staying on earth longer than we would really have to??? There is a statement in Christ's Object Lessons, which states that "when we learn to love as Christ loves, then the Lord can return." Let's become so immersed in the ways of the Lord, that loving unconditionally becomes automatic for us. In our church there may be a tendency to reject those who might be a little different. We need the Holy Spirit to guide us and soften us and make us wise!

PSALMS 74, 76, 104, 105, 114, 135, 144-150

Most of us attribute the book of Psalms to King David. And since he wrote most of them, that is understandable. But it is good to note that there are other authors/composers as well: Asaph, Solomon, Moses, and Hezekiah, for example. They are all inspired. David, though, is a prophet as much as Isaiah or Ezekiel. In the Psalms we find history rendered with clarity and sometimes details not found elsewhere, and we find future events beyond David's time which became reality just as written! I have been guilty in the past of describing Psalms glibly as Israel's hymnal. But it is so....much....more!

Psalm 74 Remember that scripture can sometimes refer to the times of the writer, and simultaneously point forward to events in the future. I believe this chapter is describing living through current enemy assaults, but it also sounds like it could refer to the 70 year exile which occurred around 600 BC when Nebuchadnezzar took most of Israel captive.

Psalm 76 Did I mention that doctrine is available in the Psalms, as well? You might want to jot down vs. 5 to share with folks when the topic of death arises. The NLT is my favorite: "The mightiest of our enemies have been plundered. They lie before us *in the sleep of death!*" The NASB says: "...They *sank into sleep*; and none of the warriors could use his hands."

Psalm 104 In verse 2 God is described as being dressed in a **robe of light**. What our friends wear is of interest to us, is it not? It's nice to know what my VERY Best Friend wears! It just now occurs to me that this is a viable verse to support the belief that God also gave Adam and Eve a robe of light when He created them. Vs. 31 says that the Lord rejoices in all He has made! – which would include the Sabbath. See Heb. 4.☺ It appears that Israel never learned the real meaning of Sabbath rest, even though scripture presents it as the crowning act of creation.

Enjoy all of these Psalms! Jot down the things you don't want to forget!!! They are all full of wonderful knowledge of God and the world in which we live and take so much for granted much of the time. May the Creator bless your study!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 12

Deuteronomy 4:44-26; Psalm 119:1-80

There is so much information in Deuteronomy that Moses felt was essential for Israel to hear. We are "spiritual Israel." Gal. 3:7 says: "The real children of Abraham, then, are all those who put their faith in God." Picture yourself in the group poised to enter the Promised Land (heaven?), listening to instructions that are pertinent to modern Israel, as well. **APPLY THE PRINCIPLES TO YOUR LIFE!** Take special note of how much Moses' talks about the Decalogue and urges the people to obey the Law and absorb the love of God that shines through Moses' words.

Ps. 119:1-80

This 119th Psalm is the longest chapter in the Bible. It declares David's love for the law of God with eloquence and an endless vocabulary on this very focused topic.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 12 Deuteronomy 4:44-26; Psalm 119:1-80

WELCOME

Enthusiasm poll: On a scale of 1-10, how great is your love for the Law of God? I would say David's was off the chart! Consider where you might be. God's reason for wanting His people to keep the law was "so that all would go well with them." That's love. There is no other law, no other God, no other happiness in the world to compare with the well being that comes with joyful obedience to the law of love: love to God and love to people.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

DEUTERONOMY 4:44-26

In Deuteronomy 5, Moses tells Israel to "learn AND OBEY." Then he points out to them that God made a covenant long ago to their ancestors, but this covenant (v. 3) was presented from the heart of the fire on the mountain.

The covenant was none other than the 10 commandments. The people were afraid of the sound of the trumpet and the voice of God, so from then on, Moses served as an intermediary between the people and God.

God reminds them that He is the One who brought them miraculously out of Egypt and therefore they should obey the commandments. Does that mean the law is only for them? This is what many Protestants say is their reason for not keeping the Sabbath – that it was just for the Jews. Never forget that in Eden, God gave Adam and Eve two sacraments (sacred obligations): the Sabbath and marriage – of a man and a woman. A "Jew" did not exist for at least two millennia.

The Jews had many amazing stories to tell regarding God's power over Pharaoh, the plagues, and the final tragedy of the death of all the first born children and cattle in Egypt. Only then did Pharaoh give permission for Israel to leave Egypt. Subsequently, he changed his mind AGAIN and chased after them. But God had created a great cloud which provided light to the Israelites, but on the other end of the cloud was dense darkness so that the Egyptians could not tell where their slaves were!! (Read I Cor. 10:4 if you don't know Who was leading them. Don't forget that text. It will shed light on much of the Old Testament!)

Did you notice how many times the word obey or obedience was used in the reading for today??? Is obedience important to God? (Read chapter 11:8-12.) Oh, I think so. But will obedience save us??? No!!! No matter how obedient we ever get, no matter

how many of our sins are forgiven, the fact that we have sinned cannot erase our identity as sinners. And because we are human, we WILL make mistakes. There will never be a time, until we are finally in heaven for the millennium that we are not desperately in NEED of our precious Savior!

Notice the details regarding the tablets of stone which were placed in the Ark. The civil laws for being good citizens in Canaan were placed *beside the Ark*. The Ark which was the permanent home of the Decalogue was treated with ultimate respect. See Deut. 10:4 which stipulates that God had hand-written the 10 Commandments not just once, but twice and with the same words He wrote the first time! These are priceless facts for those who love the commandments of God.

Look at Deut. 12:6. It mentions Israel's burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, your special gifts, your offerings to fulfill a vow, your freewill offerings, etc. When Jesus died, it fulfilled every animal sacrifice Israel ever made. When it mentions tithes, freewill offerings – these are offerings we give today!!! And we need to remember that every offering given with a cheerful heart because we love Him, is pleasing to God. He is so in touch with each heart – especially the believers! Praise God!

Attendance was mandatory for the men at three festivals each year: Unleavened Bread, Harvest and Shelters. God said the Shelters should be celebrated for seven days at the end of the harvest season. Hold on to your seats: (Deut. 16:15) God said they should honor Him Who blesses all their work! AND this festival will be a time OF GREAT JOY FOR ALL!!!

What a social being Jesus was as a human! Science has discovered now that there are huge health benefits from enjoying friendships and social activities! ☺

As you continue through Deuteronomy, watch for the things that please God, and any other identifying characteristics that reveal God to you.

PSALM 119:1-80

Ps. 119:2 and Deut. 4:29 encourage us to “Search for Him with all your heart and you WILL find Him!” Don't give up – the ability to recognize God's traits will appear to your eyes and mind more readily as you sharpen your own spiritual traits! It's an exciting project we are sharing! Tell each other what you have learned.

Use your imagination when studying Scripture. Invest every synapse in learning to know God better. I remind you of Deut. 4:29: ...if you search for Him with all your heart and soul, **YOU WILL FIND HIM!!! HALLELUJAH!**

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 13

Deuteronomy 27-30, Galatians, Psalms 2, 4, 5

DEUTERONOMY 27-30

The scenes in Deuteronomy in next week's reading are EPIC!! Two million people (probably more) divided in half on Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim to hear blessings for obedience to God's laws and curses for disobedience. Use your imagination and picture yourself in the scene. It may take some time to arrive there, but Bible study can be so very rewarding when we are patient and unhurried.

As bad as the curses sound, we need to realize that sin is more damaging than we can imagine and God doesn't sugar coat the results! He wants people to know what their choices are and be sure that they are sufficiently educated regarding them.

Ever wonder how to talk to 2,000,000 people without a sound system? How do you think it was accomplished?

In Chapter 29, vs. 29 is an important principle to remember as we study to learn to know God better. Be ready to discuss it next week.

GALATIANS

Turning to the New Testament to the book of Galatians, Paul gives us spiritual food gleaned from Old Testament stories. Galatians 3:16-17 are important to understanding the connection between this New Testament passage and the Old Testament.

PSALMS

Ps. 2, 4 and 5 have awesome revelations about our God Whom we are seeking to know better. Meditate and absorb!!!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 13 Deuteronomy 27-30, Galatians, Psalms 2, 4, 5

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

DEUTERONOMY 27-30

As we ended Deut. 26 last week, we saw a people who had re-consecrated their lives to the Lord, and the Lord accepted their dedication, stating that if they remained faithful He would make them greater than any other nation, holy to the Lord!

So in Deut. 27 Moses makes a suggestion regarding setting up an altar to commemorate the crossing of the Jordan River and entering the land promised to Abraham and Jacob 40 years before. They were to coat it with plaster and then WRITE ON IT all the terms of the law and then feast before it (vs. 6, 7): “Then Moses and the Levitical priests addressed all Israel as follows: ‘O Israel, BE QUIET AND LISTEN!’ ... ” (v. 9) The word, “obey” is used so many times. Is it important?

Deut. 28 - What blessings are pronounced! V. 13 says that if we carefully obey God’s laws, He will make us “the head and not the tail!” V. 14 warns that we must not follow after “other gods and worship them.” We need to understand that *anything* that supersedes our commitment to God is an idol whether it’s TV or food or reading “good” recreational books.

What happens if we refuse to obey God’s laws is horrendous. But we need to read it carefully. Look at v. 67 and you will see discontentment! Remember when Paul says that he has learned to be content whatever his situation is. This is an important character development that needs to happen if we are to be well-rounded, productive Christians.

So...take a look at Deut. 29:14, 15 – as the true children of Abraham, are all these words which Moses is speaking applicable to us today? Some people would like to “do away” with the Old Testament, and some of the books of the New Testament because they contradict their way of living. It’s important that we identify the principles revealed here that most definitely apply to us.

V. 29 of chapter 29 says “There are secret things that belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and our descendants forever, SO THAT WE MAY OBEY THESE WORDS OF THE LAW.” Pray for discernment for yourself and your group!

Chapter 30 is one of the most beautiful passages in all of Scripture, especially vs. 11-20. Feast and enjoy the richness of God’s love! We have a choice. Let’s all “choose life!”

GALATIANS

Gal. 1:11 Paul assures us that what he preaches is not based on mere human reasoning, but comes by a direct revelation from Jesus Christ Himself. Can Moses authenticate his message in the same way? Does God still impart truth directly to human beings?

Gal. 2:2 Paul traveled – sometimes making return trips to cities where he had already been – at instruction from God. Remember when God told Moses, “I will be with you!” And then, He made a similar promise to Joshua: (Josh. 1:5, second part, and 9) “For I will be with you as I was with Moses. I will not fail you or abandon you!...The Lord is with you wherever you go!” God took good care of his leaders. And He still does.

In Gal. 2 the issue of circumcision came up. Peter had been given the responsibility of preaching to the Jews. Paul was asked to take the gospel to the Gentiles. When Peter went to Antioch with Paul, he ate with Gentiles. But then Paul noticed that when those who still adhered to Jewish rites, including circumcision arrived, Peter left the Gentiles and sat with the Jews. This rubbed Paul the wrong way. Paul confronted Peter and ended with this sentence “For if we could be saved by keeping the law, then there was no need for Christ to die!”

Interesting, isn’t it that an angel came close to killing Moses because he had failed to circumcise his son? (Ex. 4:24-26) Before the cross, it was essential that there be a way to identify families who were from the blood line of Abraham and Jacob (including all who were in their households: foreign born servants e.g.). Circumcision was the sign chosen by God and of course with Israel in the wilderness and water sometimes being scarce, this was of hygienic benefit as well. But following Christ’s death which opened the way for salvation to the Gentiles, circumcision was no longer necessary because all humanity became eligible to be the “chosen ones” irregardless of their ancestry! (See Gal. 3:6-7,13-14)

What does this tell us about God? When there was no longer any legal reason to continue a rite in the Mosaic Law, God no longer required it. He did not want following Him to be a burden! And remember that the Mosaic Law was placed beside the mercy seat in the Most Holy Place, while the Ten Commandment Law had a place WITHIN the Ark just under the Mercy Seat. It was eternal and never to be changed.

Gal. 3:15-18, esp. vs 16: Here Paul makes the point that in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:15) when God said that there would be enmity between the serpent's seed and Eve's seed, He was speaking of the Baby Jesus as Abraham's seed! Some Bibles translate the word for "seed" as "offspring" – which suggests the vision of so many descendants that there are more than the sands of the sea or the stars in the sky – as God did say they would multiply. But in this instance the word "seed" points only to Christ. Listen to the NLT translation of Gal. 3:16, 17: "God gave the promise to Abraham and his child. *And notice that it doesn't say the promise was to his children, as if it meant many descendants.* But the promise was made to his Child—and that, of course, means CHRIST." (See Hebrews 1:2) This is what I am trying to say: The agreement God made with Abraham could not be canceled 430 years later when God gave the law to Moses. God would be breaking His promise." The inheritance which was promised to the chosen ones, was given to Christ first. Then it was through Him that the phases of the great controversy between good and evil are to be accomplished and all the righteous will be together in one place for a thousand years: in Heaven with the River of Life flowing through the New Jerusalem! Then the righteous will finally reside on the earth made new, the forever "promised land!" Read: "Baby Jesus' Inheritance" at www.thisislifeeternal.org Click the "ctrl" button at the same time you click on the URL address. Then click on "Journal (Blog)" on the home page, look to the right and click on: "September 2006."

So—it is not from keeping the law that salvation comes, it is simply through faith like Abraham's. We are to trust in Christ as little children trust their earthly fathers, and never waiver. And He promises in return to FINISH the good work He began in us (Phil. 1:6) until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again. Praise God!

Gal. 4:17-27 Paul was clearly trying to clarify truth against teachings of false teachers in Galatia. They were eager to "steel" the sheep Paul had nurtured in the love of Christ.

Paul goes on to use the illustration of Hagar and Sarah to illustrate living under the law and being set free. Hagar represents Mount Sinai where people first became enslaved to the law. And now the people in Jerusalem are caught in the same kind of slavery. BUT SARAH, the "free woman" represents the HEAVENLY JERUSALEM. And she is our mother. Isaiah writes of her "For the woman who could bear no children now has more than all the other women!" (See Isa. 53:1)

Gal. 4:28 "And you, dear brothers and sisters, are children of the promise, just like Isaac..." So Paul shows that those who are children of the "free wife" (Sarah) and who rid themselves of burdensome, "obsolete" laws, suffer persecution from Ishmael (those who choose to reject Christ's freedom), the son of the slave-wife. Read John 8:34-36.

Read Gal. 5:5, 6. Clearly the Jewish “Christians” were still practicing and teaching circumcision. And some were still keeping the Mosaic law with its festival holy days and observances. Read verses 13, 14.

Can you sense the freedom that was available to the Jews but they rejected it? Yet even some of those who chose freedom seemed to lose the center of their focus which led them away from Christ to carry out the desires “of the flesh.” We humans need the Holy Spirit’s guidance everyday, everywhere we go.

Gal 6:11-13, 15 throws more light on Paul’s concerns for the Galatians. May God give us understanding of the great truths in this epistle!

PSALMS 2, 4, and 5

Ps. 2 Many passages in Scripture have more than one interpretation. This Psalm can be applied to literal Israel, but also to scenes at the end of time when the rulers of the earth, under the leadership of Satan himself, try to attack the New Jerusalem. But it can also apply to David’s relationship to the Lord as His anointed one and the conflicts he experienced.

Vs. 6-8 are very awesome. David, the psalmist, God’s anointed as king of Jerusalem, has a vision words said by God the Father to God the Son. This is what David heard and saw: “The Lord (Father) said to Me (the Son speaking), ‘You (Jesus) are my Son. Today I have become Your Father. Only ask, and I will give You the nations as Your inheritance, the ends of the earth as Your possession.’”

Compare Hebrews 1:5-13. Notice that the Father refers to His Son as “Lord!” What a relationship. There is no competition to see Who can be greatest in the Godhead! Indeed, there is a humility there, when the Holy Spirit is willing to only speak of Christ and facilitate the dwelling of Christ in our hearts. –That’s humility.

In v. 8 the Father says He will give the Son the nations and all the earth as His inheritance! Sound familiar? (Gal. 3:15)

Ps. 4 David pleads for God’s approval and mercy and a response to his prayer! David is having trouble with accusers. Then he meditates a moment as the music plays. “You can be SURE of this: The Lord has set apart the godly for Himself. The Lord WILL ANSWER when I call to Him.” Ah, yes – faith! David certainly had it.

Then David offers some good advice: Don’t let anger control you. Think about it overnight and remain silent. And then another meditation opportunity!!

V. 5 (paraphrase) “Offer tithes and offerings and trust in the Lord.”
Let the smile of Your face shine on us, Lord. (Do you ever sense His smile???)

And a BEAUTIFUL ENDING: “I will lie down in peace and sleep, for You alone, O Lord, will keep me safe.” AMEN!

Ps. 5 O Lord, hear me as I pray; pay attention to my groaning. I will never pray to anyone but You. Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly. God detests murderers and deceivers. –Because of Your unfailing love, I can enter Your house; with deepest awe I will worship at Your Temple. ..Tell me clearly what to do, and show me which way to turn. Thank You, Lord!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 14

Deuteronomy 31-34, Jude, Psalm 119:81-176

DEUTERONOMY 31-34

Moses is 120 years old and has a very busy day ahead of him. God has composed a song! I would love to have heard God sing it to Moses, so that he could then teach it to the nation!! That very day, it sounds like. There was so much to do! Moses blesses the people, much like the patriarchs use to when they gave the birthright to their first-born sons.

Mount Nebo (Deut. 34) must have been very large coming up from the plains of Moab, for Pisgah Peak was only part of the mountain. Picture the prophet of God as he climbs up. Enjoy this chapter – it’s beautiful.

JUDE

This is a miniature, power-packed letter. There is a revealing “end of the story” scene displayed here which reveals something heart-warming about God. ENJOY!

PSALM 119:81-176

Watch for verses that reveal your loving God to you! Or His justice. Always remember, God loves you. As Moses said to Israel regarding the song God taught him, “these are NOT ‘just words’ -- they are your life!”

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS ☺

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 14 Deuteronomy 31-34; Jude; Psalm 119:81-176

WELCOME

A day or two ahead thoroughly review the prayer requests for personal needs. Many times members will request prayer for physical discomforts or medical procedures. In the moments just before the session begins is a good opportunity to get personal updates – it will save some time in the final prayer segment.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

DEUTERONOMY 31-34

Deut. 31:1-6

Moses announces his age and the fact that he is retiring and Joshua is to be the new leader. The Lord's promises were to be with Joshua just as they were with Moses, so Moses declares that they should NOT be afraid for God will go ahead of you and destroy the nations. He will neither fail you nor forsake you! Awesome! These words are also for us today!! Seek God's call on your life and be fearless! Whatever might be standing in your way HE CAN DESTROY IT for you!

Vs. 7-8 Joshua has been "in training" for Moses' job for a long time, going up the mountain with him when God gave the 10 Commandments, staying in the Tent of Meeting after Moses went back to the camp. The people recognized God's hand upon Joshua and accepted his leadership. In vs. 14, 15, and 23 God officially commissions Joshua at the Tabernacle. He appeared to them in a pillar of cloud at the entrance of the sacred tent and said to Joshua: "Be strong and courageous! (following God is not for sissies!) You must bring the people of Israel into the land I swore to give them. I WILL BE WITH YOU." If God gives you a job to do (AND HE GIVES EVERYONE A JOB TO DO!!! ☺), He will be with you – He never changes so I therefore declare to you that GOD WILL BE WITH YOU – He said so!

Vs. 16-22 God foresees that Israel will rebel and teaches Moses the words to a song. He said "Teach them to sing it, so it may serve as a witness against them. FOR I WILL BRING THEM INTO THE LAND I SWORE TO GIVE THEIR ANCESTORS—a land flowing with milk and honey." They will become complacent. Great disaster will come down on them "and this song will stand as evidence against them, for it will never be forgotten by their descendants..."

Several things here are worth considering.

1. Moses, at 120 years old, has delivered an amazing sermon to Israel, commissioned Joshua as all the people watched, and then God taught him a **very** long song which Moses was to teach to the people as they stood on the two mountains: Mt. Ebal and Gerazim!!
2. Vs. 22 says “That very day” Moses wrote down the words to the song and taught Israel to sing it as God demonstrated it. (Zeph. 3:17 pictures God as singing over His people! So this is not news that God sings!!! BUT --wouldn’t you like to hear His voice???? I certainly would.)
3. God kept His promise to give Israel the land as an inheritance, **EVEN THOUGH** He knew they would rebel. God loves unconditionally.

When Moses finished writing the entire body of the law in a book, he instructed the Levites to place it *beside the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord your God*, so it may serve as a witness against the people of Israel. V. 26 (Please note: the Mosaic Laws were placed **BESIDE** the Ark, while **INSIDE** was placed the Ten Commandment Law.) This is an important verse to remember when New Testament discussions regarding the Law occur.

If you are journaling as you study, and you wish to be able to find this reference again, write Deut. 31:26 in box you labeled “The Law “on the downloadable journaling form.

Deut. 32

Most of this chapter consists of the lyrics of the song God wrote- and sang. Since these are words directly from God’s mouth, it would be profitable for us to very carefully read it. All the while search for the words that light up your understanding about God: the Rock. I call your attention to the following verses: 10-14, 18, and more. As God reveals Himself to you, I hope you are writing the verses down in your journal! Hang on to these revelations to give you strength in the coming days when our faith in God will carry us through in spite of trouble.

Read vs. 44-47 TAKE NOTE OF V. 47! Awesome! The NASB Version reads: “For it is not an idle word for you (the song); indeed it is your life. And by this word you will prolong your days in the land, which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess.”

V. 48 (NASB) The Lord spoke to Moses that very same day, saying (vs. 49-51) “Go up to this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab opposite Jericho, and look at the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the sons of Israel for a possession. Then die on the mountain where you ascend and be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people, because you broke faith with Me in the midst of the sons of Israel at the waters of Meribah, in the wilderness of Zin, because you did not treat Me (the Rock), as holy in the midst of the sons of Israel.”

Comment: v. 48 “That very day” – It is just amazing that Moses still had energy to climb the mountain!

Deut. 33

Moses pronounces blessings on the sons of Israel before his death.

Deut. 34

This chapter pictures Moses making the trip up Mount Nebo to the top of Pisgah opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him “all the land...” V. 4: “Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob...” So Moses, the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And God buried Moses in the valley in the land of Moab!

JUDE

Jude was a brother of Jesus (James was, also), writing to all who are called to live in the love of God the Father and the care of Jesus Christ. May you receive more and more of God’s mercy, peace and love.

Jude has heard of false teachers among the new Christians. Someone who is teaching that God will save us anyway even if we live immoral lives! Jude gives examples to refute this evil doctrine.

1. The Israelites who refused to trust God and move ahead to invade the Canaanite nations were destroyed by the Lord before the nation entered Canaan.
2. One-third of the Angels in heaven did not choose to be loyal to God, so God has kept them chained in prisons of darkness waiting for the day of judgment!
3. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah and those of neighboring towns, were filled with sexual sin. They were destroyed by fire and brimstone and are a warning of the eternal fire that will punish all who are evil. JOURNAL THIS TEXT UNDER “Hell” or “Death.”

These false teachers live immoral lives, defy authority and scoff at God’s power. But we need to hold our accusations – for (v. 9) even Michael, one of the mightiest of the angels (Michael is the name of the pre-incarnate Jesus. The name means “Captain of the angel hosts.”) did not dare accuse Satan of blasphemy, but simply said, “The Lord rebuke you.” HERE IT IS! Jude was given a vision of what happened when God wanted to take Moses from the grave! We know who won that argument for Moses appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration along with Elijah and Jesus. Praise God!

Awesome God! He doesn’t have to waste time and energy arguing with the Devil – He has the power to carry out His will – and it was His will to take Moses with him to heaven. Moses, Elijah and Enoch must have all been exceedingly special to Jesus. But it

also brings to mind the fact that Jesus, even now, is eager to bring all of us who love Him home with him. I want to go there, don't you?

These false teachers follow the evil example of Cain, who killed his brother. Like Balaam, they will do anything for money. And like Korah, they will perish because of their rebellion.

Jude continues to describe these despicable people and shares a prophecy by Enoch! I had forgotten that he was a prophet!

Vs. 22 and 23 are important: Show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. There are still others to whom you need to show mercy, but be careful that you aren't contaminated by their sins.

ONE CHAPTER in this book, but what a panorama of information. I do appreciate the "book of Jude!"

PSALM 119:81-176

Awesome, awesome verses. Journal the ones that reveal God to you! Let them feed your soul!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 15 Joshua 1-13:7, Psalms 6-7, 9-10, 12-13

JOSHUA 1-13:7

Joshua is like a continuation of Deuteronomy. God spoke to Joshua personally: "Now that my servant Moses is dead, you must lead my people across the Jordan River into the land I am giving them. I PROMISE YOU WHAT I PROMISED MOSES!" The people said they would do whatever Joshua commanded them – and they obeyed quite well until Joshua died. Hallelujah!

God's promises are like money in the bank! We can rely on them. How wonderful for Joshua to have the opportunity to work that closely with God and to realize relatively large periods of time that were peaceful years. Again we are reminded that following Christ is not for sissies!

The story of Rahab, the "harlot," is awesome. She ends up in the lineage of Christ! That's redemption!

Watch how God works with and through Joshua in mighty and wondrous ways. Enjoy the stories. God appears to Joshua in person as the "Commander of the Lord's

army!” This is Jesus – reference I Cor. 10:4. Israel was to start marching around Jericho. It appears that Jesus came to give Joshua some visible support from the Almighty as he began the task of driving out the Canaanite nations.

Jericho’s walls fall down and Joshua’s name became famous throughout the land. He was a good and faithful leader.

Josh. 10 has an awesome story of “when time stood still.” Read it carefully and marvel!

V. 31 Kings were subdued and their cities destroyed. Joshua grows old and there is yet some land to be conquered.

PSALMS 6-7, 9-10, 12-13

These Psalms are a window on David’s relationship with God – which was not the same at all times. Ps. 9:10 reveals David’s first hand knowledge of God’s ways. Pray that God’s ways will be made plain to you, like David, as you study.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 15 Joshua 1-13:7; Psalms 6-7, 9-10, 12-13

WELCOME

Ask how their week has gone, and share God's guidance in your own life if there is time. "Watch for the providences."

OPENING PRAYER – always try to start on time – God was never late. Remember that prophecies were fulfilled to the very day even after hundreds of years had expired. When the Exodus occurred, it was the very last day of a 430 year period! See Ex. 12:40-42.

(NOTE: Every minute of this 90 min. together is dedicated to knowing God better. Be sure that unrelated conversation does not usurp these precious moments. How the time flies when the group is united in seeking to know God better. See John 17:3; Mal 3:16-18. My experience has been that every group needs to be reminded of this principle frequently!)

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

The language in vs. 1-9 of the first chapter of the book of Joshua is POWERFUL. God verbally outlines the territory where Joshua is responsible for clearing out the wicked nations now residing there. What were their crimes? Why were they doomed?

REMARKS REGARDING THE UPCOMING 400 YEAR TIME PERIOD:

Remember when Abraham and Lot separated their households and Lot chose to settle in the city environment of Sodom? When God told Abraham that He was going to destroy Sodom, for Lot's sake Abraham tried to get God to soften the decision to wipe the city out by saying that if there were 50 faithful people there, would He withdraw the plan and let the city survive? God actually tolerated Abraham's trying to negotiate the number of faithful it would take to save Sodom to the lowest possible number. When it came to the "bottom line" there were not even ten in the city who were believers!

By Joshua's time, hundreds of years later, evil was exceedingly prevalent, causing the Canaanites to commit perverted behaviors which God could not tolerate any longer. Canaan's "cup of iniquity" was full and it was time for the wicked to perish and Israel to begin receiving her inheritance.

When you are tempted to question God's justice for destroying every man woman and child in most of these cities, remember that their common practices were: offering their own children as sacrifices to their gods, bestiality (sexual behavior with animals – there are drawings found in ruins), crossbreeding against nature: between animal species;

male and female prostitution as part of their “worship” practices, and homosexuality. Imagine the diseases these people had and how nature suffered under their reign. How very ugly sin is! --And Christ *became sin FOR US!* Amazing grace!

There are many parallels to the Israel of the Old Testament times and modern Israel in these Old Testament stories. For example, in Hebrews 3:5 Paul says that Moses’ work was an example of truths *which God would reveal later!* Look for parallel applications in these stories of Joshua’s tenure and the subsequent 400 years when a parade of “judges” ruled in Israel.

BACK TO JOSHUA

Joshua commanded the leaders of the people to go through the camp and tell the people they had three days to get provisions ready for the journey across the Jordan River to take possession of the land the Lord has given you.

Joshua also reviews the agreement made with Moses by the tribes of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh. They vow to do whatever Joshua commands them and to put to death anyone in their camp who refused to obey Joshua’s every command! Then they said to Joshua “SO BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS!”

Joshua 2 – Joshua secretly sent out two spies and instructed them to spy out the area around Jericho. They came to the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there overnight. The king of Jericho heard some Israelites were there, so he ordered Rahab “Bring out the men who have come into your house. They are spies sent here to discover the best way to attack us.”

Discuss how Rahab deals with this challenge and how she and all her family are saved when Jericho is taken. Interesting, isn’t it, how she knew all about God’s plans to take control of Canaan? It sounds like all the inhabitants of that land knew about God’s miracles and the plan to give this land to the Israelites. See Josh. 2:34.

Joshua 3 and 4 – Israel makes the crossing of the Jordan, maintaining a ½ mi. distance between them and the Ark of the Covenant. This was during the first month of their calendar, during harvest time when the water was high. Joshua told them to purify themselves and prepare to witness God’s miracles among them.

When they were across the river, Joshua said for 12 men, one from each tribe, to gather stones (one stone per man) from where the priests were standing in the middle of the Jordan, and carry it out on your shoulder to the place where they camped for the night and build the altar there, so that in the future children will ask “What do these stones mean to you?” (See Exodus 20:24) God wants us to remember what He does for us! (I wish I had built some altars when He saved the lives of three of our four children!)

Joshua also built an altar (Joshua 4:9) in the middle of the Jordan where the priests were standing during Israel’s crossing over. It is believed that Joshua wrote this

book which bears his name and he states that that mid-river memorial was still there when he wrote the book. I doubt that it survives today!!

The tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the Manasseh tribe led Israel over the Jordan! And as soon as all were across, Joshua gave the command for the priests and the Ark to come out of the riverbed. When they did, the river flooded its banks as before. It was the 10th day of the “first month” of the year. Passover was celebrated on the 14th day.

Joshua was as revered by the people as Moses was (v. 14)! God’s miracle of drying up the river for Israel’s crossing was a similar miracle to the Red Sea crossing. He did this miracle so that all the nations of the earth might know the power of the Lord, and that you might fear the Lord your God forever!” What has God done in your life that convinced you that you will fear the Lord forever!!!

Joshua 5

Israel becomes a circumcised people once again. All Israelites who walked out of Egypt were circumcised. But they all died out before reaching Canaan (except for Caleb and Joshua). So the “new generation” needed the identification God required of them: circumcision-at Gilgal where they camped near Jericho. This sign of belonging to God “rolled away the shame of their slavery in Egypt.” V. 9 They celebrated the Passover while they recuperated, on the 14th day of the first month of the Jewish year.

Then they ate unleavened bread and roasted grain harvested from the land. *No manna appeared that day, and it was never seen again. So from that time on the Israelites ate from the crops of Canaan!!!*

As Joshua approached (v. 13) the city of Jericho, he saw a man facing him with sword in hand! Joshua went up to him and asked, “Are you friend or foe?”

“Neither one,” he replied, “I am commander of the Lord’s army!” At this, Joshua fell with his face to the ground in reverence. “I am at Your command,” Joshua said. “What do You want Your servant to do?”

The Commander of the Lord’s army replied, “Take off your sandals, for this is holy ground.” And Joshua did as he was told. Why do you suppose Moses and Joshua were told to remove their sandals? I don’t have an answer. But I will keep my eyes open as I read. Enlighten me, if you have the answer!

Joshua 6

The Lord gives instructions to Joshua in verses 1-5. Isn’t it a reassuring thing that God strengthens us for the “march?” Joshua must have been somewhat nervous about the upcoming attack of Jericho, a fortified city. God came to Joshua in a form that would not kill him- vs. 13 of chapter 5 says Joshua “saw a man facing him with sword in hand.” So Joshua *went up to him....* Wow! Joshua asked what the commander of the Lord’s army

wanted him to do! He was asked to remove his sandals, because this was holy ground! ...Then God gave him specific instructions about taking Jericho. But not before showing Joshua His sword and His strength, and His presence - that Presence is still with us. And God still uplifts and supports those to whom He has given jobs to do!!! **Don't forget that!**

Did you visualize the march around Jericho? What were your impressions?

In v. 22 Joshua said to the two spies: "Keep your promise. Go to the prostitute's house and bring her out, along with all her family."

Jericho was never to be rebuilt and if anyone tried it would cost the builder dearly!!!

Joshua 7 and 8

Make note of Joshua's grief with Achan's sin at Ai, the defeat of Israel's army and then the final victory. Picture it all!

Vs. 30-34 of Chapter 8 "look" very familiar. We've seen a similar scene before. Everyone, including women and children and the foreigners living among the Israelites were there, divided between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, listening as Joshua, their great leader, read the blessings and curses Moses had written in the Book of the Law. Every command Moses had ever given was read!!

Between the groups, the Ark of the Covenant stood with the Levitical priests who carried it.

Joshua 9

The clever deception worked! V. 14 explains the problem: Joshua and the nation's leaders failed to ask God about this. They trusted their own eyes! You might think that since there was deception involved, they could just tell those liars that the agreement was null and void! But the Israelites had ratified the agreement with the Gibeonites with a binding oath. In V. 19 the leaders explained that they had sworn an oath in the presence of the Lord... "We cannot touch them. We must let them live, for God would be angry with us if we broke our oath (or promise!). ...But we will make them chop wood and carry water for the entire community." Vs. 24, 25 contain a great explanation. They did save their lives the only way they knew how.

Lesson? Never think we can make decisions on our own – I don't care how plain things look to us. We need to ask our Senior Partner about everything. Because He "careth for you."

Joshua 10

Five kings formed an alliance against Gibeon. They were angry that Gibeon had made an agreement with Israel. Gibeon quickly sent a message to Israel requesting protection. Joshua marched all night to surprise the joint armies of five kings.

God fought side by side with the Israelite army, raining terrible hailstones which killed more of the enemy than the sword did. On the day the Lord gave the Israelites victor over the Amorites, Joshua prayed to the Lord in front of all the people of Israel. He said: “Let the sun stand still over Gibeon, and the moon over the valley of Aijalon.”

So the sun and moon stood still until the Israelites had defeated their enemies.

Is this event not recorded in The Book of Jashar? (never heard of it!) The sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and it did not set as on a normal day. The Lord fought for Israel that day. Never before or since has there been a day like that one, when the Lord answered such a request from a human being.

During the battle the five kings tried to escape but ended up hiding in a cave which was discovered. Joshua put large rocks and guards at the entrance to keep the kings inside. Joshua did kill them and hang them on trees until sundown. Joshua said to his men “Do not ever be afraid or discouraged. Be strong and courageous for the Lord is going to do this to all of your enemies.”

The cave became the final resting place for the five kings. Then the opening was covered with a large pile of stones, which remains “to this very day.”

That same day Joshua took other southern cities – read it!

Joshua 11 and 12

Joshua also defeated Northern Kings, until finally thirty-one kings and their cities were destroyed.

Joshua 13:1-7

Joshua grew old and the Lord said to him “You are growing old, and much land remains to be conquered.” God said He Himself would drive the people out for the Israelites! So Joshua was to go ahead and assign the land to Israel and include all this territory.

PSALMS 6-7, 9-10, 12-13

Psalms 6 David’s songs sometimes reflect the “cycle of redemption.” He confesses his sin and honestly discusses with God how he is feeling. Is God interested? Most definitely. At the end of this psalm, David states that the Lord has heard his crying and HE WILL ANSWER DAVID’S PRAYER. We need to be absolutely sure about this: God does hear our prayers! We know He will answer because of His unfailing love.

V. 5 refers to the silence and inactivity of death. Another doctrinal text to journal and use when non-Christian relatives visit. – If God inspires a conversation about spiritual things.

Psalm 7 V. 8 says “The Lord passes judgment on the nations. Declare me righteous, O Lord, for I am innocent, O Most High! End the wickedness of the ungodly, but help all those who obey You. For You look deep within the mind and heart, O righteous God.”

V. 10 says that God is angry with the wicked EVERY DAY!

V. 17 says “I will thank the Lord because He is just; I will sing praise...”

Psalm 9 V. 10 says “Those who know Your name trust in You, for You, O Lord, have NEVER abandoned anyone who SEARCHES for You.” That is exactly what we are doing in this group. We are searching to know God better and I pray that God who searches all hearts will assist us in this search and make us strong workers in His Kingdom! Amen.

V. 2 is typical of David. He gets so filled with joy because of God that He sings praises to God’s name! Wouldn’t it be great if in church the entire congregation would be gilled with joy when they sing together???? Pray about that, too. We want the blessings we receive as a result of what we experience here to bring our church family closer together, as well.

Psalm 10 David has righteous indignation when the poor are oppressed. He has a heart for the helpless and begs God to break arms or grind teeth. God said David was a man after His own heart! God must feel the same way and wants to end the suffering in the world. But there’s a New Testament text that says that the “man of sin” has to be fully revealed before the end can come. V. 17 entreats the Lord to listen to the cries of the helpless and comfort them.

Psalm 12 This psalm seems to capture the insincerity in our society. Lying is second nature to many and they say “Our lips are our own-who can stop us?” The Lord replies, “I have seen violence done to the helpless, and I have heard the groans of the poor. Now I will rise up to rescue them, as they have longed for Me to do.” Take note: THE LORD’S PROMISES ARE PURE, LIKE SILVER REFINED IN A FURNACE, PURIFIED SEVEN TIMES OVER.

Psalm 13 David is sad much of the time it seems. But it does him good to talk to God about his feelings. V. 3 says “Turn and answer me, O Lord my God! Restore the light to my eyes, or I will die!” And V. 5: “But I trust in Your unfailing love...! Ah yes! David’s faith in God’s unfailing love is the secret of His relationship with God.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 16

Joshua 13:8-19; Psalms 35, 47, 83, 116 and 124

JOSHUA 13:8 - 19

The land gets divided among the 12 tribes. The tribes of Reuben, Gad and the ½ tribe of Manasseh requested Moses to confirm their assignment early, promising to fight any battles at the front of the conflict, but they also asked that they be given time to build shelter for their families and their cattle before fulfilling their commitment to serve along with their relatives. The Levites were given no land at all, only towns to live in and pasturelands. The distribution was in strict accordance with the Lord's instructions to Moses.

Caleb who, along with Joshua, was one of the 12 spies sent to spy out the land of Canaan, requested His part of the land. Moses had promised him "The land of Canaan on which you were just walking will be your special possession because you wholeheartedly followed the Lord my God."

AND THE LAND HAD REST FROM WAR! Hallelujah!!

Caleb's choice of a home was the city of Arba (or, Hebron), within Judah's inheritance. Caleb drove out the three families of giants still residing on his land! Read about Caleb's daughter. Interesting!

In Chapter 17 you will see Zelophehad's 5 daughters again. Read all about it!

The tribe of Ephraim relinquished some land for Joshua's retirement home in the hill country. He could choose any town he wanted, the Lord said, so he chose Timnath-serah in Ephraim's hill country.

PSALMS 35, 47, 83, 116, 124

David has many enemies and at times he seems to get quite discouraged. But when he does, he goes to God and shares all his woes. God said David was a man after His own heart. You will remember that Paul says "Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you!" In this group of Psalms my favorite is Ps.116. See if you agree.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 16 Joshua 13:8 – 19; Psalms 35, 47, 83, 116, 124

WELCOME

During the few minutes your group is gathering, ask them to “rate” their joy as they prepared for this week’s study. Did their hearts feel warm toward God and a happiness in their hearts? On a scale of 1-10 with 1 being the least, evaluate the sense of well-being that you experienced this week as you studied.

OPENING PRAYER (--on time)

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

With this week’s assignment we are nearing the end of an era. Joshua will soon retire (chapter 13), and Caleb, as well. They are like the last survivors of WWI!!! Also, Joshua had rubbed shoulders with the greatest prophet EVER to walk the face of the earth. He had walked up Sinai with Moses to meet God! He had enjoyed a banquet half-way up the mountain where God was standing on a “pavement of brilliant sapphire, as clear as the heavens! And though Israel’s leaders saw God, He did not destroy them. In fact, they shared a meal together in God’s presence.” Did that event “escape” you? For some reason it is easy to do! It’s in Exodus 24:1-13. The 13th verse says “So Moses and his assistant Joshua climbed up the mountain of God.” At one point, Moses went on up the mountain closer to God. Joshua must have waited up there on Sinai for those 40 days and 40 nights that Moses spent with God! He was a great leader for Israel, and now he was getting older, and had chosen a place to retire when that time came.

What an exciting time for Israel! They received manna for the last time, and began eating “real food” from the crops of the land for the first time in 40 years! They fought battles with God beside them. Except for the time when they forgot to ask Him to help them. –At Ai!

Another time they forgot to ask God’s guidance, was when those Gibeonites fooled them - big-time! How did that situation turn out???

They gathered on Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerazim just as they had with Moses, and Joshua read the entire Mosaic law to them, including their wives and little ones!! ☺

Five kings joined together to attack Gibeon because they heard about the pact entered into between the Gibeonites and the Israelites. Joshua traveled all night to surprise the enemy armies. Israel fought effectively, and when the enemy started to run, God unleashed a terrible hailstorm which killed more of them than the sword had killed! But that’s not all! Joshua asked God to stop the spinning of the universe so that there would be more daylight hours for killing the enemy. See vs. 13-15 in chapter 10 of the book of Joshua. Cosmic action for the atheists and skeptics to ponder, for sure!

After many battles, there were thirty-one kings dead and their cities were destroyed...but there was much land remaining to be conquered!

PSALMS 35, 47, 83, 116, 124

Ps. 35 David's enemies are everywhere it seems. They are attacking him, trying to kill him. Some of them David has prayed for in their times of grief, he has even fasted and prayed for them!

David asks for deliverance, but God doesn't seem to be answering. At last David asks for a special blessing on those who have stood with him in his defense. And calls for continual praise to God.

Ps. 47 – In this Psalm David sees God as the King over all the earth with the rulers of the world gathered together, joining in the praises. A beautiful Psalm of joyful praise to God for the Promised Land as their inheritance, the proud possession of Jacob's descendants, whom God loves.

Ps. 83 – David fervently longed for others to learn to love God. See v. 16: “Utterly disgrace them until they submit to your name, O Lord!!” All need to learn that God alone is the Most High, supreme over all the earth.” David's heart for the Kingdom of God was like that of Jesus'.

Ps. 116 A very special text is v. 15 “The Lord's loved ones are precious to Him; it grieves Him when they die!” Ah yes! When we grieve, Heaven grieves also. How did David know so much about what God is like, unless God told him!!! See vs. 5-9.

Ps. 124 David freely gives glory to God for the military victories Israel enjoyed!!! Ending with “Our help is from the Lord, Who made the heavens and the earth.”

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 17 Joshua 20-24; Psalms 18, 50, 53, 94, 111-112

JOSHUA 20-24

Would cities of refuge, or a similar arrangement be a good idea for our society today? Read Joshua 20.

The Levite leaders requested a meeting with Eleazer (Aaron's son), Joshua and representatives from the other tribes. The main item on the agenda was to call to their attention that “The Lord instructed Moses to give us towns to live in and pasturelands for our cattle.” By the command of the Lord the Levites were given as their inheritance certain towns with adjoining pasturelands. Picture the dimensions of the Levites' accommodations – it's impressive.

Josh. 22 tells the story of a nearly disastrous civil war in Israel. What were the issues? The eastern two and a half tribes did an admirable job of keeping their promise to fight with Israel until all the assigned land was conquered.

Josh. 23 and 24 follow Joshua as he prepares to die, and does everything in his power to keep Israel “in the Lord.” In 24:16 the people respond “We would never forsake the Lord and worship other gods...” See v. 31 of chapter 24.

PSALMS 18, 50, 53, 94, 111-112

Psalm 18 was a song David sang to the Lord the day the Lord rescued him from Saul and all his enemies! Vs. 2 and 30-35 remind me of Ephesians 6 where Paul describes the “garb of salvation.” V. 35 says “You have given me the shield of your salvation.”

Psalm 50 This is awesome: Vs. 4-6 reveal a judgment of the faithful which is witnessed by “heaven and earth!” “Let the heavens declare His justice, for God Himself will be the Judge.” Vs. 13, 14 and 23 tell us how God feels about those who are thankful to Him. What do you think of that? Are you thankful for Scripture and for the experience of growing closer to the calm trust and joy that Jesus reveals in His Word?

Psalm 53 V. 2 could be the weekly memory verse for this group! Are you seeking for God in this group??? Praise God – He DOES respond to those who are seeking Him!!!

Psalm 94 A thought to remember: The Lord knows people’s thoughts (V. 11). In vs. 17-19 David’s experiences with God’s “unfailing love” strengthen him – and as we absorb these Psalms of David, they can strengthen us as well.

Psalm 111 could be “our” text every single week! God is so good to those of us who truly seek Him. V. 10: “Reverence for the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom. The rewards of wisdom come to all who obey Him.”

Psalm 112 More glorious words for those who “fear” the Lord. Claim the promises that are ours for the claiming!!! Rest in the Lord, my friends.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 17 Joshua 20-24; Psalms 18, 50, 53, 94, 111-112

WELCOME

What's the best thing that happened to you during this week? Share during the minutes before "start" time.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

JOSHUA 20-24

Would cities of refuge, or a similar arrangement, be a good idea for our society today? With our legal system being so corrupt and slow moving, it might save a lot of time and money for an innocent person to just flee to a safe place. There were protective mechanisms in cities of refuge. What did a refugee have to do to remain there? How long could he stay?

The Levite leaders requested a meeting with Eleazer (Aaron's son), Joshua and representatives from the other tribes. The main item on the agenda was to call to their attention that "The Lord instructed Moses to give us towns to live in and pasturelands for our cattle." By the command of the Lord the Levites were given as their inheritance certain towns with adjoining pasturelands. Picture the dimensions of the Levites' accommodations – it's impressive. They were assigned 48 cities. Joshua 21:45 says: "All of the good promises that the Lord had given Israel came true!" Hallelujah!

Josh. 22 tells the story of a nearly disastrous civil war in Israel. What were the issues? The eastern 2 ½ tribes: Reuben, Gad and Manasseh did an admirable job of keeping their promise to fight with Israel until all the assigned land was conquered. (See Numbers 32.) Joshua gives them an excellent commendation for their faithful service in vs. 1-6. As Joshua sent them back home he blesses them and calls "Share with your relatives back home the great wealth you have taken from your enemies: cattle, silver and gold, bronze and iron, and your clothing!!" They were rewarded for the time they were away from their families. God provides.

As they crossed the Jordan going home, it dawned on them that a river is a natural border and later generations might think the eastern tribes weren't really a part of Israel. So they built a replica of the designated altar (see vs. 28, 29), not for the purpose of offering sacrifices on it, but only to prove their connectedness with the people of God. That was a close call!! Remember how Phinehas was quick to administer punishment when the Midianite women seduced the men of God? A nervous finger on a trigger could have ignited a civil war so easily!

Josh. 23 and 24 follow Joshua as he prepares to die, and does everything in his power to keep Israel “in the Lord.” ... In 24:16 the people respond “We would never forsake the Lord and worship other gods...” See v. 31 of chapter 24.

The bones of Joseph were buried at Shechem (v. 32, **Josh. 24**) in a parcel of ground purchased by Jacob for family burials. Joseph’s relatives took care of his bones for over **500 years!** ...and faithfully buried them where he requested. Just amazing to me that they weren’t lost or mistaken for someone else’s bones... Those bones had accompanied Israel on all their wilderness travels and survived the battles fought to clear Canaan land. God is surely in charge of affairs of earth! I would love to be around Shechem when Jesus comes and see Abraham’s offspring emerge from their tombs.

PSALMS 18, 50, 53, 94, 111-112

Psalm 18 was a song David sang to the Lord the day the Lord rescued him from Saul and all his enemies! Vs. 2 and 30-35 remind me of Ephesians 6 where Paul describes the “garb of salvation.” V. 35 says “You have given me the shield of your salvation.”

Psalm 50 This is awesome: Vs. 4-6 reveal a judgment of the faithful which is witnessed by heaven and earth! The NASB reads: “He summons the heavens above, and the earth to judge His people: ‘Gather My godly ones to Me, Those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice.’ And the heavens declare His righteousness, FOR GOD HIMSELF IS THE JUDGE.” God involves the universe in His judgment of the righteous and welcomes them to proclaim His justice! And that’s OK with me, because God is the Judge Who loves us!!!

Vs. 13, 14 and 23 tell us how God feels about those who are thankful to Him. What do you think of that? Remember that when we give our offerings at church (including “thank offerings” which simply flow from a thankful heart), it is the closest parallel we have in our worship to Israel’s sacrifices. Next time you are particularly thankful to God, give extra in the offering and mark it “Thank Offering.” If there is a ministry in our local church that you’d like that offering to go to, write that in the memo line of your check and on the envelope. Otherwise, all thank offerings go to the conference office.

Psalm 53 V. 2 could be the weekly memory verse for this group! Are you seeking for God in this group??? Praise God – He DOES respond to those who are seeking Him!!!

Psalm 94 A thought to remember: The Lord knows people’s thoughts (v. 11). In vs. 17-19 David’s experiences with God’s “unfailing love” strengthen him – and as we absorb these Psalms of David, they can strengthen us as well.

Psalm 111 could be “our” text every single week! God is so good to those of us who truly seek Him. V. 10: “Reverence for the Lord is the foundation of true wisdom. The rewards of wisdom come to all who obey Him.”

Psalm 112 Claim ALL the promises! They belong to all God’s people!

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 18

Judges, Ruth, Psalms 106, 113, 115

JUDGES

It is helpful when reading Scripture, to have some idea of the historical flow of time. The 400 years of slavery in Egypt, began a series of 400 year time periods. The period of Judges lasted right at 400 years. Then the period of Kings lasted another 400 years. Then there was a 70 year exile to Babylon which left a little more than 400 years until Christ was born.

As you read through Judges, enjoy the stories of God's mighty interventions! Chapter 3, v. 9 says "But when Israel cried out to the Lord for help, the Lord raised up a man (or woman) to rescue them." Then in vs. 30 it says "So Moab was conquered by Israel that day, and THE LAND WAS AT PEACE FOR 80 YEARS." Generally there was peace when the people were thankful for God's help and they were obedient for a time, until they forgot to seek God and got into trouble again. Then they would call on the Lord and He would hear them and raise up the next "judge" who also led the nation into battle against their enemies. And so on.....

RUTH

This wonderful story of love, tragedy, commitment, and romance happened during the time of the Judges. Boaz was a man who cared about the poor, and who wanted to do right by his relatives. Ruth loved her mother-in-law, Naomi, more than the people and land where she was born, and she was determined to stay with her. We can learn interesting things about the culture of the day in this book. We learn in the "begats" lists that Ruth and Boaz were King David's grandparents. David had some good DNA!

PSALMS

PSALM 106 This Psalm briefly relates the history of the Israelites. V. 32 gives insight into why God had no choice but to punish Moses by not letting him go into Canaan. In vs. 34-39 David plainly relates the sins of the Hebrews which made the Lord angry.

PSALM 113 A delightful Psalm of praise. David sees God "enthroned" on high, and sees Him "stoop" to look for people He can help! Enjoy – purely delightful!

PSALM 115 Wonderful things about God in this Psalm. Don't miss them. Our picture of this God we worship needs to emerge in our hearts and minds – and that happens when we capture His essence in Scripture!!! I'll be praying that your acquaintance with the Almighty will flourish!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 18 Judges; Ruth; Psalms 106, 113, 115

WELCOME

Question of the day: (as they enter) On a scale of 1-10, are you a happy Christian today? This is important. If we are not happy in Jesus, what chance do our young people have of understanding the principle that “living in Jesus” IS true happiness.

OPENING PRAYER – begin on time, even though some are not there. These minutes are dedicated to the exercise of learning to know God better. If some arrive late, greet them. Discussion needs to continue without missing a beat. Much time can be lost if attention is given to lateness, excuses, etc. Ignore the lateness! We WANT them to be there!

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

JUDGES

The book begins with a summary of the successes and failures of Israel to drive out their enemies. Those who gave up for various reasons, ended up with constant “thorns in their sides.” (Judg. 2:3) They had NOT destroyed the heathen altars, either, and God said He would no longer drive the people out for them. They were giving their sons and daughters into heathen marriages. Israel wept.

Judg. 2:6 Israel served the Lord during Joshua’s lifetime and the leaders who outlived him. It seemed however that with the death of a faithful generation, God was forgotten in the new one! Every time rebellious Israel went out to battle, God fought against them (v. 15) just as He had promised!

V. 18 shows a “Godly trait” which we have observed before – if He calls someone to do a work for Him, He protects and supports that person. Praise His holy Name! When God’s “chosen ones” got into oppression being enslaved to neighboring nations, and they “cried to God,” He always heard them and raised up just the right person for that situation!

Judg. 3:1 We are told several times in close succession that God left certain nations in the land to test those Israelites who had not participated in the wars of Canaan. He did this to “teach warfare” to those who had no experience in battle!

Of course, this reminds me of Ephesians 6:10-17. Clearly, following Jesus still requires understanding that we need to be spiritually dressed and ready for battle with the powers of darkness – we need the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit and the shield of faith, and more – and victory does not come without a militant, vibrant, confident strength in Jesus. Are you experienced in battle???

Judg. 4 Israel was ruthlessly oppressed for 20 years under Sisera. When Israel cried out for help to God that time, He raised up a woman to save them. She was a prophetess who had become a judge, and she held court under a palm tree between Ramah and Bethel, and the Israelites came to her to settle disputes. She received messages from the Lord and she acted on them! Jael, a faithful woman in Israel, dared to dispose of the wicked General Sisera. King Jabin was finally subdued and Israel became stronger until they finally destroyed him.

Deborah wrote a song (Judg. 5) about the battle against King Jabin. She sings: “Most blessed is Jael!” And ends with the powerful words “Lord, may all your enemies die as Sisera did! But may those who love you rise like the sun at full strength!”

She must have been a very good judge for “there was peace in the land for forty years.”

Then we have Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair, and Jephthah – a great warrior, and also a great negotiator. The letter he wrote to the king of Ammon was a masterpiece! And THEN the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah and he led an army against the Ammonites. He made a vow to the Lord that he would sacrifice the first thing coming out of his house when he returned in triumph. Imagine his grief when his daughter, his only child, was the first “thing” coming to greet him! She seemed to immediately understand that a vow made to God MUST be kept. She took two months in the hills with her friends and wept because she would die a virgin and never have children. This young woman will have great honor in Heaven, I believe.

The tribe of Ephraim were angry that Jephthah had not called them for help to fight the Ammonites. There was war between Jephthah and the Ephraimites and 42,000 of them died! When the Ephraimites tried to get across the shallow part of the Jordan River to return home, they were asked to pronounce the name “Shibboleth.” If he was from Ephraim he would say “Sibboleth” and Jephthah’s men would kill them at once for they clearly lied about their identity. (Judges 12:5-6)

Jephthah was Israel’s judge for six years. He was buried in one of the towns in Gilead.

Ibzan from Bethlehem was the next judge, then Elon, Abdon, then Samson ruled for 20 years while the Philistines ruled the land.

Judg. 19-21 contain a very sad story – cruel wickedness invaded the tribe of Benjamin! And civil war resulted, with 400,000 warriors from 11 tribes, armed with swords to fight the tribe from which came such despicable behavior. Homosexuality was not permitted in Israel. I wonder how many of them had aids or a plague of some kind, for most of the Benjamite men, women, and cattle, were killed. But then there was pity for the tribe because there were no women left for the 600 men, the final remnant of the tribe of Benjamin! How this need was taken care of is something you must read for yourself!!! ☺

RUTH

Naomi and Elimelech with their two sons Mahlon and Kilion were Ephrathites from Bethlehem who fled to Moab to escape a severe famine. After ten years in Moab, Naomi was a widow and her sons had died, making their Moabite wives widows, so she decided to return to Israel. Thus begins a narrative as compelling as any story ever told – other than Jesus’ story, of course.

Some scholars suggest that this book should not have been included in the Canon (the collection of books accepted as Scripture), but the Holy Spirit guided in the selection, I am sure. Think of it! Ruth and Boaz’s great-grandson was King David! We have information regarding David’s growing up years and know that his father’s name was Jesse, his grandfather’s name was Obed. But without this book, we would not know that his great-grand-mother was not a Jew!

David’s story did not end with his death. Scripture mentions his name so many times. It seems that as the centuries passed his deeds multiplied! (Rev. 14:13!) If, for example, King Hezekiah produced a Passover feast well, he would say it was done as King David ordered. Also, Jerusalem is referred to as “the City of David” and that is where we will live forever! God frequently compared a leader’s performance with that of David.

The blood which flowed in David’s veins symbolizes his leadership for all peoples and all times – not just the Jews – just as God’s blessings are for all peoples – not just the Jews. It also shows God’s acceptance of ALL people – on their individual merits.

PSALMS

Psalm 106 -- This Psalm is a magnificent summary of Jewish history from the time they left Egypt. Read it carefully and see if David in his inspiration from the Holy Spirit has shed any additional light on God’s dealings with Israel, Moses in particular.

Psalm 113 -- What a wonderful glimpse of God who is enthroned on high. “Far below Him are the heavens and the earth. He stoops to look and He lifts the poor from the dirt and the needy from the garbage dump. ...” Wonderful God! Praise the Lord, indeed!

Psalm 115 -- Vs. 9-11 refer to God as our shield! Trust Him!!!!

V. 16 “The heavens belong to the Lord, but He has given the earth to all humanity!!! See the above notes on the book of Ruth.

V. 17 Tuck this one away in the awesome verses regarding death contained in Scripture. Let us sing His praises while we can!!!

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 19 I Samuel 1-7; Psalms 14-17; Proverbs 16-20; I Chronicles 1-9

I SAMUEL 1-7

Elkanah was a kind man with two wives: Hannah, who was childless but loved the most, and Peninnah, who had children. Peninnah made life miserable for Hannah taunting because of her barrenness. When Hannah would be reduced to tears, Elkanah would ask "...You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?" So Hannah made a deal with God – "If You give me a child, I will give him to You for his entire life!" And she did – as soon as Samuel was weaned. And every year she made him a garment to fit his new growth and took it to him!

Watch and learn! Biblically, God was very involved in who had children and who didn't. I no longer believe my husband and I just "happened" to have four children rather quickly after we were married. We asked God to guide and naïve as it might sound I believe our family developed exactly as God willed. So again I have to say, "Thank You, dear Lord."

I Sam. 5, 6 and 7 outline the travels of the Ark. Don't miss it! It ends up in the town of Kiriath-jearim in the hillside home of Abinadab, who ordained Eleazer, his son, to be in charge of it. The ark remained with Abinadab for 20 years. Israel mourned all that time because it seemed the Lord had abandoned them.

Remember the phrase in the hymn "The God of Abraham Praise" which says "Here I raise my Ebenezer"? Read I Sam. 7:12 and review it. Samuel was a circuit judge holding court in Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah. He always returned to his home at Ramah – and he would hear cases there, as well.

PSALMS

PSALMS 14-17 Twice in these few psalms David talks about the Lord "looking down" from heaven, looking to see if there are those with real understanding, one who seeks for God. In Ps. 16:9-11 the verbiage indicates Jesus is speaking! And in the 17th Psalm there is a relationship between David and the Lord that is so peaceful and trusting.

Look for David's understandings regarding death.

PROVERBS

PROV. 16-20 Such wisdom we find for living this life. See Prov. 16:24. Had you considered that kind words are healthy for the body?!!! Prov. 19:16 Keep the commandments and keep your life; despising them leads to death. Prov. 20: 25 It is dangerous to make a rash promise to God before counting the cost. Reference Ps. 15:4 and Eccl. 5:4-6.

I CHRONICLES 1-9

The genealogies contained in these chapters take us all the way to “the exile.” I can promise you this genealogy is not boring, because you are quite knowledgeable regarding the lives of many individuals named here! Also, there are nuggets of information sprinkled here and there in the long lists – so don’t skip any!!! We are about to launch into the period of the kings, and our readings will combine the prophets who served each king along with the story of that king. It is quite a ride – so hang on. Some assignments will look very long, but they are easy reading. At the end of the 400 years of kings, comes the 70-year exile to Babylon. From here on most of the Old Testament was generated as warnings from God regarding that exile. God sent so many messages that it’s inconceivable that they went unheeded – not only that, in many cases the prophets were killed because of the messages they gave.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS (Just a reminder that personal prayer requests, or progress reports are all CONFIDENTIAL! This group is a “safe zone.” What is said in here, please, is NEVER repeated outside this room!) Also remember that in the downloads on the TILE website are Prayer Journaling pages – a “title” page and a second sheet. Feel free to print out any downloadables there. It is all free of charge. By the time you read this, my Small Group Leader TILE Handbook should be available “in the cloud” ...for free. It is arranged so that you could just print up the notes for any week you wish. But I would suggest printing out the section in the front of the book titled “MEMBER ORIENTATION.” It might be helpful to have your members get a copy of that 3-hole punched and keep it in their notebooks with the other TILE items as a reference. Review is sometimes very helpful!

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 19 I Samuel 1-7; Psalms 14-17; Proverbs 16-20; I Chronicles 1-9

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

I SAMUEL 1-7

Each year Elkanah and his family made the trip to Shiloh where the Tabernacle and the Ark were located. (See Judg. 20:27 which states that the Ark of the Covenant of God was in Bethel and Phinehas, son of Eleazar and grandson of Aaron was the priest. It is interesting to track where the Ark was located before finding its final home in Jerusalem. It gives a sense of the ebb and flow of the nation as they traveled by hundreds of miles to observe special days of worship at least 3 times a year. Where the Ark was, there also was the altar for the feast days.)

In I Sam. 2, Hannah says a prayer of praise much like Elizabeth and Mary did in the New Testament. It is beautiful. One might think she said this prayer immediately upon learning that she was pregnant with a little boy. Not so! In the prayer she states that the “barren woman” (that would be herself) NOW has seven children. So it was long enough for her to have produced a large family before she composed her “Magnificat.” But her gratitude to God for the gift of Samuel was still fresh in her mind and it spilled out in this grand prayer of thanksgiving.

Eli’s sons were very wicked. Eli was getting very old and very fat. So God started talking to Samuel (I Sam. 3) and shared His plans with him.

In I Sam 4 the Israelites foolishly take the Ark to war with them! The Philistines captured it and kept it, and among the 30,000 men who died that day were Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli.. But it wasn’t long before the Philistines decided they really didn’t want the Ark in their possession!!!

When Eli got the news that his sons had died, he didn’t seem surprised. But when he heard that the Ark had been taken captive, he fell backwards off his seat, his heavy body broke his neck and he died. He had led Israel 40 years. When his daughter-in-law heard about the Ark, her labor suddenly began. Read what she named her son and get some idea of how the Israelites regarded the Ark of God.

PSALMS 14-17

Psalm 14: 2 The Lord looks down from heaven... How sad for God who “emptied heaven for us” to see that there is no one who really understands God. But with the revelations found in David’s psalms we get pieces of the huge puzzle and the Picture will become clearer from now ‘til the end of eternity! ☺ V.5 “...for God is with those who obey Him.” V.6 “...but the Lord will protect His people.”

Psalm 15 lists the characteristics of those who may enter God’s presence on His holy hill:

1. Those who lead blameless lives, do right, and speak truth from sincere hearts.
2. Those who refuse to slander others or harm their neighbors or speak evil of friends.
3. Those who despise persistent sinners, honor the faithful and keep promises even when it hurts!
4. Those who do not charge interest on the money they lend and refuse to accept bribes to testify against the innocent.

Such people will stand firm forever!

Psalm 16 David declares that because he is loyal to God, God guards all that is his. The Lord guides him (v. 7) ; even at night he receives instruction and he knows the Lord is ALWAYS with me. I will not be shaken for He is right beside me. (v. 8) *Right at this juncture the identity of the Speaker becomes Jesus, Who praises His Father and says His body rests safely (v. 9). “For You will not leave My soul among the dead or allow Your Godly One to rot in the grave. You will show Me the way of life, granting Me the joy of Your presence and the pleasures of living with You forever.” (NLT)

The KJV is a little plainer - vs. 10, 11: “For Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell; neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew Me the path of life; in Thy presence is fullness of joy; AT THY RIGHT HAND there are pleasures for evermore.”

In Acts 13:35-37 the point is made that David’s body DID see corruption, so these words were Christ’s experience, not David’s.

Psalm 17:6 A verse to quote as PART OF OUR PRAYER: “I am praying to You because I know You will answer, O God. BEND DOWN AND LISTEN AS I PRAY.”

V.15 David’s faith is so strong. He knows what comes after death :“But because I have done what is right, I will see You. When I awake, I will be fully satisfied, for I will see You FACE TO FACE.”

And I suppose we could preach an entire sermon on God “Guarding us as the apple of His eye!” I think God appreciated David’s eloquence. Yes, let’s incorporate David’s words of praise into our prayers in our day! I believe God would honor it.

PROVERBS 16-20

Look for proverbs that reveal God's personality to us!

Proverbs 17:5 It is possible to insult God – by mocking the poor.

V.15 The Lord despises those who acquit the guilty and condemn the innocent.

V.27 A truly wise person uses few words. (See Jesus at His trials!)

Proverbs 18:10 The Name of the Lord is a strong fortress; the godly are safe with Him.

V.22 The man who finds a good wife is favored by the Lord ☺ Proverbs

19:14 Parents can provide their son with an inheritance; but only the Lord can give an understanding wife.

V.17 If you help the poor, you are lending to the Lord! He will repay You.

Proverbs 20:10 The Lord despises double standards of every kind! (Agreed!)

V. 22 Don't say, "I will get even for this wrong." Wait for the Lord to handle the matter.

V. 24 How can we understand the road we travel? It is the Lord who directs us.

V. 25 It is dangerous to make a rash promise to God before counting the cost. See Eccl. 5:4-6 and Psalm 15:4

V. 27 The Lord's searchlight penetrates the human spirit, exposing every hidden motive.

I CHRONICLES 1-9

Following these names is like reading a history book, if you know anything at all about the characters. I Chron. 1:19 says that Eber had two sons, one of which was named "Peleg" which means "division" for during his lifetime the world was divided into different language groups! Very interesting!

I Chron 2 – Remember Judah's story, about Tamar, his widowed daughter-in-law. There is just enough information here to tickle the memory of just why this would be important to include in a genealogy! In v. 7 Achan is named as one who brought disaster on his nation!! V. 13 David's family – all his siblings are listed here. Notice his sister Zeruiah who had 3 sons, Abishai, Joab and Asahel. She must have been a strong personality because all three boys ended up members of David's mighty men!

I Chron. 4:9, 10 There was a man named Jabez.... I remember finding this gem nestled in the "begats" about 12 years ago. I had never heard of Jabez before and treasured this pearl revealed to my eyes alone! But it was only a few months before the book "The Prayer of Jabez" came out. And then these 2 verses morphed into whole books and articles. It is something to meditate on and consider God's response to Jabez's prayer.

I Chron. 4: 21-23 When the story of Judah and Tamar is told in Genesis, there is not much said about Shelah, Judah's youngest son who according to Jewish law should have married Tamar. Well, here in the genealogy we find out that apparently his descendants did well, as either linen workers or potters, who worked directly under the king!

I Chron. 5:18-22 From the half-tribe of Manasseh, 44,760 skilled warriors, well equipped, waged war against four kings. "They cried out to God DURING THE BATTLE, and HE ANSWERED THEIR PRAYER *because they trusted in Him!!!!!!*" Awesome! The plunder was large along with 100,000 captives. Many of the Hagrite enemies were killed in the battle *because God was fighting against them.*

Sadly that half-tribe of Manasseh with their great reputation as warriors and leaders, were unfaithful and violated their covenant with the God of their ancestors. They were exiled by King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria along with the tribes of Reuben and Gad. So very sad!

I Chron. 7:20-24 Each of Jacob's sons and their descendants have been listed beginning in Chapter 2 of I Chronicles. We are almost done, and are now looking at Ephraim's descendants. There is an anecdote that could almost be humorous were it not for the sadness of it all. Two of Ephraim's sons were killed while trying to steal livestock from the local farmers near Gath (Philistine country). His relatives came to comfort him and soon after he slept with his wife and she provided another son. In v. 24 we're told that Ephraim had a daughter named Sheerah. She built the towns of Lower and Upper Beth-horn and Uzzensheerah. Cool!

I Chron. 8:8 "After Shaharaim (descendant of Benjamin) divorced his wives Hushim and Baara," he had seven sons by his new wife, Hodesh. In v. 11, we're told that the divorce wasn't because Hushim was barren – for she had already given birth to two sons.

I Chron. 9:33, 34 This passage has been a delight to me, for it demonstrates the value of music in the worship of the church – or Temple. Musicians were to live in the Temple and be exempt from any other responsibilities since they were on duty at all hours during weeks they were scheduled on duty for services.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 20

I Samuel 8-31; Psalms 26, 27, 30, 44

I SAMUEL 8-31

Little Samuel was growing old and appointed his sons to be judges over Israel. They were not good and just men and the Israelites went to Samuel and requested that he find a king for them who could lead them into battle.

"Samuel went to the Lord for advice, very upset with their request. God said "Do as they say, for it is Me they are rejecting, not you. They don't want Me to be their king

any longer. But warn them about how a king will treat them.” Samuel had not been any wiser as a father than Eli had been. Even so, God answered him gently, sparing his feelings.

Saul was chosen by God to be Israel’s first King. He was a handsome young man, obedient and mild in nature and greatly loved by the Prophet Samuel. Follow the story carefully from the standpoint of how much God invested in the timing of bringing certain people to certain places at just the right time for the story to develop. How sad that Saul’s pride and jealousy drove him crazy! And he behaved badly. But watch the God of love working through Samuel to try to help Israel and their new king.

PSALMS 26, 27, 30, 44

Psalm 26 David says he comes to the sanctuary singing a song of thanksgiving and telling of God’s miracles. When we worship God through music with thankful hearts, then the humblest of church structures becomes a “gate of heaven.” See “Music, the Highest Form of Praise.” Go to www.thisislifetime.org Click on “Journal (blog) page, then click on “February, 2008.”

Psalm 27 This psalm is the inspiration for a song entitled “The Lord is My Light.” It is a very strong song. And I say again, “following God is not for the faint-hearted!” Promises are wonderful in this psalm: vs. 5, 10. I use to have a hard time personally relating to psalms that talk about enemies pressing in, just waiting for me to fall, etc. But the truth is: tenacious followers (fallen angels!) of Satan tempt and taunt believers incessantly. V.10 says “Even if my father and mother abandon me, THE LORD WILL HOLD ME CLOSE.” Thank You, Jesus!

Psalm 30 vs. 4 “Sing to the Lord all you godly ones! Praise His holy name. His anger lasts for a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may go on all night, but joy comes with the morning!”

Vs. 11, 12 “You have turned my mourning into joyful dancing. You have taken away my clothes of mourning and clothed me with joy, that I might sing praises to You and NOT BE SILENT! O Lord my God, I will give You thanks forever!”

Psalm 44 This is a psalm written by the descendants of Korah. Remember the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram against Moses and Aaron? Well, God did not wipe out all of Korah’s children. There must have been faithful ones in spite of Korah’s behavior.

These children of Korah’s are interested in the history of their nation. Vs. 7 and 8 are eloquent. It is interesting how they have developed faith in God in spite of the fate of their ancestors. God is so good.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 20

I Samuel 8-31; Psalms 26, 27, 30 and 44

WELCOME

Question for the day! Watch for your relationship to grow with God and for warm happiness to fill you as you study the Bible. Do you sense growth yet?

OPENING PRAYER Thank the Lord in advance for sending the Holy Spirit to guide our discussion.

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

I Samuel 8-31

Saul was the son of Kish, a rich and influential man from the tribe of Benjamin. One day Kish's donkeys strayed away, so he told Saul to take a servant along and go look for the donkeys. They searched all over the land until they ran out of supplies, and then the servant remembered that a seer lived in this region and perhaps he could tell them where the donkeys were.

They (Saul and his servant) entered the town, and as they passed through the gates, Samuel was coming out toward them to climb the hill. God had told Samuel the day before that he was sending someone from the land of Benjamin about this time of day. They met without wasting time – God had it all arranged.

The Lord had also told Samuel the previous day that he was going to have company for dinner (sacrifice). So he was prepared to give special honor to Saul, the seat of honor, and the best cut of meat. Samuel told him that the meat had been prepared especially for him even before the other guests had been invited! God's networking is thoughtful - He gave Samuel time to adequately prepare a nice occasion to honor the one who was to be anointed for a special position that very day. Samuel was a hospitable person, just as Abraham was. He provided a bed for Saul on the roof of his house (chapter 9:25), and called Saul early in the morning to get ready to leave. Saul was anointed that day and Samuel told him exactly what to expect, very detailed signs to watch for. He was changed into a different person and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he began to prophesy! In chapter 10:26 we're told that God even provided spiritual friends to be with Saul constantly!

I Sam. 15 One day Samuel said to Saul "I anointed you king of Israel because the LORD TOLD ME TO. NOW listen to this message from the Lord! ..." God gave Samuel directions to give Saul regarding attacking the nation of Amalek, the nation that had opposed Israel when they arrived from Egypt. They were to be completely destroyed, every person, and all the animals. So what did Saul do? He captured the king and spared some of the cattle-for sacrificing to the Lord, he said. In v. 10 God said to Samuel "I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has

again refused to obey me.” Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the Lord ALL NIGHT!

The next 12 verses are a conversation between Saul and Samuel, ending with the famous words regarding God’s appreciation of obedience. V. 22 says “What is more pleasing to the Lord; your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to His voice? OBEDIENCE IS FAR BETTER THAN SACRIFICE. Listening to Him is much better than offering the fat of rams...” Let us LISTEN to Him – clearly this is a part of our relationship with Him that is very important!

In I Sam. 16 when Samuel went to Jesse’s house to find the son that God wished to be anointed, we find another golden verse (v. 7b) of scripture: “...The Lord doesn’t make decisions the way you do! People judge by outward appearance, but the Lord looks at a person’s thoughts and intentions!”

The rest of I Samuel follows the darkening of Saul’s personality, his plotting to kill David and eventually trying to kill his own son. In I Sam. 28 he breaks his own law and goes to see a medium who called Samuel up from the grave to give Saul advice regarding going to war. Did Saul actually see Samuel? Be sure the group understands the story.

Invite the group to share impressions of our loving God as revealed to them from reading I Samuel. Have your own ready to share if their perceptions are slow in forming and hopefully that will open their minds.

PSALMS 26, 27, 30, 44

In Ps. 26 David says he comes to the sanctuary singing a song of thanksgiving and telling of God’s miracles. When we worship God through music with thankful hearts, then the humblest of church structures becomes a “gate of heaven.” See “Music, the Highest Form of Praise” on <http://www.thisislifeeternal.org> Click on home page side bar “Journaling (blog)” on the left side, then click on “February, 2008.”

Ps. 27 This psalm is the inspiration for a song entitled “The Lord is My Light.” It is a very strong song. And I say again, “following God is not for the faint-hearted!” Promises are wonderful in this psalm: vs. 5, 10. I use to have a hard time personally relating to psalms that talk about enemies pressing in, just waiting for me to fall etc. But more and more I understand the conflict between Satan’s angels, and God and His angels. When we are tempted to do wrong, our heaven-appointed guardian angel brings verses and thoughts to our minds to keep us on the right track. Tenacious followers of Satan tempt and taunt believers. V. 10 says “Even if my father and mother abandon me, THE LORD WILL HOLD ME CLOSE.” Thank You, Jesus!

Ps. 30, vs. 4 “Sing to the Lord all you godly ones! Praise His holy name. His anger lasts for a moment, but His favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may go on all night, but joy comes with the morning!”

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Ps. 44 This is a psalm written by the descendants of Korah. Remember the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram against Moses and Aaron? Well, God did not wipe out all of Korah’s children. There must have been faithful ones in spite of Korah’s behavior.

These authors from Korah’s family are obviously interested in the history of their nation. Vs. 7 and 8 are eloquent. It is interesting how they have developed faith in God in spite of the fate of their ancestor. God is so good.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 21

II Samuel 1-10; I Chronicles 10-17; Psalms 42,43,45,46

II Samuel 1-10 begins with a confession of an Amalekite who claimed he had finished Saul off after he was wounded, and Jonathan was dead, also. After mourning and fasting all day for Saul and Jonathan, and for the nation of Israel especially the many who died with Saul, David turned his attention back to his messenger and sentenced him to death, for he himself confessed that he had killed the Lord’s anointed one. A lesson for us: David showed a very consistent respect for “God’s anointed one.” We may not always “like” or agree with the pastor in our church, but it is an anointed office, one called by God. So let us be like David and respect the persons the Lord has called. If we want a close relationship to God – like David, it would be well to examine our actions and words regarding those who shepherd the flock!

In his grief over the loss of Jonathan and Saul, David was inspired to write a song. In II Sam. 1:26 he describes the love of Jonathan for him as being deeper than the love of women! The deep love found in friendship is unselfish, pure and unconditional – can we say it is a God-like love? In spite of the hatred Saul had shown toward David, he speaks of the superlative qualities in Saul! Want to be a person “after God’s own heart?” That’s how we should forgive those who sin against us – freely and with no reservations – like David.

Meantime, Abner son of Ner, cousin of King Saul, proclaimed Saul’s son, Ishbosheth king over Gilead, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, the land of the Ashurites, and all the rest of Israel. He ruled from Mahanaim for two years. Joab, chief of David’s army, is also the son of David’s sister, and from time to time he says some tough things to David. He killed Abner because Abner had killed Joab’s brother. He also killed Absalom, David’s son, because he was seeking to become king in his father’s place and disturbing the whole nation. David was upset at Joab – but Joab said “It appears to me that you love those who hate you, and reject those who love you! You’re not being logical. Now you go out and thank the soldiers who have worked so hard for you and

saved this nation today.” And David did what Joab said. Any other king would have taken Joab’s head off!

As you read these chapters from 2 Samuel and I Chronicles, watch for the qualities in David’s character that might account for God saying that David was a man after His own heart!

PSALMS 42, 43, 45, 46

Ps. 42 Our Psalms for Week 21 are all composed by the descendants of Korah. They were inspired – perhaps by the works of David – and perhaps naturally gifted. In the first Psalm which begins with words that, even in reading, sing to me. This writer is processing some sorrow and discouragement, but says in v. 8 that the Lord pours “His unfailing love upon me, and through each night I sing His songs, praying to God Who gives me life.”

Ps. 43 This writer is being treated unfairly. But in v. 3 he says: “Send out Your light and Your truth; let Them guide me.... I will praise You with my harp, O God, my God!” Truly God’s truth does guide us – we need to search for and cling to any nuggets of truth that we learn from week to week!

Ps. 45 Instrumentalists and vocalists are informed that this psalm is: “to be sung to the tune, ‘Lilies.’ A love song.”

Ps. 46 This psalm was sung by soprano voices! This is a very “strong” song. V. 2 says “So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. ...” Then toward the end another side of God’s personality shines through in v. 10: “Be silent and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.” Our future is certain when we love God!!!

PRAYER REQUEST AND PRAISE REPORTS!

CLOSING PRAYER (on time)

WEEK 21 II Samuel 1-10; I Chronicles 10-17; Psalms 42, 43, 45, 46

WELCOME

Is Bible study changing your life yet? Have you found any pieces to the puzzle which will become God's portrait in your heart? Keep looking in the Word and praying for wisdom to discern the changes God would have us personally make!!!

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

II SAMUEL 1-10

II Samuel 1 begins with a confession of an Amalekite who claimed he had finished Saul off after he was wounded, and Jonathan was dead, also. After mourning and fasting all day for Saul and Jonathan, and for the nation of Israel especially the many who died with Saul, David turned his attention back to his messenger and sentenced him to death. Why do you think David sentenced him to death??

I Chron. 10:13, 14 says that it was the LORD who killed Saul and gave the kingdom to David! It is so clear, that God is in charge and makes sure things happen on earth in a timely way! He is never late, He never forgets, we can trust that when it is time for this earth to end, we will be prepared and the world will be ready.

Sometimes there are more details to a story in Chronicles than the same story in the book of Samuel. For example, in Chronicles we learned that Jonathan had two more brothers fighting in the same battle, and they, too, were killed.

In his grief over the loss of Jonathan and Saul, David was inspired to write a song in which he describes the love he had for Jonathan as being deeper than the love of women! The deep love found in friendship is unselfish, pure and unconditional – could we say it is a God-like love?

It was at Ziklag, one of David's "hide outs" while running from Saul, where David got the news regarding Saul and Jonathan. David asked the Lord "Should I move back to Judah?" And God told him to go to Hebron where he ruled Judah for seven and a half years. David's wives were Ahinoam, and Abigail (Nabal's widow from Carmel).

Meantime, Abner son of Ner, cousin of King Saul, proclaimed Saul's son, Ishbosheth king over Gilead, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, the land of the Ashurites, and all the rest of Israel. He ruled from Mahanaim for two years.

As you read these chapters from 2 Samuel and I Chronicles, did you identify the qualities in David's character that might account for God saying that David was a man

after His own heart! Can you see any similarity to yourself at all? If so, your journey upward may be assured!

I'd like to hear your pearls of truth that you found in this reading today!!!

PSALMS 42, 43, 45, 46

Ps. 42 Our Psalms for Week 21 are all composed by the descendants of Korah. They were inspired – perhaps by the works of David – besides being naturally gifted. This first Psalm begins with words that, even in reading, sing to me. This writer is processing some sorrow and discouragement, but says in vs. 8 that the Lord pours “His unfailing love on me...which gives me songs in the night.”

Ps. 43 This writer is being treated unfairly. But in v. 3 he says: “Send out Your light and Your truth; let Them guide me.... I will praise You with my harp, O God, my God!” Truly God’s truth does guide us – we need to search for and cling to any nuggets of truth that we learn from week to week! Notice that the last verse is the same as Ps. 42! Ps. 42 and 43 must have been written by the same person.

Ps. 45 Instrumentalists and vocalists are informed that this psalm is “to be sung to the tune, ‘Lilies.’ A love song.”

Ps. 46 This psalm was sung by soprano voices! This is a very “strong” song. V. 2 says “So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. ...” Then toward the end another side of God’s personality shines through in v. 10: “Be silent and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world.” Our future is certain when we love God!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 22

II Samuel 11- 24; Psalms 51, 52; I Chronicles 18-27

II Samuel 11-24

While David was not perfect, yet he was a man after God’s own heart! Saul’s story is full of persistent jealousy and murderous hatred which drove him insane, and from which he never seemed to emerge in a healthy way. David, on the other hand, had genuine sorrow for his transgressions. God plainly said that David “murdered Uriah and stole his wife.” Then God said “From this time on, the sword will be a constant threat to your family, because you have despised ME by taking Uriah’s wife to be your own.” David immediately confessed to Nathan the prophet, “I have sinned against the Lord.” And Nathan says “Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you and you won’t die for this sin! But because your actions gave God’s enemies opportunity to despise and blaspheme Him, Bathsheba’s child will die.” David’s whole life following his adultery – and murder – was difficult. He bore consequences of that sin, BUT God never mentioned it again! In fact both David and God said things that sounded like he had never left God’s ways!!!!

THIS IS AN AWESOME GOD – UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND FORGIVENESS like we can find nowhere else. And Saul missed it completely. He could have had the same treatment, but his jealousy and pride were his downfall. (Read “*My Clean White Slate – Thank You, God!*” Go to www.thisislifeeternal.org and click on “Journal (Blog)” then click on February 2009)

In chapter 13 we see Absalom’s beautiful sister named Tamar. Amnon, her half-brother, plotted and lied in order to get Tamar in his quarters. Absalom was angry that his sister had been raped and he laid plans to kill Amnon in revenge. You’ve got to read the whole thing. David missed Absalom terribly – and Joab (David’s nephew) sensed that the King was lonesome for Absalom and hired a woman to come tell the king a story that would prick his conscience, and it worked! Absalom got to return to Jerusalem, but David said Absalom had to remain in his own house and not expect to see his father. So after two more years of this Absalom burned Joab’s field. When Joab confronted him about it, Absalom said he wanted Joab to ask the king why he brought him back if he didn’t intend to see him. So Joab went to the king and David at last summoned his estranged son, and Absalom came and bowed low before the king and David kissed him. Ah, but don’t let “nice” fool you. Amazing what Absalom did next. You will need to read it all for yourself. Part of the consequences of David’s sin was having a dysfunctional family! David’s own behavior diminished his authority in his own household! What a pity!

PSALMS 51, 52

Psalm 51 Nathan the prophet came to David he had committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband, Uriah! This is a familiar Psalm. As you read it, try to hear David’s voice. How does a truly penitent man sound? David’s confessions and repentances were indeed sincere.

Psalm 52 Is written by David and deals with the terrible thing Doeg did against David and the poor priests. Doeg killed 80+ priests single-handedly. Don’t you ever wonder how so many people just stood there and waited for the sword to reach them! Ah! The last verse, once again describes the condition of the believer whose whole existence is wrapped up in God’s “unfailing love!” That is a happy person.

I CHRONICLES 18-27

Well, Chronicles has a lot of enriching content – a lot more information about the mighty men who helped fight the wars and protect the king. More of David’s military conquests, etc. But in Chronicles 21 the information path merges once again and we are told very directly that it was Satan that provoked David to take a census that made God angry and punished a lot of Israelites. God gave David three choices of punishments, but David chose to leave it up to God. So He sent a plague on Israel which killed 70,000 people. V. 15 says that God sent an angel to destroy Jerusalem. But just as the angel was preparing to destroy it, God aborted that plan. So David bought the threshing floor and

offered sacrifices to God there. V. 26 is beautiful. The Lord sent fire from heaven to burn the offerings on the altar. Then God spoke to the angel, who put the sword back into its sheath and spared Jerusalem.

David decided to build the temple right on the threshing floor that belonged to Araunah. David paid him 600 pieces of gold in payment for it.

After that David started gathering vast amounts of building materials for the temple which Solomon was to build. In Chapter 22 David called together the foreigners living in Israel and assigned them the task of preparing blocks of stone for building the Temple of God.

Another census was taken in chapter 23 in which all Levites 30 years old or older were counted, and the total came to 38,000. Then David said “Twenty-four thousand of them will supervise the work at the Temple. Six thousand are to serve as officials and judges. Four thousand will work as gatekeepers, and another four thousand will praise the Lord with the musical instruments I have made.”

One of my favorite chapters in all of Scripture is I Chronicles 25 “Duties of the Musicians!” It’s a must-read. ☺ As all of Scripture is, as a matter of fact!! ☺

In I Chron. 27, vs. 32-34 we see government officials named. David was truly organized.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 22 II Samuel 11-24; Psalms 51, 52; I Chronicles 18-27

WELCOME

Review recent prayer requests to determine if group members have requested prayer for personal or family members' health. Ask for updates in the moments before opening prayer.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

II SAMUEL 11-24

We start off with a story that never seems to grow old! The main characters are: a handsome king with two wives, looks out his window and sees a beautiful woman taking a bath on her porch in full view of the king's window. Go figure! Anyway, she is already married, but fortunately it appears there were no children yet in that marriage. Uriah was always away at war! So what happens next in the story?

David committed adultery and murder and in chapter 12, God says so in no uncertain terms. In the same chapter, v. 13 David confesses "I have sinned against the Lord," he says to Nathan the prophet and Nathan responds that David will not die, but the child will die. Some time later David comforted Bathsheba, his wife and slept with her, she became pregnant, and gave birth to another son who God said should be named Jedidiah which means "beloved of the Lord" because God loved him.

Joab and the army, meantime, had successfully subdued Rabbah, the capital of Ammon. Joab sent word to David: "I have fought against Rabbah and captured its water supply. Now bring the rest of the army and finish the job so you will get credit for the victory instead of me." Joab was sincerely interested in the king's best image – he might have been a good publicist in today's world.

Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom, was tragically raped, and was probably never eligible to be married to anyone else. Amnon, her half-brother, was a wicked and selfish person. Two years later, Absalom's servants murdered him when all David's sons were at a dinner at Absalom's house. This whole story is tragic and full of what's wrong with this world still! Ask the group to recount their reaction to this story: the father-son relationship, Tamar's future, Absalom's ...

Thus began Absalom's exile, so ordered by King David. But the King mourned for Absalom, so Joab tried to find a way to persuade the king to end the exile. When the king did allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem, he was banned from seeing the king, living in his own house for two years. When Absalom was fed up, he sent for Joab to

request that he intercede again. But Joab kept him waiting so Absalom burned up Joab's barley field!

Joab told the king what Absalom said and at last David summoned his estranged son, and Absalom came and bowed low before the king and David kissed him! For the next four years, Absalom said and did things to win the people's hearts. Then he went to the king and asked to go to Hebron because he had vowed to God that he would sacrifice to Him in Hebron." So David let him go.

Big mistake! While in Hebron Absalom sent secret messengers to every part of Israel to stir up a rebellion against the king. "As soon as you hear the trumpets blow, you will know Absalom has been crowned king in Hebron."

Discuss the sequence of David's flight in bare feet! He walked up the road that led to the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went! The size of the entourage on that journey and the amount of food needed daily to sustain them was very large!! Where did their food come from? Interesting that the priests wanted to take the ark on their journey with the king.

Meantime who was keeping the palace??? What happened to them? Absalom symbolically established his ownership of the kingdom by having intercourse where everyone could see in a tent on the roof of the palace, with the concubines David had left in charge of the palace.

David was stoned, cursed and generally mistreated during his exile to the wilderness. But God sent generous, rich men to support David, his family and his army. Barzillai was a spunky elderly gentleman who befriended David, but wanted to die at home, so he sent his son to live near David to enjoy a special friendship with the king in place of his father.

There was a famine in the land for three years during David's reign. He asked God about it and God said Saul had wronged the Gibeonites by trying to kill them all. You may remember there was a vow made in God's name that the Gibeonites would be allowed to live and be laborers for Israel. You may also recall that Israel had to defend Gibeon from their enemies because they were servants for Israel! But Saul wanted to be RID of them and killed a lot of them. He broke a covenant that had been made in God's name, and was ruining God's reputation. So David spoke with some of the Gibeonites and asked how they could make amends. The Gibeonites said if they could have seven of Saul's descendants to be executed at Gibeon before the Lord on the mountain of the Lord (II Samuel 21:1-6) that would make amends.

So the seven of Saul's descendants died together at the beginning of the barley harvest. David went to Jabesh-gilead whose people had retrieved the bodies of Saul and Jonathan and brought their bones as well as the bones of the executed men at Gibeon and buried them all in the tomb of Kish, Saul's father at the town of Zela in the land of Benjamin. After that, the famine in the land of Israel ended.

In II Samuel 22 is a Song of Praise which David wrote after the Lord had rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul. It is AWESOME! Study especially the description of God in verses 7-17. Remember as you read that David writes from first hand information – visions and/or dreams from God. His knowledge of God is sure.

PSALMS 51, 52

Psalm 51 Ah the pain of a remorse ridden heart! David's repentance is complete and he confesses his sin. This is a process that needs to happen when we sin – don't cover it up hoping it will go away! The only solution is to admit guilt, confess it, repent and accept God's forgiveness. God is so good! When He forgives, the sins are thrown to the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19).

Psalm 52 David wrote this Psalm about tattle-tale Doeg, the Edomite who told Saul that the priest Ahimelech gave refuge to David. After describing Doeg's pathetic behavior, David declares that he is like "an olive tree, thriving in the house of God. I trust in God's unfailing love forever and ever. I will praise You forever, O God, for what You have done. ..." What a contrast! How fortunate Christians are to know God and respect His ways.

I CHRONICLES 18-27

Those Philistines were a tough bunch – hard to drive out of the country! They still had some formidable, heart-stopping giants. God helped David defeat many of them. David also conquered Moab, Edom (with Abishai son of *Zeruiah's help), Ammon, Philistia, and Amalek. The people all became his subjects and paid tribute and their gold shields or other armaments became part of David's treasury dedicated to the Lord!!!

One battle I'd like to comment on (I do hope you and your entire group are reading the entire assignments. My notes are just to "connect some dots.") In I Chron. 18 King Hadadezer is mentioned several times. In verse 3 it states that David destroyed his forces *when Hadadezer marched out to strengthen his control along the Euphrates River*. JUST A MINUTE! The town of Hamath is about 300 mi. from Jerusalem. Marching straight 200 mi. east from there (Hamath) would take Hadadezer across the northern part of the Arabian Desert to the Euphrates River which borders a more fruitful area east of the river. Have you considered the logistical challenges David must have had with his large army, so far from home?

It use to bother me that David would "cripple" the horses of his enemies. But it all had to do with subduing enemies – magnificent horses were a sign of successful rulers in those days and were a source of national pride. So to cripple them, would not kill them, but would make their gait awkward and perhaps break their enemies' fighting spirit!

In I Chron. 19 David's ambassadors were sent to establish a friendship with Hanun, the new king of the Ammonites, but they were treated shamefully. David was angry. He told his men to remain at Jericho until their beards which had been half shaved, grew back in. They were so embarrassed! Their robes were cut off at the buttocks. Military strategies were skillfully employed by David, and with God giving instruction Judah defeated Hanun plus all the allied armies he had hired to fight with him!

We dealt with the census discussed in II Sam. 21, so we'll not duplicate any more than needs explanation! It was made so clear in Chronicles that this census was the work of Satan! The consequence of the census taking was that God sent a plague. When God stopped the plague and told the avenging Angel standing with his sword drawn and stretched out toward Jerusalem, to put the sword in its sheath, David knew without a doubt that this very spot was where he would build the Temple of the Lord. (Chapter 22:1)

I want you to see the significance of David's words in 22:11 for the Temple was not built according to David's dimensions, but God's! God is in the details my friends! In v. 19 David says to Solomon "Now seek the Lord your God with all your heart. Build the sanctuary of the Lord God so that you can bring the Ark of the Lord's covenant and the holy vessels of God into the Temple built to honor the Lord's name." Whatever we say or do needs to honor our Lord – I'm preaching to myself now, we need to make that benchmark our priority, too.

So David cleared out the enemies and provided peaceful times so that Solomon could accomplish the building of the Temple of God in times of peace. In chapter 23 the number of Levites 30 years old or older came to 38,000! David said: 24,000 of them will supervise the work at the Temple; 6,000 will serve as officials and judges; 4,000 will work as gatekeepers, and another 4,000 will praise the Lord with the musical instruments I have made." Moses' sons were included with the tribe of Levi: Gershom and Eliezer (chapter 23, vs 14 and 15).

Remember when Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came to see Moses and brought his wife and sons? In the account of that visit we see Moses greeting Jethro with a kiss and sharing the problems of his work with him and finally sending him home. It didn't say Moses showed affection to his wife or his sons and from what I could find, there was nothing to indicate whether the family went home with Jethro, or stayed with Moses. So I was happy to see Moses' descendants involved in this stage of Israel's growth and development.

In v. 30 of chapter 23 is a verse that most certainly points out the benefits of morning and evening worship, for the priests were told that part of their responsibilities was to stand before the Lord each morning and evening to sing songs of thanks and praise to Him. If they needed it, I surely do! What does this tell us about God?

*The asterisk under I Chron. 18-27 above refers to the name Zeruiah. There are names in Scripture which are given to more than one person, so in order to not be

confused, the name of the father is usually mentioned right along with current person of interest. I just want you to be aware that God is not locked into male leadership. Zeruiah's three sons, Joab, Abishai, and Asahel were outstanding young men. Every time their names are mentioned, their mother is listed to confirm their identity! Whether it was because she is David's sister, or some other circumstance concerning the father of these young men, that I do not know, but I just point it out as an example that we cannot put God in a box. I'll probably say that more times. This principle is a little hard to put into words, but that describes it the best I know how. Keep an open mind as you seek to complete your picture of Jesus.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 23

I Kings 1-8; I Chronicles 28-29; Psalms 31-34, 71, 90, 102

I KINGS 1-8

As King David got older, he felt chilly much of the time, so his advisers gave him some advice: get a beautiful virgin to lie with him and keep him warm. Abishag took very good care of David, but there were no sexual relations.

Another of David's sons tried to win the favor of the people and take the kingdom for himself. Bathsheba had to intervene with the king to save the throne for Solomon. Adonijah was a pretty sneaky guy – watch how he worked!!

After Solomon dealt with all the death bed issues King David asked him to take care of, the land enjoyed a long period of peace, giving Solomon freedom to build to his heart's content.

God asks Solomon in a dream "What do you want? Ask and I will give it to you!" When Solomon gave his answer, God was pleased. Solomon woke up and realized it was a dream. He had just finished offering one thousand burnt offerings at Gibeon! No wonder he slept – and dreamed. When he got back to Jerusalem where the ark was in a tent, he offered some more offerings. Then held a great banquet.

Because David had conquered so many people, Solomon needed to have enough people strategically placed to govern the nations. Notice the food requirements that the twelve governors had to bring for the king's household needs!

King Hiram of Tyre has been in this story for quite a while. He's been a good friend to David and now assists Solomon in honor of that friendship.

Let your imagination "see" Solomon say a "Prayer of Dedication" for the Temple with his hands lifted toward heaven, and "watch" the Ark of the Lord's covenant go into its first permanent lodging.

Then, the Festival of Shelters was observed "in the presence of the Lord their God." (Everything we do is in the presence of the Lord, our God. We need to remember

that!) It took 7 days to complete all the requirements for the dedication of the Temple and the altar, then 7 more days to observe the Festival of Shelters. How interesting that the festival which was to remind them of the years they had lived in tents was scheduled back-to-back with the dedication of the magnificent temple, a very permanent place of worship!

The Record states that people came for the 14 days of celebration from the Brook of Egypt all the way north to Hamath – a distance of about 360 miles! Jerusalem was in the bottom third of that distance so some came from the south around 100 mi. and some from the north close to 260 miles. Want to take a walk???

I CHRONICLES 28, 29

In the NASB, David's words of advice to Solomon in I Kings 2:2 are: "I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man." The NLT says "I am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take courage and be a man." In I Chron. 28, it appears that David called a large crowd of people together, rose and addressed them. After making some awesome comments regarding how Solomon became king, he addressed Solomon directly: "And Solomon, my son, get to KNOW the God of your ancestors. ...If you seek Him you WILL find Him..." I do believe David knew His Lord, otherwise how could God entrust him with all the prophetic Psalms, for example. So, if you seek to KNOW your Lord, as the TILE program encourages, you are following the advice of an inspired man who was named "KING FOREVER" by God Himself.

These are awesome chapters – this is where David said "Every part of this plan was given to me *in writing* from the hand of the Lord." Vs. 20 and 21 are worth memorizing. These promises are for every faithful person!!!

Chapter 29 Add the words of this chapter to I Kings 8 and David's role in making Solomon king takes on a whole lot more energy. Enjoy!

PSALMS 31-34, 71, 90, 102

Ps. 31 In verse 6 David refers to God's "unfailing love." We just saw those words in Kings and Chronicles. He says them THREE TIMES in this Psalm!

In v.16 he talks about God's favor "shining" on him – See Numbers 6:24-26 where God is speaking, giving words for priests to say over the people! God wants us to know that He "shines" on us! Watch for that term and add that to your view of God!

V. 19 "You have stored up great blessings for those who honor You..." The rain falls on the just and the unjust, and some people say God doesn't differentiate between the faithful and unfaithful as far as His blessings go – After reading this, what do you think?

Vs. 23, 24: AWESOME! Mark it to memorize it next time through!

PSALM 32 Vs. 8 and 10 – God says “I will guide you along the best pathway for your life...Many sorrows come to the wicked, but UNFAILING LOVE surrounds those who trust the Lord. Very awesome Psalm.

PSALM 33 and 34 Beautiful songs – beautiful promises – digest them!!!

PSALM 71 A Psalm especially for our brave senior citizens. Vs. 22, 23 show that our relationship with God is naturally expressed in music!!!

PSALM 90 Another passage that makes it clear what happens to us when we die!

V. 14: “Satisfy us in the morning with Your unfailing love, so we may sing for joy to the end of our lives.”

PSALM 102 David does have human ups and downs, believe it or not! Read it carefully. David ends up saying in vs. 25-27 that “In ages past You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. EVEN THEY WILL PERISH, but You remain forever; they will wear out like old clothing. You will change them like a garment, and they will fade away. BUT YOU ARE ALWAYS THE SAME; Your years never end.” Don’t miss v. 28 either! I claim that one for my grandchildren!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 23 I Kings 1-8; I Chronicles 28-29; Psalms 31-34, 71, 90, 102

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

I KINGS 1-8

When King David's weak circulation system ceased to keep his body temperature up, his advisers told him they would find a young virgin who would wait on him and be his nurse. "She will lie in your arms and keep you warm," they said. They found Abishag who cared lovingly for David needs. But there were no sexual relations involved.

About that time David's son Adonijah whose mother was Haggith, decided he should be the next king. So he provided himself with chariots and horses and recruited 50 men to run in front of him. King David had never disciplined him at any time. Adonijah was a very handsome, spoiled young man, born after Absalom to the same mother.

Adonijah invited all his brothers (the sons of David, 18 of them since Absalom was dead) except Solomon – nor did he invite Nathan the prophet, or the King's bodyguard. When Nathan told Bathsheba what was going on, she requested an audience with King David. Read the tactful way (?) she informed David of Adonijah's actions, ending by saying "If you do not act, my son Solomon and I will be treated as criminals as soon as you are dead." Then Nathan came and verified everything she had said and updated him on who had declared allegiance to Adonijah. He ends by asking point blank, "Has my lord really done this without letting any of his servants know who should be the next king?" David gave detailed direction to Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet for the ceremony honoring Solomon's ascent to David's throne and kingdom. The priest and the prophet were to accompany Solomon to Gihon Spring. Solomon rode the king's personal mule, (a sign of royalty!), protected by the king's bodyguard. Zadok took anointing oil from the sacred tent and poured it on Solomon's head. Then the trumpets blew and the people played flutes and shouted for joy so joyously that the earth shook with the sound: "LONG LIVE KING SOLOMON!"

Adonijah and his guests were just finishing their banquet when they heard trumpets and a celebration! Jonathan, son of Abiathar the priest arrived and Adonijah welcomed him in and asked if he had good news. "No," he said. "King David has just sent Solomon to Gihon Spring riding on his personal mule. ..." He knew all the details and related them correctly.

Adonijah's guests disappeared and he, himself, was afraid of Solomon so he rushed to the sacred tent and caught hold of the horns of the altar. Word soon reached Solomon that Adonijah was pleading for Solomon to "swear that he will not kill me." Solomon replied that if he turns out to be loyal, he will not be harmed. So King Solomon summoned Adonijah and they brought him down from the altar. He bowed low before the king, and Solomon dismissed him, saying, "Go on home."

Why was Adonijah worthy of death when he went behind Solomon's back to his mother to ask her to intervene with Solomon and ask if he could take Abishag for his wife?

The chips fell pretty fast after that with all who had wronged David meeting their just punishment. At the end of chapter 2 when Shimei, the one who threw dirt and stones at King David when he was fleeing from Absalom and cursed him, disobeyed Solomon and was executed. Was that a fair judgment on the part of Solomon, do you think?

Imagine the wealth of Solomon's reign! David had left him riches beyond measure, and passive income rolled in every month! All the nations David had defeated were paying tribute to the King of Israel.

God asked Solomon what he wanted if he could have anything in the world, and he asked for wisdom so that he would be a good ruler. God was very pleased with that answer and indeed Solomon was given the moniker: "the wisest man who ever lived!"

The foundation of the Lord's Temple was laid in midspring of the fourth year of Solomon's reign. The entire building was completed in every detail by mid-autumn of the eleventh year of his reign. SO it took – how many years to build the Temple?? I hope all will feast your imagination on the beauty of the place of worship which God designed and initiated with David (I Chronicles 28:19 says: "Every part of this plan," David told Solomon, "was given to me in writing from the hand of the Lord!"), but Solomon had the privilege of building it, and stocking its treasury with all the riches his father had dedicated to the Lord's Temple.

Solomon's prayer for the dedication of the Temple is so awesome. I love to picture him in view of the entire nation with his hands lifted toward heaven before the altar of the Lord. At this time, Solomon's heart seemed genuine toward the Lord and his priorities straight. Vs. 54-61 of chapter 8 are so beautiful and powerful. What a great ruler he must have been!

I CHRONICLES 28, 29

In the NASB, David's words of advice to Solomon in I Kings 2:2 are: "I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man." The NLT says "I am going where everyone on earth must someday go. Take courage and be a man." In I Chronicles 28, it appears that David called a large crowd of people together, rose and addressed them. After making some awesome comments regarding how Solomon came to be named king, he addressed Solomon directly, "And Solomon, my son, get to KNOW the God of your ancestors. ...If you seek Him you WILL find Him..." I do believe David knew His Lord, otherwise how could God entrust him with all the prophetic Psalms, for example. So, if you seek to KNOW your Lord, as the TILE program encourages, you are following the advice of an inspired man who was named "KING FOREVER" by God Himself.

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PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 24

I Kings 9-11; Joel; II Chronicles 1-9; Psalm 28-29

I KINGS 9-11

When Solomon had finished building the Temple as well as the royal palace, he had completed everything he had planned to do.

Do you think Solomon’s relationship with Hiram would have made David proud? Hm!

Solomon’s achievements are remarkable and people from far away heard of him. The Queen of Sheba paid him a visit – enjoy chapter 10!

JOEL

God always gives warning before He punishes. The plague of locusts pictured in this book describes what will happen to Jerusalem if they don’t change their ways. God calls the people to repentance and promises restoration

Old Testament prophets write about current events in their day, but sometimes dip into the last days! See Chapter 2, vs. 28-32 and Chapter 3:14-16, 20-21. Joel shows us the very final victory. Hallelujah!

II CHRONICLES 1-9 (details to enrich the information in I Kings 1-8)

These chapters are a review of Solomon’s reign from beginning to end. There’s an explanation regarding Moses’ portable Tabernacle, where it was located and where the Ark has been put. – We learn that Solomon built up a HUGE military force. Tells the size of the workforce on the Temple

We also get a clearer picture of the good relationship between Solomon and Hiram for quite a long time. – Check out the dimensions and décor (!!!) of the Temple.

II Chron. 5:10-14 is totally awesome.

II Chron. 6:14 gives a consistent picture of our God: “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like You in all of heaven and earth. YOU KEEP YOUR PROMISES and show unfailing love to all who obey You and are eager to do Your will.”

II Chron. 7:1-10 These verses give a picture of the awesomeness of the number of the sacrifices for the dedication of the Temple. Some people say this could not possibly be true. But remember that the nation of Israel was much larger now than when Saul became king, for example, and sacrifices were used to feed people, as well as serve the Mosaic requirements for forgiveness, etc.

II Chron. 9:22 “So King Solomon became richer and wiser than any other king in all the earth. ...” So sad to think that Solomon lost his focus Here we learn (vs 30) that Solomon was buried in the city of his father, David. Then Rehoboam became the next king.

PSALMS 28 – 29

Ps. 28 Beautiful ending to this Psalm “Bless Israel, Your special possession! Lead them like a Shepherd, and carry them FOREVER in Your arms.” Comforting words!

Ps. 29 The voice of the Lord is described in this Psalm. See if you can “hear” it, “save” it, and add this trait to the portrait of the Almighty God developing in our minds as we learn to know Him!!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

Have you viewed the status of the current requests? Is there progress in illness or improvement in relationships?

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 24 I Kings 9-11; Joel; II Chronicles 1-9; Psalm 28 – 29

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

I KINGS 9-11

When Solomon finished building the Temple of the Lord, as well as the royal palace, it was the end of his current “to do” list. Then the Lord appeared to Solomon a second time as He had done before at Gibeon (see I Kings 3 – God came to Solomon in a dream). God’s blessings and promises are so rich. Don’t you want His blessings for you and those you love??? But God, being the Realist that He is, also discussed the possibility that Solomon or his descendants might abandon God and how God deals with that.

Hiram was a very good friend, helpful to David and now to Solomon. Even though Hiram did not value the towns Solomon gave as payment for all the cedar, cypress lumber and gold he furnished for the construction of the Temple, he did not sever ties with Solomon. You see him continuing to be helpful to Solomon! He is a good example of integrity in a pagan ruler through whom God blessed His chosen ones.

When the Queen of Sheba heard of Solomon’s reputation which brought honor to the name of the Lord (!), she came to visit him and test him with hard questions. She exclaimed to the king at one point “Everything I heard in my country about your achievements and wisdom is true! I didn’t believe it until I arrived...” Be sure you read the rest of the story with the details of the king’s riches.

I Kings 10:26 states that Solomon’s collection of horses were imported from Egypt and from Cilicia. That would be 300 miles to the south of Jerusalem and 400 miles north of Jerusalem, respectively! This information helps us to visualize the scope of business dealings and how they spent their time. Perhaps there were enough chariots to make journeys quicker and more efficient than walking everywhere. That is how we picture Jesus, isn’t it? Walking everywhere? Horses could be purchased for 150 pieces of silver and then many of them were then resold to the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

Aram was located northeast of Israel with Damascus as the capital, about 150 miles northeast of Jerusalem.

“Now Solomon loved many foreign women.” Besides Pharaoh’s daughter, he married women from the nations his father had conquered and from the Hittites! Perhaps it was thought that if the king had a wife from their country, the required tribute money might be lessened. But God had clearly instructed His people not to intermarry with those nations because the women would lead them to idol worship. In chapter 11:4 we learn that it was when Solomon was old his wives turned his heart away from the true God. The Lord was very angry with Solomon, for his heart had turned away from the Lord, who had appeared to him twice!!! God, ever the compassionate One, for David’s sake, doesn’t tear the kingdom away from Solomon while he’s still alive. Solomon’s son will rule only one tribe: Judah, of course (which includes Benjamin), and the rest of the nation will be given to a “servant” of Solomon’s.

The Hittite wives were acquired from an amazing distance, straight north of Jerusalem about 500 miles. That is a long way to walk, or ride a mule, or even to ride in a chariot. Come to think of it, maybe they rode camels!

Jereboam worked for Solomon rebuilding the *Millo and repairing the walls of the city of Jerusalem. When Solomon saw how industrious he was, he made Jereboam the foreman of that labor force! *(NOTE: Wikipedia threw some light on the term “Millo.” It appears to be similar to “ramparts” which were “thrown up” against city walls to climb over and take a city. So if they used earth, or dirt, to cover weak places in the walls, then stones could be laid over the dirt to act as a retainer wall, and with stones arranged on the incline with some covered nooks, it could possibly be used as “look-outs” for watchmen. It looks as though one could climb right up the Millo to the top of the wall! ☺) Modern Bible versions refer to “the Millo” as “supporting terraces.” And it’s easy to see why they might need repairing once in a while.

Have you noticed what interesting visual aids the Lord employs to get a message across? The prophet Ahijah from Shiloh was wearing a new cloak the day he met Jereboam in a field. Ahijah ripped up the cloak into 12 pieces and said “Take ten of these pieces for I am about to make you ruler over 10 of Israel’s tribes – but because of King David’s faithfulness, I will not do this until Solomon dies.

God promised blessings for Jereboam. If he would be obedient, He would always be with Jereboam and establish an enduring dynasty for him. I Kings 11:39 says I will punish the descendants of David because of Solomon’s sin – though not forever!

Solomon was buried in Jerusalem. Then his wayward son, Rehoboam became the next king.

JOEL

NOTE: The Old Testament prophets have messages to give that are immediately needed by rulers and the people. As you read them, keep your antenna up to recognize when their prophecy moves beyond their present day and into the last days – messages

that are just for us. Sometimes the message is a dual one, equally applicable to then and now. Once this principle is understood, reading the prophecies becomes much more understandable and applicable.

So – Joel writes about locusts which destroy all green things by stripping them bare. The grain, the wine and the olive oil are gone. Call the people together for a solemn meeting. Bring leaders and all the people into the Temple of the Lord your God and cry out to him there. The day of the Lord is on the way... and a time of trouble is coming.

Joel 2 continues to picture devastation sent from God in the form of pesky, devouring locusts.

In the midst of wickedness and punishment, hear God's voice pleading for repentance. He gives us a fine description to add to our portrait of Him: (2:13) ...Return to the Lord your God, for He is gracious and merciful. He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager NOT to punish you. ..."

God's restorations are complete and marvelous to behold. And then (2:28) is a last day message! In fact, Joel takes us all the way to the resolution of the sin problem in Joel 3:20 and 21: "Judah will remain forever, and Jerusalem will endure through all future generations. I will pardon my people's crimes, which I have not yet pardoned; and *I, the Lord, will make My home in Jerusalem with My people.*" Beautiful!!

II CHRONICLES 1-9 (important details to enrich the information in I Kings 1-8)

II Chron. 1 - Solomon, the son of King David, took firm control of the kingdom. He called together all Israel—the generals, captains of the army, judges, all political and clan leaders. Then they took an eight-mile walk all together up to Gibeon where the Tabernacle that Moses constructed in the wilderness was erected.

(NOTE: During Saul's reign the Tabernacle was located at Nob which was a small town located on or near the Mount of Olives. As the years passed and urban sprawl ☺ occurred, Nob must have been swallowed up by social progress. At any rate, that's where the Tabernacle stood until David moved it to Gibeon where priests offered morning and evening sacrifices. When David moved the Ark of the Covenant, which had been taken in battle by the Philistines and kept for several months, from Obededom's house to Jerusalem, he built a special tent for the Ark, but did not move Moses' Tabernacle from Gibeon to Jerusalem. So during Solomon's reign, it was still at Gibeon. And the bronze altar was also there, in front of the Tabernacle, where the sacrificial systems were observed according to the Law of Moses.)

Solomon went up to the bronze altar in the Lord's presence and sacrificed a thousand burnt offerings on it.

That night, God appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, “What do you want? Ask, and I will give it to you!” Solomon wanted to serve the people well, so he asked for wisdom and knowledge to rule the people properly, “for who is able to govern this great nation of Yours?” God was very pleased with that request.

As long as Solomon had a list of buildings to construct, his heart was thankful to the God who blessed everything he undertook, it seemed. Solomon built a huge military force with 1400 chariots and 12,000 horses!! He stationed many of them in other cities and some near him in Jerusalem. His horses were delivered from Egypt (250 mi. south) and Cilicia (over 200 mi. north). And by the same means they could be resold to the kings of the Hittites and the kings of Aram.

II Chron. 2 Solomon enrolled a workforce of 153,600, some common laborers, some stonecutters with 3600 of them to be foremen. Solomon also wrote to King Hiram at Tyre, and Hiram responded. It is a wonderful exchange of friendship and helpfulness. Solomon shares information about the Hebrew lifestyle in his letter.

II Chron. 3 Solomon began to build the Temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah (which must have been a topographical high rise within Jerusalem’s walls). You will remember it was built on the spot where David saw the Angel with a drawn sword pointing toward Jerusalem indicating that the people of Jerusalem were about to be killed. But God called to the angel and said to put up the sword, and the attack on Jerusalem was aborted! So David bought the site and decided then and there that was where he wanted to build God’s Temple.

Feast your imaginations on the carvings, jewels and gold, special wood, and beautiful colors. Take a mental visual tour as the dimensions are given of the furniture, the outer court, the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place.

II Chron. 4 The altars and water carts and necessary pots, shovels, and basins were created by Hiram-abi, the master craftsman, who had been sent by King Hiram.

II Chron. 5 In early autumn, when Solomon had finished all the work building the Temple of the Lord, he brought in the gifts dedicated by his father, King David, including all the silver and gold and all the utensils. Then he summoned the leaders of all the tribes and families of Israel to assemble in Jerusalem. They brought the Ark of the Lord’s Covenant and its special tent and all its sacred utensils, from the Gihon Spring just outside the city wall, to its new place in the Temple! The Levitical priests carried them all up to the Temple. King Solomon and the entire community of Israel, who were present to observe the Festival of Shelters, sacrificed sheep and oxen before the Ark in such numbers that no one could keep count!

II Chron. 5:10-14 is totally awesome. Please be ready, dear leader, to summarize the scene, which God responded to by sending a cloud that filled the Temple of the Lord so that the priests could not continue their work because the glorious presence of the Lord filled the Temple of God. (This scene was not presented in Kings, as I recall.)

II Chron. 6:14 In the dedication prayer, Solomon gives a consistent picture of our God: “O Lord, God of Israel, there is no God like You in all of heaven and earth. YOU KEEP YOUR PROMISES and show unfailing love to all who obey You and are eager to do Your will.”

II Chron. 7:1-10 These verses give a picture of the awesomeness of the number of the sacrifices for the dedication of the Temple. Some people say this could not possibly be true. But remember that the nation of Israel was much larger under Solomon than when Saul became king, for example, and sacrifices were used to feed people, as well as serve the Mosaic requirements for forgiveness, etc.

The people traveled from the Brook of Egypt to the south, about 120 miles and from Lebo-Hamath 140 mi. to the north.

God appeared to Solomon as he had at Gibeon, in a dream. He responded to Solomon’s dedication prayer, and spoke of good times of obedience and love, but then He warned of apostasy and the sadness that would result.

II Chron. 8:14-15 Please take notice of the language used in describing David’s organization. He is called “the man of God.” Solomon says he did not deviate in any way from David’s commands concerning the priests and Levites and the treasures. Have you equated the adulation given David with the weaknesses in his life??? Awesome God!!!

Notice v. 17 where Hiram is still collaborating with Solomon. I hope Hiram is in heaven!

II Chron. 9:22 “So King Solomon became richer and wiser than any other king in all the earth. ...” So sad to think that Solomon lost his focus Here we learn (v. 30) that Solomon was buried in the city of his father, David. Then Rehoboam became the next king.

PSALMS 28, 29

Ps. 28 Beautiful ending to this Psalm “Bless Israel, Your special possession! Lead them like a Shepherd, and carry them FOREVER in Your arms.” Comforting words!

Ps. 29 The voice of the Lord is described in this Psalm. See if you can “hear” it, “save” it, and add this trait to the portrait of the Almighty God developing in your minds as we learn to know Him!!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 25

I Kings 12-22; Amos; II Chronicles 10-22:9; Jonah; Psalms 138-134

I KINGS 12-22

Some momentous things happen in these chapters. The 12 tribes of Israel are split in two with Judah and Benjamin becoming independent from the other 10 tribes. There was a civil war between these relatives! Some 500,000 Israeli soldiers were killed by Judah (Judah and Benjamin together constitute a separate and distinct government known as JUDAH. The ten tribes were known as ISRAEL and was governed from the town of Samaria most of the time.)

There is a tapestry that forms as kings rise and fall, not in tandem. Some kings were “good” kings, buried with honor and mourned. Some kings were “evil” and were not even buried in the royal cemetery. It was said of one evil king that they didn’t build a big bonfire for him and NO ONE was sorry to see him die.

AMOS ...was a shepherd who also tended fig trees. He was not trained in the schools of the prophets. And he was plain spoken, as he revealed the visions God gave him.

In Amos 3:1, 2, God says “O people of Israel and Judah—the entire family I rescued from Egypt. From among all the families on the earth, I CHOSE YOU ALONE. That is why I must punish you for all your sins.” But, in chapters 1 and 2, God makes it clear in this book that He works with other nations as well. (See also Chapter 9:7) The descendants of Lot, Esau and Ham, Canaan’s son lived in Moab, Edom and Philistia. Ishmael’s descendants settled in Aram, Syria and Assyria and desert areas farther east.

So the Jews were the “chosen ones.” This put an “onus” on them – a responsibility to represent the One who chose them in appropriate ways! And the surrounding nations of shirt-tail relatives were watching them and seemed to be aware of times when God did amazing things, or administered punishments.

Listen to this brief picture of God from Amos 4:13 The Lord is the one who shaped the mountains (not billions of years of dripping rain), stirs up the winds (Jonah 1- it’s there, too), and reveals His every thought! He turns the light of dawn into darkness and treads the mountains under His feet. The LORD GOD ALMIGHTY is His Name!!!!

Watch for the passages that describe our mighty God and hear His plea: “Come back to the Lord AND LIVE!!!” Amos 4, 5, and 6

Pay special heed to Amos 8:5, and “Remember” how holy the Sabbath is to God!

See Amos 9:15. What time period is this verse referring to??? After the millennium??

II CHRONICLES 10-22:9

Much of these chapters mirror the I Kings chapters for this week. BUT there are additional details given here regarding some of the kings which you will not want to miss!

JONAH

I think we can call Jonah “the reluctant missionary!” He tried his best NOT to go to Nineveh because he just knew that God would not follow through on his punishments – for God always listened when the people prayed and asked Him for forgiveness. That would mean that he had just wasted his breath!

When we read from Luke 11 where Jesus refers to “the sign of Jonah” we realize that these Old Testament stories are not just given for parables or for our entertainment! There is truth and symbolic symbols to be applied in other parts of the span of this earth’s history. For the Bible is the eternal Word of God.

PSALMS 128 – 134

Most of these Psalms were written “for the ascent.” He wrote special songs for special occasions and he was so excited to be bringing the Ark back home where the Temple was to be built to honor God. I am sure creating music to equal his joy was a blessing to God and himself!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 25 I Kings 12-22; Amos; II Chronicles 10-22:9; Jonah; Psalms 128-134

If this assignment seems too long, by all means take two weeks as suggested below:

WEEK 25-1: I Kings 12-22; Amos

WEEK 25-2: II Chronicles 10-22:9; Jonah; Psalms 128-134

Later in the calendar if you wish to finish in 52 weeks, try combining Week 46 w/ 47 OR 47 w/48 would work.

WELCOME —Is there one member who would like to witness to some life changing developments in their life?? More patience, more joy in Bible study? or more ease when discussing God with anyone? Ask the person who agrees to pray for the Holy Spirit's presence.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

I KINGS 12-22

The first part of I Kings 12 reveals urgent political activity. The leaders of Israel sent for Jeroboam who had found refuge in Egypt when Solomon tried to kill him, and then the entire nation went to speak with Rehoboam. They requested him to lighten the harsh labor demands and heavy taxes. "Then we will be your loyal subjects," they said. Rehoboam requested three days to think it over, then they should come back for the answer. During those three days, Rehoboam consulted first with the older leaders who advised moderation and declared their loyalty if that was his decision, and then with the younger leaders who suggested he tell the people in cruel words that he would be even more cruel and demanding.

Three days later Jeroboam and all the people returned to hear Rehoboam's decision, just as the king had requested. When he rejected the pleas for a better life style, and proclaimed his intentions to use even worse punishments, Ahijah the prophet's prophecy was fulfilled and the ten northern tribes seceded, and went home to make Jeroboam their king. They refused to be ruled by a descendant of David "to this day." (Interpret that?) Only the tribe of Judah (which included Benjamin) remained loyal to the family of David.

Rehoboam mustered an army of 180,000 select troops to fight against the ten tribes to restore the kingdom to himself. But God sent a message which was obeyed, "Do

not fight against your relatives, the Israelites. Go back home, for what has happened is my doing!”

Jeroboam was afraid that if the Israelites returned to Jerusalem for the annual festivals, they would defect, so he made two golden calves! Amazing! And placed them at the northern and southern end of Israel’s territory (Dan and Bethel). He arbitrarily set festivals for his people to observe. Then he built shrines and ordained priests who were not of the priestly tribe of Levi.

I KINGS 13

We see God moving people to work out His plan. A prophet of Judah went to Bethel and challenged Jeroboam. Jeroboam became angry at what he was saying and thrust his arm forward saying “Seize that man!” But instantly the king’s hand became paralyzed in that position and at the same time the prophet’s message came true. Then Jeroboam begged the prophet to pray for healing – and the king’s hand became normal again.

When Jeroboam invited the prophet to come to his palace, the man of God refused telling him of God’s order. But an old prophet who lived in Bethel and whose sons had witnessed the incident with Jeroboam, came home to tell their father. He saddled his donkey, went looking for God’s messenger and found him under an oak tree, and claimed that God told him to invite the prophet home to eat and drink. What message is God sending us today with this story? *Stick with God’s Word. Don’t socialize with false teachers?*

I KINGS 14

Jeroboam’s son Abijah became very ill. He knew where to get help and asked his wife to disguise herself so no one would recognize her as the queen. Then go to the prophet Ahijah at Shiloh. Of course, Ahijah knew who she was immediately, even though he was old by now and could not see, and he called out “Come in, wife of Jeroboam! Why are you pretending to be someone else!” Then he gave her the bad news that their beloved child was ill because of Jeroboam’s idols. “I will bring disaster on your dynasty and kill all your sons, slave or free...Go on home, and when you enter the city, the child will die. Israel will mourn for him and bury him. It is the only member of your family who will have a proper burial, for this child is the ONLY GOOD THING that the Lord, the God of Israel, sees in the entire family of Jeroboam.

God was angry about the Asherah poles of worship, and the idols because when a nation turns from God, it opens the door for powers of darkness to work and cause so much misery and evil.

Rehoboam reigned 17 years, during which God brought King Shishak of Egypt to attack Jerusalem, ransack the Temple of the Lord and the royal palace, stealing everything. When a leader is evil, it pollutes entire nations and I believe God still moves

to punish by wars waged just at the right time. Rehoboam is buried among his ancestors in the City of David. His son, Abijam, became the next king.

I KINGS 15

Abijam ruled only 3 years and was evil, but for David's sake, the Lord allowed his dynasty to continue. For David had done what was pleasing in the Lord's sight and had obeyed the Lord's commands throughout his life—except in the affair concerning Uriah the Hittite.

Please take note that this negative comment regarding David's behavior was not a quote from God. Once David repented and confessed his sins, our awesome God has consistently referred to David as a man who "never" left God's laws. This was an observation made by the author of this book. Scholars do not know for sure who wrote it, but I believe it was Ezra the scribe who lived during the time of the 70-year exile to Babylon. You will notice that "historians" were appointed by each king – at least that's what David did and the rest were suppose to follow suit! Therefore there must have been records of each king's reign perhaps in a library setting. So when Ezra came to build the city back up after Nebuchadnezzar's pillages, it would have been a logical time to want to officially re-establish Israel's proper position in the world! (Read my blog "My Clean, White Slate! Thank You, God!" at <http://langsport.wordpress.com/page/2/> Click ctrl and the link, then click on August, 2009 at the right side of the page.)

Asa began to rule in Jerusalem in the twentieth year of Jeroboam's reign in Israel. He reigned in Jerusalem forty-one years, and did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, banishing the shrine prostitutes and removing idols. He even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother because she was an idol worshiper. There was constant war between Judah and King Baasha of Israel until Asa sent a gift of gold and silver to Ben-hadad in return for attacking Israel which forced Baasha to go home and leave Judah and Benjamin alone!

After Jeroboam, his son Nadab ruled, but he was evil and reigned only two years. Baasha plotted to assassinate Nadab in the middle of his war with the Philistines, and then he killed all remaining family members of Jeroboam just as Ahijah, the prophet from Shiloh had prophesied. Jeroboam really roused God's anger by the sins he had committed and the sins he led Israel to commit. Baasha reigned in Tirzah twenty-four years, beginning in the third year of King Asa's reign in Judah.

Israel seemed to have several kings in quick succession following Baasha's rule: Elah, Zimri, Omri, and then King Ahab who reigned in Samaria twenty-two years. He did more to arouse God's anger than any of the other kings of Israel before him!

Elijah's epic story (I Kings 17-19) is another "story board" showing God's loving care for our needs. Elijah had the privilege of raising a boy from the dead! He helped a widow woman survive hard economic times. And he faced up to Ahab like no one else

would. Carefully review this story and share how God's personality is revealed! Elijah said some pretty humorous things to the Jezebel's false prophets – do you think God smiles at some of these things. He hates evil but He knows laughter gives strength to our bones. ☺ Elijah's meeting with God on the mountain after he ran from Jezebel is so awesome! We need to always "listen" to what God whispers to us as we read the Word.

I Kings 20 is almost encouraging about Ahab. There is some good stuff in here. Ben-hadad attacked with the help of 32 allied kings! When Israel won the battle, Ben-hadad's officers said to him, "The Israelite gods are gods of the hills' that is why they won. But we can beat them easily on the plains..." Israel prevailed again and Ahab let Ben-hadad go free against God's orders. He couldn't help himself, he simply was not willing to obey! But – I'm just about to join Jonah – how can God show mercy to such a man as Ahab? Elijah enters the scene again and Ahab says "So, my enemy has found me!!!" God gives Elijah a terrible message for Ahab and Ahab tore his clothing, dressed in sackcloth and fasted. And God says to Elijah: "Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before me? Because he has done this, I will not do what I promised during his lifetime. It will happen to his sons; I will destroy all his descendants."

In Chapter 22, two buddies get together: Ahab and King Jehoshaphat of Judah. This is a must-read! Look at vs. 49. Jehoshaphat was a wise man, I'm thinking. Ahab's son Ahaziah was the next king, very evil, and ruled in Samaria for two years.

AMOS

God announces his judgments on several surrounding nations whose people are descendants of Lot (Moab), Esau (Edom), etc. and especially singles out the Philistines (descendants of Ham, Canaan's son) for final destruction. And to make things worse, both Judah and Israel have sinned again and again (God speaking) "and I will not forget it or let them go unpunished. They have been led astray by the same lies that deceived their ancestors! So I will send fire down on Judah and Israel."

Quoting from Amos 3:1 "Listen to this message that the Lord has spoken against you, O people of Israel and Judah—the entire family I rescued from Egypt. From among all the families on earth, I chose you alone. That is why I must punish you for all your sins." God wants his prophets to proclaim this warning throughout Israel and Judah.

This book is a warning to all the unfaithful nations in the region, that they need to change their ways or suffer the consequences. God pleads with them to turn and live!! Verses 12 and 13 in Amos 4 are a nice description of our God.

Amos 5:14 says "Do what is good and RUN from evil – that you may LIVE!"

Amos 6 describes the lives of the rich and the famous. God is not impressed. Vs 8 says (God speaking) "I will give this city to their enemies."

Amos 7 recounts three visions of locusts, fire and a plumb line. Amos begs the Lord not to destroy His people so the Lord says he won't do the locusts or the fire, but the plumb line he would use and bring the dynasty of King Jeroboam to a sudden end.

Amos has been sent by God to give His messages to Israel. In Amos 4 he refers to the women of Samaria as "fat cows" who are lazy drunkards, apparently. In Amos 7 King Jeroboam says "Get out of here you seer! Go on back to Judah and do your preaching there! Don't bother us here in Bethel with your prophecies, especially not here where the royal sanctuary is! (As if there was something sacred about his sanctuary!) So Amos replied: "I'm not one of your professional prophets. I certainly never trained to be one. I'm just a shepherd, and I take care of fig trees. But the Lord called me away from my flock and told me, 'Go and prophesy to My people in Israel.' "

Amos 8: Among the things God detests about Jeroboam's people (vs. 4) is that they can't wait for the Sabbath day to be over and the religious festivals to end so they can get back to cheating... In verse 11 Amos warns of a time when there will be a famine of the Word of the Lord in the land! People look for it, but they "will not find it." At that time there will be no hope for idol worshippers. (Remember the 400 years before Jesus' birth when there were no more prophets sent to Israel? God finally left the chosen people alone. Those who were committed did not lose their faith, but weak ones could not find God.)

Amos 9:7 reveals that God is the God Who directs all nations. In vs. 5 and 6 is a lovely picture of God. And the message of warning ends with a scene of restoration if they will only heed the Lord.

II CHRONICLES 10-22:9

This passage has the same subject material as we read in Kings. BUT there are many more details especially regarding Rehoboam's reign and Jehoshaphat's reign. Rehoboam did reign faithfully, seeking guidance from the Lord for a few years in the beginning. But in the closing bio on his life it says he was an evil king for he did not seek the Lord with all his heart.

The Levite priests living throughout Israel left their appointed homes and moved back to Judah where they could serve the Lord. This strengthened the kingdom of Judah and for three years they supported Rehoboam, son of Solomon, and honestly sought to obey the Lord as they had done during the reigns of David and Solomon. (II Chron. 11:13-17)

II Chron 13 Abijah, Rehoboam's son, became king in the 18th year of Jeroboam's reign in Israel. War broke out between Abijah's 400,000 warriors and Jeroboam's 800,000 courageous men. When the armies assembled in the hill country of Ephraim, Abijah stood on Mt. Memaraim and shouted to Jeroboam and the Israelite army, a magnificent address. See verses 4-12 – Judah maintained worship practices based on David's program including morning and evening worship. While Abijah was speaking

Jeroboam was moving part of his army around behind the men of Judah to ambush them and Judah was being attacked both front and back! They cried out to the Lord for help, the priests blew the trumpets and the men began to shout their battle cry. At that sound, God defeated Jeroboam. Ahijah and his army killed 500,000! And broke the strength of Jeroboam's reign and it was never regained.

Listen to what Abijah accomplished! His reign only lasted 3 years, but he married fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. Impressive. He was buried in the City of David and then his son, Asa, became the next king. And this was a time of peace and building. See the 14th chapter and verses 9-13.

Chapter 15 A great promise is in vs. 2 second part: ...”The Lord will stay with you as long as you stay with Him! Whenever you seek Him, YOU WILL FIND HIM. ...” Our prayers to reach the goal of this study WILL be answered by God. We want to KNOW Him. And Asa was a great king for the first 35 years of his reign. But in the 36th year he seemed to forget to ask for God's guidance, putting his trust in human kings.

Chapter 16:8 God reminds Asa of the victory He gave when over a million Ethiopians attacked Judah. “What a fool you have been (vs. 9 last part)! From now on, you will be at war.” Asa threw the prophet in prison who came to give him that message! And he began to oppress some of his people. So sad.

In the 39th year of Asa's reign, he developed a serious foot disease but did not seek the Lord's help, but sought help only from his physicians. He died in the 41st year of his reign. I'm so hoping that his actions toward the end of a very successful reign were the result of Alzheimer's or something.

Jehoshaphat, Asa's son became the next king. Vs. 3 of chapter 17 says the Lord was with Jehoshaphat because he followed the example of his father's early years. He knocked down places of idol worship. Verses 7 – 9 are totally awesome! This king sent out his government officials, including Levites to teach the Book of the Law to the people. So “the fear of the Lord fell over all the surrounding kingdoms so that none of them declared war on Jehoshaphat. But he was prepared with almost a million troops stationed in Jerusalem to serve the king, besides those Jehoshaphat stationed in the fortified cities throughout Judah.

King Jehoshaphat actually went to war with King Ahab against Ramoth-gilead. And Ahab was killed.

You must read chapter 20 in it's entirety. It is an awesome picture of a king who humbly seeks the Lord in prayer and immediately the Holy Spirit came upon a man standing there, a Levite who was a descendant of Asaph. He gave the king a message from the Lord. This is the battle where the king requested that the singers lead the army into battle! when the surrounding nations heard how the Lord fought for Judah that day, the fear of God came over them and there was peace, for Jehoshaphat's God had given him rest on every side. Ah!!! This is very good!

Toward the end of his life (Alzheimer's again?), he made a deal with wicked King Ahaziah of Israel to build ships at Ezion-geber a town on the border of the Gulf of Aqaba which feeds into the Red Sea. A prophet told Jehoshaphat that God would destroy that work because He was not happy with that alliance.

Chapter 21 The next king was Jehoshaphat's oldest son Jehoram and he was as wicked as Ahab. When his kingdom was established, he killed all his brothers and some of the leaders of Israel. He reigned eight years. The lord struck him with a severe intestinal disease which caused his bowels "to come out" and he died in agony. He did not receive the same honoring ceremonies of his predecessors. "No one was sorry when he died! He was buried in the City of David, but not in the royal cemetery.

Chapter 22 Finally, in this reading, we end with King Ahaziah, son of Jehoram who reigned for one year. His mother was the daughter of King Ahab and she advised the king. After the death of his father, members of Ahab's family BECAME HIS ADVISORS and they led him to ruin! Following their advice Ahaziah made an alliance with King Joram the son of King Ahab of Israel (so the two kings were cousins!) and they fought the Arameans together. Joram was wounded in the battle and he returned to Jezreel to recover. King Ahaziah went to Jezreel to visit him.

God commissioned Jehu to execute judgment against the family of Ahab, and while doing so, he happened to meet some of Judah's officials and Ahaziah's relatives who were attending the king. So Jehu killed them all! Ahaziah was given a decent burial because of his relationship to Jehoshaphat.

JONAH

Ninevah was the capital of Assyria whose citizens were living wickedly. It was nearly 300 miles from Jerusalem!!! The Lord asked Jonah to go to Nineveh and warn the people to return to the Lord, or they and their city would be destroyed. But Jonah knew that if the people listened to the message, humbled themselves and changed their ways, the Lord would withdraw the warning of destruction and give them another chance to follow God, so he didn't want to go. But God "flung" or "hurled" a great wind into the sea so that the ship's crew became frightened. God brought about circumstances in which Jonah finally submitted to the will of God. Awesome story!

In Jonah 4:1-4 it tells why Jonah tried to run away. He found it very disturbing to give a warning message of doom, then for the people to fast and wear sackcloth, pray to God, and then have God just rescind the message of doom and grant the people forgiveness.

Jonah had a very hard time with that. Maybe it was because of pride--or anger that his words, *which came from the Lord*, were not confirmed by the Lord. But as the Lord said in chapter 4:11 "Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their

right and left hand, as well as many animals?” (Note: In this story it is stated that walking around the circumference of Nineveh took three days! That’s a fair sized city.)

Assyria was quite a long way from Israel. Syria’s capital city, Damascus was just north of Canaan and Assyria was farther north and east of Syria, with Nineveh being their capital, located on the bank of the Tigris River. ☺

Jonah’s story reveals some wonderful things about God. He’s in control of our lives whether we’re in our beds, or under the ocean inside a whale! And He knows what lessons we need to learn to polish our characters. “Thank You, Lord! Please bring into my life situations that will prepare me for heaven, even if they are unpleasant or humiliating. I want to be chiseled and polished until I am ready to live with You forever.”

These stories of Old Testament heroes are not just for our entertainment - no, they reveal the future. Jesus said in Luke 11:29, 30 the only sign He will give this evil generation is THE SIGN OF THE PROPHET JONAH!!! “What happened to Jonah was a sign to the people of Nineveh that God had sent Him. What happens to Me will be a sign that God has sent Me, the Son of Man, to these people.”

PSALMS 128-134

All seven of these Psalms are quite short in length. Most say “for the ascent to Jerusalem.” Must be songs David composed for moving the Ark to Jerusalem. Ps. 132, v. 11 says The Lord swore to David a promise He will never take back; “I will place one of your descendants on your throne. If your descendants obey the terms of my covenant and follow the decrees that I teach them, THEN YOUR ROYAL LINE WILL NEVER end.” You must read on. It is so beautiful. Again God is taking us past the millennium and into the forever permanent part of our inheritance when God’s headquarters will be on this earth!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 26 II Kings 1-20; Hosea; Obadiah; II chronicles 22:10-32; Isaiah 1

II KINGS 1-20

As we begin II Kings, Elijah is still a prominent spiritual leader in the land. When King Ahaziah, Ahab’s son, fell from the second story of his palace in Samaria, he was severely injured. He sent messengers to the temple of Baalzebub, “the god of Ekron” to ask whether he would recover. But the angel of the Lord told Elijah to confront the messengers and ask “is there no God in Israel?”

In II Kings 17 King Shalmanezar of Assyria invaded King Hoshea of Samaria carrying away many of the people to foreign lands and repopulating the land with Assyrian people! (This was the point in time when the ten tribes part of Israel ceased to

exist and never were revived.) God used this as a time to teach the Assyrians more about Him. The new residents were attacked by lions. The king of Assyria was told that the “god of the land” didn’t approve of their life-style, so he sent one of the exiled priests back home to educate them in God’s ways. Read about it in 2 Kings 17!

Once Assyria had conquered Israel, they decided to do the same to Judah. The stories of King Hezekiah and King Sennacherib’s relationship and their epic battles are amazing. In fact these are events that are found in three places in Scripture: II Kings 18, 19; II Chronicles 32; and Isaiah 36 and 37! In II Kings 18:5 it says that Hezekiah trusted in the Lord. There was never another king like him in the land of Judah, either before or after his time. And there’s much more of a superlative praise regarding Hezekiah!

HOSEA

The story of Hosea and his prostitute wife, Gomer, demonstrates the fickle nature of Israel. Hosea named his children names that reflected Israel’s relationship to God from a time of separation to finally being once again united.

I realize that “cultural” changes occur as years pass and cite the appearance of jewelry in fundamental Christian churches. But I wonder how God reacts to it. See Hosea 2:13 “I will punish her (Israel) for all the times she deserted me, when she burned incense to her images of Baal, put on her earrings and jewels, and went out looking for her lovers.” We could add Ex. 33:4-6, and other texts .

Because Hosea had an unfaithful wife, he could empathize with God’s pain of rejection. In Hosea 5:4 God says “Your deeds won’t let you return to your God. You are a prostitute through and through, and you cannot know the Lord.” He is talking to both Israel and Judah. “As soon as trouble comes, they will search for Me.”

Hos. 6:3 and 6 are two texts to connect with John 17:3, which is TILE’s signature text, as we journey through the Scriptures. “Oh, that we might KNOW the Lord! Let us press on to KNOW Him! Then He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring.” ... “I want you to be merciful; I don’t want your sacrifices. I want you to KNOW God; that’s more important than burnt offerings.” Hosea 4:6 says “My people are being destroyed because THEY DON’T KNOW ME. It’s all your fault, you priests, for you yourselves refuse to KNOW ME.” So can we say – all the church jobs we hold won’t mean a thing to God unless we KNOW HIM?

OBADIAH

As we have previously observed, God was very much involved in the affairs of other nations than Israel. This prophecy deals with the nation of Edom, descendants of Esau. When Israel (Jacob’s descendants) was under attack, Edom just watched it happen and even helped in the slaughter and plunder. When descendants of brothers – twin

brothers, at that – do not help each other, it is not acceptable to God! Edom had even gloated over their exiled relatives!

Israel was erased by degrees. Ben-hadad, King of Aram, took some captives and moved them to several colonies up north and then Shalamanezer, and Sennacharib, Kings of Assyria, took captives north and replaced them with Assyrians! Things really got mixed up!

But the point is, God does not condone bad behavior, ever – but especially when it has familial ties involved! Those living in the foothills of Judah would soon occupy Edom.

II CHRONICLES 22:10-32

These ten chapters are about Judah's kings (Israel no longer existed). Hezekiah stands head and shoulders above the rest in this list. These stories reveal that "success" seems to destroy well motivated people! Some of the kings in this reading, started out with good intentions to remain faithful, but when they gained power and military victories, pride took them down! Lessons for us all!

ISAIAH 1

Isaiah's ministry lasted almost sixty years and served four Judean kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah!

In v. 4 Isaiah talks about the load of guilt that Judah carries because they are evil and corrupt children who have rebelled against God. By their behavior they are inviting punishment! God says in vs. 15: "From now on, when you lift up your hands in prayer, I WILL REFUSE TO LOOK. ...or listen." Because the Lord is just and righteous, the repentant people of Jerusalem will be redeemed! But all sinners will be completely destroyed, for they refuse to come to the Lord.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 26 II Kings 1-20; Hosea; Obadiah; II Chronicles 22:10-32; Isaiah 1

WELCOME

We are half way through the Scriptures with this reading. Are your eyes and ears and hearts sensing the warmth of the Holy Spirit as you read His Word? Discuss as you await all to arrive. How would you “rate” your warm response to God’s Word? From 1 to 10?

OPENING PRAYER (on time!)

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

II KINGS 1-20

As we begin II Kings, Elijah is still a prominent spiritual leader in the land. When King Ahaziah, Ahab’s son, fell from the second story of his palace in Samaria, he was severely injured. He sent messengers to the temple of Baal-zebub, “the god of Ekron (lord of the flies!)” to ask whether he would recover. But the angel of the Lord told Elijah to confront the messengers and ask “is there no God in Israel?” He prophesied that Ahaziah would die. When the messengers told the king about the man who intercepted them, the king knew from the description that it was Elijah! So he sent three groups of 50 men with a captain to arrest Elijah. The first two groups were burned with fire from heaven, and the third knelt and pleaded with Elijah to spare their lives! The Lord told Elijah not to be afraid and to go with this captain. So Elijah once again had the “opportunity” to fearlessly give God’s Words of judgment to a king.

In II Kings 2 there are two schools of prophets mentioned: one in Bethel and the other in Jericho. There was a third school of the prophets established in Gilgal as well. Samuel is the one who founded these schools, with a curriculum that included the Law and all of the instructions given to Moses, sacred history, sacred music and poetry. What a blessing the students must have been to the entire nation, keeping their spiritual vitality vibrant!

The student prophets knew that God was about to take Elijah away, and they watched at a distance when Elijah and Elisha went to cross the Jordan River, which Elijah’s mantle divided so they could cross on dry ground! “As they (Elijah and Elisha) were walking along talking, suddenly a chariot of fire appeared, drawn by horses of fire which drove between them, separating them, and Elijah was carried by a whirlwind into heaven.” ☺ Oh so amazing!

Elisha picked up Elijah’s cloak and returned to the bank of the Jordan. He struck the water with the cloak (or mantle) and cried out “Where is the God of Elijah?” When the students saw the waters divide they went to meet Elisha and suggested that perhaps

the Spirit of the Lord left Elijah on some mountain or in a valley and maybe they should look for him. A search party of fifty men searched for three days. When they returned Elisha said “Didn’t I tell you not to go?” We will “see” Elijah once again when the Transfiguration experience occurs in the gospels.

As Elisha left Jericho headed for Bethel, there was a group of boys who followed Elisha and as he was walking along, they began mocking and making fun of him. “Go away, you baldhead!” they chanted over and over. Elisha turned around and looked at them, and he cursed them in the name of the Lord. Then two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of them. From there Elisha went to Mount Carmel and finally returned to Samaria. It is a dangerous thing to be disrespectful to the Lord’s appointed, which Elisha most certainly was!

Elisha left Jericho and went to Bethel. From there he went to Mt. Carmel and finally returned to Samaria. A distance of well over 100 miles.

Ahab’s son, Joram began to rule Israel in the eighteenth year of King Jehoshaphat’s reign in Judah. He reigned 12 years and did what was evil in God’s sight – but not as evil as his father had been. The inhabitants of Moab were sheep breeders, who had to pay tribute annually to Israel. After Ahab died, King Mesha of Moab rebelled against the oppression. So Joram put his army together and marched from Samaria. On the way he texted Jehoshaphat ☺ -- that is, he sent a messenger with this message: “Will you help me fight the Moabites?” The answer was yes of course – “We are brothers!” The Edomites also joined the march to war with Joram and Jehoshaphat as they moved on toward Moab via a roundabout route through the wilderness for seven days. But there was no water for man or pack animals!

What should we do? Joram wondered. But King Jehoshaphat asked “Is there no prophet of the Lord with us? If there is, we can ask the Lord what to do.” So the three kings went to see Elisha. “I want no part of you,” Elisha said to the king of Israel. As surely as the Lord Almighty lives, whom I serve, I would not bother with you except for my respect for King Jehoshaphat of Judah. *Now bring me someone who can play the harp.*” While the harp was being played, the power of the Lord came upon Elisha. It was a peaceful answer – they would see neither wind nor rain, but this valley will be filled with plenty of water.

The next morning the Moabites who had heard they were up against three kings, mobilized every man who could fight and stationed them along the border. But when they got up in the morning, the sun was shining across the water making it look as red as blood. “It’s blood!” the Moabites exclaimed. “The three armies have attacked and killed each other. . .” So they rushed toward the camp of the three kings thinking to plunder them, but Israel rushed out and attacked them and defeated them. When the king of Moab saw that he was losing, as a last desperate act, he sacrificed his oldest son, who would have been the next king, as a burnt offering on the wall. This riled the anger of the entire Moabite population against Israel!

Don't you love the fearless things Elisha says? His comments are so confidently delivered as though God directly spoke through him. Awesome relationship between Elisha and his God. "Oh God, come close as we seek to know You better!!"

These magnificent stories bring rich love to us from God. A brief capsule can bring whole stories back to memory – if the stories have been read!

The Arameans invaded Israel and among the captives a young girl was given to the wife of Naaman, the commander of the army. She said to her mistress "I wish my master would go to see the prophet in Samaria. He would heal him of his leprosy." Elisha sent a messenger to meet Naaman and tell him what to do. Naaman was not happy.

God gives Elisha top secret battle information which foils the king of Aram's attack on Israel.

But later King Ben-hadad of Aram besieged the city of Samaria. There was a famine. Elisha prophesied that the next day food would be much cheaper.

Four men with leprosy went out to the camp of the Arameans, but no one was there --- for God had caused the whole army of Aram to hear the clatter of speeding chariots and galloping horses and sounds of a great army approaching. They said "Joram has hired the Hittites and Egyptians to attack us!" They panicked and fled.

When the lepers arrived they enjoyed the food and plunder in the Aramean camp but they finally said it wasn't right that they were not sharing this good fortune with the people at the palace. They told the gatekeepers of the city what had happened and they shouted the news to the people, who rushed out and found all the flour and barley grain they could use – for free. GOD DID THAT! He was excellent in the use of sound effects And could provide food for many in the city.

Aramean king Ben-hadad became ill, and sent Hazael with gifts to Elisha to ask for information regarding his recovery. Elisha sadly told the messenger that he, Hazael, would kill the king and become king in his place. But he would also persecute even women and children of Israel.

Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram married one of Ahab's daughters. Joram, King of Israel, was the son of Ahab! Imagine the wickedness throughout all the tribes of Israel.

Jehoram's son Ahaziah began to rule over Judah in the twelfth year of King Joram's reign in Israel. Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king and he reigned in Jerusalem – one year!

The period of time that Israel was ruled by kings was about 400 years. God gave information by which we can account for the years before Christ, and be able to

understand many of the time prophecies in Scripture. He is the ultimate Record Keeper, giving us confidence in Whom we believe!

In II Kings 17 King Shalmanezar of Assyria invaded King Hoshea of Samaria carrying away many of the people to foreign lands and repopulating the land with Assyrian people! *This was the point in time when the ten tribes part of Israel ceased to exist and never were revived.*

God used this as a time to teach the Assyrians more about Him. The new residents were attacked by lions. The king of Assyria was told that the “god of the land” didn’t approve of their life-style, so he sent one of the exiled priests back home to educate them in God’s ways. Read about it in 2 Kings 17!

Once Assyria had conquered Israel, they decided to do the same to Judah. The stories of King Hezekiah and King Sennacherib’s relationship and their battles are amazing. **In fact these are events that are found in three places in Scripture: II Kings 17, II Chronicles 32, and Isaiah 36 and 37!**

HOSEA

The Lord called Hosea to be a prophet while Isaiah and Micah and Amos were also serving. God called the prophets into service for Him, because He loved the children of Jacob and sent so many messages of truth and wooing, wishing to be able to call off the exile to Babylon which would cause destruction to the Temple and the land. But the story of Hosea and Gomer, the prostitute demonstrated the fickle nature of Israel. Hosea named his children names that reflected Israel’s relationship to God from a time of separation to finally being once again united.

I realize that “cultural” changes occur as years pass and cite the appearance of jewelry in fundamental Christian churches. But I wonder how God reacts to it. See chapter 2:13 “I will punish her (Israel) for all the times she deserted Me, when she burned incense to her images of Baal, put on her earrings and jewels, and went out looking for her lovers.” We could add Ex. 33:4-6, and other texts. When I finish this book, I plan to review my journaling topics over the past 12 years, and create a narrative for each topic. Perhaps I will start with “jewelry.”

The picture God paints of Israel, especially (see chapter 2:1... “I am no longer Israel’s husband!”), but of Judah as well, is that there were a lot of alcoholic drinks being consumed. Chapter 4:11 says “Alcohol and prostitution have robbed My people of their brains!” (NLT) The seventh chapter, vs. 5 says “On royal holidays, the princes get drunk. The king makes a fool of himself and drinks with those who are making fun of him. ... They kill their kings one after another, and no one cries out to Me for help.”

Because Hosea had an unfaithful wife, he could understand God’s pain of rejection. In chapter 5:4 God says “Your deeds won’t let you return to your God. You

are a prostitute through and through, and you cannot know the Lord.” He is talking to both Israel and Judah. “As soon as trouble comes, they will search for Me.”

Hosea 6:3 and 6 are two texts to add to John 17:3 as we journey through the Scriptures. “Oh, that we might KNOW the Lord! Let us press on to KNOW Him! Then He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring.” ... “I want you to be merciful; I don’t want your sacrifices. I want you to KNOW God; that’s more important than burnt offerings.” Hosea 4:6 says “My people are being destroyed because THEY DON’T KNOW ME. It’s all your fault, you priests, for you yourselves refuse to KNOW ME.” So can we say – all the church jobs we hold won’t mean a thing to God unless we KNOW HIM?

In 2 Kings 8:7-15 Elisha gave Hazael, a message for the ailing Aramaen King Ben-hadad stating that he would recover from his illness. But God showed Elisha what Hazael was going to do (kill Ben-hadad and rule as a violent king in Aram), and when Hazael asked Elisha, “Why weepeth my lord?” Elisha replied “Because I know the evil that you will do to the children of Israel, setting their towns on fire, slaying the young men and dashing their children, and ripping up their women with child...” So we see the fulfillment of that prophecy in Hosea 13:16. How sad. No wonder Elisha got emotional.

OBADIAH

As we have previously observed, God was very much involved in the affairs of other nations than Israel. This prophecy deals with the nation of Edom, descendants of Esau. When Israel (Jacob’s descendants) was under attack, Edom just watched it happen and even helped in the slaughter and plunder. When descendants of brothers – twin brothers, at that – do not help each other, it is not acceptable to God! They even gloated over their exiled relatives!

Israel was erased by degrees. Ben-hadad, King of Assyria, took some captives and moved them to several colonies up north and then Sennacherib, King of Assyria, took captives north and replaced them with Assyrians! Things really got mixed up!

But the point is, God does not condone bad behavior, ever – but especially when it has familial ties involved! Those living in the foothills of Judah would soon occupy Edom.

II CHRONICLES 22:10-32

Here begins a parade of character stories of kings who struggled with the sin of pride. Some began their reign professing their allegiance to the God of Heaven, but most of them lost their way. These are valuable character lessons for us today and shows God being “in touch” with the chosen people’s conditions as circumstances constantly morphed. Please read this entire assignment. If you run out of time, just don’t check the box beside this item on the menu of Bible passages for this week, so that you will know

that at some point it would be enriching for you to experience God's ways with His people and complete the reading cycle.

We will cover Hezekiah's reign, however, as some details surface that reveal God's love in amazing ways.

Hezekiah was twenty-five years old when he became king of Judah and he reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. His mother was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight, just as his ancestor David had done. His reign was such a breath of fresh air for Judah. It seemed that all the workmen leaned into the task of opening the Temple, emptying it of all its uncleanness carrying all defiled things out to Kidron Valley. It took sixteen days to complete the entire task, including purifying the Temple itself.

Hezekiah wasted no time – early the next morning the sacrificial service was reinstituted. He stationed the Levites at the Temple of the Lord with cymbals, harps, trumpets and lyres. He obeyed all the commands that the Lord had given to King David through Gad, the king's seer, and the prophet Nathan. As the burnt offerings were presented, songs of praise began. The entire assembly worshiped the Lord as the singers sang and played, and the trumpets blew, until all the burnt offerings were finished. So they offered joyous praise and bowed down in worship. Allelujah!

Next Hezekiah organized one of the biggest human events mentioned in all of the Bible. He invited their relatives in the northern ten tribes to attend a Passover celebration with them in Jerusalem. The people had not been celebrating it in great numbers as prescribed in the law. They postponed observing the Passover because they didn't have enough priests purified to serve a large crowd.

Many who came from northern tribes had not been purified, but King Hezekiah prayed for them and they were allowed to eat the Passover meal anyway, even though this was contrary to God's laws. And God heard his prayers and healed the people! Praise the Lord! Following the Passover meal the Festival of Unleavened Bread was observed for seven days with great joy. Each day the Levites and priests sang to the Lord accompanied by LOUD instruments. Hezekiah encouraged the Levites for the skill they displayed as they served the Lord. For a whole week the celebration continued with peace offerings and confession of sins to the Lord.

The entire assembly agreed to continue this celebration for another week. Meanwhile, many more priests were purified. There was great joy in the city. There had not been a celebration like this one since the days of Solomon, King David's son. Then the priests stood and blessed the people, and *God heard them from his holy dwelling in Heaven!*

When the festival ended and the northerners returned home, they went to all the towns of Judah, Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh and they smashed the "sacred" pillars, cut down the Asherah poles, and removed pagan shrines and altars.

Hezekiah prepared storerooms for the things that were dedicated to the Lord at the temple beyond the needs of the priests and Levites, and appointed the gatekeeper near the storerooms and six assistants to distribute among the priests who had worked so hard during the 14-day Feast of Unleavened Bread. And to restore to them some of what they had lost during previous reigns when the system set up for supporting the priesthood was ignored. *In everything Hezekiah did, he sought his God wholeheartedly. As a result, he was very successful.*

King Sennacherib who had decimated Israel and taken many captive, now attacked and besieged Judean towns and was planning to attack Jerusalem. Hezekiah consulted with his advisors who said the flow of the springs outside the city wall should be stopped so that enemies could not be sustained by it. He repaired whatever was broken down (the wall e.g.) and called the people to assemble. He said “Be strong and courageous. DNBA! (Do Not Be Afraid – a phrase found literally hundreds of times throughout Scripture. Fear is not a healthy emotion for our bodies. God most definitely does not want us to be afraid!)

King Sennacherib wrote a proud and pompous letter to King Hezekiah saying that his army had demonstrated their might and power and there wasn’t a god anywhere who could defeat them, even the God of Heaven! The messengers who brought the letter spoke loudly so that workers on the wall could hear what was being said about their so-called gods being more powerful than God. Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah cried out in prayer to the God of Heaven. (Don’t you love it when a leader in our government seeks God’s wisdom in making their decisions???) And the Lord sent an angel who destroyed the Assyrian army with all its commanders and officers. Sennacherib returned home in disgrace and when he entered the temple of his god, some of his own sons killed him with a sword. That is how the Lord rescued Jerusalem from King Sennacherib of Assyria and from all the others who threatened them.

So there was peace at last throughout the land. From then on King Hezekiah became highly respected *among the surrounding nations*, and many gifts arrived at Jerusalem with valuable presents for King Hezekiah.

About that time, Hezekiah became deathly ill. He prayed to the Lord Who healed him. But Hezekiah did not respond appropriately to that kindness shown him and he became proud. So the Lord’s anger came against him and against Judah and Jerusalem. The Hezekiah repented of his pride, and the people of Jerusalem humbled themselves. So the Lord’s anger did not come against them during Hezekiah’s lifetime.

When Hezekiah died, his son Manasseh became the next king.

ISAIAH 1

Isaiah’s ministry lasted almost sixty years and served four Judean kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah.

In v. 4 he talks about the load of guilt that Judah carries because they are evil and corrupt children who have rebelled against God. By their behavior they are inviting punishment! God says in v. 15 “From now on, **when you lift up your hands in prayer, I WILL REFUSE TO LOOK. ...or listen.**”

Isaiah gives many messages to Judah. God is going to pour his fury on Judah, His enemies! He is going to remove all your impurities. And then give you good judges.

Because the Lord is just and righteous, the repentant people of Jerusalem will be redeemed! But all sinners will be completely destroyed, for they refuse to come to the Lord.

V. 31, the last verse says “Your evil deeds are the spark” that will set the straw on fire, and no one will be able to put it out.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 27

II Kings 21-25; Micah; Nahum; II Chronicles 33-36; Isaiah 36-39

II KINGS 21-25

King Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, began to reign at 12 years old and he reigned in Jerusalem for 55 years. His life story mostly in the depths of sin reveals God’s saving power in a way that is deeply moving. The last part of his life following his conversion experience influenced the righteous reign of Josiah, Manasseh’s grandson! Surely this reading will enrich your portrait of God.

MICAH

The prophet, Micah, served the Judean kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. His messages were addressed to both Judah and Israel. While Micah does quote the Lord from time to time, he mostly seems to share the essence of what God has told him in His own words. It’s important to remember v.1 as you read: “The Lord gave these messages to Micah...” In the last chapter, Micah 7, 19th verse, is the familiar text regarding God’s complete forgiveness of our sins: “Once again You will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under Your feet and throw them into the depths of the sea!”

NAHUM

God called Nahum as he had called Jonah a century before to deliver a message to the wicked city of Nineveh. He lived in Elkosh which is thought to be located at the northern end of Canaan, so that was a bit closer to Nineveh than Jonah would have had to travel about a hundred years earlier. According to Wikipedia, in 1949 a group of immigrants from Yemen established a settlement in the area where it is said Elkosh was originally located near the Lebanese mountains, and they named it Elkosh.

So Nahum had to travel close to 500 mi. to deliver the messages found in this Book. God broadened Nahum’s calling to two nations (or cities), Nineveh and Thebes.

Both governments apparently had some strong allies, but God wanted them to know that it isn't the allies that keep you safe. God can bind them in chains when necessary!

II CHRONICLES 33-36

Hezekiah's son, Manasseh lived to be 67 years old! Fifty-five of those years he reigned as king of Judah, and it was evil beyond our imaginations. He even sacrificed his own children to pagan gods! During his time in captivity he had a reconversion experience and when he called on God, He answered! God NEVER gives up on us. And we should never weary of praying for family and friends.

Judah's next king was Manasseh's son, Amon. It is no surprise that his reign was evil. In two years he destroyed all signs of faithfulness to God from the country. But Amon's son, Josiah (Manasseh's grandson) had a grandfather who showed him the love of God! The converted, evil Manasseh, left an eight-year-old grandson who blessed the people with 31 years of righteous leadership. He did make a mistake that shortened his life however. –Find out what that mistake was!

Josiah's son Jehoahaz was 23 years old when he became king and reigned only three months! Pharaoh Neco deposed him and appointed his brother Eliakim king and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Then Neco took Jehoahaz to Egypt as a prisoner.

Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem a third time! Each time more treasures were taken from the temple and buildings burned.

When the time was right, after the seventy years exile, God impressed King Cyrus of Persia to say: "...All of you who are the Lord's people may return to Israel for this task: re-building the Temple."

ISAIAH 36-39

These few chapters reveal some interesting details regarding Hezekiah's skirmishes with Sennacherib, his brush with death and healing. Turns out that his fatal illness had something to do with boils! Notice what the treatment was!

Soon after this the son of a Babylonian king sent Hezekiah his best wishes and a gift. The visiting envoys were shown all of Judah's treasures! Isaiah told Hezekiah that the time was coming when everything he had would be carried off to Babylon! NOTHING would be left!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 27 II Kings 21-25, Micah, Nahum, II Chronicles 33-36, Isaiah 36-39

WELCOME

As the group assembles, ask what is their level of warmth and excitement as they studied this week? Is God's face emerging more clearly? Rate your experience on a number between 1 and 10 with 1 being the lowest point and 10 being the most rewarding study experience.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

II KINGS 21-25

Manasseh, son of Hezekiah, began to reign at twelve years old and he reigned in Jerusalem for fifty-five years. His mother was Hephzibah, and she must have talked against the God of Heaven. Why else would Manasseh have been so evil, even worshiping idols and sacrificing his own son in the fire!

Manasseh set up an Asherah pole in the Temple, the very place where the Lord had told David and his son Solomon, "My name will be honored here forever..." But the people continued to be even more evil than the pagan nations whom the Lord destroyed when the Israelites entered the land.

He also murdered many innocent people until Jerusalem was filled from one end to the other with innocent blood. But he had a conversion experience found in II Chronicles 33:10-13!

When Manasseh died, he was buried in the palace garden, the garden of Uzza. Then his evil son, Amon became the next king at age twenty-two and he reigned in Jerusalem for two years. His own servants plotted against him and assassinated him in his palace. But the people of the land killed all those who conspired against King Amon, and made his son, Josiah, the next king.

JOSIAH was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years. His mother was Jedidah. He did what was pleasing in the Lord's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David! He did not turn aside from doing what was right. Since the two kings previous to him were deep into idolatry, the Temple was in need of repair and human resource reorganization was needed.

Hilkiah the high priest found the Book of the Law in the Lord's Temple! He gave the scroll to Shaphan, the court secretary, and he read it. Shaphan returned to the king and reported that money had been given to workers and supervisors at the Temple." Shaphan also said to the king: "Hilkiah the priest has given me a scroll." So Shaphan read it to the king. When Josiah heard what was in the scroll, he tore his clothes in

despair. So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to the newer Mishneh section of Jerusalem to consult with the prophet Huldah. She told the men that GOD is going to destroy this city and the people. His anger is burning against this place. But go to the king of Judah who sent you to seek the Lord and tell him: Because your people humbled themselves, and tore their clothing in despair and wept before me in repentance, so I have indeed heard you, says the Lord. I will not send the promised disaster against this city until after you have died and been buried in peace....” Merciful Savior!

King Josiah summoned all the leaders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up to the Temple of the Lord with all the people of Judah and Jerusalem, and the priests and the prophets—all the people from the least to the greatest—there the king read to them the entire Book of the Covenant that had been found in the Lord’s Temple. The king and the people renewed their vows of loyalty to God.

Then began the big job of restoring the Temple and utensils, burning Asherah poles and defiling pagan shrines, including some altars where children had been sacrificed to Molech. The king smashed the sacred pillars and cut down the Asherah poles at the Temple and in other locations as well.

He also tore down the altar at Bethel, the pagan shrine which Jeroboam son of Nebat had made when he led Israel into sin. Josiah crushed the stones and burned the Asherah pole. Then as Josiah was looking around he noticed several tombs in the side of the hill. He ordered that the bones be brought out, and he burned them on the altar at Bethel to desecrate it. This happened just as the Lord promised through the man of God as Jeroboam stood beside the altar at the festival. Then he looked up at the tomb of the man of God who had predicted these things. “What is that monument over there?” Josiah asked.

The people of the town told him, “It is the tomb of the man of God who came from Judah and *predicted the very things that you have just done to the altar at Bethel!*” So Josiah did not disturb those bones nor those of the old prophet from Samaria. (See I Kings 13:11-22.) He went to the towns of Samaria demolishing buildings at pagan shrines just as he had done at Bethel. He executed the priests of the pagan shrines on their own altars, and burned human bones on the altars to desecrate them. Finally he returned to Jerusalem.

King Josiah then issued this order to all the people: “You must celebrate the Passover to the Lord your God, as it is written in the Book of the Covenant.” This Passover was celebrated to the Lord in Jerusalem during the eighteenth year of King Josiah’s reign. Never had the land been cleared of pagan worship so that the people could so freely worship the God of Heaven.

Josiah also cleared the land of witchcraft—in obedience to all the laws written in the scroll that Hilkiah the priest found in the Lord’s Temple. Never before had there

been a king like Josiah, who turned to the Lord with all his heart, soul and strength, and obeying all the laws of Moses. There has never been a king like him since.

Even so, the Lord's anger burned against Judah because of all the great evils of King Manasseh and He did not hold back His fierce anger from them. For the Lord had said that He would destroy Judah and banish the people from His presence just as Israel had been banished.

While Josiah was king, Pharaoh Neco, king of Egypt, went to the Euphrates River to help the king of Assyria. King Josiah marched out with his army to fight him, but King Neco killed him when they met at Megiddo. Sadly, the next four kings in Jerusalem were evil, leading into exile for the nation.

Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, was twenty-three years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months, and he was evil in the Lord's sight. The Pharaoh took Jehoahaz prisoner (he died in prison in Egypt), demanded tribute of Judah and installed Eliakem, also Josiah's son, to reign in place of his father, and he changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim.

During Jehoiakim's reign from age twenty-five to thirty-six, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon invaded the land of Judah and also demanded tribute. Then the Lord sent bands of Babylonian, Aramean, Moabite, and Ammonite raiders against Judah to destroy it, just as the Lord had promised through his prophets. These disasters happened to Judah according to the Lord's command. He had decided to remove Judah because of the many sins of Manasseh—he had filled Jerusalem with innocent blood, and the Lord would not forgive this.

Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king (Jehoiakim's son), and he reigned three months. He was evil. During his three months, King Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, then the king, queen mother, advisers, nobles, and officials of Judah, surrendered to the Babylonians.

In the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, he took Jehoiachin prisoner. As the Lord warned, Nebuchadnezzar carried away all the treasures and utensils and gold vessels from the Temple. He took ten thousand captives including all the princes and the best of the soldiers, craftsmen and smiths. So only the poorest people were left in the land. He took seven thousand of the best troops and one thousand craftsmen and smiths, all of whom were trained and fit for war.

Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah, whose name was changed to Zedekiah, was installed as king and he reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. So on January 15, during the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, King Nebuchadnezzar led his entire army against Jerusalem, and built ramps against its walls, and the city remained under siege until July 18th of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah's reign. When a section of the wall was broken down, Zedekiah and all the soldiers made plans to escape after nightfall. They made a dash across the fields in the direction of the Jordan Valley. But the Babylonians

chased after them and caught the king on the plains of Jericho, for by then his men had all abandoned him. He was made to watch as all his sons were killed. Then they gouged out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him in bronze chains and led him away to Babylon.

On August 14 of that year, which was the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard, an official of the Babylonian king was sent to Jerusalem to burn the Temple, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. He destroyed all the important buildings in the city, then they tore down the walls of Jerusalem. The captain allowed some of the poorest people to stay behind in Judah to care for the vineyards and fields.

They broke up everything possible and took all the gold or silver they could. He took more prisoners, and appointed Gedaliah to be governor over the people left in Judah. Gedaliah told the people that if they served the king of Babylon, all would go well for them. But some months later he was assassinated along with everyone with him, both Judeans and Babylonians. Then the assassins fled to Egypt for they were afraid of what the Babylonians would do to them.

In the thirty-seventh year of King Jehoiachin's exile in Babylon, Evilmerodach ascended to the Babylonian throne. He was kind to Jehoiachin and released him from prison on April 2 of that year. He spoke pleasantly to Jehoiachin and gave him preferential treatment over all the other exiled kings in Babylon, supplying him with new clothes to replace his prison garb and allowing him to dine at the king's table for the rest of his life!!! And, he was given a regular allowance to cover his living expenses until the day of his death. Amazing!

MICAH

The prophet Micah served the Judean kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. His messages were addressed to both Judah and Israel. While Micah does quote the Lord from time to time, he mostly seems to share the essence of what God has told him in his own words. It's important to remember v.1: "The Lord gave these messages to Micah..."

The "chosen" people seem to have forgotten how to be nice, or even fair, to each other! Israel was the victor in a civil war with Judah, and they took thousands of captives into Samaria without their clothes! God informed Israel they had gone too far and instructed them to return clothes to the captives, and return them home.

God sent other nations to punish Judah: Aram, Assyria, and finally Babylon to tear down the wall of Jerusalem, besiege the city, destroy fortified cities and gradually downsize the Temple and its furnishings. "Weep, you people of Judah! Shave your heads in sorrow, for the children you love will be snatched away, and you will never see them again.Your little ones will be snatched away, and you will never see them again. ...Your little ones will be exiled to distant lands." (Micah speaking)

The wealthy (chapter 2) wanted to be wealthier and they laid awake at night, thinking up ways to seize a house, or a piece of land, or someone's family inheritance! But the time is coming when others will set your boundaries, and the Lord's people will have no say in how the land is divided. You have evicted women from their homes and stripped their children of all their God-given rights. Up! Begone! This is no longer your land and home, for you have filled it with sin and ruined it completely. ...The people objected to Micah's prophecies so he said: "Suppose a prophet full of lies were to say to you, 'I'll preach to you the joys of wine and strong drink!' That's just the kind of prophet you would like!"

Micah 3 is a warning to Israel for their time of annihilation is close at hand. There were false prophets in Israel leading the whole nation astray. "At some point they will cover their faces in shame, be disgraced and admit that their messages WERE NOT FROM GOD!!!" Then Micah goes on to say "But as for me, I am filled with power and the SPIRIT OF THE LORD. I am filled with justice and might, fearlessly pointing out Israel's sin and rebellion."

Then Micah's remarks turn to both Judah and Israel and condemn rulers and priests who are taking bribes and prophesying for money. He says that Jerusalem will be reduced to rubble and a forest will grow on top of it where the Temple now stands.

Micah 4 gives us a glimpse into a time when Jerusalem will be the most important place on earth and there will be total peace. Then coming back to the present he says that the kingship will be restored to "my precious Jerusalem." But first the people of Jerusalem will be sent into exile in Babylon.

Micah 6 is a picture of an exhausted God still sending messages to an unruly people, doing all He can to draw them toward right choices and save them from war, siege, and exile!!! The Lord has a complaint against His people, Israel, and He will "prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law!" Then the question is: how can we make this up to the Lord? *This is what is required: "to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God."* The next few verses (9-16) give clear statements of their guilt and the punishment that is coming. V. 16 says that they are "following the example of King Omri and King Ahab! Therefore, I will make an example of you, BRINGING YOU TO COMPLETE RUIN. You will be treated with contempt and mocked by all who see you."

Micah 7 is a chapter of misery and hope. Here are comforting promises to keep in our memory for use in a time of need: (v. 7) "As for me, I look to the Lord for His help. I wait confidently for God to save me, and my God will certainly hear me!" (V. 9) "The Lord will bring me out of my darkness into the Light, and I WILL see His righteousness." (V. 19) "Once again You will have compassion on us. You will trample our sins under Your feet and throw them into the depths of the sea! You will show us Your faithfulness and unfailing love as You promised with an oath to our ancestors Abraham and Jacob long ago!"

NAHUM

God entrusted His message through a vision to the prophet Nahum regarding Nineveh, which was located a long way from Nahum's home town of "Elkosh"—over 500 mi. northeast, following the "crescent," avoiding the life-threatening desert, across the Euphrates River to the Tigris River. (No wonder Jonah didn't want to go to Nineveh—but you will remember that God strongly influenced him to complete the task, so he did give God's message there. That time, about a hundred years earlier, there was a reformation in the heathen city and God spared them, much to Jonah's dismay—he wanted to die!)

According to Wikipedia, in 1949 a group of immigrants from Yemen established a settlement in the area where it is said Elkosh was originally located near the Lebanese mountains, and they named it Elkosh.

Nahum writes beautifully about God—portrays His destroying might and power, and His goodness and strength. Nahum says that it doesn't do any good to scheme against the Lord for He will destroy you with one blow!!! This is what the Lord says: "Even though the Assyrians have many allies, they will be destroyed and disappear. O my people, I have already punished you once (by allowing them to be taken captive to Assyria), and I will not do it again. Now I will break your chains and release you from Assyrian oppression."

In this vision Nahum sees another nation, Thebes, which also had serious allies: Egypt, Ethiopia, Put and Libya. God makes the point that having allies doesn't necessarily save a country—because God made sure all of their leaders were bound in chains. (Vs. 8, 9) According to the new Andrews Study Bible the fall of Thebes is dated to 663 BC and the fall of Nineveh mentioned in Nahum 3:7 occurred in 612 BC. Therefore the book was written some time after 663 BC and before 612 BC.

Now He addresses the king: "...Your princes lie dead in the dust. ...There is no longer a shepherd to gather them together. ...All who hear of your destruction will clap their hands for joy."

II CHRONICLES 33-36

Hezekiah's son, Manasseh became king when he was twelve years old, and he reigned in Jerusalem fifty-five years! He undid all the good his father had done, and went right back to the Asherah poles!

The people were complaining so much that God sent fiery serpents into the camp. Thousands were bitten and many died. However, when Moses followed God's instructions and put up the pole with the bronze serpent hanging, and people looked at it, they were healed! Now a serpent represents sin, and Paul says that on the cross, Jesus *became sin* for us! So people looked at the pole and the symbol of their Redeemer (John 3:14, 15) and they were healed or snakes were prevented from biting them!

Whatever was put up on the Asherah poles must have been sacreligious and a hideous insult to God Himself. And Manasseh actually placed one of them inside the Temple. He sacrificed his own children and was evil through and through.

The Lord called the Assyrian army to come take Manasseh captive. They put a ring through his nose, bound him in bronze chains and led him away to Babylon. Assyria's capital was Nineveh, and Babylon which was then a part of the Assyrian Empire, was two hundred miles south of Nineveh. Guess there's no way to know for sure until we get to heaven, but I wonder which route they took to get Manasseh to Babylon from Jerusalem. Even if they took the very shortest route across the Arabian Desert it would be 400 miles. If they took the scenic route in the best climate (Abraham's route, across the crescent and down the rivers) it would be closer to 600 miles. Manasseh had time to think!! We don't know how long he was chained up in captivity.

One day, Manasseh was in deep distress and sought the Lord his God (with his record, one has to ask, how could that be true?). He cried out humbly to the God of his ancestors and when he prayed *the Lord listened and was moved by his request for help*. Awesome God of love! He never gives up seeking ways to save us! If Manasseh didn't ruin his chances of ever being saved, then there I hope for all the rest of us sinners!! He even got to go back to Jerusalem and be a good king for the rest of his life!

Amon, Manasseh's awful son became the next king and reigned two years. Then came wonderful eight-year old boy king, Josiah! You see, when Josiah was born, his grandfather was redeemed and reformed, and probably a great example for Josiah to observe. Josiah's father Amon grew up with a wicked father. How is it that a wicked father can be a wonderful grandfather??? It's the amazing grace of our Lord!

Josiah's reign is awesome! Have you noticed how the good kings adhere to David's "orders?" As far as the Bible record shows it appears that Josiah's only mistake (see chapter 35:26, 27) was not asking God first if he should go out and challenge Pharaoh Neco. The Pharaoh declared that he was on a mission for God Himself but Josiah would not listen! I believe Josiah needed to move along because the exile needed to happen very soon, so that prophecies regarding it would be accurate.

Josiah's son Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he became king and reigned only three months! Pharaoh Neco deposed him and appointed his brother Eliakim king and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Then Neco took Jehoahaz to Egypt as a prisoner.

Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. But he was evil. King Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and captured it, bound Jehoiakim in chains and led him away to Babylon. (So two of Josiah's sons are captives now—one in Egypt and one in Babylon.) Nebuchadnezzar also took treasures from the Temple of the Lord and he placed them in his palace in Babylon.

Then Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin (Josiah's grandson) became the next king. He was eighteen years old when he became king, but he reigned in Jerusalem only three months and ten days, for he was evil in the Lord's sight. In the spring of the following year, Jehoiachin was summoned to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar, who took more treasures from the Temple at that time, and he appointed Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, to be the next king in Judah and Jerusalem.

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king and reigned in Jerusalem eleven years. He was evil and refused to humble himself in the presence of the prophet Jeremiah, WHO SPOKE FOR THE LORD. And he rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar even though he had taken an oath of loyalty in God's name. (Read chapter 36:15,16 and weep.)

So Nebuchadnezzar came a third time! This time his army set fire to the Temple after it had been emptied of any treasures that might still be left! They broke down the wall, burned all the palaces and everything of value. The message of the Lord spoken through Jeremiah was fulfilled! The land finally enjoyed its Sabbath rest, lying desolate for seventy years, just as the prophet had said.

The end of the exile story is revealed here, even though there is more to the exile story to come, as God stirs the heart of King Cyrus of Persia to return the Israelis home to Canaan.

ISAIAH 36-39

These few chapters reveal some interesting details regarding Hezekiah's skirmishes with Sennacherib, his brush with death and healing. Turns out that his fatal illness had something to do with boils. Notice what the treatment was? An ointment from figs spread over the boils, "and Hezekiah will recover."

Soon after Hezekiah's recovery, the son of the Babylonian king, sent Hezekiah his best wishes and a gift. He had heard of the king's sickness and recovery. So the visiting envoys were shown all of Judah's treasures!

Would you say that King Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled what God said in Isa. 39:5-7? He robbed the Temple two or three times, and took captives each time. Isaiah told Hezekiah that the Lord said the time is coming when everything you have will be carried off to Babylon. Nothing will be left!

God's Words do come true!!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 28

Habakkuk, Esther, Proverbs 21-24, Zephaniah

HABAKKUK

God not only listens to complaints offered by Habakkuk, but He answers them. Habakkuk has some strong questions for God to answer. After his second complaint he climbs into a "watchtower" and awaits God's reply! The practice of idolatry is examined and condemned and God by contrast is shown "in His holy Temple. Let all the earth be

silent before Him.” Also the great reformation text “the just shall live by faith” is found in Hab. 2:4.

After this exchange with the Lord of the universe, Habakkuk is inspired to write a prayer which he instructs is to be sung with accompaniment of stringed instruments! Enjoy this wonderful book in which the true God reveals Himself.

ESTHER

This is a story from Persia, a far-away land where God was alive and well in the hearts of faithful Jews who had decided to remain in the land of their captivity at the end of seventy years. King Xerxes whose father was Darius and his mother Atossa, who was a daughter of Cyrus the Great, the servant of God, raised a great leader for Persia. Enjoy the opulence of Esther’s life in the palace and the suspense when she risked her life to save her people. And watch God move on the king’s heart to make provision for saving hundreds and thousands of Jews scattered throughout the 127 provinces of the Persian Empire.

PROVERBS 21-24

These Proverbs are rich in knowledge of God. Recognize how to apply them to your life and praise God for the privilege of reading Scripture. These chapters have meaningful personal instruction for human beings, and windows into the very heart of your Best Friend!

ZEPHANIAH

The situation in Judah and Jerusalem was very sad—people worshiping the sun, moon and stars on their rooftops, bowing to Baal, and finally worshiping Molech as well. “I will destroy those who use to worship Me but now no longer do. They no longer ask for the Lord’s guidance or seek My blessings.” So Judah was soon to go into exile, and it appears that most of them were oblivious, not wanting to listen to messages from the Lord. God also gives warnings to surrounding nations.

Did you know that God sings? Zeph. 3:17 says God will rejoice over us by singing a “happy song” in the New Jerusalem. The last part of v. 15 says “...At last your troubles will be over, and you will fear disaster no more.” No more oil spills, no more economic woes, no more physical illness! How does that sound? Within your reach? All we have to do is “walk humbly with our God and love justice and mercy.” Let’s pray for each other, that God will give us wisdom and strength to stand for Him fearlessly!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 28 Habbakuk, Esther, Proverbs 21-24, Zephaniah

WELCOME

While the group is gathering, repeat the poll showing their level of personal blessing received from reading Scripture! On a scale of 1-10 how was your spiritual energy level as you studied this week?

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

HABAKKUK

This is one of my very favorite books in all of Scripture. Habakkuk has such energy and openness in his relationship to God! God has sent so many messages to Israel warning them of the coming exile, that Habakkuk finally says “HOW LONG, O LORD, MUST I CALL FOR HELP??? But You do not listen. I see violence, and hear arguing and fighting, the courts are corrupt and the wicked far outnumber the righteous.”

The Lord replies! He informs Habakkuk that the Babylonians are going to invade the Promised Land and sweep captives ahead of them like sand. They scorn all defenses, Simply piling up ramps of earth against fortified cities and capturing them.

Then Habakkuk makes his second complaint: Is your plan in all of this to wipe us out? Surely not, O Lord our Rock—will You stand by while the wicked destroy people who are more righteous than they? “I will climb up into my watchtower now and wait to see what the Lord will say to me and how He will answer my complaint.” We don’t know how long Habakkuk had to wait for God to answer, but clearly he believed that God was going to answer his questions and he was going to a place where there was clear visibility and he would not get distracted, and..just....wait!

When God answered Habakkuk, it was in an energetic way. He said: “Write My answer in LARGE, clear letters on a tablet, so that a runner can read it and tell everyone else!” God assures the prophet that the events will develop slowly, steadily and surely as the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. “IF IT SEEMS SLOW, wait patiently, for it will surely take place and will not be delayed!”

Then God cautions against the proud idol worshipers, who are really idolizing themselves, but the righteous will live by their faith in God (Hab. 2:4). In time, Israel’s true corruption will become known and debtors will turn on Israel. How terrible it will be for you who get rich by unjust means!

What is gained by worshiping man-made idols? What fools you are to believe such lies. Can an idol speak for God? They may be overlaid with gold and silver, but

they are lifeless inside. BUT THE LORD IS IN HIS HOLY TEMPLE. LET ALL THE EARTH KEEP SILENCE.

Habakkuk now seems inspired similarly to David the psalmist, composing a prayer that is to be sung accompanied by stringed instruments! How cool is that? Read the prayer of praise and thanksgiving Habakkuk offers to the Lord he loves. Indeed all of us have reason to pray and praise the living God of heaven!

ESTHER

The story of Esther comes from the time that Jews still remained in Persia but near the end of the seventy years of exile. The Record is clear that returning to the Promised Land was not mandatory. After establishing businesses and families in “captivity” it had become home and the Jews seemed to be welcome for the most part; BUT NOT BY HAMAN, who is the villain of this story.

King Xerxes was the son of Darius the 1st and Atossa, daughter of Cyrus the Great. Imagine the fine sense of justice that came to King Xerxes from these superlatively qualified parents! Indeed, this king reigned over 127 provinces and his communication skills were very good.

You may recall that Darius, father of Xerxes, ruled at the time some wicked men conspired to get Daniel put to death, and the king by signing a law unwittingly put Daniel in great danger and then could not sleep all night for worrying about this man of God who had become an important part of his life. And the mother of Xerxes being the daughter of Cyrus the Great came from a man who God referred to as “My servant!” Cyrus gave the royal proclamation that the God of heaven had given him: build the temple of Almighty God at Jerusalem in the land of Judah. He asked the citizens of Persia to give gifts to the Jews of food, money and clothing. All to say, Xerxes came from a father and mother who had some quality experience with the God of heaven!

There are some heroes in the story: Vashti, the deposed queen; Esther, who risked her life to save her people; Mordecai who refused to bow to Haman just because he held a high office under the king; the eunuchs who were trustworthy for Esther to send or receive messages; all the Jews in the vast Persian empire who fasted and prayed to God for guidance and deliverance; and finally, Xerxes, the good Persian king who loved Esther, perceived the wickedness of Haman and the value of finding some way of preserving the Jews living throughout Persia’s 127 provinces who were about to be destroyed. If Haman had his way, it would be a genocide!

Enjoy the descriptions of vivid colors and plush décor where Esther lived and enjoyed the favor of the king. This is truly a remarkable story of a culture and land which most of us have never and probably never will experience.

King Xerxes was not perfect. His request of Queen Vashti was not appropriate and she stood her ground for which his anger was stirred. But when it was all said and

done, he was sorry he had banished her, for she had been his favorite—until Esther was found!

PROVERBS 21-24

Prov. 21:1 After having read the book of Esther, would you say God directs the hearts of kings?

Prov. 21:3 Compare I Sam. 15:22; Hosea 6:6. It IS possible to please the Lord.

Prov. 21:31 Compare II Chron. 20:15; I Sam. 17:47. The message about God, Who He is, how He works, is so consistent throughout Scripture. What does this teach us about God that helps us to know Him better??? After prayer and preparing for any battle of life, we need to relinquish the struggle and leave the victory to God's will, for He will fight FOR US. Praise God!

Prov. 22:19, 21 (NKJV or NLT) The value of the proverbs to us??? If we heed them, we WILL trust in the Lord.

Prov. 23:1-3 Is God serious about health reform? I think so! Can serious truth be mixed with a bit of humor? Looks like it to me!!! Praise my wonderful Friend! He meets all my needs!

Prov. 23:13, 14 But will someone report the parents to the authorities? Today that's a real possibility. I have just one thing to add. Spanking a child in public or in front of peers is a very shaming thing. Take the child to a private place where the issue can be discussed and prayer offered, THEN spank the child. Then the parent does not spank in anger (big mistake), and the issues are plainer to the child. And, yes, this approach to punishment may save your children's lives when all is said and done. Only the wise will learn from the counsels of Proverbs.

Prov. 23:24 So true!

Prov. 23:29-35 WOW! What a warning against strong drinks which affect our speech and make us stagger "like a sailor tossed at sea!" This chapter began with describing self-control in our eating habits, and ends with a warning regarding wine and various drinks offered in taverns, which sting like a viper and cause deviant behaviors.

BEWARE!

Prov. 24:11-13 (NLT, my favorite rendering) If we see injustice in the world and just ignore it, God will know, for He knows ALL hearts and He sees YOU. He keeps watch over your soul and He knows you knew! And He will judge all people according to what they have done and said. II Chron. 16:9; I Sam. 16:6, 7; Rev. 22:12; and 20:12. Just think! God knows your heart, all your thoughts and your actions. That could be scary if it were not for Bible conversion stories and God's gracious forgiveness (Micah 7:19).

Forgive me, Lord, for the times I have witnessed injustice and kept silent. Make me a voice for justice for the oppressed in this world. Amen.

Proverbs offers rich glimpses into the heart of God. Never forget that these sayings are beneficial only for the wise. Ask God for wisdom!!! He appreciates that prayer. See James 1:5, 6. Ask and believe and claim in faith! A, B, C.

ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah lived and served when Josiah, son of Hezekiah, was king. There were only three more kings to take the throne before the exile: Jehoiachim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah. God was still sending prophets to His chosen people with messages that could have saved their homes and their lives.

Right in Judah and Jerusalem, the Eternal City, people were worshiping Baal and the sun, moon and stars on their rooftops. *“They claim to follow the Lord but then they worship Molech, too!”* God said. *“They no longer ask for the Lord’s help or seek My blessings.”* God WANTS us to *ask* for His blessings.

God then addresses Philistia, Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria. God warned the heathen, idolatrous nations of what their judgment will be—they had a chance right along with the “chosen” people, to follow the true God.

Then God addresses Philistia, Moab and Ammon, Ethiopia and Assyria. God warned the idolatrous heathen nations of what their judgment will be—they had a chance right along with the “chosen” people, to follow the true God.

Zephaniah 3 is a classic Old Testament prophecy which begins with the current sad state of affairs in Jerusalem. V.5 pictures a consistent, ever-present, just God. But no one seems to notice. Wickedness knows no shame! Beginning in v. 8 the message is two-pronged, applying to present punishment, but looking forward to final punishment.

There will come a day when all sin and sinners have been weeded out and what is left is eternal peace and happiness, with God singing over us! I can’t wait to hear His voice. He is a composer, you know—remember, for example, the song He taught Moses to teach to the Israelites?

Let us walk humbly and love justice, and live with Jesus forever!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 29 Proverbs 25-29; Haggai; Jeremiah 30-52

PROVERBS 25-29

These chapters contain some topics that have sections of sayings—however not always sequentially numbered! Watch for texts about eating honey, about fools, about friendship, family matters, etc. My favorite I think is Prov. 26:8--Honoring a fool is as foolish as tying a stone to a slingshot.

HAGGAI

This is a two-chapter book written in the second year of Darius’ reign and the subject matter appears to begin and end in that year, except for brief allusions to the final judgment.

The remnant whose commission was to build the foundation of the Temple, were working on their own homes—not God’s house! The nation needed to have the Temple finished to provide a meeting place for Jews to worship God as they returned from captivity. They were disappointed in the size of their crops and appeared to be too depressed to begin the work on the Temple which had once been so beautiful and now even had to have the foundation replaced! God’s challenge is invigorating and His promise beautiful! Zerubbabel was given what was the least desirable of jobs. His work would never be as visible as other features of the building. But he did not lose courage and Jeshua, the high priest worked well with Zerubbabel.

Oh, read the message God sent to Zerubbabel! Is this a message YOU would like to receive from the Lord? I would! (Haggai 2:20-23)

JEREMIAH 30-52

Jeremiah’s account of God’s dealings is incredibly beautiful, full of poetic pathos, and epic stories. From Jerusalem, Jeremiah writes God’s messages to the Babylonian exiles, or to rulers of surrounding nations and to the King of Judah. Baruch is Jeremiah’s faithful scribe.

One of the assignments God gave Jeremiah was to write all the messages God had ever given him on a scroll. So as Jeremiah dictated, Baruch wrote—and wrote! When the scroll was read to the king, it was winter time and as he was sitting before a fireplace to keep warm, he would occasionally reach toward the reader with a knife and slice off a part of the scroll and throw it into the fire! Then God sent Jeremiah another message – write a second scroll with the same messages, and include more!!

Baruch eventually complained about the hard work. And God made him a beautiful promise. How God loved His people and He wanted them to be fully informed about their options. Thus, all the prophets, and all the messages! (Amos 3:7)

And why are these prophecies valuable for us to read today? Because, while they had significance for the people of Jeremiah’s time, many of them also reach down to the end of all sin, which is God’s message for those of us who are living in the end of the world. Jeremiah is truly a book for all people and all seasons. May God give you discernment!

PRAISE REPORTS AND PRAYER REQUESTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 29 Proverbs 25-29; Haggai; Jeremiah 30-52

WELCOME

Ask the group before starting time if they would like to have a social occasion outside of the weekly session? Suggestions might be meeting for a potluck meal at a member's home, or yours? Depending on the makeup of the group, a picnic lunch in a park might be nice. Doesn't have to be fancy. The main menu is getting to know each other on a different level. This is an opportunity to hear life stories from your members. This works best if only members and immediate family members attend.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

PROVERBS 25-29

Interesting, isn't it, that Books which were to be included in our Bibles were not finalized until during the Reformation years. Yet here we have Hezekiah's advisers who lived around two thousand years before the Reformation being inspired to collect "more proverbs" of Solomon.

Prov. 25:6,7 I wonder if the sons of thunder, James and John, read the book of Proverbs? If they had, perhaps they would not have presumed to ask for the most prized seats in the cabinet of Jesus' new kingdom!

Prov. 25:16, 27 Did you know the Bible discourages eating too much sweets? It's here! V. 27 rounds out the topic of "honey!"

Prov. 25:21, 22 The way to treat our enemies that pleases God! He will reward us.

Prov. 25:28 A person without self-control...is defenseless and probably not dependable.

Prov. 26:5 When arguing with fools, don't answer their foolish arguments, or you will become as foolish as they are.

Prov. 26:4 When arguing with fools, be sure to answer their foolish arguments, or they will become wise in their own estimation. –So could we sum up vs. 4 and 5 by saying that there is no productive way to argue with a fool? See also vs. 8 and 12.

Prov. 27:2 Don't praise yourself, let others do it!

Prov. 28 Evil people don't understand justice, but those who follow the Lord understand completely.

Prov. 29:1 Whoever stubbornly refuses to accept criticism will suddenly be broken beyond repair.

HAGGAI

Haggai is a contemporary with Zechariah and Daniel (probably pretty old by now) and Zerubbabel. On August 29 of the second year of King Darius' reign God sent a message which was for the Jews who had returned from Babylon for the express purpose

of rebuilding the House of God. God tells the people that their crops have not done well because He has caused the drought that made their crops so poor. Why? Because My house lies in ruins while you are all busy building your own fine houses. Then October 17 of that same year, the Lord sent another message through Haggai addressed to Zerubbabel, Jeshua, the high priest and to the remnant of God's people living in Judah. God gives them a pep talk saying that the appearance of the Temple must, in comparison to the grandness of the former Temple, look like nothing at all. "Take courage and work, for I am with you, says the Lord Almighty. My Spirit remains among you just as I promised when you came out of Egypt. SO DO NOT BE AFRAID!" Then God jumps to the "end of the Story!"

On December 18 of the same year, Haggai got another message to deliver: Ask the priests this question about the law: God makes the point that everything the people do and everything they offer is defiled. So He asks them to remember how their crops had disappointed them earlier that year—but on this day—the day when the foundation of the Lord's Temple was laid—"carefully consider this: I'm making you a promise: From this day onward I will bless you."

BE SURE to read the message God sent to Zerubbabel! Is this a message YOU would like to receive from the Lord? I would! (Hag. 2:20-23)

JEREMIAH 30-52

Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet for revealing his deep emotions so freely. You can feel the heart-rending grief that he experiences as his beloved Judah follows Israel's footstep to idolatry and corruption. When Judah is taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, Jeremiah was given the choice to go or to remain in Jerusalem. He chose to remain and sees firsthand the devastation caused by Nebuchadnezzar's three attacks, the last of which was when the Temple was burned and the last of the golden Sanctuary utensils were stolen. Jeremiah writes letters from Jerusalem to be delivered to the exiles in Babylon.

Underline phrases that reveal God to you. Underline phrases that are familiar phrases in church doctrine, such as: Jer. 30:7 "In all history there has never been such a time of terror. IT WILL BE A TIME OF TROUBLE FOR MY PEOPLE ISRAEL. Yet in the end they will be saved!"

Let your tears flow in gratitude for a loving God who hears the cries of His people (Jer. 30:4, 5), and know that He has tried to spare them this grief. For He says He will do nothing without telling His servants the prophets first! (Amos 3:7)

This is the 4th of July and on the television as I write are the sounds of Macy's fabulous display of fireworks as seen from Norwegian Cruise Line's newest ship, with a 15-story high deck in the New York Harbor. There are cheers and singing. And here I read what God says in Jer. 31:7: Sing with joy for Israel! Shout for the GREATEST OF NATIONS! Shout out with praise and joy "Save Your people, O Lord, the remnant of Israel!" We have a dual citizenship as Christians. I love the USA and I will be a good citizen here, but my heart is in the Kingdom of God and that's most worthy of singing and shouting about! Praise God! Keep reading the scenes that Jeremiah sees. They are totally awesome. See Jer. 31:26 – Jeremiah slept sweetly as he viewed these scenes.

The reason we are spending time reading the Scriptures as a group is so we can share revelations of God and His love with each other and in that process come to really know HIM. But there will come a time, when there will be no need to go through this process for everybody who is in heaven will KNOW God. There is no other way to have eternal life! (John 17:3) And God says “I will forgive their wickedness and will never again remember their sins.” (Jer. 31:34; Micah 7:19) What a glowing picture God gives us of His love for Israel and the Promised Land.

Be alert to the beginning of each separate message sent to Jeremiah from the Lord. At times God requires the prophets to present audio/visual aids for the people to grasp certain truths. What is the message God wants the people to understand in these texts? (Jer. 32:9-25, 43, 44)

Jer. 33:3 “Ask Me and I will tell you some remarkable secrets about what is going to happen here.” What other friendship do we have in this world as enriching and supportive to our lives as the words of God Himself? In vs. 14-26 God states His plans for this earth AND for eternity, more than once. See vs. 17, 19-21, and 26. I can hardly wait to see the harvest of descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as God takes us all home with Him!

Jeremiah 36 is a chapter that is so graphic that one’s imagination can function very well. Picture it all! King Jehoiachin thought if he burned a scroll the message it contained would not come true. What a fool! It was a pain, but Baruch wrote another scroll and it all came true, with more added to the second one!!!

Jeremiah gets thrown into prison in chapters 37 and 38. In chapter 39 when King Nebuchadnezzar arrived in Jerusalem he requested that his highest officer, Nebuzaradan, find Jeremiah and take care of his needs. So Jeremiah was released from prison and he chose to remain in Jerusalem. There was an Ethiopian palace official named Ebed-melech who had helped Jeremiah while he was in prison, so God sent him a special message through Jeremiah: “I will do to this city everything I have threatened. I will send disaster....You will see its destruction, but I will rescue you from those you fear so much. Because you trusted Me, I will preserve your life and keep you safe. I, the Lord, have spoken!”

In chapter 40 we learn that when Nebuzaradan, captain of the guard went looking for Jeremiah as Nebuchadnezzar requested, he found Jeremiah bound in chains among the captives of Jerusalem and Judah *who were being sent to Babylon!* The captain gave Jeremiah food and money and let him go. So Jeremiah returned to Gedaliah, newly appointed governor of Judah at Mizpah and lived in Judah with the few who were still left in the land.

In this great book of Jeremiah three chapters of messages to a variety of neighboring nations. Then in chapter 50 Babylon gets a long message which includes a history of the relationship between Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord, and Israel. It’s a “must-read!” God warns Babylon of a great army (the Medes) marching from the north to chase Babylon from its land, and He says “I will appoint the leader of My choice! For who is like Me and who can challenge Me...?” Chapter 51 is a warning to the Babylonians to flee from their homes and save yourselves. The Lord is going to punish Babylon.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS for Week 30 Ezra; Proverbs 30-31; Isaiah 2-35

EZRA

In the first six chapters, Ezra gives a historical account of the decree of Cyrus giving permission for Jews to return to their homeland, under the leadership of eleven men, but appearing to be headed up by Zerubbabel and Jeshua. There were about 50,000 Jews who chose to return to Judah, plus animals for sacrifices, under their care.

Ezra arrived some years after Zerubbabel with a smaller group of exiles, servants, singers, priests and more gold temple utensils to return to the Temple. Everything was filed and numbered and weighed!

In chapter 9 is a description of Ezra's utter grief, sorrow and shock over the fact that these repatriates have already intermarried with idolators. Chapters 9 and 10 are pictures of a leader in Israel who has come just in time to put his abilities and gifts to work straightening out a complicated mess. There were children in some of these marriages and yet God is saying that the gentiles must leave. Ezra's list of each man who married pagan wives is here for all to see!

PROVERBS 30-31

These two chapters are a different style than most of this Book. Enjoy them and see the verses that stand out with a characteristic of the Almighty.

ISAIAH 2-35

Remember that prophetic messages did not come all at once. Watch for the beginning and ending of the messages. You will be able to tell from the wording whether the message is just for the current situation, or if it looks forward toward the final solution, OR does it refer to both the present and the future in one message! It's exciting to see God occasionally pull back the curtain to reveal future scenes just enough to help His people cope with the present. Hope is what keeps us healthy!

God says that it is necessary to punish nations/individuals who sin. But the eternal Love with which it is administered makes the punishment, if received appropriately, an opportunity for eternal life!

Isaiah has some interesting things to say about all kinds of jewelry and adornment and alcoholic drinks. For example, He says in Isaiah 28:1 that wine is what brought Samaria down! (See Isaiah 5:13, too.)

May God bless your study this week and reveal Himself to you is my prayer!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 30

Ezra; Proverbs 30-31; Isaiah 2-35

WELCOME

Finalize location and time for the social occasion.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

EZRA

“In the first year of King Cyrus of Persia, the Lord fulfilled Jeremiah’s prophecy (Jer. 25:12) by stirring the heart of Cyrus to put this proclamation in writing and to send it throughout his kingdom.” That is just the first verse of the book of Ezra and it’s already full of God’s power! God is moving on many hearts to fulfill the march of prophecies. And what was happening here needed to happen on time because it signaled the beginning of the 2300 day prophecy of Daniel 8!

Cyrus knows that God had given him all the kingdoms of the earth, and he also knew that the God of heaven “lived” at Jerusalem. Therefore his people should help the Jews in any way they could to return to Canaan to rebuild the Temple. King Cyrus himself brought out the precious gold utensils which Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple and placed them in his own heathen temple. Cyrus directed the treasurer to count and list all these items and present them to Sheshbazzar, the leader of the exiles returning to Judah.

Ezra is a good scribe and he makes lists which keep things organized and accounted for. In this first group returning from Babylon are 42,360 people! In addition there were 7,337 servants and 200 singers, both men and women. They took 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, and 6,710 donkeys. They contributed 61,000 gold coins, 6,250 pounds of silver, and 100 robes for the priests. Nice.

Zerubbabel and Jeshua, who we read about last week in the book of Haggai, were the first in a list of 11 leaders. In chapter 3 of Ezra, Jeshua and Zerubbabel rebuilt the altar of the God of Israel so they could sacrifice burnt offerings on it. Then they immediately began to sacrifice burnt offerings each morning and evening. (There it is again, the suggestion that there needs to be family worship in our homes morning and evening!) Their first sacrifice on the newly built altar was fifteen days before the Festival of Shelters began. Work on the foundation had not even started yet!

But it began in earnest with some hired masons and carpenters and cedar logs purchased from the people of Tyre and Sidon. The logs were brought down from the Lebanese mountains and floated along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea to Joppa, FOR

KING CYRUS HAD GIVEN PERMISSION TO DO THIS. (Since all nations of the world kingdom belonged to him at this time, then I guess all resources were his to disburse!) A celebration was held with mixed emotions among the attendees. Can you hear it? If you're acquainted with Jewish emotions, I believe you can hear it.

Enemies of the people of Judah and Benjamin tried to join the work force, but Zerubbabel and Jeshua refused their offer. So they wrote a letter to Artaxerxes claiming that the Israelites were dishonoring him and that he was going to lose the province west of the Euphrates River. Artaxerxes ordered the building to stop without delay.

And so building was at a standstill until the second year of King Darius of Persia. At that time Haggai and Zechariah, two prophets, brought messages from God encouraging the work to go forward. In fact they weren't just messengers, they actually worked side by side with Zerubbabel. So it was that Tattenai, the new governor of the west province and his colleagues soon arrived in Jerusalem to challenge them once again. Because their God was watching over them, the leaders of the Jews were not prevented from building until a report was sent to Darius and he returned his decision.

The letter to Darius is awesome, but his reply to the Jews' letter is beyond awesome ((Ezra 6:1-12))!! The temple foundation was completed on March 12 during the sixth year of King Darius's reign. It was dedicated with great joy and with diligent attention to the instructions recorded in the Book of Moses. On April 21 the repatriates enjoyed their first Passover in 75 years! What a day! And clearly God was with them and had protected them and helped them finish the foundation of the Temple.

Years later, during Artaxerxes' reign, there was a man named Ezra, who asked King Artaxerxes for permission to take a second group of exiles home to Israel. The king gave him everything he asked for because "the gracious hand of the Lord his God was on him." (See chapter 7:27,28) Notice the reason Ezra gives for God's gracious hand being on him! (v. 10) Important to note that as we determine to study, know and obey the Word of God, it is possible for us to feel "the gracious hand of God" upon us. Ezra experienced honor from human beings (v. 28), but it was God's affirmation that clearly warmed his heart the most!

When gathering his group of exiles together to make the trip home, he asked a trusted friend to find ministers for the Temple of God at Jerusalem. Since the gracious hand of God was upon them, an astute priest of the lineage of Levi, a man with 18 sons was asked to return to Israel with Ezra's company. And they did.

Ezra gave orders that all should fast and pray as they prepared to leave on their trip, and God heard their prayers and gave them safety with all the treasure they took with them. They broke camp on April 19 and started off on their three and a half month trip to Jerusalem. "And the gracious hand of our God protected us and saved us from enemies and bandits along the way." Upon their arrival in Jerusalem, they rested for three days. Then they accounted for all their valuables which had been numbered and weighed and the total weight recorded. King Artaxerxes' decrees were delivered to his lieutenants and

the governors of the province west of the Euphrates River, who then supported the people and the Temple of God.

As always, problems among the people surfaced. The Israelites had intermarried with surrounding idolatrous nations. Ezra tore his clothing and pulled hair from his head and sat down in utter shock until time for the evening sacrifice! Ezra fell to his knees and lifted his hands to the Lord (Ezra 9:5) his God. This was a situation that required some time to rectify. Ezra made a list of the men who were guilty of intermarriage. I was pleased to see that there was only one singer guilty of this offense.

PROVERBS 30-31

Prov. 30

Vs. 5, 6: Every word of God proves true. He defends all who come to Him for protection. Do not add to His words, or He may rebuke you, and you will be found a liar. Compare Rev. 22:18, 19; and Deut. 4:2.

Vs. 11, 12, 17: There are many texts in scripture which deal with attitudes of children toward their parents. It is not true love to allow children to be disrespectful in speech or behavior toward their parents. Parents, therefore, need to be good examples by being respectful to each other and the children in the home.

Prov. 31

This entire chapter is worth some meditation. These “sayings” were taught to King Lemuel by his mother!!! She must have been a strong woman who although in privileged circumstances did not spend her time in laziness! That’s for sure. And she tells the King what he should appreciate in a wife. In v. 31 it says “Reward her for all she has done. Let her deeds publicly declare her praise.” She does charity work, she watches for bargains and makes business deals (and doesn’t say to her husband “May I?”). She is ready for guests at all times. And sometimes she has to travel long distances to get the things she needs. (*Who could measure up to this!*)

ISAIAH 2-35

Isa. 2— The vision that begins in v. 1 is clearly Jerusalem as it will be when sin is ended. See vs. 4, 5. All the nations will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. All wars will stop... Come, people of Israel, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

V. 6 takes us back to God’s rejection of Israel because of alliances with foreigners from the East who practice “magic” like the Philistines. Idolatry is rampant. The Lord cannot ignore their sins! (And people say there’s nothing wrong with the Harry Potter books and movies—among so many more!) There will come a time when people will try to hide themselves and their silver and gold idols in caverns and holes from the glory of His majesty!

Isa. 3— Jerusalem was to be attacked ferociously by Nebuchadnezzar several

times to punish them for the behavior revealed in this chapter. God presents His case against Judah and Jerusalem in a court scene in vs. 13 and 14. God is the prosecuting attorney “against His own people!” Jerusalem’s women are brazen and covered with jewelry. God will strip all of that away and only shame will be left to them.

Isa. 4 – “In that day” – the day Nebuchadnezzar carries out the Lord’s punishment on His own people, the men will either be taken captive or killed on their own soil. So the women gave up finding “Mr. Right” – They were ready to marry any man at all – for his name only so they won’t be mocked as old maids. Hm! That fear has been around for a long time, hasn’t it?

God is going to purify his holy people, all those whose names are written down, who have survived the destruction of Jerusalem! Then He will provide shade for Jerusalem similar to what Israel experienced in the wilderness!

Isa. 5 – This appears to be a song composed and sung by Isaiah. See God’s heartbreak in v. 7. Destruction is certain for you (Judah and Jerusalem’s inhabitants) who rise early to drink until late at night. You take the time to furnish lovely music and wine at your grand parties; the harps, lyres, tambourines, and flutes are superb! BUT YOU NEVER THINK ABOUT THE LORD – OR NOTICE WHAT HE IS DOING. So I will send my people into exile far away because THEY DO NOT KNOW ME. Destruction is certain for those who think they are wise and consider themselves to be clever. God will send a signal to the nations far away. He will whistle (or call) to those at the ends of the earth, and they will come racing toward Jerusalem. They will not tire or stumble. They will run without stopping for rest or sleep. They will seize my people and carry them off into captivity, and no one will be there to rescue them.

Isa. 6 -- is the scene of Isaiah’s calling to the ministry! In the year that King Uzziah died, he had a vision of the Lord on His lofty throne with hovering seraphim, each with six wings. They sang and it shook the Temple to its foundations, and the entire sanctuary was filled with smoke. God told Isaiah to:

“Harden the hearts of these people.
Close their ears.
Shut their eyes.

That way they will not see, hear or understand with their hearts and turn to me for healing.” In v. 11 Isaiah says “Lord how long must I do this!?” God replies, “Until the entire country is an utter wasteland. ...But what remains will be a holy seed that will grow again.”

Isa. 7 – Messages for Judah’s King Ahaz, grandson of Uzziah, regarding a joint attack by King Pekah of Israel and King Rezin of Aram. Ahaz and his people feared the allied armies. God said this invasion will never happen, so don’t worry about it. You do not believe Me? If you want Me to protect you, LEARN TOO BELIEVE WHAT I SAY!!! Then God said to Ahaz, “Ask me for a sign, ask for anything you’d like, and make it as difficult as you want.” Then Isaiah said “Listen well. You aren’t satisfied to exhaust my patience. You exhaust the patience of God as well! All right then, the Lord

Himself will choose the sign. Look! A virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, Immanuel – ‘God is with us.’ By the time this child is old enough to eat curds and honey, the two kings you fear so much—will both be dead.”

Isa. 8 – Isaiah is asked to make a visual aid: a sign. God said: “Make a large signboard (See Hab. 2:2, 3), and clearly write this name on it: Maher-shalal-hash-baz.” So Isaiah got a large sign board and asked Uriah the priest and Zechariah both known honest men, to testify that I had written it before the child was *conceived*! THEN he slept with his wife and she became pregnant and had a son. We named him “Maher-shalal-hash-baz,” which means that in a couple years, before the child is speaking, the king of Assyria will invade both Damascus and Samaria and carry away all their riches. But God calls to His people to TRUST HIM. He says “If you fear Me, you need fear nothing else. He will keep you safe.” Beautiful!

Isa. 10 – God said that when the Lord has used the king of Assyria to accomplish His purposes in Jerusalem, He will turn against the king of Assyria and in a single night He will destroy Assyria’s vast army and their warriors and they will waste away like sick people in a plague. Less than ten will survive! Then at last those left in Israel and Judah will trust the Lord before they trust in human armies. A remnant of them will return to the Mighty God.

It is difficult not to comment on every chapter of Isaiah. But hopefully by now your thought patterns are comfortable with prophecies which deal with Israel’s current situations, and when the language abruptly refers to a time which is beyond the millennium. In Isa. 14, vs. 12-23 reference Lucifer from his beginning in heaven to his inglorious end! The other reference which gives some details about him is Ezekiel 28. Both Isaiah and Ezekiel take us to his final destruction. We long for the Great Controversy to be over, don’t we? But we need to realize from the many scriptures which tell us not to be afraid, that trials on this earth are given to us to help us exercise faith that casts out all FEAR and TRUSTS in the One who loves us beyond our wildest imagination!!! Praise His name!

If you read on in Isaiah, you will find an experience Isaiah had that must have been difficult for him. See if you can find the purpose of it. God said “Take off all your clothes, including your sandals.” Isaiah lived like that for three years! God is a Master Teacher and this assignment given to Isaiah was a warning to Israel for the future. I’ll give you a hint. You will find this saga somewhere in chapters 15 and 20.

Isa. 28 – Many powerful statements are made in this book regarding the use of wine. See v. 1, last part: Destruction is certain for that city (Samaria)—the pride of a people brought low by wine. Vs 22-29 are awesome. Farmers must appreciate these words.

Isa. 33, 35 – Now for a cool drink at the spring of salvation, read Isaiah 33:21, 22. A few years ago, I decided to tabulate the times that God says “Do not be afraid,” not always verbatim like that, if you’re tuned in to counting the times God gives us that

message they jump out at you. Before I got to the end of the Old Testament, I had noted almost 400 times it had occurred. If you believe that God doesn't waste words (and I happen to believe that fervently), then it becomes clear that this is one of God's HUGE messages directly to us. Look at Isa. 35:3 and 4.

Being afraid is not healthy for us, and it clouds the clarity with which we make decisions. It also definitely shows that God still has a work to do in us until our trust in Him takes away any dread of the future or anything else here on earth. Jesus said that we must become as little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. You know, children who have good parents do trust in them and their sleep is sweet. Our Heavenly Father's love for us makes allowances for our humanity, we see it in the way he communicated with Sarah and Abraham for instance. So we do not need to fear ANYTHING.

Being over half way through this adventure with God, I'm hoping that your minds are energetically open to see the blessings God WANTS to bestow on us. He wants us to work for Him and it is clear the way He related to spiritual leaders of all time, that He works right along beside us. Anyone who dedicates to God all the gifts that the Holy Spirit bestows on us at baptism or gifts our parents shared with us, is destined for a life in which God directs you and how you live your life! (Ps. 139) Blessed Peace!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 31 Nehemiah; Ezekiel 40-48; Psalms 136-143

NEHEMIAH

There is some similarity between the lives of Ezra and Nehemiah. Nehemiah was the cup bearer for King Artaxerxes. The king apparently knew Nehemiah quite well, because he noticed an expression on Nehemiah's face that made him think something was very wrong for his favorite cup bearer. When Nehemiah explained that he was concerned about his family back in Israel and needed to make a trip. When he asked permission to go, the queen asked "How long will you be gone? When will you return?"

The king provided Nehemiah with financial help and wrote orders for enough lumber to build a home for himself. Like Moses, he was zealous that the people obey God's commandments. And there were times that he made physical contact with disobedient ones.

Daniel had the vision regarding the 2300 day prophecy and Ezra and Nehemiah are books which help establish the exact times that decrees were given to build and restore the Temple and the city. This is a fascinating journey for this week.

EZEKIEL 40-48

Orthodox Jews still pray three times a day that Ezekiel's Temple will be built. They also have blueprints drawn up based on this book's descriptions. And it would have

been the third Temple if the Jews had accepted Christ. In vision Ezekiel saw some things which are similar to Revelation 22: the river flowing from the throne, fruit trees with a new crop each month and leaves for the healing of the nations.

PSALMS 135-143

These Psalms are so full of the love of God. Psalm 136 is clearly antiphonal with a leader singing a phrase and then the congregation immediately responding with the same words every time! Wonderful words! Psalm 139 is an intimate portrait of God's closeness to us *even before we are born!!!* We can know for certain that God has plans for each of us with details that are mind boggling. For Him to know us that well – and still love us is so strengthening! Psalm 143 has practical promises that we can claim when we need direction in our lives.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 31 Nehemiah; Ezekiel 40-48; Psalms 136-143

WELCOME

During study this week, how many of you experienced moments of joy at the discovery of truth??? Is the focus on the face of God as you read getting more consistent?

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

NEHEMIAH

Just to review, Zerubbabel and Jeshua led some 50,000 repatriates to Judah following Cyrus' decree releasing the Jews living in the Babylonian Empire (now the Medo-Persian Empire) to go home and build the Temple. Against all odds, this first group completed the foundation for the new Temple.

Then many years later under the reign of King Artaxerxes of Persia there was a man named Ezra, the scribe, well versed in the law of Moses and a student of the Word of God, who brought several more thousand Jews home from Babylon. This group brought new energy with them and the Temple was built.

In the twentieth year of the reign of King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah's brother came to visit with some other men who had just arrived from Judah. Their report of the work in Judah distressed Nehemiah. He prayed a prayer that sounded very much like the prayer Daniel prayed in Daniel 9. (In fact, Daniel had been reading Jeremiah's prophecies regarding the exile. There were up-to-date prophecies available to people of those times! Forget computers – they did very well in the communication department!) So as Nehemiah and Ezra and Daniel and other prophets and faithful souls were praying, heaven responded, placing God's gracious hand on Nehemiah, as well as Ezra, and providing the means necessary to finish the wall of the great City of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem was so sparsely populated that defending the wall building was problematic. So after the wall was finished a tenth of Judah's population was chosen by sacred lots to move into the city. Nehemiah and Ezra were meticulous record keepers and census takers.

The dedication of the wall was truly magnificent with antiphonal choirs and instrumentalists, and officials marching behind the choirs. Nehemiah organized all the personnel for specific tasks in the temple, the music and the gatekeepers.

In Neh. 13:1-3 it is recounted that the people found a statement which said no Ammonite or Moabite should ever be permitted to enter the Assembly of God. They had not been friendly or helpful to Israel when they left Egypt. As soon as that stipulation was read, all those of mixed ancestry were immediately expelled from the assembly.

Nehemiah was in Jerusalem for 12 years working side by side with Ezra to get the Jewish government off on the right foot with a completely rebuilt city and wall. He did return to work for King Artaxerxes, so he was not in Jerusalem at the time that Eliashib the priest who was supervisor of the storerooms of the Temple, and who was also a relative of Tobiah, had converted a large storage room and placed it at Tobiah's disposal!! When he returned to Jerusalem and learned what Eliashib had done, he became upset and threw all of Tobiah's belongings from the room. Then he demanded the rooms be purified, and the proper things were returned to that room which was dedicated to store grain offerings, frankincense, Temple utensils, etc.

He also discovered that the priests and singers had not been receiving support from the people so they had left off their Temple work and gone to work in their fields! He confronted the leaders and demanded, "Why has the Temple of God been neglected?" So he restored the Levites to their proper duties. And once more the people brought their tithes of grain, new wine, and olive oil to the Temple storerooms.

Is there a parallel between Nehemiah's Sabbathkeeping and yours? (Neh. 13:15-22) It is from this Scripture we learn that we should "guard the edges of the Sabbath." As the years have gone by, it seems to me that Sabbathkeeping is not taught as it use to be. Did you notice how Nehemiah asks God to remember his good deeds? This particular time he was asking that God would remember his faithfulness in helping the people to "Remember the Sabbath Day..." How did that strike you?

"About this same time," (v. 23) Nehemiah became aware of mixed marriages in the land. In chapter 13:25 it says "So I confronted them and called down curses on them. I beat some of them and pulled out their hair..." Nehemiah worked very hard when he was in Israel, to pull the nation back to God and to clarify their beliefs. I don't think it was pride in himself that prompted him to ask God to remember his "good deeds." I think he earnestly desired God's approval on the work which he did only to glorify God!

EZEKIEL 40-48

Ezekiel arrived in Babylon with the first group of exiles from Judah. He writes: "On the 25th year of our captivity—14 years after the fall of Jerusalem—the Lord took hold of me." Ezekiel had a vision from God in which he was taken to the Land of Israel and set down on a very high mountain. "From there a city across from me toward the south was visible. As He brought me nearer, I saw a man whose face shone like bronze standing beside a gate-way entrance. He was holding a measuring tape and a measuring rod."

He heard God say: “Son of man (Ezekiel), watch and listen. Pay close attention to everything I show you. You have been brought here so I can show you many things.”

The Man who measures many things stays beside Ezekiel throughout the vision. It becomes clear that when we talk about a “gate” in the wall, we’re talking about a good sized room actually, with guards’ alcoves on either side of the pavement leading into the Temple grounds. Once in the outer courtyard, it is seen that a stone pavement flanks the gates and extends out from the walls into the courtyard the same distance as the gateway entrance! Then the Man measured across the Temple’s outer courtyard between the outer and inner gateways; the distance was 175 feet!

Now let’s consider the measurements of the Inner Courtyard gates and passageways – they are identical to the Outer Wall measurements. Inside the inner courtyard there were two one-room buildings for the singers (Ezekiel 40:44), one beside the north gateway, facing south, and the other beside the south gateway, facing north. There is also a building beside the south inner gate for the priests in charge of the altar, for they alone of all the Levites may approach the Lord to minister to Him.

The way to enjoy these chapters is to visualize the swinging doors and the figures carved all along the inside of the Temple, from the floor to the top of the walls, including The outer wall of the Holy Place!!! Can you see it!! All the walls were decorated with carvings of cherubim, each with two faces, and there was a palm tree carving between each of the cherubim. One face—that of a man—looked toward the palm tree on one side. The other face—that of a young lion—looked toward the palm tree on the other side.

Ezekiel 44 talks about a prince who is the only person that can be in the foyer of the gate to the east, for that is where the glory of the Lord entered! Even the prince cannot enter into the temple from that gate. He can only watch from the foyer of that gate as the worship is offered by the priests.

Ezekiel 44:24 reminds the priests to see to it that the Sabbath is set apart as a holy day (Nehemiah would say a hearty “Amen” to that!) Chapter 46:1-8 also emphasizes Sabbath days, and further explains how the prince enters the foyer of the gateway and watches the service standing by a gatepost.

Ezekiel 47 has some hints of the final scene in Heaven. There is a river flowing from the Temple. Fruit trees grow on both sides of the river, with leaves that never turn brown and fall. There will be a new crop of fruit every month, without fail! The leaves of those trees will be for food and the leaves for healing. (Rev. 22:1-5)

It is said that David and Solomon built Temple #1. Zerubbabel built Temple #2 along with others who worked after the foundation was in place. Ezekiel’s Temple would have been #3, but once again, Israel rejected Christ. In 70 AD Roman soldiers attacked Jerusalem and ransacked the temple. It is said that building materials, parts of

the Temple, were taken to several foreign countries to be included in palaces under construction at that time.

And so—Ezekiel’s Temple was never built, because the Jews rejected the Messiah! Orthodox Jews still pray three times a day that Ezekiel’s Temple will be built. Some historians say that Jewish leaders have Ezekiel’s descriptions put in blue print format, ready to build!

PSALMS 136-143

The richness of these psalms is so heart-warming. By now are you recognizing the texts that reveal God to you? “His unfailing love endures forever!” (Psalms 136; 138:8; 143:8, 12) My friends, He is faithful, even if we are not. And when we call on Him, He bends down and listens...and cares. Thank You, Lord Jesus!

In Psalm 141:2 David says “Accept my prayer as incense offered to you, and my upraised hands as an evening offering!” Isn’t that beautiful? “Take control of what I say, O Lord, and keep my lips sealed.”

Psalm 143 David is so depressed that (v. 4) he is “losing all hope; I am paralyzed with fear.” Then David says “I remember the days of old (v.5). I ponder all your great works. I think about what You have done and I reach out for You. I thirst for You as parched land thirsts for rain.” (Now come words of hope:) (v. 8) “Let me hear of Your unfailing love to me in the morning, for I am trusting You. SHOW ME WHERE TO WALK, for I have come to you in prayer... I run to You to hide me. Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God. May Your gracious Spirit lead me forward on a firm footing.”

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 32 Job; Lamentations

JOB

JOB is a fascinating book! It could be written as a stage play—a drama for church. Some people say this should be categorized as a parable and therefore Job wasn’t really a real person. But James 5:11 speaks of Job in a very real sense!

When Job is stricken with boils and Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar come to visit, they talk a lot. At one point Job pretty much calls them a bag of wind. These three men do seem to know a lot about God, but they do NOT know why Job is having sorrow and hardship. Elihu is younger than the rest and he enters toward the end of the story after having listened to all the rest and declares that his wisdom is better than that of his elders. (Where have we heard that before!) But none of them seems to consider that God has cosmic factors going on in the universe that they know nothing of.

Pay close attention to Chapter 28 and the dialog between Job and God in the last four or five chapters. God never does tell Job exactly why he's being punished—at least that's the way it looks! He just validates His power and creativity as God, and Job repents just because he had been talking about God and realizes that God is so far above him that he should have been more careful about what he says about God.

It was when Job prayed for his friends that his own situation turned around!! His friends seemed to have some correct knowledge about God, but the information that Job wanted to hear was that they accepted his declaration of innocence! God rewarded Job with a complete new family and twice as many animals – thousands and thousands! Furthermore, he got to live until he saw the third and fourth generations of his NEW FAMILY! Think about that!

Read the book carefully. There are some very good texts useful for teaching the state of the dead, and the second coming.

LAMENTATIONS

As you read this book, picture Jeremiah standing in the middle of Jerusalem with the Temple burned, the palaces burned, all the better homes burned, and the wall torn down and very few people in sight. Almost all of them were in captivity. Even the ground itself was totally bare following the trampling of Nebuchadnezzar's soldiers over the ground THREE TIMES! Ugly place! So Jeremiah, soft hearted Jeremiah, weeps quite a bit. He recognizes that this punishment is from God but it is given because of the wickedness of some of the kings: Manasseh for one. Remember that after Manasseh's dramatic conversion acceptance of God, the Lord let him return to Jerusalem for several years to reign as a good king. And God said that the evil Manasseh had committed had led all of Jerusalem and Judah astray and the innocent blood that had been shed demanded punishment, but God would defer it until after Manasseh died.

Lam. 3 is like a taste of cool, fresh water. At the end of Lam. 4 it talks about the people of Edom and the Land of Uz which is located in Edom. Interesting that this would be mentioned in the same reading where we learned that Job lived in the Land of Uz!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 32 Job, Lamentations

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

JOB

This book reveals far-reaching cosmic truths. For this book, it's good to keep a King James Version handy. Where the word "angel(s)" is used in the newer versions, the KJ version renders the same word: "sons of God." To say "angels" dilutes the wonderful truth I wish to share with you. You'll see.

If you go to the Gospel of Luke, chapter 3, you will see an unusual genealogy which begins with the present (when Luke was writing) and takes us back to the beginning of the creation story. The impact of saying "ADAM was the SON of GOD" is powerful, especially after saying many, many, times that everybody else on the list was begotten by a human being! I believe that every inhabitable planet God created has a "Son of God" who is the top authority on that planet.

SCENE I Place: On earth at Job's place Job is the leading character

As the story begins, Job, a devoted servant of God, has a comfortable life with thousands of service animals, ten children: seven sons and three daughters, and a wife. Job's children are mature enough to own their own houses where they celebrated, feasting on their birthdays for several days at a time! When these feasts ended, Job would get up early in the morning and offer a burnt offering for each of his children, for Job said to himself, "Perhaps my children have sinned and renounced God in their hearts." This was Job's practice continually. They live in the "Land of Uz" where Job was known as the greatest person of all the people "of the East." In Edom, there is an area called "the Land of Uz!" It is located south of Jerusalem about 100 miles, bordering the Red Sea.

SCENE II Place: A celestial council meeting (Heaven)

Job 1:6-12 "Now there was a day when the SONS OF GOD came to present themselves before the Lord. And Satan came also among them." (Job's story had to have occurred

after the “fall” when Eve and Adam sinned. *Up until the “fall” Adam was totally in charge of earth and would have represented earth at heavenly councils.* But Adam and Eve gave up their positions which put Satan here on earth, thrown down after an awful battle in Heaven. (Rev. 12)

LORD: Whence comest thou?

SATAN: From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

LORD: Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?

SATAN: Doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth Thine hand now, and touch all that he hath, and he will curse Thee to Thy face.

LORD: Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand.

SCENE III Job’s place. Time: Somebody’s birthday, the children are celebrating

1ST Messenger to Job: The oxen were plowing and the asses feeding beside them: and the Sabeans fell upon them, and took them away; yea, they have slain the servants with the edge of the sword; and I only am escaped to tell thee.

2nd Messenger to Job: The Chaldeans made out three bands, and fell upon the camels, and have carried them away, yea, and slain the servants with the edge of the sword and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

3rd Messenger to Job: Thy sons and thy daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother’s house: And behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and smote the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young men, and they are dead; and I only am escaped alone to tell thee.

(Job tears his mantle and shaves his head, falls down upon the ground and worships)

JOB: Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.

(In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly.)

SCENE IV Second council in heaven with all the sons of God present)

LORD: Whence comest thou?

SATAN: From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.

LORD: Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil? And still he holdeth fast his integrity, although thou movedst me against him, to destroy him without cause.

SATAN: Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put forth thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face.

LORD: Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life.

SCENE V

(So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown. And he took a potsherd, a piece of broken pottery, to scrape himself withal; and he sat down among the ashes.)

JOB'S WIFE: Dost thou still retain thine integrity? Curse God, and die.

JOB: Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?

(In all this did not Job sin with his lips. ENTER: Three friends come to visit to mourn with Job and to comfort him. Eliphaz, Bildad, Zophar, and finally Elihu. When they neared the place, they tried to see him from afar, but could not recognize any features. They lifted up their voices and wept, rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. They sat with him seven nights and days and spake not a word unto him; for they saw that his grief was very great.)

This could still continue as above with characters having their “say” about Job’s situation, but there is way too much to continue relating it here. I’m hoping you will read the entire book. It turns out that Job clearly lives a life close to His Maker. His life exemplifies “good and perfect religion” helping widows, the poor, and must ask forgiveness immediately after realizing that he has sinned, because his friends could NOT believe that he was sinless!

In Chapter 38:6, 7 God tells Job that all the morning stars AND ‘Sons of God’ sang and shouted when He laid the Cornerstone and the foundations of earth!They were ALL participating in the plans laid by God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit! Hallelujah!

Chapters 38-41 are a fabulous conversation between God and Job. See Job pray for his friends and move God to give Job a family with same number of children, and he got to see them grow up and give him grandchildren to the 4th generation!!!

LAMENTATIONS

Jeremiah is known as the weeping prophet because of his emotional group of funeral songs written in honor of the devastated, beloved city, Jerusalem.

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 33

Daniel; Ezekiel 1-2; Rev. 1, 4

All three passages listed above contain accounts of scenes in Heaven. The writers: Daniel, Ezekiel and John the Beloved saw Jesus and His Father working in our behalf in Heaven. All three of these men seemed to faint, or get weak and couldn't stand up in God's presence. But they were touched with the power of Heaven and given strength. The descriptions of immortal beings seem to have similarities!

Of course, as you read the Book of Daniel, I am sure you will have memory of much of the prophecy foretold in that book, but toward the end, Daniel was told that the message of this book was to be sealed, since it pertains to the end of all things.

Be bountifully blessed with this reading! Along with Ezra, Nehemiah and now these three heroes in this week's reading, learn to recognize *the hand of the Lord* on you!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 33 Daniel; Ezekiel 1-3; Revelation 1, 4

WELCOME

If you had your social occasion recently outside of the regular session, talk about that, and schedule another similar event two or three months from today so there is time for all to make plans in their schedules.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

DANIEL

This prophet was taken captive to Babylon when he was very young. He was to become one of the most influential people in all of Babylon and beyond that into the Medo-Persian government. To whom did he owe his success? God, of course, but Daniel made a choice to be close to God. THAT was his secret!

In fact, his relationship to God was so important that he maintained his prayer life by praying three times a day in front of an open window toward Jerusalem. Even when he knew it would get him in trouble. You have to admire this young man who, along with his best three Hebrew friends, requested a vegan diet, and who refused to bow down to the king's image.

This is the kind of relationship with God which we all need and seek in this group – is that not correct? Is it available to us? Now? Today? If so, let us with God's help make it a daily pattern in our lives – to walk with God like Daniel is something to be treasured and nurtured. In Daniel 9 and 10 an angel told Daniel that he was “greatly beloved in heaven!”

Daniel was loved on earth as well. When King Darius could find no loop-hole in his law regarding punishment for worshiping anyone or anything other than himself, the king had a sleepless night after having Daniel thrown in the hungry lions' den. He arose early the next morning and called down to Daniel hoping to hear Daniel's voice, still alive! Darius clearly was exceedingly fond of Daniel, even though he was a foreigner and one of those socially outcast Hebrews.

We know the battle that was begun in heaven (Rev. 12) has been continuing on earth ever since. Scripture rarely provides clear pictures of the cosmic conflict on earth. But Daniel 9 and 10 give us a detailed account of a mighty angel from heaven who was sent to help Daniel understand a prophecy which devastated him at first. Read the

account carefully and you will see that “Michael” (one of Jesus’ Old Testament names, it means “captain of the host”) and the angel, Gabriel, had to actually relieve each other from time to time.

Daniel 12 is an awesome chapter. The world is most certainly running to and fro already!! In Dan. 12:1 “Michael” (Jesus) is pictured as the Archangel who stands guard over his own people. You may recall when Joshua saw a “Soldier” apparently sent to encourage Joshua for his first battle as leader of Israel. I Cor. 10:4 shows us that the One involved in Old Testament times was JESUS. Just saying, this is not the only time Jesus is referred to and seen in angel form. John 1 says that Jesus did ALL the creating “in the beginning...” Another reference shows that the Godhead met “before the foundations of the earth were laid” and the Son volunteered to provide salvation for mankind should it ever become necessary.

As we continue in our discussion with Ezekiel and Revelation, just one word of explanation. I was moved to present these scriptures together because each of these authors were given the great privilege of seeing Jesus Christ in vision, and their physical reactions to the experience are very similar! It is ALL very visual in the presentation of the writers. Be blessed!

EZEKIEL 1-3

On July 31 of Ezekiel’s thirtieth year, he was with the Judean exiles beside the Kebar River in Babylon. And the heavens were opened to him where he saw visions of God!!!! The Lord gave a message to him, there beside the Kebar River in the land of the Babylonians and he felt the hand of the Lord take hold of him (See Ezra 7:6, 9 and Neh. 2:8).

Read these chapters as though you have a television screen in your mind. These scenes are worthy of your best concentration. ...I thought I was done with this portion of the week’s assignment, but I think I just felt the Lord’s gracious hand on me! This is the message: God’s messages are just as powerful in printed words as in audible words. We ARE receiving God’s messages as we read Scripture – and it is our commission to absorb and share these words, just as credibly as if they were spoken to us audibly. God bless you!!

REVELATION 1 and 4

John the revelator was on the Isle of Patmos for the crime of sharing the Word of Christ. Now he faithfully reports the Word of God and the Testimony of Jesus – everything he saw. Treasure the promise in v. 3 of chapter 1. John’s greeting says: “This letter is from John to the SEVEN CHURCHES in the province of Asia.” He points their minds immediately to our Savior and says “Look! He comes with the clouds of heaven even as the disciples saw Him go into heaven!...And everyone will see Him – even those who pierced Him. (A special resurrection??)

Notice how many times the words “Don’t be afraid” appear. If we were to count the number of times in the entire Bible that those words are uttered, it would be hundreds. I counted carefully just in the Old Testament and when it was close to 400 times when I quit counting! Clearly Jesus does not want us to be afraid! We need to understand that *we are God’s children* and God WILL TAKE CARE OF US. Being afraid is not good for our health! Jesus, in His glorified body, tells John “Don’t be afraid,” and He lays His right hand on John! Rev. 1:17 How reassuring and comforting!

In chapter 4, John experiences the “same voice” he had heard before with the sound of a mighty trumpet blast! Drink up every word. These are precious scenes.

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 34 Isaiah 40-48; I, II, III John; Malachi 1, 2

ISAIAH 40-48

These chapters are affirmations of our belief in a Creator God. It behooves each of us to be certain of Whom we believe, for the voices of evolution seem to be getting louder.

I, II, III JOHN

The “beloved disciple” brings such wonderful dimensions of God’s love to the Scriptures. John’s knowledge of God is that of personal hands-on learning. And that knowledge was so wonderful for John that he needed to witness to his experience with Christ “so that our joy will be complete.”

I John 2:1 tells us Christ’s work was not finished yet when He died on the cross. See Him pleading for you before the Father right now? He is there still very much involved with what is happening with His children on earth.

I John 5:20 says “And He has given us understanding so that we can KNOW the true God..” That the essence of our purpose in going through the ENTIRE Bible: to KNOW God. Notice that God gives us help in that direction GIVING us understanding. Pray for it, He has promised and He WILL help us to be able to see Him more clearly.

III John v.8 encourages us to support ministries that promote God’s truth, and thereby we become part of that team! Sounds good!

MALACHI 1, 2

God states His love for Israel and explains that He loved Jacob, their ancestor, but rejected Esau, his twin. The descendants of Esau are exceedingly wicked and their country is known as “the Land of Wickedness.”

Remember in our very first week, where God says quite a lot about keeping our promises? We need to take a good look at ourselves and do an integrity reality check! Anyone who “knows God” WILL BE A PROMISE KEEPER, not fickle and unstable.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 34 Isaiah 40-48; I, II, III John; Malachi 1, 2

WELCOME

Were you able to establish a date for a get together last week? Maybe today would be a good time to try to “nail that down!” There will probably be only one more opportunity between now and the end of the calendar.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

ISAIAH 40-48

Reading these chapters at this time in earth’s history is like a breath of fresh air. The voices of the evolutionists (atheists) are strong today, claiming that there are billions of years of history on the earth. They find large bones in digs and proclaim their great knowledge of the age in which this skeleton was a living, breathing creature. Indeed, it seems that intellect (supposed) far supersedes (“sits in place of”) a Creator!

Evolutionists imagine their minds are more reliable than the Creator, and they cut themselves off from the Source of life. They are lost forever if they remain on that road! Isaiah 43:25 states: “I—yes, I alone—am the One who blots out your sins FOR MY OWN SAKE and will never think of them again!” God says in Isaiah 1:18 “Come now, let us reason together...and you can present your case if you have one.” God is reasonable and will listen to any honest seeker after “TRUTH.” But what non-Christians do not see is Jesus IS TRUTH.

Isaiah 44:3, 4 (NLT) says “...And I will pour out My Spirit and My blessings on your children. They will thrive like watered grass, like willows on a riverbank.” My prayer for all TILE small groups: “Oh Creator God! Please bless all families now in TILE groups with Your lifegiving Spirit and energy! I thank You in advance, because I believe the promises of my Creator. Amen.”

Isaiah 44:28 (God speaking) “When I say of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd,’ he will certainly do as I say. He will command that JERUSALEM BE REBUILT AND THAT THE TEMPLE BE RESTORED.” Very important text in the fulfillment of prophecy. It also shows that God is not locked in to working with Jews only. Cyrus ruled a heathen nation! See vs. 1-8 to see God working well ahead of the actual time Cyrus was to go into action for God. God “called” him and He says “I have prepared you for this work, even though you do not know me, so all the world from east to west will know there is no other God. I am the Lord, and there is no other! I create light and darkness. I am the One Who sends good times and bad times.”

Isaiah 46:3, 4 “Listen to me, all you who are left in Israel. I created you and have cared for you since before you were born. I will be your God throughout your life time—until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you.” What a wonderful God!

I JOHN

This book was written toward the end of the first century A.D. Isn't it logical that the youngest disciple who seemed to be closest to Jesus, AND the one who took care of Jesus' mother, would write some books that deal very much with the love of God? See I John 1:4: “We are writing these things so that our joy will be complete.” Isaiah 43:25 says that God forgives our sins FOR HIS OWN SAKE! So, for John to write about Jesus' love, must give Him peaceful joy AND for us to accept God's forgiveness gives Him joy! Since we all have sin in our lives, we should not deny it! We need to remember that there is repentance that must come before forgiveness. The good news is God NEVER sees our forgiven sins again because He has thrown them to the bottom of the sea. (Micah 7:19) Thank You, so much, Jesus!

I John 2:27, 28 say that the Holy Spirit teaches us what is true. “Continue to live in fellowship with Christ so that when He returns, you will be full of courage and NOT SHRINK BACK FROM HIM in shame.” Awesome!

I John 3:8, 10 “But when people keep on sinning, it shows they belong to the Devil, who has been sinning since the beginning...” Vs. 21-24: “Dear friends, if our conscience is clear, we can come to God with bold confidence and receive whatever we request because we obey Him and do the things that please Him....Those who obey God's commandments live in fellowship with Him and He with them. And we KNOW He lives in us because the Holy Spirit lives in us.”

Anyone who believes in evolution has denied Christ and does not “have life.” I John 5:13 states John's purpose in writing this book: “I write this to you who believe in the Son of God, so that you may KNOW that you HAVE eternal life!”

II JOHN

In II John he may have chosen to refer to a specific church with the feminine term: “elect lady.” John sees some faithful believers in her church and is happy for that. He includes a warning against deceivers who do not believe that Jesus came to earth in a real body. It's important that we believe that He became human for our sakes. It is a mystery which will be discussed throughout eternity.

III JOHN

John greets Gaius light heartedly hoping that his body is as healthy as his soul is! John refers to converts as “my children” the same as Paul did. He commends Gaius for his hospitality to traveling teachers of the faith, even though they are strangers to him. After updating him on a couple of troublemakers, John says that he would much rather talk to him face to face and he hopes to see him soon.

MALACHI 1, 2

God sent a message to Malachi to give to Israel, in which He declares His deep love for Israel. The people say “Really? How have You loved us? God says He loved Israel by loving Jacob. But he rejected Esau and devastated his inheritance and “turned his hill country into a desert for jackals.” Esau’s descendants may say, “We’ve been shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins.”

But God says, “Then I will demolish them again! Esau’s country (Edom) will be known as ‘The Land of Wickedness,’ and their people will be known as ‘The People with whom the Lord is forever angry.’ When you see the destruction for yourselves, you will say, ‘Truly, the Lord’s great power reaches far beyond our borders!’ “

Israel was offering defective animals for sacrifices made to God. This dishonors God, defiling the Lord’s table. Some animals are stolen and mutilated, crippled and sick. “Cursed is the cheat who promises to give a fine ram from his flock but then sacrifices a defective one to the Lord. For I am a great King” says the Lord Almighty, “and My Name is feared among the nations!” Consider how we might be doing the same type of giving today! Dishonoring God by not giving of our best. It’s worth giving serious contemplation!

Malachi 2:10-17 appears to have a double meaning. It could be applied to Israel’s unfaithfulness to God which some scholars suggest, but some of the wording seems to me to relate directly to faithfulness in marriage. See what you think. And remember that the Mine of Truth in Scripture has not been totally excavated. New truth is still visible to those who prayerfully seek precious ore in the Oracles of God.

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 35 Isaiah 49-57; John

ISAIAH 49-57

These are marvelous chapters foretelling much about Christ’s earthly life. Chapter 56 has wonderful promises for Eunuchs and Gentiles. Chapter 57 has comfort for those who lose loved ones who died “before their time,” and some amazing texts about God’s forgiveness. But ends with the words “ ‘There is no peace for the wicked,’ says my God.”

JOHN

This gospel is the fulfillment of much of the book of Isaiah. Of course, there is too much in this book to discuss in a short time, but focus on what you learn about God that is new, or a new dimension of understanding and share those things during the group session.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 35 Isaiah 49-57; John

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

ISAIAH 49-57

These chapters reveal the Savior plainly. It is so sad that the priests, who studied Scripture constantly did not recognize its fulfillment in Jesus! When I read Isa. 53:10, 11, I see Jesus in Gethsemane pleading with His Father to “take this cup away from Me.” He was to become sin for us, and He knew that for a time the Father would be separated from Him. During Jesus’ earthly ministry, He and the Father were inseparable. John 14 quotes Jesus saying that He didn’t even say His own words or do His own deeds – it all came from His Father!

There in the garden, as Jesus suffered intense emotional agony, there must have come a time of calm acceptance. Hebrews 6:7-9 states that Jesus offered prayers and pleadings with A LOUD CRY AND TEARS to the One Who could deliver Him out of death! Heb.12:2 (NASB) states that Jesus went to the cross because He was willing to die that shameful death “because of the joy He knew would be His afterward!” Prov. 15:11 (NLT) says “Even the depths of Death and Destruction are known by the Lord. How much more does He know the human heart?”

Over and over in the gospels, Jesus refers to those who believe on Him as being His father and mother or sister or brother. Jesus views US as “family!” He must be very eager to gather the faithful from all ages to Him in heaven! And, it may be that for the first time in at least 6,000+ years in heaven, it will have it’s “normal” population once again! (We’ll talk more about that later.)

Isaiah 56 is so awesome! God says to be just and fair to all for He’s coming soon and blessed are those who honor My Sabbath days of rest by refusing to work! Sabbath blessings are available to faithful eunuchs AND gentiles, as well, for God will bring back the outcasts of Israel (from their exile to Babylon) and others besides Israel! God promises great things to the eunuchs who could not have children because captors had neutered them so that sexual desires would not distract them from their work – which frequently was guarding the harem!

I can't leave Isaiah without commenting on chapter 57. The very first verse is a wonderful one to comfort those who lose loved ones in the prime of their lives, a tragedy too terrible to endure. Sometimes death is a way that God protects and preserves them!

Read Isa. 57:15-20 and then tell me if you believe God makes it more difficult to be lost than to be saved?? Doesn't the love of God just totally amaze you?

JOHN

As you read the gospel of John, could you not hear the words of Isaiah frequently? We can trust God to let us know of His plans. (See Amos 3:7, NASB: Surely the Lord does nothing unless He reveals His plans to his servants, the prophets.)

The way Jesus related to "other humans" is so incredible. His insights were truly supernatural, coming to Him from His Father – according to Him: John 14:10, 11. And Jesus wants the same kind of relationship with us that He had with His heavenly Father. And now, He indicates that kind of relationship is available to us with the Father and the Spirit as well. He is our entire reality. Without Him we are nothing!

Jesus came to reveal the Father. Share what you learned about God through the life of Jesus. Were there brand new revelations for you? What were they? DID YOU WRITE THEM DOWN? If not, think about starting journaling your inspirations so you don't forget them!!!

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 36

Jeremiah 26-29; Isaiah 58-66; Revelation 19-22

JEREMIAH 26-29

Being God's prophet in Jeremiah's day was not for sissies! He delivered messages that he KNEW were going to incite people to want to kill him, and sometimes false prophets challenged him in public! God took care of Jeremiah in remarkable ways. And, his messages were accompanied at times with visual aids. You cannot tell me God doesn't have a sense of humor!

ISAIAH 58-66

These chapters in Isaiah contain the one which Jesus read in the Temple on the Sabbath Day. You will recognize it, I'm sure. Also, the kind of lives we should be living to please the Lord is made very clear. As far as getting to know the Lord better – watch for the verses that reveal His heart. Isaiah 63:2-6 is a parallel passage to Revelation 19:11-21. And finally, chapter 66 begins "Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool." The hypocrisy of the wicked is reviewed and then the future of the faithful is revealed, and then the final judgment rids earth of sin and suffering forever and ever, Amen!

REVELATION 19-22

These chapters describe the Marriage Feast, the final defeat of the wicked in battle, the millennium, the new earth and the joy of a universe without sin! But there is a caveat: God declares that if anyone adds to the prophecy of this book, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life, and from the holy city, which are written in this book. Important that we don't presume things that are NOT written here! Or that we omit truth, maybe because it's not convenient - ? But this is important to God. I know some protestant pastors who say this book should never have been included in the Bible Canon. That's taking away from it, for sure! It will not go well for the shepherds who have misled their flocks on judgment day!!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 36 Jeremiah 26-29; Isaiah 58-66; Revelation 19-22

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

JEREMIAH 26-29 messages from God

Jer. 26 It was a dangerous thing to be a faithful prophet in the days that Israel was Rebellious. God told Jeremiah he could hide behind a tree and shout: “Oh, NO--- God said go stand in front of the temple and say every single word I tell you to say.” Jeremiah did it apparently with no fear. That is God’s man! Or woman!

Jer. 27 Ah, a visual aid is used! Jeremiah has to wear a yoke fastened to his neck with leather thongs! I love the opening sentence God told Jeremiah to say to King Zedekiah: “By My great power I have made the earth and all its people and every animal. I can give these things of mine to anyone I choose...” Judah (and Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon were suppose to surrender to King Nebuchadnezzar and the officials and people balked. But God said “Submit to Babylon’s king and serve him; put your neck under Babylon’s yoke!” Jer. 27: 2-11. Wow! Sounds like a good deal to me!! I urge you to read vs. 2-11 – to the end!

Jer. 28 Hananiah was a false prophet who challenged Jeremiah publicly in the Temple while all the priests and people listened. He said God was going to return the gold utensils from Nebuchadnezzar in two years -- “the Lord has spoken!” After Jeremiah refuted the false message, Hananiah took the yoke off Jeremiah’s neck and broke it! Not a good idea! The Lord gave Jeremiah a message for Hananiah in vs. 15-17. He died shortly thereafter.

Jer. 29 Jeremiah wrote a helpful letter from Jerusalem to the elders, priests, prophets, and all the people who had been exiled to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar.

ISAIAH 58-66

Isaiah 58 is one of my favorite chapters in all of Scripture! It contains crystal clear directives as to what true religion is. Check them out and see what your score is! The truth is though, it’s impossible to “score” unless you do what you do only because

you know God personally and want to please Him. And it ends with beautiful texts regarding “keeping” the Sabbath, again with some pretty clear directives.

Isaiah 59 This prophet seems to write in a way that reveals God to a focused reader. If you are wanting to really know God, then read Isaiah especially for that purpose. The NASB renders vs. 1, 2 as follows: “Behold, the Lord’s hand is not so short that it cannot save; nor is His ear so dull that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear.” So there does come a point in our level of wickedness beyond which God will not listen! V. 9 says “It is because of all this evil that deliverance is far from us. That is why God doesn’t punish those who injure us....”

The Lord looked and was displeased to find that there was no justice. He was amazed to see that no one intervened on behalf of the oppressed. So He put on His “gospel armor” (Eph. 6:10-18)! I wonder if Paul based his comments on this Isaiah passage. Vs. 20-21 are wonderful promises. I treasure promises that include children and children’s children!

Isaiah 60:1-3 form the lyrics for much of the MESSIAH, Handel’s Oratorio. While a lot of this chapter deals with the Babylonian exile, the part that deals with their return to Judah also parallels our deliverance from captivity on this earth and our trip to heaven. Vs. 19-21 clearly relate to the end of all sin! HALLELUJAH!

Isaiah 61 is the Scripture Jesus read in the temple on the Sabbath Day. Luke 4:18-21. Then He said: “This Scripture has come true today before your very eyes!” Wow! These verses were written hundreds of years before Christ. I’m sure the priests who study Scripture all the time were familiar with the text He selected. The Lord loves justice, hates robbery and wrongdoing. He will faithfully reward His people for their suffering and make an everlasting covenant with them. Then Isaiah speaks of his joy in the Lord for He has clothed me with garments of salvation and wrapped me with **a robe of righteousness**. I am like a bridegroom in his wedding suit or a bride with her jewels. So beautiful!

Isaiah 62 Definitely has a double message regarding the exile and God’s return at the end of time.

Isaiah 63 It is fascinating to see Scriptural passages written so far apart in time, yet they complement the message so beautifully. This chapter has a New Testament parallel in Rev. 19:15, 18. Look at v. 10 of this chapter and see what grief the sin problem has caused our Lord. Surely the “man of sin” has been revealed enough for Jesus to come back very soon!

Isaiah 64 This chapter is a continuation of the prayer begun in the previous chapter, v. 15. We are all infected with sin and yet, Lord, You are our Father. We are the clay and You are the Potter. We are formed by Your hand. What a plea for God to move to help His people.

Isaiah 65 God says “I am being found by people who were not looking for Me!!! To them I have said ‘I am here!’ I opened my arms to my own people all day long, but they have rebelled.” When God punished Judah He did not annihilate them, but left a remnant. God “destines” the rebellious ones to the sword. Vs. 13-16 highlight the difference in God’s treatment of the faithful ones. But then God jumps millennia ahead to a time when the wolf and lamb will feed together and no one will be hurt ever again. Amen and amen! I am sure He likes to look ahead to a more peaceful time, too!

Isaiah 66 Righteousness and justice will come to a final act: freeing the universe from the taint of sin. I’m not sure there is a clear understanding anywhere of the last verse of the Book of Isaiah. But I do believe that Satan, for sure, will suffer longer than anyone else. Perhaps his body has developed such density from all his wickedness that it burns slower than a person who has sinned only a little. There will be “degrees of punishment” as indicated in one of Jesus’ parables. See Luke 12:47, 48.

REVELATION 19-22

Rev. 19 John sees the victory crowd in heaven rejoicing. The twenty-four elders and four living beings fell down and worshiped God, Who was sitting on the throne. They cried out “Amen, Hallelujah!” Notice that the fine white linen worn by the saints represents their good deeds. An angel tells John to write: “Blessed (or “happy” – oh yes!) are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” Then comes the description that has a parallel in Isa. 63:2-6. Look at vs. 15 and 21 of chapter 19: Their entire army was killed by the sharp sword that came out of the mouth of the One riding the white horse. What does the sword represent??? Heb. 4:12; Eph. 6:17. It is the mighty WORD OF GOD and THAT (the Word of God) is what strikes down nations!!! And confounds mighty armies. We are developing the best weapon in the world to put on alert for use whenever the Spirit calls us! Pray that we will be ready.

Rev. 20-22 are totally awesome. Digest them and see if these final chapters don’t tie a ribbon around the rest of the Bible! We began this story with creation and the Creator and we end it with the Creator still creating: a new earth, a new heaven, a New Jerusalem. I believe that the New Jerusalem will descend with the Garden of Eden providing the Central Park for the city which will be foursquare with an opening up to the sky – wa-a-a-ay up to the sky! Read my blog entitled *Baby Jesus’ Inheritance*, please. Go to www.thisislifetimeeternal.org, click on Journal (Blog), then click on the right sidebar on September, 2006.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 37

Jeremiah 1-25; Zechariah; Psalm 60

JEREMIAH 1-25

Jeremiah experienced a dramatic call to the ministry. He was fearless in executing the directions of God. We learn in Jeremiah 2 that the entire universe is shocked at what they see here. See v. 12. Enjoy the visual aids God asks Jeremiah to use to drive home truths to the Jews. When Nebuchadnezzar invades Judah and subdues the nation, Jeremiah is given a choice of whether to go or stay. Remember as you read that he is writing from Jerusalem. There were other prophets who were exiled to Babylon: Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah and Haggai.

I've been impressed with the grief God has experienced time and again with those who profess His Name, but who turn away from Him. Jer. 4:22 says "My people are foolish and do not know me." We want to KNOW HIM, deeply, personally until we sense the reality of His infinitely deeper love for us. Thank You, Jesus!

Jer. 5:3 says that God is searching for honesty in His people. Imagine that!

Jer. 6:19 says the disaster brought upon His people is "the fruit of their own sin because they refuse to listen to Me. They have rejected ALL my instructions."

Jer. 7:25 "From the day your ancestors left Egypt until now, I have continued to send My prophets—day in and day out!"

Jer. 8:18+ "My grief is beyond healing (Jeremiah speaking). I am stunned, silent, mute with grief. Oh, that my eyes were a fountain of tears; I would weep forever! I would sob day and night for all my people who have been slaughtered. ..."

ZECHARIAH

This book contains messages for the first group of exiles returning to their homeland. Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah strike me as very strong men of God. Zechariah's writings deal mainly with Zerubbabel's work. It is fascinating reading.

PSALM 60

David understands rejection by God and writes to restore himself and his people to a right relationship with God. Can you relate to this Psalm? Human help is useless, he says. But with God's help we will do mighty things, for He will trample down our foes. You don't have any foes? Think again!!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 37 Jeremiah 1-25; Zechariah; Psalm 60

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

JEREMIAH 1-25

Jeremiah got a very invigorating call from the Lord to be His prophet. While you are reading it, Psalm 139:13-16 is going to be playing in your mind. Another parallel passage. And God ends it with familiar words which he says to those entrusted to fill positions of leadership in the work of the Lord (Jer. 1:19): “I am with you, and I will take care of you. I, the Lord, have spoken!” Listen to those words! God protects His team and works right alongside of them (Moses, Joshua, Elijah, Enoch...)! **When God gives us a work to do, let us do it with joy because we can rely on His Leadership!**

Jer. 2-25 Some Bible indexes indicate these chapters contain twelve sermons. I have not been able to delineate the beginning and ending of twelve sermons! That’s not to say they are not there. Keep in mind as you read that Jeremiah lived and worked in Jerusalem. At times he would send letters from Judah to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar makes three attacks on Judah. On the first one, close to 50,000 exiles left Judah to go to Babylon, and with each attack devastation got worse and worse.

(I’m going to trust that you are ready now to recognize texts that reveal God to you, therefore my notes will be random facts that impact understanding of the events of the time.)

Heavenly beings are affected by sins of this world (Jer. 2:11, 12 NLT). That people would exchange lifeless objects to worship and reject the true God SHOCKS the Heavens and they shrink back in horror and dismay, says the Lord. It is spiritual adultery!

God says Israel will be led into exile with their hands on their heads (Jer. 2:37), for the Lord has rejected the nations you trust. King Shalmaneser led Samaria into exile into cities of the Medes in 772 B.C. Then he sent Assyrians down to colonize Samaria and they remained there a very long time.

Jer. 4:19-22 Jeremiah weeps and writhes in pain! His heart pounds within him! Waves of destruction roll over the land. Suddenly, every tent is destroyed; ...”My people are foolish and DO NOT KNOW ME,” says the Lord. “They are clever enough at doing wrong, but they have no talent at all for doing right!”

God says: “The whole land will be ruined, but I will not destroy it completely. I have made up my mind and will not change it.” (Jer. 4:28; Heb. 13:8; Mal. 3:6)

Both Israel and Judah are living in terrible sin, so Israel will be exiled north to Assyria, and about 130 years later Judah will go to Babylon which is either due East across the desert, or followed the rivers up across the crescent (which is Abraham’s route) and then down to Babylon along the Euphrates River. Check a map and you will see how far they walked!

King Shalmaneser sent Assyrians to colonize Samaria. Remember that God sent lions to attack the Assyrians who were living heathen lives in the “promised land!” So King S. asked some Israeli priests to go back to their homeland and teach the foreigners who were now residents in Samaria, how to live so that the lions would quit killing them. They claimed to worship the true God, but they never gave up their former idols. So that would help to explain the Jewish attitudes toward the “Samaritans.”

Jer. 7:21-26 God describes His relationship with His chosen people and says: “I have continued to send my prophets—day in and day out!” But He finally says in v. 29: “O Jerusalem, the Lord has rejected and forsaken this generation that has provoked His fury.”

Jer. 9:24 A text to memorize (the Lord speaking): “Let them boast in this alone; **THAT THEY TRULY KNOW ME** and understand that I am the Lord Who is just and righteous, Whose love is unfailing, and that I delight in these things. I, the Lord, have spoken.” To know our wonderful God is the highest calling we can find on this earth. Keep it a high priority!!!! Pray for it. Fast for it. Seek the Holy Spirit’s aid in the journey!!!!

Jer. 10:12-16 There are some traits of God listed here that are worthy of our study. And vs. 23-25 – A prayer of Jeremiah – can you sense the depth of Jeremiah’s friendship with God? It’s palpable.

Jer. 11:18-23 God warned Jeremiah of a plot by the men of Anathoth who wanted Jeremiah dead.

Jer. 13:1-11 God told Jeremiah to go shopping for a linen belt and put it around his waist. “As a belt clings to a person’s waist, so I created Judah and Israel to cling to me,” says the Lord. Hint: To KNOW a person, takes time. God wants us to *cling* to Him. Set aside time in your life to get to know your VERY BEST Friend!

Jer. 15:6 God gets tired of always giving Judah another chance. He’s ready to take away everything they hold dear!

Jer. 16:14, and 15b People will change the way they take an oath to reflect the fact that God will bring them back to the land He gave their ancestors.

Jer. 17:5-10 Please digest these verses! God's description of His people and Himself is beautiful. He says He is fair and just and "will give all people their due rewards, according to what their actions deserve!" Then, in vs. 19-27 is a passage regarding the observation of the Sabbath.

NOTE: I need to allow your Scriptural creativity and understanding to function on your own. Enjoy, explore the significance of visual aids to the end of Jer. 25.

May God bless your reading of the wonderful book of Jeremiah, is my prayer!

ZECHARIAH

Have you noticed the array of messages and prophets sent by God to Judah and Israel? I believe that the entire universe sees that God left no stone unturned to try to educate and save His people from a sad and painful exile. Zechariah's messages are an interesting combination of symbolism and reality and looking to the future. Remember that we don't expect prophecy to be absolutely chronological or to segue. Think of each chapter as a separate vision and message to the people.

Zech. 1:1-6 Confirmation that God's warnings were fulfilled. This was received in midautumn (October). Then in verse 7: on February 15 that same year, about 4 months later (the length of time that it took to travel from Canaan to Babylon) there is a vision which appears to assure us that God is watching affairs here. We are never without His presence – unless we request that He not be with us. The riders reported to the angel of the Lord that the "whole earth was at peace!" When the angel hears that, the Lord speaks kind and comforting words to the angel who talked with me (Zechariah).

I would love to actually hear God's voice speaking kind and comforting words. His voice has been described as sounding like a waterfall, or like thunder, or like a whisper. So when the angel said (vs. 14-17) to Zechariah: "SHOUT this message for all to hear: This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'My love for Jerusalem and Mount Zion is passionate and strong.'..." He goes on to say that God is very upset with the nations who took Israel captive and then punished them beyond God's intentions, when actually He was only a little angry with His people. "Therefore, this is what the Lord says: I have returned to show mercy to Jerusalem. My Temple will be rebuilt..." He said the towns of Israel would be restored and Zion and Jerusalem will be comforted as His own.

Zech. 2 can be applied to current events, or far in the future – after all, are we not captives on this earth? Had sin not entered we could have traveled anywhere in the universe we wished. When God says to come out of Babylon, that's a current event, but at the end of time those same words will apply to those of us who are living to see Jesus come. Unless He tarries longer than we think. For example, v. 5 harks forward to Rev.

21:23 and Isaiah 60:19, 20. V. 12 fulfills Gen. 12:7 and Gal. 3:16. V. 13 sounds like Psalm 46:10 – just interesting how ALL Scripture fits together!

Zech. 3 See Satan the accuser at work! God rejects his accusations and gives Jeshua a top position in the Temple. The angel in the vision suggests clean clothes for Jeshua and Zechariah interacts and says, “Please, could he also have a clean turban on his head?” So they put a clean priestly turban on him. Then Jeshua, now the high priest – as long as he follows God’s ways – is told that he and all the other priests are a symbol of good things to come: God’s Servant, The Branch is coming. God will remove all sins from the land and every Israelite will invite their neighbors into their homes to share the peace and prosperity the Lord has given them following their exile. *Hospitality is a good trait for us to cultivate!*

Zech. 4 Then the angel who had been talking to Zechariah “returned” and woke me as though I had been asleep. “What do you see now?” he asked. Zechariah answered: “A solid gold lampstand with a bowl of oil on top of it. Around the bowl are seven lamps, each one having seven spouts with wicks. And I see two olive trees, one on each side of the bowl.” Before giving the interpretation, the angel says some powerful things about Zerubbabel’s work on the Temple. These are the Lord’s words spoken by an angel: V. 6 “It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit says the Lord Almighty.” Then God states that Zerubbabel WILL succeed in his mission to lay the Temple foundation.

Then Zechariah gets a second message from the Lord stating the same thing as above with different words. And then God adds: “Do not despise these small beginnings, for the Lord rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel’s hand. For these seven lamps represent the eyes of the Lord that search around the world (4:10, and II Chron. 16:9).” So the eyes of the Lord observe and bless even small beginnings! A ministry has to start somewhere!

Zech. 4 cont’d – Then Zechariah asks the angel: “What are these two olive trees on each side of the lampstand, and what are the two olive branches that pour out golden oil through two gold tubes? The “easy” dialog between Zechariah and the angel is pretty cool in this chapter. The angel said: “They represent the two anointed ones who assist the Lord of all the earth.” I believe the word “ones” should be capitalized for they must represent the **Son and Holy Spirit**. Some believe the two anointed ones are Zerubbabel and Jeshua, but it seems to me that they were working under the auspices of God the Son, and the Holy Spirit both of Whom are heavily involved in everything that happens on earth!! So is the Father, but we don’t see Him appearing on earth very often. At Creation and the Transfiguration are two of those occasions.

Zech. 6 pictures four chariots pulled by red, black, white, and dappled-gray horses. An angel told Zechariah they represented the four spirits of heaven who stand before the Lord of all the earth. They are going out to do His work. These powerful horses were eager to patrol back and forth across the earth and needed only for the Lord to say “Go and patrol the earth!” Then the Lord summoned Zechariah and said: “Those

who went north have vented the anger of my Spirit there.” Sometimes God enlists other nations to work His purposes, but sometimes He just sends His mighty angels – remember when one angel killed 185,000 men of the Assyrian army in one night?

Jeshua gets a beautiful crown which is kept safe in the Temple for visitors to enjoy. Many will come from distant lands to assist in rebuilding the Temple of the Lord, and then you will know, says Zechariah, my messages have been from the Lord Almighty!

NOTE #1: -- Zechariah’s messages coincided with the period of time when Zerubbabel and Jeshua (along with some others) were leaders of the exiles who were repatriating to their homeland (Ezra 2). You will recall that when they arrived in Judah, there was an outcry from local officials thinking that the wicked city of Jerusalem was being rebuilt and would present problems for the kings of Medo-Persia. The Jews were forced to quit for a time. It must have been a rather extended time that building ceased, because the first group left Babylon under the decree of Cyrus. Later when officials again sent letters to the king, it was addressed to King Darius and finally King Artaxerxes was involved. So this re-building process took quite a while!

Zech. 10 and 11 talk about worthless shepherds – spiritual leaders. Zecharah gets a job caring for a flock of sheep (11:7). Good reading! Worthless shepherds will not see the Kingdom of God.

Zech. 12-14 These chapters combine current events and future. It is an invigorating process to identify the difference! I’m sure you will pinpoint the truths presented here on your own! Enjoy the challenge!

PSALM 60

David prays for help from God. Verse 5 says (NLT) “Use Your strong right arm to save us, and rescue your beloved people.” V. 11: Oh, please help us against our enemies, for all human help is useless. With God’s help we will do mighty things, for He will trample down our foes.

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 38

Ezekiel 4-24; Psalms 36-41, 48, 49, 53, 55

EZEKIEL

This is an awesome book. Ezekiel was in his thirtieth year while beside the Kebar River with other Judean exiles in Babylon. The Lord probably requested this prophet to use the most visual aids to impress listeners with truth.

Eze. 4 God told Ezekiel to take a large brick, draw a map of the city of Jerusalem on I, build siege ramps against the city walls, and surround it with enemy camps and battering rams. Then place an iron griddle between him and the “city.” Turn toward it

and demonstrate how the enemy will attack Jerusalem. This was to be a warning to the people of Israel. There are more directions from God as to what he should do.

Eze. 5 In this chapter God says: “Son of man, take a shart sword and use it as a razor to shave your head and beard. Use a scale to weigh the hair into three equal parts...” You’ll have to read it to find out why it was to be divided.

Eze. 8 God says He is consumed with passionate love for Mount Zion and for Jerusalem. God looks ahead to the time when His residence is permanently in Jerusalem. And He pronounces blessings on the Jews.

Eze. 9 Six men appeared from the upper gate that faces north, each carrying a battle club in his hand. One was dressed in linen and carried a writer’s case strapped to his side. They all went into the Temple courtyard and stood beside the bronze altar. Then the Lord’s glory rose up from between the cherubim where it had rested, and moved to the entrance of the Temple! And the Lord called to the man in linen with the writer’s case: “Walk through the streets of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of all those who weep and sigh because of the sins they see around them.”

Then there are beautiful Messianic prophecies. V. 14 pictures the Sovereign Lord sounding the trumpet” and protecting His people. ...Hopefully this will pique your interest and carry you through chapter 24!

PSALMS 36-41, 48, 49, 54, 55

Psalms 36-41 Very clear phrases that reveal our wonderful God – would you like to be close to Him?

Psalm 48 “Go, inspect the city of Jerusalem. Walk around and count the many towers. ...For that is what God is like. He is our God forever and ever, and He will be our guide until we die!!”

Psalms 49, 54, 55 Look for the nature of God in these Psalms! Share things about your Best Friend in the group setting!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 38 Ezekiel 4-24; Psalms 36-41, 48, 49, 54, 55

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER — Pray for God to send people into your lives that you can share some truth from our recent studies.

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

EZEKIEL 4-24

We don't know how old Ezekiel was when he was taken captive to Babylon, but we do know that as this book begins, **he is only thirty years old**. He must have been fairly physically fit because God asked some fairly demanding actions from him.

“And now, son of man, take a large brick and set it down in front of you...”
Instructions: “Draw out a map of the city of Jerusalem on the brick. Build siege ramps against the city walls, put an iron griddle between you and the city, and then *act out the war!*” I believe this was to serve as a news bulletin for the exiles in Babylon regarding further attacks from Nebuchadnezzar.

There are awesome descriptions of God's abilities and how He sent prophets to warn the people of coming events “day in and day out!” PLEASE read all the chapters from Ezekiel 4 to 24 completely!!! Many of God's messages are acted out in this unusual book. Not hard to understand – but what does it tell you about God? Are you impressed with the varieties of ways He tries to reach the hearts of His people?

PSALMS 36-41, 48, 49, 54, 55

Ps. 36:1 segues well from what we just read of the pervasive sinfulness in Israel. But feast on the refreshing verses 5-12.

Read these Psalms with your focus on Jesus. Remember that God's love is the paramount reason for everything He does. Because justice is a part of His nature, sometimes the exiles experienced oppression – all the trials that come are to help them recognize their need for His presence. Look for the gems and share them with your group. There are awesome pictures of God in these Psalms.

NOTE: Are you ready to try journaling? Go to www.thisislifeeternal.org and download the journaling pages (a sample page to demonstrate how the page is to be used, and then a blank journaling page for you to fill in). If you will jot down the texts under subjects placed in the top rows of boxes on the page (topics that you wish to learn more about), you will be able to share in the group much more effectively. OR even if you are not in a group, believe me, in the long run, it will save you a LOT of time searching to recover lost flashes of discovery ah-ha! moments.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 39

Ezekiel 25-32; Psalms 56-57, 63-64

EZEKIEL

These chapters are, for the most part, messages to Israel's surrounding nations. Most of them are due to be punished for their mockery or mistreatment of Israel. But very significant is chapter 28. It begins with a message for Tyre's King. "In your great Pride you exclaim, 'I am a god! I sit on a divine throne in the heart of the sea.' (Historians tell us that the coastal city of Tyre was built out over the water.) But you are only a man and NOT a god." God continues to challenge the king but then changes gears with a message directed to Ezekiel: "Son of man, weep for the king of Tyre. Give him this message from the Sovereign Lord: you were the perfection of wisdom and beauty. You were in Eden..." Do you see how quickly we moved from the current King of Tyre into the realm of "Lucifer?" Read carefully to the end of v. 19.

Remember a couple weeks ago, we discussed the book of Daniel. In Daniel 9 Gabriel explained to Daniel that his prayer came just as he was battling with the king of Persia and he couldn't get away until Michael could come to continue battling evil in Persia, and give Gabriel a break so he could come and minister to Daniel! It appears to me that the throne of any ruler who gets proud is easy prey for the devil. So heaven has to come down on occasion to be sure that the devil does not gain the upper hand. This is also a glimpse into the cosmic battles that rage between good and evil. We will not know until we reach heaven how many times Heaven intervened to release us from cosmic attacks.

PSALMS 56, 57, 63, 64

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 39 Ezekiel 25-32; Psalms 56, 57, 63,64

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

EZEKIEL 25-32

Eze. 25 The Ammonite nation is in trouble with the Lord of the universe! Because you clapped (v. 6) and stomped and cheered with glee at the destruction of my people, I will lift up my fist against mockers. God declares that Ammon will be destroyed completely. In other words, don't mess with My people!

V. 8 and 12: Messages for Moab and Edom whose people are also in trouble with God because of their treatment of Israel. God will raise His fist in judgment against them because He is the Sovereign Lord!

V. 15 The Philistines had plagued the people of Judah since Israel immigrated to Canaan. God says "the people of Philistia have acted against Judah out of revenge and long-standing contempt. ...Therefore, I will raise My fist of judgment and wipe out the Cherethites (thought to be a synonym for Philistines) and utterly destroy the people who live by the sea.

Eze. 26 God is an enemy of Tyre because she rejoiced over the fall of Jerusalem thinking it would increase their trade. God's description of Nebuchadnezzar's siege and sledge hammers etc. is really impressive. Their homes were to be destroyed and the parts dumped into the sea. And here is a big part of the punishment: God will stop the music of your songs. No more harps. This is the word of the Sovereign Lord.

Eze. 27 God shows Ezekiel the beauty of Tyre in it's heyday. It must have been a sophisticated place in those days where the rich and famous came to get whatever it was they needed. But look! There is the storm of war coming with shipwreck in the heart of the sea! Everything is lost. The sailors and helmsmen come to stand on shore. They wail and mourn as they sing this sad funeral song. (Vs. 32-36)

Eze. 28 Refer to the "promotional remarks" in last week's comments. Then look at v. 18: "You defiled your sanctuaries with your many sins and your dishonest trade. So I (God) brought fire from within you, and it consumed you. I let it burn to ashes on the ground in the sight of all who were watching. ...You have come to a terrible end and you are no more." Which takes us to the end of the sin problem! Won't that be a wonderful day when the evil tempter is GONE?

Eze. 29 Egypt's story comes from the Lord on January 7, during the twelfth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity. God said: "I am your enemy, O Pharaoh, king of Egypt – you great monster, lurking in the streams of the Nile. For you have claimed that the Nile River is yours; 'I made it for myself!' Therefore I am now the enemy of both you and the river. God will put hooks in your jaws and drag you out on the land with gish sticking to your scales."

An army is coming to attack Egypt, destroy both people and animals and leave her desolate. Then Egypt will know that God is the Lord. Egyptians will be scattered for forty years, but God will bring them home again after that time. Egypt will survive but will be the lowliest of all the nations, never again great enough to rise above its neighbors.

V. 17 On April 26, during the 27th year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, this message came to me from the Lord:

NOTE: At the beginning of this chapter we learned that message came ten years into King Jehoiachin's captivity. Now SEVENTEEN YEARS later, Ezekiel gets another message regarding Egypt!

V. 18 King Nebuchadnezzar's army fought so hard against Tyre that there were blisters on their shoulders and their heads were rubbed bare (I suppose from the helmets' friction), since there was no plunder for their compensation I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. He will carry off their wealth, plundering everything they have to pay his army, because he was working for ME when he destroyed Tyre!!

Eze. 30:3 The terrible day is almost here – the day of the Lord! Those who are slaughtered will cover the ground. Their wealth will be carried away and their foundations destroyed. Ethiopia, Libya, Lydia, and Arabia with all their other allies, will be destroyed in that war. God gives so much information in this message which is very valuable to those who are about to be attacked!

NOTE: LOOK AT THIS!!! God doesn't just warn His chosen people, He also warns their enemies as well. God's span of acquaintance with characters on this earth is limitless. Look at His knowledge of Cyrus, for example – and for a long time, Nebuchadnezzar as well. Darius and Artaxerxes also seemed to have impressive integrity.

V. 20 On April 29, during the eleventh year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, this message came from the Lord: "Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. ..." Does God have a sense of humor? Read this "memo" and know your God better. (NOTE: Notice the randomness of the arrival of messages from God. The former message, Eze. 29:17, came in the 27th year of Jehoiachin's captivity. So whether things are chronological in Scripture is not all that important. It's

the subject matter that counts. However, there is enough information to let us know how to organize our responses.)

Eze. 31 Read this carefully and weep for the damage pride does to all human beings! Egypt was doing well, but now she will land in the pit along with all the proud people of the world! And we know that Ezekiel received this on June 21, just a little over a month after the message in Eze. 30:20. This message is intended for Pharaoh. He will have to understand allegories to benefit!

Eze. 32 Just about a year has passed since the allegory message was received, and Ezekiel receives this message from the Lord: “Son of man, mourn for Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and give him this message: you think of yourself as a strong young lion among the nations but you are really just a sea monster, heaving around in your own rivers, stirring up mud with your feet!”

V. 17 Two weeks later another message comes from the Lord: “Son of man, weep for the hordes of Egypt and the other mighty nations. ...” It’s another allegory showing that all the proud end up in the same position. Be ready to intelligently explain this one to those who believe in a consciousness after death.

PSALMS 56-57, 63-64

Ps. 56:1-4 We may battle temptation fiercely and pray for victory. At times like that: “When I am afraid, I put my trust in You. O God, I praise Your Word. I trust in God, so why should I be afraid? What can mere mortals do to me?”

V. 8 “You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in Your bottle. You have recorded each one in Your Book!” Thank You, Jesus!

V. 9 “On the very day I call to You for help, my enemies will retreat. This I know: GOD IS ON MY SIDE!” Halleluiah!

Ps. 57:1, 2 “I will hide beneath the shadow of Your wings until this violent storm is past. I cry out to God Most High, to God Who will fulfill His purpose for me. He will send help from heaven to save me, rescuing me from those who are out to get me. My God will send forth His unfailing love and faithfulness.”

Ps. 63:1 “O God, You are my God; I earnestly search for You. My soul thirsts for You; my whole body longs for You in this parched and weary land where there is no water.”

Vs. 4, 5 I will honor You as long as I live, lifting up my hands in prayer. You satisfy me more than the richest of foods. I will praise You with songs of joy”

Ps. 64:10 “The godly will rejoice in the Lord and find shelter in Him. And those who do what is right will praise Him.”

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 40

Ezekiel 33-39; Matthew; Psalms 21, 22

EZEKIEL 33-39

Eze. 33:1-9 How would you feel about accepting the call to be a watchman?

Vs. 10-16 How the Lord pleads for the wicked to choose to live!!!! V. 11

Vs. 17-20 Another reference to show that righteous people do turn to evil.

Vs. 21-22 This appears to have a connection with Eze. 24:26, 27.

Vs. 23-29 The sparse population of Jews now think they should inherit the entire promised land.

Vs. 30-33 God tells Ezekiel that the people are whispering behind his back!

Eze. 34:1-24 Shepherds of the flock should examine themselves, and see if they resemble the careless shepherds, or the Good Shepherd. Those who feed us spiritual food have a tremendous opportunity to love and care and search for the sheep. I will set one shepherd over them, even my servant David. He will feed them and be a shepherd to them. And I, the Lord, will be their God, and my servant David will be a prince among my people. I, the Lord have spoken. Beautiful! Forever words!

There are only seven chapters in Ezekiel this week for you to read. And they are all wonderful.

MATTHEW

This is an awesome book, beginning with the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah.

In Matt. 4 Jesus fasts for 40 days and then goes into the desert to be tempted.

Notice how he defeats the devil by quoting scripture! Hopefully the Holy Spirit will equip us, too, to defeat the devil with *scripture* at *every* turn, because we are asking Him to help us to be successful!

PSALMS 21, 22

Psalm 21 David thanks God for a list of granted requests and then he says (vs. 6, 7) You endowed (speaking of himself) with eternal blessings. You have given him THE JOY OF BEING IN YOUR PRESENCE. For the king trusts in the Lord. The UNFAILING LOVE (big building block in our picture of God) OF THE MOST HIGH will keep him from stumbling. I say, Amen and Amen, David!

Psalm 22 Awesome to see Jesus' words spoken on the cross written here hundreds of years before the cross. Is David speaking Jesus' words entirely in this Psalm? Or do you think any of it refers to David himself?

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 40 Ezekiel 33-39; Matthew; Psalms 21 and 22

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

EZEKIEL 33-39

Eze. 33:1-9 How would you feel about accepting a call to be a watchman??

Vs. 10-16 How the Lord pleads for the wicked to choose to live!!! Vs.11

Vs. 17-20 Another reference to show that righteous people can turn to evil!

Vs. 21-22 This appears to have a connection with Chapter 24:26, 27.

Vs. 23-29 The sparse population of Jews now think they should inherit the entire promised land! Check it out!

Vs. 30-33 God tells Ezekiel that people are whispering behind his back!

Eze. 34:1-24 Words of caution to “Shepherds of the flock(s).” It is a respected position and if successful, then the temptation is to become proud of accomplishments.

Vs. 1-10 God warns that Shepherds should take care of their flock *first*. Some shepherds feed themselves and let their flock starve. Oh yes! Have you ever come home from church starving for some of that Bread of Life?

Vs. 20-24 God Himself will judge between fat sheep and scrawny ones. He will determine which ones should be rescued. And He will set one shepherd over them, “even My servant David.”

Vs. 25-30 “I will make a covenant of peace with them and drive away the dangerous animals from the land. Then my people will be able to camp safely in the wildest places and sleep in the woods without fear.” Why should we ever doubt our loving Creator? Let us build our faith and be ready to meet Him without fear. See I John 4:16, 17.

Eze. 36 God says that Israel’s restoration (remember Israel is in exile in Babylon) will happen, but not because they deserve it. God is protecting His holy name. When He finishes declaring His blessings on them, He says something very revealing about HIM and I don’t want you to miss it! V. 37: “This is what the Sovereign Lord says: *I am ready to hear Israel’s prayers for these blessings, and I am ready to grant them their requests.*” JUST BECAUSE GOD PRONOUNCES blessings does not make them a reality necessarily. I’m not going to suggest that He never bestows blessings without our

asking, but it appears to me that GOD's basic principle is that praying for them *is for our own good*.

Eze. 37 "The Lord took hold of me..." Don't you just love that phrase? When the Lord takes hold of us there is generally some energetic action taking place – and it's His passion that flows through us to others. So this time, Ezekiel is carried away by the Spirit of the Lord to a valley filled with bones. Then He asked me: "Son of man, can these bones become living people again?" This is a beautiful chapter from start to finish. Milk the meanings to feed your own soul so that YOU can rise again!!!

Eze. 38 and 39 These chapters are very prominent in the discussion of today's evangelicals who believe that our current Israel may fulfill some of these prophecies. Read looking to know God better, pray for that result, and see if the meanings of some of these terms begin to fall in place.

While I do think it's important to understand as much of Scripture as possible, I also believe that God reveals only as much as He wants to, or on our "need to know" basis. Read Deut. 29:29 and Matt. 24:36.

May God pour His Holy Spirit on your study this week, is my prayer.

MATTHEW...

...an awesome book beginning with the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah. There were 14 generations between Abraham and David, and 14 generations between David and the birth of Jesus! "Now this is how Jesus the Messiah was born..." How simply scripture presents truths that we will study for eternity! An angel comes and gives Joseph, Mary's fiancée, a message that will spare both of them embarrassment and perhaps future shame for Mary – who had done nothing wrong. She was pregnant because the Holy Spirit "came upon her." Joseph was ready to put her away quietly and be done with her. An angel said to Joseph "Do not be afraid to *go ahead* with your marriage to Mary. For the child within her has been conceived by the Holy Spirit. She is to have a Son and you will call His name "Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins."

Joseph was a very good man. Soon as he awakened, he did what the angel said and brought Mary home to be his wife. However, she remained a virgin until her son was born. And Joseph called Him "Jesus."

Matthew leaves the part about the shepherds and angels for others to tell and goes directly to the Wise Men who were among the last visitors to come to seek the baby. They bypassed a return visit to Herod who had ascertained from them that the "Star" had appeared about two years earlier. (Mt. 2:16) So Jesus was around two years old when the family fled to Egypt for safety. Such a cute age! Meantime, Herod caused heavy sorrow in Bethlehem!!! Gifts from the Wise Men financed their trip to Egypt!

When Herod died a horrible death, God sent instructions to Joseph to return, but they were to go to Nazareth, not Bethlehem which was too close to Jerusalem and prying eyes. The new king was Herod's son. Thus prophecy was fulfilled once again. They went to Nazareth!

As you read Matthew's account of the gospel, be aware that the demons that seemed so prevalent in Jesus' day *knew Who Jesus was*. WE KNOW they were angels in heaven before they were thrown down to earth with their leader (Rev. 12), Lucifer better known as Satan now! So, OF COURSE, the demons knew Who He was!!! Sometimes Jesus told them to "BE QUIET!" The Jews accused Jesus of working miracles through demons! How disrespectful of them! Doesn't that throw some light on the temptations out in the desert when Jesus was exhausted, thirsty and hungry following 40 days of fasting? Yet, Jesus, our High Priest, did not sin! Thank You, Jesus!

In Matt. 7:24, Jesus says that anyone who "listens to My teaching and OBEYS Me is wise." See Rev. 1:3; Luke 11:27, 28; Neh. 10:12, 13. Over and over God makes it clear that those who listen and obey His Word, are REALLY His FAMILY!!! I like it! Watch for it!

Enjoy the journey through Matthew, touching on the points that reveal God to you. I want to touch on Matt. 27:51-53 before leaving you to complete your TILE journey through this Gospel. When the earth shook and rocks split apart on Friday at the moment Jesus died, many godly men and women were uncovered in their tombs. Then, on Sunday at Christ's resurrection, the bodies of many godly men and women were raised from the dead. They went into Jerusalem and appeared to many people! It is clear that this event happened and that, indeed, a group of people were raised from the dead WITH CHRIST. But then I could not find what happened to them! A few later cycles through the TILE calendar, I was reading in Revelation 5:9, 10 and came across words sung by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders as they worshiped God: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals: For You were slain, and have redeemed US to God by Your blood...And have made US kings and priests to our God; and WE shall reign on the earth." The lyrics of their song revealed their identity to me! And I shouted for joy all by myself in my living room. "There they are!" I shouted! Now new translations have changed the tense of the pronouns (including the NKJV) which of course blurs the identity. BUT if one uses the good old KJV, it remains clear. That was all I needed to know to support my understanding of who the twenty-four elders and the four beasts were. But in the next few cycles through the entire Bible, I found at least four other references to the experience of these human beings who are now in heaven. And guess what! God gave them a job to do (as he always does) which included a censor with incense smoke ascending which represents the prayers of the saints!!! That's us!! When a professor from one of our leading universities told one of my TILE members that one could not verify the identity of the elders by virtue of the tense of the pronouns, it did not sway me at all. For I had enough proof with what I have told you to convince me that Scripture had proven it to me. Let me invite you to my blog "The 24 Elders – Who are They?" Go to www.thisislifeeternal.org (Click on URL while holding down ctrl), then

click on Journal “Blog” and finally click on September, 2007 on the right side of the page.

I’m looking forward to praising God together with those twenty-four elders and four living creatures. How the Trinity puts all the details together so that they function beautifully is somehow so calmly reassuring!

PSALMS 21, 22

Ps. 21 David thanks God for a list of granted requests and then he says (vs. 6, 7) “You endowed him (speaking of himself) with eternal blessings. You have given him THE JOY OF BEING IN YOUR PRESENCE. For the king trusts in the Lord. The UNFAILING LOVE (big building block in our picture of God) OF THE MOST HIGH will keep him from stumbling.” I say, Amen and amen, David!

Ps. 22 Awesome to see Jesus’ words on the cross written here hundreds of years before the cross. Is David speaking Jesus’ words entirely in this Psalm? Or do you think any of it refers to David himself?

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 41

Mark, Psalms 23-25, 84-89

Mark is the shortest of the gospels. There are things we learn from him that are not in the others, such as that Mary Magdalene had seven demons cast out! Also he goes into detail a little more at the end about how the disciples did not believe the report of the women regarding Jesus’ resurrection. But it would be well to put John 20:16 and 17 with the information at the end of Mark’s gospel.

The writer of this gospel is the same “Mark” (called “John Mark” on occasion) that Paul refused to travel with after Mark deserted Paul and Barnabas in the middle of a journey. After that incident, Barnabas and Mark formed their own missionary team. And Paul and Silas formed a team – which meant that out of what might have been somewhat unpleasant, there were TWO teams working for the Lord where there had been ONE before. God ALWAYS has a way of making things work out for the best. Have you ever noticed that?

Remember that when Lucifer was thrown out of heaven, he brought 333,333,333,333 evil angels with him to earth. There are a lot of them across the earth doing Satan’s bidding. But Jesus won the victory for us and we can claim His Name and render demons helpless! Also, when you get to the very end of Mark, remember that Jesus was on the earth 40 more days after His resurrection. BUT he did make a quick trip with those who were resurrected with Him because they represented the “first fruits”. Jesus was resurrected on the very day of that festival. See Lev. 23:11 and let your mind see our High Priest offering the resurrected saints in fulfillment of that festival. It says clearly that it was the day AFTER the Sabbath when the sheaf from the early harvest was “lifted up to the Father.” Jesus fulfilled that festival on (Sunday), the very date it was kept for hundreds of

years before He would let Mary touch Him. (See John 20:16, 17!) Hebrews 12:2 states that Jesus was able to go to the cross because of the joy He knew would be His afterwards! Everything He did was done for you and me, and all the saints! Take it personally!

PSALMS 23-25, 84-89

Ps. 23 This is such a familiar Psalm. I am hoping you will find new enrichment!

Ps. 24 Also familiar, but not as familiar. The description of those who qualify to enter Heaven is crystal clear. Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols, AND NEVER TELL LIES. (Not even while lies? Think about it.) They will receive the Lord's blessing and may enter God's presence and worship the God of Israel.

The rest of the psalms is called "antiphonal" singing where two groups of singers answer back and forth. The unique thing about this event is that all the singers are angels. One group is inside the Holy City, the other is approaching the gate into the city singing "Lift Up Your Gates! And let the King of glory come in." From inside the city angels sing "Who is the King of glory?" and without waiting for answer to their question, they answer that He IS the King of glory." Then from outside a second time the same words are sung. But I believe the groups join together for the last declaration that the King IS "The Lord Almighty—He is the King of glory."

Ps. 25 This is a psalm of David. See v. 10 and 11 "The Lord leads with unfailing love and faithfulness all those who keep His covenant and obey His decrees. For the honor of Your name, O Lord, forgive MY MANY, MANY sins."

Ps. 84-89 Four of these six psalms are written by some descendants of Korah, one is by David (86) and one by Ethan the Ezrahite! Ethan must have been a admirer of David's psalms! Enjoy.....

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 41 Mark, Psalms 23-25. 84-89

WELCOME

PRAY FOR GOD'S GUIDANCE ON THIS DAY!!!

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

MARK

I think it is difficult for people like those of us in this group, to feel that there is something new in some of these New Testament books which probably most of us were reading exponentially more than we read the Old Testament since we left high school or college study. We have read them so much that I confess it seems almost less than necessary to bother God with requests for guidance. But take heed! This is when we need His inspiration more than ever!

I read Mark this time with the knowledge gained from Ezekiel 28 shedding new light on this familiar territory. The vivid pictures that came through were very humbling! As always – trying to put these flashes of light into words is the challenge of my life!!! By all means, tell me if you don't understand any part of what I say.

The Man, called Jesus, looked like a human being. Similar, I suspect to His appearance when he ate lunch at Abraham's place. This Man, so gentle and unassuming to the eye, but authoritative in message, also had "another Life," a previous Life. Scripture gives us glimpses into that "previous Life." We know about the sad day when Lucifer and a third of the angels were thrown out of heaven down to this earth. It would seem logical that this war occurred after the earth was created, although that detail is not clearly given. The next question would be: did this happen before or after Adam and Eve sinned? Again, logically I would say "before."

To provide even an inkling of what that meant to the ambiance of Heaven, I'd like to compare what it's like when one or more of our group is absent. Have you ever noticed that there is a change in the rhythm of the flow of information? Have you really, really missed the person or persons who were not with us any given week? YES. There is a big change in the group dynamics. I'm not saying it's bad, in our case. But it is different and requires a certain adjustment.

On a calculator, multiplying the minimal figures mentioned in Scripture (Rev. 5:11, KJV): 10,000 x 10,000 and 1000 x 1000, I get 1 trillion. If that were the figure, Satan took about 333,333,333,333 or 333.3 billion angels out of heaven. Of course, 666,666,666,666 would remain, but what a radical, unsettling difference it must have made. Now add the emptiness that must have occurred when Jesus left the environs of heaven to come to earth. Sin has scarred even heaven!

In Matthew 18:10, Jesus mentions the work of the angels with children. “Do not despise a single one of these little ones. For in heaven, their angels are always in the presence of my heavenly Father.”

OK, so the angels who are assigned to an earthly child, are “always in the presence of the Father!” Read my blog “God Gives Everyone a Job to Do.” Think for a moment of assigning 666,666,666,666 angels tasks to do. It’s probably many more than that, but this is the minimal amount according to Scripture. They sing for special occasions. They throw the seven last plagues onto the earth. They reap the harvest at the end. And Heb. 1:14 says that angels are ministering spirits sent to minister to those who will receive salvation.

The bad angels – possibly 333,333,333,333 of them – are here along with Satan. Some people worship him. Can you imagine? These “demons” are visible in Scripture as well as the good ones. They are available for assignments from the one who took Adam’s place in this world. Do you think we need to understand as we read the Psalms that we indeed have many enemies who are plotting our demise? Oh – we need Jesus in our hearts every day.

In the book of Mark, the demons said to Jesus, “I know who You are – the Holy One sent from God.” Yeah! I bet they recognized Him. They lived with Him in Heaven for eons! So, there must have been something that looked similar to the Person He was in Heaven. These demons had their work to do – soooo sadly different from that of the good angels. They threw children into the fire, and made people so they couldn’t speak. Sometimes many of them entered the same person and drove them insane.

Mark devotes three lines to Jesus’ journey to the wilderness for 40 days and then being subjected to Satan’s wily temptations. Jesus met them with Scripture! Oh, the power of the Word! And because of Jesus’ victories both in Heaven and on earth, He has the power and the authority to give apostles the “keys to the Kingdom,” to give them power to cast out demons (Hallelujah!) and to help make us a part of the Heavenly family.

Now, here’s a question for you: if Jesus says that believers who also “do” or “keep” the Word are His family, then where would our future lie??

Do you think the angels are looking forward to our arrival in Heaven for the millennium?

You know, it appears that following the millennium, the headquarters for our Creator, His Father and the Holy Spirit will be on this earth made new? Jesus wants to live with us. Do you think His love is way beyond our comprehension? Oh, yes. But I like to try to understand. That kind of love is healing, it's enlightening, and the best part is that I know He wants what is best for me. Could it be that He wants each one of us to fill one of those vacant positions in Heaven? WE ARE HIS FAMILY!!!! He said so.

PSALMS 23-25, 84-89

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Ps. 24 Also familiar, but not as familiar. The description of those who qualify to enter Heaven is crystal clear. Only those whose hands and hearts are pure, who do not worship idols, AND NEVER TELL LIES. (Not even while lies? Think about it.) They will receive the Lord's blessing and may enter God's presence and worship the God of Israel.

The rest of this psalm is called "antiphonal" singing where two groups of singers answer back and forth. The unique thing about this event is that all the singers are angels. One group is inside the Holy City, the other is approaching the gate into the city singing "Lift Up Your Gates! And let the King of glory come in." From inside the city angels sing "Who is the King of glory?" and without waiting for answer to their question, they answer that He IS the King of glory." Then from outside a second time the same words are sung. But I believe the groups join together for the last declaration that the King IS "The Lord Almighty—He is the King of glory."

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PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 42 Luke; Psalms 91-93

LUKE

Read Luke's introduction to this book which is addressed to a good friend of his: Theophilus. One who was blessed to receive not one, but TWO of Luke's books which have also been available to us! They are marvelous books!

Luke gives us some history of Jesus' relatives that is given nowhere else in the Bible. We see pre-natal influences (John the Baptist leaped within Elizabeth's womb at six months into her pregnancy) when Mary (who was three months along) greeted her cousin, Elizabeth.

But I'm getting ahead of myself, Zechariah was on duty at the Temple for his "order" was on duty that week. He was chosen by lot to center the sanctuary and burn incense in the Lord's presence while Israelites stood outside, praying. IT WAS PRAYER MEETING TIME!! Zechariah was in the sanctuary when an angel of the Lord appeared to the right of the incense altar. This was not a usual occurrence for Zechariah because he was *overwhelmed* with fear! The angel delivers a message similar to Abraham and Sarah's. Zechariah does not believe the angel's message because Elizabeth is past child bearing age, and apparently he was "well along in years." (v. 18) Gabriel also delivered a punishment because Zechariah did not believe the angel who had come from the very throne of God to deliver it! "You won't be able to speak until the child is born!"

SO, since Elizabeth is not pregnant at the moment, and since sometimes it takes a while to get pregnant, Zechariah was without a voice at least 9 mo. plus the waiting time at the beginning.

Can you picture this whole scene??? I mean, people are standing outside to hear answers to their prayers and when the priest came out finally, he could not speak! The people "realized" from his gestures that he must have seen a vision - but I'm thinking it was absolutely a real angel who visited Zechariah.

Luke's version of the gospel has unusual feeling, depth of emotion, and definitely some medically scientific information being dispensed. Luke's writing fills me with joy.

Be sure and think through these passages: Luke 12: 41-48; compare 20:45-47; **11:27, 28!!!; 11:33-36; 12:8-12; Luke 12:35-37

**Comment on Luke 11:27-28: This is loaded with significance: Mary has been deified in some circles. But Jesus identifies those who are "more blessed" than his own mother. One can only conclude that faithful Christians are treasured by Jesus a GREAT deal! Don't you love Him???

PSALMS 91-93 Read them and BE BLESSED!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 42 Luke; Psalms 91-93

WELCOME

**There are only ten more weeks left in this journey through the Bible.
Consider if the group would benefit from one more social occasion outside of our weekly meetings**

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

LUKE

Most honorable Theophilus:

Many people have written accounts about the events that took place among us. They used as their source material the reports circulating among us from the early disciples and other eyewitnesses of what God has done in fulfillment of His promises. Having carefully investigated all of these accounts from the beginning, I have decided to write a careful summary for you, to reassure you of the truth of all you were taught.

Luke gathers facts just like any self-respecting historian would do. Interviewing people, and then putting the story together with the Holy Spirit's help, into a wonderful narrative. Being a doctor, he seems to share more details of the situation of Jesus' birth than the other gospels. Prenatal influences are pictured here with baby John the Baptist reacting to the sound of Mary's voice. See Luke 1:39-41.

Mary's "Magnificat," (Luke 1:46-55) a Song of Praise, reminds me of Hannah's in I Sam. 2:1-10. Zechariah also prophesied in Luke 1:67-79 in his joy at the birth of John.

Have you ever wanted to express deep emotion to God over momentous occasions in your lives? I'm just wondering why we don't see deep expressions like this today much. Any ideas?

Jesus was circumcised when he was eight days old, as the custom was. They followed the law regarding the "purification offering" for poor folks. Either a pair of

turtledoves or two young pigeons. Then Simeon and Anna, a prophetess in the temple recognized Jesus as “Lord!”

It is such a good story the way Luke tells it. I hope you enjoy it and learn more of the sacrifice your Jesus gave so that you can have eternal life!

PSALMS 91-93

Psalm 91 – extols rest in the shadow of the Almighty. God’s protection is so beautiful. V. 14 God says, “I will rescue those who love Me. I will protect those who trust My name...” Our God LOVES those of us who love Him. There is room right beside Jesus for ALL of us.

Psalm 92 – “It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to the Most High. It is good to proclaim Your unfailing love in the morning, your faithfulness in the evening, accompanied by the harp and lute and the harmony of the lyre. You thrill me, Lord, with all You have done for me!” ...

Psalm 93 -- Comparison of ocean waves thunder, pounding the shore. But mightier than the violent raging of the seas, mightier than the breakers on the shore – the Lord above is mightier than these!!!! Atheists miss out on so much love and power!!! They seem bound and determined to have faith in a myth, rather than our great God.

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 43

Acts (omit chapter 6:8-15 and Chapter 7. See Week 10)

Luke provides us with what appears to be an open-ended book. The growth in the Christian church sky-rocketed and Luke is faithful in giving us events and people’s personalities. About the middle of the book he begins to use the first person pronoun referring to himself, so we can only surmise that the first part of Acts was accomplished with research and verifications of things that had already happened. But in Acts, it is clear that he began traveling with Paul and supported him in Rome while he was sick.

The faithful since the time of Jesus and the subsequent faith of his disciples many of whom died as martyrs, are documented in the Book of Acts. The church of Jesus continues to grow today and we represent a sequel to the Book of Acts which will continue until Jesus comes! What a privilege we have to work with Jesus to expand the Kingdom because we, too, want as many as possible to be there!!!

Enjoy this assignment for Week 43. Watch for the reconciliation between Paul and Mark. I think it is worth noting, that if personalities clash in the “work” of serving the Lord, it is OK to separate. Remember that two teams were able to get a lot more done than just one team. And I can’t remember at the moment which letter of Paul’s reveals that he and Mark were very close in Rome, Paul’s last residence.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK #43 Acts (can omit Chapter 6:8-15 and Chapter 7. See Week #10)

WELCOME

Set your best date for another social occasion. I'm hoping you are using these social times to share personal life stories – things that we don't have time for during the weekly sessions.

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

Acts was written by the physician, Luke, who also wrote the book bearing his name! And it is addressed to the same mysterious individual, Theophilus. That sounds like a Greek name. Perhaps they met at a medical convention, or they worked together in some area of research. Clearly it is someone who is respected and with whom Luke wants to share his well documented witness!

In chapter 16 of Acts, Luke begins to use first person pronouns telling experiences traveling with Paul and others. Paul calls him “Dear Dr. Luke” (NLT) or “beloved physician” (NASB & KJV) in Colossians 4:14, a book written from prison in Rome. So Luke must have traveled with Paul and then faithfully stayed by him when he was imprisoned.

The way Luke segues his gospel into the 1st chapter of Acts is unprecedented in scripture. In the last verse of Luke we see Jesus lifting His hands to bless the disciples, and in Acts, the story line continues as He ascends toward heaven, disappearing into a cloud, and two bright angels appear to the disciples, assuring them that Jesus would come back to earth exactly as they had seen Him go into heaven!

Jesus instructed the disciples in Luke 24:49 that they were to remain in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came and filled them with power from heaven! During the 40 days after the crucifixion, (according to Acts 1:3) Jesus appeared to them “from time to time.” What an encouragement that must have been for them.

You will recall that there was an earthquake on Friday when Jesus died on the cross. Matt. 27:52 says that many graves were opened, but the occupants did not come to life until the Lifegiver came from the tomb! Matthew further states that on the 1st day of the week, these risen ones went into the city! Their destination is not revealed in Matthew, but there are texts in Psalms, and Revelation which show them in heaven. SO – remember when Jesus told Mary not to touch Him because He needed to go see His Father? I believe that Jesus continued to fulfill the Old Testament Prophecies in

Leviticus: they were the **“first fruits”** of the early harvest lifted up to the Father just as the priest had lifted up the sheaf of grain toward heaven for acceptance from God.

The Day of Pentecost, then, paralleled the “Festival of Harvest” occurring 50 days after the resurrection (see Lev. 23:15,16). And what a grand harvest was realized from the infilling, indwelling Holy Spirit as thousands upon thousands believed in Christ and miracles abounded. Unusual miracles flowed through Paul – see Acts 19:11 and 12.

Deacons were chosen to manage logistical issues and even they were able to perform miracles and baptize people.

Now tell me what you found in Acts that helped you to know God better!
What did you think of Stephen’s defense? Awesome, I say. And when the angry people stoned him, he had the grace of God in him when he said “Don’t charge them with this sin!” Paul remembered this event and after his conversion he was sorry he had assisted those angry people by holding their coats.

If you were looking for someone to be a missionary for Christ, would you have chosen Saul?? Our God knows hearts. We need to be wary of assuming that we know what God would do in any choice or any situation.

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 44: Romans and Psalms 96-101

ROMANS

The book of Romans contains several references which Protestants cite in opposition to the seventh-day Sabbath. It is essential, therefore, for us to know this book as it relates to present day truth, without any hesitation.

Paul was an outstanding scholar and frequently uses references from the Old Testament in his logical statements. Romans 1:19 says that God has put knowledge about God’s truth into the hearts of all people. See Eccl 3:11.

When Paul wrote Romans, he was a seasoned traveler, leader in the church, on the way to visit the emperor and the Christians in Rome. But he maintained what is the sign of a great man: humility - underneath some of what appear to be marginally proud statements. In v.12 he says that he’s been longing to come see the Christians in Rome to encourage them in their faith, but he also wanted to be encouraged by *their faith*. May God keep humility in those at the top echelons of our church leadership. Human beings are never beyond falling because of pride.

Especially study the 14th chapter, the most hotly contested part of Romans. And come next week ready to encourage the faith of us all.

PSALMS 96-101 Enjoy all these Psalms!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 44 Romans; Psalms 96-101

WELCOME

HOW WAS YOUR WEEK? ON A SCALE OF 1-10 HOW MUCH DID YOU ENJOY STUDYING THE WORD OF GOD??

INVOCATION

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

PSALMS 96-101 (Allow 10 minutes for discussion)

Let's begin with the Psalms today. Romans will fill the entire session if we don't, I'm afraid! I found Psalms 96-100 to be resounding praises to our Father. Ps. 101 is full of praise, as well, but it also contains David's profound vow to be an over-comer!!!! Share the texts from these chapters in Psalms that reveal God to you.

ROMANS (Allow 65 minutes)

Paul is on his 3rd missionary journey, and planning to go to Rome to meet with the Jewish leaders, the Roman Christians, and to see the emperor. After all that Paul has been through, the beatings, the imprisonments, shipwrecks, stonings, and being left for dead on at least one occasion, he appears to have lost none of his eagerness to serve and teach the believers. Paul's status in the growing church is impressive; however, he was not listed among *the* "apostles" whose names are to appear on the foundations of the New Jerusalem. The thing about Paul that is most outstanding to me is that his knowledge came directly from Jesus after he was struck down on the Damascus road. While he was not privileged to be in Jesus' inner circle during Christ's ministry on earth, Jesus personally educated Paul "One-on-one" in spiritual matters which gave the words Paul wrote or spoke sterling credibility!

Paul relates an experience that defied reality – he didn't know if he had traveled to paradise in body or apart from it. The NLT definitely gives the best translation of 2 Cor. 12:1-7. Verses 6 and 7 read "I have plenty to boast about and would be no fool in doing it, because I would be telling the truth. But I won't do it. I don't want anyone to think more highly of me than what they can actually see in my life and my message, even though I have received wonderful revelations from God. ..."

2 Cor. 13:10 suggests that Paul was given authority to be “severe” if necessary to discipline the church. But he didn’t want to be severe! For he wanted to use the authority the Lord had given him to build them up, not to discourage them.

Peter states in 2 Peter 3:16 that some of Paul’s comments are hard to understand! (No offense! Just the facts.) I think Peter is anxious that those who read “dear brother Paul’s” epistles be faithful to read them completely and thoughtfully, so that God’s intended message comes through to us.

So, when Paul wrote Romans, he was preaching in Corinth, had never been to Rome before, but had become friends with some people who were Roman Christians, including Aquila and Priscilla. In chapter 16, vs 3, Paul asks the Romans to greet them for they had been “co-workers” in Paul’s ministry! Paul asks that greetings be given to the church that meets in their home!

Some scholars, in a quest to be sure we have the right author for Romans, question how Paul could possibly have known so many people in Rome since he had never been there in person. But Paul had been in the “work” for a long time by now, and for example (16:5, last part) he asks that his friend Epenetus be greeted and states that he was the first convert to Christianity in Asia. Clearly, it seems to me, there were Roman citizens all over the Roman empire! So Paul would meet and certainly make friends with those who became Christians, and subsequently they found their way back to Rome.

Paul wanted to introduce himself to the Roman church through this letter before he saw them face to face. His communication skills were effective! Before he showed up in the “eternal city” he could share his concerns for some of the things he had heard about some of the Roman Christian practices and how they related to getting along well within the body of Christ. They would have some time to digest Paul’s theology and be ready to spiritually move ahead with him when he arrived. That this letter did not offend them is shown by their eagerness to meet Paul in person. “The brothers and sisters in Rome” got word that Paul was coming and met him at the Forum on the Appian Way, or at Three Taverns.

Paul gets right to the message of Romans. In the salutation to this letter, he states that he is Jesus Christ’s slave, but chosen by God to be an apostle sent out to preach the Good News, which was promised long ago by prophets in the holy Scriptures: God’s Son, Jesus, came as a man, born into King David’s royal family line. In v. 4 Paul makes the point that when Christ was resurrected, the Father raised Him up “BY MEANS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.” Awesome, how They work together!!!

Now share your texts that reveal God to you in the book of Romans. (1:17, cf Hab.2:4; 1:19, cf Eccl. 3:11.

NOTE: Romans 1:21-32 chronicles the downward spiral of those who reject clear knowledge of God’s truth. This kind of wickedness surely is what provoked God to bring the flood of Genesis. Combine this wickedness with brilliant minds and inventive genius

and we have life threatening plagues and methods of mass destruction! Only eternity will reveal the sad reasons God's heart broke (Gen. 6:6) and ending that civilization, except for Noah and his family, was the only solution. Romans 2:12-16 further amplifies 1:21-32.

Romans 2:29, a gem, says "a true Jew is one whose heart is right with God!" NLT. Lineage and circumcision is meaningless without the relationship that has been essential to salvation since Eden when God visited Adam and Eve to enjoy their company! True circumcision is a change of heart produced by God's Spirit.

Romans 3:25, 26, 31 Christ took our punishment. Nothing we can do would pay for our sins. If we emphasize faith, does this mean we can forget about the law? Of course not! In fact, *only when we have faith do we truly fulfill the law.*

Romans 4:1-3, 9, 23-25 cf Gen. 15:6: Abraham was pronounced faithful before he was circumcised because he believed God. Not for any deeds – for then he would have had something to boast about.

Romans 5:1-11: Faith in God's promises brings *PEACE with God and *JOY because trusting God brings a new relationship with Him—all because of what Jesus has done for us in making us friends of God. Ps 32:1, 2 says that there is joy for the sinner whose sins are put out of sight, and their sin is not counted against them by the Lord.

Romans 7:11,12 Sin took advantage of the law and fooled me; it took the good law and used it to make me guilty of death. But still, THE LAW ITSELF IS HOLY AND RIGHT AND GOOD.

Romans 8:11 The Spirit of God, Who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as He raised Christ from the dead, He will give life to your mortal body by this same Spirit living within you!!!!!!.....vs 15 So you should not be like cowering, fearful slaves. You should behave instead like God's very own children, adopted into His family—calling Him "Father, dear (abba) Father." (continue with 16-17 – beautiful! Compare Gal. 3:16 and reconcile the fact that our redemption was part of the birthright given to the Baby Jesus.)

Romans 8:26-30 The Holy Spirit's work for us spans our life and our death until the resurrection is accomplished. Vs.29 says "For God knew His people in advance, and He chose them to become like His Son, so that His Son would be the firstborn (Gal. 3:16) with many brothers and sisters."

Romans 9 God's dealings with Pharaoh (vs. 15 & 16) were intended to spread God's glory over all the earth. God "used" Pharaoh's hard heart to fulfill His purposes. The whole chapter deals with God's prerogative to have mercy on anyone He chooses! WE SHOULD NOT JUDGE HIS ACTIONS!!! See 11:7,8!

Romans 10 Paul emotionally states his longing that the Jewish people be saved, stating that their enthusiasm for God is misdirected zeal! For they don't understand God's

way of making people right with Himself. We all need to understand this basic fact of Christianity – that Christ’s death makes salvation a gift that we could NEVER earn.

Romans 14:1-4 We should not argue with new believers, or those who are weak in the faith, about life style choices. For example one person believes it is all right to eat anything. (This does not include unclean foods or unhealthy foods – but whether food has been dedicated to an idol! See 1 Cor. 8 which throws light on this chapter.) But another believer who has a sensitive conscience will eat only vegetables.

V. 5 ...”Each person should have a personal conviction about this matter (holy days).” Lev. 23:1-4 indicates that the weekly Sabbath was kept in addition to the festival holy days which were also referred to as a “Sabbath.” Lev. 23:38 says “These festivals must be observed *in addition to the Lord’s regular Sabbath days*. And these offerings must be given in addition to your personal gifts...the vows...or freewill offerings that you present to the Lord.” SO THIS CONVICTION ABOUT “holy days” needs to take into account the festival Sabbaths which have been fulfilled by Christ. They are no longer a requirement. But the weekly Sabbaths are not just an option since God has made it abundantly clear that they are HIS Sabbaths! (Is. 56)

Romans 15:23-28 Paul speaks of the long years he has waited to come to Rome to see the Christians there. He’s planning to go to Spain (which does not happen), stop off in Rome and after a time of fellowship they can send him on to Spain. –He speaks of a “gift” being collected in Corinth for him to take to Jerusalem where there has been a famine. (I Cor. 16) This gives us a definite sequence of Paul’s writings and of his missionary journeys.

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 45: I and II Corinthians

HMS Richards use to say that if he ever lost his sermon notes, all he would have to do is turn to 1 Cor. 15, read the whole chapter and sit down. And, there is 1 Cor. 10:4 which unlocked the understanding of the entire Old Testament for me! Be ready to share what you learned about God that helps you to know Him better! Double check I Cor. 16:2

REQUESTS FOR PRAYER AND PRAISE REPORTS (15 min.)

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 45

I and II Corinthians

WELCOME

INVOCATION

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

II Cor. 13:1 says “This is the third time I am coming to visit you. (To hold court!) As the Scriptures say, ‘The facts of every case must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ ” Previous to his second visit he had warned those who had been sinning and now he warns again that on his third journey he “will not spare them!” Those are strong words. He said “I want to use the authority the Lord has given me to build you up – not to tear you down.” (See I Cor. 4:18-21). Paul reveals in these two books to the Corinthians (II Cor. 11:28, 29) the depth of his concern for all the churches and his desire to help them prepare for eternal life, whatever it takes.

During Paul’s first visit (on his second missionary journey) to the town of Corinth, he established a church there. In 1 Cor. 1:4-9, he recounts the miraculous things God has already done to enrich their church: gifts of eloquence and every kind of knowledge. The best thing is that Jesus will keep us strong right up to the end (v. 8), and he will keep us free of all blame on the great day of the Lord! He declares in v. 9 that God will surely do this for us for He always does just what He says!

CHARACTERISTICS OF GOD FOUND IN I CORINTHIANS

Now share with us things you learned that revealed God in I Corinthians.

GROUP MODERATOR: Mark in your own Bible or on your journaling page the texts that reveal God’s mode of operation, or the depth of His love, or how God works through human beings to complete the Kingdom of God. The things that were revealed to *you* that help you know our wonderful God better. ☺

I Cor. 1:17 Christ didn’t send me to baptize, but to preach the Good News. (God gives specific instructions along with His commission to work for Him.)

I Cor. 1:20, 21 Worldly philosophy can never reveal God’s wisdom. So God has used humble, “foolish preaching” to save all who believe. Vs. 28, 29 reveal how God helps His workers to stay humble.

I Cor. 2:7-12 Earthly rulers would never have crucified Christ if they had taken pause to understand God's wisdom which He created before creation (v. 7). No eye has seen, no mind imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him. But true Christians know these things because we have His Spirit Who searches out everything and shows us even God's deep secrets (vs.10, 11). WHAT A GIFT the Holy Spirit is to us!!! How very drab life would be without enrichment received through Him. See vs. 12-15 as well. Hallelujah!

I Cor. 2:1-5 and 3:1-3 Until new believers progress in their spiritual development past jealousy and sinful, ambitious desires, they cannot process solid truth. Let us be patient with our "babies" in Christ! God says that He understands "our frame." Jesus reflected that patience to the disciples: "I'd tell you more but you cannot bear it now." (John 16:12)

I Cor. 3 is about attitudes toward those who are called to lead in the Kingdom. One might bring more baptisms, but others are planting seeds which become another's harvest! "So don't take pride in following a particular leader..." See vs. 6-11.

I Cor 3:16 All of us together make the "temple of God." Anyone who ruins any part of the temple will be recompensed with ruin! And the foundation of the temple (vs. 10-15) will be tested by fire (trials). If the building materials are less than God's truth, it will burn up. So don't take pride in following a particular leader. All leaders belong to you (the church), "you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God."

I Cor. 4:5 Oh, be careful of judging others! God will take care of that – it is not ours to attempt because He can see the heart – we cannot.

I Cor 4:20 A definition of the "Kingdom of God." "For the Kingdom of God is not just fancy talk; IT IS LIVING BY GOD'S POWER." ... Which is the Holy Spirit living in us! (I Cor. 2:14, 15)

I Cor. 5:12-13 and Deut. 13:5 It appears that Spiritual pride and sexual immorality go hand in hand. I am uncomfortable with "removing" someone from the church or "censuring" them. But the Scriptures say, "You must remove the evil person from among you." I believe God honors the church that humbly applies biblical instruction to church discipline. Influence is huge within a church body and must not be allowed to remain until repentance has occurred.

I Cor. 6:11 As we apply discipline, It's important that the sinner realize that sexual sins can be washed away by Jesus' blood and the sinner reinstated. They are "made right" with God because of what the Lord Jesus Christ and the SPIRIT of our God have done for them!!! Praise God!

I Cor. 6:13-20 Our bodies were not made for sexual immorality. They were made for the Lord and the Lord cares about our bodies. He will raise our bodies from the dead by His marvelous power, just as He raised our Lord from the dead. (Rom. 1:4)

Our bodies are actually parts of Christ! The person who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with Him. Therefore, honor God with your body, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (v. 19).

I Cor. 7 Interesting counsel from Paul here. He shares his own wisdom and I'm inclined to accept it. V. 25 says "But the Lord in His kindness has given me wisdom that can be trusted, and I will share it with you." See vs. 33 and 34 – it reminds me of Aquila and Priscilla who were married and worked as a team for the Lord. Surely if the couple is a team within the Lord's work, it can go forward as well or better than if they remained single!

I Cor. 8:3 The "person who loves God is the ONE GOD KNOWS AND CARES FOR." Yes, God loves all human beings "equally," and it is "His will" that all would be saved. HOWEVER, for the human being who loves God, there is a special relationship. PRAISE GOD!

I Cor. 8:4-10, and see 10:14-22: Paul almost sounds as though eating food offered to idols is OK at first, since we know that idols are worthless and we know the TRUE GOD. However, some new Christians have not thought this through and if they have been idol worshippers, food that has been dedicated to an idol has evil connotations. Because of the mature Christian's knowledge of these things, he needs to be careful not to encourage someone to do something they believe is wrong. Paul would never eat food again if it would make another Christian stumble.

I Cor. 9:17 Paul defends his lifestyle of supporting himself here, even though he is legitimately eligible to be paid. He says in v.15 that he would rather die than lose the distinction of preaching without charge. In v. 17 he says "...But God has chosen me and given me this sacred trust, and I have no choice." God gives everyone a job to do. I pray I have fulfilled his plan for me.

I Cor. 10 Read verses 1-4 and meditate on v.4: "And all of them (Israelites) drank the same miraculous water. For they all drank from the miraculous Rock that traveled with them, and that Rock was Christ." God the Son is the "God" of the Old Testament. Over and over He appears in different forms, but is then identified as being "the Lord." He never deserted Adam's family since creation! He made us, and He WILL save us! Hallelujah!

I Cor. 10:13 Oh yes! When we are tempted, GOD WILL SHOW US A WAY OUT so that we will not give in to it! Praise His holy Name!

I Cor. 10:14-22 This clarifies the "bottom line" on eating food that's been offered to idols. See above I Cor. 8:4-10.

I Cor. 10:27 Here's a different slant: what about when you're invited out to eat? Some use this text to say that we should just bless any kind of food when invited to a non-believer's home. Paul does not go into clean and unclean foods here. What is under

discussion is: should food that's been offered to idols be OK to eat. He says don't ask your host whether the food has previously been offered to idols. BUT if your host tells you it has been offered to idols, then don't eat it for the sake of the one who informed you. Now comes v. 31, the famous text that says: "Whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, you must do all for the glory of God."

I Cor. 11:7-16 In the heathen temples in Corinth were thousands of prostitutes who served the idolators *in the temple*. Sex was an integral part of their "worship." There were male prostitutes as well, but they were probably a minority. Apparently the new Christians in Corinth who came out of pagan practices were clueless about effective worship of the living God.

I Cor. 11:17-34 -- especially vs. 27-29: "So if anyone eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily, that person is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup unworthily, not honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself!!" Read Lev. 16:30, and 23:28. The Israelites were to examine their souls, fasting the entire Day of Atonement. For us, today, examining ourselves for sins and confessing and repenting of them, thereby transferring them into the heavenly Sanctuary, is still a requirement for partaking of Communion where we ingest bread and wine into our bodies which is a symbol of the indwelling Christ, through the Holy Spirit. Through that service our sins are cleansed: a New Covenant act which parallels the Old Testament Day of Atonement!

NOTE: Can you imagine what it must have been like for the new Christians of that day to implement the New Covenant services? For the Jews, the new symbols had to be accepted just as readily as the visible death and blood of animal sacrifices were to them. For those accustomed to heathen worship, which included wanton behavior and drunkenness, they initially found it hard to understand why observing a "high" occasion did not have the same sensory perceptions.

I Cor. 12 Paul says we should desire the "most helpful gifts." Tongues is listed last, and by Paul's comments it is to be the least desired of the available gifts.

I Cor. 13:12 Now we see things imperfectly as in a poor mirror, but then we will see everything with perfect clarity. All that I know now is partial and incomplete, but then I will know everything completely, just as GOD KNOWS ME NOW! So—
GOD KNOWS ME COMPLETELY. And He loves me anyway! Thank You, God!!!!

I Cor. 14 Paul continues to explain regarding the gift of tongues. He says love should be our highest goal and the gift of prophecy should be the gift we seek.

I Cor. 14:21-25 MUST READ!!!! Vs. 36-39 The women in Corinth were requested not to speak in their meetings. If they had questions, they were to ask their husbands. Because Paul praises leadership qualities in women in other cities, we can only conclude that the culture of Corinth was such that it was necessary to make this directive.

I Cor. 15 If we believed that there is no resurrection, what purpose would life have? Paul says if that is true, all who have died believing in Christ have perished! And we are all facing extinction.

Vs 21-26 Just as death came through a man, Adam, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another Man, Christ. Everyone died because we're all related to Adam. But all who are related to Christ, the "other Man", will experience the resurrection: Christ was raised first and then when Christ comes back, ALL His people will be raised. The last enemy to be destroyed is death – and then the Father will give Him authority over all things.

Vs. 27-28 Then the Son will present Himself to God, so that God, Who gave His Son authority over all things, will be utterly supreme over everything everywhere.

Non-believers in the resurrection say: "Let's feast and get drunk, for tomorrow we die!" Paul begs believers to stay away from that bad company. "Come to your senses and stop sinning," he begs. "For to your shame I say that some of you DON'T EVEN KNOW GOD." Prov. 9:10; Hosea 6:3, 6; Isa. 5:11-13a; John 17:3

Vs. 35-39 Paul poses what he calls a foolish question: "How will the dead be raised? What kind of bodies will they have?" He likens death to putting seed in the ground, which grows and then is harvested. Whatever seed is sown produces its own kind, whether person or animal, birds or fish.

Vs. 40-- However the resurrected bodies will have glory and power. What we had at the first were natural bodies, the resurrected bodies will be spiritual. Just as we are now like Adam, so we will someday be like Christ. Alleluia!

He reveals that some will be living when their new, immortal bodies are given to them. It will happen in the twinkling of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, the Christians who have died will be raised with transformed bodies and then we will all meet Jesus in the air (I Thess 4:16).

V. 58 So, dear brothers and sisters, be strong and steady, always enthusiastic about the Lord's work, FOR YOU KNOW THAT NOTHING YOU DO FOR THE LORD IS EVER USELESS!

I Cor. 16 Paul is writing from Ephesus (v. 8) and is planning to stay there until the Festival of Pentecost, for the work there is going very well. But there is opposition so he's looking forward to Timothy's soon return from Corinth, along with other brothers.

NOTE: It appears that Paul is in touch with missionary work being done by others, some in the churches he has raised, strengthening the believers. Paul tells the believers in Corinth to respect these workers and others like them who serve with such real devotion. It almost appears that Paul puts out a newsletter when he writes

to a specific church, it also gets sent to the other established churches – kind of like John’s letters to the 7 churches who were urged to read the letters to all the churches of Revelation. Pretty amazing!

II CORINTHIANS

II Cor. 1 Timothy is with Paul as he writes this second letter to the church in Corinth, AND to ALL the Christians throughout Greece. May God give you His grace and peace.

Vs. 4-6 This God of peace comforts us in our troubles SO THAT WE CAN COMFORT OTHERS. When we go through trials and experience God’s comfort, that enables us to help others. So when we are weighed down with troubles it is for our benefit and salvation!

Vs. 8-11 Think back to the stories in Acts of the floggings and persecution of all sorts are heaped on Paul and his companions. Here he tells the Corinthians about it and commends them for their intercessory prayers. As a result many will give thanks to God because so many people’s prayers for our safety have been answered.

V. 13 “My letters have been straightforward, and there is nothing written between the lines and nothing you can’t understand. I hope someday you will fully understand us, even if you don’t fully understand us now. Then on the day when our Lord Jesus comes back again, you will be proud of us in the same way we are proud of you.”

NOTE: Paul had wanted to visit Corinth both on his way to Macedonia and again on the return trip back to Judea. But for some reason his plans changed and he finally gets to the painful fact that he wanted to spare them from a severe rebuke.

V. 24 “...We want to work together with you so you will be full of joy as you stand firm in your faith.”

II Cor. 2 Paul further relates that he had cried over his first letter to them. “I didn’t want to hurt you, but I wanted you to know how very much I love you.”

NOTES: Paul now addresses the man who caused “all the trouble” which hurt the whole church more than he hurt Paul. He now advises to forgive and comfort him else he might become so discouraged that he won’t be able to recover. He suggests that when the church forgives the man, Paul will forgive him, too and that forgiveness will be done with Christ’s authority for your benefit, SO THAT SATAN WILL NOT OUTSMART US (v. 11). For we are very familiar with his evil schemes.

It appears that Paul is now in Troas to preach the Good News but he couldn’t rest because his “dear brother” Titus had not arrived with a report from you. Paul said goodbye and went a couple hundred miles to Macedonia to find him.

II Cor. 2:14-17 Paul then thanks God Who leads us along! Wherever we go He uses us to tell others about God and spread the Good News like a sweet perfume. “**OUR LIVES ARE A FRAGRANCE PRESENTED BY CHRIST TO GOD!**” To unbelievers this fragrance produced a fearful smell of death and doom. –Who is adequate for such a task as this? We are not like those who preach just to make money. We preach with sincerity and with Christ’s authority. **AND WE KNOW THAT THE GOD Who sent us IS WATCHING US!! Alleluia!**

II Cor. 3 Paul seems to come back to a defense of his credentials to be a missionary. The Corinthians must need their confidence restored in Paul and the workers.

II Cor. 3:2 is beautiful. “Your lives are a letter written in our hearts and everyone can read it and recognize our good work among you.” Going on to vs. 3-6, Paul declares again that the only power or success they have comes from God to enable them to represent God’s New Covenant which is of the life-giving Holy Spirit.

II Cor. 3:12-18 Paul describes the contrast between the Old and the New Covenants and points out that the Old Covenant has been set aside (the sacrificial system) even though there was glory connected to it – Moses would cover his face with a veil so the brightness would not distract the people. (See Exodus 34:33.) If there was glory with a system that has been set aside, then the new covenant, which remains forever, has far greater glory. Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, then the veil is taken away. And Wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, He gives freedom. And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be **MIRRORS** that brightly reflect the **GLORY OF THE LORD**. And as the **SPIRIT OF THE LORD** works within us, we become **MORE AND MORE LIKE HIM**. And the glory grows!!!!

II Cor. 4 This chapter continues to present the sterling quality of Paul’s work for the churches, proclaiming that they do not preach about themselves; they preach Christ Jesus, the Lord. We are your servants. He says that he and those who work with him are “perishable containers!” So clearly, there is light and power shining through their work, that can only come from God’s power, not their own.

II Cor. 5:1-10 If we keep the vision of the earthly bodies being transformed to immortal bodies **AT THE RESURRECTION**, this passage becomes easier to interpret. The golden verse in this passage is v. 5: “God Himself has prepared us for this, and as a **GUARANTEE**, He has given us His Holy Spirit!” Remember that the Holy Spirit was credited with raising Christ from the dead and He will raise us as well. (Rom 1:4)

II Cor. 5:11-17 Paul’s defense of his ministry continues – v. 12: “Are we trying to pat ourselves on the back again? No, we are giving you a reason to be proud of us...” So it’s important that we stop evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. **A NEW LIFE HAS BEGUN!**

II Cor. 5:18-20 For God (the Father) was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. This is the wonderful message He has given us to tell others. For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God the Father through Christ. (Day of Atonement!!!!)

II Cor. 6:2 TODAY IS THE DAY OF SALVATION!

II Cor. 6:3-12 Paul relates his hardships and endurance through the Holy Spirit. And then he says in v. 11: "Oh dear Corinthian friends! We have spoken honestly with you. Our hearts are open to you. If there is a problem between us, it is not because of a lack of love on our part, but because you have withheld your love from us. I am talking now as I would to my own children. Open your hearts to us!" What a plea!

II Cor. 6:14 Beware of attaching yourselves to unbelievers.

II Cor. 7 I believe this letter was not written in one sitting for it relates finding Titus who had been in Corinth and who brought a good report. V. 7: "When he told me how much you were looking forward to my visit and how sorry you were about what had happened, and how loyal your love is for me, I was filled with joy!" Now he could quit agonizing over whether he had offended them beyond recovery. Titus was treated with respect by the Corinthians and they listened to him so that he, too, learned to love them (I Cor. 7:14-15). Paul said he was "very happy now because I have complete confidence in you" (II Cor. 7:16).

NOTE: The idea to give an offering to help the Christians in Jerusalem was started over a year before in the church at Corinth. Paul gives a pep talk about finishing the project and in the process gives us some good quotes to use when calling for the offering in our services. Such as I Cor. 9:6-8 "Remember this—a farmer who plants only a few seeds will get a small crop. But the one who plants generously will get a generous crop. You must each make up your own mind as to how much you should give. Don't give reluctantly or in response to pressure. For GOD LOVES THE PERSON WHO GIVES CHEERFULLY! ...

II Cor. 10 Summary: Apparently some preachers were declaring how important they were and trying to assert their authority over the Corinthians, saying that Paul acts from purely human motives. Paul says he is human but doesn't use human plans and methods to wage war of any kind. Vs. 4, 5: "We use God's mighty weapons to knock down the Devil's strongholds. And with these weapons we break down every barrier that keeps people from KNOWING GOD!!!!!" Their problem was that they relied on appearance. Paul declares that he will not be put to shame by having his work among the Corinthians destroyed.

Paul refuses to compare himself with any other human being. His goal (vs.13) is to stay within the boundaries of God's plans for us, "including our working there with you."

II Cor. 11 Paul urges the church to maintain its first love to Christ and not be led away (as Eve was) by the appearance of those who preach about a different Jesus than Paul preaches! Paul never asks for financial support. Apparently these “false apostles” criticized Paul for NOT taking money for his service. Corinth must have been in an economic downturn (v. 9) for Paul says when he was living in Corinth and didn’t have enough money to live on, he didn’t ask the people for help, and he never would ask that church for help! And he does it to cut the ground out from under the feet of the spoilers! Vs. 13, 14 say: “These people are false apostles. They have fooled you by disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. But I am not surprised! EVEN SATAN CAN DISGUISE HIMSELF AS AN ANGEL OF LIGHT.”

II Cor. 11:16-30 Paul talks like a “fool” (according to him). He really gets wound up in this passage. In vs. 28 he reveals a daily burden of concern for the churches. God must have appreciated this constant caring attitude for the sheep in Paul because God has the same trait. See 2 Chron. 16:9!

II Cor. 12:7 Paul has experienced visions of such magnitude that he does not boast about them because he doesn’t want anyone to dwell on that instead of his message – “even though I have received wonderful revelations from God.” To keep him from getting “puffed up” he was given a thorn in the flesh: a messenger from Satan to torment me and keep me from getting proud. My verse (thinking about the speech challenge I function with) is V.10 “Since I know it is all for Christ’s good, I am quite content with my weaknesses, and with insults etc. for when I am weak, then I AM STRONG!”

II Cor. 12:11-21 Paul is coming to Corinth for the third time, and some issues are still not resolved. V. 16 “Some of you admit I was not a burden to you. But they still think I was sneaky and took advantage of you by trickery.” Paul’s co-leaders haven’t required financial support either (Vs. 18, last part): “For we have the same Spirit and walk in each other’s steps, doing things the same way.” Paul declares “We know God is listening to what we say. So before Him I declare: everything we do is for your benefit!”

II Cor. 13 Paul encourages the Corinthian church to find witnesses to testify in the cases he will hear on his arrival. On this third visit, he will not spare those who have erred. Christ speaks through Paul, he declares. And Christ is not weak in His dealings with you; He is a mighty power among you!!!! Although He died on the cross in weakness, He now lives by the mighty power of GOD (v. 4). We, too, are weak, but we live in Him AND HAVE GOD’S POWER—the Power we use in dealing with you.

Paul writes this letter before arriving, hoping that he won’t have to deal harshly with them when he does come. “For I want to use the authority the Lord has given me TO BUILD YOU UP, NOT TO TEAR YOU DOWN.”

Final greetings: Rejoice. Change your ways. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. THEN THE GOD OF LOVE AND PEACE WILL BE WITH YOU (II Cor. 13:11-13).

PROMOTIONAL REMARKS FOR WEEK 46 Ephesians, Philemon, Psalms 107-110

EPHESIANS

We read two of Paul's "letters" for Week 46. In Ephesians Paul gives us parts of the "gospel armor!" plus advice regarding family behaviors, requirements for certain offices in the church, etc.

PHILEMON

Philemon is written to the owner of a slave named "Onesimus." Paul advises Philemon to reinstate his slave and treat him with kindness. Paul really wanted to keep him there in Rome while he was in chains. Onesimus may have been trouble earlier, but now, Philemon needs to know that conversion has taken place in Onesimus' heart and now he's VERY valuable.

PSALMS 107-110

Everyone of these Psalms ends with a positive and warm statement about God's protection, or God's great love. Enjoy!!! Chapter 110 is a companion psalm to Psalm 2 and Hebrews 1, 2.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 46 Ephesians; Philemon; Psalms 107-110

WELCOME

Have you been thinking of a date, time and place for what will be your final social event in this TILE “year?”

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

EPHESIANS

Paul begins with another series of comments showing how the FATHER, SON AND HOLY SPIRIT work together to save human beings. In Ephesians, God the Father is shown to have loved us before the creation of the world, and He was in full agreement with the plan to purchase our freedom through the blood of His Son! He has showered His kindness on us, along with wisdom and understanding.

Eph. 1:9-11 talks about the final step of the promise given in Eden (Gen 3:15, Gen. 12:7, and Gal 3:16) regarding “the Child.” Because of Christ we have received an eternal inheritance from God with rights to the New Jerusalem as well as to the earth made new. Vs. 10, 14 would indicate that WE are part of the baby Jesus’ inheritance!

Paul’s sincere prayer for the Ephesians has been for Christ to give them wisdom and understanding so that they can GROW in their KNOWLEDGE of God and understand the rich and glorious inheritance He has given to His people.

Now it’s your turn to share your illuminations!!! ☺

(Thoughts to use to keep discussion moving)

Eph. 1:6 When we believe in Christ, God the Father pours wonderful kindness on us because we belong to His dearly beloved Son.

Eph 1:19: “I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of His power for us who believe Him!!!” (See 2 Chron. 16:9)

Eph. 2:3 pt 2 “We were born with an evil nature!” THANK GOD FOR JESUS!

Eph. 2:4, 5 Christ’s resurrection gave us life! *Eternal life* is ours NOW and because of our relationship to Christ we are currently seated – through Him – in the

heavenly realms. (Vs. 9, 10) We cannot boast about it for we are GOD's masterpiece, CREATED ANEW in Christ Jesus.

Eph. 2: 17-22 The "Temple" for the Lord is now complete, with all humanity eligible for membership, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, and the cornerstone is Christ Jesus Himself. All who believe are joined together through God, forming the dwelling where God lives by His Spirit.

Eph. 3:6 And this is the secret plan – Gentiles are as eligible as Jews. A COUPLE THOUGHTS REGARDING THE ORGANIZATION OF THE "CHURCH" FROM EDEN: A. God designed that the "patriarch" was to be the spiritual leader for his family, including children and grandchildren, the first one being ADAM, then SETH etc. all the way to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. B. Jacob's 12 sons founded the Israelite nation, and God changed the way the "Church" functioned. He "took all the firstborns" unto Himself (Lev. and Num.) through the Levitical priesthood. In other words, spiritual leadership was directly under God and through the Levites, and it was structured to accommodate millions, rather than a relatively small clan.

C. Following the resurrection of Christ, under the apostles and disciples, the Holy Spirit's power worked in everyone everywhere at once! Leading to the great harvest! ☺ At this juncture, the stage was set for final steps of the sin solution! After Christ's death on the cross, Christianity was as available to gentiles who believed on Christ, as it was to the Jews. He died for ALL.

Eph. 3:10-12 God's purpose was to show His wisdom to all the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms!!!! (another text demonstrating life on other planets!) So now we can come directly to the throne of grace. Jesus said that we can even ask the Father directly because He loves us, too, as Eph. 1:3-14 pictures.

Eph. 3:14-21 One of the most magnificent prayers in Scripture. Thank you, Paul!

Eph. 4 contains part of Ps. 68:18 Christ ascended with a "crowd of captives, and gave gifts to His people." Paul does not address the "first fruits" issue, but uses the verse to verify that the gifts of the Spirit were given at or near the time of His ascension. The One Who was equal with God had been made "a little lower than the angels" Heb. 2:7 Now, He is reinstated in Heaven at the right hand of His Father (Eph 4:9, 10), so that He can rule the universe. (Ps. 110 After vs. 6 is fulfilled, Christ will rule from Jerusalem, vs 2, from this earth!) He will be a priest after the order of Melchizedek: no beginning and no end!!! The Father is working with the Son, extending His kingdom to the entire universe! Vs. 2, 10

Eph 4:16 As each member of the church, fitted together perfectly, does his/her own special work, all the parts are healthy and the church grows, full of love.

Vs. 17-31 - Those whose lives have been filled with sin need to change into Christ's likeness in their deeds and their ATTITUDES. Ref. Eph 5:15-20.

Eph. 5:10 LEARN WHAT IS PLEASING TO THE LORD.

Eph 5:21-33 Within marriage each man must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. Each Christian husband reflects the pattern set in Eden where Adam was created first and then woman was taken from man, but from then on they were equally responsible for populating the earth.

Eph 6 Advice to children (they should take this seriously), and a special note addressed to fathers! Don't make the children angry, rather bring them up in a manner approved by the Lord.

Eph 6:10-20 "The sword of the Spirit" (v. 17) in this passage preparing us to be victorious in this world, is the **WORD OF GOD**. (The rider pictured in Rev. 19:15 is a fair judge, who judges and THEN goes to war. His title is: **THE WORD OF GOD**. And from His mouth comes a "sharp sword" (Heb. 4:12).

Eph 6:18 Pray in the power **OF THE HOLY SPIRIT**. Alertly and persistently!!!

Eph 6:19 Pray for all who preach the gospel today, revealing "secret" things – at least the Sabbath truth, e.g. is a secret to most of the Christian world – pray for our pastors!

PSALMS 106-101

PSALM 106 begins with the words of Psalm 136 where "Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! His faithful love endures forever!" is repeated by the people over and over. These words must be sweet to God's ears.

V. 23 Moses truly was a mediator between God and the people. See Acts 7:38, 39.

PSALM 107 begins exactly the same as 106! David encourages people to TELL OTHERS how God has saved us. See vs. 2 and 31, 32.

Vs. 24-30 David must have seen the storm on Galilee! I had always thought of the book of Psalms as the hymnal of the ancient believers. But it is also a book of prophecy. Through inspiration David sees both history and the future and shares it in poetry and prose which I am sure were songs, sung by a leader, phrase by phrase.

PSALM 108 Vs. 4 and 5 reveal a beautiful contemporary praise song

V. 8 which is spoken by God, says: "...Judah will produce my kings...." This is why it was necessary for Jesus to be born in Judea in the town of Bethlehem.

Vs. 12, 13 portray the helpless human condition. But with God's help we can do mighty things for "He will trample down our foes!"

PSALM 109 Vs. 1-5 reveal one of the reasons God said David was a man after His own heart – David prayed for his enemies and *loved them* (vs. 4). BUT then he prays a long list of punishments for them and in vs. 20 and 21 requests God to punish his accusers who are plotting against his life, but he ends by saying in vs. 30 and 31: “But I will give repeated thanks to the Lord, praising Him to everyone. For He stands beside the needy, ready to save them from those who condemn them.” (II Chron 16:9!)

PSALM 110 This one is huge in significance. Jesus used v. 1 when proving His identity to the Jewish leaders (Matt. 22:44; Also see Ps. 2:7; Acts 13:32,33). David refers to two separate, divine Beings, One as “Lord” and another as “*my* Lord.” David’s “Lord” was the incarnate Jesus, but still verily God, and 100% human! We’ll be studying that for eternity! I Cor. 10:4 sheds some light on Who has been forever devoted to the people of earth: it is Christ. And the way Christ used this verse would seem to underline this understanding.

V. 4 “The Lord” continues to speak: “You (Jesus) are a Priest forever in the line of Melchizedek!” See Hebrews 7:1-3 and the entire chapter, which describes Melchizedek as having the “power of Life *within Himself*” so that He could not die. And without record of parents or lineage, it would seem that surely Melchizedek must have been the Son of God! Gen. 14:18 says that the King of Salem, Melchizedek, brought out bread and wine (communion symbols) when Abram paid tithe to Him. Very interesting Bible character, Melchizedek!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR Week 47 I & II Thess.

Next week’s reading contains some of the most meaningful information in all of Scripture regarding the second coming of Christ and the resurrection. Your heart and soul will be invigorated as you read I and II Thessalonians

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK #47 I and II Thessalonians

WELCOME

PRAYER FOR THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GUIDANCE

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

I THESSALONIANS

I Thess. 1: "Greetings"! Paul gives to two other writers of this letter: Silas and Timothy. (You may recall that on the 2nd missionary journey, Silas was imprisoned with Paul at Philippi just before coming to Thessalonica [Acts 16]. They prayed and sang songs at midnight when there was an earthquake which shook the prison doors open and all the chains fell off the prisoners!)

I wonder how long Paul's prayer list was *every day*! He says "we always thank God for you and we pray for you *constantly*!" many times in his letters.

V. 4 says "We know that God loves you." These are words I often use when people are going through difficult trials. When a person is dying, I believe these are the most healing words to bring comfort. For whatever happens to us on this earth, our future with Jesus is more than enough reward!

V. 5 shows the power of the Holy Spirit working right alongside Paul to convict listeners of truth! Thank You, dear Holy Spirit!

I Thess. 2: Paul's ministry is consistent. Persecution does not deter his bold declaration of the Good News; he earns his own living; as they convert gentiles to Christianity, Jews get jealous and persecute the new believers. No wonder Paul felt a need to keep in contact with the new "babes in Christ." He said they are his "glory and joy" (KJV). The NLT says they were his "pride and joy." There must be a real sense of conquering the devil when the Holy Spirit is victorious and decisions are made for Christ.

I Thess. 3:1-7 In Acts 17 the story of Paul and Silas's stay in Thessalonica is very short. They weren't there very long before the Jews stirred up the town against them and the believers took them quickly to Berea to avoid heavy persecution. But the Jews from Thessalonica came over to Berea to continue their trouble making.

Paul was always concerned about new believers and the strength they may, or may not, have! So he sent Timothy to Thessalonica to bolster up the believers and report

back to Paul. The report was good so in Chapter 3:5-8 Paul relates that this good news gives him new life “knowing that you remain strong in the Lord.”

I Thess. 4:1 “Live to Please God” What a motto!! We should study diligently what it means to live to please God and be willing to make any changes necessary to reach that goal (vs. 2-12).

Vs. 2-12 Digest the list put before us and learn “HOW” to live godly lives.

Vs. 13-18 Beautiful description of the second coming of Christ. Let’s be READY!!!!

I Thess. 5:12, 13 Big lesson for us: we need to not just tolerate our pastors, but think highly of them and give them your wholehearted love and support because of their work.

Vs. 14-19 Paul continues to encourage patience, do good. Always be joyful, pray, and be thankful – THIS IS GOD’S WILL for you!!!! Then he continues “Do not stifle the Holy Spirit, or scoff at prophecies, but test everything that is said. Keep away from every kind of evil.”

II THESSALONIANS

II Thess. 1:5 and 11 make a statement that is also made in Philippians 1:6 although in different wording: What God has begun in us HE WILL FINISH!!! Praise God! And Thank You to the entire Godhead, for They ALL work together on our behalf, constantly.

Paul indicates that the church’s spirituality is growing (Chap.1:3) in spite of persecution and points them to the reward when Jesus appears from heaven. He will come with his trillion(s) of angels ☺ in flaming fire, to bring judgment on those who **don’t know God.** (Chap.1:8) So sad that some (maybe most people) will refuse the chances God has offered for them know Him! In Jesus’ own words He said (John 17:3): “And this is the way to have eternal life—**to know You,** the only true God, and Jesus Christ, the One You sent to earth.” Rom. 1:20 indicates that knowledge of God is available to the world through nature and those who reject it, “are without excuse.”

II Thess. 2 Someone in the Thessalonian Church claimed knowledge supposedly given in a vision that the “day” of the Lord’s coming had already begun.

There are specific things that must happen before that day: (vs. 3-12) a rebellion against God, the man of lawlessness will be revealed, who will tear down every object of adoration and worship. He will position himself in the temple of God claiming that he himself is God! But the revealing of the “man of sin” will happen when God says the time has come.

This chapter ends with the exhortation to “stand firm” in the salvation that came THROUGH THE HOLY SPIRIT Who makes you holy, and remain in their belief in the truth.

II Thess. 3 tells the Thessalonians to pray for the rapid spread of the message. Wonder what Paul would think if he could see the internet’s instant worldwide communication and the lay people of our church preaching the word around the world.

V. 3 promises that the Lord will make us strong and guard us from the evil one. How can we lose a salvation that is so nourished by God??

Paul ends the book with again encouraging them to be practical, hard workers, -- following his example. V. 10 says that “Whoever does not work should not eat.” And anyone who does not obey what is said in this letter should be warned of their condition, but speaking to them as you would to a Christian.

Paul signs his name at the end with his own hand to prove that the letter is authentic.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR LESSON 48

Colossians; Titus; Psalms 79-82

COLOSSIANS

Paul had never been to the city of Colosse, but a “co-worker” of his named Epaphras had planted a church there. This is a letter of encouragement and counsel. Some very important key texts for the doctrine about law and grace are in chapter 2, vs. 13-19.

There is more advice regarding food that has been offered to idols (Col. 2:20-23).

TITUS

Titus had been left on the island of Crete to appoint elders for the churches there. But the task may have been daunting given that a prophet from Crete had said “The people of Crete are all liars; they are cruel animals and lazy gluttons.” Paul tells Titus to promote the right kind of living that reflects right teaching! A “living” sermon?

PSALMS 79 - 82

Psalms 79 - 82 are awesome. Drink them in!

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 48 Colossians; Titus; Psalms 79-82

WELCOME

INVOCATION

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

COLOSSIANS

Paul writes this book to a church he had never visited. He had come to know of these believers while living in Ephesus on his second missionary journey, and now he was concerned because he had heard of strange theories that were creeping into the church. They were dabbling in astrology, magic and a theory about Jesus called “Judaism,” which downgraded the Son of God to being some sort of angel. You can imagine how Paul might approach them.

This letter presents a carefully worked out proof that Christ was God in human form. Paul is very good at working through problems which surfaced in the early churches. He writes from Rome!

TITUS

Paul says that he has been sent to bring faith to those God has chosen and to teach them to know the truth that shows them how to live godly lives. This truth gives them the confidence of eternal life, which God promised them before the world began—and He cannot lie. Ah yes! Confidence in God’s promise of eternal life needs to be repeated over and over. Paul says that it is by the command of God our Savior that I (Paul) have been trusted to do this work for Him.

Paul brings some important principles to the people of Crete. A prominent citizen on Crete describes the people as “all liars; they are cruel animals and lazy gluttons.” Paul goes on to say “This is true. So rebuke them as sternly as necessary to make them strong in the faith. They must stop listening to Jewish myths and the commands of people who have turned their backs on the truth.”

Apparently, Titus needs some helpers with him on Crete. So at the end of his letter Paul promises some good help will come and Titus is to see to it that they have everything they need.

PSALMS 79-82

Beautiful psalms of praise. Notice how our God of love appears to try everything possible to lure his faithful people to live good lives and to listen to the voice of God!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR LESSON 49

I and II Timothy; Philippians; Psalms 58, 59, 72

I and II TIMOTHY

Paul writes not just one, but two letters to Timothy personally. Apparently Paul knows his family quite well and knows that Timothy comes from a genuinely spiritual heritage due to two shining examples: his mother and his grandmother. Esp. see II Tim. 4:14-17. Note Paul's fantastic statement that since Timothy had known the scriptures since *childhood*, He possessed the wisdom to receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Christ Jesus. What an example for parents and grandparents today!!

Paul reveals that on one of their missionary journeys he requested Timothy to remain in Ephesus and stop false teachers' doctrines from spreading and polluting the early church. In 1 Tim. 4:12 is a brief comment which all dedicated youth need to keep in their hearts.

PHILIPPIANS

In Phil. 2:19 Paul mentions plans to send Timothy to Philippi to evaluate what was happening there and subsequently give Paul a report. He says there's no one else who genuinely cares about their welfare as much as Timothy.

In Phil. 2:25-30 Paul reveals his plan to send Epaphroditus back home to Philippi. He had been helping Paul in Rome and almost died of an illness.

PSALMS 58, 59, 72

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 49 I and II Timothy; Philippians; Psalms 58, 59, 72

WELCOME

INVOCATION

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

What runs through your mind when a new, young, fresh out of college, or even out of the seminary, steps into the pulpit and starts dispensing wisdom and instruction to the church family. Are you ever tempted to ask yourself if they're mature enough to understand the very words that are coming from their mouths? Or the fine point of negotiation necessary in board meetings at times? **THEN WATCH IT!** For God works through young people! It's definitely scriptural. If a person is called of God to preach and guide a flock, then God will aid that Godly young person. Sometimes seasoned members can support by example, and maybe even be called by God to sustain a fledgling minister. But we stand on dangerous ground if we reject anyone called by God to the ministry.

Timothy is a comparatively young man, for in I Tim. 4:11-13 Paul says, "Teach these things and **INSIST** that everyone learn them. Don't let **ANYONE THINK LESS OF YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE YOUNG**. **BE AN EXAMPLE TO ALL BELIEVERS** in what you teach, in the way you live, in your love, your faith and your purity. Until I get there, focus on reading the Scriptures to the church, encouraging the believers and teaching them." Good advice!

Paul writes this letter to Timothy so he will know how people must conduct themselves in the household of God (chapter 3:14-16). This is the church of the living God, which is the pillar and support of the truth! (This is a text for all Christians to memorize.) I believe Paul is writing from Rome.

Now let's start at the beginning of I Timothy and tell me what you learned about God in our reading for today. **You know, when God called Paul to the ministry, he was hell-bent in a totally different direction (according to his own words). Isn't it amazing what God wrought through this converted man? (I Tim 1:16) I believe God gave Paul insight into the fact that new churches needed repetitive encouragement to live the lives God requires of us. Timothy was at the top of the list of responsible workers to appoint to this kind of work.**

I Tim. 1:12-17 give us a wonderful glimpse of our longsuffering God.

I Tim. 1:18, 19 Words to memorize, no matter our age!

I Tim 2:8 Paul requests that in worship, men should pray with ‘Holy hands’ lifted up to God! I like it! Then he admonishes the women of Ephesus on worship behavior.

I Tim. 3:1-5 needs to be balanced with the Eph. text which says that fathers should not aggravate their children. Men need to be aware that their leadership must be God-directed or it can have the opposite effect he is seeking.

I Tim. 3:14, & 4:13 It appears again that God had not totally revealed Paul’s future to him. He needed to suffer persecution the way most Christians do. Do you think?

I Tim. 4:14-16 It appears that prophecies were spoken over candidates for ordination! Paul admonishes Timothy to develop the gifts received at that time!

I Tim. 5 deals with behavioral issues in the church family

I Tim 6 is rich counsel to Timothy – and all of us.

II TIMOTHY written from Rome (see chapter 4:6) – Paul shares sublime creeds with Timothy in chapter 2 and earlier in I Tim. 3:16. Paul’s personal counsels to Timothy are full of energetic fuel. How can anyone read this letter without feeling strengthened and energized to work for the Lord?

See II Tim. 3:8, 9 Jannes and Jambres were Egyptian magicians who tried to copy all the miracles Moses and Aaron performed with their rods.

II Tim. 4:16-18 The strength of Paul’s faith shines here as he faced appearing in court without anyone to stand with him, except God!

“Hurry so you get here before winter. ...” 2Tim 4:21 See vs. 13 ☺

PHILIPPIANS

...is “from” both Paul and Timothy. It’s interesting to note that 2 Cor. and Col. were also from both of them. Paul shared authorship for 1st Cor. with Sosthenes. It would be interesting to know just how much Timothy or Sosthenes actually contributed to the letters! 1st & 2nd Thessalonians were from Paul, Silas AND Timothy!! I find this interesting because it seems to me that all the NT letters were ascribed to Paul. I had never considered that there were other authors. How do we miss such clearly presented facts for so long???

I like to think of Philippians as an upbeat book. Paul presents thanksgiving and prayer, joy when trials hit us, understanding that we ARE citizens of heaven just as soon as we believe in Christ.

Phil. 2:5-11: He presents the humility of Christ (see *John 14:10,11) in taking on human form and becoming a servant even unto death, *not speaking His own words, but those of the Father. And because of His humility, the Father gives Him a name above every other name and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is LORD, to the glory of the Father.

Phil. 2:16 Hold tightly to the Word of Life, so that when Christ returns, I (Paul) will be proud that my life was not useless.

Phil. 2:17 What did Paul mean about his life being poured out like a drink offering? Did Leviticus help us understand these words?? I hope so.

Paul is eager to send Timothy to Philippi so he can bring back news of the Philippians' progress! Vs 19-21.

Phil. 3 Nothing is so important that it should come between us and our time with Christ. Pressing toward the goal is the REASON FOR OUR EXISTENCE! To glorify God.

Phil. 4:1 says that the believers are Paul's joy and the reward for his work. See Heb. 12:2b. Jesus experienced joy before going to the cross – somewhere between the struggle in Gethsemane and Golgotha Jesus was given a glimpse of the JOY that would be His when the redeemed are with Him forever! Paul, as a human apostle, also had joy in those who accepted his teaching.

Vs. 2-9 Paul then tells the believers to live harmoniously and settle any disagreements between Euodia and Syntyche, because both women had worked hard with Paul in telling the Good News. He states that their names and Clement who had also worked with them and their names were written in the BOOK OF LIFE. Hallelujah!

Be full of joy, don't worry, pray to God and tell Him what you need, then thank Him for what He has done. This is the way to have peace!!! Think pure thoughts and thoughts of excellence and worthy praise! Live as I've told and showed you. And you will have peace.

Note the last 12 verses: Paul has learned to be content no matter what. Then he praises the Philippians for their generosity. Epaphroditus had brought gifts from them to Paul and he said that "they are a sweet-smelling sacrifice that is acceptable to God and pleases Him." Clearly then, can we see that gifts given to God's servants, in the right spirit and place can be viewed as being given directly to God???? Occasionally Paul uses language straight out of Lev. I do think that today we can perceive a direct connection between our support of our church leaders and the world-wide church and God upon His throne!!! ☺

Epaphroditus brought Paul gifts from the Philippians and stayed with Paul until he got sick and almost died. Now Paul is sending him home as a faithful worker, but also to recuperate, for he almost died!

PSALM 58 – Imagine yourself singing these words to the tune, “Do Not Destroy!” The ending is victorious and presents God as the “just Judge.”

Psalm 59 – This song is also to be sung to the same tune: “Do Not Destroy!” “Because of the sinful things they say, because of the evil that is on their lips, let them be captured by their pride, their curses and their lies...” Verses 16-17 are sublime by comparison!

Psalm 72 –A Psalm of Solomon: blessings flow to the just kings of Israel. Vs.18 and 19 are particularly glorious. It might be in order to pray for just legislators and leaders in our own country TODAY!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR Week 50

Hebrews should be full of new understanding for us following the recent study of Psalms 110 and related passages in Hebrews. Enjoy it and be filled with joy in this most revealing of all scripture as to what Jesus is doing in the heavenly courts on our behalf.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 50 Hebrews 1, 2, 5-13 (*chapters 3 and 4 included in weeks 7, 8, and 9)

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER seeking the Holy Spirit's direction as we discuss the work of our Most High Priest in the Most Holy place in the sanctuary *in heaven!*

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

NOTE: *(Hebrews 3, 4 and 5:1-4 were included in weeks 7, 8, and 9 because of their mention of events found in the book of Numbers. It was not required reading for Week 50 because it had been read before. But for our discussion, we will need to discuss the entire book of Hebrews because of the sequence of the information.)

Heb. 1 This entire chapter reveals a relationship between Father and Son that has been agreed upon since (Eph. 1:4,5) before the creation of the world. Heb. 1:2 says that the Father promised the Son that *everything* would be given to Him as an *inheritance*. Clearly the love the Son has for mankind has been shown to be part of His strength in fulfilling his promised death on the cross (Heb. 12:2, compare Matt. 26:36-47).

The Father is saying breathtaking things to His Son: (1:10-12) "*Lord, in the beginning you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens...they will fade away like old clothing. But You are always the same; You will never grow old.*"

David the Psalmist, and Isaiah were shown this dialog between Father and Son!! He records it in Ps. 2:7, Ps. 110:1; Ps 45:7; Ps. 8:4,5; Ps. 104:4; Isa. 61:3.

Heb. 2 This writer admonishes us to believe the Good News because scripture shows that rejection of Truth has consequences especially when that Truth has been verified by God's gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His will! (Eph. 4:7,8; Ps. 68:18; Acts 2:4)

He points out that God has not yet given His Son authority over all things, so there are things that still must happen before the Plan is completely finished. Vs. 9-12 say that Jesus was made a little lower than the angels, but is now crowned with glory and honor for tasting death so that He can bring many sons to glory. Both He that sanctifieth and those who receive sanctification have become God's "family:" (vs. 12) "I will declare Thy Name unto My brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto God (the Father)."

Vs. 14 By Christ's death He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Heb. 3 The people who are receiving this letter (the Hebrews, or Jewish) clearly have a high regard for Moses. But this writer challenges them to consider that faithful Moses, called by God to be a savior (Acts 7:37 and Deut 18:15) for Israel. But Israel turned away from God's messenger, Moses, and didn't believe.

We see human nature refusing to accept the Messenger sent from the Father to die on the cross, and yet people use His name as a curse word! We are urged to be on guard against unbelief and warn each other against making the same mistake Israel did. Vs. 12-14 tell us we need to warn each other *every day* while time lasts. "...For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ." God vowed that the unfaithful Israelites who did not trust God to get them safely into the promised land would *never* enter His place of rest.

Heb. 4 In this chapter using Pauline logic it seems to me, looking at this issue from various sides, the "rest" God promises us is NOT the land of Canaan (V. 8). Yet in our church we have said that the promised rest was reaching Canaan. I'm hoping to help change this perception. Reaching Canaan was certainly a goal God had for Israel, but they never appreciated it (see 3:16-18), or believed in God's power to provide it for them. See vs. 9-11. So there is a special rest still waiting for the people of God. For all who enter into God's rest will find rest from their labors (Rev. 14:13) just as God rested after creating the world."

To reach the end of life in this world with "works" to follow us which indicate that we have been people of faith in God, should be our goal!! We need to see His working in our lives and recognize God's direction in all we do and "rest" in His promises as we finish this earthly journey which must take place before *all things are placed in the hands of the One who died for us!*"

With all the promises of "finishing the work in us" (Phil.1:6) and gifts from the Holy Spirit both at baptism or any time ordination takes place, it seems that it should be an automatic win with God working in us and for us!!! But until death is put under His feet, we are still being bombarded by the tempter. Our true rest is when our genuine belief in God and His Plan keeps us balanced and open to God's leading. The final complete, true, unending rest will come when Satan can no longer tempt us, and we are given immor-tality to leave this world. But we should seek that rest EVERY DAY and urge our friends to make that a priority as well. Could this fall under the statement of Paul that we should "work out our salvation with fear and trembling?" This is a serious work.

Vs. 12 A verse we should all know by heart so that we can use it appropriately. The power surging through the words of this verse fill my heart with energy for the tasks ahead in this journey with Christ to the fulfillment of all His plans for me and for my

family. Oh, Lord, bless them so that even in their busy-ness You and Your Word will be the top priority every day, seeking a growing knowledge of You !

Vs. 14-16 David was shown Jesus at the right hand of the Father and heard some conversations! Stephen saw Jesus in the sanctuary with the Father on His throne! Isaiah and John the Revelator saw our High Priest in heaven. Believe that He is there and believe in His desire to finish this time of sin. I believe it is far greater than we can comprehend. Approach Him boldly (v. 16) for He is graciously offering His mercy and grace. Love Him, serve Him, every day and seek His help!

Heb. 5 Melchizedek – We met him in Gen. 14:17-24 It says that M. went out to meet Abraham and brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God. M blessed A, and the most high God who had delivered his enemies into his hand. And A paid tithe to M.Then the king of Sodom came to A and offered for A to take some of the spoils. A refused, saying “I have ‘lift up my hand’ unto the Lord...” Ah, yes! Lift up the hand to the Lord and told the Possessor of heaven and earth that he would not take a thing from the heathen king lest he would claim to have made A rich! A was rich! And he gave all the glory to God.

Vs. 7-10 “While Jesus was here on earth He offered prayers and pleadings with a loud cry and tears, to the One who could deliver Him out of death. God heard His prayers because of His reverence for God (!)” God’s Son begged to have the “cup” taken away from Him. But He learned obedience from the things He suffered. In this way, God qualified (a legal term!) Him as a perfect High Priest, and He became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey Him.” Jesus came through the line of Judah. He was a High Priest of a different line than Levi. V. 10 And God designated Him to be a High Priest in the line of Melchizedek.

In Heb. 6 Paul urges Christians to move beyond basic doctrines to “further understanding.” Praise the name of Jesus, who patiently works with us today – knowing that true joy comes from spiritual growth, which takes time and WE are SO busy. Who has time to dig for the pearls of truth just waiting to be discovered!!! When a field soaks up the rain, and bears a good crop for the farmer, it has the blessing of God. But fields that bear thorns and thistles will be condemned and burned.

But God is fair and He will not forget how hard you have worked for Him and loved other Christians. Loving others will make certain that what we hope for will come true!

Then we will not become spiritually indifferent. NO! You will follow the example of those who are going to inherit God’s promises because of their faith and patience. Vs. 16-18: God took an oath on His own name, so that the people would trust God to never change His mind. So we have God’s promise AND His oath that are unchangeable because IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR GOD TO LIE.

Vs. 19,20 This confidence is like a strong and trustworthy anchor for our souls.
It leads us right into the Holy of Holies of God's inner sanctuary! Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the line of Melchizedek.

Heb. 7 What does this chapter reveal regarding the person, Melchizedek? Does this expand your understanding of Who Melchizedek was?? See Heb. 7:1-3. Abraham had seen "Melchizedek" before--when he entertained "strangers" not being aware that one of them was God Himself and the other 2 were angels.

Melchizedek's name meant "King of Justice." He is also "King of Peace" because Salem means "peace." He had no record of beginning or ending to his life. He is a priest forever, "resembling the Son of God!"

Heb. 7: 4-7 Priests in the Old Covenant were to be from the tribe of Levi and they had to have legal proof of their identity. God introduced Melchizedek way back in Gen. to show that there would be a priest who would last forever and he would NOT be a Levite! (**vs. 15-17**) David recorded words that he heard the Lord say to "my Lord" "You are a priest forever in the line of Melchizedek." Why is this important??? Because Levitical priests were born and died and sinned. So Melchizedek had no beginning and no end and was greater than Abraham, because A. paid tithe to M!!! (And because Abraham was the progenitor of Levi, Levi also paid tribute to Melchizedek's status, since he was residing in Abraham's loins!) Can we not say with surety, that Melchizedek, whose name means "justice," and who was the King of Salem (or Peace), *must have been the pre-incarnate Christ?* What human being could possibly be of greater significance than the "father of the faithful"?

Vs. 20-22 The Father's oath that Jesus was to be a priest forever was pronounced a thousand years before His birth, so it was Jesus' "work" to guarantee the effectiveness of this better covenant. In contrast to the Levite priests, Jesus will never have to be replaced! Because He has never sinned, there was never a need to offer sacrifices for his own sins as the Levite priests did. And since His sacrifice was "once for all," (vs. 27) sacrifices are a thing of the past!!!! Jesus' blood covers all confessed sins since the beginning of the world. Earthly sacrifices were but symbols of Jesus' sacrifice – awaiting the reality of the efficacious life-giving blood of God's only Son!

Heb. 8 "Here is the main point:" This chapter establishes that the earthly tabernacle was a "shadow" of the "real one" in heaven. The old covenant was a shadow of the new covenant which God says is far superior! It made the first covenant obsolete!

Heb. 9 After reviewing the tabernacle rooms and furniture and the commandments being kept in the Ark, the writer zeroes in on Christ's location and work in the heavenly sanctuary TODAY. Vs. 27 and 28 knock the rapture theory (no wonder some Protestants say Daniel, Hebrews and Revelation should not have been accepted into the Canon) out of the water! "And just as it is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment, so also Christ died only once as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again BUT NOT TO DEAL WITH OUR SINS

AGAIN. *This time, He will bring salvation to all those who are eagerly waiting for Him.*

Heb. 10 As is so typical with Paul, he reiterates truths regarding the old system and the new from different “angles.” It is his goal to solidly convert the “Hebrews” from Jewish thinking into eternal truth grooves! Gleaning from Psalm 40, Jeremiah 31, and Deuteronomy 32 he pulls “bi-partisan arguments” to appeal to Jew and gentile believers. He also refers to faithfulness exhibited in the early days of Christianity (I Cor. 4:9; Phil. 1:7) and urges in verse 35: *Do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord...*

He ends this chapter by stating strongly that unlike the Jews who refused to believe in God at the border of Canaan: “We have faith that assures our salvation!”

Heb. 11 Listen to the marvelous words of the first vs. from the NLT: “What is faith? It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see. God gave His approval to people *in days of old* because of their faith! (Gal. 2:6; Gen. 15:6)

V. 3 leaves no space for evolutionism!

V. 4 – from the NLT (much preferred): “It was by faith that Abel brought a more acceptable offering to God than Cain did. God accepted Abel’s offering to show that he was a righteous man. And although Abel is long dead, he still speaks to us because of his faith.”

Vs. 5, 6 - Enoch was a testimony that we can please God! Furthermore without faith it is *impossible to please God!*

Then the heroes are listed and in vs. 13, 14 it says “All these faithful ones died without receiving what God had promised them, but they saw it all from a distance *and welcomed the promises of God!!!!* They agreed that they were no more than nomads and foreigners on this earth. They were looking for a better place, a heavenly homeland and that is why God is not ashamed to be called their God!

Vs. 17-19 Amazing verses! They “fill in the blanks” in the Genesis story of Abraham and Isaac. Thank You, God for giving us both the Old AND the New Testaments.

More heroes listed, all with the commonality being faith.

V. 22 briefly mentions – Joseph, who had such faith (God had told Abraham that his descendants would be slaves for *400 years Gen. 15:13) that he made his brothers promise to take his bones back to Canaan *when they left Egypt!* (Gen. 50:25) In Exodus 12:41, 42, 51, it says that the *very day* they left Egypt was the last day of the *430th year!

*NOTE: There is a difference in the length of years mentioned in Genesis and Exodus. Notice that in the *Genesis* prophecy, God says that Jacob's descendants would be oppressed as slaves for 400 years. We know that slavery did not begin immediately as soon as they arrived in Egypt. In *Exodus* it says that the people of Israel lived in Egypt for 430 years. SO... my interpretation is that when Jacob and his family arrived they lived peacefully. Seventeen years later Jacob died at 147 years of age. Joseph died at a comparatively younger age (only 110), and then a new ruler came to Egypt who had not "known Joseph." There may have been 430 years of residence, but only 400 years of slavery.

V. 35b They (all the faithful of all ages) placed their hope in the resurrection to a better life. Some were victorious in their fight, but others were tortured to death. And the strength to endure came from their faith in the resurrection – which does not come until we can all receive the prize. See Vs. 39 & 40.

Heb.12 – Paul uses words from Proverbs as a quote from God. He recognized Proverbs as being Inspired! Interesting! Some scholars state that it is not!

Vs. 16-17 Again! NT enlightenment regarding the sin of Esau. Very helpful.

Vs. 22, 23 The names of all the faithful are written in Heaven! Oh, can you see your name there? May that thought guide our choices constantly! We are not subjected to a terrifying experience as Israel had to come to God, but rather to the City of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, with myriads of angels! Part of that picture is "the spirits of the redeemed *in heaven who have now been made perfect!*" Enoch, Elijah, Moses and the 24 elders and 4 beasts (Matt. 27:52, 53; Ps. 68:18, 25; Lev. 23:9-11; Eph. 4)

Heb. 13 Final advice which most certainly sounds like Paul's phrasing! V. 5b quotes from Joshua 1:5 and 9 where God tells Joshua: "...As I was with Moses, so I will be with Thee: I will never fail you or forsake you." Very encouraging words to those who were to take up the cross as Paul did and carry on the work begun by him and other early apostles. TODAY we can claim the same promise as we work to win precious souls to the Kingdom.

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 51

I & II Peter, James, Psalms 117, 118, 120-123, 125-127

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 51 I & II Peter; James; Psalms 117, 118, 120-123, 125-127

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

I'd like to begin Peter's books with a text found in the last chapter of his 2nd book, vs. 15, 16: "And remember, the Lord is waiting so that people have time to be saved. This is just as our beloved brother Paul wrote to you with the wisdom God gave him—speaking of these things in all of his letters. Some of his comments are hard to understand, and those who are ignorant and unstable have twisted his letters around to mean something quite different from what he meant, just as they do the other parts of Scripture—and the result is disaster for them." Peter's style of writing is very clear. I'm wondering if he didn't feel that he should write these books to make some things Paul had written plainer to his "dear friends"!

I PETER

I Pet. 1

Peter writes to Christians who are living as foreigners in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia and Bithynia. He assures them that because Jesus died and rose again, their priceless inheritance, reserved in heaven for them, is beyond the reach of change and decay. They can trust God's mighty, protecting power until it is a reality! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though trials must come first.

V. 9 makes it crystal clear that our love for God and our trust in Him will be the basis for the salvation of our souls.

Old time prophets wanted to know more about this salvation and wondered at the things they were given to prophecy! To whom would all this happen? They were told it would happen many years later – during your lifetime! Angels are eagerly watching the fulfillment of these prophecies.

Vs. 13-16 are verses to meditate upon, internalize, and live by!

V. 18 refers to the “ransom” paid to save us. This means “someone” is holding us captive and we need free-ing!!! Vs. 20 Jesus was chosen to pay the ransom long before the world began.

Vs. 21, 22 Through Christ we have learned to trust in God. His resurrection from the dead breaks the grip Satan has had on us. Peter says that “God raised Christ from the dead...” Please compare Rom. 1:4 and esp. Rom. 8:11 as you consider the way in which Christ was raised and the way we will be raised. ☺ This knowledge (that Christ’s resurrection frees US) gives us the ability to sincerely love each other – that’s when the body of Christ really becomes a family! ☺

I Pet. 2

I Pet. 2:2 This writer encourages the believers to crave pure spiritual milk so that they can GROW into the “fullness of your salvation.”

V. 8 Believers stumble because they do not listen to God’s word – and do not obey it and so they meet the fate that has been planned for them. *Listen, believers, Rev. 1:3 says that blessed (“happy”) is the person who (1) listens...(2) reads...and (3) obeys the Word.*

V. 9 Peter hastens to assure them that they are not like the Jewish nation who rejected Christ. They are the current “chosen people – WE are a kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation, His very own possession.” Now they (we) are to show others the way out of the darkness!

V. 12 Be careful how you live among unbelieving neighbors.

Vs. 13-15 *For the Lord’s sake* be good citizens, and support the officials He has appointed! See Rom.13!!! Vs. 17 Show respect for everyone. Love your church family, Fear God and show respect for the president -- !!!!

V. 23b *Jesus left His own case in the hands of God,* Who always judges fairly.

V. 24 Christ personally carries away our sins in His own body on the cross...We have been healed (dead to sin) by His wounds!

V. 25 Christ is the guardian of our souls. ☺

I Peter 3

Wives must accept the authority of their husbands – even unbelieving husbands! A godly life will speak more than words. They will be won over by watching their wife’s pure behavior.

Don't be so concerned about outward adorning, but rather of the condition of the heart which shines out.

Husbands, treat your wives with understanding. She is your equal partner in God's gift of new life. If you don't treat her as you should, your prayers will not be heard.

He urges all Christians to be of one mind, full of sympathetic love toward one another. (Vs. 8-14) God wants us to repay unkind remarks with a blessing! God does not want us to worry –or be afraid –even if we must suffer. God will reward us for it.

V. 12 “The eyes of the Lord watch over those who do right” – (2 Chron 16:9a should be referenced here. An awesome comfort in time of trouble!)

V. 18 Jesus suffered death in the flesh, but He was raised to life in the Spirit (cf. 1:21, and Romans 8:11).

Vs. 19-21 (continuing from v. 18) by Whom He also preached to the wicked people in Noah's time, while the ark was being built, in which 8 people were saved “through the water.” This is a picture of **baptism** which now saves you by the power of Jesus Christ's resurrection.

CONCLUSION: The wicked (unbelievers) perished in the water. Noah's family lived because they obeyed the Word. All were invited to believe in God's word and come into the ship. Christ and the Spirit were there (1 Pet. 4:6), and made sure that the Gospel was presented in its fullness. But the wicked mocked everything they heard and now are prisoners in their place of death, awaiting the judgment day of God. When we go under the water in baptism, it is an antitype of Christ in the tomb. When we rise from the water, it is an antitype of Christ's resurrection. Christ went to heaven and sat at the right hand of His Father.

I Peter 4

Vs. 7-9 Peter shares what are important traits to be developed as Christ's coming nears.

Vs.10 and 11 “God has given gifts to each of you from his great variety of spiritual gifts. *Manage them well so that God's generosity can flow through you.* Are you called to be a speaker? Then speak as though God Himself were speaking through you!” Peter is encouraging all to develop the gifts the Holy Spirit has given us through the Father and the Son for the building up of the church. Paul encourages Timothy (see I Tim. 4:14) to work at developing his gift so people will see his progress. Paul suggests that gifts are given at occasions where the elders of the church lay on hands – which would be ordination and at baptism. It appears that even the gifts of the Holy Spirit need to have cooperation of the recipients in developing the gifts.

V. 14 If we are insulted for being Christians, the glorious Spirit of God will come upon us! Praise God!

Vs. 16, 17 If we do suffer we need to be sure it is not for our own wrong doing, for the time has come for judgment and *it must begin first AMONG GOD'S OWN CHILDREN!* And if even Christians must be judged, what terrible fate awaits those who have never believed God's Good News?

V. 19 Trust yourself to the God Who made you, for HE WILL NEVER FAIL YOU. Ref. Joshua 1:5, 9.

I Pet. 4:1b-5 A beautiful appeal to leaders of the churches. Our church is infinitely blessed. Thank you, Lord!

Vs. 5, 6 Humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and in His good time He will honor you. *Give all your worries and cares to God, for He cares about what happens to you.* **Note: We need to internalize vs. 6!!!!**

Vs. 8-9 The Christians truly need the armor of God ON at all times. Being a Christian in these latter days calls for adventurous, strongly convicted Christians.

V. 13 NKJ Peter uses "code" words to confuse the enemies of the Christians. He says "She" *meaning church* "who is in Babylon" *meaning the church in Rome* greets you; and so does Mark, my son.

NOTE: Peter refers to Mark as his son. Sounds like Paul, doesn't it? Vs. 10, 11 sound like Paul, as well.

V. 14 "Greet one another with a kiss of love" (NKJ) or "Greet each other in Christian love." (NLT)

II PETER

As I read Peter's letters, I'm aware of two things: these letters are NOT written to any specific church; and, Peter knew Jesus intimately, and personally experienced His forgiveness and unconditional love!

II Peter 1

V. 1 Peter addressed the first letter to "God's chosen people living as foreigners in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, the province of Asia and Bithynia." This second letter is going to "ALL who share the same precious faith given to us by Jesus Christ...Who makes us right with God."

Vs. 2, 3 These texts could be the entire basis of the TILE program: “May God bless you with His special favor and wonderful peace as you come to KNOW Jesus, our God and Lord, better and better. As we KNOW Jesus better, His divine power gives us *everything we need for living a godly life*. He has called us to receive His own glory and goodness!”

Isn't that beautiful??? Warms my heart that “His divine power gives us EVERYTHING WE NEED FOR LIVING A GODLY LIFE.” No excuses now. Victory IS OURS.

V. 4 And by that same mighty power, He has given us all of His rich and wonderful promises. He has promised that you will escape the decadence all around you caused by evil desires and that you will share in His divine nature.

NOTE: Is this verse to be fulfilled on earth? Yes. There is no indication that this is something to be realized only after we reach heaven! Through the promises, we will escape the sinful influences all around us! PRAISE GOD! O, Lord, thank You so very much for these protecting promises. Put a hedge around my children, Lord, I pray diligently.

V. 8 “The more we grow like this (through the promises), the more you will become productive and useful in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

V. 9 “But those who fail to develop these virtues are blind or, at least, very shortsighted...”

Vs. 12-21 The value of knowledge of Scripture from beginning to end is stressed here. God bless all who are immersing themselves in these Messages from prophets of old who were moved by the Holy Spirit to write what they wrote!!!

II Peter 2

Vs. 4-7 After establishing the value of the entire Bible, Peter relates OT happenings, and once again the NT sheds some enlightenment on the distant history, and demonstrating the awful end that will come to false teachers and mockers and scoffers.

V. 9 So you see, the Lord knows how to rescue godly people from their trials, even while punishing the wicked right up until the day of judgment.

Vs. 21, 22 It would be better if they had never known the right way to live than to know it and then reject the holy commandments that were given to them. They make these proverbs come true: “A dog returns to its vomit,” and “A washed pig returns to the mud.”

NOTE: Would Vs. 21 & 22 be good to demonstrate that the 10 commandment law is the one that never changes?

II Peter 3

Vs. 3-7 (see note inserted above at the beginning of II Peter) Peter was definitely a “creationist.” These verses are powerful in their defense of Jesus as the Creator and warning that there will be scoffers who will laugh at the truth and do every evil thing they desire. He mentions the flood for the third time in these two short books. Important to the picture of evolution! Changes do not have to take millions of years to occur!

Vs. 8-10 In v. 7 Peter has said that the day of judgment is when ungodly people will perish. Then he counsels us that we need to remember that God’s time dimensions are not the same as ours and for that reason the Lord isn’t really being slow about His promise to return. (See v. 15a) The truth is He is waiting as long as possible so that as much time is given for repentance as possible. But when He does come, the heavens will pass away with a terrible noise as the heavens and everything in them will pass away in fire!

Vs. 11-13 Since everything around us is going to melt away, what holy, godly lives we should be living!!! You should look forward to that day and hurry it along. For we are looking forward to the new heavens and new earth He has promised, a world where everyone is right with God!

V. 17 Peter’s books are forewarnings so that we can watch out and not be carried away by errors. Don’t lose your own secure footing. But GROW in the special favor and KNOWLEDGE OF OUR Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

JAMES

James was a brother of Jesus. This book was written to “Jewish Christians” scattered among the nations.

James 1

V. 1 Greetings! James doesn’t waste any time on a “preamble” – he gets right into his concerns.

Vs. 2-4 Whenever we have trouble we should view it as an “opportunity for joy.” For tested faith, grows and when it is fully developed, our character will be strong and ready for anything.

Vs. 5-8 When we need wisdom, --if you want to know what God wants you to do—ask Him and He will gladly tell you. Be sure of your belief that He answers prayer – an unsure person wavers!

Vs. 9-11 Whether we are rich or poor, we should be glad. God will honor the faithful poor and humble the rich. And we will all fade away along with all our “achievements.”

Vs. 12-15 God blesses those who patiently endure testing. The reward to those who love Him will be great. Remember that we should never say “God is tempting me.” That is never the case. Temptation comes from our own evil desires, which lead to evil actions and evil actions lead to death. DON’T BE MISLED!

Vs. 17-18 Every good and perfect gift comes to us from God above, Who created all heaven’s lights. But HE never changes or casts shifting shadows. In His goodness He chose to make us His own children by giving us His true Word. And we, OUT OF ALL CREATION, became His choice possession.

Vs. 19-25 James is a man of action. He wants his readers to be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. Anger can never make things right in God’s sight. –Get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives and humbly accept God’s message planted in your hearts for it will save your souls. –Remember, it is a message to obey, not just listen to. If you don’t obey, you are only fooling yourself. For if you just listen and don’t obey, it’s like looking in a mirror but not improve your face! BUT, if you keep looking steadily into God’s perfect law—the law that sets you free—and if you do what it says and don’t forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.—Control your tongue or your religion is worthless. –Care for orphans and widows in their troubles—Refuse to let the world corrupt us.

James 2

Vs. 1-9 It is important that prejudice not make us favor the rich and insult the poor. God has chosen the poor in this world to be rich in faith! They will inherit the Kingdom. It is good when you truly obey our Lord’s royal command found in the Scriptures: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But - IF YOU PAY SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE RICH, YOU ARE COMMITTING A SIN, FOR YOU ARE GUILTY OF BREAKING THAT LAW.

Vs. 10-13 Breaking one of the 10 commandments makes one guilty of breaking all of them. We will be judged by the law of love. There will be no mercy for you if you have not been merciful to others.

Vs. 14-20 Faith without works is worthless.

V. 24 So you see, we are made right with God by what we do, not by faith alone. (see Vs. 21-23)

Vs. 25-26 Rahab hid God's messengers and sent them away safely by a different road. JUST AS THE BODY IS DEAD WITHOUT A SPIRIT, SO ALSO FAITH IS DEAD WITHOUT GOOD DEEDS."

James 3

V. 1 Leaders in the church will be judged by God with greater strictness!

V. 2 Those who can control their tongues can also control themselves in every other way!!!! THIS IS HUGE. Meditate on it. Blessings and curses cannot come from the same mouth – it's not true to nature!

Vs. 3-12 The tongue which produces words is a powerful instrument for good or evil. These are verses to meditate on.

Vs. 13-16 Boasting and jealousy and selfishness are not God's kind of wisdom. They are motivated by the Devil.

Vs. 17-18 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, loving, gentle at all times, willing to yield to others. There's no partiality, always sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness.

James 4

Vs. 1-3 Quarrels and fights among believers? Not a pretty thought. But wanting material things, scheming to get it, and finding you can't possess it, so you fight and quarrel to take it away from others. AND YET THE REASON YOU DON'T HAVE WHAT YOU WANT is that you don't ask God for it. And even when you do ask, you don't get it because your whole motive is wrong: pleasure.

Vs. 4-6 Friendship with this world makes us enemies of God! The Holy Spirit jealously longs for us to be faithful! He gives us more and more strength to stand against such evil desires.

Vs. 7-10 So humble yourselves before the Lord. Resist the Devil and he will flee from you. Draw close to God, and God will draw close to you. Let there be tears for the wrong things you have done. Let there be sorrow and deep grief. When you bow down before the Lord, He will lift you up and give you honor.

Vs. 11-12 Criticizing and judging others is not our job, but God's alone. So what right does anyone have to condemn his neighbor?

Vs. 13-16 Since our lives are just temporary and God only knows our disposition, shouldn't we say "If the Lord wants us to make a trip, e.g. we will live and do this or that" Otherwise you will be boasting about your own plans, and all such boasting is evil.

V. 17 A pregnant little text: "Remember, it is sin to know what you ought to do and then not do it!" That one hurts!

James 5

Vs. 1-6 I wonder if these verses would apply to our economic crisis right now? People are getting rich on making investments they knew would cause people to lose their homes. The rich will have many things to answer for in the judgment.

Vs. 7-11 Job's patience in suffering is used as an example. James gives credence to the existence of a real person named Job and the good ending to his troubles.

V. 12 "Never take an oath, just say yes or no so that you will not sin and be condemned for it."

V. 13 Yes. We have church members who live with chronic pain and sickness. We should keep on praying about it. And those who have reason to be thankful should continually sing praises to the Lord! So we should sing through our pain?

Vs. 14-15 Those who are ill should call for the elders and have them pray and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And their prayer offered in faith will heal the sick, and the Lord will make them well! And anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

Vs. 16-18 Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and wonderful results.

The example of Elijah is given, he was a human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for the next three and a half years! Then he prayed again and down it poured.

Vs. 19 Bringing a wanderer back to the truth will save them from death and bring about the forgiveness of many sins.

PSALMS 117, 118, 120-123, 125-127

Psalms 117 & 118 are praise psalms. The words of Ps. 136 are used in both of these: His faithful love endures forever. David says that the Lord punished "me severely, but he has not handed me over to death." He asks for the gates which lead to the presence of the Lord to be opened. This is the day that the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. You are my God and I will praise You. Give thanks to the Lord for He is good! His faithful love endures forever.

Ps. 120 – 134 are all written for the ascent to Jerusalem when David brought the ark to Jerusalem.

Ps. 120 David says “I am tired of living among people who hate peace. As for me, I am for peace; but when I speak, they are for war!” Some things never change!

Ps. 121 A psalm, beautiful with things of nature and God’s reliability. “The Lord Himself watches over you! (II Chron.16:9) ...The Lord keeps watch over you as you come and go, now and forever.

Ps. 122 “Pray for peace for Jerusalem. May all who love this city prosper...” Can’t wait for the New Jerusalem to be here!!!

Ps. 123 “*I lift my eyes to You, O God, enthroned in heaven...*” When Jesus prayed, He lifted His eyes toward heaven where His Father eagerly accepted His prayers.

Ps. 125 “Those who trust in the Lord are as secure as Mount Zion;” ...Take away those who turn to crooked ways, O Lord ... and let Israel have quietness and peace.”

Ps. 126 “Those who plant in tears will harvest with shouts of joy!”

Ps. 127 Unless the Lord builds a house, it is useless. 2. Unless the Lord protects a city, sentries will do no good. 3. Children are a gift from the Lord – a reward from Him!!!

PROMOTIONAL COMMENTS FOR WEEK 52

Who is the Author of the book of Revelation? JESUS! V. 1 tells us that this is a “Revelation from Jesus Christ!” The apostle John is the scribe, or secretary. An angel was sent to John to assist him in faithfully reporting everything he saw. There is a TRIPLE blessing to those who READ this book, and to those who LISTEN to it. And to those who OBEY the Word.

We read Rev. 1 and 4, and 19-22 earlier in the year. So your assignment for next week is Rev. 2, 3, and 5-18, Psalm 75, and Malachi 4. We will review some parts in the previously read chapters.

PRAYER REQUESTS AND PRAISE REPORTS

CLOSING REMARKS: Next week will mark the end of a year of study together. It is my prayer that the time we have spent together will be a springboard into a **lifetime** of love for God and HIS Word and continue this study right into eternity. As you read the book of Revelation for next week, watch for glimpses of Jesus in this book of symbols. Be ready to share your sense of Jesus’ involvement with the entire book of Revelation.

CLOSING PRAYER

WEEK 52 Psalm 75; Revelation 2, 3, 5-18; Malachi 4

WELCOME

OPENING PRAYER for the Holy Spirit's guidance in our discussion of today's assignment!

INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION

PSALM 75

"We thank you, O God! We give thanks because you are near." This Psalm gives us courage to meet life's trials for "God is near!" "God says: 'At the time I have planned, I will bring justice against the wicked...I warned the proud...Don't lift your fists in defiance at the heavens or speak with rebellious ignorance.'"

In v. 7 we see that God, the Judge, holds a cup in His hand; it is full of foaming wine mixed with spices. The wicked must drain it to the dregs, and it's the same cup Jesus begged to have taken away from Him in Gethsemane. Since He *became sin* on the cross in our place, He had to experience the punishment for our sins which have been confessed, processed in the heavenly sanctuary and then placed on the Lamb of God (fulfilling the antitype of the Day of Atonement Lamb - review Lev. 16), but ultimately they will be placed on the scape goat representing Satan. He will have to die the second death carrying the weight of our confessed sins. That's why he works so hard trying to tempt us so that we would have to die for our own sins.

REVELATION 2, 3, 5-18

The book of Revelation can be confusing until one realizes that the 7 churches, the 7 seals, and the 7 trumpets all occur between Christ's ascension and the time of the end.

For our purposes of getting to KNOW God better, pay close attention to the closing words of the messages to the churches. Jesus uses a variety of descriptions in connection with His love and relationship with each of the seven churches.

There is not time in a setting like this to do a Revelation Seminar type study – such as identifying characteristics of the cities where Christian churches were to receive letters from the resurrected Lord as revealed to John in vision (Rev. 1). **The goal of this entire year of study has been: "to learn to know God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent." John 17:3.**

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NOTE for MODERATOR: General notes follow in case questions come up. Use only if necessary.  
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**CHURCHES** from 538 – 1798 A.D. - the 1260 year prophecy  
**REVELATION 2 Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira**  
**REVELATION 3 Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea**

The letter to the church of **Ephesus** reflects the zeal of the early Christian church.

The church at **Smyrna** was to have ten days tribulation, and the first martyr.

The church at **Pergamos** got a pretty good evaluation, but the “**doctrine of Balaam**” was among them. Also the **Nicolaitans**, and God “hated” them.

The church at **Thyatira** had good news and bad news. They had “**Jezebel**” there who promoted fornication and eating food offered to idols. Those who strayed would be judged according to their works (Rev. 2:23). Those who stood firmly for God were given no other burden than remaining faithful!

**NOTE: 1.** The pagan practices of **the Nicolaitans, the Balaamites and Jezebel** were brought into the early church to please the pagan converts and disassociate Christians from the Jews. The basic concept was abandonment of all laws, thus allowing complete self-expression and opening the way to “change” Sabbath to Sunday! Mixing religion and paganism brought spiritual corruption into the church. It was at this time in the middle ages when Pagan Rome dissolved into Papal Rome.

The letter to the church in **Sardis** reveals a dead church to whom Jesus says “Wake up! Repent!” turn around, and hold to what you believed at first. “Those who have not soiled their garments with evil deeds will walk with me in white for they are worthy. I will never erase their names from the Book of Life, but will announce before my Father and His angels that they are Mine.”

The letter to **Philadelphia** is from “the One Who has the key of David, Who opens doors, and no one can shut them; He shuts doors, and no one can open them.” This church is the one which announces to the world “the hour of His judgment has come!” The church at **Philadelphia** “had little strength” but they obeyed God’s Word and did not deny God.

**NOTE 2:** The final judgment began in the Most Holy Place in heaven in 1844 during the time frame of the Church of Philadelphia, according to Daniel’s prophecy.

The **Laodicean** believers were pronounced nauseating in their lack of love for God which made them neither hot nor cold! God said He would spit them out of His mouth! Jesus counseled them to buy gold from Him! And white garments, and eye salve. God says He corrects and disciplines everyone He loves. Beautiful promises follow! (Heb. 12:7-9)

**NOTE 3:** In spite of the condition of the Laodiceans, God tells them to turn from their indifference. Then His Words to them are so loving, so inviting. “**ANYONE** who is willing to hear should listen to the Spirit...” Have you noticed how much help heaven sends to human beings who have lost their way? How can people resist such Love!

## SEALS

The first seal was a white horse, the rider carried a bow, and had a crown. **Early believers had purity and strength.**

The second seal was a red horse whose rider had a mighty sword and authority to remove peace from the earth. **Pagan Rome persecution tried to erase Christianity.**

The third seal had a black horse, a rider holding a pair of scales. One of the living beings said “A loaf of wheat bread or three loaves of barley for a day’s pay. And don’t waste the olive oil and wine.” **Barley=inferior spiritual food, cheaper.**

The fourth seal: a pale green horse corpse whose rider was Death, followed by the Grave. **Many millions martyred during this seal.**

The fifth seal – John sees “martyred souls under the altar” sacrificed for being faithful. He hears them ask “How long before we’re avenged?” **God says they must rest a while longer until the full number of martyrs is reached.**

The sixth seal – earthquake, dark day, moon like blood, falling stars all fall during 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. **Humanity saw their frailty and were afraid.**

The seventh seal - silence in heaven, ½ an hr. - **all have gone to earth to bring the righteous back with them! (Rev. 8:1-5) HALLELUJAH!!!**

## TRUMPETS

Trumpets were used to call Israel to war, So it is logical to compare attacks on the Roman Empire (Pagan) with the descriptions of each passing period.

The first 4 trumpets were judgments on pagan Rome.

The first angel blew his trumpet:

Hail, fire and blood were thrown down upon earth

1/3 of the earth was set on fire, 1/3 of trees and grass burned.

Rev. 9:4 commands that only those who have not the seal of God in their foreheads should be hurt.

The second angel blew his trumpet:

A mountain of fire was thrown into the sea.

The Vandals attacked the Roman navy and in one night destroyed half of their ships, killing more than 100,000 men in the Battle of Carthage. So much havoc was caused that to this day we refer to malicious damage as “vandalism.”

The third angel blew his trumpet:

A flaming star fell out of the sky burning like a torch (Lucifer/Satan)

It fell on 1/3 of rivers and springs of water.

The star, “bitterness” or “wormwood” made 1/3 of the water bitter

And many people died. Satan worked through Attila the Hun, called the “scourge of God” to ruin Pagan Rome.

The fourth angel blew his trumpet, and 1/3 of the sun, moon and stars were struck. 1/3 of the day and of the night were also struck

One of Attila’s generals, Oadacer, leader of the German Heruli, attacked Rome, removed the emperor and crowned himself as ruler!

On top of the ashes of Pagan Rome grew Papal Rome.

NOTE: Rome was her own worst enemy. Her immorality and internal decay left



her open to attack and defeat. The medieval church misinterpreted Scripture and denied access to the Bible to the citizens. They had dimmed the light of Salvation. The last three trumpets were so severe that they were called “WOES!!”

*The fifth angel blew his trumpet:* John sees a fallen star, a key to the bottomless pit, sooty smoke, and air pollution that darkened the sun (CA smog!). Satan the fallen star gathers an army of locusts, with armor of iron, with stingers, who were told to sting those without the seal of God, and given authority to torture them for 5 months, causing them to seek death.

NOTE: The Ottoman Turks invaded the Greek empire in 1299. Thus started 150 years of almost continual warfare: July 27, 1299-1449

*The sixth angel blew his trumpet:* The 4 angels bound at the Euphrates River are unleashed to bring punishment to 1/3 of the people of earth for an hour a day a month and a year which = 391 years and 15 days. (Joseph Litch predicted the Ottoman Empire would fall on Aug. 11, 1840. It did!!!)  $1449 + 391 = 1840$

There is a break between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> trumpets. We will discuss Rev. Chapters 7, and 10 to 11:14 at this point.

**REVELATION 7** God does not allow events on earth to happen until the time is right. In Vs. 2, 3 an angel of God carrying the seal of the living God shouted out to four angels who had been given power to injure land and sea: “Wait!! Don’t hurt the land, or the sea, or the trees *until we have placed the seal of God on the foreheads of His servants!*” And John heard how many were sealed: 144,000, 12,000 from each tribe of Israel. Then a vast crowd too great to count from every nation and tribe and people and language (human beings), stood before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white, holding palm branches in their hands, shouting with a mighty shout: “Salvation comes from our God on the throne and from the Lamb!” Then all the angels joined in around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. They fell face down before the throne and worshiped!

One of the 24 elders asked John, “who are these who are clothed in white? Where do they come from?” John said “Sir, you are the one who knows!” So the elder explained to John that these had come through great tribulation. They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and that’s why they stand in front of the throne of God serving Him day and night in His Temple. They’ll never be sad again. For the Lamb Who stands in front of the throne will be their Shepherd. He will wipe away all their tears!

**REVELATION 10** opens with an angel described much like Jesus appeared in Chapter 1. He has a “small book” or “little scroll.” He stands with one foot on land (lightly populated areas), one on the sea (densely populated areas). The Angel roars like a lion – the Lion of Judah??? John starts to write down but a voice says “Keep secret what the seven thunders said. Do not write it down.” He said that when the 7<sup>th</sup> trumpet sounded, God’s mysterious plan will be fulfilled, just as He announced to His servants, the prophets. A voice from heaven told John to eat the scroll, which would first taste like

honey, but after swallowing it, his stomach would be sour. He was told that he must keep prophesying. Scholars say the small book is Daniel.

**REVELATION 11** – John is given a measuring stick and told to measure the Temple of God and the altar and count the number of worshipers. But do not measure the gentiles in the courtyard, -for they will trample the Holy City for 42 months (1260 yr). God will give power to His two witnesses: the olive trees and the candlesticks standing before the God of the earth – to prophecy 1260 days.

1. Candlesticks: The Word of God is a light unto my feet.
2. Oil which comes from olive trees represents the Holy Spirit. (Zech. 4:2, 3)

God symbolizes the Old and New Testaments as two living witnesses. They will have fierce opposition from the powers of darkness warring against God's Word for 1260 day. During the Dark Ages the Bible was kept from the people, and those who did read it distorted the truth. In v. 7 it says the witnesses were killed and people celebrated. In 1793 Napoleon officially denied worship of the Deity. Nevertheless, a spiritual revival rocked Europe! Satan reacted viciously and in France all Bibles were burned, churches were closed, fornication was legalized. The two witnesses were figuratively slain in Paris. The horrors of the French revolution lasted 3 ½ days (literally: years). When and wherever human reasoning is exalted above God's revelation, His two witnesses are symbolically clothed in sackcloth and ashes.

The seventh angel blew his trumpet: (Rev. 11:15) In v. 16 the twenty-four elders sitting on their thrones sang that it is time for judgment, and time to reward Your servants, all who fear Your name, from the least to the greatest!

Rev. 11:19 lets us see that the temple in heaven has been opened and the **Ark is visible which means that the Most Holy Place is open** and the final steps in the process of salvation are soon to take place.

## REVELATION 12

John sees a woman who represents the followers of Jesus. She's pregnant and starting labor. Then he sees a large red dragon with seven heads, ten horns, with seven crowns on his heads. His tail *dragged down* 1/3 of the "stars," which he threw to earth. He stood before the woman as she was about to give birth to her child, to devour it. She gave birth to a Boy who was to rule all nations. But the Child was snatched away from the dragon and taken up to God and to His throne. The woman fled into the wilderness, (the Waldensians) where God had prepared a place to care for her for 1,260 days.

The events in this chapter are not in chronological order, but that's OK – John saw a war in heaven when Satan and one-third of the angels were thrown down to earth where he deceives many. Then John heard a loud voice shouting across the heavens.

Verses 10-12 make it clear that Satan is the accuser of our church family 24/7!! But believers can defeat him because of the blood of the Lamb and BECAUSE OF THEIR TESTIMONY! And they were not afraid to die. Rejoice O heavens! But terror

will come on the earth and the sea. For the Devil has come down to you in great anger, and he knows that he has little time.” (Ref. I Peter 5:8)

NOTE: Water means people - so the devil tried to “drown” the woman (the church) by making it popular and lots of new members joined. But the earth (uninhabited areas- the US) helped her by opening its mouth and swallowing the river of people. Many pilgrims escaped religious domination in Europe by fleeing to America. The devil declared war against all God’s commandment keeping children who belong to Jesus.

## REVELATION 13

John sees a beast rising up out of the sea (inhabited area). It had seven heads, 10 horns, 10 crowns on its horns. Written on each head were names that blasphemed God. It looked like a leopard, but had bear’s feet and a lion’s mouth! The dragon (Ref. Rev. 12:8,9) or devil gave him his own power and throne and great authority.

One of the heads was wounded (pope taken captive in 1798, at the end of the-- #1. 1260 days, #2. the 42 months, or #3. time, times and ½ a time). But the head was healed and the world marveled at the miracle and followed the beast in awe.

The beast was allowed to speak blasphemies against God and a free hand for 42 months, and to wage war against God’s holy people and to overcome them. All the people of this world worshiped the beast. Their names were not written in the Book of Life which belongs to the Lamb who was killed before the world was made! Vs. 9, 10 make it plain that seasons of trials are our opportunities to grow in endurance and faith.

Then John sees another beast come up out of the earth! (uninhabited area) The United States. It had 2 horns (civil and religious liberty), but spoke like a dragon. He had all the authority of the first beast and required all who are not in the Lamb’s Book to worship the first beast. He did astonishing miracles and deceived all the people who belong to this world. He made a great statue of the beast who was wounded and revived and ordered people to worship the statue. Anyone refusing would die.

He required everyone--great and small to be given a mark on the right hand or on the forehead. No one could buy or sell without that mark, which was either the name of the beast or the number representing his name. Wisdom is needed to understand this. Let the one who has understanding solve the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man and his number is 666. Hm! Perhaps history needs to further unfold before we can know for sure who that is!

## REVELATION 14

John sees the 144,000 who have their Father’s name written on their foreheads. They all had harps and played together roaring like a great waterfall or the rolling of mighty thunder. This choir sang a new song before the throne and before the four living beings and the twenty-four elders. And no one could join this song except those 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. Only they can sing of earth’s final experience before Jesus comes again.

Then John is brought back to this world and is shown 3 angels who have special messages for the time of the end – or the pre-advent judgment.

1. Fear God for the hour of His judgment HAS come....
2. Babylon is fallen because she seduced the nations and made them sin!
3. Anyone who worships the beast or his statue or who accepts his mark on the forehead or the hand must drink the wine of God's wrath.

Vs. 13 is one of my favorites. "And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this down: Blessed are those who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, they are blessed indeed, for they will rest from ALL their toils and trials; for their good deeds follow them!" Amen!

John then sees the Son of Man sitting on a white cloud with a gold crown on His head and sharp sickle in His hand. An angel comes from the Temple and says the time has come to harvest the crop on earth.

After that, another angel appears who prepares for the final judgment of the wicked.

## **REVELATION 15...**

... is another great worship scene of all the people who had been victorious over the beast and his statue. They were holding harps that God had given them and they were singing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.

Then, in verses 5-8 we are privileged to see the Temple in heaven with the doors WIDE OPEN! Seven angels clothed in white linen came out of the temple with bowls of the seven last plagues. One of the four living beings handed each of the seven angels a gold bowl filled with the terrible wrath of God, Who lives forever and forever. And the smoke from God's glory and power filled the Temple!!!

## **REVELATION 16**

A mighty voice shouts from the Temple to the seven angels, "Now go your ways and empty out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

#1 Horrible, malignant sores broke out over all the earth on all with the mark of the beast.

#2 Is poured out on all life in the sea and it became like the blood of a corpse.

#3 Poured out on rivers and springs and they became blood. God declared just!

#4 Poured out on the sun: a blast of heat, God cursed! Wicked did not repent.

#5 Poured out on the throne of the beast causing darkness, anguish and curses against God, but they did not repent! *This is the last plague where repentance is still available! Probation is now closed.*

#6 Poured out on the Euphrates River. It dried up so kings from the east could march westward without hindrance. John sees 3 evil spirits looking like frogs leap from the mouth of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. These miracle-working demons caused all the rulers of the world to gather for battle against the Lord on that great judgment day of God Almighty. (Take note: Blessed are all who are watching for the Lord to

come and who keep their robes ready so they will not need to walk naked and ashamed.) The rulers and their armies gathered to a place called *ARMAGEDDON*.

#7 IT IS FINISHED!! Thunder crashed and rolled. Lightning flashed. And there was an earthquake greater than ever before in human history. Babylon split into three pieces, cities around the world were rubble. Islands disappeared, mountains were leveled. Hailstorm, and hailstones weighing 75 lb. fell from the sky onto the people below. They cursed God. ---**It was too late to repent.**

## REVELATION 17

This chapter appears to give details which describe certainly the Catholic Church: she is robed in scarlet, precious jewelry, Mother of all Prostitutes. Verse 6 says she was drunk with the blood of God's holy people who were witnesses for Jesus. (the dark ages)

Verse 7 reveals the time frame of this prophecy: "The beast you saw was alive but isn't now. And yet he will soon come up ... and people will be amazed at his reappearance..." There are theories regarding the 5 kings fallen, the 6<sup>th</sup> who now reigns and the seventh is yet to come, to reign only briefly. The beast that was not and then was, is the 8<sup>th</sup> king. His 10 horns and crowns "have not yet come into power." Together they will wage war against the Lamb-and He will defeat them. They also hate the prostitute, and God will use them to carry out His purposes. V. 18: "And this woman you saw in your vision represents the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

## REVELATION 18

It appears that this chapter ties with the previous chapter, showing the punishment levied on "Babylon"- a place where false worship occurs based on false truths. Vs. 4 is a plea for God's people to get out so that they will not be punished with her! Vs. 8 says death, mourning and famine with "overtake her" in **a single day**. - 1 year, it appears - ending when she will be utterly consumed by fire. Those who have benefited from her trafficking will grieve over her fate: the merchants, the ship owners, captains. They will say (V. 18): "where in all the world is there another city like this?...(V. 19) She made us all rich from her great wealth. And now in **a single hour** (2 weeks) it is all gone. See vs. 21-24 to see the extent of her evil.

## REVELATION 19

John hears the sound of a vast crowd in heaven shouting "Hallelujah! Salvation is from our God. Glory and power belong to Him alone. His judgments are just and true. He has punished the great prostitute who corrupted the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the murder of His servants." Again and again their voices ring with worship.

Then the twenty-four elders and the four living beings fell down and worshiped God, who was sitting on the throne. They cried out, "Amen! Hallelujah!" (NOTE: Notice that the 24 elders and 4 living beings praise God with similar words as the vast crowd has previously said. But this group represents a unique experience with God for they previously in this Book have sung songs that no one else in heaven can sing!)

The angel tells John (Vs. 9) to “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding feast of the Lamb.” John fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said “No, don’t worship me. For I am a servant of God, just like you...!” Wow! Do you feel related to that angel? My sense of family with the angels is increasing. No wonder Jesus said we who believe His Word are his “family!!!”

Verses 11-21 pictures Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords, riding on a white horse, with a sharp sword and His title was “the Word of God!” The armies of heaven followed on white horses. Vultures gather for a banquet of their own.

Then John sees the beast gathering the kings of earth to fight against the King of kings! He is captured along with his false prophet and they were thrown into the lake of fire. NOTE VS. 21: The entire enemy army was killed by the sharp sword that came out of the mouth of the One riding the white horse! (Reference Heb. 4:12 which says “For the Word of God is FULL OF LIVING POWER...It exposes us for what we really are.” And Eph. 6:17 says we should always take the “sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God” with us!!!) We need to thank God for the POWER available to us in His Word!

## **REVELATION 20**

John has already watched the end of the beast and the false prophet. Now starts some new information which begins with the first resurrection. An angel comes from heaven with the key to the bottomless pit and a heavy chain in his hand. “He seized the dragon—that old serpent, the Devil, Satan—(we know for a certainty who John is writing about!!) and bound him in chains for a thousand years, locking him in the pit so Satan could not deceive anyone anymore until the thousand years were finished.

Then he sees thrones and people sitting on them who have been given authority to judge!! He sees those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus and those who had not worshiped the beast or his statue, nor accepted his mark on their forehead or their hands. They came back to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **THIS IS THE FIRST RESURRECTION.** (The rest of the dead came back to life after the thousand years had ended.) Blessed and holy are those who share the first resurrection. Death holds NO power over them, but they will be priests of God and reign with Him for a thousand years.

Verses 7-10 appear to parallel Chapter 19:19-21, with more details. Satan and his followers call a mighty host, as numberless as sand on the shore, to cross the broad plain of the earth to attack the Holy City! But they were consumed, and then the Devil and the false prophet were tormented until they were dead.

John then sees the final phase of the judgment. The wicked dead came up in the **SECOND RESURRECTION** and stood before God’s throne with no place to hide. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life (Ps. 69:28) and all who had been given up from the sea and the grave were judged according to their deeds. Those whose names were not in the Book of Life were thrown into the lake of fire – and death had **NO MORE POWER!!**

## REVELATION 21

The next thing John sees is a brand new heaven and earth. The sea was gone! The Holy City came down from heaven like a beautiful bride prepared for her husband.

A loud voice from the throne says: "Look! The home of GOD is now among His people! He will live with them, and they will be His people..."

Vs. 5 The One sitting on the throne said, "Look, I am making all things new." Then He said to John: "Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true....All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God *and they will be My children.*"

Vs.9-17 An angel who had emptied a "bowl" (a plague) invited John to come see the bride, the wife of the Lamb. So he took John to a high mountain, and there they could see the Holy City, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. It was filled with the glory of God, with sparkling gems, 12 gates made of a single pearl, and 12 foundations. The angel took a gold measuring stick to measure the city which he found to be a very large cube. Then he measured the walls and found them to be 216 ft. thick.

Vs. 18-27 No temple could be seen in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple!!! They are also its Light! Righteous rulers of the world will come and bring their glory to it. The gates never close because there is no night. Only those whose names are written in the Book of Life may enter the City.

## REVELATION 22

V. 7 Jesus says He is coming soon and happy are those who obey the prophecy written in this scroll. I, John, am the one who saw and heard all these things. And when I did, I fell down to worship the angel who showed them to me. BUT AGAIN he said, "NO, don't worship me. I am a servant of God, just like you (Rev. 19:10) and your brothers the prophets, as well as all who obey what is written in this scroll."

The book of Daniel was sealed, but Revelation was not to be sealed.

Jesus said He was coming soon and bringing His reward with Him. He claimed to be the Alpha and the Omega, the First and Last, the Beginning and the End!

V. 16 "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to give you this message for the churches. I am both the source of David AND THE HEIR to his throne. I am the bright and Morning Star."

What an invitation is given to ALL to come – ***it's FREE!*** Then God warns against changing anything in His Word. Jesus says He is coming SOON!"  
HALLELUJAH!!!! AMEN!

So where do you see Jesus in the book of Revelation? Jesus identifies Himself in Rev. 1:8, 11 and 22:13 as the forever existent One!! - Who loves me!! Amazing! John sees Jesus in the “midst” of the candlesticks (the churches), He holds the pastors of the 7 churches in His righteous right hand (my pastor son is in His hand! ☺). So the message begins with Jesus in the Holy Place where the candlesticks stood. Jesus is speaking of this book to John – so awesome. It must be accurate beyond any earthly measure!!!

Every one of the 7 letters to the 7 churches has marvelous heartwarming promises designed for the recipients. In the 6<sup>th</sup> letter which was to the city of Philadelphia, which includes 1844, it quotes “These things saith He that is holy, He that is true, He that hath the key of David, He that openeth and no man shutteth; and shutteth and no man openeth, I know thy works: behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it.” Compare this with Daniel 7:9 “I watched until thrones were put in place and the Ancient One sat down to judge....Then the court began its session, and the books were opened.”

Back to REV. 3:20: “Behold, I stand at the door, and knock. If any man hear my voice, and OPEN THE DOOR, I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me.”

So to Philadelphia Jesus writes with the language of the compartments in the sanctuary in Heaven, and it’s occurring when the judgment was to start “with the house of God.” I Pet 4:17! And to Laodicea is given a message that is an altar call!!! All we have to do is open the door to Him and He WILL come in!! ☺

In REV. 4 there is a worship scene with a throne “set” and the One who sat upon it was Eternal. The four living creatures surrounded the throne, praising God, and then the 24 elders formed yet another larger rectangle around the throne. They would fall down and worship God when the 4 beasts inspired them!

REV. 5:6 says that in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts and in the midst of the elders who each had a harp and a golden censer with *smoke* ascending (*the prayers of the saints!!!*), stood a Lamb as it had been slain! They sing a song to the Lamb which reveals their identity: “(V. 9) And they sang a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast *redeemed US to God by Thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, people and nation.*” The 4 beasts and the 24 elders were the First Fruits of Jesus’ labors on earth as a human being for the Kingdom of God!!! Billions of angels joined in singing praise to God. And the 24 living beings said, “Amen!”

The Lamb is the only One who has the authority to break the seals. Thank You, dear Jesus!

#### **MALACHI 4 (only 6 vs. All should memorize it!)**

**The LORD ALMIGHTY** says, “The day of judgment is coming, burning like a furnace. The arrogant and the wicked will be burned up like straw on that day. They will be consumed like a tree—roots and all. (2) But for you who fear My name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture. (3) On the day when I act, you will tread upon the



wicked as if they were dust under your feet,” says the LORD ALMIGHTY. (4) Remember to obey the instructions of My servant, Moses, all laws, and regulations I gave him on Mount Sinai. (5) I am sending you the prophet (John the Baptist) Elijah before the great day of the Lord arrives, to change hearts. (Matt. 17:10-13)

NOTES: The theologians in the Seventh-day Adventist Church believe that Ellen White is God’s last-day “Elijah.” Jesus made it plain that John the Baptist had served as Elijah in preparation for Jesus’ first coming. Prepare, John the Baptist urged the people. He also begged families to get past disagreements and learn to love each other to prepare for the Greater Love Who was already in the world.

As we read Scripture, it becomes clear that God is using every tool possible to help people be ready for His coming the second time! Ellen Gould White began serving as God’s prophet for *the last days* in the 1840’s. She was a bit fragile physically. A school mate, a boy, threw rocks at Ellen on the way home from school when she was 10. He broke her nose and disfigured her face and it made her tend to faint often. When she was 17 years old God came to her in a vision and asked if she would be willing to spread His messages across the earth. He had asked a couple of men earlier and they turned the opportunity down. After much prayerful thought, Ellen decided to be God’s prophet. She lived to be in her 80’s, had four sons, and her husband, James White, served the church in writing articles and printing them and addressing and mailing them! Two of James and Ellen’s sons died before their parents: one was a baby and another was 16. Ellen fell asleep in Jesus after serving Him faithfully for 70 years. She is considered to be the most published writer in the last 100 years. She holds the world’s record (men or women) for the number of languages into which her books have been translated. She traveled the world to assist church workers in placing hospitals and schools in the best location possible. God brought her visions of exact locations and when she would actually see them she would praise the Lord. She only had a third grade education!!

As we live our lives day to day as followers of Christ, the Book of Acts continues --with stories of giving kindness, helping widows, volunteering to help with mega medical clinics in San Francisco, San Antonio and help those who cannot pay for those services, as Jesus would do, if He were here. We can be the hands, arms and heart of Jesus to others in this world. May God bless us all as we endeavor to serve and LOVE the Godhead!

















