



OHBC MEMORY VERSE – WEEK #21

THIS WEEK'S MEMORY VERSE: ECCLESIASTES 4:9-10

"Two are better than one... For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up."

Why Ecclesiastes 4:9-10?

Because it is such a great reminder that God never designed for us to function in isolation and/or independence!

The media, it seems, has always been bent (as has Satan!) on glamorizing what some have termed "rugged individualism." It's the whole attraction the natural man has toward some guy who doesn't need anybody or anything, except his pack of Marlboro's, his six-pack, his horse, or his machine gun. The reason that is so appealing to us is because we are still living in a body of flesh that used to house a depraved nature. "Rugged individualism" (not needing anybody or anything) is associated with depravity, not Christianity.

God designed for us to function as a body. Not in INDEPENDENCE, but INTERDEPENDENCE! Not in ISOLATION, but INSULATION! Whether we like it or not, whether we admit it or not, or whether we want it to be this way or not, the fact is, we need each other! And in answer to Cain's age-old question, "Yes! We are our brother's keeper!"

Biblically, the Christian life can be summarized by the metaphors: sitting, standing, walking, and running. Because of that, our enemy constantly does everything he can to get us to fall. The sad reality is, from time to time (sometimes feeling a little more like minute to minute) we DO fall. We don't have to, but experience tells all of us, falling is reality. Don't allow the fact that you've been able to get back up to this point deceive you into thinking that you're above the principle (and warning!!!) of Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 (i.e. "but woe to him that is alone when he falleth").

May hiding this verse in our hearts this week tie us further into the relationships God intends for us to pursue, develop, and maintain in His body, our own local church.

DAY 101

TODAY'S READING: II CHRONICLES 22-26

OVERVIEW: The reign of Ahaziah; the usurping of the throne by Ahaziah's grandmother, Athaliah; Jehoiada's plot to put Joash on the throne; Joash becomes king and repairs the Temple; the death of Jehoiada and the demise of the nation of Judah; Amaziah reigns in Judah; the war against Edom; Israel defeats Judah; Uzziah reigns in Jerusalem; Uzziah stricken with leprosy.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Little did the good king Jehoshaphat realize how far reaching the effects of his unnecessary alliance with Ahab would go (II Chron. 18). As we move into the reign of Ahaziah in chapter 22, this is now the third generation that has been evilly affected by Jehoshaphat's "unequal yoke with an unbeliever" (II Cor. 6:14). Ahaziah followed the counsel of his wicked mother, and the counselors from the house of Ahab (22:3-4), and verse 4 says, "Wherefore he did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab." That's quite a statement in light of the fact that I Kings 21:25 says, "There was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up."

When Ahaziah was killed in Samaria (22:9) after only one year on the throne (22:2), his godless, wicked mother, in great "Jezebellian" fashion, had every one of his sons and grandsons killed so she could rise to throne herself. (Though her selfish pride motivated this unbelievably horrific act, don't discount Satan's unseen hand working tenaciously behind the scenes to cut off the Messianic line!) What Athaliah didn't realize is that her sister, Jehoshabeath (Jehoiada, the high priest's wife), took Joash, the one-year-old son of Ahaziah and hid him so he wouldn't be killed. (Note that this is God's unseen hand working tenaciously behind the scenes to fulfill His promise of Genesis 3:15, and the Davidic covenant (II Chron. 17:11; II Sam. 7:12).)

Jehoiada kept Joash hidden until he was old enough to be able to really comprehend all that had happened, at which time Jehoiada began to strategize Athaliah's overthrow (23:1-3). All of the Levites and princes were designated their assignments (23:4-7), and on a particular Sabbath, Jehoiada's plan unfolded to get Joash, the rightful heir, to his place on the throne. When grandma (Athaliah) heard all of the cheering and shouting in the temple, she ran in to investigate only to find her seven year old grandson, whom she presumed dead, crowned as the king of Judah (23:8-13). As any loving grandmother would do, she immediately screams out, "Treason! Treason!" (Be careful who you listen to! Many times those who scream the loudest are guilty of the very things they are so enraged by!) – See Rom. 2:1.

Through Jehoiada's influence, a covenant was established between young Joash the king, and all the people that would submit themselves to the Lord (23:16).

To demonstrate their sincerity, the Temple of Baal was destroyed, and Mattan, the priest of Baal, was killed (23:17). Jehoiada also reestablished God's design for worship in the Lord's Temple.

Chapter 24 and verse 2 records that "Joash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord." Sadly, the rest of the verse says that it only lasted as long as Jehoiada was alive. Once the godly influence of Jehoiada was gone, Joash turned to idolaters for advice, to the demise of the kingdom (24:15-18). Though God sent prophets to warn him, rather than repent, he further rebelled (24:19). By the time it was all said and done, all of the great things that Joash had accomplished in the early days of his reign, he had allowed to be undone by his wickedness in the latter part of his reign. As we have seen time and time again in our 365 Days of Pursuit, there are many who START well, but few who FINISH well! May we all heed God's warning to us through the Apostle John: "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward." (II John 8).

After Joash was murdered by his servants (24:25-27), his son Amaziah became the king of Judah. Note what was said of him in 25:2: "And he did that which was right in the sight of the LORD, but not with a perfect heart." In other words, he did what he did for the Lord with an ulterior motive. In time, as it always does, that ulterior motive was revealed. In one instance, after defeating the armies of an idolatrous foe, he gathered up their idols and actually began worshipping them (24:11-14)! You gotta love God's rebuke of him through His prophet, "Why hast thou sought after the gods of the people, which could not deliver their own people out of thine hand?" (25:15)

One of the most successful kings in Judah's history was Amaziah's 16 year old son Uzziah (26:10). Like so many others, however, he started strong, but ended defeated. He sought the Lord (26:5) and remained dependent upon Him "till he was strong. But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the LORD his God, and went into the temple of the LORD to burn incense upon the altar of incense." (26:15-16). Uzziah began to think so highly of himself (Rom. 12:3), he thought God wouldn't mind if he performed a task only to be carried out by the priests. God did mind, however! God struck him with leprosy, and he lived the remaining years of his life an outcast from both his own palace, as well as the Lord's (the Temple)! Don't ever think more highly of yourself than you ought to think (Rom. 12:3), and don't ever think that you are above the Word of God.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through AZARIAH THE HIGH PRIEST who stood between Uzziah and the altar, because the only way to approach the Lord God of Israel was through the priests – II Chron. 26:17-18 (Heb. 4:14 – Jesus, our great High Priest is the only way through which any person can come to God – John 14:6).

DAY 102

TODAY'S READING: II CHRONICLES 27-31

OVERVIEW:

The reign of Jotham; the reign of Ahaz; Syria and Israel defeat Judah; the death of Ahaz; Hezekiah's reign; worship is restored in the Temple; Hezekiah destroys idolatry and paganism in Judah; the tithes and offerings of the people.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As chapter 26 came to a close in yesterday's reading, Uzziah had been stricken with leprosy because of his sin of pride in going into the temple to burn incense, and had been made an outcast from the Temple and even his own palace. In chapter 27, Uzziah's son, Jotham, begins to reign in Judah. Verse 2 says

that he followed in the footsteps of his father, doing that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but did not make the mistake his father had made in going into the Temple. Despite his personal devotion to the Lord, the people of Judah were living “corruptly” (27:2).

When Jotham died, his son Ahaz came to the throne. To say that he didn’t follow in his father’s footsteps might be the understatement of the year! He was the most wicked king that Judah had yet known. He plunged the entire nation headlong into idolatry, even burning his own children as sacrifices! Because of his unbelievable wickedness, the kingdom of Judah continued to suffer more and more loss of territory. The Edomites took over in the southeast; the Philistines had raided the cities of the southwest and were now occupying them (28:17-18); and thousands upon thousands of his people were taken as slaves into other countries. Rather than these things causing Ahaz to cry out to the Lord in humility and repentance, it caused him to become more wicked and to trespass against the Lord to an even greater degree. (See 28:22). By the time he died, the Temple of the Lord was in shambles, and the entire kingdom of Judah was completely engulfed in idolatry (28:23-25).

Remarkably, Ahaz’s son Hezekiah comes to the throne upon his wicked father’s death, and he is one of Judah’s greatest kings! For all who had a wicked father, take refuge and courage in the fact that God can enable you by His grace and power in you to intersect that cycle of sin, and cause you to be a holy servant of the Lord Jesus Christ! What a blessing Hezekiah is! Four entire chapters are devoted to his reign in II Chronicles (29-32).

Rather than bemoan his terrible upbringing and plight in life, or allow bitterness toward his godless father (or God for that matter!) to rule him, when given the opportunity, Hezekiah chose to put the past behind him and simply made decisions that were in accordance with God’s will and Word. To put his mode of operation into the words of Paul, “Hezekiah forgot those things which were behind him, and went reaching for the things that were before him, pressing toward the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 3:13-14).

In the very first month of his reign, he reopened and repaired the house of the Lord, restored the long-neglected priority of Temple worship and the observance of the Passover, and passionately sought to remove any and all idol worship or pagan practices in Judah. His obedience to God and His Word, manifest through the reforms he set in place brought about the wonderful blessing of God. The days of Hezekiah were the greatest time (30:26) since the glory days of Solomon’s reign (I Kings 10; II Chron. 9). God’s epitaph of him is worth noting and striving toward: “Hezekiah...wrought that which was good and right and truth before the LORD his God. And in every work that he began in the service of the house of God, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered” (31:20-21). What a guy!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through KING HEZEKIAH who offered intercessory prayer for everyone in his kingdom that was seeking God – II Chron. 30:18-19 (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:27, 34; John 17:9).

DAY 103

TODAY’S READING: II CHRONICLES 32-36

OVERVIEW: Assyria invades Judah; Hezekiah’s death; Manasseh’s reign; Amon’s reign; Josiah’s reign; the Book of the Law is found; the reigns of Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah; the fall of Jerusalem; Judah is taken into Babylonian captivity; the decree of Cyrus to rebuild the Temple.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Our closing commentary concerning Hezekiah in yesterday’s reading was, “What a guy!” That is further reiterated in today’s reading. The character of Hezekiah made manifest through the incredible decisions and reforms he made during his reign was a rare commodity in the kings of Judah and Israel. As we have seen with every king, however, God allowed each of them to be tested. In chapter 32, Hezekiah faces a major test as he gets word that Sennacherib, the wicked king of Assyria, with his ferocious army “purposed to fight against Jerusalem” (32:2). When faced with similar dilemmas, so many other kings we have read about resorted to the arm of the flesh for help, and/or contracting the help of pagan kings and nations. Note the incredible surrender of Hezekiah to the Lordship of Jehovah, and his absolute confidence and complete trust in the Lord’s strength for victory in the battle. My, my, my, do we 21st century Christians need to learn from Hezekiah’s example! When faced with the threat of Sennacherib’s

army, Hezekiah didn't freak out, or kick into panic mode in any way! Rather, he spoke "comfortably" to the people of Judah, saying, "Be strong and courageous, be not afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him: for there be more with us than with him: with him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our GOD, to help us, and to fight our battles" (32:7-8a). Wow! What strength! What faith! What dependence! What trust! And notice the response of the people: "And the people rested themselves upon the words of Hezekiah king of Judah" (32:8b).

Note also that this great demonstration of faith didn't cause Satan (i.e. Sennacherib) to roll over or shut up. Actually, it caused him to run his blasphemous mouth even more! He sought to intimidate the people saying, "Yeah, yeah, all the other countries that I've humiliated and obliterated thought their god was going to deliver them out of my hand too, and you see where it got them! And you're going to be no different!"

Verses 9-18 of chapter 32 let us know that Satan (i.e. Sennacherib) used every opportunity and available means to continuously seek to destroy the people's confidence in Hezekiah's leadership and Jehovah's lordship. But he was barking up the wrong tree! I love verse 19: "And they spake against the God of Jerusalem, as against the gods of the people of the earth, which were the work of the hands of man." Sennacherib was successful in defeating those gods, because they were man-made gods. Now he was coming against the God who made man! Hezekiah and Isaiah join their hearts together in prayer to THAT God, and the rest is history! God turned loose an angel and that was it! The battle was over just that quick. Verse 21 says that loudmouth Sennacherib "returned with shame of face to his own land." (For those of you who are acquainted with Asian and Middle Eastern culture, you understand that that "shamed face" thing is monumental!) It was so monumental that when he did get home, his own sons slew him with their swords (32:31)!

Hezekiah is faced with another test (32:24-26), and briefly allows his pride to cause him to sin against God. In great Romans 7 fashion, however, he immediately humbles himself before the Lord.

After his death, his son Manasseh comes to the throne. His reign was even more wicked than that of Ahaz, if you can imagine! He gets the prize for not only having the longest reign in Judah (55 years), but for having the most evil reign! The list of sins he was involved in and led the people into is horrendous (33:3-8). Verse 9 of chapter 33 takes the cake! It says, "So Manasseh made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, (and catch this!!!) and to do worse than the heathen, whom the LORD had destroyed before the children of Israel." For those who have a family member/co-worker/neighbor, etc. that you can think is just too far gone to ever turn to God, let the remainder of Manasseh's story in chapter 33 fill you with hope and revive your prayers for them!

A great revival takes place in chapter 34 under the reign of one of the greatest kings, Josiah. Time and space will not allow to highlight this incredible young man, but read chapter 34 slowly and carefully taking note of a guy who was doing the best he could with what he knew of the Lord, and then watch what happens when he gets the Word of God in his hands (and ears!). Excuse the grammar, but may he be we! Note what is said of him in II Kings 23:25!

The last four kings of Judah – Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, were all evil, and led the nation spiraling downward to its disastrous end morally, politically, and spiritually. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, and his army finally break through the north wall of Judah, killing anyone and everyone in sight, regardless of their age (36:17). They remove all of the vessels out of the Temple, break down the walls of the city, and burn the Temple to the ground (36:18-19). Those who weren't killed in the massacre were taken into captivity (they would remain there for 70 years).

While in captivity, Babylon was conquered by Persia, which led to the great proclamation of Cyrus, their king in 36:22-23.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through the messengers of God who were rejected by His people – II Chron. 36:15-16 (Isa. 53:3; John 1:11; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 20:17).

DAY 104

TODAY'S READING: EZRA 1-6

OVERVIEW:

The decree from Cyrus; the returning Jewish families are listed; the altar and temple are rebuilt; the adversaries come against the work.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Ezra breaks down into two sections based upon the leader and the time period. Chapters 1-6 are under the leadership of Zerubbabel. Chapters 7-10 are under the leadership of Ezra and take place approximately 60 years after chapter 6.

The children of Israel have been in captivity for seventy years when the book of Ezra begins. God works in the spirit of Cyrus to issue a decree for the Jews to return to their homeland and rebuild their temple. This fulfills the prophecy in Jeremiah 29:10 and Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1. Because of the wording of the decree and its emphasis upon God as "THE God," many have speculated that Daniel had an influence upon the king's decision, or even wrote the decree for the king. Whatever the case, it happened because God said it would!

The captivity was not the same kind of slavery the Jews had endured in Egypt. They actually did quite well as a people group in captivity. That's why not all Jews returned to the land. The ones returning make it to the land and begin the restoration process.

The restoration is led by Zerubbabel, from the king's line, and Jeshua, from the priest's line. They lead the people to establish an altar as the starting point. They begin rebuilding the temple, starting with the foundation, in the second year. It was both a joyous moment and sad moment as the foundation was completed. Joyous because many had only dreamed of such a time when they could be a part of fulfilling God's plan. Sad for those who remembered the former temple and its glory, as they realized this would not be to the same scale.

It's at this time that opposition to God's work comes. First, the adversaries offer their services to join the Jews in the building of the temple. However, when Zerubbabel and Jeshua refuse their offer, their real motives surface. The adversaries begin to trouble the people, and even hire counselors to "frustrate their purpose" (4:5). They also appeal to the new king to make these people stop citing the past as the reason. The new king agrees with the adversaries and the work stops.

However, Zerubbabel and Jeshua, along with the prophets, are able to encourage the people and lead them to begin the work again, even without permission. When they are questioned about it, they make request to the king and their request is granted.

What a beautiful picture of restoration for our lives. Maybe we need to make sure we are being led by a king and a priest. A king that we submit to as Lord and do His will; a priest that not only can cleanse us from all sin, but can also be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. There are times we need to get back to the altar of God, where it is just us and God, and our fellowship with Him can continue. The good news is, we don't have to lay the foundation again. I Corinthians 3:11 says Christ is our foundation and our concern is how we build our temple upon that foundation (I Cor. 3:10-15). However, there will be adversaries. The first battle is compromise. If that doesn't work, the adversary will trouble you, and try to "frustrate your purpose". Many well intentioned-Christians have been knocked out of the battle because their purpose was frustrated. When those times come, and they will, we need to persevere in the work to which God has called us, and appeal to our King to intervene on our behalf. We don't always know how God's plan will work out. Our responsibility is to be faithful to our purpose and persevere in the work of the Lord (I Corinthians 15:58).

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through the GREAT STONES used in building the Temple of God – Ezra 5:8. Christ is the Stone which the builders rejected and He has become the Cornerstone of our faith (Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42).

DAY 105

TODAY'S READING: EZRA 7-10

OVERVIEW:

Ezra leads a second group of Jews to return to the land; the sinful condition of the people; Ezra's prayer and confession; the people repent.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Ezra chapter 7 begins approximately 60 years after the end of chapter 6. Ezra leads a second wave of people returning to Jerusalem. Ezra has a good testimony before King Artaxerxes and the king gives Ezra the letter authorizing the return. The description of Ezra in 7:6-10 is a description we should long for as well. Verse 6 says he was a "ready scribe in the law of Moses". Though Ezra could not perform all his duties while in captivity, he still had made himself ready for the time when God would use him. Am I preparing myself with God and His Word for whatever He may want to accomplish with me in the future? I may not be able to do it now but am I READY? Then verse 10 shows us how he had made himself ready – "Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments". First he knew he must seek the law of the Lord. Proverbs 2:4 talks about seeking God's word as silver and searching for it as for "hid treasure"! Honestly, how many of us have prepared ourselves to seek God's word that way?

Secondly, Ezra was prepared to do it. Many of us have a good handle on the knowledge of God's Word. However, the real key is, are we prepared to DO it? We know we should seek the things above. Do we do it? We know we should be submissive one to another. Do we do it? We know we shouldn't talk about each other. Do we do it? We know we shouldn't hold grudges or be bitter. Do we do it? There are lots of things we know, but how much do we put in practice.

Third, Ezra wanted others to understand God's word. One doesn't have to be a pastor to teach the Word of God to others. It's called discipleship. Is this still a priority in my life? We are a group of people that like new things, and grow bored with things of the past! We must always remember that discipleship is the one thing the Lord left us here to fulfill. Is teaching the word of God to others something that excites you and you're prepared to do? It should be and must be for us to fulfill God's plan for our life. Notice also that God's hand is upon Ezra. This is not a coincidence. We all want God's hand to be upon our life; the problem is we also want to do what we want to do. God's hand was upon Ezra because he was a man surrendered to the purposes of God. We can have God's hand upon us as well, but it only comes as we are surrendered to the purposes of God.

Once Ezra arrives in Jerusalem he soon understands the true condition of the people. Though they had returned to where they should be (the Promised Land), they had once again given in to their flesh and were involved in the abominations of the people around them. We must remember that the battle with the flesh is a daily battle. You can't get to the place where you think you have conquered your flesh and can take it easy. Sure you may not commit the kinds of sin these people committed but your flesh will constantly seek to find a way to conquer you. Remember I Corinthians 10:12! Ezra's response to this is brokenness. Chapter 9 and verse 5 says, "And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my heaviness..." In fact, as you read Ezra's prayer in chapter 9, he identifies himself with his people. Rarely do we take this path. Many times we're not broken about the sin in our brothers and sisters lives. We may talk about it, we may think it's terrible, we may think we knew something like that would happen, but rarely in Laodicea are we truly broken and heavy about it. And the few times we may be truly mourning our brother or sisters sin, how often do we identify with them. Do we intercede in prayer on their behalf before God? Is it something that consumes us as it did Ezra?

Ezra does confront the sin, and the people confess their sin and turn from it. This was difficult. It meant turning from things to which they had grown very accustomed. It meant turning from things and people they loved. True repentance seems costly until you view it through the eyes of eternity.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through EZRA (a priest) making intercession for his people. – Ezra 9:1-5; 10:1 (Hebrews 7:25 says Jesus is our priest who "...ever liveth to make intercession for them.")