

## WEEK 21, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: 2 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 is 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. (2 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." (2 Cor. 6:14) Ahaziah followed the counsel of his wicked mother and the counselors from the house of Ahab (22:3-4), and verse 14 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 1 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 wicked and godless mother—in great "Jezebellian" fashion—had every one of his sons and grandsons killed so she could rise to throne herself. Wow! You talk about a case of "without natural affection!" (2 Tim. 3:3) And though it was her own selfish pride that 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, however, 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. And note that this was God's unseen hand working tenaciously behind the scenes to fulfill His promise of Genesis 3:15, and the Davidic covenant! (2 Chron. 17:11; 2 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 very careful who you listen to! Many times those who scream the loudest are guilty of the very things they are so enraged by! See Romans 2:1.)

Through Jehoiada's influence, a covenant was established between he, 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. (22:17) 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, resulting in 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 52 Weeks 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." (2 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) And you've just 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, too, 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 that was 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! (i.e. the Temple) It is a great lesson to teach us to never think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think (Rom. 12:3), and to never think that we 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 — 2 Chronicles 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).

## WEEK 21, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: 2 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, not only an outcast from the Temple, but 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 is right in the sight of the Lord—but, praise the Lord, he 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 and profitable servant of the Lord Jesus Christ! What a blessing Hezekiah is! Four entire chapters are devoted to his reign in 2 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) Hallelujah! May we follow his incredible example!

In the very first month of his reign, Hezekiah 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. (1 Kings 10; 2 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) May each of us, "Do thou likewise!" (Luke 10:37)

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through KING HEZEKIAH who offered intercessory prayer for everyone in his kingdom that was seeking God — 2 Chronicles 30:18–19 (Heb. 7:25; Rom. 8:27,34; John 17:9).

## WEEK 21, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: 2 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 the victorious life of Hezekiah in yesterday's reading was, "May each of us, 'Do thou likewise!'" His positive example is only 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, though, 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) You see, this is the way it's supposed to work!

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 end up just like them!"

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. He was barking up the wrong tree, though! And you've just gotta 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." And the point is, Sennacherib was successful in defeating those gods, because they were "man-made gods." Now, however, 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 buddy, 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) And again I say, hallelujah!

In 32:24–26, Hezekiah is faced with another test, and he briefly allows his pride to cause him to sin against God. In great Romans 7 fashion, however, he immediately humbles himself before the Lord. Again, may we follow his incredible example when our pride gets in the way and causes us to sin against 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 even possibly imagine that! He gets "the prize"—not only for 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 nothing short of horrendous! (33:3–8) And 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."

But for those who have a family member, co-worker, neighbor, friend, 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 in Israel and/or Judah, Josiah. Time and space will not allow to highlight all of the accomplishments of 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!" Because like Josiah, we do have the Word of God in our possession! And note what is said of him in 2 Kings 23:25: "And like unto him was there no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the law of Moses; neither after him arose there any like him."

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—where they would remain for 70 years.

While in captivity, Babylon was conquered by Persia, which led to the great, history-changing proclamation of Cyrus, their king in 36:22–23: "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord spoken by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying, Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath the Lord God of heaven given me; and he hath charged me to build him an house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Who is there among you of all his people? The Lord his God be with him, and let him go up."

### **CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through the messengers of God who were rejected by His people — 2 Chronicles 36:15–16 (Isa. 53:3; John 1:11; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22; 17:25; 20:17).

## WEEK 21, DAY 4: 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:

As we begin the Book of Ezra today, keep the "big- picture" in mind. This Book breaks down into two sections, each 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.

As the Book of 2 Chronicles ended and the Book of Ezra begins, also keep in mind that the children of Israel have been in captivity for 70 years. It is then that God works in the spirit of Cyrus, a pagan king, 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 decree, or even wrote the decree on the king's behalf. Whatever the case, the Jews returned to their homeland—not because of Cyrus, or even because of Daniel, but because God said they would!

Recognize, however, that the Jew's captivity in Babylon was not the same kind of slavery and bondage they had endured in Egypt. The Jews had actually functioned quite well as a people during the Babylonian captivity. That's why only a remnant of the Jews chose to return to their homeland when Cyrus issued the decree. The ones who chose to return, however, made it to the land—and once they did, immediately began the process of restoring the temple.

The restoration is led by Zerubbabel from the "king's" line, and Jeshua from the "priest's" line. Knowing the scope and magnitude of this great work, in their wisdom, these two men lead the people to keep God Himself the priority (as opposed to the project!)—by first establishing the altar. It is a great reminder to make certain that we constantly keep WORSHIP as our first priority—recognizing that we are all always very susceptible to allowing ourselves to be so caught up in the "WORK" of the LORD—that we forget the "LORD" of the WORK!

The remnant begins rebuilding the temple in the second year after their return to the land, starting, of course, with the foundation. (3:8) Once the foundation was completed, an emotional dichotomy erupted amongst the people! The Jews who were too young to have recollection of the glory and magnificence of Solomon's Temple looked at the foundation and were so emotionally overjoyed and jubilant that they burst forth with great shouting and praise! (3:11) The older generation, who had witnessed the previous Temple, however, looked at the size of the foundation of this new Temple, and immediately burst forth with wailing and weeping. (3:12) The emotional responses were so dramatic on both ends of the spectrum that it was impossible to discern the wailing from the rejoicing! (3:13)

The foundation of the Temple was completed in chapter 3, and as chapter 4 begins, the people of God begin to experience opposition to the work. 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" (4:4), and even hire counselors to "frustrate their purpose." (4:5) The adversaries then appeal to the new king to make the people stop the construction—citing the history of the Jewish people as the reason—in essence, accusing them of being a "rebellious" people, constantly guilty of "sedition" and "insurrection." The new king investigates their claims and comes to the same conclusion—so the work was halted.

However, Zerubbabel (from the kingly line) and Jeshua (from the priestly line), 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 to continue the work is granted.

And my, oh my, what a beautiful picture of the restoration God intends for our lives! It begins by making sure that like this remnant in Ezra 4, we, too, are being led by a King and a Priest. A "King" that we submit to as Lord—to do His will; and 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, folks, when we just need to get back to the altar of God, where it is just us and God—so that the intimacy of our fellowship with Him can be restored and revived! The good news is, unlike the Jews in today's reading, we don't have to lay the foundation again! 1 Corinthians 3:11 says that Christ is our foundation! And He is the foundation that cannot be moved! (2 Tim. 2:19) We need only to concern ourselves with how we build "our temple" upon that foundation! (1 Cor. 3:10–15) And as we do, may we keep ever-present in our minds, that there will be adversaries! (1 Cor. 16:9)

As pictured in today's reading, we must recognize that the first attack of the enemy will be to attempt to get us to compromise by becoming "unequally yoked" with them. (4:1–2; 2 Cor. 6:14–18) If that doesn't work, the adversary will then "trouble us"—attempting to "frustrate our purpose." Many well-intentioned Christians have been knocked out of the battle for the simple reason that 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 unfold. Our responsibility, however, is simply to be faithful to our purpose—and persevere in the work of the Lord! (1 Cor. 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. (Psa. 118:22; Mat. 21:42)



## WEEK 21, DAY 5: 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 is now leading a second wave of Jews who had chosen to leave their captivity and return to Jerusalem. Ezra, who obviously had a good testimony before King Artaxerxes, receives a letter from the king authorizing their return. The description of Ezra in 7:6–10 is one we all should desire to be said of us.

Note that 7:6 says he was a "ready scribe in the law of Moses". Though Ezra could not perform all of his duties while in captivity, he still had made himself "ready" for the time when God would use him. We would do well to ask ourselves, "Am I preparing myself through my relationship with God and His Word for whatever it is that He may want to accomplish in and through me in the future?" No, for whatever reason, we may not be able to accomplish it now—but what are we doing now to make ourselves "READY" for when God does change our circumstances and allows it to happen?!

The good news is, chapter 7 reveals to us just what it was that Ezra did to make himself "ready!" Verse 10 says, "Ezra prepared his heart to seek the law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments." Notice that Ezra recognized that he first must "seek the law of the Lord." Proverbs 2:4–5 lets us know that when we're seeking God's Word as if it were "silver"—and searching for it as we would for "hid treasure," that's when it will do its transforming work in us! It is "then" that we will understand "the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God!" Can you honestly say that that you are presently "preparing yourself" for what God may have for you in the future—by seeking the truth of His Word like that now?

Secondly, notice that 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?" (Joh. 13:17) We know we should "seek the things which are above" (Col. 3:1–2)—but do we "do it?" We know we should "submit ourselves one to another" (Eph. 5:21)—but do we "do it?" We know we should "love our neighbor as ourself" and not "bite and devour one other" (Gal. 5:14–15)—but do we "do it?" We know we should be "patient" with one another and not hold "grudges" or be "bitter" against others—offering the same forgiveness to them that we have received from God (Jam. 5:9; Eph. 4:32)—but do we "do it?" There are lots of things we "know," but how much do we actually "put into practice?"

Thirdly, notice also that "God's hand" was upon Ezra. (7:6,28) And recognize that this was certainly not a coincidence! God's hand was upon Ezra because he was a man surrendered to His purposes. To put it in the words of 1 Peter 5:6, God's hand was upon Ezra for the simple fact that he had "humbled himself under God's mighty hand!" We, too, can have God's hand upon our lives, if we, like Ezra, will be willing to humbly surrender ourselves under God's hand—and for His purposes. (1 Pet. 5:6) Many 21st century Christians want the blessing of God's hand upon their lives—and yet, in their pride, pursue their own purposes. It doesn't, however, work that way!

Once Ezra approaches the outskirts of city of Jerusalem, he soon learns of the true condition of those who had previously returned. Though they had "physically" returned to the place God intended them to be (the Promised Land), they were not "spiritually" in the place God intended them to be! Once again, God's people had fallen prey to their own sinful flesh—and were involved in the same abominations as the heathen around them. We must remember that even though we may "physically" be in a good church, and even though "physically," we make our way into the 52 Weeks of Pursuit on a daily basis, it is no guarantee of our true "spiritual" condition! The battle with the flesh is a daily "spiritual" battle—not just a "physical" one! We can never get to the place that we think we've conquered our flesh—or that we think we can coast spiritually. Remember 1 Corinthians 10:12! The very time we think we are the strongest, is actually the time we are the most vulnerable!

Notice that Ezra's response to news of the spiritual condition of God's people was absolute brokenness. What an incredible example of the heart God intends those in positions of leadership in the lives of His people to possess! In 9:3, Ezra testifies, "And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down ASTONIED." Physically, Ezra was so distraught, he was unable to even move a muscle! He says that it was as if he actually had turned into "a stone!" In 9:5 he says, "And at the evening sacrifice I arose up from my HEAVINESS..." Notice that sin in the lives of the people of God was actually a weight in this godly and passionate leader's soul! And as you proceed in chapter 9 and you begin to listen to Ezra's prayer, it is very interesting to consider how this leader personally identifies himself with the people of God! Note the continual references throughout his prayer, not to "they, their and them"—but to "our, we and us!" (9:6–15) Rarely do leaders in the 21st century express the type of brokenness over sin that Ezra demonstrated in this prayer—not to mention, the personal identification with the people we're seeking to lead. Oh, we may talk to others about it... we may think it's terrible... we may have even have expected that something of this nature was going to happen—but rarely in Laodicea are we truly broken and in heaviness because of it! And if you listen to our prayers, seldom, if ever, will we ever even get close to identifying ourselves with our people because of sin in our midst. Perhaps that's the reason we also fail to see the revival Ezra was able to lead God's people to experience!

### **CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through EZRA (a priest) making intercession for his people. — Ezra 9:1–5; 10:1 (Hebrews 7:25–27 says Jesus is our High Priest who "...ever liveth to make intercession for them.") 5)

## WEEK 22, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: NEHEMIAH 1-4

### OVERVIEW:

Nehemiah prays to God about Jerusalem's desolate condition; Nehemiah petitions the king for permission to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem; Nehemiah organizes the people and they begin repairing the walls; opposition to the work arises.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As the Book of 2 Chronicles came to an end, we saw that God's people were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. In the Book of Ezra, we saw that God worked in the heart of Cyrus, the pagan King of Persia (note, that while Israel was in captivity, the Babylonians were overtaken by the Persians), to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple—and to restore Temple worship. After this small "revival" (only a remnant of God's people chose to return), which began around 536 B.C., God used a prayerful man named Nehemiah in 445 B.C. to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of the ruined city. God's purpose behind this mission was to restore both safety and order to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.

After hearing reports of the sad state of the city of Jerusalem, Nehemiah became burdened for his brethren and began to pray. This was all in spite of the fact that he was in a high position in the king's court (he was the cupbearer — Neh. 1:11) and truly had no worries for himself. After all, it wasn't his fault that the city was in the condition it was in! He could have easily justified not doing anything but praying. Instead, he risked his own life by going before the king with his request to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. (Neh. 2:1–6) Unlike Nehemiah, so often we pray—expecting God to do all the work. Nehemiah, however, was willing, not just to pray, but to get up off of his knees, stand to his feet, and do something about the need at hand! Proverbs 16:9 talks about the Lord directing our steps—but for Him to do that, keep in mind it necessitates that we be standing... and moving! And notice that God did more than just get the king to grant his permission for the work to be accomplished! He also worked in the king's heart to make him willing to fund the entire project! It becomes yet another example of the fact that our God is able to do "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think!" (Eph. 3:20) But do recognize, that just like Nehemiah, we need to ASK—and then we need to ACT! We must, as the old saying goes, "PRAY as if it all depends upon GOD, but WORK as if it all depends upon US!" God expects us to DO the POSSIBLE—and TRUST HIM for the IMPOSSIBLE.

In chapter 3, notice that God lists the names of the workers and the actual work He used them to accomplish. Note that each man had a specified area of responsibility. It is a great reminder of the principle that "NO man can do EVERYTHING, but EVERY man can do SOMETHING." It is interesting to note in verse 5, however, that some of the "nobles" didn't do anything! God talked about this very thing through the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26–29, when he said, "not many NOBLE are called" to do the work of God. Perhaps we should do some major introspection if we find ourselves at a place in time where we are not involved in the work of the Lord. It may be because we feel that we're "above" doing such insignificant tasks, or that we have the egotistical attitude that we are too "noble" for such trivial work. Note that God also used the Apostle Paul to talk about those who think of themselves "more highly than [they] ought to think!" We must always keep in mind, we are "SERVANTS of the MOST HIGH God!" (Dan. 3:26)

Note also, that there are 10 gates that were repaired in this chapter. They paint for us an incredible picture of the Christian life:

1. The SHEEP Gate. (3:1)  
This speaks of Christ's sacrifice for us on the cross. This was the first gate to be repaired, for without the sacrifice of the Lamb of God, there is no salvation. Note that the Sheep Gate had no locks or bars, for the door of salvation is always open for the sinner to enter!
2. The FISH Gate. (3:3)  
Symbolizing that as the recipients of salvation, we have been called to be "fishers of men." (Mark 1:17)
3. The OLD Gate. (3:6)  
This pictures the fact that we are to follow the "old paths" of the Word of God, that we might find "rest for [our] souls." (Jer. 6:16)
4. The VALLEY Gate (3:13)  
Picturing that we are not to think more "highly" of ourselves than we ought to think, but to "lower" ourselves, having an attitude of humility—just as our Lord Jesus Christ did. (Phil. 2:5–9).
5. The DUNG Gate (3:14)  
This is the gate through which the waste of the city was taken, picturing the fact that we are to "cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." (2 Cor. 7:1)
6. The Gate of the FOUNTAIN. (3:15)  
This points to our need to "be filled with the Spirit." (Joh. 7:37–39, Eph. 5:18)
7. The WATER Gate (3:26)  
This gate speaks of the Word of God. (Eph. 5:26) And notice that this "just happens" to be the seventh gate mentioned! (As we have previously seen, seven is the number of perfection/completion in the Bible.) Psalm 19:7 says that God's Word is "perfect!" And as you might could suspect, it "just so happens" that this gate needed no repairs!
8. The HORSE Gate (3:28)  
The horse is a symbol of war in the Bible, and pictures for us the fact that we are in a warfare as soldiers of Jesus Christ. (Eph. 6:10–17; 2 Tim. 2:1–4)
9. The EAST Gate (3:29)  
This is a picture of Christ's return—that time when the "Sun of Righteousness" will rise in the east with healing in His wings. (Mal. 4:2)
10. The Gate MIPHKAD. (3:31)  
This gate is a picture of God's judgment. Note that the Hebrew word "miphkad" that the translators chose to not translate here means "appointment, account, or census." It points us to the reality that one day we all have an "appointment" with our Lord Jesus Christ at His Judgment Seat—at which time we will give an "account" of the life we lived after being inhabited by His Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:10–12; 2 Cor. 5:10)

If you'll take just take a minute to walk back through the 10 gates, you'll notice that even the very order in which the gates are mentioned is highly instructive about how we have been called to walk as believers now that we've entered through the "narrow gate" of the Lord Jesus Christ! (Mark—connect all of them for the reader or not?)

Note in chapter 4 that the enemy appears. There is one thing for which we can always be certain—when God's work is being accomplished, the enemy will always show up to come against it! The enemy will ridicule us, try to discourage us, and/or attempt to strike fear in us—anything to try to halt "the work of the Lord" through us! And notice what chapter 4 reveals about how this remnant actually overcame their enemies! It was through prayer! (4:9) And yet, notice also in verse 9, that Nehemiah did not just depend on prayer alone—he also set a watch! Four times in the New Testament Jesus told us to "watch AND pray!" (Mat. 26:41; Mar. 13:33;14:38; Luk. 21:36) May God also find us giving diligence to both!

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

As the KING'S CUPBEARER — Nehemiah 1:11 (Nehemiah was the king's cupbearer – i.e. He served the king beverages at his table, just as Jesus drank the cup of the King's wrath for us on the cross – Luke 22:42.)

Through NEHEMIAH — Nehemiah 1–3 (Nehemiah left the king's court and his high position behind, to go far away (approx. 750 miles) to build a wall of protection for God's people, in the same way that Jesus left the King's court and His exalted position to build a wall of protection for us!)

As the SHEEP GATE — Nehemiah 3:1 (Jesus is the "Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" — Joh. 1:29. The only way we can become one of Christ's "sheep" is by entering through the right "door," which is none other than Christ Himself — John 10:1,7,9,10.)

## WEEK 22, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: NEHEMIAH 5-9

### OVERVIEW:

The anger of Nehemiah regarding the way the wealthy Jews had taken advantage of the poorer Jews; the enemy attacks with deceit, slander and threats; the people who returned are numbered; the Word of God is preached to the people; the Levites cry out to God praising Him for His mercy and goodness.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Nehemiah 5 is just a sad chapter. The Jews are selfishly preying upon one another for the sake of material gain and wealth! And it just so happens, that no building takes place in this chapter! There were great economic burdens on the Jews, not only because of the famine (Hag. 1:7–11), but also because of taxes and tributes that were being inflicted upon them. To provide food and the basic necessities for their families, the poorer Jews were being forced to mortgage their property and sell themselves into servitude to their own Jewish kinsmen. God had instructed and admonished His people the Jews, just as He has Christians today, to watch out for one another—to love one another, to help one another, and to care for one another. They did the exact opposite! Rather than "PRAY FOR" each other, they "PREYED UPON" each other. Proverbs 3:27 tells us to, "withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thine hand to do it." Philippians 2:4 says, "look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others." It is a great reminder to us that if we aren't careful, we can become so selfish and self-serving that we choose to make money on those to whom we should be ministering! Note that Nehemiah's extremely angry response to witnessing the Jews gauging one another for personal gain is the same response our Lord Jesus Christ had when this same type of thing was happening in His day! (Mark 11:15–17) Nehemiah very wisely put this evil and selfish practice to an end—and refocused the people to the work at hand. (Neh. 5:9–12)

In chapter 6 the work on the walls resumes. Recognize that it is no coincidence that when the work restarted, the enemy also reappeared! This time, however, Sanballat and his men aim their attack against Nehemiah, the leader. Satan knows very well—that everything rises and falls on leadership. He knows that if he can get Nehemiah to stop leading, the work of rebuilding the walls will soon come to a complete halt. It should be noted, that if you are in any type of leadership position (i.e. pastor, father, mother, teacher, discipler, etc.), there is a high price to pay! There is a large target on your back for which the enemy is constantly seeking to take aim. It is of great necessity and importance, therefore, that we learn to put on the whole armor of God on a daily basis! (Eph. 6:10–18)

Observe that Sanballat repeatedly tries to arrange a meeting with Nehemiah "just to talk," as it were. Nehemiah did not fall for this deception, however, because he was "not ignorant of Satan's devices." (2 Cor. 2:11) May we, likewise, learn to beware of the smiles of the enemy, for Satan is often more dangerous when he appears to be our friend—than when he appears to be our enemy! Sanballat extends four invitations to Nehemiah, and he wisely refused them all. (Neh. 6:3–4) And again, may we likewise, learn to keep ourselves focused on the task at hand when our enemy extends an invitation designed to deceptively redirect us—in an attempt to halt the work of the Lord through us. When the first four "invitations" failed to get the response Sanballat was hoping for, notice that the fifth messenger was sent with a different strategy. He arrives with an "open letter" filled with slanderous accusations against Nehemiah. (6:5) "It is reported," as it says in 6:6, is one of the devil's chief weapons when wanting to disrupt the people of God and the work of the Lord. "People are saying..." or "I've been hearing..." and "Did you know..." are usually phrases that introduce gossip and lies. In this case, Nehemiah's life and character, however, refuted every lie in the letter. Note that as a tremendous leader of God's people, once again, Nehemiah takes this problem to the Lord in prayer. (6:9) As servants of God, may we learn that we can't control what people may say about us—but we

can certainly control what kind of character and testimony we have! And we can certainly do with the accusations against us what Nehemiah did—we can take them to the Lord in prayer! Recognize that had Nehemiah stopped the work to defend his reputation, the walls would never have been built! Because he gave the problem to God, the walls were completed in just 52 days! (6:15) And the result was, God was glorified—and the enemy was embarrassed! (6:16). May all the work we allow the Lord to do through us end with this same incredible result!

Chapter 7 is a numbering of all the people who had returned from the exile. In Chapter 8, Ezra returned to Jerusalem to assist Nehemiah with the dedication of the walls and the sanctifying of the people. It is significant that the people gathered to hear the Word of God at the "water gate," (8:1) for water in the Bible consistently pictures the Word of God. (Eph. 5:26) Notice also, that 8:1–9 provides a description of what we might refer to as the "perfect church service!"

- The people all assembled to listen.
- The Word was exalted high.
- The preacher read and explained the Word so the people could understand it.
- And the people wept at hearing the Word, which no doubt, revealed their sensitivity to the working of the Spirit as He revealed areas of sinfulness in their lives!

This reading of "the Word of God" in chapter 8, provoked the leaders to pray to "the God of the Word" in chapter 9. All of chapter 9 is simply a prayer that provides us a beautiful spiritual summary of the Old Testament history of the Jews. In this prayer, they praise God for His mercy to them—despite their unfaithfulness to Him. May we praise Him today for the same!

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through NEHEMIAH — Nehemiah 5:17–19. He was the governor of the people, yet, he fed all who came to his table (Jews, nobles, and even Gentiles!)—at no cost to them.

## WEEK 22, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: NEHEMIAH 10-13

### OVERVIEW:

The list of leaders who placed their seal on the covenant with God; the city of Jerusalem is populated by the Jews; the dedication of the city wall; Nehemiah condemns the people's wicked ways and reforms the abuses.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

After making a "sure" covenant with God in chapter 9 to do all things according to His Word, the leaders then "sealed" it. (9:38) Chapter 10 then lists for us the names of those that entered into this covenant with God that day by sealing it themselves. Little did they realize that their names would be recorded eternally in God's Word as an example for believers in every subsequent generation! In 9:28–39, we see the people actually applying the Word in a practical way to their everyday lives. They gave evidence that they weren't just coming to the Word of God to gain INFORMATION—but that they were coming to it because they were desiring TRANSFORMATION! You see, it's one thing for people to pray and sign a covenant—it is quite another thing for people to actually separate themselves from evil (10:28), straighten out their homes (10:28–30), honor the Sabbath (10:31), contribute to the house of God (10:32–33), and serve God with their tithes and offerings! (10:34–39) In the 21st century, too many Bible conferences, Bible studies, Bible lessons and church services end with people feeling emotionally stirred and blessed, but somehow it doesn't seem to translate into repentance, obedience and transformation of life! Maybe this is a good time for all of us to honestly ask ourselves:

- Am I able to detect life change through the things God is teaching me through the ministry of the Word in and through my own local church, and through the 52 Weeks of Pursuit?

In chapters 11 and 12, the city of Jerusalem is populated—and the wall of Jerusalem is dedicated. It was necessary to at least get a portion of the Jews to live in the city, both for the good of the city and for the glory of God. This, of course, demanded faith—because it required them leaving their homes for an unspecified place. Notice that all of the leaders moved into Jerusalem, some of the people graciously volunteered to move there by faith, and the rest of the people cast lots to determine who was to go so that a minimum of 10% of the people were actually dwelling in the city of Jerusalem. (11:1–2) Were you to take the time to do the math in 11:3–19, it would reveal that 3044 men actually made the move into Jerusalem. If this represents 10% of the male Jewish population that had returned from exile back into the Promised Land, it reveals just how small the returning remnant actually was. It certainly reiterates the principle Jesus taught in Matthew 7:14: "Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and FEW there be that find it."

From Nehemiah 7:2 and 13:6, we learn that Nehemiah had returned to Babylon for a few years, leaving the actual governing of the city in the hands of his brother, Hanani. Even though Hanani was "a faithful man, and feared God above many" (7:2), when Nehemiah returned, he discovered that the people had fallen back into their old ways. We would be wise to force ourselves to both observe and meditate on the horrible biblical reality that sin in the lives of God's people tends to find a way of repeating itself! We can certainly never allow ourselves to become complacent! When Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem, he found that the inner parts of the house of God were being used to commit fornication (13:7); the Levites were not being supported for their work in the Temple, forcing them to forsake



their work in the house of God to work in their fields in order to sustain themselves (13:10); the sabbath day was being abused (13:15–22); and the Jewish men had repeated the sin of taking for themselves heathen wives. (13:23–27; Deu. 23:3–5) In fact, even the priests had sinned in this way! (13:28–31) It was necessary for Nehemiah, the courageous saint and leader that he was, to honestly confront the people with the reality of their sin, and to explain God's judgment concerning it—and that's exactly what he did! (13:1–3,8–9,11) May his example cause us to examine whether we are judging the sin in our own lives—and whether we are being a good enough friend to those we say we love (or are leading) to confront them with their sin, that our Lord might receive the glory that is due His name through their lives?

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

As the WALL OF JERUSALEM — Nehemiah 12:27. God is our fortress in whom we trust (Psa. 91:2).

## WEEK 22, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 1-3

### OVERVIEW:

Vashti (a Gentile woman) is removed from her royal position as queen; Esther (a Jewish woman) is chosen to be the new queen; the evil plot of Haman against the whole Jewish race.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The events of Esther take place between Ezra 6 and 7. When verse 3 of Esther chapter 1 sets the time as the third year of Ahasuerus, the year is actually 483 B.C. Note that the term "Ahasuerus" is not a particular man's name, but was the title used to refer to the supreme ruler in Persia at this period in history, just as "Pharaoh" was the title of the supreme ruler in Egypt.

It is interesting to note that God's name is found nowhere in the Book of Esther, although Jewish scribes have found the name Jehovah "hidden," as it were, in five different verses. It illustrates a beautiful spiritual lesson: when it seems that God is nowhere to be found, if we look beneath the surface, we will actually find Him working "behind the scenes" to accomplish His purposes for our lives! (Rom. 8:28)

The Book of Esther opens with the king holding a seven day feast for all those in his palace. (1:5) After seven days of excessive drinking (1:10), Ahasuerus decides to show off Vashti, his beautiful "trophy wife" and queen, to all of his male friends. In her wisdom, however, and with her apparent high moral values, Vashti refuses to cater to the king's selfish and carnal drunken request. This, of course, infuriates the male chauvinist king and all his male chauvinist princes—so they collectively decide that it would be best for the king to remove her from her exalted position—and to spread the word of her removal so that all the women in the kingdom might not follow her "rebellious example," but would rather "learn from her mistake," so they would be sure to "honor their husbands."

After about four years, however, the king begins to miss his wife, and regrets his rash decision to put her away. (2:1) Recognizing, not only his regret, but his loneliness, the king's servants convince him to pick a new queen from among the many beautiful women in his kingdom by holding what might be considered the equivalent of a "beauty pageant." And "it just so happens," that God had placed a Jew, a man named Mordecai, in a very important position, seated at the king's gate. (2:21) Mordecai, a cousin of Esther, who had not only brought her up from her youth, but had actually become like a father to her (2:7), decided to enter her into this "contest" to potentially become the next queen. Per the instruction of Mordecai, Esther did not let it be known to anyone, however, that she was a Jew. (2:10,20)

In God's sovereignty, and because of her distinct character and beauty, Esther was chosen by the king to be his new queen—and a feast was held in her honor. At the end of chapter 2, Mordecai finds out about a plot to kill the king. He notifies Esther, who in turn, tells the king in Mordecai's name—and it all gets written down in the book of the chronicles of the king. While this may seem like a rather insignificant detail at the time, we'll find that it ends up being the very thing that God uses to save His people from destruction! Isn't it just like God to save His people by something written in "the Book of the King?!" (Rom. 10:17)

Chapter 3 begins with a man named Haman getting a big promotion from the king. Haman becomes the king's "chief advisor" and "right-hand man!" It might be important to note, that he just happens to despise the Jews! Haman, as a perfect picture of the flesh, is a selfish, self-seeking, self-serving, egomaniac. When he sees that

Mordecai refuses to bow to him as he passed by, he becomes incensed. (3:5) Haman decided to offer the king the equivalent of about \$25 million in silver if the king would pass a law condemning the entire Jewish race to death (including women and children). This money would, no doubt, come from the revenue acquired from the sale of the property of the slain Jews, much like what has happened at other times in history, such as with Hitler during WWII—and the Roman Catholic Church during the Crusades. The king passes the law—and the date for their execution was set by casting lots. (Est. 3:7, Pro. 16:33) In God's providence, the date for the extermination of the Jews was set an entire year away (3:7), providing plenty of time for the "plan of God" to unfold through the "plan of Mordecai," to halt this satanically generated plot against the Jewish people.

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through KING AHASUERUS — Esther 1–2. There is coming a day very soon when God will remove (rapture) the church (His Gentile bride and queen) off of this earth because of her unfaithfulness to Him, and replace her with the Nation of Israel (His Jewish queen)—for His 1000 year reign on earth as King.

## WEEK 22, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 4-7

### OVERVIEW:

Mordecai and the Jews mourn over the king's commandment to destroy them; Esther and Mordecai work a plan to save the Jews; Esther plans a banquet for the king at which she makes her request of him to save her people, the Jews; the king belatedly honors Mordecai for his service to him in uncovering the assassination plot; Esther accuses Haman before the king and Haman is executed.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

In chapter 4, Mordecai grieves and weeps in sackcloth and ashes in the streets of the city over the decree issued by the king to destroy the Jewish race. He does this right in the king's gate where everyone could see him—without fearing the consequences, and certainly without being ashamed of his God or his people. Esther, not understanding why Mordecai was expressing such extreme public emotion (and commotion!), sends a servant to find out what was wrong. Mordecai sends word back to her explaining his actions, along with a copy of the king's decree to exterminate the Jews, so she might understand just how desperate the situation actually was. Mordecai proceeds to convince Esther that she is the one that God wants to use to deliver His people, suggesting that her rise to such an exalted position in the kingdom might well have been "for such a time as this." (4:14) We must admire Esther, for she presents herself before the king as a "living sacrifice" (Rom. 12:1) to do God's will—knowing she could die if the king doesn't hold out the golden scepter to her.

Based on Mordecai and Esther's behavior, we would do well to ask ourselves two simple but very sobering introspective questions:

- Am I like Mordecai in that I am deeply concerned for those who are condemned?
- Am I like Esther in that I am willing to sacrifice myself in order to intercede on behalf of those who are facing inevitable judgment?

Rather than just being forthright with her request to the king concerning her people, however, Esther very wisely presents herself before him, extending what might be considered somewhat of a formal invitation to attend a special banquet that she wanted to prepare for him and Haman. She was obviously keenly aware of the king's strong affinity for food and wine, and decided her best chance for getting her request granted would be when the king was of a "merry heart." (Pro. 15:13,15; 17:22) At the banquet, the king asks Esther what was on her mind, and confirms his willingness to grant her petition—even if it were for half of the kingdom! Once again, rather than present such a grave and monumental request at an inappropriate or inopportune time, she chooses to invite him to yet another banquet on the following day. (Ecc. 3:11)

As Esther's first banquet came to an end, Haman walks out feeling like he was sitting on top of the world! He ponders the fact that not only was he the king's "right-hand man," but that he was the only man in the entire kingdom that the queen invited to her special banquet. As he walks past the king's gate after the banquet, however, he once again finds himself enraged because of Mordecai's refusal to do obeisance to him. When he gets home, he tells his wife and friends about the "high" of his day, with his special "honor" of his exclusive time with the king and queen—and the "low" of his day, with that "despicable Jew" not bowing to him in the gate! They suggest to Haman

that he command that gallows be made for Mordecai's "terrible insurrection," and that he be hanged on them the next day.

At the same time that Haman is plotting these things against Haman in his house, for some strange reason, the king, in his house, finds himself unable to sleep. He commands that the recent chronicles of his kingship be read to him, and as they are, he is reminded of how that it was Mordecai that was used to foil the recent assassination attempt against him. He is also reminded that no kindness had been extended to Mordecai for his heroic deed, so he decides to do something special to honor him—but found himself at a loss for just exactly how to do it. He hears that Haman is in the court, and calls him in to seek his counsel on what he thought would be an appropriate way for the king to bestow honor upon a very special individual. Thinking that the king must certainly have been referring to him, Haman wastes no time concocting an extravagant plan to exalt himself before all the people. The king thought Haman's plan was absolutely perfect—and was excited to see it enacted. What a humiliating shock it was to Haman when the king gave him the personal assignment to see that every last detail of his plan be lavished upon "Mordecai the Jew!" (6:10) Haman was so beside himself that he immediately goes home to tell his wife and his counselors what had unfolded in his meeting with the king, and rather than attempt to encourage him, they basically tell him that this will prove to be something he will not be able to overcome. (6:13) While they were discussing this matter, the king's chamberlains came to tell Haman that it was time for Esther's second banquet.

As the banquet begins in chapter 7, the king is very anxious to find out just what the request is that Esther has in her heart, and why it was that she was being so mysterious about it all. When she finally tells the king that there was a conspiracy unfolding to exterminate her and her people—the king is absolutely wrath! He wants to know immediately "who" it is that has devised such a heinous plan, and "where" he is! And what an unbelievable surprise it is to the king when Esther points across the table and says, "The adversary and enemy is this wicked Haman!" The chapter ends with the king ordering that Haman be executed upon the very gallows that he had commanded to be built to hang Mordecai. And as the old saying goes, "Couldn't have happened to a nicer guy!"

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through ESTHER – Esther 5–7. Esther goes before the King pleading for the salvation of her people knowing it may cost a very high price: her own life! Jesus goes before the Father (or King) on our behalf as our Advocate (1 John 2:1, Rev. 12:9–10) to plead our case for forgiveness in light of the very high price He had to pay to obtain it: His own life!

## WEEK 23, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: ESTHER 8-10

### OVERVIEW:

King Ahasuerus issues another decree allowing the Jews to defend themselves and destroy their enemies; the Jews defeat and destroy their enemies; the feast of Purim is instituted to commemorate this victory; Mordecai's prosperity and promotion.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

To this point in our overview of the Book of Esther, our emphasis has primarily been on the storyline — or the "historical" application. And what an intriguing story it is! It is literally packed full of all of the things that typically hold our interest as humans when reading a story: a villain, a hero, hatred, love, danger and romance. And while all of these things have been recorded in the Book of Esther with precise historical accuracy — it is important to note that in the "doctrinal" or "prophetic" application, this story is actually an incredible picture of the unfolding daily "drama" of the Christian life — as "the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." (Gal. 5:17)

From the perspective of the "doctrinal/prophetic" application (i.e. what a verse, passage, chapter or book of the Bible is actually "teaching" us through the "real-life" illustrations in pictures and types)...

- King Ahasuerus is a picture of the human soul, and particularly our will. (Where DECISIONS are made, POLICIES are determined, and DECREES are put into motion.)
- Vashti is a picture of the fallen human spirit, representing our "old" or "fallen" nature.
- Esther is a picture of the human spirit, revived by the Holy Spirit, representing our "new" nature.
- Mordecai is a picture of the Holy Spirit.
- Haman is a picture of the flesh.

With these pictures in mind, understand that it is a monumental thing when Ahasuerus gives his ring to Haman in chapter 3:10, for whoever has possession of the king's ring has the "power" — or, is "in control." Chapter 3 becomes, then, a perfect picture of the flesh (Haman) in control, "lusting against the Spirit (Mordecai)" — and chapter 4 becomes a perfect picture of the "Spirit (Mordecai) lusting against the flesh (Haman)."

Note also in chapter 4, that when the flesh (Haman) is in control, the Spirit (Mordecai) is "grieved." What an incredibly graphic and horribly sad glimpse of what actually takes place in "the midst of our city," (or, on the inside of us) when the flesh is "wearing the ring," or, is "in control" of our lives. We "grieve" the Holy Spirit of God within us! (Eph. 4:30) Oh, what a difference it would make if we could only see and hear what Esther 4:1 describes through the picture of Mordecai, as the Holy Spirit in us is wearing "sackcloth and ashes," and weeping with a "loud and bitter cry!" God help us.

Notice also in today's reading in Chapter 8, that because of the law of the Medes and Persians (8:8), the king could not cancel the decree that had been written to put the Jews to death. The only way to prevent the execution demanded by the old law was to institute and implement a new law. It is a perfect picture of what Paul revealed to us in Romans chapter 8. The law of sin and death (the Old Testament) is binding and in effect. "The wages of sin" is most certainly "death." (Rom. 6:23a) There is no reversing that. The only remedy is the institution and

implementation of the new law provided in and through our Lord Jesus Christ that supersedes the old law — "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus!" (Rom. 8:2) Hallelujah!

In light of these incredible pictures, Esther 8:8 also becomes a beautiful verse that pictures for us the New Testament teaching of the "eternal security of the believer." As pictured in the law of the Medes and Persians, once something had received the "sealing" of the king, no man had the ability to reverse it — not even the king himself! In the New Testament, Ephesians 1:12–14 and 4:30 teach us that the moment we called on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, trusting Him alone for our salvation, He "sealed" us with His own Spirit! Ephesians 1:14 even calls this "sealing" the "earnest" (or "down payment," and literally, "engagement ring!"), guaranteeing our complete redemption, and the inheritance of eternal life. May we not only rejoice, but rest in the fact that when the King of creation and salvation seals us with His Holy Spirit, we are secure in Him for all of eternity! (Also see Daniel 6:17.)

Esther 8:10–14 is a beautiful picture of the urgency of taking the life and death message of the gospel to the ends of the earth. Observe how the scribes hurriedly wrote the message and the official ambassadors quickly took the "good news" to the four corners of the kingdom. Likewise, we have become the King's "ambassadors," commissioned to take the message of "good news" to the four corners of the globe while we still have time! Note also, that when the Jews received the message of "good news"—namely, that the OLD law ensuring DEATH had been superseded by a NEW law ensuring LIFE, it not only provided deliverance, but incredible rejoicing!

In chapter 9, note that the Jews avenged themselves of their enemies, trusting God to destroy them all — all 75,810 of them! (75,000 in 9:16; 500 in 9:6; 300 in 9:15; and the 10 sons of Haman in 9:13.) Note also in chapter 9, while comprehending the actual history of what actually was happening in Esther's day, at least six powerful New Testament principles concerning the Christian life that apply directly to believers in our day...

**Principle #1:**

**What I do to ensure victory TODAY, is the same thing I must do to ensure victory TOMORROW. (9:12–13).**

The middle of verse 13 says, "... Do tomorrow also according to this day's decree." The victory in the Christian life is simply a matter of reckoning our death to self and Christ's life within us on a daily basis. (Rom. 6:11; 2 Cor. 4:10–11; 1 Cor. 15:31)

**Principle #2:**

**Even though my flesh is already dead, I must take it out daily and nail it to the cross. (9:13–14)**

The end of verse 13 says, "... And let Haman's ten sons be hanged upon the gallows." Notice that the ten sons of Haman were already dead, but they still took them out and hanged them the next day. (See Romans 6:11–15)

**Principle #3:**

**In order to attain and sustain victory in my spiritual walk, my motives must be free of self interests. (9:10b, 15b,16b)**

Verse 10 says, "... *but on the spoil laid they not their hand.*"

Verse 15 says, "... *but on the prey they laid not their hand.*"

Verse 16 says, "... *but they laid not their hands on the prey.*"

See 1 Corinthians 6:19–20.

**Principle #4:**

**As I walk in the victory of the fullness and power of the Spirit, God's love will be shed abroad through me causing me to fulfill the "one another" commands of scripture toward my brothers and sisters, and causing me to express compassion for the poor. (9:22)**

See Galatians 5:22, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love..."

See Romans 5:5, "...the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."

See the New Testament "one another" commands. (Joh. 13:34; Rom. 12:5,10,16; 13:8; 14:13,19; 15:5,7,14; 16:16; 1 Cor. 4:6; 6:7; 11:33; 12:25; 16:20; Gal. 5:13,15,26; Eph. 4:2,25,32; 5:21; Col. 3:9,13,16; 1 Thes. 3:12; 4:18; 5:11; 1 Tim. 5:21; Heb. 13:13; 10:24,25; Jam. 4:11; 5:9,16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 3:8; 4:9,10; 5:5,14; 1 Joh. 1:7; 3:11,23; 4:7,11.)

See Galatians 2:10, "... remember the poor."

**Principle #5:**

**There is a memorial feast that I am to celebrate in remembrance of the day God turned my inevitable destruction into deliverance and salvation. (9:17–32)**

See 1 Corinthians 11:23–26.

**Principle #6:**

**I must constantly remember that God's Spirit (Mordecai) will not override my will (King Ahasuerus), and only through yielding my will to Him will I ever experience the spiritual wealth and peace of the Spirit in the kingdom I call my life. (10:1–3)**

See Romans 6:13–22.

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through MORDECAI — Esther 10:3. He became "next unto the king" after delivering God's people from sure destruction. Jesus "sat down on the right hand of God" after delivering us all from sure destruction. (Heb. 10:12–14)



## WEEK 23, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: JOB 1-6

### OVERVIEW:

Job's godly character and wealth; the dialogue between God and Satan; Satan permitted to afflict Job; the negative counsel of Job's wife; Job's three friends come to visit; the first speech of Eliphaz; Job's response.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Job is one of the most incredible men in the entire Bible! In fact, he was of such impeccable character that God Himself used the sacrifice, service and surrender of Job to get in Satan's face in Job chapter 1. As God and Satan dialogue concerning him, Satan basically told God that the only reason Job did the things he did, and was the man he was, was because of all of the good things God had done for him. In other words, Satan accused God of "buying" Job's affection. Satan tells God, "You take all of your blessing away, and see how worthy Job thinks You are of his followship and service!

God tells Satan to go ahead and do whatever he wanted to do to Job, without harming Job's physical condition. And boy, did he! In one day, Job gets word that all of his oxen and donkeys had been killed, along with all of his servants who kept them; that fire had fallen from the sky and burned up all the sheep, along with those who tended them; and that all of his camels had been stolen, and his servants who kept them had been murdered. His entire fortune had been lost in only a few hours time! But then to make the news of all of those dreadful things seem rather trivial and somewhat insignificant, he gets word that all of his sons and daughters had been at the eldest brothers house for a family gathering when a tornado hit the house—killing every last one of them!

What would your response to God be if all of these things had befallen you? Would God still be God to you? Would you still consider Him good? Would He be worthy of your followship? Would you, or could you praise Him?

Note also, a few practical things it will be important for us to glean from these chapters:

#### Concerning Satan —

Satan is extremely powerful, but not all-powerful. Though he "goes to and fro in the earth... walking up and down in it," the Book of Job lets us know he's actually on God's leash! He can only go as far as God permits him. That lets us know that everything that takes place in our lives is either APPOINTED by God, or ALLOWED of God. Take heart!

#### Concerning Suffering —

Suffering is not a matter of misfortune or bad luck, nor is it always chastisement from God for some wrong that we have refused to remove out of our lives. Sometimes we suffer for doing what is right. God's own testimony of Job was that he "was perfect and upright and one that feared God, and eschewed evil." (1:1)

#### Concerning People —

As well-meaning as people can sometimes be, they can also be used by Satan, as in the case of Job's "friends," to criticize, accuse, and condemn—thinking they have everything all figured out—when they don't really know all of the facts, and are functioning off of human reasoning, temporal values and half-truths.

Some of the things in the Book of Job that are not as easily seen as some of those practical gleanings just listed, have been laid out in one of the most incredible commentaries I have ever read. The commentary is entitled: *Job: Adventures in the Land of Uz!* and was written by Pastor Jeff Adams. (It can be obtained through [realitylivingpublishing.com](http://realitylivingpublishing.com))

Jeff writes,

"In Job, God gives us an incredible illustration of believers in tribulation. If ever anyone qualified for enduring tribulation it was Job! Remember that the next major event on God's prophetic calendar is a seven-year period we often call the "Tribulation" which will fall upon this earth. Some of the prophecies in the Book of Revelation are incredible and probe the limits of our imagination. To help us understand, God has given us the story of a man named Job. More than a simple story about his trials, Job is a wonderful picture of the coming time of Tribulation, and helps us to better understand the future.

"As you approach the Book of Job, consider the picture that is drawn. The parallels between what happened to Job and the prophecies of the coming time of Tribulation are too many to be mere coincidence...

"The story of Job takes place in the land of Uz, exactly where the faithful remnant of Jews will be hidden during the Tribulation. Uz always has a connection with Edom in the Bible, and the famous "Petra" (from the Greek word for "rock") is in Edom, the refuge God has prepared for His people...

"Job sits in his misery for seven days, while his friends look on speechless. In the coming Tribulation the Jews will suffer at the hands of the Antichrist for a seven-year period. The world will be powerless to help, and most will genuinely believe that they are only getting what they deserve. Don't think that World War II did away with anti-Semitism.

"Actually, the "Great Tribulation" is the last half of the seven years, though we often apply the word "Tribulation" to the entire period. The first three and a half years are a time of false peace, when the Antichrist comes into power through a brilliant series of treaties that brings peace to the Middle East, and structures a disarmament. (Daniel 8:11-14, 25, 9:27; Isaiah 28:18)

"At midpoint of this seven-year period the Antichrist breaks his treaty with Israel, and in the reconstructed Jewish Temple declares himself to be God. This is the abomination spoken of by Daniel. (Daniel 9:27; 8:13-14; 11:31; Matthew 24:15) These last three and a half years are of world war and great destruction. The Book of Revelation counts it as a period of 42 months. (Revelation 11:2) Chapter divisions in the Bible were not added until several hundred years ago, and most people may not believe that God had anything to do with it. But it is interesting to notice that Job has 42 chapters...

"Very few people can boast that the Devil himself has personally persecuted them, but Job could. He was the direct target of Satan. This is also a figure of what will happen to Israel in the time of Tribulation. Israel will be attacked by the very Devil...

"At the end of the book of Job, Job's captivity is turned, and he receives double all that he lost. In similar way, the captivity of Israel will be turned around after the purging of the Tribulation, and will be restored to the position of blessing."

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

In the dialogue between God and Satan — Job 1:6–12 (Through it we can understand the meaning of Christ's statement to Peter, that Satan desired to "sift [him] as wheat" — Luke 22:31.)

## WEEK 23, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: JOB 7-11

### OVERVIEW:

Job continues his response to Eliphaz: Job reproaches his friends; Bildad's theory about Job's tribulation; Job's response to Bildad; Zophar's accusations against Job.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we saw in yesterday's reading, Eliphaz was the first of Job's friends to offer his "counsel." (Job 3-4) In chapter 6, Job responds to Eliphaz's speech. As we move into chapter 7 today, Job is in the midst of continuing his response. It's as if he opens his soul and cries out, "If there is a set time for man to be upon the earth, surely my time is about up!" (7:1) Through all that has befallen Job, he has been brought to the total depths of despair. He feels there's nothing left to look forward to in life but long, empty days and sleepless nights. (7:3-4) On one hand, he's afraid his life is over, and on the other hand, he's afraid that maybe it isn't! In the midst of it all, however, Job has no clue that the things that have happened to him were actually the result of how blessed God was with Job's godly character and pure heart. Job simply assumes that because all of these horrific things happened to him—for some unknown reason, God must have been displeased with him. As we read of Job's awful plight, certainly our hearts go out to him. If we put ourselves in Job's situation, we certainly have no problem understanding why he is so distraught. As Job brings his response to Eliphaz to a conclusion at the end of chapter 7, he readily admits that he is a sinner like everybody else, but holds tenaciously to the fact that his "tribulation" is not because of some secret sin in his life that he is refusing to confess.

Then in chapter 8, Bildad, the second of Job's friends begins his "counsel." Whereas Eliphaz at least made an attempt to grace his accusation that Job must be guilty of some secret sin, Bildad goes right for Job's spiritual jugular. In effect, he tells Job that he's sick of listening to his excuses, and that he's full of hot air. If that weren't assaulting enough, he even has the audacity to tell Job that his 10 children also had to be guilty of sin, and that they had gotten from God's hand exactly what they deserved. Wow! With friends like Bildad—who needs enemies?! Do be aware, however, that there are "Bildads" in every church. They are typically well-intentioned, but they are majorly misinformed! The typical problem with these people, however, just as in Bildad's case, is that it is impossible to convince them of that. Basically, Bildad points the finger at Job and tells him that if he would simply pray and earnestly seek God, all of his "tribulation" would go away. As our wealth of biblical knowledge increases, we must be very careful that we don't turn into a bunch of "Bildads!" We must guard against the pride that causes us to think that we know why every person goes through the things they go through. As Job can tell us, that arrogant and judgmental attitude can be extremely hurtful. And like Bildad, we can also be very wrong!

In chapter 9, Job responds to Bildad's accusations. Though there were many things he could have said to defend himself, much of what Job chose to do was admit the truth of Bildad's words. Do note that most of the things that all three of Job's friends said to him were actually true. They all possessed a great deal of information about God and His ways. They were simply off in their timing and their application of that truth.

Note the seven "IF's" in chapter 9:

The 1st "IF" – (9:16-18)

The 2nd "IF" – (9:19)

The 3rd "IF" – (9:20a)

The 4th "IF" – (9:20b-26)

The 5th "IF" – (9:27–28)

The 6th "IF" – (9:29)

The 7th "IF" – (9:30–35)

As chapter 10 begins, Job sets forth a series of questions for God. Job wants to know how God could understand the sufferings of a man, since He had never been one. Obviously, Job could say that in his day. But no one in the world has been able to register that complaint against God for the past 2000 years, because God has since become a man. We now have a God who is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:15a) because He became one of us, and was "tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin." (Heb. 4:15b) Because of that, Paul tells us in Hebrews 4:16, that we can "come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help him in time of need."

In chapter 11, Zophar, the third of Job's friends begins to offer his "loving counsel." He, too, comes on with both feet, saying, in effect, "Job, I'm not going to let you get by with all of your meaningless talk and lies!" (11:2–3) Like Bildad and Eliphaz, he also tells Job that it's obvious that what he needs to do is repent, get his heart right with God, and everything would be all right.

Have you ever been an Eliphaz, Bildad, or Zophar—all up in somebody's face, thinking you knew what they needed, when what they really needed was someone to simply be a loving friend to them? Maybe there's someone you need to contact today, seeking their forgiveness for your haughty spirit and judgmental attitude.

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through JOB'S SORROWFUL CONDITION — Job 7:1–6 (Christ is called "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" — Isa. 53:3; Mark 15:34)

Through the "DAYSMAN" (mediator) Job longed for — Job 9:33 (The Lord Jesus Christ is the only mediator (daysman) between holy God and sinful men — 2 Tim. 2:5).

## WEEK 23, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: JOB 12-16

### OVERVIEW:

Job's affirmation of faith in God's wisdom; Job's defense of his righteous testimony; Eliphaz's intensified accusations and condemnation; Job's complaint of God's dealing with him.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As yesterday's reading came to a close in chapter 11, Zophar had just completed his scathing accusations against Job. As Job's three friends have all taken their turn to pound him, Job has been so overcome with grief he hasn't actually addressed the attacks they've hurled against him. That changes in chapter 12. He's had just about all of their pious, "godly counsel" he could stand! Something in our humanness says, "Go, Job! Put 'em in their place!" Job tells his friends, in effect, that their problem is that they have a whole lot of knowledge, they just don't have a whole lot of wisdom and understanding. Nothing could be more descriptive of many (or shall we go as far as to say most?) believers in the 21st century!

In chapters 13 and 14, Job continues his answer to his critics, who see themselves as his self-appointed counselors. Job is finally collecting his thoughts and verbalizing them with much greater boldness, as he defends the righteousness of his testimony. In 13:9–12, Job hurls some accusations of his own. He accuses his three friends of mocking God, of secretly being "respectors of persons," of not fearing God, and failing to remember that they are also mortal bodies of clay that will ultimately return to ashes.

By the time we come to verses 20–22 of chapter 13, Job presents God with two ultimatums:

"Knock off the tribulation."

"Let's talk! Either You ask me, or allow me to ask You, what in the world is going on?!"

Recognizing that God hadn't seen fit to take away his trials, Job decides that he'll ask God a series of four questions that he wants Him to answer. (13:23-25)

As we move into chapter 14, Job is still addressing God, not his human "counselors." In chapter 15, however, Eliphaz throws his hat back into the ring. He begins with a series of questions for Job, along with a few carefully placed and spaced "digs." Basically, Eliphaz tells Job that he has a heart problem, and that it can even be detected in his eyes. He tells Job that his spirit is in rebellion against God, and the proof of it is in the words that he has spoken. May God spare us from ever being so judgmental of people—especially when we don't know all of the facts, and especially since we never really know how God is actually working in a person's life!

As we begin chapter 16, Job begins to unload his frustration. From an historical standpoint, he is simply sharing what he is going through. It is, however, an incredible chapter from a prophetic standpoint. Chapter 16 is one of six chapters in the Old Testament that show us what was taking place in the heart and mind of the Lord Jesus Christ as He hung on the cross. The other chapters are Job 30, Isaiah 50, 52, and 53, and Psalm 22. In this chapter, Job is a picture of Christ, deserted by the Father, and hanging on the cross in our place.

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through the SMITING OF JOB — Job 16:10 (Christ was also struck by His accusers — Mat. 27:29–44; Joh. 18:22–33; Psa. 22:7–8; 109:25; Isa. 53)

Through JOB SUFFERING NOT FOR HIS OWN SIN – Job 16:17 (2 Cor. 5:21)

## WEEK 23, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: JOB 17-21

### OVERVIEW:

The continuation of Job's defense of himself; Bildad's continued accusations; Job's response to Bildad; Zophar's accusation that Job is a wicked man; Job's response to Zophar.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As yesterday's reading came to a close in chapter 16, we saw that Job's expression of what he was going through speaks prophetically of what was taking place in the heart and mind of our Lord Jesus Christ as He hung on the cross. As Job continues his speech in chapter 17, the picture also continues. When Job says in verse 7, "Mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow," we see a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ consumed with the weight of our sin. "The innocent" in verse 8, who "shall stir up himself against the hypocrite," is obviously a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, of Whom Job's innocence is simply foreshadowing. Christ is the innocent Savior who died for the guilty.

Note that chapter 17 is also a great reminder of one of the great paradoxes of life: winners don't always win—and losers don't always lose. Many times the godly suffer, while the wicked prosper.

In chapter 18, Bildad presents his second "sermon" to convince Job that there must be some secret sin that has been the cause of his intense persecution and suffering. As only God's supernatural Book has the ability to do, God's record of Bildad's words provide us unbelievable information about the Antichrist and the time of Tribulation. The subject of the passage appears for the first time in verse 5, as reference is made to "the wicked." The reference to "the wicked" in the Book of Job is a prophetic foreshadowing of "that Wicked" (the Antichrist) whom Paul mentions in 2 Thessalonians 2:8. Verse 21 of this 18th chapter looks to the coming Antichrist, and to his ultimate destination in hell: "Surely such are the dwellings of the wicked, and this is the place of him that knoweth not God."

Chapter 19 opens with Job's response to Bildad's discourse. Job's words are like a triple-exposure picture pointing to Christ's suffering on the cross, the Jew suffering in the Tribulation, and the lost man suffering in hell. The common denominator shared by these three pictures is the fact that they are all the objects of God's wrath. (19:11-12) The three-fold imagery is further seen in 19:13-19, as...

It points to ISRAEL as a proverb and a by-word of reproach.

It points to CHRIST counted as an enemy by the armies of God as He hung on the cross.

It points to the LOST MAN forever separated from everyone he knows and loves in hell.

Verses 25-27 of chapter 19 are the spiritual climax of the Book. Job's words in these verses comprise one of the greatest confessions of faith in the entire Bible. He declares that the Redeemer is alive and well; that He will physically be present on the earth in "the latter day," and that the believer will live in a new physical body! That's some pretty awesome theology for a guy who didn't have a single page of the Bible!

In chapter 20, it's Zophar's turn to take his shots at Job. Once again, the record of his words give us greater insight into the coming Antichrist, "that wicked."



In chapter 21, Job has been brought to a place of utter frustration with his counselors. His words point to the future judgment and conquest of the Antichrist's false system by the Lord Jesus Christ.

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

As "THE INNOCENT" — Job 17:8 (Christ is the innocent Savior who died for the guilty – Mat. 27:4)

Through JOB as the one whom God's WRATH was presumably kindled against – Job 19:11 (2 Cor. 5:21)

As the REDEEMER – Job 19:25 (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:14; Rev. 5:9)

## WEEK 24, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: JOB 22-28

### OVERVIEW:

Eliphaz's scathing accusations against Job; Job's desire to plead his case before God; Bildad's attack on Job; Job's desperate seeking for God.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we continue today in the Book of Job, we find that Job's counselors, called "friends," are increasingly losing control of their emotions in this "discussion" they're having with Job. Up to this point, they have twisted words and circumstances to fit their own ideas and agendas, but in chapter 22, Eliphaz enters into the realm of just blatantly saying things that are not true. Notice that in the list that Colossians 3:8-9 tell us to "put off," that there is a progression: "But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." That progression can most certainly be followed with Job's friends. They first became "angry" with Job's refusal to confess his "secret sin," and now they have worked themselves up through "wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy, communication out of their mouth," and now, through Eliphaz, "lying!" Take note of this progression the next time you allow "anger" to move back into your being. Deal with it immediately, lest you find yourself in the vortex described in Col. 3:8-9!

As we begin chapter 22, we enter into the third and final round of this bout with Job and his three friends who came with the intention of confronting and counseling him through his time of trial. There is a great overriding lesson to be learned through the "ministry" of Job's counselors. They remind us that even those of us who seek to minister the Word of God to others with the absolute best possible intentions, can be guilty of breaking people to pieces with our words—even while we think we're doing what God would have us do, and thinking we're saying what God would have us say. Job's friends had all of their theological "i's" dotted just right, and all of their doctrinal "t's" crossed to perfection—they just didn't have a clue about how to apply them. We must allow their negative example to cause us to totally depend upon God's grace to help us to learn to listen as we counsel those in need, and to be sure that we actually understand the biblical meaning of the words that can, at times, so easily roll off of our lips.

After Eliphaz delivers his scathing address in chapter 22, Job is so incredibly low that he has no where else to look—but up. All he can do is desperately seek for God. As tough as that is, it's actually not a bad place to be in the light of Deuteronomy 4:29, the theme verse of our 52 Weeks of Pursuit! In chapters 23 and 24, Job does just that—he desperately seeks God.

In chapter 25, Bildad re-enters the ring. He opens his final remarks by declaring an indisputable truth, followed by a leading question, which leads to a series of questions that form his conclusion. In response, Job will ask some questions of his own in chapter 26. He fires back six questions that Job's friends absolutely cannot answer. It is interesting to consider these same questions as questions that could and may be asked each of us at the Judgment Seat of Christ! After firing out these questions in 26:1-4, the remainder of the chapter is an unbelievable cosmological discourse that has proven to be several years ahead of "modern" science.

As we move into chapters 27 and 28, we are able to get a glimpse of Job's incredible spirit. As you read through his "speech," ask yourself whether you could maintain the integrity of your heart the way Job has. It is sobering to think that every one of us makes the choice of whether or not we will offer our absolute surrender to Christ—every single day of our life. Let's all make that surrender this day.

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through JOB'S faithfulness to God through his suffering — Job 23:1–12 (Christ's faithfulness to the Father is seen as He prayed for the Father's will to be done – Luke 22:42)

## WEEK 24, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: 2 CHRONICLES 5-8

### OVERVIEW:

Job's recollection of days gone by; Job's proclamation of his righteousness and integrity; Elihu's accusations.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we enter Job 29, we find Job looking back over his shoulder, reflecting on how good life "used to be." We call them "the good 'ole days." For most of us, it's not really that "the good ole days" were really that good, it's just that our memory is so bad, and/or so selective, that we don't remember all of the things that made life difficult during those times! Job's case, however, is different. He really did have a better life in days gone by!

Job 29:1 reminds us that this is the continuation of a parable. Biblically, a parable is something that is used to give instruction to believers, but hide truth from the skeptic. (See Mat. 13:11)

After walking back through "the good 'ole days" in chapter 29, in chapter 30, Job is brought back to the reality of his present condition. He describes the misery of his terrible state. While it tells the tale of Job's horror historically, it also, once again, paints an unbelievable picture of Christ's plight on the cross, the Jew in the Tribulation, and the lost man in hell. Note that Job 30 has the same "feel" as Isaiah 53—the classic Old Testament passage prophesying the details of our Lord's crucifixion.

In chapter 31, the tone changes rather abruptly. Job somehow digs himself up out of the depths of despair mentally, and causes us to stand in awe of this incredible man's ability to hold tenaciously to his integrity after being pulverized relentlessly both physically (from the devil), and psychologically (from his friends)! Beginning in verse 5 of chapter 31, Job fires off a series of questions regarding his personal testimony. Each is marked by the word "if," which is found 20 times in the passage! In effect, Job is saying, "If I'm guilty of any of the things you guys have accused me of, I'm ready to receive the judgment of God for it." Job ends his argument in 31:40, and the reality is, no one actually won the debate. Job, Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar have all simply become more entrenched in their own position. It teaches us a great lesson about debating "spiritual" matters. No one ever really wins. Everybody simply holds firm to their own convictions, while no communication is really taking place, because no one is actually listening. One person is just waiting for the other's lips to stop moving so they can say what they want to say.

As chapter 32 begins, all four men have run out of steam, and now, no one is talking. But don't forget, there has been one other person present throughout this whole episode with Job and his three friends! He has listened intently to everything that has been said. Because he was younger than the other men, out of respect, to this point he's kept his mouth closed. But Job has brought him to his boiling point! He feels he must open his mouth and "defend God," as it were. His name is Elihu. Like Job's three friends, he thinks he's speaking for God out of a pure heart and pure motives. And once again, you would never be able to convince him otherwise! What he says proves that he is very knowledgeable—but knowing what we know about why Job has encountered these trials reveals that while Elihu has knowledge, he, just like Job's three other "friends," definitely lacks wisdom and understanding. Everything Elihu says in chapter 32 and 33 is completely accurate in terms of truthfulness, and is right smack dab on the bull's eye. The only problem is, the bull's eye is on the wrong target! As we have said throughout our overview of Job, we must allow the Lord to teach us through the negative example of Job's friends, lest we also demoralize, discourage, and defeat our brothers and sisters with knowledge, but no wisdom and understanding. God help us!

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through Job's compassion for others — Job 29:15–17,21–25 (Mat. 4:14; 15:30–39).

Through the ridicule and affliction which Job endured — Job 30:10–11 (Mar. 15:15–20; Isa. 50:6; 53:2–5; Mat. 27:26–30; Joh. 19:1–3)

## WEEK 24, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: JOB 34-38

### OVERVIEW:

Elihu's continued accusations against Job; God's questions to Job.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we pick up in today's reading, youthful, knowledgeable, well-meaning Elihu is still running his mouth. (Somebody please pass me the muzzle!) And he still has a lot more to say to Job, "in the name of the Lord," of course! He has even convinced himself, and is trying to convince Job, that he has received his insight by inspiration of God. While Job's other "counselors" continuously pointed to some "secret sin" in Job's life as the source of his heartache and suffering, Elihu claims that he even knows what the specific sin is! Wow! Hello, Holy Spirit! He says that Job's problem is the fact that he hasn't really submitted himself to the sovereignty of God, and is bumping himself up against God's working in his life. Compare this "godly insight and inspiration" with God's own words concerning Job in chapter 1, verse 8: "There is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil!" So much for Elihu's insight and inspiration! Oh, how careful we must be about throwing God's name over the top of our own opinions and conclusions in dealing with people! We must be certain that we have a chapter and verse to support our counsel, and we must be certain that the verse means what we are passing it off to mean in its context. Job's "counselors" show us how easily we can deceive, and be deceived!

It is interesting that throughout Elihu's entire rampage, it would be impossible to fault the correctness of what he says. The problem, however, is that he is operating under a basic assumption that is false. When our basic conclusion is off base, it doesn't matter how many correct facts are hung on it to make it look and or sound "godly"—it's still just flat out wrong! Sadly, this is the problem with many discussions about spiritual matters and religion in these dark last days.

Finally, Elihu has gotten what he felt he "just had to say" off of his chest, and can now shut his mouth. Hallelujah! These four men have all had their shots at questioning Job. The "ministry" of Job's "friends" has so worn him down that now he has actually begun to question God himself. It's interesting, that when God finally speaks, He does so by actually "declaring" nothing. He rather "answers" Job's questions—by asking questions Himself! He asks a series of at least 35 questions, depending on how you divide them. They are all designed to show man, and in this case, Job in particular, that he really knows nothing about anything! The breakdown of chapter 38 is as follows:

- Questions about words without knowledge. (38:1–3)
- Questions about creation. (38:4–7)
- Questions about the waters. (38:8–11)
- Questions about the sun's light. (38:12–15)
- Questions about strange places. (38:16–21)
- Questions about the weather. (38:22–30)
- Questions about the heavens. (38:31–33)
- Questions in general. (38:34–41)

### CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the One Who watches how we live and all we do — Job 34:21. (The Lord keeps His eyes on the righteous – 1 Pet. 3:12)

## WEEK 24, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: JOB 39-42

### OVERVIEW:

The continuation of God's questions to Job; God's great power reviewed; Job's submission to God; Job's prayer for his friends; God's double blessing upon Job.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we completed chapter 38 yesterday, God was in the midst of answering Job's questions with a series of questions that brought all of Job's questions to a screeching halt! God's questions had to do with creationism, and appear to be totally unrelated and disconnected from Job's situation, until you realize that Job had gotten to the place that his focus had become directed solely onto his personal problems. God attempts to redirect Job's focus to help him to see the "big picture." Namely, to show Job...

His problems aren't as big as he thought! And,  
His problems aren't the center of the universe... God is!

Having laid down a series of cosmological and naturalistic questions in chapter 38, God now asks Job questions about animals. In fact, from Job 38 to 41, God mentions 14 animals. Jeff Adams reminds us, "Seven is God's number of completion, the number associated with his perfect works, just as in the seven days of creation. Two is the number of witness, or confirmation. We are considering a list of 14 animals for whatever reason. Could it be that God wants to confirm the perfection of His work to Job? Is there valuable truth to be learned from God's zoo?"

Of particular interest are the two animals mentioned in chapters 40 and 41, "Behemoth" and "Leviathan," respectively. A few things to consider, first of all, concerning "Behemoth." The word "behemoth" is not a translation of a Hebrew word, but rather a "transliteration." In other words, because the word has no English equivalent, it cannot be translated. So, when the translators came to this particular Hebrew word, it was simply given an English spelling and pronunciation. While some speculate that "behemoth" is an elephant, hippopotamus, or a water ox, the word simply means "beast" or "animal." What's interesting, however, is that it is a plural form of the word, and yet, all of the pronouns in the passage concerning this animal are singular. So, either God uses some really bad grammar—or there's something else going on here!

Can you think of any other place in the Bible where a single "animal," is actually a composite of different "animals" (plural)? How about "the beast" (i.e. animal) in Rev. 13:1-2? We know, of course that "the beast" is the Antichrist. And yet, "the beast" (singular) is actually described as a composite of several beasts (plural): the leopard, the bear, and the lion. When we see who "behemoth" actually is (the Antichrist), we find that God is, in a sense, actually answering the question of Job's suffering—by pointing him to the source! The same spiritual power that was behind Job's "tribulation," will be the mastermind behind the worldwide "Tribulation" in the very near future! None other than "Satan incarnate!" Wow!

"Leviathan" in chapter 41 is likewise intriguing. He, too, is speculated by "scholars" to be some sort of animal or sea creature—either a whale, a crocodile, a sea monster, or perhaps even a mythological beast. Comparing Scripture with Scripture, however, it reveals a very interesting description of "Leviathan!" Psalm 74:14 lets us know that whatever a "leviathan" is, it has more than one head! And Isaiah 27:1 specifically identifies "leviathan" as a "serpent" and a "dragon." Hmmmm. Can you think of any creature in the Bible that has more than one head, and is specifically identified as both a serpent and a dragon? How about Revelation 12:3?! It talks about a great "DRAGON, having seven heads," and verse 9 of that same chapter says, "And the great DRAGON was cast out, that old

SERPENT, called the DEVIL, and SATAN!” Once again, we see by comparing scripture with scripture, that God was, in fact, answering Job's questions—pointing him to the one who was responsible for his “tribulation.” Again, none other than Satan himself! Wow! What a Book! And, what a God!

To summarize our study of Job, allow me to “borrow” from Jeff Adams’ summary in his commentary on this Book, which I have already mentioned, I highly recommend:

1. Some questions will never be answered in this life, if ever, God owes us no explanations.
2. Some believers suffer for no reason of their own making.
3. We are but a small part of an immense spiritual war that has been raging since the fall of Lucifer, a war of which we have little understanding.
4. Unless we exercise great caution and discernment, even our best intentions to minister to those who suffer can be easily seized by the enemy to use to his advantage in this spiritual war.
5. An abundance of facts about God does not necessarily qualify anyone to understand God's purposes, especially to diagnose His workings in the life of another.
6. Our need is not just for more information about God; our need is to know God.
7. When baffled and overwhelmed by trials that are not of our own creation, we should lift up our eyes to see the big picture of God's plan for the universe. We should simply stand in awe of God's great power, and simply let Him be God.
8. All trials for righteousness' sake ultimately lead to new beginnings.

**CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

Through Job's praying for his friends — Job 42:10 (Christ both modeled for us and instructed us to pray for those who falsely accuse us – Luke 6:28; 23:34).



## WEEK 24, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: PSALM 1-11

### OVERVIEW:

The contrast between the "blessed man" and the "ungodly man;" a prophecy of Christ and His request for the heathen as His inheritance; David cries out to God for help and deliverance from his enemies; the Lord's name is magnified and David wonders with amazement why God is even mindful of sinful man.

### HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The word "psalm" means "hymn" or "praise." This Old Testament book was the national "hymn book," as it were, for the Israelites. The Psalms reveal many varied emotions and experiences of God's people: adoration, joy, faith, grace, mercy, suffering, hope, etc. In just the 11 Psalms in today's reading, we see David writing about his emotions and experiences...

- During his son Absalom's rebellion. (Psalms 3–6)
- During the persecution he experienced at the hands of Saul. (Psalm 7)
- During his time as a shepherd. (Psalm 8) And...
- During his reign as the king of Israel. (Psalms 9 and 11)

Because of the number of psalms in today's reading, for the sake of space and time, we will focus our attention on only one particular psalm... Psalm 1. In this psalm, God contrasts for us the "blessed man," (1:1–3) and the "ungodly man." (1:4–6) Note, first of all, that the "blessed man" is one that is separated from the world! (1:1) "He WALKETH not in the counsel of the ungodly!" Recognize that the Bible consistently refers to the actual lives we live on a daily basis as our "walk." (See Eph. 4:1, 5:2) Our "walk" begins with trusting Christ alone for our salvation—and yet, continues with our faithful obedience to God's Word. The psalmist reveals that the man God "blesses" makes progress in His "walk" by three things that he is extremely careful NOT to do!

1. The "blessed man" does not WALK in the COUNSEL of the UNGODLY. (1:1a)  
In other words, he is very specific about who he allows to have a voice in his life!
2. The "blessed man" does not STAND in the WAY of SINNERS. (1:1b)  
In other words, he is very careful about where he actually positions himself in the course of his daily life!
3. The "blessed man" does not SIT in the SEAT of the SCORNFUL. (1:1c)  
In other words, he is very particular about those with whom he chooses to associate!

And notice from 1:1, that the "blessed man" is very mindful of three groups of people who are negatively seeking to influence his life: the UNGODLY, SINNERS and the SCORNFUL. Also notice that he recognizes the downward spiral of their influence: First, we begin to WALK according to their COUNSEL; which leads to our STANDING, or just observing their WAY of life; and before we know it, we find ourselves SITTING with them, participating with them in a way of life that SCORNS the very truth that God says in His Word is to characterize our lives!

Then, notice the contrast introduced in 1:2, with the word, "But." After identifying the negative things the "blessed man" makes certain are NOT a part of his life in verse 1, the psalmist carefully identifies the contrasting positive things that DO characterize the life of the "blessed man."

Note, several positive things here...

1. The "blessed man" DELIGHTS in the Word of God. (1:2a)  
It brings him joy... it brings him refreshment... it brings him pleasure and satisfaction... because he LOVES it! (Psa.119:47)
2. The "blessed man" MEDITATES on the Word of God. (1:2b)  
All of the DAY and all of the NIGHT, the Word of God is what completely saturates and permeates his thoughts and controls his mind. Note that MEDITATION is to the SOUL—what DIGESTION is to the BODY. (Jer. 15:16)
3. The "blessed man" PLANTS his life in the Word of God. (1:3)  
The decision to "delight" and to "meditate" in the Word of God results in the development of a strong biblical root system that bears "fruit that remains" (Joh. 15:16), causing him to continuously "prosper" spiritually.

Note also, that the perfect example of this "blessed man" is none other than our Lord Jesus Christ Himself! (Joh. 14:6) He is the WAY (Psa 1:1)... the TRUTH (Psa. 1:2)... and the LIFE! (Psa. 1:3)

Then, in 1:4–6, the psalmist gives us a biblical description of the "ungodly man." In stark contrast to the "blessed man," the first thing we learn about "the ungodly" is that they "are not so." That is, they are nothing like the "blessed man!" While the "godly" or "blessed man" is compared to a tree that is strong, beautiful, and fruitful—the "ungodly man" is compared to chaff that even the slightest wind blows away—because it has no roots! Paul used a similar metaphor in Ephesians 4 when he talked about how spiritual children are "tossed to and fro, and carried about" with every wind of doctrine" that blows by. (Eph. 4:14) Note also that 1:5 clearly teaches that there is a coming "judgment" that is prepared for "the ungodly," at which they will fall on their knees (i.e. they "shall not stand") and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord! (Phi. 2:10–11)

In 1:6, the psalmist presents the "two WAYS" that are set before each of us: "the WAY of the RIGHTEOUS," and "the WAY of the UNGODLY." In Matthew 7:13–14, Jesus also talked about these "two WAYS." Comparing the two passages, Psalm 1 and Matthew 7:13–14 (1 Cor 2:13), we learn that "the UNGODLY" have chosen the "BROAD WAY, that leadeth to DESTRUCTION," whereas "the RIGHTEOUS" have chosen the "NARROW WAY, that leadeth unto LIFE." Note that "the ungodly" take heed to "the counsel of the ungodly" (1:11) as opposed to "all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27)—and chooses "the friendship of the world" (Jam. 4:4), rather than the friendships found in "the congregation of the righteous." (Psa. 1: 5b)

### **CHRIST IS REVEALED:**

As THE SON – Psalm 2:12. We're told in Psalm 2:10–12 to "be wise NOW" and "KISS the Son" because "blessed are all they that put their trust in Him." (Eph. 1:12–14)