

WEEK 37, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: EZEKIEL 37-40

OVERVIEW:

The resurrection of Israel (Chapter 37); God's Judgment against Gog (chapters 38–39); Ezekiel's vision of the millennial temple. (chapter 40)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Chapter 37 continues a series of prophecies given to Ezekiel the night before the messenger of Ezekiel 33:21–22 arrived. God knew that Israel would faint in their hearts once they knew that Jerusalem had been destroyed and the temple had burned. The word "hopeless" would be a completely fair description! God takes Ezekiel to a valley full of dry bones. He asks him if the bones can live again. It is important to realize that if the children of Israel didn't believe in an individual resurrection (as some liberal scholars would suggest) — this vision would have no meaning. Ezekiel is commanded to prophesy to the bones (37:4) and to the wind. (37:9) After Ezekiel follows God's instructions, the bones are resurrected before his very eyes. God explains the meaning of the vision in Ezekiel 37:11–14. These bones represent the whole house of Israel being resurrected as a nation.

The Jews were cutoff from their homeland — defeated and without hope. God gives Israel hope. He gives them His Word. He promises that Israel, as a nation, will be resurrected! (Isa. 66:8) God tells Ezekiel to join together the sticks upon which He has written a name that represents a part of Israel — illustrating the fact that Israel will be one nation. (37:15–19) The remainder of the chapter looks forward to the millennium.

Chapters 38 and 39 tell of a northern confederacy of nations (38:6,15) who will invade the Promised Land and wage war against Israel. (38:16) The phrase "after many days" and "latter year" in Ezekiel 38:8 indicates that this prophecy is tied to the coming of Christ at His Second Advent. (39:11) This confederacy will then be led by the Antichrist (Rev. 12:1-3) and will be the recipient of God's fury and wrath. (38:18–23) It will take Israel seven months to bury the dead! (39:12) God also instructs Ezekiel to speak to the carrion birds and carnivorous animals to consume the fallen flesh. (Rev. 19:21) Chapter 39 ends with God's promise to never hide His face from Israel again. This prophetic promise refers to the beginning of the millennial kingdom.

Introduction to Ezekiel 40-48

The last nine chapters of Ezekiel, beginning with chapter 40, form an inseparable unit. Explicit details about Christ's millennial reign follow the great battle described in chapters 38 and 39. This portion of scripture provides more detail about the 1000-year kingdom than all other Old Testament prophecies combined. In these chapters, we will find a vivid description of the millennial temple and reinstated Jewish rituals and sacrifices. This portion of Ezekiel must be approached the same way we have approached the previous 39 chapters... literally! Ezekiel, who is a priest, is speaking of a literal temple... and literal sacrifices... that will exist in a literal future kingdom! We must be careful to understand that the reinstatement of the temple and sacrifices in no way nullifies or diminishes the finished work of Christ on the cross. Just as the sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed to the finished work of Christ on the cross, the sacrifices in the millennium will point back to the finished work of Christ on the cross. These last nine chapters break down as follows:

- The New Temple. (40:1–43:12)
- The New Worship.(43:13–47:12)
- The New Appointment of Land. (47:13–48:35)

Note that the Book of Ezekiel began with a vision of Christ at the Second Advent — and ends with a vision of Christ in the millennial kingdom.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As “THE MAN” in Ezekiel 40:3.

WEEK 37, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: EZEKIEL 41-44

OVERVIEW:

Measurements of millennial temple (chapter 41); measurements of the temple chambers (chapter 42); God's glory returns to the temple (chapter 43); the priests. (chapter 44)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Chapters 41 and 42 describe the specific measurements of the temple.

Note that it is Christ alone, not Ezekiel, who enters the "most holy place" of the temple! (41:3–4) This serves as a great reminder that it was Christ alone who entered the most holy place to make atonement for our sin! (Heb. 9:8,12;10:19)

The side chambers will be the priest's quarters in the millennial temple. (41:5–11) This serves as a reminder to us of the priesthood of all believers. The priesthood of all believers is a very key New Testament doctrine. In the Old Testament, there was only a select group of men who were chosen to offer sacrifices as Levitical priests in accordance with the law. These priests were all prophetic shadows pointing, of course, to our great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, who would by His one sacrifice for sin, bring the need for a Levitical priesthood to an end. But what the New Testament teaches, is that because of Christ's sacrifice, He has now made all of us who have called upon His name for salvation, part of a new priesthood — commonly referred to as "the priesthood of all believers." Peter said of us in 1 Peter 2:9: "But ye are a chosen generation, a ROYAL PRIESTHOOD, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light." In Revelation 1:5–6, John said: "... Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And hath made us kings and PRIESTS unto God and his Father..." Peter said that we are Christ's "HOLY PRIESTHOOD, to offer up SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 2:5) It should be noted that there are at least seven "SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES" referred to in scripture:

1. The sacrifice of PRAISE. (Heb. 13:15; Psa. 54:6; Jer. 33:11)
2. The sacrifice of THANKSGIVING. (Psa. 107:22; 116:17; Heb. 13:15)
3. The sacrifice of DOING GOOD and COMMUNICATING to OTHER'S NEEDS. (Heb. 13:16)
4. The sacrifice of our BODY. (Rom. 12:1)
5. The sacrifice of a BROKEN SPIRIT. (Psa. 51:17)
6. The sacrifice of RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Psa. 4:5; 51:19; Deu. 33:19)
7. The sacrifice of FAITH. (Phi. 2:17)

In light of these sacrifices, we would all do well to ask ourselves, "Am I fulfilling my role in bringing glory to God as a New Testament priest?"

The galleries mentioned in Ezekiel 41:15–20 were buildings having decorations described as palm trees and cherubim. Between the palm trees was a cherub with two faces: the face of a man, and the face of a lion. These faces obviously represent both the HUMANITY and KINGSHIP of our Lord Jesus Christ — who was 100% MAN... and at the same time, 100% GOD! The altar of incense is described in Ezekiel 41:21–26. (c.f. Exo. 30:1–3) The incense represents the prayers of God’s people. (Psa. 141:2)

Note that there is no reference to the Ark of the Covenant in the furnishings of the millennial temple. This is a direct fulfillment of Jeremiah 3:16–17: “And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.” Obviously, there will no longer be a need for the Ark as a type of Christ in the temple, for Christ Himself will physically be sitting on the throne of His glory in the temple during the millennium!

Chapter 42 contains specific measurements of the court temple chambers (42:1–12), details concerning the use of the chambers by the priests (42:13–14), and the measurement of the outer wall and entire complex. (42:15–20) The walls in the millennial temple will be approximately one mile on each side, which means that the millennial temple will not fit on the current Mount Moriah (where Solomon’s temple stood). This will require a “modification” of the land. The prophet Zechariah spoke about this change in the topography of the land in Zechariah 14:9–10: “And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one. All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem...”

Chapter 43 must be understood in the context of Ezekiel’s previous prophecy. Earlier in the book, we saw that God’s glory had departed from the temple. (10:19; 11:23) This chapter speaks of God’s glory returning to a future physical temple. (43:1–5) Praise God for His mercy and grace — and for His passion for the glory of His own name! (Eze. 20:9,14,22,44; 36:23; 39:7,25)

May we also learn from the Book of Ezekiel, that God’s name was always intended to dwell in all of it’s glory in the temple — and, therefore, God’s/our enemy has always hated it. The record of history is clear about that! There has always been a war for the glory of our God’s name as it has dwelt in the temple. The enemy hated Solomon’s temple — it was ultimately burned by Babylon. The enemy hated Zerubbabel’s/Herod’s temple — it was ultimately burned by Rome. The enemy hated Christ, who was the personification of the temple (Mat. 12:6; Joh. 2:19) — and He was crucified by Rome. God has now made us His temple where He has set His name (1Cor. 6:19–20) — and so now, the enemy hates us! We are now the target of the enemy on planet earth. Satan seeks to devour us (1 Pet. 5:8) — because he wants to devour the glory that God is worthy of receiving from the temple of our lives. There may even be times when he is successful! However, just as God’s glory will return to the physical temple, God can take lives that the enemy has destroyed — and restore them for His glory! Do recognize, however, that unlike the physical temples of the Old Testament — God will never leave us! (Heb. 13:5; Eph. 4:30)

Chapter 44 deals with regulations for the priests who will serve in the millennial temple. Once again, as the priesthood of believers, we find numerous pictures of how we should minister in our priesthood.

It should be noted that "the prince" described in Ezekiel 44:3 is permitted to enter through the vestibule, or the porch of the eastern gate — the same gate through which the Messiah has entered! This prince cannot be the Messiah, however, for the simple fact that he offers a sacrifice for his own sin. (45:22; Heb. 4:15) This prince is referred to at least 14 times in chapters 44–47. We cannot be sure as to the identity of this prince. He is most likely a descendant of David. Some students of the scripture believe he may even be David himself! We can only speculate.

Will there be sin in the millennium? This is often a confusing concept for believers. We must remember that at the end of the millennium, there will be yet another sinful rebellion against God. (Rev. 20:7–9) But just who will these rebels be? Be it known, they will certainly not be us! As believers in Christ from the church age, we will carry out our existence in the millennial kingdom having received a glorified body that will be exactly like Christ's glorified body, which, of course, is a body incapable of committing sin. (Phi. 3:21; 1 Cor. 15:53–54; Col 3:4; Rom. 8:23) Hallelujah! But also know that there will be tribulation saints who will "endure to the end" of the tribulation period (Mat. 24:13) who will also enter into the millennial kingdom in mortal bodies... who will continue to have children and further populate the millennial kingdom. These will be born with a sin nature, and must willingly choose to receive Christ. When Satan is loosed for that little season at the end of the millennium, they will make their choice. Sadly, and might I add, unbelievably (!!!), there will be those who will ultimately choose to reject Christ. Why? For the same reason people reject Christ today. They simply refuse to submit to Christ's Lordship. (Luk. 19:14)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the One who enters the "most Holy place" — Ezekiel 41:3–4. (Heb. 9:8,12)

WEEK 37, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: EZEKIEL 45-48

OVERVIEW:

The allotment of land for the priests and the millennial temple (chapter 45); offerings and sacrifices during the millennium (chapter 46); the waters of the land healed and the land divided. (chapters 47–48)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Chapter 45 begins with an allotment of land to be offered unto the Lord during the millennium. (45:1–8) This portion of land will cover a territory of about eight square miles. A rectangle of 25,000 X 10,000 cubits in the middle will be for the temple, and will be set aside as the dwelling for the priests. A similar rectangle to the north of it will be for the Levites — and on the south, there will be a rectangle of 25,000 X 5,000 cubits that will be reserved for the city itself. (Note: A “cubit” is an ancient linear unit based on the length of the forearm, from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. It is usually considered to be a unit of measurement that is from 17 to 21 inches, or 43 to 53 cm.)

Ezekiel's description allows us to see that the temple will be the focal point of the land, and that it will be surrounded by an area for the priests on the east and west, an area for the Levites on the north, with the city located to the south. An area for the prince (discussed in yesterday's reading) will exist outside the domain of the priests.

After detailing the layout of the land, Ezekiel admonishes the priests of his day to execute judgment and justice by ceasing to take advantage of the people. (45:9–12) The conduct to which the priests had grown accustomed will certainly have no place in the millennial kingdom.

Ezekiel 45:13–17 records the offerings Israel will give to the prince. The prince in turn will make provision for the sacrifices for public worship. The remainder of the chapter (45:18–20) records the institution of a new festival to start the “new year” with an emphasis on holiness — as well as the reinstatement of the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. (45:21–25) Note also that the offerings in the millennial temple will be much richer and more abundant than those under the law.

Chapter 46 deals with the offerings and the sacrifices that will be offered during the millennium. We are also informed about the reinstatement of the Sabbath. (46:1) Do note that the Sabbath is an entirely Jewish observance — and was never intended to be kept by anyone other than a Jew! (Rev. 2:9b) God clearly reveals that it was a “sign” that He instituted specifically and exclusively between He and the nation of Israel. (Eze. 20:12; Deu. 5:14–15) As the people who comprise the Lord's church, for us to try to incorporate the Sabbath into our worship makes us “false worshippers” — who are offering to God “false worship!” (John. 4:23) Ezekiel lets us know in 46:12 that it will be on the Sabbath when the prince will enter through the eastern gate of the inner court to lead the children of Israel in worship.

Ezekiel 46:16–17 teaches that if the prince gives an inheritance to his sons, it is permanent — while a gift given to a servant, lasts only to the year of Jubilee. And what an incredible picture that paints for us! Because, praise God, His “Prince” (our Lord Jesus Christ — Acts 3:15; 5:31) deals with us as “sons” — and not as “servants!” (Gal. 4:7; Rom. 8:14)

Chapter 47 begins with Ezekiel being escorted again to the door of the temple. (47:1) The waters issue forth from the entrance, symbolizing that all blessings flow from the presence of the Lord. (Jam. 1:17) God then heals and transforms the waters of the Dead Sea — a body of water that had formerly been incapable of supporting life — into a living sea of fresh water! (47:6–12) It is an incredible picture of the fact that we, too, we're a body that was incapable of supporting life, but has now been spiritually healed and transformed by the power of God — and is now capable of providing "life" to those who are dead in trespasses and sins! (Eph. 2:1)

The remainder of this chapter (47:13–23) and chapter 48 deal with the dividing of the land. It should be noted that the stranger (the "non Jews") living during the millennium will not be excluded. (47:21–23) The Mosaic Law did not permit the stranger to acquire land. It will, however, be permissible during the millennium. The right is extended to those who will settle permanently in the land of promise, having children there. This further reminds us of the fact that there will be children born during the millennium.

The final chapter (48) deals with the distribution of the Promised Land for the millennial age. All the tribal portions extend across the breadth of the land. All the tribes are west of the Jordan, with a central tract of land separated for the temple, for the city, and for the prince's land (discussed in chapter 45).

Notice that Dan is the first tribe mentioned as Ezekiel begins talking about the distribution of the land. What makes that so interesting is that when the tribes were listed in Revelation 7 concerning the 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes of Israel that will comprise the 144,000 witnesses of Jehovah during the tribulation period, the tribe of Dan had been written out of the list of tribes because of their idolatry. (Rev. 7:5–8) But glory to God, in the millennium, God, in His grace and mercy, will restore the tribe of Dan! Don't ever forget, our God is all about restoration! He restores what has been lost! He repairs what has been broken! He sees past our failures! He seeks our restoration!

The Book of Ezekiel began with much of Israel in exile. Nebuchadnezzar was the king of the world. Over the course of Ezekiel's life, the glory of the Lord departed from the temple, and the temple and Jerusalem were burned and destroyed. In these last nine chapters, however, God has given Ezekiel a glimpse of Israel's future. The Book of Ezekiel ends with a new city — and the name of that city is, "The Lord is there!" (48:35) Hallelujah!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As waters of life coming forth from the presence of God — Ezekiel 47:1 (John 4:14)

WEEK 37, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: DANIEL 1-3

OVERVIEW:

Daniel and his friends are taken captive in Babylon away from their families (Chapter 1); Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Daniel's interpretation (Chapter 2); The image of gold erected by Nebuchadnezzar and the refusal of Daniel's three friends to bow down and worship it. (Chapter 3)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Since the Jews had refused to repent and follow the Lord in obedience through the passionate preaching of the prophet Jeremiah, the Babylonian army came in and conquered their land just as Jeremiah had warned. When a nation would overtake another nation in those days, it was customary that the very best and most promising of their youth would be taken to be trained in the king's court. Since Daniel and his three teenage friends were all princes of the royal family (1:3) — they, of course, were the ones who were snatched from their homes in Jerusalem, and taken to the king of Babylon's palace. The king's goal, of course, was to conform them to the ways of Babylon, that they might serve his purposes in his kingdom for the rest of their lives. As is detailed in 1:4b–7, this conforming process involved a new home, new knowledge, new diets, and new names. Obviously, Satan's strategy today is no different than it was then! He is bent on conforming God's people (and maybe we could say, especially young people!) to the kingdom of this present evil world's system (Rom. 12:1–2) — that they might serve his purposes for the rest of their lives! (2 Tim. 2:26)

Showing unbelievable courage and maturity, however, Daniel and his friends purposed in their heart that they would not defile themselves with the king's meat. (1:8) They dared to stand for what they believed to be true and right — even though it meant doing so at the risk of their own lives. Risking their own lives was one thing, but their decision also meant risking the life of Melzar — the one the king had appointed to control the diets of the Hebrew children. Melzar understood that if it would become evident by their physical appearance that they were not following the king's directions — it would mean his neck, as well as theirs! (1:10) Daniel believed God would honor their refusal to eat the king's meat, and asked Melzar, in whom he had found favor, for a 10 day trial of simply eating pulse (vegetables) and water to prove that God would step up on their behalf. God did, indeed, step up, as their countenance was much healthier looking after the 10 day trial period than the others who were eating according to the king's prescribed diet. So often we talk about the law of sowing and reaping (Gal. 6:7–8) from a negative standpoint — this happens to be a positive example of the principle! Because of the great faith and trust these young men sowed at this point in their life, they reaped God's promotion and protection in the worldly kingdom of Babylon throughout the remainder of their lives!

In chapter 2, Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, has a dream and demands that the wise men in his court not only interpret it, but actually tell him what the dream was! None were up to the task, so Nebuchadnezzar ordered all of the so-called "wise men" to be slain. At the last minute, however, God reveals the dream and its interpretation to Daniel. He proceeds to tell the king the dream, sparing the lives of the wise men from certain death. Nebuchadnezzar is quite impressed and pleased with Daniel, and to show his appreciation, promotes Daniel and his three friends to key positions of authority in his kingdom. It should be noted that the dream that Daniel interpreted was actually a prophetic outline of world history. It describes the kingdoms and governments that would rule the world beginning with Babylon at that time — all the way up to this present day! (2:28) In fact, without the revelation

of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel, it would be impossible to interpret the Book of Revelation. The two books go hand in hand. (1 Cor. 2:13)

Chapter 3 takes place approximately 20 years after Nebuchadnezzar's dream. While Nebuchadnezzar had acknowledged that Jehovah God is the "God of gods, and a Lord of kings" (2:47), he evidently suffered a major lapse in memory in that 20 year period. In this chapter he sets up a golden image of himself, requiring every person in the entire kingdom to bow before it and worship it. Obviously, this poses a major problem for Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Babylonian names of Daniel's three Hebrew friends). If they were so surrendered to God's Word that they refused to eat the king's meat, they certainly would have no part in bowing down before the king's image! (Note: Daniel must have been away from the kingdom at the time the image was set up, because his uncompromising and godly character most certainly proves that he would have been among those who refused to bow down to the image!) Their refusal to bow to his golden image caused Nebuchadnezzar to have them cast into the fiery furnace. In the midst of the furnace, there is an incredible pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ, the fourth man in the fire, who protected them, not only from the flames, but even from the very smell of smoke! Nebuchadnezzar was reminded once again of the power of Jehovah God, and made a decree stating that it was illegal for anyone to speak against Him! He also promoted these three men in his kingdom.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As THE STONE — Daniel 2:35,45 (Jesus is the chief corner stone — Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6–7; Rom. 9:31–33)

As the FOURTH MAN IN THE FIRE — Daniel 3:25.

WEEK 37, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: DANIEL 4-6

OVERVIEW:

Nebuchadnezzar's tree dream and Daniel's interpretation; Belshazzar (grandson of Nebuchadnezzar) and the handwriting of God on the wall; Daniel and the lion's den.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

In chapter 4, Nebuchadnezzar has another dream. This time the dream was about a huge tree overshadowing the entire earth that was ordered to be cut down by an angelic voice. Once again, the king summoned his wise men to interpret the dream, but to no avail — and so once again, he called upon Daniel, the man of God, to provide the interpretation. After hearing the description of the dream, Daniel was rather reluctant to declare the troubling interpretation, sitting in complete silence for a solid hour. The dream dealt with some pretty disconcerting things the king would be encountering in his near future.

The interpretation/explanation of the dream was not difficult. The tree represented Nebuchadnezzar and his mighty kingdom, and the tree would be cut down because Nebuchadnezzar did not give God the glory even after beholding all of the things God had done. (see Dan. 1–3) The interpretation specified that not only would Nebuchadnezzar lose his position, but he would be forced to live like a beast of the field for seven years. The intent of those seven horrific years was obviously to teach Nebuchadnezzar humility, and yet, even after hearing and believing the interpretation, he refused to repent, and continued with his prideful boasting. (4:30)

While his boastful words were still in his mouth, the interpretation of the dream began its fulfillment. For seven years he lived like a beast, just as the dream had delineated. After those seven long years, he finally “lifted up his eyes unto heaven ... and blessed the most high.” (4:34) Though it took these drastic measures to finally flush out Nebuchadnezzar's pride, this chapter is essentially the story of Nebuchadnezzar's conversion! Our God is, indeed, merciful! Hallelujah!

May Nebuchadnezzar's powerful statement in 4:37 be a very practical warning to all of us: “those that walk in pride [God] is able to abase.” And yet, recognize that this chapter is actually a prophetic preview of what will befall the nations of the world in the latter days. Just about the time the nations will be boasting of their greatness and glory, God will send seven years of awful judgment upon them — bringing them extremely low. Then, at the end of the tribulation period, Christ will return to the earth to establish His millennial kingdom. The nations that have trusted Him will enter into the glorious kingdom — while the others will be abased.

In chapter 5, Daniel is now about 80 years old, and Belshazzar, Nebuchadnezzar's grandson, is now king. Apparently, Belshazzar had not been impressed with his grandfather's decision to worship the one true God of heaven, as we find him in this chapter throwing a party in honor of one of the Babylonian gods. And yet, he was not content to simply drink wine in honor of his gods — his rebellious spirit made him feel the need to also blaspheme the God of the Jews (and the whole earth) — bringing in the sacred temple vessels to be used in his idolatrous and blasphemous feast. (5:3–4) It was then, that a mysterious hand appeared — writing a secret message on the wall, causing Belshazzar to shake uncontrollably in fear. (5:6) As usual, the king's experts could not interpret the message in the handwriting on the wall — causing the king to become even more freaked out. (5:9)

Evidently, the queen hears about how God had crashed her wicked husband's party, and enters into the room to tell him about a man by the name of Daniel who could most certainly provide the interpretation of the writing. Obviously, Belshazzar was completely oblivious of Daniel — and Daniel's God! As Daniel is summoned, as we have grown to expect, he quickly proceeds to exercise his God-given spiritual wisdom in providing the interpretation. Three key words summarize God's message to Belshazzar in the infamous "handwriting on the wall" (a phrase used to this day because of this account, to refer to circumstances that clearly indicate imminent disaster): "numbered, weighed, and divided." Belshazzar's days were "numbered" — and his time was up! He had been "weighed" on God's scales — and found wanting! And now his kingdom would be taken from him — and "divided" by the Medes and Persians.

The question is, did Belshazzar actually believe Daniel — because there is certainly no evidence of repentance — or the least bit of concern, for that matter! He did, however, keep his promise to Daniel — putting him third in command, as if his kingdom would continue forever! Yet, that same night, Belshazzar was slain and the Medes and Persians took the kingdom just as God had said! (5:30–31)

Chapter 6 deals with a day in the life of Daniel, the Prime Minister of the Medo-Persian empire. God had honored Daniel's faithfulness through many different kings and kingdoms. Don't forget, though, that ever since Cain and Abel, the wicked have hated the righteous — a fact proven again by the events in this chapter. The other leaders of the land conspire against Daniel and manipulate the king to pass a law prohibiting any man from petitioning any God or man, except for the king, for a period of 30 days. This, of course, was a trap specifically designed to ensnare Daniel, because they knew he purposely and consistently cleared off time in his busy schedule three times during the day to pray to his God — and knew he would continue regardless of the law, choosing to obey God rather than men. (6:10; Acts 5:29) After hearing of this new law, just as His conspirators suspected, Daniel fearlessly continued his pattern of praying three times a day just as before! Though the king loved and respected Daniel, because of the law, he was forced to cast Daniel into the lion's den — even against his own inner desires. (6:14) The law simply could not be reversed, even by the king himself. (6:15)

Daniel, of course, was placed into the lion's den — sending King Darius into a night of fasting... and sleeplessness! (6:16–18) When morning finally arrived, much to the king's delight, he discovered that Daniel's God had miraculously spared him from the mouths of the lions. (6:19–23) The men who had accused Daniel were then cast into the lion's den and killed. (6:24) The king then made a decree stating that Daniel's God was the one true God, and that He was to be feared and followed. (6:25–27) Daniel went on to prosper in the kingdom throughout the reign of Darius and Cyrus. (6:28)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As GOD'S ANGEL sent to shut the lion's mouths — Daniel 6:22. (Rev. 20:3; 1 Pet. 1:8; Heb. 11:33)

WEEK 38, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: DANIEL 7-9

OVERVIEW:

Daniel's vision of the four great beasts; Daniel's vision of the ram and the he-goat; Daniel's 70 weeks.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Until now, Daniel has been interpreting dreams for others. In chapter 7, God gives him extraordinary visions of his own. His first vision is of four great beasts that came up from the sea. An angel explains this dream to Daniel. Each beast represented a kingdom:

1. The LION with wings: the BABYLONIAN empire. (7:4) Babylon was still ruling at this time, but in just a few years (as chapter 5 explains) the empire would fall.
2. The BEAR with ribs: the MEDO-PERSIAN empire. (7:5) The three ribs represent the three empires already defeated in history (Egypt, Babylonia, Libya). The fact that the bear stood "raised up on one side" indicates that one half of the empire (the Persian half) was stronger and more honorable than the other half. (the Medes)
3. The four-headed winged LEOPARD: the GRECIAN empire. (7:6) The Grecian empire was, of course, led by Alexander the Great who swiftly conquered the world, defeating the Persians in about 331 B.C. Alexander died, however, in 323 B.C., and his vast kingdom was divided into four parts (thus the four heads). Four of his generals each took parts of the kingdom and ruled them as monarchs.
4. The terrible BEAST: the ROMAN empire. (7:7–8, 17–27) This picture seems to go beyond history into the "latter days" because we see the ten horns on the beast which parallel the ten toes of the image in chapter 2, the revived Roman Empire of the last days. Verses 8 and 20 tell us that a "little horn" (ruler) will appear and defeat three of the ten kingdoms represented by the ten horns and ten toes. This little horn will then become a world ruler, the Anti-Christ! His mouth will speak great things and he will persecute the saints for three and a half years. (7:25) God will send judgment (7:9–14, 26–28) in the person of Jesus Christ to slay this beast and set up his kingdom forever!

This vision in chapter 7 complements and supplements the one from chapter 2. Chapter 2 provides the vision of the nations from MAN'S vantage point (precious metals) — while the vision of chapter 7 provides the vision of the nations from GOD'S vantage point (ferocious beasts). The vision in chapter 8 is actually an amplification of 7:6, explaining how Greece will conquer Medo-Persia.

In chapter 9, we have the prophecy concerning Daniel's 70 weeks. While Daniel was in prayer confessing his own sin's, along with the sins of his nation, the angel Gabriel touched him and proceeded to give him this prophecy concerning Jerusalem. It is a time period of 70 weeks of years ($70 \times 7 = 490$ years). Verse 25 tells us that the event that will begin the countdown of this 490 year period is a decree that allows the Jews to go back to Jerusalem after being scattered for a time. This decree came about 100 years after Daniel received this prophecy, when Artaxerxes decreed that Nehemiah could return and rebuild the city of Jerusalem in 445 B.C. (Neh. 2) Gabriel said that there would be "seven weeks and threescore and two weeks" ($69 \times 7 = 483$ years) between the giving of the decree and the coming of the Messiah. Keep in mind that prophetic years in the Bible are 360 days, not 365 days. It has been

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calculated that exactly 173,880 days (483 X 360) following the issuing of this decree — Jesus rode into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday! (See the book entitled, *The Coming Prince* by Sir Robert Anderson for a thorough treatment of this prophecy.) Since Messiah was rejected and cut-off as was prophesied, there remains yet one week of years to be fulfilled. This week of years is what the Bible refers to as the seven year Tribulation period, or the time of Jacob's trouble. It is detailed for us in Revelation 6–19. This period ends with Christ's return to take His rightful place as King of the whole earth. Amen!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As THE ANCIENT OF DAYS — Daniel 7:9 (John 1:1–3, 14)

As THE SON OF MAN — Daniel 7:13 (Mark 10:45 and Luke 6:5)

As MESSIAH — Daniel 9:25 (Matt. 16:16 and 1 John 5:1)

WEEK 38, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: DANIEL 10-12

OVERVIEW:

Daniel's prayer answered by God's messenger who was detained for 21 days by the Prince of Persia; prophecy of the kingdoms from the time of Daniel to the Antichrist; the Great Tribulation.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The first half of Daniel's book centers around the prophet's personal historic adventures. The second half focuses on his prophetic visions. God's people, the Jews, a major political and military force among the Gentiles since the days of Joshua, now find themselves under Gentile domination. But, take note, that even world powers do not rise and fall without the consent of almighty God! In a remarkable collection of prophecies, Daniel sets forth both the near and distant future of God's chosen people — a future filled with purifying judgment and blessing.

Chapter 10 gives us a graphic view of the other half of reality above our heads that we can't see with our physical eyes — but is just as real as everything we do see in the other half! In 2 Corinthians 4:18, Paul distinguishes between these two realities, saying that the things we can see with our physical eyes are part of the TEMPORAL realm, and the things we can't see with our physical eyes are part of the ETERNAL realm. It is in this unseen realm above our heads, as we learn from Daniel 10, where much of our spiritual warfare actually takes place. What the angel declares to Daniel that he had been warring against for that 21 day period in which Daniel had been seeking the Lord, was one of the key "principalities, powers, rulers of the darkness of this world, or spiritual wickedness in high places" that Paul talked about in Ephesians 6:12, that was specifically set above and against the nation of Persia. (10:13,20) Evidently, these demonic spiritual forces are highly regimented and intricately networked to carry out their warfare against God's purposes and people around the entire globe. It is also this realm to which Elisha prayed that his servant would have his eyes opened to see in 2 Kings 6:15–17. As we consider the warfare that was above Daniel's head during this 21 day period, one can only wonder what might have happened had Daniel not prayed — and/or, had he not fasted and prayed! How many answers to prayer have we forfeited because of our lack of faithfulness and importunity? May God open our eyes!

The history of the Greek Empire is detailed further for us in chapter 11. This is truly one of the most remarkable prophecies in the entire Bible! In perfect sequence, Daniel chronicled in advance...

- The coming of Alexander the Great.
- The division of his empire into four parts.
- The conflicts between Syria and Egypt.
- Israel's miseries as the pawn between these two rival powers.
(Called the "king of the north and the king of the south.")
- The dark days of the tyrant, Antiochus Epiphanes. (A picture of the coming Antichrist.)
- The intervention of Rome in the affairs of Palestine.

Daniel then goes on to speak of the last days — and of the coming of the actual Antichrist of whom Antiochus Epiphanes was merely a type. We are told two interesting things regarding the Antichrist in chapter 11. Verse 20 reveals that he will be a "raiser of taxes," and many believe that verse 37 suggests that he may also possibly be a homosexual — the prophecy stating, "neither shall he regard... the desire of women." It is difficult to determine with absolute certainty. He may well be! But, if he is a homosexual, this would appear to be the only mention of it in

Scripture. Another thing to at least consider is the fact that the verse specifically says that he will not regard the "desire 'OF' women"... not the "desire 'FOR' women." Certainly, the words "of" and "for" are sometimes used interchangeably in normal conversation, but a key cross reference we pick up from the verbiage in Daniel 11:37 is in Luke 1:28, when the angel Gabriel appears to Mary to inform her that she would be the earthly vessel to bring forth the Messiah, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Gabriel begins his salutation to her by referring to her as "thou that art highly favoured among women" — and when Elisabeth learns of the Christ-child in Mary's womb, she refers to her, with the filling of the Spirit, saying, "Blessed art thou among women." (Luk. 1:42) It would appear that it was the "desire" of every Jewish maiden, that she would be the one chosen to give birth to the Messiah. So, it may be that Daniel 11:37 is simply a prophecy referring to the fact that the Antichrist will have no regard for the Lord Jesus Christ, the One who was "the desire of women." Again, it is difficult to say with absolute certainty.

In chapter 12, Daniel writes prophetically concerning the Great Tribulation — and even Daniel himself doesn't understand the meaning of what he's writing! (12:8) As he asks God to help him to understand, God tells Daniel in verse 9 that the words he was writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit would be "closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (which just happens to be the very time in which we are now living!). In other words, we have the ability to understand the prophecies in the Book of Daniel, even more than the human author of the Book himself! Wow! How crazy is that?

Regarding the "time of the end," we are told in Daniel 12:4 that "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." This is an amazing prophecy considering the modes of transportation (automobiles, trains, airplanes, space shuttles, etc.) and the accessibility of information (computers, cell phones, the internet, etc.) available to us today, as opposed to what was available in Daniel's time — or, even 150 years ago! We are truly living in "the time of the end!" (12:9) May that reality cause us to purify ourselves as we await our Lord's coming (1 Joh. 3:3), and cause there to be a passionate urgency in our souls to get the gospel to the lost while we still have time! (Rom. 1:16; Mat. 28:19–20)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As THE ONE WHO LIVES FOREVER — Daniel 12:7 (Joh. 8:58; Rev. 1:8; 4:8)

WEEK 38, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: HOSEA 1-6

OVERVIEW:

Israel compared to an unfaithful wife (chapter 1); God seeks reconciliation with Israel (chapter 2); Hosea's reconciliation with his wife (chapter 3); God's controversy with his people. (chapters 4-6)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

We now move into the section of the Old Testament referred to as the Minor Prophets. As has been previously mentioned, they are "minor," not in terms of the content of their message, but simply in terms of their length. The Books of the Bible written by these next 12 prophets were simply shorter than the writings of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

Also keep in mind, that a prophet was someone God called to take His side against nations and peoples. (Deu. 18:22 — "a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord.") There is, without a doubt, no prophet who had more of an opportunity to actually "speak in the name of the Lord" than Hosea — as God asked this prophet to do the unthinkable! "And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms." (Hos. 1:2) Hosea was actually told to marry a wife that God knew would break his heart by her unfaithfulness!

Why would God do such a thing? For two reasons:

First, because it was a graphic ILLUSTRATION. Hosea, whose name means "Jehovah," or "God, is salvation" (much like "Joshua" in the Old Testament, and "Jesus" in the New Testament), is to take a wife of whoredoms because she depicts the unfaithfulness of Israel to her "husband," the "God of her salvation." (Eze. 16:8-15)

Secondly, faithful Hosea is to take an unfaithful wife because it is a graphic REALIZATION. God wanted Hosea to preach to unfaithful Israel, feeling in his heart, what God felt in His. Perhaps the only way Hosea could really preach "in the name of the Lord," with both the Lord's passion and compassion, was living through the hurt in his relationship with his own lover, Gomer, that God felt with His lover, Israel.

Are you experiencing hurt in any area of your life right now? It may reveal something very interesting and significant if you were to take the time to write down the circumstances of what happened to hurt you, and how it has made you feel. Many times, God allows the events and circumstances of our lives to unfold as they do, not only because they fit perfectly into His sovereign design and plan for our lives, but to allow us, like Hosea, to feel in our hearts what He feels in His! When we actually put the situation that has hurt us into words, we discover that what we are going through and how it has made us feel, is actually a perfect description of what God goes through and feels — and has gone through and felt! The New Testament terminology for this principle is "the fellowship of His suffering!" (Phil. 3:10) And do recall, that it is through this unique type of "fellowship" — that actually leads to "death" to ourselves, through which we truly come to "know Him, and the power of His resurrection!"

It seems, however, that most Christians never connect the dots between the pain they're experiencing, and what our Lord experienced. (i.e. "His suffering.") Missing this connection, it becomes very easy to begin to use our circumstances to justify a vengeful, angry or bitter spirit — rather than allow our circumstances to move us into a whole new dimension of "fellowship" with our Lord! God has always longed for and looked for people "after His own heart" (1 Sam.13:14) — people who know Him, love Him and manifest His power! Sadly, when He orchestrates/ allows the events and circumstances of our lives to conform us into that kind of people, we tend to forget the principle of Philippians 3:10 — and miss the fact that God, through the circumstances of our lives, is actually answering the prayer of our hearts to know Him, love Him, and be like Him! (Rom. 8:28–29)

And before we actually get into the "guts" of the Book of Hosea, don't miss the fact that Gomer is also a very graphic and extremely sad picture of us! When we "love the world" (1 Joh. 2:15), or seek to rationalize or justify our "friendship with the world" (Jam. 4:4), our "husband" (2 Cor. 11:2), the God of our salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ, views it, and even calls it, "adultery!" (Jam. 4:4)

As we move into chapter 1, note also the lesson God wanted to "preach" to Israel through Hosea's three children:

God named his first child "Jezreel," meaning "God sows" or "God scatters" — depicting the fact that God was about to scatter the nation of Israel.

His second child, God named "Loruhamah," meaning "no mercy" or "unpitied" — pointing to the fact that God would no longer extend His mercy to Israel, but that she (Israel) would be taken into captivity.

The third child, God named "Loammi," meaning "not my people" — teaching Israel that He no longer recognized them as His children. It may have even been that Loammi was not actually Hosea's child, but a child born of Gomer's whoredoms.

Realize, that it would be difficult to ever get very far away from your calling if you had to give your children names that depicted God's vantage point of the very people to which you were called to minister! It would be like God asking those of us called to "preach" to this generation (Rom. 10:14), to name our children "Laodicea" — meaning "the rights of the people," and "Lukewarm" — depicting the state of His church and the lives of His people, and "Selfish" — depicting the real love of His people... "lovers of their own selves!" (2 Tim. 3:2) Can you even imagine?

Note, however, in Hosea 2:1, that the Lord points to a time when the "Lo" — meaning "no" or "not" or "without" would be removed, and Israel would once again be "Ammi" — meaning "my people," and "Ruhamah" — meaning "having obtained mercy!" Note, also, that "in that day," "Jezreel" will no longer mean "God scatters," but "God sows!" God says in 2:23, "And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God!" Hallelujah! This, of course, will be during the Great Tribulation, culminating with the Second Coming of Christ and the establishment of His millennial kingdom.

More will be said concerning the chapters in today's reading in tomorrow's "Highlights and Insights."

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

Through HOSEA'S LOVE FOR HIS UNWORTHY, SINFUL WIFE — Hosea 3:1–5 (Rom. 5:8; 8:32; 2 Pet. 1:3)

WEEK 38, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: HOSEA 7-14

OVERVIEW:

Israel's sin rebuked (chapter 7); Israel's judgment foretold (chapters 8–10); Israel's restoration promised. (chapters 11-14)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

In yesterday's reading, just as God had predicted, Hosea's wife, Gomer, deserted her faithful husband for other "lovers," and as we discussed — a very painful and graphic illustration of Israel's unfaithfulness to her husband, God Himself. In chapter 3, Gomer even ends up on the slave block, and God commands Hosea to go "redeem" her (or "buy her back") — and restore her as his wife. And to that, all I can say is, "What a guy!" And yet, remember, Hosea is simply a picture of God and His love for Israel — and His plan to restore her as His wife. And to that, all I can say is, "What a God!"

The people of Israel all knew who Hosea was, and knew all that his wife had done. They, no doubt, pointed the finger at her and her many sins. Little did they realize, however, that they were actually pointing the finger at themselves! In chapter 4, Hosea begins to help them to understand their own sin (4:1–2), and their own unfaithfulness and spiritual adultery against their husband! Hosea likens them to several graphic pictures:

- 1) "A morning cloud." (6:4) — As in, here one minute and gone the next.
- 2) "A cake not turned." (7:8) — What we might call today "half-baked." (i.e. Their spirituality was only superficial, not into the core of their being.)
- 3) "Gray hairs." (7:9) — Gradually losing their strength, but unaware of the change.
- 4) "A silly dove." (7:11) — As in, extremely fickle; here, there, and everywhere.
- 5) "A deceitful bow." (7:16) — Looking like it has everything it needs to fulfill its purpose, but can't hit the target.

Before simply moving on past the above illustrations, we may want to look back to see how many of them our Lord might use to describe our relationship with Him! It is amazing how "the more things change, the more things stay the same!"

As we move into chapter 8, Hosea understood that it would not be long before the Assyrians would come to take Israel into captivity. He likens God's judgment to the circling of an eagle (8:1), the devastation of a whirlwind (8:7), and the burning of a fire. (8:16) Numerous times in our 52 Weeks of Pursuit we have mentioned the Galatians 6:7–8 principle, that we "reap" according to what we've "sown." Don't miss, however, that we actually always reap MORE than we have sown! A farmer sows a few seeds that multiply into a huge harvest. Israel sowed the wind, yet reaped a whirlwind! (8:7; 10:13) And once again, we may need to stop to consider whether there is anything we're presently sowing in our lives that we're not wanting to reap — much less, reap in abundance! May we learn from Israel's mistakes — remembering that 1 Corinthians 10:6 and 11 admonish us to do just that!

Chapter 9 walks us back into some key places of sinfulness in Israel's past. Hosea references the "deep corruption" at Gibeah (9:9), the "shame" and "abominations" at Baalpeor (9:10), and the "wickedness" at Gilgal. (9:15) This chapter teaches us that a life of sin leaves a trail. In time, the trail itself tells the story of how we ended up where we did.

But, praise the Lord, the Book of Hosea doesn't end on a negative note! Just as Hosea never lost his love or his heart for his wife in spite of all of her unfaithfulness — God did not lose His love or His heart for Israel in spite of her unfaithfulness! And just as Hosea bought his wife back out of slavery to be restored in their relationship, God begins to point to the time when He would redeem Israel out of their slavery and be restored in His relationship with them.

God shows His heart for Israel in chapter 11, as He reminds them of how He loved them from the very beginning of their relationship, when He called them out of Egypt. He also reminds them of how from the very beginning of His marriage to them, they were "bent on backsliding." (11:7) How incredibly sad, that God "drew them with cords... and bands of love" (11:4), but they saw His cords and bands as restrictive — and wanted to be free of Him.

In chapter 14, God cries out to His wife to return to Him. (14:1) He says of Israel, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him." (14:4) He points to a time when the nation will be as a beautiful lily, a fruitful olive tree, and flourish as a vine. (14:5–9) As we have repeatedly seen in the prophets, this is pointing to the time of the Second Coming of Christ when our Lord Jesus Christ establishes His millennial kingdom.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

In ISRAEL, as the SON WHO WAS CALLED OUT OF EGYPT — Hosea 11:1 (Mat. 2:14–15)

WEEK 38, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: JOEL 1-3

OVERVIEW:

The plague of locusts; Joel's call to repentance; the great day of the Lord; the Holy Spirit; the restoration of Israel; the judgment of the nations.

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we embark into the three chapters of the Book of Joel, the Book begins by saying, "The word of the Lord that came to Joel the son of Pethuel." The name Joel means "Jehovah is God" — and the name Pethuel means "the sincerity of God" or "godly simplicity." A simple breakdown of the Book of Joel is as follows: Chapter 1: The Day of the Lord. Chapter 2: The Day of the Lord. Chapter 3: The Day of the Lord. Please exert great mental energy in seeking to keep that outline straight. :-)

The Book actually begins with a question: "Hath this been in your days, or even in the days of your fathers?" (1:2b) The inferred answer, of course, is "no." The "days" Joel is about to describe are so devastating that no one had ever seen anything quite like it. This is much like Jesus' words in Matthew 24:21 concerning the days of the great tribulation: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be."

Joel's prophecy concerning those days is a message God wanted to be handed down generationally through the families. (1:3) The 1st generation (1:2b)... was to tell it to their children (2nd generation — 1:3a)... and they were to tell it to their children (3rd generation — 1:3b)... who were then to tell it to their children (4th generation — 1:3c). It is just another biblical reminder that whether we want them to or not, our lives are going to impact the next four generations — whether it be negatively, as in Exodus 20:5 and 34:7 — or whether it be positively, as in Psalm 78:4–7. The good news is, we get to choose which it will be!

Verse 4 of chapter 1 describes how there are certain things that seek to "worm" their way into our lives, as it were, and slowly but surely, "eat" away the important things of life. What the "palmerworm" doesn't eat, the "locust" will. What the "locust" doesn't eat, the "cankerworm" will. And what the "cankerworm" doesn't eat, the "caterpillar" will. God's message is that it's time we "wake up" (1:5), and "sober up" (1:5), so we can recognize the things we're allowing to "consume" the important things in our lives, before it's too late — and before the lives of the next four generations are not completely "devoured" by our adversary! (1 Pet. 5:8)

And notice, even if we've been "sleeping" on our watch (1 Thes. 5:6), or have allowed ourselves to become "drunk" spiritually (1 Thes. 5:7), the good news is, if we'll obey Joel 1:5, and both "wake up" and "sober up," God can and will "restore to us the years that the locusts hath eaten, the cankerworm, and the caterpillar and the palmerworm!" (2:25) Hallelujah! Obviously, this is simply the devotional application of these verses as they apply to us. Historically, or from the standpoint of the historical application, Joel is preaching these truths to the people of Judah. He reminds them of what they had seen take place in their land by the destruction of a recent plague of locusts. That judgment, however, would pale in comparison to the judgment that was about to be unleashed by an invading army from the north (the Assyrians). Their only hope was through repentance.

But even the historical application doesn't address the real purpose of Joel's prophecy. Remember, the doctrinal application, as already mentioned, has to do with the days of the great tribulation ("those days" — 2:29; 3:1), just

prior to and leading up to “the day of the Lord.” (i.e. “that day” — 1:15; 2:1,2,11; 3:14,18) Joel is prophesying about the judgment of God that will be taking place during the Tribulation Period as a northern confederacy converges upon the Nation of Israel just prior to her restoration — in that day when the nation will finally repent and the Lord Jesus Christ will establish His millennial kingdom.

Seeing these three layers of application (the historical, prophetic and devotional) will help to keep us “between the white lines” as we seek to navigate through this Book — because there is a lot of false teaching/doctrine that is propagated out of this little Book of the Bible! Most of it surrounds chapter 2, because Peter quotes Joel’s prophecy in Acts 2 when he was preaching on the Day of Pentecost. Peter basically says, “THIS” (the events taking place at Pentecost in Acts 2) “was THAT” (the events Joel was prophesying in Joel 2)!

Because of a failure to “rightly divide the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15), both in Joel 2 and Acts 2, however, these two chapters have been used to give credence to the modern tongues movement. The modern tongues movement (1901 – present), however, actually has nothing whatsoever to do with anything prophesied in Joel 2 or that was supposedly “fulfilled” in Acts 2 — and everything to do with some crazy stuff that was taking place at the Bethel Bible College in Topeka, Kansas in 1901, and out on the west coast in Los Angeles, California at the Azusa Street Mission in 1906! There are a few key things we need to make sure that we are taking note of in these two extremely misunderstood and controversial chapters...

- Note in Acts 2, Peter is very careful NOT to say that the speaking in tongues on the day of Pentecost was the “FULFILLMENT” of the things Joel prophesied! Just that Joel had “SPOKEN” of it.
- Note also, that on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, the Spirit was NOT poured out “upon all flesh” as was prophesied in Joel 2:28.
- Note that in Joel’s prophecy, he DOESN’T mention anything about “tongues” anywhere in the entire chapter!
- Note that none of the “wonders” that Joel DOES mention in Joel 2:20 took place on the Day of Pentecost.

Yes, had the nation of Israel exercised a national repentance on the Day of Pentecost... even up to Stephen’s audience with and message to the ruling counsel of Israel in Acts 7 — what took place at Pentecost could have become the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy! Because of Israel’s refusal to repent, however, Joel’s prophecy was put on hold, and won’t pick up again until the Tribulation Period.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the ONE WHO SAID, “I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UPON ALL FLESH” — Joel 2:28 (Zec. 12:10; Isa. 54:13; Eze. 39:29)

WEEK 39, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: AMOS 1-6

OVERVIEW:

God's judgment upon eight nations (chapters 1–2); the guilt and punishment of Israel. (chapters 3–6)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

One of the most beautiful things about the Book of Amos was the man God chose to use to write it. Amos was just a common, ordinary guy of average intelligence. Hallelujah! He didn't come from a well-to-do or noble family, so you'll notice that no family pedigree is listed in the introduction. (i.e. Amos, the son of...) When God called Amos, he made his living as a "herdman" (1:1 — i.e. sheep-breeder), and as a mere "gatherer of sycamore fruit." (7:14) In 7:14, Amos is trying to communicate that he understood that there was really nothing special about him that would have caused God to have seen fit to choose to use him. And yet, praise be to the Lord, God was able to use this common, ordinary and very average man in a very uncommon, extraordinary, and above average way! One thing we learn from the record of history, is that God is always a champion for the common man! Speaking of the time of Jesus' ministry, Mark said in Mark 12:37, "And the COMMON PEOPLE heard him gladly!"

Listen, it was the nobility and intelligencia that had such a hard time believing and following Jesus, and spent their time contesting and contending with Him — and ultimately, putting Him to death! God has always taken great pleasure "[choosing] the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are!" (1 Cor. 1:27–28) He even says in 1 Corinthians 1:26: "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." And may we be sure not to take this principle further than God does, however! Notice that He DOESN'T say "Not ANY wise, mighty and noble are called." He simply says, "Not MANY wise, mighty and noble are called." There are "SOME" — there just aren't "MANY!"

And oh, may we recognize today, that the same uncommon, extraordinary, above average thing God was able to do with Amos — is the same exact thing He wants to be able do with common, ordinary, average folks like me and you! This little tirade may not help us to understand the Book of Amos, but it will certainly help us to understand how incredibly God wants to use each of us! Praise the Lord!

Now, concerning understanding the Book of Amos — as verse 1 indicates, Amos prophesied during the days when Uzziah was king in Judah, and Jeroboam was king in Israel. That would mean he was a contemporary of Hosea, and places his prophetic ministry somewhere between the years of 783 to 753 B.C.

During this time historically, the physical aspects of the northern kingdom were going extremely well. Businesses flourished, the economy was good, and the government was stable. The spiritual climate, however, was something totally different. The entire kingdom was full and running over with idolatry, greed, injustice, immorality, pride and hypocrisy.

In the first two chapters, Amos pronounces judgment on eight nations — saying that God will attack them as a "roaring lion" (1:2; 3:8) — and a "consuming fire." Notice the repetition:

- "But I will send a fire..." (1:4)
- "But I will send a fire..." (1:7)

- “But I will send a fire...” (1:10)
- “But I will send a fire...” (1:12)
- “But I will kindle a fire...” (1:14)

The eight nations are Damascus of Syria (1:3), Gaza (1:6), Tyrus (1:9), Edom (1:11), Ammon (1:13), Moab (2:1), Judah (2:4), and Israel. (2:6) Notice also the repetition of the phrase, “For three transgressions, and for four.” (1:3,6,9,11,13; 2:1,4,6) Very simply, three plus four equals seven, the number of completion. And the point is, God had “reached the top” (completion), as it were, with the transgressions of these nations, and was about to execute His complete judgment upon them!

In 2:6–16, notice that Amos identifies the specific sins that had prompted God’s promise of judgment upon Israel: bribery, greed, adultery, immorality, selfishness, ungratefulness, drunkenness (even forcing the Nazarites to drink! — 2:12), and rejecting God’s Word. Sounds like a perfect description of the spiritual climate in our day!

In chapters 3–6, Amos delivers three sermons to identify God’s purposes in this judgment. Each sermon begins the same way, “Hear this word.” (3:1; 4:1; 5:1)

In the sermon Amos preaches in 3:1–15, he tells the people the reason for God’s judgment upon Israel.

In his sermon in 4:1–13, Amos lists all the things God had already sought to do to get Israel to repent — and yet, to no avail. (Note the fierceness of Amos’ preaching in 4:12 — “Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel!”)

In chapter 5:1–6:14, Amos preaches a message of lamentation (5:1) — as he laments Israel’s fallen condition. In 5:3, he informs them that unless there is a national repentance — 90% of Israel will die! Amos tells the people to seek the Lord (5:4,6,8,14) — and not just religious activity! (i.e. “But seek not Bethel” — 5:4) Note that all three messages have a tremendous devotional application to us, and a tremendous doctrinal application for Israel in the future.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the CREATOR OF THE UNIVERSE — Amos 5:8 (Heb. 1:2–3; Rev. 4:11)

WEEK 39, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: AMOS 7-9; OBADIAH 1

OVERVIEW:

The five visions symbolizing the approaching judgment: the plague of locusts, the devouring fire, the plumbline (Amos 7), the basket of summer fruit (Amos 8), the altar (Amos 9); the abasement of Edom's pride (Oba. 1:1–4); the destruction of Edom (Oba. 1:5–16); the restoration of Israel and Judah, and the extinction of Edom. (Oba. 1:17–21)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we left off in yesterday's reading, Amos had just concluded the third of three sermons God anointed him to preach to provide the bewildered people of Israel the reason God's judgment was about to come upon them. They were bewildered because they seemingly had so many "spiritual" things in place. They observed the feast days... they made sacrifices and gave their offerings... they sang songs to the Lord. (5:21–25) Like so many people and churches today, they could point to all of these outward expressions of so-called "worship," but God, as always, wasn't looking at the outward appearance — He was looking at their hearts! (1 Sam. 16:7; 2 Cor. 5:12) Though they had all the correct OUTWARD ACTIONS, their problem was their corrupt INWARD ATTITUDES (hearts). "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear!"

As we move into chapters 7–9 today, Amos continues his prophecy against the nation of Israel. He challenges those who have developed a false sense of security (6:1 — "them that are at ease in Zion"), and trust in everything but God (6:1 — "the mountain of Samaria." i.e. their money, their homes, their ivory beds, etc.) to beware of impending judgment. God gives Amos three visions in chapter 7 to serve as illustrations of His judgment. The first vision Amos sees is that of locusts ("grasshoppers") coming and stripping the land of all of its vegetation. (7:1) Amos intercedes on Israel's behalf, and the Lord stays the plague of locusts. (1:2–3) Oh, may we never underestimate the power of intercessory prayer! God responded in Amos' day, Elijah's day (James 4:16–17), and He will respond in our day as well! Is there someone for whom God would have you intercede today?

The second vision Amos receives is almost the same as the first, but rather than locusts destroying the land, this time he sees it being destroyed by fire — after a severe draught. (7:4) Once again, Amos intercedes on Israel's behalf, and God chooses to deliver the land. (7:5–6)

The third vision is that of a plumbline. (7:7–9) Amos sees the Lord holding a plumbline and standing by a wall that was perfectly plumb. The point is, that God was inspecting Israel to see if they were "out of line," as we might say, or to see if Israel "measured up." We would all do well to consider that if God held the "plumbline" of His perfect word next to our life today, how would we "measure up?" Is there any area of our life that is "out of line?" Notice in this vision, Amos offers no intercession — and God offers no retraction of His plan to judge them. Notice also in the remainder of chapter 7, that Amaziah, who was the "state priest," as it were, tells Amos "where to go" (namely, Judah — 7:12) — and to do his little prophesying there! Amos tells him, (if I might paraphrase)... "Listen pal, I was minding my own business tending sheep and picking fruit when God called me to prophesy on His behalf — and there ain't anybody including you that's gonna get me to stop! And while I'm at it, I just happen to have a prophecy for you! Your wife is going to become a 'streetwalker' — and your entire family is going to die by the sword because of your sin and compromise!" (7:14–17) Wow! Go Amos!

In chapter 8, God gives Amos a fourth vision. This time Amos sees “a basket of summer fruit.” (8:1–3) Israel, like summer fruit, has ripened for judgment, and the end was near. Amos spends the remainder of chapter 8 identifying the sins for which the judgment was coming.

In chapter 9, Amos receives the fifth and final vision. He sees the Lord Himself standing at the altar. (9:1–10) The message is the inescapability of God’s judgment. Regardless of where they go, God says He will find them. The Book of Amos doesn’t end on a negative note, however! In 9:11–5, God promises the future restoration of Israel which will unfold “in that day.” What day? The “day of the Lord” — the second coming of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Today’s reading also includes the little Book of Obadiah — only 21 verses! Obadiah, whose name means “servant of the Lord,” prophesied in the time period between 587 B.C. and 580 B.C. As with every prophetic Book of the Old Testament, the theme is the second coming of Christ or “the day of the Lord.” This Book is unique in that it is the only Book of the Bible written against a particular nation of people — the Edomites. Though we typically think of the Old Testament Books addressing the Jews (Israel), this Book is actually written to address Gentiles.

The Edomites are the descendants of Esau, and are a group of people who have consistently caused Israel problems. In 1 Chronicles 18:14 they become servants to Israel, but later revolt in 2 Chronicles 21:8–10, only to continue to cause Israel problems. After that, they become a part of an alliance with Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar that led to Israel’s downfall.

The cold hard facts are, God hates the Edomites! Why? Because He said, “I’ll bless them who bless thee, and curse them that curse thee!” (Gen. 12:3) The Edomite nation cursed Israel, and thus, God’s cursing upon them.

This little Book provides great insight into Romans 9:13 — where a lot of good people have lost their necks! God says, “Jacob have I loved, and Esau have I hated.” Some (Calvinists; Hyper-calvinists) read that and somehow immediately conclude that God chooses who goes to heaven and who goes to hell. If we go back to Genesis 25, however, God specifically said that there were two NATIONS in Rebekah’s womb. This is about NATIONS — not INDIVIDUALS! The descendants of Esau, the Edomite nation, hated Israel, and because of it — God hated them!

And don’t miss realizing that the Edomites are still in existence in the Middle East — we just know them by different names today. Their game plan, however, is still the same as it ever was: do anything and everything possible to cause Israel grief! Notice also, that Psalm 83:4–6 lists the Edomites with the 10 confederated nations of the Antichrist. (Psa. 83) That will certainly provide us great insight into understanding current events in the Middle East!

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the PLUMBLINE — Amos 7:7–8 (The Lord Jesus Christ alone is the perfect standard — and He alone is qualified to walk in the midst of His people, measuring good and evil, and true and false — Rev. 2–3.)

WEEK 39, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: JONAH 1-4

OVERVIEW:

Jonah's call and rebellion (chapter 1); Jonah's chastening and repentance (chapter 2); Jonah's second call and obedience (chapter 3); Jonah's rebellion and rebuking. (chapter 4)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

There is perhaps no prophetic Book of the Old Testament more important than the little Book of Jonah. It is this Book that prophesies and teaches us about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus Himself said, "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas (Jonah): For AS Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; SO shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matt. 12:39–40) It is for that reason, as you can well imagine, that the Book of Jonah has been more "SPOKEN AGAINST" (see Luke 2:34!) than any other Old Testament Book. The attacks come in many different forms. One of the most popular attacks from the unsaved world is that the events in this Book are actually just fiction. That's why the devil has handed down several similar stories in mythology — Andromeda, Orion, and not the least of which, Hercules, who was supposedly in the belly of a sea creature for three days and three nights! The devil always has a counterfeit, and he would love for the events in the Book of Jonah to be viewed as fiction right along with all of his fictitious stories in mythology. Obviously, the devil's attack isn't against Jonah and his being spit out on dry land after three days and three nights in the belly of the whale — his attack is against Christ and His death, burial, and resurrection! Remember, Jesus said, "AS was Jonah, SO was the Son of Man!" (Mat. 12:39–40) If Jonah was fictitious, so was Christ's death, burial and resurrection! We could put it another way: if the Book of Jonah is a LIE — then Jesus was a LIAR!

Another key attack on the Book of Jonah is the attack that comes from "scholars" in the "saved" world. They believe that the events all happened — they just don't believe that Jonah was dead in the belly of that "great fish" (Jonah's words in Jonah 1:17) or "whale" (Jesus' word in Matthew 12:40). Again, the point is, "AS was Jonah, SO was Jesus!" If Jonah didn't actually die and resurrect from the belly of the whale — then Jesus didn't actually die (enter the "swoon theory") and resurrect from the heart (belly) of the earth! Listen, I'm not the one that said that Jonah was going to be the only sign given of the resurrection, Jesus did! (Mat. 12:39) It doesn't matter that we can't figure it out physiologically, scientifically, practically or any other way. If Jesus said Jonah was a picture of the resurrection, then Jonah had to die, and that's where we resign ourselves to Romans 3:4: "Let God be true, but every man a liar!" Interestingly enough, the Book of Jonah begins, "Now the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the son of Amittai, saying..." (1:1a) The name Jonah means "the dove," and the name Amittai means "truth" or "truth telling." A dove is a biblical type of the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 3:16), and truth is specifically defined in Scripture as Jesus (John 14:6) — and as the Word of God! (John 17:17) We could say, therefore, that the Book of Jonah is the Book written by the Spirit of God (2 Pet. 1:21) to give us the truth about Jesus — and we'll leave it at that!

Historically, Jonah was a prominent prophet in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam (793–753 B.C.), with the specific events described in this Book taking place around 760 B.C. The real purpose of his ministry, as revealed in these four chapters, is to preach to Gentiles, who DO respond to his message with repentance, making it the record of the greatest revival in the history of mankind! Note that Ninevah was a city of almost a million people, and thus, the continued reference to it being a "great city!" (1:2; 2:2; 3:3; 4:11) Note also, that every single person in the city responded to the call to repent! Wow! (3:5)

From a doctrinal or prophetic standpoint, Jonah is a type of the 144,000 in the Tribulation Period who preach to Gentiles when the world experiences the greatest revival in the history of mankind! (Rev. 7:4–9)

Note the following things that may prove helpful in understanding both the importance of the Book of Jonah and its placement in the canon of Scripture — and that can hopefully help us to see the big picture...

- Ninevah is the capital city of Assyria — the dominant world power of that time. Jonah knew that two things were true: #1 — The wickedness of Assyria had come up to God (1:1), meaning God was about to blast 'em! #2 — Assyria was about to blast the Nation of Israel! If God judges Assyria for their sin first, Israel will be spared. If Jonah preaches to Ninevah and they repent, he is not only signing his own death warrant, but the death warrant of his entire nation. That may help us to make sense out of why Jonah goes in the opposite direction when he's called to preach to Ninevah — and why he's so ticked off when almost a million sinners repent! (See Jer. 18:7–8)
- Jonah went to Whale University.
- Everyone in the entire Book of Jonah obeyed God — except the man of God, the one for whom the Book is named! The storm, the dice (lot), the sailors, the fish, the Ninevites (again, every last one of them!), the east wind, the gourd, the worm — absolutely everyone and everything obeyed, except the one we would expect!
- Jonah shows us that it is very possible to serve the Lord, and yet not love people. God makes it very clear through the Book of Jonah that He (God) loves and has pity for lost souls. (4:2,11) This same Book makes clear that Jonah had more love and pity for himself, and even for the lousy gourd (4:10–11) — than he did for the lost multitudes in the city Ninevah. As we read this incredible Book today, we would do well to ask ourselves: "Do I care more about myself than I do God's will or the lost? And to what is my life more consumed than it is the lost people on this planet?"

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the ONE WHO WOULD DIE, BE BURIED, AND RISE FROM THE DEAD AFTER THREE DAYS —
Jonah 1:7–2:10 (Mat. 12:39–41)

WEEK 39, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: MICAH 1-7

OVERVIEW:

Micah prophesies of God's wrath (chapter 1); God's attitude toward oppression (chapter 2); God's judgment on Israel's leaders (chapter 3); the restoration of Israel (chapter 4); Christ foretold (chapter 5); the Lord's controversy (chapter 6).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Micah, whose name means, "who is like Jehovah," was a country boy from the foothills of Judah. He prophesied to the nation of Israel for a 25 year period between 735–710 B.C. His ministry spanned the reigns of Jotham (750–731 B.C.), Ahaz (731–715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (715–686 B.C.). Most of his prophecy is directed toward Judah (the southern kingdom) — since the northern tribes of Israel were about to fall to Samaria. He was a contemporary of Hosea and Isaiah.

God opens the Book by foretelling His judgment against Judah and Israel, specifically naming the capital cities of each: Jerusalem, the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah — and Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel. (1:1) And you've just gotta love Micah's heart for the Lord and His people — his message to the people literally brings him to tears, and mourning! (1:8–9) This prophecy is partially fulfilled when Israel is taken captive by Samaria in 722 B.C. — and Judah is taken captive by Babylon in 605 B.C. However, when taken literally, the verbiage points to a future time when Israel (as a nation) will once again be judged. There is no doubt that the reference in 1:3 to the "Lord coming forth out of His place to tread upon the high places of the earth" refers to the coming tribulation, which, of course, culminates with "the Day of the Lord" — the second coming of Christ.

In chapter 1, God addresses through Micah, one of Israel's key sins against God — namely, the sin of idolatry. In chapter 2, God singles out another of Israel's key sins: the sin of injustice. He specifically speaks to those who devise ways to oppress their neighbor. (2:2) And recognize, that God makes it clear throughout the Bible that He will repay those who oppress the less fortunate — especially the fatherless and widows! (Jer. 7:5–7; 23:3–5; Eze. 22:7; Zec. 7:10–12; Mal. 3:5) God also makes clear that one of His key priorities, and one of the key priorities of His children — is showing compassion on the fatherless and widows, by "visiting" them "in their affliction." (Jam. 1:27; Isa. 1:17; Exo. 22:22; Deu. 10:17–18; 14:29; 16:11,14; 24:19–21; 26:12–13; Psa. 68:5; 146:9) Oh, may we share our Lord's heart of compassion by looking for those around us who are oppressed — and may we seek opportunities to minister to the affliction of the fatherless and widows in our church... in our community... and in our world! When we truly understand the heart of God, we will be compelled to minister to widows and single moms, young people whose fathers have died or abandoned them, and those who have been oppressed by others. Real ministry means really sacrificing to meet the needs of others!

Micah 2:10 warns Israel to prepare for their coming captivity — and warns them against prophets who were telling them that the captivity wasn't coming. (2:11) Micah tells the people that the prophets who were telling them the positive things they wanted to hear, regardless of how ridiculous their prophecies were, were the prophets they were actually choosing to follow! (2:11) Mark it down, the popularity of a preacher in no way indicates the accuracy of a preacher! The Bible proves over and over again that people tend to blindly follow preachers who scratch them where they itch! God tells us in 2 Timothy 4:2–4 that this will be especially characteristic of people living in our time! We must be very discerning!

In chapter 3, God warns the leaders of Israel that they will be held accountable for how they abused His people in failing to care for them, protect them and lead them. Just as the Antichrist will proclaim peace before the tribulation (Dan. 8:25), the leaders of Israel were proclaiming peace before the coming captivity. (3:5) God promises His judgment upon them. (3:5–7) Do note, that God's judgment always begins at His house, and with His leaders! (1 Pet. 4:17)

In chapter 4, Micah prophesies of the coming millennium. This chapter parallels Ezekiel's prophecy in Ezekiel 44–48. Micah provides a beautiful description of life during the Christ's millennial reign in 4:1, as Micah describes the Lord's people "flowing" into Christ's glorious presence! It is a time when the Lord will rule and reign in His kingdom over all the nations of the earth (4:7) — and nations will finally be at peace with other nations. (4:3–5) In this present time, world leaders keep working tenaciously to bring peace on earth apart from Christ. There will be never be peace on this earth, however, apart from Christ! May we also note that this principle applies to our own personal walk as well. Every individual on this planet wants their hearts, minds and lives to be shrouded in peace. Few, however, want Christ! And apart from Christ ruling and reigning in the kingdom that we call our life — we will never experience any lasting peace! On a daily basis, may we surrender every aspect of our lives to the Lordship of Christ, and allow His kingdom, in all of it's power and glory, to be established in us — and discover His glorious peace!

Micah chapter 5 contains one of the most well known prophecies concerning Christ —the very city of His birth! (5:2 — "Bethlehem") Micah also reveals the magnificence of Christ's kingdom as it is established on the earth via His second coming. (5:4–ff) Note also that "the Assyrian" in this chapter is a specific reference to the coming Antichrist. (5:5–6)

Micah chapter 6 contains, as it were, a trial. The Lord is presenting His legal case ("controversy" — 6:2) against His people. He calls on nature to serve as the jury (6:1), and Micah to act as His prosecuting attorney. He reminds Israel of His goodness to them — even in the leaders He had provided for them. (6:3–5) He specifically references Moses, Aaron and Miriam. From a mere practical and devotional standpoint, what is awesome about this reference to Moses, Aaron and Miriam — is that all three of them were by no means perfect! In fact, Aaron and Miriam are most often remembered by their failures (the golden calf and questioning Moses' authority) than they are anything else! And yet, God holds all three of them up in this passage as His chosen leaders — and reminds Israel that they are actually a sign of His goodness. May that be an encouragement to all of us who have failed as a leader, or have failed in properly following God's set leader(s).

What God was desiring as the outcome of His "trial," was for Israel to rise above mere religious ceremony — and experience a genuine relationship with Him! (6:8) He wanted them to walk "WITH HIM!" He wanted them to do what was right, but show mercy to those who didn't! And even though we live in a different dispensation, Micah 6:8 provides a pretty simple, and yet, comprehensive overview of how God intends for His people to live their lives: "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Perhaps we could express it this way: God wants us to: 1) Walk humbly with Him. 2) Do what's right. 3) Be merciful to others.

Micah ends his Book prophesying about the eventual restoration of Israel. (7:12–20) That is certainly an incredible reality for the nation of Israel, and yet, from a devotional and inspirational standpoint, it is also an incredible and blessed reminder to us — that God delights in mercy (7:18)... He has compassion on us (7:19a)... He pardons our iniquity (7:19b)... and He has cast all of our sins into the deepest sea! (7:19c)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the RULER IN ISRAEL WHO WAS BORN IN BETHLEHEM — Micah 5:2 (Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem as the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give to Him the throne of His father David — Luke 1:32–33; 2:4–6.)

WEEK 39, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: NAHUM-HABAKKUK

OVERVIEW:

Nahum, whose name means "comforter," comforts God's people by unveiling God's plan to take vengeance on the wickedness of the nation of Assyria, beginning with the capitol city of Nineveh. (Nah. 1–3); Habakkuk's difficult questions for God (Hab. 1–2); Habakkuk's praise to God for answering his questions. (Hab. 3)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

As we have already learned, the vast majority of the Old Testament is written to and by Israelites, the chosen people of God. When we discover any Book of the Old Testament written to a nation other than Israel, we must recognize that we have discovered something significant in the plan and revelation of God. There are only three prophets (out of 16) who prophesy to Gentile nations: Obadiah prophesied to the people of Edom; and Jonah and Nahum prophesied to Nineveh, the capitol city of Assyria.

And just what do Edom and Nineveh have in common? Both were Gentile nations who worshipped false gods — and were used by Satan to persecute the nation of Israel. Do note that God doesn't take either of these offenses lightly! (1:14; 3:19) And to add insult to injury, just 150 years earlier, God proved to Nineveh that He is "good, and ready to forgive; and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon [him]" (Psa. 86:5) —when He sent Jonah to warn them of coming judgment. (Jon. 3) As we saw, the Ninevites heeded the words of Jonah, and as a result of their repentance, revival had broken out in Ninevah! Apparently, the Ninevites failed to "make disciples," as it were, because as we come into the Book of Nahum, God is once again ready to pour out His wrath upon them! (1:2–6)

Nahum describes how the city of Nineveh would be destroyed by "an overrunning flood" (1:8) and how the "gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved" (2:6), while enemy invaders would ravage and spoil the fortified city (3:1–7), until an "utter end [was made] of the place." (1:8–9) As we might expect, 18 years after Nahum's prophecy, Nabopolassar, king of Babylon, unsuccessfully besieged Nineveh for three years until the Tigris River suddenly overflowed its banks, washing a hole in the city wall — and the Babylonian army rushed into the city, murdering the people and pillaging their goods. So complete was the destruction (1:9), that Alexander the Great marched over the former city without recognizing any evidences of a previous civilization! In fact, its existence was so annihilated, archaeologists didn't even begin excavating the city until 1845 A.D.

The moral of the story is this: God is longsuffering — but He isn't a door mat! When you worship false gods (recognize that our modern day false gods are things like wealth, self, sex, etc.) and/or mess with God's people, God will make a complete and utter end of you! (2 Thess 1:7–9) Those who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, however, will be safe in the Day of Judgment. (1:7)

Also in Nahum, God addresses a man and a woman whose full identities are revealed in greater detail in the Book of Revelation: the Antichrist (1:11) and Mystery Babylon, the Mother of Harlots. (3:4–19 c.f. Rev. 17 and 18) Nineveh and her king are types of these end time characters.

Habakkuk

If the moral of Nahum's message is that "God is not a doormat," then the moral of Habakkuk's message is — "God sure seems to be a doormat!" Nahum is the prophet of God's WRATH realized; Habakkuk is the prophet of God's PATIENCE realized.

As the Book opens, Habakkuk is struggling with two of the most common questions of life: 1) "Why doesn't God answer my prayers?" (1:2) And 2) "If God is good and all powerful, why does He allow evil and suffering in the world?" The very first verse of the Book describes Habakkuk as an indignant prophet pinned under the unbearable burden of life's injustices. This man of God has suppressed his frustration and confusion until he can no longer take it. Habakkuk unleashes his pent up indignation, puts God on trial, and asks Him why the wicked are allowed to evade judgment and prosper. God leads Habakkuk up a specific path that ends on the mountain peak of the only possible answer: God knows what He's doing... so relax! (3:17-19) The path is as follows: it begins with a "burden" (1:1); the burdened is transformed into a "vision" (2:1-4); the vision becomes a "prayer" (3:1); and it ends with "rejoicing" and confidence. (3:18-19) If we examine our past, we will see that all of our wrestling matches with God have followed this same path — and what we thought at the beginning was an obstacle — was actually a stairway leading us high above the nagging questions, circumstances and issues of life. May our feet, indeed, be as hinds' feet. (3:19)

Historically, Habakkuk predicts the Babylonian captivity. (1:5-11) Prophetically, chapter 3 describes events surrounding the return of Jesus Christ.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As THE stronghold of the faithful in the day of trouble — Nahum 1:7 (Joh. 16:33)

As THE Holy One — Habakkuk 3:3 (Mar. 1:24; Act. 2:27; 3:14; 13:35)

As THE coming Savior of Israel – Habakkuk 3:4-6,18 (Act. 13:23)

WEEK 40, DAY 1: TODAY'S READING: ZEPHANIAH-HAGGAI

OVERVIEW:

God's judgment of Judah (Zeph. 1:1–2:3); God's judgment of the Gentile nations (Zeph. 2:4–3:7); God's restoration of His people (Zeph. 3:8–20); A call to build (Hag. 1:1–15); A promise of glory (Hag. 2:1–9); A problem of defilement (Hag. 2:10–19); A promise to a servant. (Hag. 2:20–23)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Zephaniah is one of the strongest preachers in the entire Bible. Verse 1 merely introduces him, providing us his background and placement in history, and in verse 2, he's already going for the jugular! "I will utterly consume all things from off the land, saith the Lord." (1:2) Zephaniah's message is a message of judgment. There are only 53 verses in the entire Book, and there are at least 20 references to "the Day of the Lord!" (See how many you can find — i.e. "the day of the Lord," "that day," "the day," "same day," "at that time," etc.)

The "day of the Lord" is a two-edged sword. On one side, it is an horrendous day. For evildoers, Zephaniah says, "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness." (1:15) Zephaniah adds that it is a day when the earth's mightiest men shall "cry bitterly" (1:14), and the earth's wealthiest men will see the futility and worthlessness of their "silver" and "gold" to "deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath." (1:18)

On the other side of "the day of the Lord" sword — it is a glorious day! For the Lord's faithful, Zephaniah exhorts, "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel: be glad and rejoice with all the heart." (3:14) In 3:17, Zephaniah adds, "The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing." This two-edged sword describing "the day of the Lord" can also be seen in Paul's words to the Thessalonians in 2 Thessalonians 1:7–10: "And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." Note that while those who "know not God" are the recipients of His vengeance and punishment — on that very same day, for those of us who have "believed," we will joyfully and passionately make certain that our Lord is both "glorified" and "admired!"

Though the Book of Zephaniah is built around "the day of the Lord," another key word in the Book is the word "remnant." In fact, the theme of the Book is actually "the salvation of Israel's remnant." Interestingly enough, the name Zephaniah means "Jehovah hides" or "Jehovah protects/treasures." And that is exactly what God will do with Israel's believing remnant during the outpouring of His incredible wrath in "the day of the Lord." (Rev. 12:13–17)

A brief breakdown of the Book is as follows:

In 1:1–2:3, Zephaniah reveals God's judgment of Judah. Notice in 1:4–6, that Judah, like Laodicea, had three kinds of sinners: 1) Those who have totally forsaken God and worship idols; 2) Those who worship (or think they worship) both God and idols; 3) Those who at one time followed the Lord, but have totally and openly forsaken Him and want nothing to do with Him.

In 2:4–3:7, Zephaniah reveals God’s judgment of the Gentile nations. After describing His judgment upon them, God makes an appeal to His own people (3:1–7), saying in effect, “If I will judge the heathen nations for their sins, how much more will I judge this sin of the nation that I separated out of all the nations of the world to be holy unto Me?”

In 3:8–20, Zephaniah reveals God’s restoration of His people. The Book of Zephaniah ends with the incredible promise that God will one day punish the Gentiles, and regather and restore Israel and Judah to Himself and to their land. Notice that 3:8 is most definitely describing the Battle of Armageddon, when the Lord Jesus Christ will return out of heaven to rescue Israel from the Gentile nations who will gather against her when He comes on the great “day of the Lord” to establish His millennial kingdom. (Rev. 19:11–12; Zeph. 3:8,15) The Lord’s closing message to Israel through Zephaniah is that, “At that time will I bring you again, even in the time that I gather you: for I will make you a name and a praise among all people of the earth, when I turn back your captivity before your eyes, saith the Lord.” (3:20) That promise has yet to be fulfilled, but certainly will be in the very near future!

Today’s reading also includes the two chapters that comprise the Book of Haggai (the second shortest Book of the Old Testament).

In order to understand the ministry of the last three prophets (Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi), we must understand that they prophesied after the exile in 520 B.C., and thus, their Books are referred to as post-exile Books. Here’s a simple way to get the setting of these Books in your mind:

In 536 B.C., Ezra led approximately 50,000 Jews back into their land after the Babylonian captivity. Under Ezra’s leadership, they rebuilt the altar, reinstated the sacrifices, and in 535 B.C., laid the foundation for the rebuilding of the Temple. Because of the incredible opposition they faced, the work on the Temple ceased. It was through four godly men that the work finally continued and was ultimately brought to completion: Zerubbabel, the governor; Joshua, the high priest; and Haggai and Zechariah, the prophets.

When Haggai begins his prophecy (1:1), recognize that the date is September 1, 520 B.C. It has been 16 years since the construction on the Temple began, but rather than walls covering the foundation, it was covered with weeds. Interestingly, though God’s house lay desolate, they had found the time and money to make sure that their own houses were completed! Haggai’s message to Zerubbabel and Joshua, the two leaders of the nation, was: “The people have made a priority out of their own houses and careers, and it’s high time priority is given to the Lord’s house and His cause!”

The Book of Haggai breaks down into four sections. Each section is actually a “sermon” Haggai preached, and each one is prefaced by the date in which it was delivered. (1:1; 2:1; 2:10; 2:20) In each “sermon,” Haggai points out a particular sin that keeps God’s people from fulfilling His will and accomplishing His work.

- 1) Making self a priority instead of the Lord. (1:1–15 c.f. 2 Timothy 3:1–2)
- 2) Looking back instead of looking ahead. (2:1–9 c.f. Phil. 3:13–14)
- 3) Failing to be cleansed of sin. (2:10–19 c.f. 2 Cor. 7:1)
- 4) Unbelief. (2:20–23 c.f. Heb. 3:12–4:2)

We would do well to ask ourselves today: “What work has God called me to accomplish that I haven’t finished? (See 1 Cor. 15:58)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As THE KING OF ISRAEL, EVEN THE LORD — Zephaniah 3:15 (John 1:49)

WEEK 40, DAY 2: TODAY'S READING: ZECHARIAH 1-8

OVERVIEW:

A call for repentance and exhortation to fathers (1:1–6); the eight visions designed to encourage the people to rebuild the temple (1:7–6:8); Joshua is crowned the high priest (6:9–15); Jews from Bethel inquire concerning the continuance of fasting. (7:1–8:23)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Because of the significant content and length of the Books of Genesis, Psalms, and Isaiah, it is certainly no surprise that they are the most quoted Books in the New Testament. Do you realize, however, that the little Book of Zechariah (only 14 chapters) is quoted almost 40 times in the New Testament?! That is most certainly because of the messianic emphasis in this Book. It is, without a doubt, the most Christ-centered of all of the Minor Prophets — and contains more messianic prophecies than perhaps any other Book in the entire Old Testament.

Notice that verse 1 says, "...the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo." (1:1) The name Zechariah means "Jehovah remembers." His father's name, Berechiah, means "Jehovah blesses." His grandfather's name, Iddo, means "His time." If we put the meanings of these three names together, it beautifully states, "Jehovah remembers and blesses in His time!" Hallelujah! You may need that subtle reminder to be a word of encouragement to you today (Prov. 15:23; 25:11), but the historic and prophetic significance of "the Lord remembering and blessing in His time" has to do with Jews and Jerusalem. In fact, the city of Jerusalem is mentioned 39 times in the Book of Zechariah. Verses 14–17 of chapter 1 are really a condensed overview of the theme of the Book, stating that God, the great "I AM," is jealous for Jerusalem; He remembers what the heathen did to His city; and, one day, He will bless Jerusalem with prosperity and peace!

Do note that Zechariah and Haggai were contemporaries who ministered to the same people, even though their lives, their ministries, and their Books are filled with contrasts. Haggai was an old man — Zechariah was a young man. (2:4) Haggai preached sermons — Zechariah shared visions. Haggai's ministry was marked by exhortation — Zechariah's ministry was marked by encouragement.

Zechariah's prophecy begins in 1:2 with a statement that could be made in our day just as aptly as it was his own: "The Lord hath been sore displeased with your fathers." One of the most horrific things about the Laodicean Church Period is what has taken place in the whole realm of fathering. As we have previously discussed, the devil has waged an all-out attack on fathers because they possess the title with which God wants us to relate in our relationship with Him. Fathers, we may need to ask ourselves how we're doing in fulfilling our seven biblical responsibilities to our children? And we may need to consider, that if the Lord were to comment on our fathering as He did on the fathers in Zechariah's day, would He say He was "pleased" with the job we're doing, or as in their case, would He say He was "sore displeased?" Or, would it be somewhere in-between? May we hear, heed and be encouraged in the admonition and promise of verse 3: "Turn ye unto me, saith the Lord of hosts, and I will turn unto you!" Oh, may we turn to our heavenly Father today!

As we have seen all through the Old Testament, the problem in fathering is that unless something supernatural takes place in a man's life, he invariably becomes like his father. And most often, that isn't a good thing (1:2), and thus, the admonition of verse 4: "Be not as you fathers." Zechariah continues on in verse 4, saying that though the prophets were crying out to the fathers to turn from their "evil ways" and "evil doings," they paid absolutely no attention

whatsoever to them! In verse 5, God asks, "Where are they now?" Or, in other words, "How'd that kind of life work out for 'em?" Zechariah states in verse 6, that had they taken hold of God's words and statutes, His words and statutes would have taken hold of them! They could have received blessing from the Lord, but because they refused to listen and turn, they willfully chose cursing. Oh Dads, there might be some things we can miss concerning Zechariah's "visions" in the first 6 chapters, but please don't miss the message in the first 6 verses!

What follows this powerful exhortation to fathers in 1:1-6, is a series of eight visions that Zechariah received and was commanded to share with the people. The eight visions which span 1:7-6:8, were designed by God to encourage the people to rebuild the Temple. Each vision is introduced with phrases such as, "I saw" ... "I lifted up my eyes and looked" ... "He showed me" ... etc.

The eight visions and a brief statement concerning God's message each of them is as follows:

- 1) The Man Riding on a Red Horse. (1:7-17)
God is displeased with the Gentiles who are at ease while His people are afflicted. He will punish the nations and restore His people.
- 2) The Four Horses and Four Carpenters. (1:18-21)
God will destroy the four Gentile world powers.
- 3) The Man with a Measuring Line. (2:1-13)
God will restore Jerusalem.
- 4) Joshua the High Priest. (3:1-10)
God will cleanse and restore the priesthood, which is representative of the nation.
- 5) The Golden Candlestick and Two Olive Trees. (4:1-14)
Israel, God's light-bearer, will rebuild the Temple by the power of the Spirit of God (pictured by oil) under the leadership of Joshua and Zerubbabel.
- 6) The Flying Roll... or Scroll. (5:1-4)
God will judge the sin in the land.
- 7) The Woman Sitting in the Ephah (a basket used for measuring). (5:5-11)
Wickedness (the woman) will be carried from the land back to the land of its origination; Babylon.
- 8) The Four Chariots. (6:1-8)
God controls the nations. His enemies have been shut down, and Jerusalem is safe.

In 6:9-15, for the first time, the word of the Lord came to Zechariah without being in the form of a vision. Joshua, a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ, a "priest-king" referred to as "The BRANCH," would build the Temple and sit on the throne!

Chapters 7 and 8 form somewhat of an interlude in the Book. In these chapters, God addresses the subject of fasting. The only required fast in the Old Testament was the fast on the Day of Atonement, but the Jews had

included fasts to remember the fall of Jerusalem. (We might equate it with remembering the fall of the Twin Towers on 9/11.) Zechariah uses this as an opportunity to teach about God's intention through fasting.

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the BRANCH — Zechariah 3:8; 6:12 (Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15)

As the STONE THAT REMOVES SIN — Zechariah 3:9 (Rom. 9:31–33)

As JOSHUA (Hebrew word for Jesus) THE PRIEST-KING — Zechariah 6:11–13

WEEK 40, DAY 3: TODAY'S READING: ZECHARIAH 9-14

OVERVIEW:

Zechariah's first "burden" or oracle, emphasizing Christ's first coming (9:1–11:17); Zechariah's second "burden" or oracle, emphasizing Christ's second coming. (12:1–14:21)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

The Bible is the most incredible history Book the world has ever seen. Obviously, it's a thousand times more than just that, but in terms of history, it is in a class totally by itself. No other history book in the world would even dare to write about events that haven't yet taken place! (See Isaiah 42:9; 46:9–10)

Back in the 1950's people worried about "red power." In the 1960's and 70's, it was "black power." In the 80's it was "white power," the 90's it was "yellow power," and now that we've moved into the 21st century, it seems people are worried about all of the above! But actually, there is only one power to which the world really needs to concern itself — and that's what we might call "Jew power!" And the fact is, as the prophet Zechariah reveals, even if all of the nations of the world combined military forces and together converged upon Israel (which is exactly what is going to happen at the infamous Battle of Armageddon!), it still wouldn't (won't) be enough to stop them! Not necessarily because Israel's military power and prowess is so great, but because Israel's coming King is so great — and so infinitely powerful!

People in the 21st century spend a lot of time wondering:

- < What will ultimately come of the conflict in the Middle East between the Arabs and Jews?
- < Will the Jews actually be able to hold their land and their beloved city of Jerusalem?
- < What nation will ultimately be the world power when all of the turmoil in the world has been settled, and the war on terror is over? Will it be the U.S.? Russia? China?

With the prophecies revealed through Zechariah, there is no wondering necessary. Zechariah emphatically says that Jerusalem will stay in the hands of the Jews, their borders will be established according to God's specific design, and after the military rampage of the Lord Jesus Christ at His second coming, Israel will dominate the world under the rule of their Messiah and King, the Lord Jesus Christ! At that time, Isaiah 9:7 will be a glorious reality: "Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. (And you've gotta love this next line...) The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this!" (Also see Luke 1:32b–33)

The remainder of the Book of Zechariah is broken down into two different oracles that God calls "burdens" (9:1; 12:1), against specific nations. In 9:1–8, Zechariah describes the judgment that would come against Israel's neighbors. We now know that this passage is actually describing the conquest of the Greek general, Alexander the Great. Though Alexander would conquer many cities, one city he did not destroy was Jerusalem!

In striking contrast to the judgment pronounced on Israel's neighbors, God promised His people a King whose worldwide reign would establish the world in peace. (9:8–10) Rather than this King making His entrance into Jerusalem on a regal charger (first coming), Zechariah saw Him on a lowly "beast of burden," or donkey. (Mat. 21:4–

5; Joh. 12:12–16) What would be the outcome? Zechariah tells us in 11:12: He would be sold for the price of a slave (Mat. 27:3–10); He would be arrested and smitten (Zec. 13:7; Mat. 26:31); He would be wounded in the house of His friends (Zec. 13:6; Mat. 26:47–50); and He would be pierced on the cross. (Zec. 12:10; Joh. 19:32–37) Ironically, Jerusalem, the city of Peace, crucified its King, the Prince of Peace.

Keep in mind that Zechariah prophesied a full 500 years before Christ's first coming, and yet, every detail of Zechariah's prophecy concerning Christ's coming came to pass exactly the way he said they would. So, what might that tell us about Zechariah's prophecies concerning Christ's second coming?! Folks, we can bank on it — they're all going to come to pass with the same impeccable precision!

The glory that Zechariah describes as he brings his prophecy to a close is hard to put into words. He provides an awe-inspiring panorama of what God has in store for Israel "in that day!" (Note that that phrase appears no less than 15 times in chapters 12–14 alone!)

From a topographical standpoint, Zechariah says the Mount of Olives will split in two when Christ sets foot on it at His second coming. (Zec. 14:4; Mat. 24:3) From a military standpoint, Zechariah says that all the nations that mess with Israel will be obliterated. (Zec. 12:9; Rev. 16:14–16; 19:19–21) From a spiritual standpoint, all of the godless idols, false prophets and spirits will be removed from the land. (Zec. 13:2–3) And from a political standpoint, Zechariah says that the Lord Jesus Christ alone will be King of the entire earth! (Zech. 14:9) That, my friend, is why it is called "the day of the Lord!" It's "the day" the Lord set apart unto Himself and blessed way back in Genesis 2:1–3, and "the day" to which all of history has been and is pointing! It's that "glorious day" when God's Son finally receives the glory that is due His name! "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

The COMING KING — Zechariah 9:9 (Mat. 21:4–5)

The ONE SOLD FOR 30 PIECES OF SILVER — Zechariah 11:12 (Mat. 27:3–10)

The ONE WOUNDED BY HIS FRIEND — Zechariah 13:6 (Mat. 26:47–50)

The ONE WHO WAS PIERCED — Zechariah 12:10 (Joh. 19:32–37)

The SMITTEN SHEPHERD – Zechariah 13:7 (Mat. 26:31)

The LORD WHO WILL RETURN TO THE MOUNT OF OLIVES — Zechariah 14:4 (Mat. 24:3)

WEEK 40, DAY 4: TODAY'S READING: MALACHI 1-4

OVERVIEW:

Introduction (1:1); Israel questions God's love (1:2–5); the priests dishonor God (1:6–2:9); God's people dealing treacherously with one another (2:10–16); Israel's perversion of good and evil (2:17); the promise of "the messenger of the covenant" (3:1–7); Israel robs God (3:8–12); Israel's arrogant words against God (3:13–15); God's message of reassurance (3:16–4:3); exhortation to remember the law of Moses (4:4); the promise of Elijah's return before the day of the Lord. (4:5–6)

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

Upon completing today's reading, we will have read the last of the 929 chapters, 23,214 verses, 592,439 words, and approximately 2,728,100 letters that comprise the Old Testament. Perhaps this is a good time for us to be reminded that the goal of the 52 Weeks of Pursuit, though, isn't simply to get through the Word of God — but for the Word of God to get through us!

Note at least five things that make the little Book of Malachi unique.

First, it's unique in that the exact date of the Book is not known. It is generally accepted that Malachi lived approximately 100 years after Haggai and Zechariah, and is associated with the reforms of Ezra and Nehemiah. To help place his ministry, though, keep in mind that a remnant returned from captivity in 536 B.C. Under Haggai and Zechariah's leadership, the Temple had been rebuilt in approximately 520–516 B.C. After another 60 years, Ezra came on the scene to re-establish the nation spiritually (457 B.C.), and after another 13 years (444 B.C.), Nehemiah was used of God to rebuild the wall. Malachi is most likely a contemporary of Nehemiah, because they faced the same exact spiritual problems...

- A profane priesthood. (Mal. 2:1–9 c.f. Neh. 13:27–30)
- Mixed marriages with the heathen. (Mal.2:10–16 c.f. Neh. 13:23–29)
- The withholding of tithes from God's house. (Mal. 3:8-12 c.f. Neh. 13:10-13)
- An overall spiritual apathy in the hearts of God's people.

The date of the Book is placed approximately at 450–400 B.C.

Secondly, the Book of Malachi is unique in the style in which it is written. Malachi uses a question–and–answer format to reveal the absolute spiritual cluelessness of the people due to their arrogance and apathy. There are at least 25 questions recorded in these four brief chapters!

Thirdly, this Book is unique in that 47 of the 55 verses in this Book are actually spoken by God. That is certainly the highest percentage of any of the Books of the prophets.

Fourthly, the Book of Malachi is the only one of the prophets whose Book ends on a note of condemnation and judgment, rather than restoration and hope. The word God chose to use to conclude the entire Old Testament is quite interesting and revealing. (If you don't know what it is, take a second now to look it up.) That word points us to the reality of man's sinful condition, and makes us long for a remedy that is satisfying to God's justice and holiness. Can you think of one? See 1 John 2:2!

And then, fifthly, this Book is unique because when Malachi penned the final word in 4:6, there was no more new revelation from God for a period of approximately 400 years! We often refer to them as “the 400 years of silence.” We might say the last Book of the Old Testament foreshadows the first Book of the New Testament, as John the Baptist breaks the silence by declaring, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” (Read Malachi 3:1, and then turn over a few pages into the New Testament and read Matthew 3:1–2!)

CHRIST IS REVEALED:

As the LORD, WHOM YE SEEK, (WHO) SHALL SUDDENLY COME TO HIS TEMPLE — Malachi 3:1 (Mark 11:15–17)

As the SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS — Malachi 4:2 (John 9:5)

As the TEACHER OF WISDOM — Proverbs 4:7,11 (Col. 2:3).

WEEK 40, DAY 5: TODAY'S READING: MATTHEW 1-4

OVERVIEW:

The Genealogy of the King (chapter 1); the Birth of the King (chapter 2); the Announcement of the King (chapter 3); the Testing of the King (chapter 4).

HIGHLIGHTS & INSIGHTS:

When you turn the page in your Bible after reading the Old Testament Book of Malachi and you come into the New Testament Book of Matthew, recognize that there has been a 400 year gap between these two Books. Sometimes when we're talking in terms of history, 400 years doesn't seem like an extremely long period of time. To help to put it in perspective, however, realize that 400 years ago, most English speaking people didn't even own their own copy of the Bible! Four hundred years is a long time!

And keep in mind that in that 400 year period of time between the Testaments, God had remained completely silent in terms of new revelation. God hadn't spoken to a single soul by direct revelation (Gen. 3:8), through the Angel of the Lord (Judges 6:12), out of a cloud (Ex. 34:5-7), from a burning bush (Ex. 3:4), with the mouth of a donkey (Num. 22:28), the mouth of a prophet (Deut. 18:18), or any other means. But recognize, that though He had been silent in the world, He certainly hadn't been absent! During those 400 years, God was busy orchestrating the events of history to prepare the world for the coming of His only begotten Son. Remember, Galatians 4:4 says, "But when the FULNESS OF TIME WAS COME, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law."

But also understand that the world had changed in that 400 year period. By this time, Hebrew had become a dead language, with Greek and Aramaic now the languages of common communication and commerce. There were also at least five different sects and parties that were now on the scene that were influencing the world religiously, socially and politically.

1. **The Scribes** – These were men regarded with great reverence by the Jews as the interpreters and teachers of the Scriptures. Ezra was perhaps the first of this sect, but by the time of Christ, they had degenerated greatly from Ezra's character and godliness. They were constantly in opposition to Christ, and some of Christ's most harsh words were directed to the Scribes, and to the next key sect...
2. **The Pharisees** – These men were also highly regarded by the Jews. They saw themselves as holy and zealous guardians of the law, and were ultra-conservative in all aspects of their beliefs and external behavior. They, too, brought the Lord Jesus Christ tremendous opposition, and were denounced by Him quite frequently.
3. **The Sadducees** – If the Pharisees were the religious "right," the Sadducees were the religious "left." For the most part, they were a part of the wealthy, influential, priestly parties, and were rationalistic and liberal in their beliefs, denying the immortality of the soul, as well as the resurrection.
4. **The Herodians** – This was not a religious group, but a political party who took their name from Herod. Because of their zealousness for the Roman government, they viewed Christ as a threat to Rome's authority, viewing Christ as nothing more than a political revolutionary.
5. **The Zealots** – These were extreme and radical defenders of a theocratic form of government (God rules), and were involved in acts of violence against the Roman government to champion their cause.

We will run into these sects repeatedly throughout Matthew and the other gospels and it is important to understand who they are to really understand the social, political, and religious world of the New Testament.

As we move into the Book of Matthew today, because the events are easily understood, perhaps the best use of our time will be in providing an analysis of the Book as a whole:

1. Information About The Author

- His name: Matthew.
- His name means: Gift of the Lord (or Jehovah).
- He is also called Levi. (Mk. 2:13-14; Lk. 5:27-29)
- He was a Publican. (Mt.10:3; 17:24-27; Ro.13:1-7)
- He was born a Jew. (Mk. 2:14; Lk. 5:27)
- He is the son of Alphaeus. (Mk. 2:14)
- He has two brothers, James and Judas. (Mk. 3:18; Lk. 6:16)
- He was chosen to be one of the 12 disciples. (Lk. 6:12-16; Mt.10:1-4; Mk. 3:13-19)

2. Facts About Matthew's Gospel

- Approximate date of writing: 64-66 A.D.
- Written from: Jerusalem.
- Dates of the recorded events: 4 B.C. – 33 A.D.
- Theme: Christ, the King of the Jews.
- Christ is seen as: The Promised King.
- Key Verse: Matthew 27:37.
- Key Word: Kingdom (56 times).
- Chapters: 28
- Verses: 1,071
- Words: 24,755

3. Features of Matthew's Gospel

- This is the only gospel that uses the phrase "kingdom of heaven" (32 times).
- This is the only gospel that uses the phrase "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken" (9 times)
- This gospel contains 60 references to the Old Testament.
- This gospel contains 25 fulfilled prophecies.

4. A Simple Outline of Matthew's Gospel

- Two Rejections:
 - Rejection #1 - The rejection of the Kingdom. (Chapters 1-12)
 - Rejection #2 - The rejection of the King. (Chapters 13-28)