

THE SECOND BOOK OF CHRONICLES

CHAPTER 1 Oct. 13

Solomon Asks for Wisdom

Solomon the son of David was strengthened in his kingdom, and Yahweh his God was with him, and magnified him exceedingly. ² Solomon spoke to all Israel, to the captains of thousands and of hundreds, and to the judges, and to every prince in all Israel, the heads of the fathers' households. ³ So Solomon, and all the assembly with him, went to the high place that was at Gibeon; for there was the Tent of Meeting of God, which Moses the servant of Yahweh had made in the wilderness. ⁴ But David had brought the ark of God up from Kiriath Jearim to the place that David had prepared for it; for he had pitched a tent for it at Jerusalem. ⁵ Moreover the bronze altar, that Bezalel the son of Uri the son of Hur had made, was there before the tabernacle of Yahweh; and Solomon

and the assembly were seeking counsel there. ⁶ Solomon went up there to the bronze altar before Yahweh which was at the Tent of Meeting and offered one thousand burnt offerings on it. ⁷ In that night God appeared to Solomon and said to him, Ask what I shall give you. ⁸ Solomon said to God, You have shown great grace to David my father, and have made me king in his place. ⁹ Now, Yahweh God, let your promise to David my father be established; for you have made me king over a people like the dust of the earth in multitude. ¹⁰ Now give me wisdom and knowledge, that I may go out and come in before this people; for who can judge this your people, that is so great? ¹¹ God said to Solomon, Because this was in your heart, and you have not asked riches, wealth, or honour, nor the life of those who hate you, neither yet have asked long life; but have asked

1:6 The Chronicles record is very positive compared to the accounts of Solomon in 1 Kings. But Solomon's many sacrifices must be compared with Mic. 6:7, which says that God isn't impressed by such "thousands" of sacrifices, but looks instead for humility, justice and kindness in a person. Solomon's father had likewise appreciated that the cattle on one thousand hills are God's and so we can't give Him anything materially which He doesn't have, but we can give Him our personalities and characters (Ps. 50:10). But Solomon thought that external generosity to God was what He wanted, and he ignored the spiritual sacrifices which are far more important to God.

1:10 'Going out and coming in' is an idiom for leadership. Solomon was asking for wisdom because he thought that he was the Messiah, and he saw wisdom as a Messianic characteristic. He failed to realize that the promises to Abraham and David were only being primarily fulfilled in him (e.g. 1 Kings 4:20); he thought that he was the ultimate fulfilment of them (1 Kings 8:20 states this in so many words). His lack of faith and vision of the future Kingdom lead him to this proud and arrogant conclusion (cp. building up our own 'Kingdom' in this life through our lack of vision of the future Kingdom which is to come at Christ's return).

wisdom and knowledge for yourself, that you may judge my people, over whom I have made you king: ¹² wisdom and knowledge is granted to you. I will give you riches, wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had who have been before you; neither shall there any after you have the like.

Solomon's Prosperity

¹³ So Solomon came from the high place that was at Gibeon, from before the Tent of Meeting, to Jerusalem; and he reigned over Israel.

¹⁴ Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen: and he had one thousand four hundred chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen, that he placed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. ¹⁵ The king made silver and gold to be in Jerusalem as stones, and cedars made he to be as abundant as the sycamore trees that are in the

lowland. ¹⁶ The horses which Solomon had were brought out of Egypt and from Kue; the king's merchants purchased them from Kue. ¹⁷ They brought out of Egypt a chariot for six hundred pieces of silver, and a horse for one hundred and fifty. They also brought them out for all the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of Syria.

CHAPTER 2 Oct. 13

Solomon Arranges Raw Materials for the Temple from Huram

Now Solomon purposed to build a house for the name of Yahweh, and a house for his kingdom. ² Solomon counted out seventy thousand men to bear burdens, and eighty thousand men who were stone cutters in the mountains, and three thousand six hundred to oversee them. ³ Solomon sent to Huram the king of Tyre saying, As you dealt with David my father, and sent him cedars to build

1:11 We too can prefer wisdom over wealth when we decide to turn down a more demanding or a second job or course of education because we don't want to be left without time or heart for God's word.

1:16 *The king's merchants purchased them* – This was specific disobedience to Dt. 17:16, which taught that Israel's king shouldn't cause the people to go to Egypt to buy horses. And Solomon would have copied out this section of the law and memorized it (Dt. 17:18). This shows how we have a tendency to not only ignore God's word but actually to do exactly the opposite. Israel was strategically situated between Egypt and other nations, and so Solomon became a middleman for the horse and chariot trade (:17); but Israel were not to have horses and chariots themselves (Dt. 17:16). Inevitably, Solomon ended up keeping horses for himself because he was 'in the trade', and became obsessed with them. It's rather like a person dealing in alcohol becoming themselves an alcoholic; and in more subtle ways we too can fall for the goods of Egypt through wilful association with them and enabling others to enjoy them.

2:1 Solomon wanted to build two houses, one for God and another for himself. There was always a duality in Solomon's service, rather than a total commitment to God alone.

2:3-6 These words seem to smack of a false humility. He pompously informs Hiram of the magnificence of his project, lost in the manic obsession of the powerful architect,

him a house in which to dwell, so deal with me. ⁴ Behold, I am about to build a house for the name of Yahweh my God, to dedicate it to Him, and to burn before Him incense of sweet spices, and for the continual showbread, and for the burnt offerings morning and evening, on the Sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the set feasts of Yahweh our God. This is an ordinance forever to Israel. ⁵ The house which I build is great; for our God is great above all gods. ⁶ But who is able to build Him a house, since heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain Him? Who am I then, that I should build Him a house, except just to burn incense before Him? ⁷ Now therefore send me a man talented to work in gold, silver, brass, iron, purple, crimson and blue, and who knows how to produce engravings, to be with the talented men who are with me in Judah and in Jerusalem, whom David my father provided. ⁸ Send me also cedar trees, fir trees, and al gum trees, out of Lebanon; for I know that your servants know how to cut timber in

Lebanon. My servants shall be with your servants, ⁹ even to prepare me timber in abundance; for the house which I am about to build shall be great and wonderful. ¹⁰ Behold, I will give to your servants, the cutters who cut timber, twenty thousand measures of beaten wheat, and twenty thousand measures of barley, and twenty thousand baths of wine, and twenty thousand baths of oil. ¹¹ Then Huram the king of Tyre answered in a writing which he sent to Solomon, Because Yahweh loves His people, therefore He has made you king over them. ¹² Huram continued, Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel That made heaven and earth, Who has given to David the king a wise son, endowed with discretion and understanding, that should build a house for Yahweh, and a house for His kingdom. ¹³ Now I have sent a talented man endowed with understanding, of Huram my fathers, ¹⁴ the son of a woman of the daughters of Dan; and his father was a man of Tyre, talented to work in gold, silver, brass, iron, stone, timber, purple,

and then concludes: “Who am I then, that I should build (God) an house?”. Confirmation of this is provided by the way in which Jer. 22:13-17 describes Jehoiakim's proud building of his own cedar house in the language of Solomon's building of the temple. We can serve God with pride, in which case it is an abomination. There's an obvious contradiction in Solomon's reasoning; if God is indeed so great that He doesn't dwell in human houses (Acts 7:48; 17:24), then why build Him a house? This was all false humility, draped, as it were, in out of context Biblical quotation and spiritual allusion.

2:5 The house which I build is great – The Hebrew word translated “great” is used again by Solomon at the end of his life when he lost his faith and looked back at how he had built “great” buildings (Ecc. 2:4) in a vain search for self-fulfilment which he ultimately found to be vanity. The lesson of Solomon is that we can serve God on a surface level whilst our heart is far from Him, and the works we do for Him are in fact only a living out of our vain search for self-fulfilment, rather than a total devotion to Him and His causes.

blue, fine linen and crimson, also to engrave any kind of engraving, and to devise any device. Let there be a place appointed to him with your talented men, and with the talented men of my lord David your father.¹⁵ Now therefore the wheat and the barley, the oil and the wine, which my lord has spoken of, let him send to his servants;¹⁶ and we will cut wood out of Lebanon, as much as you shall need. We will bring it to you in floats by sea to Joppa; and you shall carry it up to Jerusalem.¹⁷ Solomon numbered all the foreigners who were in the land of Israel, after the numbering with which David his father had numbered them; and they were found one hundred and fifty-three thousand six hundred.¹⁸ He set seventy thousand of them to bear burdens, and eighty thousand to be stone cutters in the mountains, and three thousand six hundred overseers to set the people to work.

CHAPTER 3 Oct. 14

The Dimensions and Specifications of the Temple

Then Solomon began to build the house of Yahweh at Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where Yahweh appeared to David his father, which he prepared in the place that David

had appointed, in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite.² He began to build in the second day of the second month, in the fourth year of his reign.³ Now these are the foundations which Solomon laid for the building of God's house. The length by cubits after the first measure was sixty cubits and the breadth twenty cubits.⁴ The porch that was in front, its length, according to the breadth of the house, was twenty cubits, and the height one hundred and twenty; and he overlaid it within with pure gold.⁵ The greater house he made with a ceiling of fir wood which he overlaid with fine gold, and ornamented it with palm trees and chains.⁶ He garnished the house with precious stones for beauty: and the gold was gold of Parvaim.⁷ He overlaid also the house, the beams, the thresholds and its walls and its doors, with gold; and engraved cherubim on the walls.⁸ He made the most holy place: its length, according to the breadth of the house, was twenty cubits, and its breadth twenty cubits; and he overlaid it with fine gold, amounting to six hundred talents.⁹ The weight of the nails was fifty shekels of gold. He overlaid the upper rooms with gold.¹⁰ In the most holy place he made two cherubim of wood; and

3:1 This implies David assumed that the spot where the Angel appeared to him in 2 Sam. 24:17,18 was where he should build the temple. But this could be one of several examples of David wildly over-interpreting in order to justify his obsession with his son building a temple.

Mount Moriah – This was where Abraham offered Isaac (Gen. 22:2), and it was near Jerusalem – further strengthening the connections between that offering and the sacrifice of Christ on a hill outside Jerusalem.

3:3 A cubit was the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger.

they overlaid them with gold.¹¹ The wings of the cherubim were twenty cubits long. The wing of the one was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house; and the other wing was five cubits, reaching to the wing of the other cherub.¹² The wing of the other cherub was five cubits, reaching to the wall of the house; and the other wing was five cubits, joining to the wing of the other cherub.¹³ The wings of these cherubim spread themselves forth twenty cubits. They stood on their feet, and their faces were toward the house.¹⁴ He made the veil of blue, purple, crimson and fine linen, and decorated it with cherubim.¹⁵ Also he made be-

fore the house two pillars of thirty-five cubits high, and the capital that was on the top of each of them was five cubits.¹⁶ He made chains in the oracle, and put them on the tops of the pillars; and he made one hundred pomegranates, and put them on the chains.¹⁷ He set up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand, and the other on the left; and called the name of that on the right hand Jachin, and the name of that on the left Boaz.

CHAPTER 4 Oct. 14

Details of the Temple Furniture

Then he made an altar of brass,
twenty cubits in length, and

3:12 Joining to the wing of the other cherub – The cherubim totally covered the ark. In the Psalms, David reflects that the righteous dwell under the shadow of God's wings (Ps. 17:8; 36:7), as if we are located on the atonement cover which was on top of the ark, where the blood of atonement was sprinkled, which represented Christ's blood. Our covering by God's Angelic cherubim protection is therefore total and complete. But the cherubim described here aren't those which covered the ark; these covered the entire Most Holy Place. Likewise the constant theme of cherubim everywhere in the temple suggests that Solomon wished to expand the concept of the holiness and protection of the atonement cover to the entire temple. The temple represents all God's people; for we are His temple. The New Testament expands the theme further – the person of each individual believer is the temple of God (1 Cor. 3:17; 6:19). Each of us personally becomes as it were within the Most Holy Place and likewise constantly in God's most intense presence and covered by His wings.

4:1 Stephen says that David tried to find a *tabernacle* for God, “*But Solomon built him an house. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, Heaven is my throne... what house will ye build me?*” (Acts 7:46–49 AV). This cannot mean ‘God no longer dwells in the temple as He used to before Christ’s death’, because the reason given is that the prophet Isaiah says that God cannot live in houses. This reason was true in Isaiah’s time, before the time of Christ. It would seem that Stephen is politely saying: ‘Solomon made this mistake of thinking that God can be limited to a physical building. You’re making just the same mistake’. And he goes on to make a comment which could well allude to this: “*Ye do always resist the Holy Spirit: as your fathers (including Solomon) did, so do ye*” (Acts 7:51 AV). Further evidence that Stephen saw Solomon’s building of the temple in a negative light is provided by the link between Acts 7:41 and 48: “*They made a calf... and rejoiced in the works of their own hands... howbeit the Most High dwelleth not in*

twenty cubits in breadth, and ten cubits in height.² Also he made the molten sea of ten cubits from brim to brim, round in compass; and its height was five cubits; and a line of thirty cubits encircled it.³ Under it was the likeness of oxen which encircled it for ten cubits, encircling the sea. The oxen were in two rows, cast when it was cast.⁴ It stood on twelve oxen, three looking toward the north, three looking toward the west, three looking toward the south and three looking toward the east. The sea was set on them above, and all their back parts were inward.⁵ It was a handbreadth thick; and its brim was worked like the brim of a cup, like the flower of a lily. It received and held three thousand baths.⁶ He made also ten basins, and put five on the right hand and five on the left, to wash in them. Such things as related to the burnt offering they washed in them; but the sea was for the priests to wash in.⁷ He made the ten lampstands of gold according to the command concerning them; and he set them in the temple, five on the right hand and five on the left.⁸ He made also ten tables, and placed them in the temple, five on the right side and five on the left. He made one hundred basins of gold.⁹ Furthermore he

made the court of the priests, and the great court, and doors for the court, and overlaid their doors with brass.¹⁰ He set the sea on the right side of the house eastward, toward the south.¹¹ Huram made the pots, the shovels and the basins. So Huram made an end of doing the work that he did for king Solomon in God's house:¹² the two pillars, and the bowls, and the two capitals which were on the top of the pillars, and the two networks to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the top of the pillars,¹³ and the four hundred pomegranates for the two networks; two rows of pomegranates for each network, to cover the two bowls of the capitals that were on the pillars.¹⁴ He made also the bases, and the basins he made on the bases;¹⁵ one sea, and the twelve oxen under it.¹⁶ Huram his father also made the pots, the shovels, the forks, and all its vessels for king Solomon for the house of Yahweh of bright brass.¹⁷ The king cast them in the plain of the Jordan, in the clay ground between Succoth and Zeredah.¹⁸ Thus Solomon made all these vessels in great abundance; for the weight of the brass could not be estimated.¹⁹ Solomon made all the vessels that were in God's house, the golden altar also, and the tables

temples *made with hands*" (AV). The word "made" is stressed here in the record of Solomon's building the temple (3:8,10,14-16; 4:1,2,6-9,14,18,19,21). The work of the temple was very much produced by men's *hands* (2:7,8). Things made with hands refers to idols in several Old Testament passages (e.g. Is. 2:8; 17:8; 31:7). Significantly, Solomon's temple is described as being made with hands in 1 Chron. 29:5. The lesson ought to be clear: we can expend huge effort in apparently serving God when in fact we are only serving ourselves; and thus we can turn the supposed service of God into an idol.

with the showbread on them;²⁰ and the lampstands with their lamps, to burn before the oracle according to the commandment, of pure gold;²¹ and the flowers, and the lamps, and the tongs, of gold (perfect gold);²² and the snuffers, basins, spoons and fire pans, of pure gold. As for the entry of the house, the inner doors of it for the most holy place, and the doors of the main hall of the temple were of gold.

CHAPTER 5 Oct. 15

The Temple Is Dedicated with Praise

Thus all the work that Solomon did for the house of Yahweh was finished. Solomon brought in the things that David his father had dedicated, even the silver and the gold, and all the vessels, and put them in the treasuries of the house of God.² Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel, and all the heads of the tribes, the princes of the fathers' households of the children of Israel, to Jerusalem, to bring up the ark of

the covenant of Yahweh out of the city of David, which is Zion.³ And all the men of Israel assembled themselves to the king at the feast, which was in the seventh month.⁴ All the elders of Israel came. The Levites took up the ark;⁵ and they brought up the ark, and the Tent of Meeting, and all the holy vessels that were in the Tent; these the priests the Levites brought up.⁶ King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel, that were assembled to him, were before the ark, sacrificing sheep and cattle, that could not be counted nor numbered for multitude.⁷ The priests brought in the ark of the covenant of Yahweh to its place, into the oracle of the house, to the most holy place, even under the wings of the cherubim.⁸ For the cherubim spread forth their wings over the place of the ark, and the cherubim covered the ark and its poles.⁹ The poles were so long that the ends of the poles were seen from the ark before the oracle; but they were not seen outside. It is there to this day.¹⁰ There was nothing in

5:6 Sacrificing sheep and cattle, that could not be counted – Whilst the record here isn't specifically critical of Solomon, he failed to understand his father David's reflection that all the cattle on every hill are God's (Ps. 50:10) and therefore God doesn't so much as seek animal sacrifice from us as desire faith and a broken casting of ourselves upon God. David came to that understanding because his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba deserved death and there was no animal sacrifice which could take away that guilt – he had to throw himself upon God's grace and learn that the real sacrifice God sought was that of a broken, penitent heart (Ps. 51:16,17). Solomon didn't recognize his sins as David did, he didn't mess up so publically as David did, and therefore he failed to appreciate this, focussing instead on the external rather than the internal. It's amazing how God uses human sin and failure to teach us; those like Solomon who don't sin publically and don't recognize the weight of their private sins are often lead into the shallow, empty spirituality and surface level service of God which we see in Solomon at this time. See on 7:5.

5:8 The cherubim covered the ark – See on 3:12.

the ark except the two tables which Moses put in it at Horeb, when Yahweh made a covenant with the children of Israel when they came out of Egypt.¹¹ The priests came out of the holy place, (for all the priests who were present had sanctified themselves, and didn't keep their divisions; ¹² also the Levites who were the singers, all of them, even Asaph, Heman, Jeduthun, and their sons and their brothers, arrayed in fine linen, with cymbals and stringed instruments and harps, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them one hundred twenty priests sounding with trumpets). ¹³ The trumpet-ers and singers were as one, to make one sound to be heard in praising and thanking Yahweh; and they lifted up their voice with the trumpets and cymbals and instruments of music, and praised Yahweh, saying, For He is good; for His loving kindness endures forever! Then the house was filled with a cloud, even the house of

Yahweh,¹⁴ so that the priests could not stand to minister by reason of the cloud; for the glory of Yahweh filled God's house.

CHAPTER 6 Oct. 15

Solomon Addresses the People

Then Solomon said, Yahweh has said that He would dwell in the thick darkness.² But I have built You a house of habitation, and a place for You to dwell in forever.³ The king turned his face and blessed all the assembly of Israel; and all the assembly of Israel stood.⁴ He said, Blessed be Yahweh the God of Israel, Who spoke with His mouth to David my father and has with His hands fulfilled it saying,⁵ Since the day that I brought forth My people out of the land of Egypt, I chose no city out of all the tribes of Israel to build a house in, that My name might be there; neither chose I any man to be prince over My people Israel.⁶ But I have chosen Jerusalem, that

6:2 A place for You to dwell in forever – This is one of several hints that Solomon felt that the full fulfilment of the Davidic promises was to be found in him (see on :10). He failed to look forward to the spirit of Christ, instead becoming obsessed with the achievement of his own works. He was largely encouraged in this by David, who seems to have felt that Solomon was the Messiah figure the promises spoke about. Thus Ps.72 is dedicated to Solomon, and yet it speaks clearly of the messianic Kingdom. David thus came to misquote and misapply the promises God made to him in his obsession about his own family, rather than seeing the promises as concerning the great spiritual family which would be built by Messiah. Solomon repeated his father's error. God had told David that He did not want a physical house, because He had never commanded this to be done at any time in the past. Solomon misquotes this in :5,6 to mean that God had never asked for a physical house in the past, but now He had asked David's son to build such a house in Jerusalem. This is a lesson to us all against misquoting and misapplying Scripture to justify how we would like things to be for us and our immediate family.

6:6. Solomon claims that God said: “But I have chosen Jerusalem, that My name might be there”. God had chosen no resting place, although it would have been po-

My name might be there; and have chosen David to be over My people Israel. ⁷ Now it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel. ⁸ But Yahweh said to David my father, Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart. ⁹ Nevertheless you shall not build the house; but your son who shall come forth out of your body, he shall build the house for My name. ¹⁰ Yahweh has performed His word that He spoke; for I have risen up in the place of David my father, and sit on the throne of Israel, as Yahweh promised, and have built the house for the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel. ¹¹ Therein I have set the ark, in which is the covenant of Yahweh, which He made with the children of Israel.

Solomon's Prayer of Dedication

¹² He stood before the altar of Yahweh in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands ¹³ (for Solomon had made a bronze

scaffold, five cubits long, five cubits broad and three cubits high, and had set it in the midst of the court; and on it he stood, and kneeled down on his knees before all the assembly of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven). ¹⁴ He said, Yahweh, the God of Israel, there is no God like You, in heaven or on earth; You Who keep covenant and loving kindness with Your servants who walk before You with all their heart; ¹⁵ Who has kept with Your servant David my father that which You promised him: yes, You spoke with Your mouth, and have fulfilled it with Your hand, as it is this day. ¹⁶ Now therefore, Yahweh the God of Israel, keep with Your servant David my father that which You promised him saying, There shall not fail you a man in My sight to sit on the throne of Israel, if only your children take heed to their way, to walk in My law as you have walked before Me. ¹⁷ Now therefore, Yahweh the God of Israel, let Your word be verified which You spoke to Your servant David. ¹⁸ But will God indeed dwell with men on

litically convenient for Solomon if Jerusalem as a city was where God had chosen to dwell. And so he kept thinking that way until he persuaded himself that in fact this was what God had said, and misquoted God's word to that end.

6:10 Yahweh has performed His word that He spoke – The promise to David about his great son building God's house was a promise of Messiah building a house in the sense of a spiritual family (Lk. 1:31-35). The promise was given in response to David's desire to build a physical house for God. But Solomon was too eager to see the prophecy fulfilled in him and before his eyes, and this lack of Christ-centeredness and focus on the future, ultimate Kingdom of God on earth led him astray.

6:12, 13 The record emphasizes how Solomon prayed in front of everyone and showed his apparent humility before all. Christ's teaching condemning such behaviour may well allude to Solomon's failures in these things (Mt. 6:6).

6:18 These fine words contradict what Solomon just said in :2, that he was building a house where God *would* dwell, and would do so, he claimed, "for ever". This is all

the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens can't contain You; how much less this house which I have built! ¹⁹ Yet have respect for the prayer of Your servant and to his supplication, Yahweh my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer which Your servant prays before You; ²⁰ that Your eyes may be open toward this house day and night, even toward the place where you have said that You would put Your name; to listen to the prayer which Your servant shall pray toward this place. ²¹ Listen to the petitions of Your servant and of Your people Israel when they shall pray toward this place. Yes, hear from Your dwelling place, even from heaven; and when You hear, forgive. ²² If a man sin against his neighbour, and an oath is laid on him to cause him to swear, and he comes and swears before your altar in this house; ²³ then hear from heaven, and do, and judge your servants, bringing retribution to the wicked, to bring his way on his own head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness. ²⁴ If Your people Israel be struck down before

therefore false humility, which is something every spiritual person must ever be on their guard against.

6:20 Pray toward this place – Prayer should've been directed toward God, but Solomon gave in to the human tendency to want a buffer between God and man, just as Israel didn't want to hear God speaking directly with them. Popular religion has pandered to this tendency through hierarchical systems of priesthood etc., but God has always revealed Himself as thirsting for relationship with man and therefore is eager for the most direct form of contact with us which our humanity permits. This is supremely enabled for those who are by status “in Christ” who can come directly to God because of Christ's achievement for us.

6:24 Turn again and confess Your name – God's Name refers to the declaration of His characteristics (Ex. 34:4-6). Repentance involves a recognition both of our wrongness, and God's rightness. See on 12:6.

the enemy because they have sinned against You, and shall turn again and confess Your name, and pray and make supplication before You in this house; ²⁵ then hear from heaven, and forgive the sin of your people Israel, and bring them again to the land which You gave to them and to their fathers. ²⁶ When the sky is shut up and there is no rain because they have sinned against You; if they pray toward this place, and confess Your name and turn from their sin, when You afflict them; ²⁷ then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants and of Your people Israel, when You teach them the good way in which they should walk; and send rain on Your land, which You have given to Your people for an inheritance. ²⁸ If there is famine in the land, if there is plague, blight or mildew, locust or caterpillar; if their enemies besiege them in the land of their cities; whatever plague or whatever sickness there is; ²⁹ whatever prayer and supplication be made by any man, or by all Your people Israel who shall know every man his own plague and his own sorrow of heart,

and shall spread forth his hands toward this house; ³⁰ then hear from heaven Your dwelling place and forgive, and render to each man according to all his ways, whose heart You know; (for You, even You only, know the hearts of the children of men;) ³¹ that they may fear You, to walk in Your ways, so long as they live in the land which You gave to our fathers. ³² Moreover concerning the foreigner, who is not of Your people Israel, when he shall come from a far country for Your great name's sake and because of Your mighty hand and Your outstretched arm; when they shall come and pray toward this house; ³³ then hear from heaven,

even from Your dwelling place, and do according to all that the foreigner calls to You for; that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name and fear You, as does Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name. ³⁴ If Your people go out to battle against their enemies, by whatever way You shall send them, and they pray to You toward this city which You have chosen, and the house which I have built for your name; ³⁵ then hear from heaven their prayer and their supplication, and uphold their case. ³⁶ If they sin against You (for there is no man who sins not) and You are angry with

6:30 *Render to every man according to all his ways* – This will happen when Christ returns at the final day of judgment (Rev. 22:12). And yet it is said to happen in response to prayer now. When we pray, we come before God's throne; the experience of prayer is therefore a foretaste of the day of judgment. As we feel toward the Lord now when we are in His presence in prayer, so we will then.

6:33 Solomon speaks as if the heavens where God lived were actually the temple; he bid men pray towards the temple where God lived, rather than to God in Heaven. Yet theoretically he recognized the magnitude of God (:18); yet the vastness of God, both in power and spirituality, meant little to him; it failed to humble him as it should have done. It is a feature of human nature to be able to perceive truth and yet act the very opposite. His enthusiasm for his own works lead him to lose a true relationship with God. The idea of salvation by grace became lost on him, loving response to God's forgiveness was not on his agenda, he felt true humility was unnecessary for him, given his certainty that he was King as God intended.

6:35 *Uphold their case* – The crises encountered by God's people on earth are as it were considered by the court of Heaven, with God acting as both the advocate and judge, upholding their case. But this is if we bring our case before Him in prayer. This is why simply telling God the situation we're in, although He knows it in the sense that He knows all things, is so necessary.

6:36 Solomon is alluding in this verse to God's threatened punishments for Israel if they totally rebelled against Him. But Solomon seems to minimize that sin by describing it as if it's inevitable – “for there is no man who sins not”. God set before Israel the blessings for obedience and abiding in the covenant, and the curses for disobedience and breaking covenant with God, which included being scattered amongst the Gentiles and losing their land. And Solomon minimizes such serious rebellion as something ordinary. This minimizing of sin is what led him to spiritual self-destruction.

them, and deliver them to the enemy, so that they carry them away captive to a land far off or near; ³⁷ yet if they shall repent themselves in the land where they are carried captive, and turn again, and make supplication to You in the land of their captivity saying, We have sinned, we have done perversely, and have dealt wickedly; ³⁸ if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their captivity to where they have carried them captive, and pray toward their land which You gave to their fathers and to the city which You have chosen, and toward the house which I have built for Your name: ³⁹ then hear from heaven, even from Your dwelling place, their prayer and their petitions, and uphold their case and forgive Your people who have sinned against You. ⁴⁰ Now, my God, let, I beg You, Your eyes be open, and let Your ears be attentive, to the prayer that is made in this place. ⁴¹ Now therefore arise, Yahweh God, into Your resting place, You and the ark of Your strength: let Your priests, Yahweh God, be clothed with salvation, and let Your saints rejoice in goodness. ⁴² Yahweh God, don't turn

away the face of Your anointed. Remember Your graces to David Your servant.

CHAPTER 7 Oct. 16

God Accepts the Temple

Nan end of praying, the fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of Yahweh filled the house. ² The priests could not enter into the house of Yahweh, because the glory of Yahweh filled Yahweh's house. ³ All the children of Israel looked on, when the fire came down, and the glory of Yahweh was on the house; and they bowed themselves with their faces to the ground on the pavement and worshipped and gave thanks to Yahweh saying, For He is good; for His grace endures for ever. ⁴ Then the king and all the people offered sacrifice before Yahweh. ⁵ King Solomon offered a sacrifice of twenty-two thousand head of cattle, and a hundred and twenty thousand sheep. So the king and all the people dedicated God's house. ⁶ The priests stood, according to their positions; the Levites also with instruments

7:1 Although God had clearly told David that He didn't want a physical house built for Him, He made a concession to Israel's weakness as He did in allowing them to have a human king – and worked through that concession, that lower level of spiritual life which His people had chosen. Such is His thirst for relationship with us His people. Therefore His glory filled the temple as a sign that despite Solomon's pompous prayer of chapter 6, He was willing to accept that system of temple presence.

7:5 These huge numbers of animal sacrifices weren't really what God was looking for; each animal represented the dedication of one person, and we cannot dedicate other people's devotion; they must themselves offer it. The fact Solomon's animal sacrifices were too many or too large to fit on the altar God had designed and specified the size of (:7) indicates that they weren't what God had intended. See on 5:6.

of music of Yahweh, which David the king had made to give thanks to Yahweh, when David praised by their ministry saying, For His grace endures forever. The priests sounded trumpets before them; and all Israel stood. ⁷ Moreover Solomon made the middle of the court holy that was before the house of Yahweh; for there he offered the burnt offerings, and the fat of the peace offerings, because the bronze altar which Solomon had made was not able to receive the burnt offering, and the meal offering, and the fat. ⁸ So Solomon held the feast at that time seven days, and all Israel with him, a very great assembly, from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt. ⁹ On the eighth day they held a solemn assembly; for they kept the dedication of the altar seven days, and the feast

seven days. ¹⁰ On the twenty-third day of the seventh month he sent the people away to their tents, joyful and glad of heart for the grace that Yahweh had shown to David, and to Solomon, and to Israel His people. ¹¹ Thus Solomon finished the house of Yahweh, and the king's house. He successfully completed all that came into Solomon's heart to make in the house of Yahweh, and in his own house.

God Responds to Solomon's Prayer

¹² Yahweh appeared to Solomon by night and said to him, I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this place to Myself for a house of sacrifice. ¹³ If I shut up the sky so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send plague among My people; ¹⁴ if My

7:11 The house of Yahweh, and in his own house – Twice in this verse and often elsewhere we see God's house paralleled with Solomon's house. His dedication to God's house wasn't total and undivided.

7:12 2 God accepted the temple only as a place of sacrifice, i.e. a glorified altar (cp. 2 Sam. 24:17,18). And yet – God didn't really want sacrifice (Ps. 40:6; Heb. 10:5). It was a concession to weakness.

7:14 Solomon in his prayer had said that if Israel sinned and then prayed toward the temple, God would then forgive them. But God corrects this; He wants sinners to pray directly to Him, and He will forgive them – the temple was not to be seen as the instrument or mediatrix of forgiveness which Solomon envisaged. Likewise, Solomon's implication that prayer offered in the temple would be especially acceptable was not upheld by God's reply to him about this (6:24-26 cp. 7:12,13). Again and again we see that God thirsts for direct relationship with Him, rather than via any system of priesthood or human religion, even attending meetings because that's our social club and family background. Solomon says that God will hear the prayers of His people because *the temple* is called by God's Name; but God's response is that "My people who are called by My name" would pray to Him themselves and be heard, quite apart from the temple (6:33 cp. 7:14). He sees *them* as bearing His Name rather than the temple building, as Solomon perceived it. God goes on to parallel the temple and His people in :21,22, saying that if He punishes the temple He will punish the people. Solomon seems to have thought that the temple would still stand favourably in God's eyes even

people who are called by My name shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land. ¹⁵ Now My eyes shall be open and My ears sensitive to the prayer that is made in this place. ¹⁶ For now have I chosen and made this house holy, that My name may be there forever; and My eyes and My heart shall be there perpetually. ¹⁷ As for you, if you will walk before Me as David your father walked, and do according to all that I have commanded you and will keep My statutes and My ordinances; ¹⁸ then I will establish the throne of your kingdom, according as I covenanted with David your father saying, There shall not fail you a man to be ruler in Israel. ¹⁹ But if you turn away and forsake My statutes and My commandments which I have set before you, and shall go and

serve other gods, and worship them; ²⁰ then I will pluck them up by the roots out of My land which I have given them; and this house, which I have made holy for My name, I will cast out of My sight, and I will make it a proverb and a byword among all peoples. ²¹ This house, which is so high, everyone who passes by it shall be astonished, and shall say, ‘Why has Yahweh done thus to this land, and to this house?’ ²² They shall answer, ‘Because they abandoned Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, and took other gods, worshipped them, and served them. Therefore He has brought all this evil on them’.

CHAPTER 8 Oct. 17

Solomon's Building Projects

It happened at the end of twenty years, in which Solomon had built the house of Yahweh and his own

if the people were punished. The lesson is that it's individual people rather than religious structures, of whatever sort, which God is interested in.

7:16 This is a conditional promise, followed by five verses of conditions concerning Solomon's spirituality which he overlooked. Like Solomon, we too can fix upon promises without considering their conditionality. There is good reason to think that communally and individually we so easily shut our eyes to the possibility of our spiritual failure and disaster, the sense of the future we might miss. God constantly warned Solomon about the conditionality of the promises, before the building started (2 Sam. 7:14), during it (1 Kings 6:11-13) and immediately after completing it (1 Kings 9:2-9).

7:20 God here corrects Solomon's idea that if Israel were dispersed, then the temple would still stand and they could pray to it from their dispersion.

8:1 *Solomon had built the house of Yahweh and his own house* – Again Solomon's building of God's house is paralleled with building his own house, implying his dedication to God's house wasn't wholehearted, unlike David his father. This chapter goes on to use the word “built” many times. Solomon's building of God's house is set within the context of the way he liked building anyway. At the end of his life, he admits that he went through a phase of being obsessed with building, in some vain search to

house,² that the cities which Huram had given to Solomon, Solomon built them, and caused the children of Israel to dwell there.³ Solomon went to Hamath Zobah, and prevailed against it.⁴ He built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the storage cities which he built in Hamath.⁵ Also he built Beth Horon the upper, and Beth Horon the lower, fortified cities, with walls, gates, and bars;⁶ and Baalath, and all the storage cities that Solomon had, and all the cities for his chariots, and the cities for his horsemen, and all that Solomon desired to build for his pleasure in Jerusalem, and in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion.⁷ As for all the people who were left of the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, who were not of Israel;⁸ of their children who were left after them in the land, whom the children of Israel didn't consume, of them Solomon conscripted forced labour to this day.⁹ But of the children of Israel, Solomon made no servants for his work; but they were men of war, and chief of his captains,

and rulers of his chariots and of his horsemen.¹⁰ These were the chief officers of king Solomon, even two-hundred and fifty, who ruled over the people.¹¹ Solomon brought up the daughter of Pharaoh out of the city of David to the house that he had built for her; for he said, My wife shall not dwell in the house of David king of Israel, because the places where the ark of Yahweh has come are holy.¹² Then Solomon offered burnt offerings to Yahweh on the altar of Yahweh, which he had built before the porch,¹³ even as the duty of every day required, offering according to the commandment of Moses, on the Sabbaths, and on the new moons, and on the set feasts, three times in the year, in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tents.¹⁴ He appointed, according to the ordinance of David his father, the divisions of the priests to their service, and the Levites to their offices, to praise, and to minister before the priests, as the duty of every day required; the doorkeepers also by their divisions at every gate; for so had David the man of God

find self-fulfilment without God (Ecc. 2:4). In his apparently zealous building of the temple, Solomon was therefore only serving God in ways which he enjoyed, which reinforced his own personality type. Hence :6 speaks of how he “desired to build for *his* pleasure”. On one hand, we must use our God-given talents to serve Him; and yet on the other, we are asked to take up Christ’s cross and follow Him, going right against the grain of how we would naturally like to be.

8:6 Solomon had so many horses and chariots that he needed to build cities to store them. This was a specific disobedience to the command that the king of Israel was not to multiply horses to himself (Dt. 17:16). Yet that was the very section of the Law which he had to copy out and remember (Dt. 17:19). He had the ability, like all of us, to know God’s requirements and yet do the very opposite. He must’ve assumed that somehow he was an exception... but if we accept and love God’s principles we will not wish to make ourselves any exception to them.

commanded.¹⁵ They didn't depart from the commandment of the king to the priests and Levites concerning any matter, or concerning the treasures.¹⁶ Now all the work of Solomon was prepared to the day of the foundation of the house of Yahweh, and until it was finished. So the house of Yahweh was completed.¹⁷ Then went Solomon to Ezion Geber, and to Eloth, on the seashore in the land of Edom.¹⁸ Huram sent him ships and servants who had knowledge of the sea by the hands of his servants; and they came with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and fetched from there four hundred and fifty talents of gold, and brought them to king Solomon.

CHAPTER 9 Oct. 18

The Visit of the Queen of Sheba

When the queen of Sheba heard of the fame of Solomon, she came to Jerusalem to prove Solomon with hard questions, with a very great train, and camels that bore spices, and gold in abundance and precious stones. When she had come to Solomon, she talked with

him of all that was in her heart.² Solomon told her all her questions; and there was not anything hidden from Solomon which he didn't tell her.³ When the queen of Sheba had seen the wisdom of Solomon, and the house that he had built,⁴ and the food of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the attendance of his ministers and their clothing, his cup bearers also and their clothing, and his ascent by which he went up to the house of Yahweh; there was no more spirit in her.⁵ She said to the king, It was a true report that I heard in my own land of your acts and of your wisdom.⁶ However I didn't believe their words until I came, and my eyes had seen it; and behold, the half of the greatness of your wisdom wasn't told me: you exceed the fame that I heard.⁷ Happy are your men, and happy are these your servants who stand continually before you, and hear your wisdom.⁸ Blessed be Yahweh your God, who delighted in you to set you on His throne, to be king for Yahweh your God: because your God loved Israel to establish them forever, therefore He made you

9:5 No more spirit in her— The Hebrew word translated “spirit” has a wide range of meaning. It can refer to the life force within people; or as here, it can refer to the mind.

9:6 People usually need to see intellectual truths lived out in practice before they will really believe them. This is why the Gospel is more powerfully taught by people, rather than through impersonal mediums like the internet or reading books.

9:8 To be king for Yahweh your God – Israel were God's Kingdom on earth, and their kings were reigning on God's behalf. The Kingdom was therefore overturned when the last king of Israel was deposed; but it will be re-established at Christ's return (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:6). The hope of the coming Kingdom of God on earth is therefore the hope of the re-establishment of God's Kingdom which once was upon earth. Again we see that the promised Kingdom will be on earth – this is the Biblical hope, not going to Heaven on death.

king over them, to do justice and righteousness.⁹ She gave the king one hundred and twenty talents of gold, and spices in great abundance, and precious stones. Neither was there any such spice as the queen of Sheba gave to king Solomon.¹⁰ The servants also of Huram, and the servants of Solomon, who brought gold from Ophir, brought algum trees and precious stones.¹¹ The king made of the algum trees terraces for the house of Yahweh and for the king's house, and harps and stringed instruments for the singers. There were none like these seen before in the land of Judah.¹² King Solomon gave to the queen of Sheba all her desire, whatever she asked, besides that which she had brought to the king. So she returned to her own land, she and her servants.

Solomon's Wealth

13 Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was

six hundred and sixty-six talents of gold,¹⁴ besides that which the traders and merchants brought. All the kings of Arabia and the governors of the country brought gold and silver to Solomon.¹⁵ King Solomon made two hundred large shields of beaten gold; six hundred shekels of beaten gold went to one large shield.¹⁶ He made three hundred other shields of beaten gold; three hundred shekels of gold went to one shield: and the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon.¹⁷ Moreover the king made a great throne of ivory, and overlaid it with pure gold.¹⁸ And there were six steps to the throne, with a footstool of gold, which were fastened to the throne, and stays on either side by the place of the seat, and two lions standing beside the stays.¹⁹ Twelve lions stood there on both sides of the six steps: there was nothing like it made in any kingdom.²⁰ All king Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels

9:13 The reference to 666 cannot be coincidental; this is the number of a man who is the epitome of “the beast” (Rev. 13:18). There are many other similarities between the descriptions of the beast’s kingdom and that of Solomon’s kingdom. And yet his kingdom was clearly a type of Christ’s kingdom. We see in this the terrible duality possible within human beings; and we see how what may appear very spiritual and wonderful on the surface can in fact be very sinful. This is true of both individuals and communities.

9:19 Solomon came to see his throne as the throne of God; he seemed to think that the promise to David that Messiah would sit on his throne could be fulfilled if he built the most amazing throne ever seen in the world. He made 12 lions to stand on either side of his throne, perhaps in imitation of how the Angels were perceived to be on either side of God’s throne (1 Kings 22:19). He was indeed sitting on the throne of the Lord as king over Israel, but in the sense that he was reigning on God’s behalf; for God was Israel’s true king. Solomon seems to have thought that he himself was some kind of God over Israel. And the lesson for us is to perceive ourselves as God’s servants and representatives, but not to take this to the extent that we think that all of our actions are thereby justified as somehow Divinely sanctioned. The end result was that Solo-

of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. Silver was nothing accounted of in the days of Solomon. ²¹ For the king had ships that went to Tarshish with the servants of Huram; once every three years came the ships of Tarshish, bringing gold, silver, ivory, and apes, and peacocks. ²² So king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom. ²³ All the kings of the earth sought the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. ²⁴ They brought each man his tribute, vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and clothing, armour, and spices, horses, and mules, a rate year by year. ²⁵ Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen that he stationed in the chariot cities, and with the king at Jerusalem. ²⁶ He ruled over all the kings from the River even to the land of the Philistines, and to the border of Egypt. ²⁷ The king made silver to be in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedars to be as the sycamore trees that are in the lowland, for abundance.

mon lost sight of the future Kingdom – and we too will likewise lose our way if we *de facto* consider our little kingdoms to effectively be God's Kingdom.

9:23 Solomon had God's wisdom throughout his apostasy (Ecc. 2:9), as the Truth ever remains with us in intellectual terms. God put that wisdom in his heart in order for him to help others, both in Israel and in the world; yet Solomon failed to realize that he needed to apply it to himself. The more truth passes through our lips to others, the stronger we are tempted to not apply it to ourselves personally.

10:4 The temple project became an obsession with Solomon; after his death, his people complained at the “grievous service” which Solomon had subjected them to. But the Hebrew word translated “service” is that repeatedly used to describe the “service” of the temple by the people (1 Chron. 25:6; 26:8,30; 27:26; 28:13-15,20,21; 29:7; 2 Chron. 8:14). Solomon became obsessed with making others ‘serve God’ when it was effectively serving *him*; he came to be abusive to God's people, when the initial idea of the temple was that it was to be built in order to help God's people serve Him. And

dance. ²⁸ They brought horses for Solomon out of Egypt, and out of all lands. ²⁹ Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, aren't they written in the history of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer concerning Jeroboam the son of Nebat? ³⁰ Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel forty years. ³¹ Solomon slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the city of David his father. Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.

CHAPTER 10 Oct. 19

The Division of the Kingdom

Rehoboam went to Shechem; for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king. ² When Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard of it (for he was in Egypt, where he had fled from the presence of king Solomon), then Jeroboam returned out of Egypt. ³ They sent and called him; and Jeroboam and all Israel came, and they spoke to Rehoboam saying, ⁴ Your father made our yoke grievous. Now therefore make lighter the grievous

service of your father, and his heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you.⁵ He said to them, Come again to me after three days. The people departed.⁶ King Rehoboam took counsel with the old men who had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What advice do you give me to return answer to this people?⁷ They spoke to him saying, ‘If you are kind to this people, and please them, and speak good words to them, then they will be your servants forever’.⁸ But he forsook the counsel of the old men which they had given him, and took counsel with the young men who had grown up with him, who stood before him.⁹ He said to them, What advice do you give, that we may return answer to this people who have spoken to me saying, ‘Make the yoke that your father put on us lighter?’¹⁰ The young men who had grown up with him spoke to him saying, Thus you shall tell the people who spoke to you saying, Your father made our yoke heavy, but make it lighter on us; thus you shall say to them, My little finger is thicker than

my father’s waist.¹¹ Now whereas my father burdened you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.¹² So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king asked, saying, Come to me again the third day.¹³ The king answered them roughly; and king Rehoboam forsook the advice of the old men,¹⁴ and spoke to them after the advice of the young men saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to it. My father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.¹⁵ So the king didn’t listen to the people; for it was brought about of God, that Yahweh might establish His word, which He spoke by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.¹⁶ When all Israel saw that the king didn’t listen to them, the people answered the king saying, What portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse! Every man to your tents, Israel! Now see to your own house, David. So all Israel departed to their tents.¹⁷ But as for the

such obsession, turning well motivated projects into means of personal ego tripping, with all the resultant abuse, has sadly damaged so many within the body of Christ. Jesus invited people who were heavy burdened under a hard yoke to come to Him and have that yoke made lighter (Mt. 11:29,30). He was clearly alluding to this incident, where heavily burdened people ‘came’ seeking a lighter yoke.

10:10 Younger people are often harsher than older ones, and therefore make good soldiers in wars of aggression, both literal and figurative. As we grow older we ought to become softer and the more influenced by God’s grace, rather than growing hard and gnarled as some do.

10:15 *It was brought about of God* – Rehoboam’s response to the people seems obviously wrong and unwise. Yet this error of judgment was worked through by God to fulfil His prophetic word. Whilst we have freewill, God confirms us in the attitudes and choices which we make.

children of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them.¹⁸ Then king Rehoboam sent Hadoram, who was over the men subject to forced labour; and the children of Israel stoned him to death with stones. King Rehoboam made speed to get himself up to his chariot, to flee to Jerusalem.¹⁹ So Israel rebelled against the house of David to this day.

CHAPTER 11 Oct. 19

Rehoboam Begins Well

When Rehoboam had come to Jerusalem, he assembled the house of Judah and Benjamin, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen men who were warriors, to fight against Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam.² But the word of Yahweh came to Shemaiah the man of God saying,³ Speak to Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and to all Israel in Judah and Benjamin saying,⁴ Thus says Yahweh, ‘You shall not go up nor fight against your brothers! Return every man to his house; for this thing is of Me’. So they listened to the words

of Yahweh, and returned from going against Jeroboam.⁵ Rehoboam lived in Jerusalem, and built cities for defence in Judah.⁶ He built Bethlehem, Etam, Tekoa,⁷ Beth Zur, Soco, Adullam,⁸ Gath, Mareshah, Ziph,⁹ Adoraim, Lachish, Azekah,¹⁰ Zorah, Aijalon and Hebron, which are in Judah and in Benjamin, fortified cities.¹¹ He fortified the strongholds, and put captains in them, and stores of food, and oil and wine.¹² He put shields and spears in every city, and made them exceedingly strong. Judah and Benjamin belonged to him.¹³ The priests and the Levites who were in all Israel resorted to him out of all their border.¹⁴ For the Levites left their suburbs and their possessions and came to Judah and Jerusalem; for Jeroboam and his sons cast them off, that they should not execute the priests’ office to Yahweh.¹⁵ He appointed priests for the high places, and for the male goats, and for the calves which he had made.¹⁶ After them, out of all the tribes of Israel, such as set their hearts to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel, came to Jerusalem to sacrifice

11:4 *So they listened to the words of Yahweh* – This is very commendable. When we’ve prepared to do something on a major scale, turning back from the project because we perceive God’s word to teach otherwise is a hard thing to do. But this must be the power of God’s word in our lives. Any war of aggression against our brethren just has to be wrong; and we as the Israel of God should bear this always in mind regardless of what provocation we receive from our brethren.

11:14 Despite Jeroboam being so apostate from the true God, the ten tribes are still called the “brothers” of Judah (:4). No matter how far some go from the Lord or His truth, once a brother always a brother. Once a person is within the family of God through baptism into Christ, it is not for us to ever say in this life that they are no longer in that family.

11:16 In times when the children of God turn away from Him, the faithful minority will go to great lengths to meet with others who are still faithful; and it may even

to Yahweh, the God of their fathers. ¹⁷ So they strengthened the kingdom of Judah, and made Rehoboam the son of Solomon strong, three years; for they walked three years in the way of David and Solomon. ¹⁸ Rehoboam took him a wife, Mahalath the daughter of Jerimoth the son of David and of Abihail the daughter of Eliab the son of Jesse. ¹⁹ She bore him sons: Jeush, and Shemariah, and Zaham. ²⁰ After her he took Maacah the daughter of Absalom. She bore him Abijah, Attai, Ziza and Shelomith. ²¹ Rehoboam loved Maacah the daughter of Absalom above all his wives and his concubines. (He took eighteen wives, and sixty concubines, and became the father of twenty-eight sons and sixty daughters.) ²² Rehoboam appointed Abijah the son of Maacah to be chief, the prince among his brothers; for he intended to make him king. ²³ He dealt wisely, and settled some of his sons throughout all the lands of Judah and

Benjamin, to every fortified city: and he gave them food in abundance. He sought for them many wives.

CHAPTER 12 Oct. 20

The Invasion of Shishak

When the kingdom of Rehoboam was established and he had made himself strong, he forsook the law of Yahweh, and all Israel with him. ² It happened in the fifth year of king Rehoboam, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, because they had trespassed against Yahweh, ³ with twelve hundred chariots and sixty thousand horsemen. The people were without number who came with him out of Egypt: the Lubim, the Sukkiim and the Ethiopians. ⁴ He took the fortified cities which pertained to Judah and came to Jerusalem. ⁵ Now Shemaiah the prophet came to Rehoboam and to the princes of Judah, who were gathered together to Jerusalem because of Shishak, and said to them, Thus

require our geographical relocation, with all the economic costs associated with that (:13).

11:18 This implies that David married his own niece. There were many anomalies in David's life, especially in his personal relationships; and yet God accepted him and spoke so highly of him. This isn't to justify any sin or complacent attitude in ourselves personally; but to encourage us in the hard work of being patiently accepting of those who have similar anomalies in their lives.

11:21 *Eighteen wives, and sixty concubines* – The weakness of Solomon his father was repeated in Solomon's son. Justifying sin and worldly behaviour inevitably influences our children to think such behaviour is acceptable. And in their turn, Solomon's son sought to lead *his* children into failure in this area of polygamy (:23).

12:1 *Made himself strong* – The Hebrew word translated “strong” is *hezek*. Good king Hezekiah had the same word within his name, but with ‘Yah’ added on the end – ‘the one made strong by Yah’. Human strength and prowess is the very opposite to God’s strength. We wonder why we don’t always have all we want – wealth, health, acceptance, good relationships, praise of men, nice homes and vehicles... but it’s not surprising really, because human strength nearly always leads us away from God.

says Yahweh, You have forsaken Me, therefore have I also left you in the hand of Shishak. ⁶ Then the princes of Israel and the king humbled themselves; and they said, Yahweh is righteous. ⁷ When Yahweh saw that they humbled themselves, the word of Yahweh came to Shemaiah, saying, They have humbled themselves. I will not destroy them; but I will grant them some deliverance. My wrath shall not be poured out on Jerusalem by the hand of Shishak. ⁸ Nevertheless they shall be his servants, that they may know My service, and the service of the kingdoms of the countries. ⁹ So Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem, and took away the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and the treasures of the king's house. He took it all away. He also took away the shields of gold which Solomon had made. ¹⁰ King Rehoboam made in their place shields of brass, and committed them to the hands of the captains of the guard who kept the door of the king's house. ¹¹ It was so, that as often as the king entered into the house of Yahweh, the guard came and carried them back into the guard room. ¹² When he humbled himself, the wrath of Yahweh turned from him, so as not to destroy him altogether. Moreover, in Judah there were good

things found. ¹³ So king Rehoboam strengthened himself in Jerusalem, and reigned. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which Yahweh had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. His mother's name was Naamah the Ammonitess. ¹⁴ He did that which was evil, because he didn't set his heart to seek Yahweh. ¹⁵ Now the acts of Rehoboam, first and last, aren't they written in the histories of Shemaiah the prophet and of Iddo the seer, after the way of genealogies? There were wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam continually. ¹⁶ Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David; and Abijah his son reigned in his place.

CHAPTER 13 Oct. 20

Abijah's Reign

In the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam began Abijah to reign over Judah. ² He reigned three years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Micaiah the daughter of Uriel of Gibeah. There was war between Abijah and Jeroboam. ³ Abijah joined battle with an army of valiant men of war, even four hundred thousand chosen men. Jeroboam set the battle in array against him with eight

12:6 *Yahweh is righteous* – Repentance involves not only a recognition of our wrongness, but of God's rightness. See on 6:24.

12:8 *They shall be his servants, that they may know My service* – Sometimes God teaches us how to relate to Him by putting us in situations where we simply have to be obedient to some human entity or person. In this way we can serve our worldly masters in our employment as if we are serving Christ (Col. 3:22-24; it seems Paul there is alluding to the LXX here).

hundred thousand chosen men, who were mighty men of valour.⁴ Abijah stood up on Mount Zemaraim, which is in the hill country of Ephraim, and said, Hear me, Jeroboam and all Israel.⁵ Ought you not to know that Yahweh, the God of Israel, gave the kingdom over Israel to David forever, even to him and to his sons by a covenant of salt?⁶ Yet Jeroboam the son of Nebat, the servant of Solomon the son of David, rose up, and rebelled against his lord.⁷ There were gathered to him vain men, base fellows, who strengthened themselves against Rehoboam the son of Solomon, when Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them.⁸ Now you think to withstand the kingdom of Yahweh in the hand of the sons of David. You are a great multitude, and there are with you the golden calves which Jeroboam made you for gods.⁹ Haven't you driven out the priests of Yahweh, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites, and

made priests for yourselves after the ways of the peoples of other lands? So that whoever comes to consecrate himself with a young bull and seven rams, the same may be a priest of those who are not gods.¹⁰ But as for us, Yahweh is our God, and we have not forsaken Him. We have priests ministering to Yahweh, the sons of Aaron, and the Levites in their work:¹¹ and they burn to Yahweh every morning and every evening burnt offerings and sweet incense. They also set the showbread in order on the pure table; and the lampstand of gold with its lamps, to burn every evening. We keep the instruction of Yahweh our God; but you have forsaken Him.¹² Behold, God is with us at our head, and His priests with the trumpets of alarm to sound an alarm against you. Children of Israel, don't fight against Yahweh, the God of your fathers; for you shall not prosper.¹³ But Jeroboam caused an ambush to come about behind them:

13:7 When Rehoboam was young and tenderhearted, and could not withstand them – This was an exaggeration, because he was 41 when he became king (12:13). We can so easily justify the sins and weakness of others whom we perceive as being ‘on our side’, trying to reduce everything to a simplistic black and white view of the world, whereby people are either wonderfully good or totally bad (:11). Reality is far different – we only have to realistically analyze our own lives and personalities.

13:12 Don't fight against Yahweh – It seems Abijah was assuming that he was as it were in the place of God. He had picked a fight with Jeroboam (:3), but then realized he was outnumbered and wanted a way out – and so he starts claiming how righteous Judah are (:10-12) even though they were rebellious against God from the day He knew them (Is. 65:2; Ez. 16,20) and were worshipping idols (14:3). He also starts playing God, by assuming that his enemy is God's enemy. Therefore God brought Judah's strong men into a situation where they were about to be destroyed, and had to throw themselves upon His grace (:14).

13:13 This was exactly the situation which the Gentile people of Ai were in as described in Josh. 8:21,22. They were caught in an ambush and hemmed in on all sides. Judah who thought they were so superior spiritually were being taught they were no better than Gentiles who had to be cast out by God.

so they were before Judah, and the ambush was behind them.¹⁴ When Judah looked back, behold, the battle was before and behind them; and they cried to Yahweh, and the priests sounded with the trumpets.¹⁵ Then the men of Judah gave a shout; and as the men of Judah shouted, it happened, that God struck Jeroboam and all Israel before Abijah and Judah.¹⁶ The children of Israel fled before Judah; and God delivered them into their hand.¹⁷ Abijah and his people killed them with a great slaughter; so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand chosen men.¹⁸ Thus the children of Israel were overcome at that time, and the children of Judah prevailed, because they relied on Yahweh, the God of their fathers.¹⁹ Abijah pursued after Jeroboam, and took cities from him: Bethel with its suburbs, Jeshanah with its suburbs and Ephron with its suburbs.²⁰ Jeroboam didn't recover strength again in the days of Abijah. Yahweh struck him, and he died.²¹ But Abijah grew mighty, and took to himself fourteen wives, and became the father of twenty-two sons, and sixteen daughters.²² The rest of the acts of Abijah, and his ways and his sayings, are written in the commentary of the prophet Iddo.

CHAPTER 14 Oct. 21

King Asa Begins Well

So Abijah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of

David; and Asa his son reigned in his place. In his days the land was quiet ten years.² Asa did that which was good and right in the eyes of Yahweh his God.³ He took away the foreign altars, and the high places, and broke down the pillars, and cut down the Asherim,⁴ and commanded Judah to seek Yahweh, the God of their fathers, and to obey the law and the commandment.⁵ Also he took away out of all the cities of Judah the high places and the sun images. The kingdom was quiet before him.⁶ He built fortified cities in Judah; for the land was quiet, and he had no war in those years, because Yahweh had given him rest.⁷ For he said to Judah, Let us build these cities, and make walls around them, with towers, gates, and bars. The land is yet before us, because we have sought Yahweh our God. We have sought Him, and He has given us rest on every side. So they built and prospered.⁸ Asa had an army that carried shields and spears: out of Judah three hundred thousand; and out of Benjamin, that bore shields and drew bows, two hundred and eighty thousand. All these were mighty men of valour.⁹ There came out against them Zerah the Ethiopian with an army of a million troops, and three hundred chariots; and he came to Mareshah.¹⁰ Then Asa went out to meet him, and they set the battle in array in the valley of Zephathah at Mareshah.¹¹ Asa cried to Yahweh his God and said, Yahweh, there

14:3 This shows that the previous king's claim to such great spirituality in Judah was hypocritical; see on 13:12.

14:11 *Him who has no strength* – All Asa's human strength he considered as non-

is none apart from You to help, between the mighty and him who has no strength. Help us, Yahweh our God; for we rely on You, and in Your name are we come against this multitude. Yahweh, You are our God. Don't let man prevail against You.

¹² So Yahweh struck the Ethiopians before Asa and before Judah; and the Ethiopians fled. ¹³ Asa and the people who were with him pursued them to Gerar. There fell of the Ethiopians so many that they could not recover themselves; for they were destroyed before Yahweh and before His army; and they carried away very much booty. ¹⁴ They struck all the cities around Gerar; for the fear of Yahweh came on them. They despoiled all the cities; for there was much spoil in them. ¹⁵ They struck also the tents of the herdsmen, and carried away sheep in abundance, and camels, and returned to Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 15 Oct. 21

Asa's Dedication to God

The Spirit of God came on Azariah the son of Oded: ² and he went out to meet Asa and said to him, Hear me, Asa, and all Judah

and Benjamin! Yahweh is with you, while you are with Him; and if you seek Him, He will be found by you; but if you forsake Him, He will forsake you. ³ Now for a long time Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. ⁴ But when in their distress they turned to Yahweh the God of Israel and sought Him, He was found by them. ⁵ In those times there was no peace to him who went out, nor to him who came in; but great troubles were on all the inhabitants of the lands. ⁶ They were broken in pieces, nation against nation, and city against city; for God troubled them with all adversity. ⁷ But you be strong, and don't let your hands be slack; for your work shall be rewarded. ⁸ When Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet, he took courage, and put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from the hill country of Ephraim; and he renewed the altar of Yahweh that was before the porch of Yahweh. ⁹ He gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and those who lived with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh,

existent. He had learnt the lesson of 12:3 [see note there]; that the *only* strength is in God. God brought Asa to this realization by putting him in a situation where he was hopelessly outnumbered, just as He tried to teach Abijah in 13:12. We see God working to a pattern in these men's lives, just as He does with us. He puts us in situations which are quite beyond our own strength – and then makes a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13; 2 Cor. 1:8; 8:3). This not only strengthens our faith for the next crisis we face, but awes us into an appropriate humility.

15:8 And put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah – But 14:3 says that Asa did this at the start of his reign. Whenever we root out weakness from our lives, it tends to return. The records of Judah's kings are full of such accounts of purging out the idols – and then we read the same again soon afterwards. The tendency to idol worship was and is very strong.

and out of Simeon; for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that Yahweh his God was with him.¹⁰ So they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa.¹¹ They sacrificed to Yahweh in that day, of the spoil which they had brought, seven hundred head of cattle and seven thousand sheep.¹² They entered into the covenant to seek Yahweh the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul;¹³ and that whoever would not seek Yahweh the God of Israel, should be put to death, whether small or great, whether man or woman.¹⁴ They swore to Yahweh with a loud voice, and with shouting, trumpets and cornets.¹⁵ All Judah rejoiced at the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought Him with their whole desire; and He was found of them: and Yahweh gave them rest all around.¹⁶ Also Maacah, the mother of Asa the king,

he removed from being queen, because she had made an abominable image for an Asherah. Asa cut down her image, and made dust of it, and burnt it at the brook Kidron.¹⁷ But the high places were not taken away out of Israel. Nevertheless the heart of Asa was perfect all his days.¹⁸ He brought into God's house the things that his father had dedicated, and that he himself had dedicated, silver, and gold, and vessels.¹⁹ There was no more war until the thirty-fifth year of the reign of Asa.

CHAPTER 16 Oct. 22

Asa Falls Away from God

In the thirty sixth year of the reign of Asa, Baasha king of Israel went up against Judah, and built Ramah, that he might not allow anyone to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah.² Then Asa brought out silver and gold out of the treasures of the house of Yahweh and of the king's house, and sent to Ben Hadad king of Syria,

15:9 The faithful in the 10 tribes relocated to be near the believers in Judah. We should make every effort to fellowship with other believers, even if it may mean relocating.

15:15 *All Judah rejoiced at the oath* – Joy comes from full dedication to God; indeed true joy can come from nothing else.

Sought Him... and He was found – Christ's invitation to seek knowing that we shall find is in the context of His teaching that whatever we ask for in prayer will be given; if we knock, the door will be opened (Mt. 7:7; Lk. 11:9). However, this isn't a blank cheque offer to give us whatever we wish; rather is it teaching that if we pray to find God, if we really seek relationship with Him – we will find it, and thereby all other requests and needs in our lives will appear far less significant.

16:2 By giving the wealth of the temple to Ben Hadad, Asa was acting as if it was his personal wealth, to spend as he wished. But those things had been given or dedicated to God; if you give somebody something, it's theirs and no longer yours. Although God was invisible to Asa, it's as if He was sitting there in that temple with His silver and gold – which had been given to Him in thanks for what He had done for His people. And then Asa walks up to God and takes that silver and gold right from His presence and gives it to a pagan idolater whom he considers a better defence against

who lived at Damascus saying, ³ Let there be a covenant between me and you, as there was between my father and your father. Behold, I have sent you silver and gold. Go, break your treaty with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. ⁴ Ben Hadad listened to king Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel; and they struck Ijon, and Dan, and Abel Maim, and all the storage cities of Naphtali. ⁵ It happened, when Baasha heard of it, that he left off building Ramah, and let his work cease. ⁶ Then Asa the king took all Judah; and they carried away the stones of Ramah, and its timber, with which Baasha had built; and he built therewith Geba and Mizpah.

enemies than God. The more we sense the presence of God, the more we perceive His total ownership. What we dedicate to God is His, it's not for us to 'play God' by then taking it back and acting as if it's ours. And we are asked to dedicate our whole lives to God.

16:3 *Let there be a covenant* – Asa's covenant or treaty with Yahweh in 15:12,13 demanded total dedication to Him; he should therefore have trusted in Yahweh rather than now making another covenant with a pagan king. Covenant relationship with God is all demanding, as Asa had said at the time; we can't be in covenant with more than one God.

16:8 God gave Asa a test of faith when He sent a huge army against him earlier; and Asa passed the test. But like any good teacher, God repeats the circumstances in our lives; and sometimes like Asa we may do well in one test, but fail when it is repeated. God gave Asa more such wars (9) – not simply as a punishment, but so he would learn the lesson of trusting in God and not men against our enemies.

16:9 These "eyes of Yahweh" refer to the Angels. If we ask how, mechanically, as it were, God sees and knows all things, the answer is perhaps 'Through His Angels'. Their activity is amazing; because their work is invisible to us, we may get the impression at times that God is somehow silent and inactive. But the colossal network of Angelic work on earth is constantly humming with activity – for our sakes (Heb. 1:14).

16:10 *Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time* – In our deepest conscience, we know when we sin; even if we don't consciously recognize every sin. We also realize that sin must be punished. When we sin but don't confess that sin, or if we refuse to accept the punishment for sin, we have a tendency to subconsciously transfer that sin onto others and punish them for it. This is why religious people can be capable of the greatest hypocrisies and inconsistencies, punishing others for the very sins which

⁷ At that time Hanani the seer of visions came to Asa king of Judah and said to him, Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and have not relied on Yahweh your God, therefore is the army of the king of Syria escaped out of your hand. ⁸ Weren't the Ethiopians and the Lubim a huge army, with exceeding many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied on Yahweh, He delivered them into your hand. ⁹ For the eyes of Yahweh run back and forth throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward Him. Herein you have done foolishly; for from henceforth you shall have wars.

¹⁰ Then Asa was angry with the seer

of visions, and put him in the prison; for he was in a rage with him because of this thing. Asa oppressed some of the people at the same time.¹¹ Behold, the acts of Asa, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel.¹² In the thirty-ninth year of his reign, Asa was diseased in his feet. His disease was exceeding great; yet in his disease he didn't turn to Yahweh, but to the physicians.¹³ Asa slept with his fathers, and died in the forty-first year of his reign.¹⁴ They buried him in his own tombs, which he had dug out for himself in the city of David, and laid him in the bed which was filled with sweet odours and various kinds of spices prepared by the perfumer's art; and they made a very great burning for him.

CHAPTER 17 Oct. 22

Jehoshaphat Strengthens Judah Spiritually

Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his place, and strengthened himself against Israel.² He placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim which Asa his father had taken.³ Yahweh was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and didn't seek the Baals,⁴ but sought to the God of his father, and walked in His commandments and not after the

doings of Israel.⁵ Therefore Yahweh established the kingdom in his hand. All Judah brought to Jehoshaphat tribute; and he had riches and honour in abundance.⁶ His heart was lifted up in the ways of Yahweh. Furthermore, he removed the high places and the Asherim out of Judah.⁷ Also in the third year of his reign he sent his princes, even Ben Hail, Obadiah, Zechariah, Nethanel and Micaiah, to teach in the cities of Judah;⁸ and with them the Levites, even Shemaiah, Nethaniah, Zebadiah, Asahel, Shemiramoth, Jehonathan, Adonijah, Tobijah and Tobadonijah the Levites; and with them Elishama and Jehoram, the priests.⁹ They taught in Judah, having the book of the law of Yahweh with them. They went about throughout all the cities of Judah, and taught among the people.¹⁰ The fear of Yahweh fell on all the kingdoms of the lands that were around Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat.¹¹ Some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute. The Arabians also brought him flocks, seven thousand seven hundred rams, and seven thousand seven hundred male goats.¹² Jehoshaphat grew great exceedingly; and he built in Judah fortified and store cities.¹³ He had many works in the cities of Judah; and men of war, mighty men of valour, in Jerusalem.¹⁴ This was the numbering of them

they commit, or falsely accusing others of committing the sins they commit and then eagerly punishing them for them. Asa's bad conscience at this time is reflected in how he treated others.

17:3 *In the first ways of his father David* – Does this imply that David became less spiritually committed as he got older?

according to their fathers' houses. Of Judah, the captains of thousands: Adnah the captain, and with him mighty men of valour three hundred thousand; ¹⁵ and next to him Jehohanan the captain, and with him two hundred and eighty thousand; ¹⁶ and next to him Amasiah the son of Zichri, who willingly offered himself to Yahweh; and with him two hundred thousand mighty men of valour. ¹⁷ Of Benjamin: Eliada a mighty man of valour, and with him two hundred thousand armed with bow and shield; ¹⁸ and next to him Jehozabad; and with him one hundred and eighty thousand prepared for war. ¹⁹ These were those who waited on the king, besides those whom the king put in the fortified cities throughout all Judah.

CHAPTER 18 Oct. 23

Jehoshaphat Makes a Wrong Alliance with Ahab

Now Jehoshaphat had riches and honour in abundance; and he joined affinity with Ahab. ² After certain years he went down to Ahab to Samaria. Ahab killed sheep and cattle for him in abundance, and for the people who were with him, and moved him to go up with him to Ramoth Gilead. ³ Ahab king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat king of Ju-

dah, Will you go with me to Ramoth Gilead? He answered him, I am as you are, and my people as your people. We will be with you in the war. ⁴ Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, Please inquire first for the word of Yahweh. ⁵ Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, four hundred men, and said to them, Shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I desist? They said, Go up; for God will deliver it into the hand of the king. ⁶ But Jehoshaphat said, Isn't there here a prophet of Yahweh besides, that we may inquire of him? ⁷ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of Yahweh; but I hate him, for he never prophesies good concerning me, but always evil. He is Micaiah the son of Imla. Jehoshaphat said, Don't let the king say so. ⁸ Then the king of Israel called an officer and said, Get Micaiah the son of Imla quickly. ⁹ Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah sat each on his throne, arrayed in their robes. They were sitting in an open place at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. ¹⁰ Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made him horns of iron and said, Thus says Yahweh, 'With these you shall push the Syrians,

18:1 This chapter shows how Jehoshaphat was wrong to make this alliance with Ahab; our covenant with Yahweh precludes any other covenant. Ahab was one of God's people, but clearly his faith in Yahweh was weak and he had surrounded himself with false prophets who claimed that whatever Ahab wanted to be true was in fact the word of Yahweh (4:7). Even within those who are externally the children of God, we must be careful whom we choose to closely associate with; for not all are seriously interested in following God's word.

until they are consumed'. ¹¹ All the prophets prophesied so, saying, Go up to Ramoth Gilead, and prosper; for Yahweh will deliver it into the hand of the king. ¹² The messenger who went to call Micaiah spoke to him saying, Behold, the words of the prophets declare good to the king with one mouth. Let your word therefore, please be like one of theirs, and speak good. ¹³ Micaiah said, As Yahweh lives, what my God says, that will I speak. ¹⁴ When he had come to the king, the king said to him, Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth Gilead to battle, or shall I desist? He said, Go up, and prosper. They shall be delivered into your hand. ¹⁵ The king said to him, How many times shall I adjure you that you speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of Yahweh? ¹⁶ He said, I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd. Yahweh said, These have no master. Let them return every man to his house in peace. ¹⁷ The king of Israel said to

Jehoshaphat, Didn't I tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?

Micaiah's Vision of Angels

¹⁸ Micaiah said, Therefore hear the word of Yahweh: I saw Yahweh sitting on His throne, and all the army of heaven standing on His right hand and on His left. ¹⁹ Yahweh said, Who shall entice Ahab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Gilead? One spoke saying this way, and another saying that way. ²⁰ A spirit came out, stood before Yahweh and said, I will entice him. Yahweh said to him, How? ²¹ He said, I will go forth, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. He said, You will entice him, and will prevail also. Go forth, and do so. ²² Now therefore, behold, Yahweh has put a lying spirit in the mouth of these your prophets; and Yahweh has spoken evil concerning you. ²³ Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah came near, and struck Micaiah on the

18:14 Considering Micaiah had already seen the vision of :18-21, this was a significant failure of his. In some contexts, we all have a tendency to quickly perceive and then say what we think the other person wants us to say. The fact we know God's word means that we are now bound not to do that, but to speak according to how His word has influenced us.

18:18-21 We have here a unique insight into how the court of Heaven operates. God states His plan, but the Angels discuss how they will operationalize it. The "spirit" in :20 refers to an Angel – for God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4). One Angel had the idea that Ahab's false prophets could be moved to prophesy to him a false prophecy about going to Ramoth Gilead, where he would die. God liked that idea, perhaps because it was an appropriate way to punish Ahab for his rejection of the true prophets. That Angel was empowered to bring that about, and went out from the court of Heaven to do it. God confirms people in the way they wish to go, and He can do this through leading them into mindsets and theological understandings which are false (2 Thess. 2:11). The amazing thing is that God is holding case conferences about us in Heaven, with Angels discussing how best to bring about God's will in our lives.

cheek, and said, Which way did the spirit of Yahweh go from me to speak to you? ²⁴ Micaiah said, Behold, you shall see on that day, when you shall go into an inner room to hide yourself. ²⁵ The king of Israel said, Take Micaiah, and carry him back to Amon the governor of the city, and to Joash the king's son. ²⁶ Say, 'Thus says the king, Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I return in peace'. ²⁷ Micaiah said, If you return at all in peace, Yahweh has not spoken by me. He said, Listen, you peoples, all of you!

The Battle at Ramoth Gilead

²⁸ So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went up to Ramoth Gilead. ²⁹ The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and go into the battle; but you put on your robes. So the king of Israel disguised himself; and they went into the battle. ³⁰ Now the king of Syria had commanded the captains of his chariots saying, Fight neither with small nor great, except only with the king of Israel. ³¹ It happened that when the captains of the chariots saw Jehoshaphat, they said, It is the king of Israel! Therefore

they turned around to fight against him. But Jehoshaphat cried out, and Yahweh helped him; and God moved them to depart from him. ³² It happened, when the captains of the chariots saw that it was not the king of Israel, that they turned back from pursuing him. ³³ A certain man drew his bow at random, and struck the king of Israel between the joints of the armour. Therefore he said to the driver of the chariot, Turn your hand, and carry me out of the army; for I am severely wounded. ³⁴ The battle increased that day. However the king of Israel propped himself up in his chariot against the Syrians until the evening. About the time of the going down of the sun, he died.

CHAPTER 19 Oct. 23

Jehoshaphat Reforms Judah

Jehoshaphat the king of Judah returned to his house in peace to Jerusalem. ² Jehu the son of Hanani the seer went out to meet him, and said to king Jehoshaphat, Should you help the wicked, and love those who hate Yahweh? Because of this, wrath is on you from before Yahweh. ³ Nevertheless there are good things found in you, in that you have put away Asheroth out of the land, and

19:2 Love those who hate Yahweh – We can imagine how Jehoshaphat would've justified the alliance he made with Ahab in 18:1,2 – ‘We both serve the same God... believe more or less the same things... face a common enemy...’. But God’s wrath was upon Jehoshaphat for saying this. Ahab’s refusal to hear Yahweh’s word in 18:4–17 was counted as hating Yahweh.

19:3 Nevertheless – God didn’t reject Jehoshaphat because of his failure in one area in one period of life; He saw the bigger picture. When one aspect of another believer’s failure is extremely difficult for us to tolerate, we too need to see this bigger picture and think of the other areas of their lives where they are spiritual.

have set your heart to seek God.

⁴ Jehoshaphat lived at Jerusalem. He went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim, and brought them back to Yahweh, the God of their fathers.

⁵ He set judges in the land throughout all the fortified cities of Judah, city by city, ⁶ and said to the judges, Consider what you do. You don't judge for man, but for Yahweh; and He is with you in the judgment. ⁷ Now therefore let the fear of Yahweh be upon you. Be careful and do so; for there is no iniquity with Yahweh our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of bribes.

⁸ Moreover in Jerusalem Jehoshaphat appointed Levites and priests, and of the heads of the fathers' households of Israel, for the judgment of Yahweh, and for controversies. They returned to Jerusalem.

⁹ He commanded them saying, Thus you shall do in the fear of Yahweh, faithfully, and with a perfect heart.

¹⁰ Whenever any controversy shall come to you from your brothers who dwell in their cities, between blood and blood, between law and commandment, statutes and ordinances, you shall warn them, that they not be guilty towards Yahweh, and so wrath come on you and on your brothers. Do this, and you shall not be guilty.

¹¹ Behold, Amariah the chief priest

is over you in all matters of Yahweh; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, in all the king's matters. The Levites shall be officers before you. Deal courageously, and may Yahweh be with the good.

CHAPTER 20 Oct. 24

Jehoshaphat Prays to God for Deliverance

It happened after this that the children of Moab, and the children of Ammon, and with them some of the other Ammonites, came against Jehoshaphat to battle. ² Then some came who told Jehoshaphat saying, A great multitude is coming against you from beyond the sea from Syria. Behold, they are in Hazazon Tamar (that is, En Gedi). ³ Jehoshaphat was alarmed, and set himself to seek to Yahweh. He proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. ⁴ Judah gathered themselves together to seek help from Yahweh. They came out of all the cities of Judah to seek Yahweh. ⁵ Jehoshaphat stood in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem, in the house of Yahweh, before the new court; ⁶ and he said, Yahweh, the God of our fathers, aren't You God in heaven? Aren't You ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations? Power and might are in Your hand, so that

19:10 *Between blood and blood* – Perhaps a reference to controversies about revenging bloodshed, alluding to Dt. 17:8.

20:2 A great multitude is coming – Jehoshaphat was expected to have learnt the lesson from Asa's experience when hugely outnumbered (16:8), and it seems he did. The whole purpose of Biblical history is for *our* sakes, that we might learn from the experiences of others who in essence were in our situation – and be strengthened, warned and encouraged (Rom. 15:4).

no one is able to stand against You.
 7 Didn't You, our God, drive out the inhabitants of this land before Your people Israel, and give it to the seed of Abraham Your friend forever?
 8 They lived in it, and have built You a sanctuary in it for Your name saying,
 9 If evil comes on us—the sword, judgment, plague or famine—we will stand before this house and before You, (for Your name is in this house), and cry to You in our affliction, and You will hear and save.
 10 Now, consider the children of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir, whom You would not let Israel invade when they came out of the land of Egypt, but they turned aside from them, and didn't destroy them.
 11 See how they reward us, to come to cast us out of Your possession which You have given us to inherit.
 12 Our God, will You not judge them? For we have no might against this great company that comes against us; neither know we what to do, but our eyes are toward You.
 13 All Judah stood before Yahweh, with their little ones, their wives and their children.

Judah Win the Battle without Fighting

14 Then the Spirit of Yahweh came on Jahaziel the son of Zechariah, son of Benaiah, son of Jeiel, son of Mattaniah, the Levite, of the sons of

Asaph, in the midst of the assembly.
 15 He said, Listen, all Judah and you inhabitants of Jerusalem, and you, king Jehoshaphat. Thus says Yahweh to you, 'Don't be afraid, neither be dismayed by reason of this great multitude; for the battle is not yours, but God's.
 16 Tomorrow go down against them. Behold, they are coming up by the ascent of Ziz. You shall find them at the end of the valley, before the wilderness of Jeruel.
 17 You will not need to fight this battle. Set yourselves, stand still, and see the salvation of Yahweh with you, O Judah and Jerusalem. Don't be afraid, nor be dismayed. Go out against them tomorrow, for Yahweh is with you'.
 18 Jehoshaphat bowed his head with his face to the ground; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem fell down before Yahweh, worshipping Yahweh.
 19 The Levites, of the children of the Kohathites and of the children of the Korahites, stood up to praise Yahweh, the God of Israel, with an exceeding loud voice.
 20 They rose early in the morning and went forth into the wilderness of Tekoa. As they went forth, Jehoshaphat stood and said, Listen to me, Judah, and you inhabitants of Jerusalem! Believe in Yahweh your God, so you shall be established! Believe His prophets, so you shall prosper.
 21 When he had taken counsel

20:12 God, will You not judge them? – Jehoshaphat like David in the Psalms saw the crises of life as a foretaste of the final judgment; he stated the situation before God in detail (:10) and felt his prayer was a coming before God's throne of judgment. Our prayers likewise come before the throne of grace (Heb. 4:16); our feelings toward God in prayer now are as they will be in essence at the final judgment.

20:21 There is a strong theme of praise; and praise is something one does to their God

with the people, he appointed those who should sing to Yahweh and give praise in holy array, as they went out before the army, and say, Give thanks to Yahweh; for His grace endures forever. ²² When they began to sing and to praise, Yahweh set ambushers against the children of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir, who had come against Judah; and they were struck. ²³ For the children of Ammon and Moab stood up against the inhabitants of Mount Seir, utterly to kill and destroy them. When they had made an end of the inhabitants of Seir, each one helped to destroy another. ²⁴ When Judah came to the place overlooking the wilderness, they looked at the multitude which were now dead bodies fallen to the earth, and there were none who escaped. ²⁵ When Jehoshaphat and his people came to take their spoil, they found among them in abundance both riches and dead bodies, and precious jewels, which they stripped off for themselves, more than they could carry away. They were three days in taking the spoil, it was so much. ²⁶ On the fourth day they assembled themselves in the valley of Beracah; for there they blessed Yahweh. Therefore the name of that place is called The valley of Beracah

to this day. ²⁷ Then they returned, every man of Judah and Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat in their forefront, to go again to Jerusalem with joy; for Yahweh had made them to rejoice over their enemies. ²⁸ They came to Jerusalem with stringed instruments and harps and trumpets to the house of Yahweh. ²⁹ The fear of God was on all the kingdoms of the countries, when they heard that Yahweh fought against the enemies of Israel.

Jehoshaphat's Last Years

³⁰ So the realm of Jehoshaphat was quiet; for his God gave him rest all around. ³¹ Jehoshaphat reigned over Judah: he was thirty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-five years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. ³² He walked in the way of Asa his father, and didn't turn aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh. ³³ However the high places were not taken away; neither as yet had the people set their hearts to the God of their fathers. ³⁴ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, first and last, behold, they are written in the history of Jehu the son of Hanani, which is inserted in the book of the kings of Israel. ³⁵ After this, Je-

after a victory, not before it. Humanly, they must have feared that they were being asked to trust in mere words. Yet Jehoshaphat praised God for the assurance of victory as if it had already happened; and his battle plan was hardly humanly wise. He sent out ahead of his troops a group of priests who were praising God for the victory. Such faith is all about adopting God's perspective, who speaks of things which are not yet as if they are, so sure is His word of promise of fulfilment (Rom. 4:17).

20:35 *Jehoshaphat king of Judah joined himself with Ahaziah king of Israel – When he earlier joined himself with a king of Israel, he nearly lost his life and was rebuked*

hoshaphat king of Judah joined himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly.³⁶ He joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish; and they made the ships in Ezion Geber.³⁷ Then Eliezer the son of Dodavahu of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat saying, Because you have joined yourself with Ahaziah, Yahweh has destroyed your works. The ships were broken, so that they were not able to go to Tarshish.

CHAPTER 21 Oct. 25

The Bad Reign of Jehoram

Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Jehoram his son reigned in his place.² He had brothers, the sons of Jehoshaphat: Azariah, Jehiel, Zechariah, Azariah,

Michael and Shephatiah. All these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel.³ Their father gave them great gifts, of silver, and of gold, and of precious things, with fortified cities in Judah; but the kingdom gave he to Jehoram, because he was the first-born.⁴ Now when Jehoram was risen up over the kingdom of his father, and had strengthened himself, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and various also of the princes of Israel.⁵ Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he began to reign; and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem.⁶ He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab; for he had the daughter of Ahab as wife: and he did that which was evil in the eyes of Yahweh.⁷ However Yahweh would not destroy the house of David, because of the covenant

for it severely in 19:2. We too can deal with a situation in the wrong way, repent for doing so, and then the essence of the situation is repeated in another context – and again we fail. And yet although at the end of his life, Jehoshaphat failed in this matter, he was on balance reckoned as righteous (:32). This shouldn't lead us to think that some aspects of human behaviour don't matter and we can 'get away' with them. But it helps us in not rejecting brothers or sisters who clearly have weakness in one point of their lives at some period of their spiritual journey, even if as with Jehoshaphat it's right at the end of their lives when we might expect more spiritual maturity from them. We will all come to the end of our journeys with some incomplete spirituality, and we should show others the same grace God shows us.

21:6 Jehoshaphat his father had been rebuked for his alliance with Ahab (19:2) and had continued to fail in making alliances with the rulers of Israel (see on 20:35). The result of this was that although he himself was righteous, his son committed failure in the same area but went much further to the point of becoming totally sinful and being rejected by God. The problem with sin and permitting ourselves weaknesses is that our children and others will likely commit the same weaknesses but take them much further; the mother who gets drunk once a year on her birthday shouldn't be surprised if her son becomes alcoholic.

For he had the daughter of Ahab as wife – The history of the kings often stresses the huge influence of women upon a man, especially his wife or mother. Women at that time were considered mere chattels, but the Biblical record grants them human dignity and significance, and stresses their huge influence especially in spiritual matters.

that He had made with David, and as He promised to give a lamp to him and to his children always.⁸ In his days Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves.⁹ Then Jehoram passed over with his captains, and all his chariots with him. He rose up by night, and struck the Edomites who surrounded him, along with the captains of the chariots.¹⁰ So Edom revolted from under the hand of Judah to this day. Then Libnah revolted at the same time from under his hand, because he had forsaken Yahweh, the God of his fathers.¹¹ Moreover he made high places in the mountains of Judah, and made the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the prostitute, and led Judah astray.¹² A letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus says Yahweh, the God of David your father, ‘You have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah,¹³ but have walked in the way of the kings of Israel, and have made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to play the prostitute like the house of Ahab did, and also have slain your brothers of your father’s house, who

were better than yourself.¹⁴ Therefore, Yahweh will strike with a great plague your people and your children and your wives, and all your substance;¹⁵ and you shall have great sickness by disease of your bowels, until your bowels fall out by reason of the sickness, day by day’.

Jehoram's Punishments

¹⁶ Yahweh stirred up against Jehoram the spirit of the Philistines, and of the Arabians who are beside the Ethiopians.¹⁷ They came up against Judah and broke into it, and carried away all the substance that was found in the king’s house, and his sons also and his wives; so that there was no son left him except Jehoahaz, the youngest of his sons.¹⁸ After all this Yahweh struck him in his bowels with an incurable disease.¹⁹ It happened, in process of time, at the end of two years, that his bowels fell out by reason of his sickness, and he died of severe diseases. His people made no burning for him, like the burning for his fathers.²⁰ Thirty-two years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight years. He departed without being de-

21:12 This incident is well after the time when Elijah had ascended into the sky at the close of his public ministry. It seems that Elijah was simply taken up into the sky and put down somewhere else, which is why his servants went out looking for him; it was done in this dramatic public manner to indicate to all that his public ministry had come to an end. But it seems that he returned to earth and continued a more discrete ministry, as this incident demonstrates. The Bible doesn’t teach that we go to Heaven at death; Jesus was the first person to be raised from the dead and given eternal life, and all the faithful will receive eternity together at the day of judgment when Christ returns.

21:16 God is able to work directly on the mind or “spirit” of people, according to His will. We should therefore eagerly ask Him to work on our spirit / mind to make it holy; for the human mind is the ultimate arena of our spiritual warfare.

sired; and they buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings.

CHAPTER 22 Oct. 25

Ahaziah Reigns One Year

The inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his place; for the band of men who came with the Arabians to the camp had slain all the older ones. So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned. ² Forty-two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign; and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah the daughter of Omri. ³ He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab; for his mother was his counsellor to do wickedly. ⁴ He did that which was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, as did the house of Ahab; for they were his counsellors after the death of his father, to his destruction. ⁵ He walked also after their counsel, and went with Jehoram the son of Ahab king of Israel to war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth Gilead; and the

Syrians wounded Joram. ⁶ He returned to be healed in Jezreel of the wounds which they had given him at Ramah, when he fought against Hazael king of Syria. Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Jehoram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick. ⁷ Now the destruction of Ahaziah was of God, in that he went to Joram; for when he had come, he went out with Jehoram against Jehu the son of Nimshi, whom Yahweh had anointed to cut off the house of Ahab. ⁸ It happened, when Jehu was executing judgment on the house of Ahab, that he found the princes of Judah, and the sons of the brothers of Ahaziah, ministering to Ahaziah, and killed them. ⁹ He sought Ahaziah, and they caught him (now he was hiding in Samaria), and they brought him to Jehu, and killed him. They buried him, for they said, He is the descendant of Jehoshaphat, who sought Yahweh with all his heart. The house of Ahaziah had no power to hold the kingdom. ¹⁰ Now when Athaliah the mother of Ahaz-

22:3 *His mother was his counsellor to do wickedly* – Again we see the influence of women on the spiritual lives of their children; see on 21:6. Her ‘counsel’ to him likely refers to the way she raised him in his youth. His grandfather, righteous king Jehoshaphat, had a weakness with respect to his friendship with the Ahab family (19:2). Jehoshaphat’s son Jehoram even more so (see on 21:6), and the grandson likewise. The failure of a righteous man had disastrous spiritual consequence even for his grandchild. Grandfather Jehoshaphat nearly lost his life by going to war in tandem with Ahab king of Israel; and the grandson failed in exactly the same way (:5), at the very same place, Ramoth Gilead (18:11). He didn’t learn the lesson of his grandfather’s failure but rather repeated it.

22:6 Ahaziah was severely punished because he didn’t learn the lesson from spiritual history. Jehoshaphat had been nearly killed because of his union with Ahab the king of Israel; we really are intended to learn from Biblical history and take concrete action based upon what we perceive within it, rather than let these records drift over us without taking a grip upon our lives in practice.

iah saw that her son was dead, she arose and destroyed all the royal seed of the house of Judah.¹¹ But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him away from among the king's sons who were slain, and put him and his nurse in the bedroom. So Jehoshabeath, the daughter of king Jehoram, the wife of Jehoiada the priest (for she was the sister of Ahaziah), hid him from Athaliah, so that she didn't kill him.¹² He was with them hidden in God's house six years; and Athaliah reigned over the land.

CHAPTER 23 Oct. 26

Jehoiada the Priest Supports Joash

In the seventh year Jehoiada strengthened himself, and took the captains of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah and Elishaphat the son of Zichri, into covenant with him.² They went about in Judah, and gathered the Levites out of all the cities of Judah, and the heads of fathers' households of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem.³ All the assembly made a covenant with the king in God's house. He said to them, Behold, the king's son shall reign, as Yahweh has spoken concerning the sons of David.

⁴ This is the thing that you shall do. A third part of you, who come in on the Sabbath, of the priests and of the Levites, shall be porters at the thresholds.⁵ A third part shall be at the king's house; and a third part at the gate of the foundation. All the people shall be in the courts of Yahweh's house.⁶ But let no one come into the house of Yahweh, except the priests, and those who minister of the Levites. They shall come in, for they are holy, but all the people shall follow Yahweh's instructions.⁷ The Levites shall surround the king, every man with his weapons in his hand. Whoever comes into the house, let him be slain. Be with the king when he comes in, and when he goes out.⁸ So the Levites and all Judah did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded. They took every man his men, those who were to come in on the Sabbath, with those who were to go out on the Sabbath; for Jehoiada the priest didn't dismiss the shift.⁹ Jehoiada the priest delivered to the captains of hundreds the spears, large shields and shields that had been king David's, which were in God's house.¹⁰ He set all the people, each man with his weapon in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, along by the altar and the house, surrounding the king.¹¹ Then they brought out

23:1 Took... into covenant with him – Note how at this same time they made a covenant with God (:3). Our covenant with God is often connected with our covenant with each other; covenant relationship isn't just a deal between God and us, rather does our relationship with Him involve us in relationship with the rest of His true people. We can't be in relationship with God and isolate ourselves from His people.

23:11 Jehoiada and his sons anointed him – One of these sons was Zechariah, whom

the king's son and put the crown on him, and gave him the testimony, and made him king. Jehoiada and his sons anointed him; and they said, Long live the king! ¹² When Athaliah heard the noise of the people running and praising the king, she came to the people into the house of Yahweh. ¹³ She looked, and, behold, the king stood by his pillar at the entrance, and the captains and the trumpets by the king; and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew trumpets. The singers also played musical instruments, and led the singing of praise. Then Athaliah tore her clothes, and said, Treason! Treason! ¹⁴ Jehoiada the priest brought out the captains of hundreds who were set over the army and said to them, Bring her out between the ranks; and whoever follows her, let him be slain with the sword. For the priest said, Don't kill her in Yahweh's house. ¹⁵ So they made way for her. She went to the entrance of the horse gate to the king's house; and they killed her there.

Jehoiada Reforms Judah

¹⁶ Jehoiada made a covenant between himself and all the people, and the king, that they should be Yahweh's people. ¹⁷ All the people went to the house of Baal and broke it down, and broke his altars and his images in pieces, and killed Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. ¹⁸ Jehoiada appointed the officers of the house of Yahweh under the hand of the priests the Levites, whom David had distributed in the house of Yahweh, to offer the burnt offerings of Yahweh, as it is written in the law of Moses, with rejoicing and with singing, according to the order of David. ¹⁹ He set the porters at the gates of the house of Yahweh, that no one who was unclean in any matter should enter in. ²⁰ He took the captains of hundreds, and the nobles, and the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and brought down the king from the house of Yahweh. They came through the upper gate to the king's house, and set the king on the throne of the kingdom. ²¹ So all

Joash was later to ungratefully murder for daring to criticize him (24:20-22). Indeed, 24:25 says that Joash killed all these sons. Ingratitude is a sin because the kindness we were shown is a reflection of God's grace to us through a human channel, and to be ungrateful for it is thereby a rejection of God's grace.

23:16 The parallel record in 2 Kings 11:17 says this covenant was between Yahweh and the people, but here we read that it was between Jehoiada and the people. Jehoiada as the priest was God's representative, and therefore what he did was on God's behalf. God's representatives can be spoken of as if they are God, even though they aren't God Himself in person. This principle, which is found throughout the Old Testament, should prepare us to accept that God's Son, Jesus, as His Father's total representative, isn't God Himself but can be spoken of as God, as Jehoiada was, because He functions so completely on God's behalf.

23:21 *The people of the land rejoiced* – In the same way as “all the people” destroyed the temple of Baal (:17) and “all the people” rejoiced at the idea of Joash being made king (:13). Although the people were spiritually weak at this time, there was deep

the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet. Athaliah they had slain with the sword.

CHAPTER 24 Oct. 27

Joash Zealously Restores the Temple

Joash was seven years old when he began to reign; and he reigned forty years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba. ² Joash did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh all the days of Jehoiada the priest. ³ Jehoiada took for him two wives; and he fathered sons and daughters. ⁴ It happened after this that Joash intended to restore the house of Yahweh. ⁵ He gathered together the priests and the Levites and said to them, Go out to the cities of Judah, and gather money to repair the house of your God from all Israel from year to year. See that you hasten this matter. However the Levites didn't do it right away. ⁶ The king called for Jehoiada the chief and said to him, Why haven't you required of the Levites to bring in the tax of Moses the servant of Yahweh, and of the assembly of Israel, out of Judah and out of Jerusalem, for the tent of the testimony? ⁷ For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up God's house; and they

also gave all the dedicated things of the house of Yahweh to the Baals. ⁸ So the king commanded, and they made a chest, and set it outside at the gate of the house of Yahweh. ⁹ They made a proclamation through Judah and Jerusalem, to bring in for Yahweh the tax that Moses the servant of God laid on Israel in the wilderness. ¹⁰ All the princes and all the people rejoiced, and brought in, and cast into the chest, until they had made an end. ¹¹ It was so, that whenever the chest was brought to the king's officers by the hand of the Levites, and when they saw that there was much money, the king's scribe and the chief priests' officer came and emptied the chest, and took it, and carried it to its place again. Thus they did day by day, and gathered money in abundance. ¹² The king and Jehoiada gave it to those who did the work of the service of the house of Yahweh. They hired masons and carpenters to restore the house of Yahweh, and also those who worked iron and brass, so as to repair the house of Yahweh. ¹³ So the workmen worked, and the work of repairing advanced in their hands, and they restored God's house to its proper condition and strengthened it. ¹⁴ When they had finished, they brought the rest

within them a desire to do the right thing – they just lacked the strength to do it, and needed someone like Jehoiada to present it clearly to them. We may consider those around us to be totally disinterested in spiritual things, but if we present them with the right way, we will be surprised how this is passively and unconsciously what a lot of apparently 'worldly' people are in fact looking for. See on 24:10.

24:10 People do respond generously when someone gives them firm leadership and explains the need; see on 23:21.

24:14 All the days of Jehoiada – Joash's zeal for restoring the temple appears to have been all on his own initiative. But clearly his zeal for God was all the result of Je-

of the money before the king and Jehoiada, from which were made vessels for the house of Yahweh, even vessels with which to minister and to offer, and spoons, and vessels of gold and silver. They offered burnt offerings in the house of Yahweh continually all the days of Jehoiada. ¹⁵ But Jehoiada grew old and was full of days, and he died. He was one hundred and thirty years old when he died. ¹⁶ They buried him in the city of David among the kings, because he had done good in Israel, and toward God and His house.

Joash Departs from Yahweh

¹⁷ Now after the death of Jehoiada came the princes of Judah, and made obeisance to the king. Then the king listened to them. ¹⁸ They forsook the house of Yahweh, the God of their

fathers, and served the Asherim and the idols. Wrath came on Judah and Jerusalem for this their guiltiness. ¹⁹ Yet He sent prophets to them, to bring them again to Yahweh; and they testified against them. But they would not listen. ²⁰ The spirit of God came on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, Thus says God, ‘Why do you disobey the commandments of Yahweh, so that you can’t prosper? Because you have forsaken Yahweh, He has also forsaken you’. ²¹ They conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king in the court of the house of Yahweh. ²² Thus Joash the king didn’t remember the kindness which Jehoiada his father had done to him, but killed his son. When he died, he

hoiada's influence upon him, and as soon as Jehoiada was dead, he turned to other gods (:17,18). People can serve God, even in a very zealous way, purely as the result of others' influence upon them. This is why how we end our spiritual journey is so important – when those who influenced our youth are no longer with us, and we serve God with no possibility of the motivation of pleasing those we respect. It seems Joash was grateful to Jehoiada for saving his life and organizing the coup which led to his having the kingdom at seven years old – when his gratitude should've been to *God*, who used Jehoiada merely as a human channel. If we don't see our spiritual elders as *channels* used by God, but glorify them in themselves, then we will tend to do spiritual things just to please those elders. And when they are no more, we are left with no real relationship with God Himself. This would explain how *immediately* on the death of Jehoiada, Joash turned to other gods.

24:17 *The king listened to them* – So often the history of the kings repeats itself. This was exactly the mistake of Rehoboam – listening to bad advisors and rejecting the Godly advice of older men (1 Kings 12:8,10). Our life situations likewise tend to repeat in essence the situations faced by Biblical characters; and we really are expected to learn the lessons. We have to ask how often it is that we base a life decision specifically upon a Biblical precedent... How much does Bible history really affect our life choices today?

24:21 *At the commandment of the king* – See on 23:11.

24:22 *May Yahweh look at it, and require it* – This is one of many Biblical indications that at the day of judgment, situations in this life will as it were be played back to

said, May Yahweh witness it, and require it.²³ It happened at the end of the year, that the army of the Syrians came up against him. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus.²⁴ For the army of the Syrians came with a small company of men; and Yahweh delivered a very great army into their hand, because they had forsaken Yahweh, the God of their fathers. So they executed judgment on Joash.²⁵ When they had departed from him (for they left him very sick), his own servants conspired against him for the blood of the sons of Jehoiada the priest, and killed him on his bed, and he died; and they buried him in the city of David, but they didn't bury him in the tombs of the kings.²⁶ These are those who conspired against him: Zabad the son of Shimeath the Ammonitess and Je-

hozabad the son of Shimrith the Moabitess.²⁷ Now concerning his sons, and the greatness of the burdens laid on him, and the rebuilding of God's house, behold, they are written in the commentary of the book of the kings. Amaziah his son reigned in his place.

CHAPTER 25 Oct. 28

Amaziah's Incomplete Devotion

Amaziah was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem.² He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, but not with a complete heart.³ Now it happened that when the kingdom was established to him, he killed his servants who had killed the king his father.⁴ But he didn't put their children to death, but did according to that which is written in the law in the book of Moses, as

the wicked, and be 'required' from them. All their sins will be mentioned unto them, whereas this will not be the case for the righteous, whose sins have been forgiven (Ez. 18:22; 33:16).

25:3 *When the kingdom was established to him, he killed his servants* – This sentence structure is common in the record of the kings; *when* they became strong, *once* they were set up in life, *then* they did wrong (11:17; 12:1; 17:1; 21:4; 26:8,16). Some people never get set up in life or become financially or domestically 'strong' as they would wish, and resent it. But remember this formula; perhaps if that had been granted them by God, they would turn away from Him. Amaziah repeated the pattern of Jehoram, who became strong in his kingdom, and then killed his brothers (21:4). Again we see how God intended Amaziah, as He intends all of us, to perceive how we should be and live on the basis of the examples in the history of His people. This is why reading the records of these kings is so valuable for us; and more than valuable, God intends us to be familiar with the history He has recorded and carefully preserved for so long, and learn from it, applying it specifically in our lives.

25:4 Despite committing murder after the pattern of wicked Jehoram (21:4), he was careful to be obedient to part of God's law. We so often justify wrong behaviour by mixing it with some element of legalistic obedience to God's word, just as we see in

Yahweh commanded saying, The fathers shall not die for the children, neither shall the children die for the fathers; but every man shall die for his own sin.⁵ Moreover Amaziah gathered Judah together, and ordered them according to their fathers houses, under captains of thousands and captains of hundreds, even all Judah and Benjamin. He numbered them from twenty years old and upward, and found them three hundred thousand chosen men, able to go forth to war, who could handle spear and shield.⁶ He hired also one hundred thousand mighty men of valour out of Israel for one hundred talents of silver.⁷ A man of God came to him, saying, O king, don't let the army of Israel go with you; for Yahweh is not with Israel, with all the children of Ephraim.⁸ But if you will go, go and take action, be strong for the battle. God will overthrow you before the enemy; for God has power to help, and to overthrow.⁹ Amaziah said to the man of God, But what shall we do for the hundred talents which I have given to the army of Israel? The

man of God answered, Yahweh is able to give you much more than this.¹⁰ Then Amaziah separated them, the army that had come to him out of Ephraim, to go home again. Therefore their anger was greatly kindled against Judah, and they returned home in fierce anger.¹¹ Amaziah took courage, and led forth his people, and went to the Valley of Salt, and struck ten thousand of the children of Seir.¹² The children of Judah carried away ten thousand alive, and brought them to the top of the rock, and threw them down from the top of the rock, so that they all were broken in pieces.¹³ But the men of the army whom Amaziah sent back, that they should not go with him to battle, fell on the cities of Judah, from Samaria even to Beth Horon, and struck of them three thousand, and took much spoil.

Amaziah's Spiritual Decline

¹⁴ Now it happened, after that Amaziah had come from the slaughter of the Edomites, that he brought the gods of the children of Seir,

the account of the judgment and crucifixion of Jesus, with the Jews careful to obey parts of the Mosaic Law in detail – whilst totally missing the bigger picture

25:6 Jehoshaphat (19:2) and other kings of Judah had always gotten into trouble by making military alliances with Israel; but still the lesson wasn't learnt, spiritual history wasn't allowed by Amaziah to really have a practical impact upon him.

25:8 *But if you will go, go and take action, be strong for the battle* – A classic example of the downward spiral, whereby God pushes people along the road of self-destruction if this is the path they choose.

25:13 We might be surprised at this; Amaziah had paid money to hire this army, but in humility to God's word had dismissed them and as it were wasted his money, just because God had told him not to use them but trust in Him. But then they do so much damage to Amaziah's kingdom. Perhaps this was because his obedience to God's word was only external, and not with a complete heart (:2). Likewise Amaziah won a great victory by faith in Yahweh, but immediately adopted pagan gods (:14,15).

and set them up to be his gods, and bowed down himself before them, and burned incense to them. 15 Therefore the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Amaziah, and He sent to him a prophet who said to him, Why have you sought after the gods of the people, which have not delivered their own people out of your hand? 16 It happened, as he talked with him, that the king said to him, Have we made you one of the king's counsellors? Stop! Why should you be struck down? Then the prophet stopped, and said, I know that God has determined to destroy you, because you have done this, and have not listened to my counsel. 17 Then Amaziah king of Judah consulted his advisers, and sent to Joash, the son of Jehoahaz the son of Jehu, king of Israel, saying, Come, let us face off against each other. 18 Joash king of Israel sent to Amaziah king of Judah saying, The thistle that was in Lebanon sent to the cedar that was in Lebanon saying, Give your daughter to my son as his wife. Then a wild animal that was in Lebanon passed by, and trampled down the thistle. 19 You say to yourself that you have struck Edom; and your heart lifts you up to boast. Now stay at home. Why should you meddle with trouble, that you should fall, even you, and Judah with you? 20 But Amaziah would not listen;

for it was of God, that He might deliver them into the hand of their enemies, because they had sought after the gods of Edom. 21 So Joash king of Israel went up; and he and Amaziah king of Judah confronted each other at Beth Shemesh, which belongs to Judah. 22 Judah was defeated by Israel; and they fled every man to his tent. 23 Joash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah, the son of Joash the son of Jehoahaz, at Beth Shemesh, and brought him to Jerusalem, and broke down the wall of Jerusalem from the gate of Ephraim to the corner gate, four hundred cubits. 24 He took all the gold and silver, and all the vessels that were found in God's house with Obed-Edom, and the treasures of the king's house, the hostages also, and returned to Samaria. 25 Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Joash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years. 26 Now the rest of the acts of Amaziah, first and last, behold, aren't they written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel? 27 Now from the time that Amaziah turned away from following Yahweh, they made a conspiracy against him in Jerusalem. He fled to Lachish; but they sent after him to Lachish, and killed him there. 28 They brought him on horses, and buried him with his fathers in the city of David.

25:17 Earlier Amaziah had wanted to make an alliance with Israel (:6,7); now he picks an argument with them and purposefully provokes a war with them. This unstable, inconsistent attitude arose from his incomplete devotion to God (:2). The instability and inconsistency evident in so many aspects of so many lives is reflective of a lack of steady, consistent devotion to the God who is eager to be our rock.

CHAPTER 26 Oct. 29***Uzziah's Industry and Success***

All the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king in the place of his father Amaziah.² He built Eloth and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers.³ Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jechiliah of Jerusalem.⁴ He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all that his father Amaziah had done.⁵ He set himself to seek God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the vision of God. As long as he sought Yahweh, God made him to prosper.⁶ He went forth and warred against the Philistines, and broke down the walls of Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod; and he built cities in the country of Ashdod and among the Philistines.⁷ God helped him against the Philistines, and against the Arabians who lived in Gur Baal and the Meunim.⁸ The Ammonites gave tribute to Uzziah. His name spread abroad even to the entrance of Egypt; for he grew extremely strong.⁹ Moreover, Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate and the valley gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them.¹⁰ He built

towers in the wilderness, and dug out many cisterns, for he had much livestock; in the lowland also, and in the plain. He had farmers and vineyard keepers in the mountains and in the fruitful fields; for he loved farming.¹¹ Moreover Uzziah had an army of fighting men, who went out to war by bands, according to the number of their reckoning made by Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the officer, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the king's captains.¹² The whole number of the heads of fathers' households, even the mighty men of valour, was two thousand six hundred.¹³ Under their hand was an army, three hundred and seven thousand five hundred, who made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy.¹⁴ Uzziah prepared for them, even for all the army, shields, spears, helmets, coats of armour, bows and stones for slinging.¹⁵ He made in Jerusalem engines, invented by skilful men, to be on the towers and on the battlements, with which to shoot arrows and great stones. His name spread far abroad; for he was marvelously helped, until he was strong.

Uzziah's Failure

But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up, so that he did corruptly, and he trespassed against Yahweh

26:4 But Amaziah only did a few things right before God and turned to other gods in the end (25:20). God so thirsts for human response to Him that He writes these records so positively, in recognition of any spirituality which there was.

26:16 *But when he was strong* – He was strong only in his own self-perception, because his strength was only the result of God's help (:15). Again we see how human strength precedes spiritual failure, which is a common theme in these lives of the kings and indeed throughout history; see on 25:3.

his God; for he went into Yahweh's temple to burn incense on the altar of incense.¹⁷ Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him eighty priests of Yahweh, who were valiant men.¹⁸ They resisted Uzziah the king, and said to him, It isn't for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to Yahweh, but for the priests the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Go out of the sanctuary; for you have trespassed; neither shall it be for your honour from Yahweh God.¹⁹ Then Uzziah was angry; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense; and while he was angry with the priests, the leprosy broke forth in his forehead before the priests in the house of Yahweh, beside the altar of incense.²⁰ Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked on him, and behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out quickly from there. Yes, he himself hurried also to go out, because Yahweh had struck him.²¹ Uzziah

the king was a leper to the day of his death, and lived in a separate house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of Yahweh; and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land.²² Now the rest of the acts of Uzziah, first and last, Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, wrote.²³ So Uzziah slept with his fathers; and they buried him with his fathers in the field of burial which belonged to the kings; for they said, He is a leper. Jotham his son reigned in his place.

CHAPTER 27 Oct. 29

Jotham's Good Reign

Jotham was twenty-five years old when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerushah the daughter of Zadok.² He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all that his father Uzziah had done. However he didn't enter into Yahweh's temple.

26:17 Azariah was very brave to do this; for kings, especially like Uzziah at this time, considered themselves all powerful and beyond such criticism. We shouldn't fear to bring God's word to those who are 'senior' in rank, even if it criticizes them explicitly or implicitly; for compared to God's word, all men are as grass, of whatever rank they are in human society (Is. 40:6-8).

26:18 Uzziah is here condemned for doing what only the priests could do. However, David also did what only the priests (of the tribe of Levi) could do; but he was of the tribe of Judah and therefore not a priest (1 Chron. 15:27; 16:3). So we conclude that the same action can be sinful for one person but a sign of spiritual maturity in another. We need to bear this in mind when considering the behaviour of others, and try not to legislate against it in a legalistic manner but treat each case on its merits. We also learn from this that motive and not external action nor appearance are of ultimate importance to God. All our works need careful analysis once we grasp this point. It could be that Uzziah was trying to imitate David in acting as a priest when he wasn't; for 2 Kings 14:3 emphasizes that Uzziah did *not* do his good deeds in the spirit of David. It was all just an attempt to externally mimic a righteous man when the heart was far from spirituality; and God judges such hypocrisy very hard.

The people still did corruptly. ³ He built the upper gate of the house of Yahweh, and on the wall of Ophel he built much. ⁴ Moreover he built cities in the hill country of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers. ⁵ He fought also with the king of the children of Ammon, and prevailed against them. The children of Ammon gave him the same year one hundred talents of silver, ten thousand measures of wheat and ten thousand of barley. The children of Ammon gave that much to him in the second year also, and in the third. ⁶ So Jotham became mighty, because he prepared his ways before Yahweh his God. ⁷ Now the rest of the acts of Jotham, and all his wars and his ways, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. ⁸ He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem. ⁹ Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David; and Ahaz his son reigned in his place.

CHAPTER 28 Oct. 30

The Wickedness of Ahaz

Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign; and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: and he didn't do that which was right

in the eyes of Yahweh, as David his father did; ² but he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and additionally made molten images for the Baals. ³ Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, according to the abominations of the nations whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel. ⁴ He sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places and on the hills, and under every green tree. ⁵ Therefore Yahweh his God delivered him into the hand of the king of Syria; and they struck him, and carried away from him a great multitude of captives, and brought them to Damascus. He was also delivered into the hand of the king of Israel, who struck him with a great slaughter. ⁶ For Pekah the son of Remaliah killed in Judah one hundred and twenty thousand in one day, all of them valiant men; because they had forsaken Yahweh, the God of their fathers. ⁷ Zichri, a mighty man of Ephraim, killed Maaseiah the king's son, and Azrikam the ruler of the house, and Elkanah who was next to the king. ⁸ The children of Israel carried away captive of their brothers two hundred thousand, women, sons and daughters, and took also away much spoil from them, and brought

27:6 If a man prepares his way after God's principles (see too Prov. 4:26), then God will 'prepare' that man's way too (Ps. 37:23; 119:5), confirming him in the way he chooses to go.

28:5 *Therefore Yahweh his God* – Yahweh was still his God even through this very evil part of his life when Ahaz had forsaken God (:6); we too shouldn't give up on our brethren who clearly leave God's principles. Even if we disbelieve God, He still remains faithful to us (2 Tim. 2:13). God is still working with our lost brethren, and so should we, after the pattern of the shepherd who searches until he finds the lost sheep.

the spoil to Samaria. ⁹ But a prophet of Yahweh was there, whose name was Oded. He went out to meet the army that came to Samaria and said to them, Behold, because Yahweh, the God of your fathers, was angry with Judah, He has delivered them into your hand, and you have slain them in a rage which has reached up to heaven. ¹⁰ Now you purpose to oppress the children of Judah and Jerusalem for bondservants and bondmaids for yourselves. Aren't there even with you trespasses of your own against Yahweh your God? ¹¹ Now hear me therefore, and send back the captives, that you have taken captive from your brothers; for the fierce wrath of Yahweh is on you. ¹² Then some of the heads of the children of Ephraim, Azariah the son of Johanan, Berechiah the son of Meshillemoth, and Jehizkiah the son of Shallum, and Amasa the son of Hadlai, stood

up against those who came back from the war. ¹³ They said to them, You shall not bring in the captives here; for you purpose that which will bring on us a trespass against Yahweh, to add to our sins and to our trespass; for our trespass is great, and there is fierce wrath against Israel. ¹⁴ So the armed men left the captives and the spoil before the princes and all the assembly. ¹⁵ The men mentioned by name rose up and took the captives, and with the spoil clothed all who were naked among them, dressed them, gave them sandals, and gave them something to eat and to drink, anointed them, carried all the feeble of them on donkeys, and brought them to Jericho, the city of palm trees, to their brothers. Then they returned to Samaria. ¹⁶ At that time king Ahaz sent to the kings of Assyria to help him. ¹⁷ For again the Edomites had come and struck

28:9 The “rage” of sinful Israel against sinful Judah was likely because they transferred their own sins onto their brethren, and then eagerly punished them for them. This psychological phenomenon explains why there is so much judgmentalism and anger against other members within the church. To avoid it, we must face up to our own sins, and believe that the judgment for them has truly been laid upon Jesus. We will therefore know our guilt to have been lifted and will not feel the need to transfer it onto others.

28:11 Fierce wrath – This seems a stronger term than the ‘anger’ of God with Judah for their idolatry (:9). Hypocrisy and harshly judging our brethren when we too are sinners is something which makes God fiercely angry.

28:13 This kind of thing happens several times in the record of the kings; men had committed themselves already to a significant plan like hiring many soldiers and are then told to not go ahead with the plan (e.g. 25:9) at the risk of loss of face or money. This kind of thing ought to be a regular aspect of our lives – stopping in our tracks and turning back from a course of action because of God’s word.

28:15 Clothing the naked, putting them on donkeys and taking them to Jericho is all the basis of the good Samaritan parable (Lk. 10). We can therefore understand that parable in terms of our having compassion upon those within the ecclesia who are suffering for their sins; we are to take care of them, considering our own sins deserve the same judgment (:10).

Judah, and carried away captives. 18 The Philistines also had invaded the cities of the lowland, and of the South of Judah, and had taken Beth Shemesh, Aijalon, Gederoth, Soco with its towns, Timnah with its towns, Gimzo also and its towns; and settled there. 19 For Yahweh brought Judah low because of Ahaz king of Israel; for he had dealt wantonly in Judah, and trespassed severely against Yahweh. 20 Tilgath Pilneser king of Assyria came to him and distressed him, but didn't strengthen him. 21 For Ahaz took away a portion out of the house of Yahweh, and out of the house of the king and of the princes, and gave it to the king of Assyria: but it didn't help him. 22 In the time of his distress, he trespassed yet more against Yahweh, this same king Ahaz. 23 For he sacrificed to the gods of Damascus which struck him. He said, Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, so I will sacrifice to them, that they may help me. But they were the ruin of him, and of all Israel. 24 Ahaz gathered

together the vessels of God's house, cut in pieces the vessels of God's house, and shut up the doors of the house of Yahweh; and he made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. 25 In every city of Judah he made high places to burn incense to other gods, and provoked to anger Yahweh, the God of his fathers. 26 Now the rest of his acts, and all his ways, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. 27 Ahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city, even in Jerusalem; for they didn't bring him into the tombs of the kings of Israel; and Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

CHAPTER 29 Oct. 31

Hezekiah Cleanses the Temple

Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five years old; and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Abijah, the daughter of Zechariah. 2 He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, according to all

28:27 *They didn't bring him into the tombs of the kings* – This is mentioned several times about the sinful kings. Although the people were themselves sinful and rebellious, they recognized that the kings who hadn't followed the spirit of king David shouldn't be buried together with him. There is in society a basic sense of right and wrong, which is reflected in such decisions as this. It's not the case, therefore, that people are totally disinterested in spirituality and have no sense of right or wrong. There is interest in spirituality in people; it's just connecting with it in an appropriate way which is our challenge.

29:2 We wonder how it could be that such an evil man as Ahaz had such a righteous son as Hezekiah. Perhaps the extreme sinfulness of Ahaz made Hezekiah reflect upon the wrongness of sin; perhaps Hezekiah was angry with his father for killing his brothers and sisters in sacrifice to stupid idols (28:3) and so he went the other way, as it were. Whatever, we learn that bad background doesn't force people into sin; Hezekiah had an awful spiritual background but he was righteous. We can't blame our sin on anything, including bad background.

that David his father had done.³ In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he opened the doors of the house of Yahweh, and repaired them.⁴ He brought in the priests and the Levites and gathered them together into the broad place on the east,⁵ and said to them, Listen to me, you Levites! Now sanctify yourselves, and sanctify the house of Yahweh, the God of your fathers, and carry all the abominations out of the holy place.⁶ For our fathers have trespassed and done that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh our God, and have forsaken Him, and have turned away their faces from the habitation of Yahweh, and turned their backs.⁷ Also they have shut up the doors of the porch, and put out the lamps, and have not burned incense nor offered burnt offerings in the holy place to the God of Israel.⁸ Therefore the wrath of Yahweh was on Judah and Jerusalem, and He has delivered them to

be tossed back and forth, to be an astonishment and a hissing, as you see with your eyes.⁹ For, behold, our fathers have fallen by the sword, and our sons and our daughters and our wives are in captivity for this.¹⁰ Now it is in my heart to make a covenant with Yahweh, the God of Israel, that His fierce anger may turn away from us.¹¹ My sons, don't be negligent now; for Yahweh has chosen you to stand before Him to minister to Him, and that you should be His ministers, and burn incense.¹² Then the Levites arose, Mahath son of Amasai, and Joel son of Azariah, of the sons of the Kohathites; and of the sons of Merari, Kish son of Abdi and Azariah son of Jehallelel; and of the Gershonites, Joah son of Zimmah and Eden son of Joah;¹³ and of the sons of Elizaphan, Shimri and Jeuel; and of the sons of Asaph, Zechariah and Mattaniah;¹⁴ and of the sons of Heman, Jehuel and Shimei; and of the sons of Jedut-

In the eyes of Yahweh – These “eyes of Yahweh” refer to the Angels (16:9). If we ask how, mechanically, as it were, God sees and knows all things, the answer is perhaps ‘Through His Angels’. Their activity is amazing; because their work is invisible to us, we may get the impression at times that God is somehow silent and unobservant. But His “eyes” are constantly informing Him of our situations and forming an opinion about them.

29:3 There is a frequent cycle in the record of the kings of mass apostasy by the people, reformation by a faithful king and then quick descent into apostasy again. This mirrors the cycle of sin, repentance, devotion and sin which is seen in so many personal lives. One of the greatest joys we can look forward to in the Kingdom of God is not just the eternity of the life, but the spiritual quality of it, never able to sin again. The cycle of the kings suggests, however, that much of the reformation was as a result of the personal leadership of the king; people go back to the easier way of the flesh very easily, and good leadership can only go so far in personal reformation; because our relationship with God is ultimately so very personal.

29:11 *My sons* – Hezekiah was only 25 years old when he said this (:1), but when others are spiritually weak and someone takes spiritual leadership, they become the elder – regardless of their age.

hun, Shemaiah and Uzziel. ¹⁵ They gathered their brothers and sanctified themselves, and went in, according to the commandment of the king by the words of Yahweh, to cleanse the house of Yahweh. ¹⁶ The priests went in to the inner part of the house of Yahweh to cleanse it, and brought out all the uncleanness that they found in Yahweh's temple into the court of the house of Yahweh. The Levites took it, to carry it out abroad to the brook Kidron. ¹⁷ Now they began on the first day of the first month to sanctify, and on the eighth day of the month came they to the porch of Yahweh. They sanctified the house of Yahweh in eight days, and on the sixteenth day of the first month they made an end. ¹⁸ Then they went in to Hezekiah the king within the palace and said, We have cleansed all the house of Yahweh, and the altar of burnt offering, with all its vessels, and the table of showbread, with all its vessels. ¹⁹ Moreover all the vessels which king Ahaz in his reign threw away when he trespassed, have we prepared and sanctified; and behold, they are before the altar of Yahweh.

A Service of Re-dedication

²⁰ Then Hezekiah the king arose early, and gathered the princes of the city, and went up to the house of Yahweh. ²¹ They brought seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven male goats for a sin offering for the kingdom and for the sanctuary and for Judah. He commanded the priests the sons of Aaron to offer them on the altar of Yahweh. ²² So they killed the bulls, and the priests received the blood, and sprinkled it on the altar. They killed the rams, and sprinkled the blood on the altar: they killed also the lambs, and sprinkled the blood on the altar. ²³ They brought near the male goats for the sin offering before the king and the assembly; and they laid their hands on them: ²⁴ and the priests killed them, and they made a sin offering with their blood on the altar, to make atonement for all Israel; for the king commanded that the burnt offering and the sin offering should be made for all Israel. ²⁵ He set the Levites in the house of Yahweh with cymbals, with stringed instruments, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of

29:23 It would seem from :21 that the male goats were the sin offering. Jesus understood goats to represent those who would be rejected at the final judgment (Mt. 25:33). We are to put our hand as it were on the head of such goats, recognizing that we should come to judgment day and be condemned, treated as goats. We need to imagine how it would feel to be at the judgment and be sent to the left hand side. This is what we deserve, and we recognize that by placing our hand on the head of the goat, as it were. But we are saved by the blood of the lamb; we are identified with Him and will therefore be treated as Him, and moved to the right hand side where the sheep are. All these principles are brought together in baptism into Christ, whereby through that immersion in water we die the death of a sinner and yet rise again with Christ; and we are to continue living out the essence of baptism in an ongoing sense throughout our lives.

Gad the king's seer and Nathan the prophet; for the commandment was of Yahweh by His prophets.²⁶ The Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets.²⁷ Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt offering on the altar. When the burnt offering began, the song of Yahweh began also, and the trumpets, together with the instruments of David king of Israel.²⁸ All the assembly worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded. All this continued until the burnt offering was finished.²⁹ When they had made an end of offering, the king and all who were present with him bowed themselves and worshipped.³⁰ Moreover Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praises to Yahweh with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. They sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped.³¹ Then Hezekiah answered, Now you have consecrated yourselves to Yahweh; come near and bring sacrifices and thank offerings into the house of Yahweh. The assembly brought in sacrifices and thank offerings; and as many as were of a willing heart brought burnt offerings.³² The number of the burnt offerings which the as-

sembly brought was seventy bulls, one hundred rams, and two hundred lambs. All these were for a burnt offering to Yahweh.³³ The consecrated things were six hundred head of cattle and three thousand sheep.³⁴ But the priests were too few, so that they could not flay all the burnt offerings. Therefore their brothers the Levites helped them, until the work was ended, and until the priests had sanctified themselves; for the Levites were more upright in heart to sanctify themselves than the priests.³⁵ Also the burnt offerings were in abundance, with the fat of the peace offerings, and with the drink offerings for every burnt offering. So the service of the house of Yahweh was set in order.³⁶ Hezekiah rejoiced, and all the people, because of that which God had prepared for the people; for this was done suddenly.

CHAPTER 30 Nov.1

Hezekiah's Great Passover

Hezekiah sent to all Israel and Judah, and wrote letters also to Ephraim and Manasseh, that they should come to the house of Yahweh at Jerusalem, to keep the Passover to Yahweh, the God of Israel.² For the king had taken counsel, and his princes, and all the assembly in Je-

30:1 By doing so, Hezekiah was seeking to bring together the spiritually minded of both Israel and Judah (see too :5). Technical divisions between God's people are always ended 'on the ground' when like minded believers find they have so much in common, and the official divides between them only exist from a human viewpoint; God sees His people as one, whatever divisions between them there may be from human perspectives.

30:2 *The second month* – Passover was to be kept in the first month; but Hezekiah perceived the urgency which there is in serving God, and he rightly perceived it was better to technically infringe the Law in order to keep the spirit of it.

rusalem, to keep the Passover in the second month.³ For they could not keep it at that time, because the priests had not sanctified themselves in sufficient number, neither had the people gathered themselves together to Jerusalem.⁴ The thing was right in the eyes of the king and of all the assembly.⁵ So they established a decree to make proclamation throughout all Israel, from Beersheba even to Dan, that they should come to keep the Passover to Yahweh, the God of Israel, at Jerusalem; for they had not kept it in great numbers in the manner that is written.⁶ So the couriers went with the letters from the king and his princes throughout all Israel and Judah, and according to the commandment of the king saying, You children of Israel, turn again to Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, that He may return to the remnant that have escaped of you out of the hand of the kings of Assyria.⁷ Don't be like your fathers, and like your brothers, who trespassed against Yahweh, the God of their fathers, so that He gave them up to destruction, as you see.⁸ Now don't be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; but yield yourselves to Yahweh, and enter into His sanctuary which He has sanctified forever. Serve Yahweh your God, that His fierce anger may turn away from you.⁹ For if you turn

again to Yahweh, your brothers and your children shall find compassion before those who led them captive, and shall come again into this land: for Yahweh your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away His face from you if you return to Him.¹⁰ So the couriers passed from city to city through the country of Ephraim and Manasseh, even to Zebulun; but there they were ridiculed and despised.¹¹ Nevertheless certain men of Asher and Manasseh and of Zebulun humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem.¹² Also on Judah came the hand of God to give them one heart, to do the commandment of the king and of the princes by the word of Yahweh.¹³ Many people assembled at Jerusalem to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great assembly.¹⁴ They arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kidron.¹⁵ Then they killed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the second month. The priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought burnt offerings into the house of Yahweh.¹⁶ They stood in their place after their order, according to the law of Moses the man of God, and the priests sprinkled the blood which they received of the hand of the Levites.

30:9 Note that if *they* turned to Yahweh, then their spiritually weak brethren currently in captivity would be blessed; to some extent, our spirituality can affect third parties.

30:12 God is capable of working directly on the human heart to make us obedient to His word; given the tragic weakness of our will, we should also ask Him to be with us in this way, as David often does in Ps. 119.

The Passover Kept in Uncleanliness

17 There were many in the assembly who had not sanctified themselves; therefore the Levites were in charge of killing the Passovers for everyone who was not clean, to sanctify them to Yahweh. 18 For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet they ate the Passover otherwise than it is written. For Hezekiah had prayed for them saying, May the good Yahweh pardon everyone 19 who sets his heart to seek God, Yahweh, the God of his fathers, even if they aren't clean according to the purification of the sanctuary. 20 Yahweh listened to Hezekiah, and healed the people. 21 The children of Israel who were present at Jerusalem kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised Yahweh day by day, singing with loud instruments to Yahweh. 22 Hezekiah spoke to the heart of all the Levites who had good understanding in the service of Yah-

weh. So they ate throughout the feast for the seven days, offering sacrifices of peace offerings, and making confession to Yahweh, the God of their fathers. 23 The whole assembly took counsel to keep another seven days; and they kept another seven days with gladness. 24 For Hezekiah king of Judah gave to the assembly for offerings one thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the assembly a thousand bulls and ten thousand sheep; and a great number of priests sanctified themselves. 25 All the assembly of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the assembly who came out of Israel, and the foreigners who came out of the land of Israel, and who lived in Judah, rejoiced. 26 So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. 27 Then the priests and the Levites arose and blessed the people; and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to His holy habitation, even to heaven.

30:18 *They ate the Passover otherwise than it is written* – This needs to be ever remembered by those who fear they aren't worthy to participate in the breaking of bread service, which is the Christian equivalent of the Passover feast. Our desire for God and His thirst for relationship with us are between them more than enough to make our weaknesses no barrier to remembering the great salvation He achieved for us in Christ. However, the reference in :20 to God's healing of the people at this time suggests that although He agreed with their keeping of Passover in an unclean state (:12 “by the word of Yahweh”), He also made them recognize their sinfulness at this time.
30:23 If we truly love God, we will not be minimalists, doing the minimum required by His word; we will joyfully go beyond. For His commandments are but a springboard to more total dedication by us on our own initiative. We need to ask, when was the last time we decided to do something for God as it were “extra”, on our own initiative?

CHAPTER 31 Nov.2***Generous Response and Distribution of the Tithes***

Now when all this was finished, all Israel who were present went out to the cities of Judah, and broke in pieces the pillars, and cut down the Asherim, and broke down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin, in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had destroyed them all. Then all the children of Israel returned each man to his possession, into their own cities. ² Hezekiah appointed the divisions of the priests and the Levites after their divisions, each man according to his service, both the priests and the Levites, for burnt offerings and for peace offerings, to minister, to give thanks and to praise in the gates of the camp of Yahweh. ³ He appointed also the king's portion of his substance for the burnt offerings, for the morning and evening burnt offerings, and the burnt offerings for the Sabbaths, and for the new moons, and for the set feasts, as it is written in the law of

Yahweh. ⁴ Moreover he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion of the priests and the Levites, that they might give themselves to the law of Yahweh. ⁵ As soon as the commandment was published, the children of Israel gave in abundance the first fruits of grain, new wine, oil and honey, and of all the increase of the field; and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly. ⁶ The children of Israel and Judah, who lived in the cities of Judah, they also brought in the tithe of cattle and sheep, and the tithe of dedicated things which were consecrated to Yahweh their God, and laid them by heaps. ⁷ In the third month they began to lay the foundation of the heaps, and finished them in the seventh month. ⁸ When Hezekiah and the princes came and saw the heaps, they blessed Yahweh and His people Israel. ⁹ Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. ¹⁰ Azariah the chief priest, of the house of Zadok, answered him and said, Since people

31:3 *The king's portion of his substance* – Hezekiah led this reformation by his personal example – absolutely vital in any leadership role within God's people.

31:7 There are many 'small' details in the Biblical record which indicate that we are reading real history, inspired by God and infallible. The third month was at the end of the grain harvest, the time of the feast of Pentecost. The seventh month was at the end of the fruit and wine harvest, the time of the feast of tabernacles.

31:8 The Hebrew idea of 'blessing' carries more weight than a casual 'Bless you!' or 'Well done!'. It was loaded with the solemn belief that something actual would happen as a result of the blessing being pronounced (the same is true of the idea of 'cursing'). Passages like Ez. 44:30; Hag. 2:19 and Mal. 3:10,11 state that there would be material blessing in the homes of those who gave the tithe, and Hezekiah surely had this in mind. Our giving to God is responded to by Him; maybe not in cash terms (otherwise the concepts of giving and generosity lose their significance), but we can be assured that there will be a real blessing in response.

31:10 Several times in the record of Israel's history we have this feature – of response

began to bring the offerings into the house of Yahweh, we have eaten and had enough, and have left plenty; for Yahweh has blessed His people. That which is left is this great store.

¹¹ Then Hezekiah commanded them to prepare rooms in the house of Yahweh; and they prepared them.

¹² They brought in the offerings, the tithes and the dedicated things faithfully. Conaniah the Levite was ruler over them, and Shimei his brother was second.

¹³ Jehiel, Azaziah, Nahath, Asahel, Jerimoth, Jozabad, Eliel, Ismachiah, Mahath and Benaiyah were overseers under the hand of Conaniah and Shimei his brother, by the appointment of Hezekiah the king, and Azariah the ruler of God's house.

¹⁴ Kore the son of Imnah the Levite, the porter at the east gate, was over the freewill offerings of God, to distribute the offerings of Yahweh and the most holy things.

¹⁵ Under him were Eden, Miniamin, Jeshua, Shemaiah, Amariah and Shecaniah, in the cities of the priests, in their office of trust, to give to their brothers by divisions, both to the great and small.

¹⁶ Also under him were those who were reckoned by genealogy of males, from three years old and upward, even each one who entered into the house of Yahweh,

the duty of every day required, for their service in their offices according to their divisions;

¹⁷ and those who were reckoned by genealogy of the priests by their fathers' houses; and the Levites from twenty years old and upward, in their offices by their divisions;

¹⁸ and those who were reckoned by genealogy of all their little ones, their wives, their sons and their daughters, through all the congregation. In their office of trust they sanctified themselves in holiness.

¹⁹ Also for the sons of Aaron the priests, who were in the fields of the suburbs of their cities, in every city, there were men who were mentioned by name, to give portions to all the males among the priests, and to all who were reckoned by genealogy among the Levites.

²⁰ Hezekiah did so throughout all Judah; and he worked that which was good and right and faithful before Yahweh his God.

²¹ In every work that he began in the service of God's house, and in the law, and in the commandments, to seek his God, he did it with all his heart, and prospered.

CHAPTER 32 Nov.3

The Assyrian Invasion

After these things, and this faithfulness, Sennacherib king of

to a call for donations far over what was required (e.g. 24:10). And yet the prophets emphasize that Israel never really quit idol worship and were constantly rebellious against Yahweh. We observe from this that there was a conscience toward God amongst them, and people love and need to be given some concrete way of serving God; generally, people lack initiative and need to have a structure given to them within which they can serve God. But we also see that it's far easier to give material things at one point in time than to give our hearts to God for a lifetime.

32:1 *After these things, and this faithfulness –* This is clear enough evidence that devotion to God doesn't save us from trial, nor guarantee us an easy life in the flesh.

Assyria came, and entered into Judah, and encamped against the fortified cities, and thought to win them for himself. ² When Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib had come, and that he was set to fight against Jerusalem, ³ he took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the springs which were outside of the city; and they helped him. ⁴ So many people gathered together, and they stopped all the springs, and the brook that flowed through the midst of the land saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water? ⁵ He took courage, and built up all the wall that was broken down, and raised it up to the towers, and the other wall outside, and strengthened Millo in the city of David, and made weapons and shields in abundance. ⁶ He set captains of war over the people, and gathered them together to him in the broad place at the gate of the city, and spoke to their hearts saying, ⁷ Be strong and courageous, don't be afraid nor dismayed for the king of Assyria, nor for all the mul-

titude who is with him; for there is a greater One with us than with him. ⁸ With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is Yahweh our God to help us, and to fight our battles. The people rested themselves on the words of Hezekiah king of Judah. ⁹ After this, Sennacherib king of Assyria sent his servants to Jerusalem, (now he was before Lachish, and all his power with him), to Hezekiah king of Judah, and to all Judah who were at Jerusalem saying, ¹⁰ Thus says Sennacherib king of Assyria, In whom do you trust, that you remain under siege in Jerusalem? ¹¹ Doesn't Hezekiah persuade you, to give you over to die by famine and by thirst by saying, 'Yahweh our God will deliver us out of the hand of the king of Assyria?' ¹² Hasn't the same Hezekiah taken away His high places and His altars, and commanded Judah and Jerusalem, saying, You shall worship before one altar, and on it you shall burn incense? ¹³ Don't you know what I and my fathers have done to all the peoples of the lands? Were

Hezekiah's devotion was extraordinary – and now calamity came. Although it could be that his dedication wasn't matched by Israel's, and the Assyrian crisis came as a result of their unfaithfulness.

32:12 His high places and His altars – We see in this comment the nature of Israel's apostasy. They hadn't rejected Yahweh totally, become atheists; rather they had proclaimed the pagan high places and altars as actually being Yahweh's, thus justifying pagan idol worship as if it were a form of Yahweh worship. Something similar happened when the pagan feast of December 25th and the worship of the evergreen tree was declared a Christian festival, and the pagan tree turned into the "Christmas tree". But we make the same mistake countless times, in justifying fleshly behaviour (e.g. anger, judgmentalism, gossip, pride, exclusivity, character destruction etc.) as a form of serving Yahweh.

32:13 All this was true; but to the faithful mind, it was actually an encouragement, although a discouragement to the weak in faith. Truly the pagan gods had been powerless, and so too would be the Assyrian gods.

the gods of the nations of the lands in any way able to deliver their land out of my hand? ¹⁴ Who was there among all the gods of those nations which my fathers utterly destroyed, that could deliver his people out of my hand, that your God should be able to deliver you out of my hand? ¹⁵ Now therefore don't let Hezekiah deceive you, nor persuade you in this way, neither believe him; for no god of any nation or kingdom was able to deliver his people out of my hand, and out of the hand of my fathers. How much less will your God deliver you out of my hand? ¹⁶ His servants spoke yet more against Yahweh God, and against His servant Hezekiah. ¹⁷ He also wrote letters insulting Yahweh, the God of Israel, and to speak against Him saying, As the gods of the nations of the lands, which have not delivered their people out of my hand, so shall the God of Hezekiah not deliver His people out of my hand. ¹⁸ They cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language to the people of Jerusalem who were on the wall, to frighten them, and to trouble them; that they might take

the city. ¹⁹ They spoke of the God of Jerusalem, as of the gods of the peoples of the earth, which are the work of men's hands. ²⁰ Hezekiah the king, and Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz, prayed because of this, and cried to heaven. ²¹ Yahweh sent an angel, who cut off all the mighty men of valour, and the leaders and captains, in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned with shame of face to his own land. When he had come into the house of his god, those who came forth from his own bowels killed him there with the sword. ²² Thus Yahweh saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side. ²³ Many brought gifts to Yahweh to Jerusalem, and precious things to Hezekiah king of Judah; so that He was exalted in the sight of all nations from thenceforth.

Hezekiah's Poor Response to Grace

²⁴ In those days Hezekiah was sick even to death. He prayed to Yahweh; and He spoke to him, and gave

32:21 *Those who came forth from his own bowels* – The reference is to his sons. But children come forth from the “bowels” or inner parts of a woman, not a man. But husband and wife are seen as one in the production of children; ‘they’ become pregnant and jointly bring forth children. This was a radical perspective in a society where women existed basically to bear children and the fathers carried little responsibility for their children.

32:24 *In those days Hezekiah was sick even to death* – 2 Kings 14:2 shows that Hezekiah reigned for 29 years, and the Assyrian invasion came in the 14th year of his reign. At the time of his sickness, God gave him another 15 years of life; hence his sickness and the invasion were at the same time. When circumstances come together in such an awful way, we know this is the hand of God trying to develop us; not coincidence, nor any personal Satan being, of whom the Bible knows nothing.

him a sign. ²⁵ But Hezekiah didn't render again according to the grace done to him. His heart was lifted up; therefore there was wrath on him, and on Judah and Jerusalem. ²⁶ Notwithstanding, Hezekiah humbled himself for the pride of his heart, both he and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the wrath of Yahweh didn't come on them in the days of Hezekiah. ²⁷ Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour and he set up treasures for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, and for shields, and for all kinds of goodly vessels; ²⁸ store-houses also for the increase of grain and new wine and oil; and stalls for all kinds of animals, and flocks in folds. ²⁹ Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance; for God had given him very much substance. ³⁰ This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper spring of the waters of Gihon, and brought them straight down on the west side of the city of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his works. ³¹ However concerning the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent to him to inquire of the wonder

that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that He might know all that was in his heart. ³² Now the rest of the acts of Hezekiah, and his good deeds, behold, they are written in the vision of Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz, in the book of the kings of Judah and Israel. ³³ Hezekiah slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the ascent of the tombs of the sons of David; and all Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem did him honour at his death. Manasseh his son reigned in his place.

CHAPTER 33 Nov.4

Manasseh's Great Wickedness

Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem. ² He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, after the abominations of the nations whom Yahweh cast out before the children of Israel. ³ For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; and he reared up altars for the Baals, and made Asheroth, and worshipped all the army of the sky, and served them. ⁴ He built altars in the house of Yahweh, of which Yah-

32:25 We have all received grace; and the intended response to it is humility. It is because God so hugely values humility that He has arranged the whole concept of grace as the basis of our salvation. Those who deny grace and rather trust in works will therefore tend towards pride and away from humility.

33:2 Manasseh's father Hezekiah was a righteous man; his grandfather Ahaz a very wicked man. This just shows that spirituality isn't totally the result of our upbringing and background. We each stand as individuals before God and can overcome the influence of where we came from; and on the other hand, faithful parents are no guarantee of personal spirituality. It could be that Hezekiah in the last 15 years of his life was somewhat switched off from devotion to God, resting on his laurels and enjoying the good life in retirement. Whilst he didn't himself turn to other gods, this laid back attitude to the true God meant that his son turned away from Him.

weh said, My name shall be in Jerusalem forever.⁵ He built altars for all the army of the sky in the two courts of the house of Yahweh.⁶ He also made his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom; and he practised sorcery and used enchantments, and practised witchcraft and dealt with those who had familiar spirits, and with wizards. He worked much evil in the sight of Yahweh, to provoke Him to anger.⁷ He set the engraved image of the idol, which he had made, in God's house, of which God said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put My name forever:⁸ neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel from off the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will observe to do all that I have commanded them, even all the law and the statutes and the ordinances given by Moses.⁹ Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did more evil than the nations did whom Yahweh had destroyed before the children of Israel.¹⁰ Yahweh spoke to Manasseh,

and to his people; but they gave no heed.¹¹ Therefore Yahweh brought on them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh in chains, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon.

Manasseh's Repentance

¹² When he was in distress, he begged Yahweh his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers.¹³ He prayed to Him; and He was entreated by him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that Yahweh was God.¹⁴ Now after this he built an outer wall to the city of David, on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, even to the entrance at the fish gate; and he encircled Ophel with it, and raised it up to a very great height; and he put valiant captains in all the fortified cities of Judah.¹⁵ He took away the foreign gods, and the idol out of the house of Yahweh, and all the altars that he had built in the mountain of the house of Yahweh, and in Jerusalem, and cast them out of the city.¹⁶ He built up the altar of Yahweh, and offered thereon

33:12 *Yahweh his God* – God was still his God even in those years of revolt against Him; God never gives up with us so long as we live on this earth. Although Yahweh was *his* God, only on repentance years later did “Manasseh [know] that Yahweh was God” (:13), and we read of Yahweh as “*his* God” (:18). Thus in repentance, a man makes Yahweh’s knowledge of him mutual; and in that meeting of God and man in repentance there is a huge synergy. All the Angels of God rejoice when one person repents (Lk. 15:10). Hence the huge, cosmic joy at each repentant baptism into Christ. *Humbled himself* – This shows that no matter how wicked a person is, there is always a way back to God; but the supreme requirement is of humility. We should therefore never give up on people as too far gone. Self humbling is spoken of in :19 as the same as repentance; this is what repentance is all about, not a passing recognition on a mental level of a small slip, but a deep humbling of self.

sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving, and commanded Judah to serve Yahweh, the God of Israel. ¹⁷ Nevertheless the people sacrificed still in the high places, but only to Yahweh their God. ¹⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and his prayer to his God, and the words of the seers who spoke to him in the name of Yahweh, the God of Israel, behold, they are written among the acts of the kings of Israel. ¹⁹ His prayer also, and how God was entreated of him, and all his sin and his trespass, and the places in which he built high places, and set up the Asherim and the engraved images, before he humbled himself: they are written in the history of Hozai. ²⁰ So Manasseh slept with his fathers, and they buried him in his own house; and Amon his son reigned in his place.

Amon's Wicked Reign

²¹ Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign; and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. ²² He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, as did Manasseh his father; and Amon sacrificed to all the engraved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them. ²³ He didn't humble himself before Yahweh, as Manasseh his father had humbled himself; but this same Amon trespassed more and more.

33:22 The consequence of sin, even if we ourselves repent of it, is in the bad pattern it sets to others. Our examples are more powerful than we think; sin is largely sin because of the effect it has upon others.

34:3 A 16 year old can significantly search after God; and a 20 year old isn't too young to do major things for God or take a leadership role if there are no others willing to do so.

²⁴ His servants conspired against him, and put him to death in his own house. ²⁵ But the people of the land killed all those who had conspired against king Amon; and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his place.

CHAPTER 34 Nov.5

Josiah's Good Reign

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem. ² He did that which was right in the eyes of Yahweh, and walked in the ways of David his father, and didn't turn aside to the right hand or to the left. ³ For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father. In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the Asherim, and the engraved images, and the molten images. ⁴ They broke down the altars of the Baals in his presence. He cut down the incense altars that were on high above them. He broke in pieces the Asherim, and the engraved images, and the molten images, and made dust of them, and strewed it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them. ⁵ He burnt the bones of the priests on their altars, and purged Judah and Jerusalem. ⁶ He did this in the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim

and Simeon, even to Naphtali, in their surrounding ruins.⁷ He broke down the altars, and beat the Asherim and the engraved images into powder, and cut down all the incense altars throughout all the land of Israel, and returned to Jerusalem.⁸ Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of Yahweh his God.⁹ They came to Hilkiah the high priest, and delivered the money that was brought into God's house, which the Levites, the keepers of the threshold, had gathered of the hand of Manasseh and Ephraim, and of all the remnant of Israel, and of all Judah and Benjamin, and of the inhabitants of Jerusalem.¹⁰ They delivered it into the hand of the workmen who had the oversight of the house of Yahweh. The work-

men who laboured in the house of Yahweh gave it to mend and repair the house;¹¹ even to the carpenters and to the builders they gave it, to buy cut stone, and timber for couplings, and to make beams for the houses which the kings of Judah had destroyed.¹² The men did the work faithfully; and their overseers were Jahath and Obadiah, the Levites, of the sons of Merari; and Zechariah and Meshullam, of the sons of the Kohathites, to set it forward; and others of the Levites, all who were skilful with instruments of music.¹³ Also they were over the bearers of burdens, and set forward all who did the work in every kind of service. Of the Levites there were scribes, and officers, and porters.

The Book of the Law Discovered

¹⁴ When they brought out the money that was brought into the house of Yahweh, Hilkiah the priest found

34:14 *Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of Yahweh given by Moses – Jeremiah (Jer. 15:16) says that when this book was found, it was to him the joy of his heart and he as it were ate it. Yet the part of the Law which was found listed the judgments for disobedience and the explanation of the terms of the covenant (:31). He didn't regard these things as some might – the boring droning on of God about sin. Jeremiah perceived in it God's requirements and the blessings for obedience, and rejoiced in it all, as only one who truly loves God can do. Note that in the generations that didn't have access to this book of the Law, there were still people who pleased God greatly, including Josiah. And yet they did so in ignorance of all His word. We who have the completed word of God so conveniently accessible can come to think that therefore anyone without a complete knowledge of God's word on every point cannot please Him or have a relationship with Him. But this is clearly not the case; for those at Josiah's time and the generation before who were ignorant of parts of God's word could still please Him. However we who have God's completed word have a far higher level of responsibility before Him. It could also be argued that God revealed more of His word and requirements to Josiah in response to Josiah's zeal to do the right thing before God so far as he knew, as with Cornelius in the New Testament. Those who truly seek after God will have His true word revealed to them.*

the book of the law of Yahweh given by Moses.¹⁵ Hilkiah answered Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of Yahweh. Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan.¹⁶ Shaphan carried the book to the king, and moreover brought back word to the king, saying, All that was committed to your servants, they are doing.¹⁷ They have emptied out the money that was found in the house of Yahweh, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and into the hand of the workmen.¹⁸ Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest has delivered me a book. Shaphan read therein before the king.¹⁹ It happened, when the king had heard the words of the law, that he tore his clothes.²⁰ The king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant saying,²¹ Go inquire of Yahweh for me, and for those who are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found. Great is the wrath of Yahweh that is poured out on us, because our fathers have not kept the

word of Yahweh, to do according to all that is written in this book.²² So Hilkiah, and they whom the king had commanded, went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tokhath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe; (now she lived in Jerusalem in the second quarter), and they spoke to her to that effect.²³ She said to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: 'Tell the man who sent you to me,²⁴ Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will bring evil on this place, and on its inhabitants, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah.²⁵ Because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore is My wrath poured out on this place, and it shall not be quenched'.²⁶ But to the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of Yahweh, thus you shall tell him, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: 'As touching the words which you have heard,²⁷ because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before God when you heard His words against this place, and against

34:19 *He tore his clothes* – He realized that sins of ignorance are still sins; hence the Law of Moses required offerings for sin once the sin was recognized. “Great wrath” was from God because of this disobedience, albeit performed in ignorance (:21). The fact sins of ignorance are still felt by God should lead us to search His word the more diligently to know what exactly He requires and hopes for from us. Spare a thought for God in this; He feels sin, all sin, committed by whoever, even in ignorance. His sensitivity to sin should lead us to vow the more passionately to live pleasingly before Him.

34:22 *Huldah the prophetess* – The Hebrew word translated ‘prophet’ doesn’t just refer to someone who predicts the future, but to one who spoke forth God’s inspired word. It’s significant that in such a male dominated society, God chose to relay His word at times through women.

its inhabitants, and have humbled yourself before Me and have torn your clothes, and wept before Me; I also have heard you, says Yahweh. 28 Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, neither shall your eyes see all the evil that I will bring on this place, and on its inhabitants'. They brought back word to the king. 29 Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30 The king went up to the house of Yahweh, and all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, both great and small; and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of Yahweh. 31 The king stood in his place, and made a covenant before Yahweh, to walk after Yahweh, and to keep His commandments, His testimonies and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. 32 He caused all who were found in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. The inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. 33 Josiah took away all the abominations out of all

the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all who were found in Israel to serve, even to serve Yahweh their God. All his days they didn't depart from following Yahweh, the God of their fathers.

CHAPTER 35 Nov.6

Josiah's Passover

Josiah kept a Passover to Yahweh in Jerusalem: and they killed the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 2 He set the priests in their offices, and encouraged them to the service of the house of Yahweh. 3 He said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who were holy to Yahweh, Put the holy ark in the house which Solomon the son of David king of Israel built. There shall no more be a burden on your shoulders. Now serve Yahweh your God and His people Israel. 4 Prepare yourselves after your fathers' houses by your divisions, according to the writing of David king of Israel, and according to the writing of Solomon his son. 5 Stand in the holy place according to the divisions of the fathers' houses of your brothers the children of the people, and let there be for each a portion of a father's house of the Levites. 6 Kill the Passover and sanctify yourselves, and prepare for your brothers, to do

34:31 Josiah didn't just accept the threatened judgment to come as inevitable. He believed that by repentance it could possibly be averted by God's grace, just as the people of Nineveh believed.

35:3 Serve Yahweh your God and His people – We serve God through serving His people; our attitude to them, our care for them, is effectively our attitude to the Lord, and will be the basis upon which we are judged at the last day (Mt. 25:40). We can't simply believe in God from the isolation of our own homes or computer screens, and not get involved with actively serving His people.

according to the word of Yahweh by Moses.⁷ Josiah gave to the children of the people of the flock, lambs and young goats, all of them for the Passover offerings, to all who were present, to the number of thirty thousand, and three thousand bulls. These were of the king's substance.⁸ His princes gave for a freewill offering to the people, to the priests, and to the Levites. Hilkiah and Zechariah and Jehiel, the rulers of God's house, gave to the priests for the Passover offerings two thousand and six hundred small livestock, and three hundred head of cattle.⁹ Conaniah also, and Shemaiah and Nethanel, his brothers, and Hashabiah and Jeiel and Jozabad, the chiefs of the Levites, gave to the Levites for the Passover offerings five thousand small livestock, and five hundred head of cattle.¹⁰ So the service was prepared, and the priests stood in their place, and the Levites by their divisions, according to the king's commandment.¹¹ They killed the Passover, and the priests sprinkled the blood which they received of their hand, and the Levites flayed them.¹² They removed the burnt offerings, that they might give them according to the divisions of the fathers' houses of the children of the people, to offer to Yahweh, as it is written in the book of Moses. So they

did with the cattle.¹³ They roasted the Passover with fire according to the ordinance. They boiled the holy offerings in pots, in caldrons and in pans, and carried them quickly to all the children of the people.¹⁴ Afterward they prepared for themselves, and for the priests, because the priests the sons of Aaron were busy with offering the burnt offerings and the fat until night; therefore the Levites prepared for themselves, and for the priests the sons of Aaron.¹⁵ The singers the sons of Asaph were in their place, according to the commandment of David, and Asaph, and Heman, and Jeduthun the king's prophet. The porters were at every gate: they didn't need to depart from their service; for their brothers the Levites prepared for them.¹⁶ So all the service of Yahweh was prepared the same day, to keep the Passover, and to offer burnt offerings on the altar of Yahweh, according to the commandment of king Josiah.¹⁷ The children of Israel who were present kept the Passover at that time, and the feast of unleavened bread seven days.¹⁸ There was no Passover like that kept in Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet; neither did any of the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept, and the priests, and the Levites, and all Judah

35:11 Flayed them— This seems to imply that the skin was flayed off the lambs, in uncanny prediction of Christ's whipping and scourging before His offering as the ultimate Passover lamb.

35:18 Neither did any of the kings of Israel keep such a Passover as Josiah kept – Kings like David and Solomon were more prosperous than Josiah was, and yet he was the more generous in his Passover celebration. Seeing that God isn't impressed by numbers of sacrifices, this may not necessarily be an indication of Josiah's spirituality;

and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.¹⁹ In the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah was this Passover kept.

Josiah's Death

20 After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Neco king of Egypt went up to fight against Carchemish by the Euphrates; and Josiah went out against him.²¹ But he sent ambassadors to him saying, What have I to do with you, you king of Judah? I come not against you this day, but against the house with which I have war. God has commanded me to make haste. Beware and know that it is God who is with me, that he not destroy you.²² Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and didn't listen to the words of Neco from the mouth

of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo.²³ The archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Take me away, because I am seriously wounded!²⁴ So his servants took him out of the chariot, and put him in the second chariot that he had, and brought him to Jerusalem; and he died, and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah.²⁵ Jeremiah lamented for Josiah. All the singing men and singing women spoke of Josiah in their lamentations to this day; and they made them an ordinance in Israel. These are written in the lamentations.²⁶ Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and his good deeds, according to that which is written in the law of Yahweh,²⁷ and his acts, first and last, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah.

he should've learnt the lesson from the success of David and the failure of Solomon, that God seeks a broken heart rather than physical sacrifice. In any case, the people of Judah were soon taken into captivity because of their wickedness; Josiah gave them sacrifices to offer, whereas ideally they should've brought their own. We simply can't give spirituality to others.

35:21 This spirit of seeking a fight was his destruction; he should've learnt the lessons from Abijah in 13:3 who made the same mistake. God's history is written so that we might learn from it; but whilst it remains in our minds as mere history for the sake of it and doesn't become a living word speaking to us personally, it won't fulfil its intention. Perhaps Josiah's zeal for God had lifted him up in pride, and he thought that he could show his zeal for God by aggression towards 'the world', represented as always by Egypt. But aggression for the sake of it is so displeasing to God; God gave His Son to die for this world, this Egypt, rather than to try to destroy it for the sake of it. And it cost Josiah his life. Spiritual superiority, arrogance and aggression are simply so abhorrent to God.

35:22 *The words of Neco from the mouth of God* – The words of pagan Neco weren't inspired by God but were indirectly from Him, just as the words of Caiaphas were in Jn. 12:49-51. We mustn't think that unbelievers have nothing to teach us; God may be trying to communicate with us through them, although this doesn't make the channel of His communication righteous.

CHAPTER 36 Nov.7***The Final Kings of Judah***

Then the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and made him king in his father's place in Jerusalem.² Joahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months in Jerusalem.³ The king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem, and fined the land one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold.⁴ The king of Egypt made Eliakim his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. Neco took Joahaz his brother, and carried him to Egypt.⁵ Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did that which was evil in the eyes of Yahweh his God.⁶ Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon.⁷ Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of Yahweh to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon.⁸ Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim, and his abominations which he did, and that which was found in him, behold, they are written in the book of the kings of Israel and Judah. Jehoiachin his son reigned in his place.⁹ Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned three months

and ten days in Jerusalem. He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh.¹⁰ At the return of the year king Nebuchadnezzar sent, and brought him to Babylon, with the beautiful vessels of the house of Yahweh, and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah and Jerusalem.¹¹ Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem.¹² He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh his God; he didn't humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet speaking the words of Yahweh.¹³ He also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God; but he stiffened his neck, and hardened his heart against turning to Yahweh, the God of Israel.¹⁴ Moreover all the chiefs of the priests, and the people, trespassed very greatly after all the abominations of the nations; and they polluted the house of Yahweh which He had made holy in Jerusalem.¹⁵ Yahweh, the God of their fathers, sent to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place.¹⁶ But they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against His people, until there was no remedy.

36:9 *Jehoiachin was eight years old when he began to reign* – 2 Kings 24:8 says he was 18, and Ez. 19:5-9 speaks of him as a young lion who killed people – relevant to an 18 year old but not an 8 year old. The Septuagint – the Greek version of the Old Testament which the New Testament writers tend to quote rather than the Hebrew text – gives “eighteen” here. This is an example of where although the Bible text itself is inspired, there may be slight errors of copying in a few places as the manuscripts were transmitted over the centuries.

Judah Taken Into Captivity

¹⁷ Therefore He brought on them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, old man or gray-headed. He gave them all into his hand. ¹⁸ All the vessels of God's house, great and small, and the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and the treasures of the king, and of his princes, all these he brought to Babylon. ¹⁹ They burnt God's house and broke down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all the beautiful vessels of it. ²⁰ He carried those who had escaped from the sword away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and his sons until the reign of the kingdom of Per-

sia: ²¹ to fulfil the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its Sabbaths. As long as it lay desolate it kept Sabbath, to fulfil seventy years. ²² Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing saying, ²³ Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, Yahweh, the God of heaven has given all the kingdoms of the earth to me; and He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all his people, Yahweh his God be with him, and let him go up.

36:17 King of the Chaldeans – Assyria is here called ‘Chaldea’ perhaps to bring out the fact the people of Abraham, who had been called out of Ur in Chaldea, were now returning there. The call of the Gospel is a call to separation; if we don’t want to be separate from this world, we shall be returned there. When Christ returns, those responsible to Him will come before His judgment, and the rejected will be sent back into the world to share the judgments coming upon it (1 Cor. 11:32). But that will be the last thing they want – seeing the eternity of God’s new world stretching before them, to be sent back into this world which they so preferred in this their day of opportunity.

36:22 Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus – Although God can work directly on the mind / spirit of people, Dan. 10:13 says that the Angel who brought this about was initially resisted by the king of Persia for 21 days. This amazing proclamation by Cyrus, to allow the Jews to return to their land with his blessing and rebuild their temple, was genuinely from him; and yet the Angel had worked through various ways to stir him up to it. The amount of Angelic activity going on behind the scenes in our lives and in the geopolitics of the world is amazing; God isn’t indifferent nor inactive, but is ceaselessly at work to bring about His Kingdom plans for us His people.

EZRA

CHAPTER 1 Nov.8

The Temple to Be Rebuilt

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and put it also in writing, saying,² Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth; and He has commanded me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.³ Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Yahweh, the God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem.⁴ Whoever is left, in any place where he lives, let the men of his place help him with silver, with gold, with goods, and with animals, be-

sides the freewill offering for God’s house which is in Jerusalem’.

Offerings for the Temple

⁵ Then the heads of fathers’ households of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, even all whose spirit God had stirred to go up, rose up to build the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem.⁶ All those who were around them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with animals, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered.⁷ Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of Yahweh, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought out of Jerusalem, and had put in the house of his gods;⁸ even those, Cyrus king of Persia brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah.⁹ This is the number of them: thirty platters of

1:1 God ‘stirred up’ the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel’s saviour would be “raised up” [s.w.] – Is. 41:2,25; 45:13. And yet Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up – Is. 51:17; 52:1 appeals to Zion to “Awake!” – the same word translated “stirred up”. But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would ‘stir up themselves’ (Is. 64:7). God had given them the potential to be ‘stirred up’ in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return – but they wouldn’t respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits – but because we’re not robots, we have to respond. And yet, God’s grace still shines through. 1 Kings 8:47-50 had predicted that God would give the exiles compassion before their captors if they repented. They didn’t repent, as passages like Ez. 18 make clear (they blamed everything on their fathers and protested their personal innocence) – and yet still God gave them compassion in the eyes of their captors, through the amazing decrees of Cyrus enabling them to return to their land and rebuild the temple at his expense.

gold, one thousand platters of silver, twenty-nine knives,¹⁰ thirty bowls of gold, silver bowls of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels one thousand.¹¹ All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand four hundred. Sheshbazzar brought all these up, when the captives were brought up from Babylon to Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 2 Nov.8

List of Those Who Returned from Exile

Now these are the children of the province, who went up out of the captivity of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away to Babylon, and who returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each one to his city;² who came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Reelaiyah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispar, Bigvai, Rehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel:³ The children of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two. ⁴ The children of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two. ⁵ The children of Arah, seven hundred and seventy-five. ⁶ The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and

twelve. ⁷ The children of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four. ⁸ The children of Zattu, nine hundred and forty-five. ⁹ The children of Zaccaï, seven hundred and sixty. ¹⁰ The children of Bani, six hundred and forty-two. ¹¹ The children of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-three. ¹² The children of Azgad, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two. ¹³ The children of Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-six. ¹⁴ The children of Bigvai, two thousand and fifty-six. ¹⁵ The children of Adin, four hundred and fifty-four. ¹⁶ The children of Ater, of Hezekiah, ninety-eight. ¹⁷ The children of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-three. ¹⁸ The children of Jorah, one hundred and twelve. ¹⁹ The children of Hashum, two hundred and twenty-three. ²⁰ The children of Gibbar, ninety-five. ²¹ The children of Bethlehem, one hundred and twenty-three. ²² The men of Netopah, fifty-six. ²³ The men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight. ²⁴ The children of Azmaveth, forty-two. ²⁵ The children of Kiriath Arim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three. ²⁶ The children of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one. ²⁷ The men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two. ²⁸ The men of Bethel and Ai, two hundred

2:1 The majority of Jews preferred to stay in Babylon. “*The province*” (singular) suggest that only a few Jews who lived in the province of Babylon returned (one out of 127 provinces; see 7:16 too), even though there were significant numbers of Jews in all the provinces, as the book of Esther makes clear (as also does Neh. 1:8, which says that the Babylonian captivity fulfilled God’s prophecy to scatter Israel amongst all nations). Those who did return were very significant to God, and He has therefore recorded their names and numbers to the individual, even how many donkeys went with them – each one who returned was so special to Him, just as we will be if we respond to the call of the restored Kingdom and come out from ‘Babylon’.

and twenty-three.²⁹ The children of Nebo, fifty-two.³⁰ The children of Magbish, one hundred and fifty-six.³¹ The children of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four.³² The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty.³³ The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-five.³⁴ The children of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five.³⁵ The children of Senaah, three thousand six hundred and thirty.³⁶ The priests: the children of Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three.³⁷ The children of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two.³⁸ The children of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven.³⁹ The children of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.⁴⁰ The Levites: the children of Jeshua and Kadmiel, of the children of Hodaviah, seventy-four.⁴¹ The singers: the children of Asaph, one hundred and twenty-eight.⁴² The children of the porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, in all one hundred and thirty-nine.⁴³ The Nethinim: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth,⁴⁴ the children of Keros, the children of Siaha, the children of Padon,⁴⁵ the children of Lebanah,

the children of Hagabah, the children of Akkub,⁴⁶ the children of Hagab, the children of Shamlai, the children of Hanan,⁴⁷ the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar, the children of Reaiah,⁴⁸ the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda, the children of Gazzam,⁴⁹ the children of Uzza, the children of Paseah, the children of Besai,⁵⁰ the children of Asnah, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephisim,⁵¹ the children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur,⁵² the children of Bazluth, the children of Mehida, the children of Harsha,⁵³ the children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Temah,⁵⁴ the children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.⁵⁵ The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Hassophereth, the children of Peruda,⁵⁶ the children of Jaalah, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel,⁵⁷ the children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth Hazzebaim, the children of Ami.⁵⁸ All the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred and ninety-two.⁵⁹ These were those who went up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addan, and Immer; but they could not show their fathers' houses, and their genealogy, whether they were

2:52 Comparing the list of names in the list of returnees in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, we find that a number of names recur in both lists, e.g. Bazluth (Ezra 2:52; Neh. 7:54). It could be that some went from Babylon to Judah with Ezra, then returned to Babylon, and returned with Nehemiah. This hardly sounds like the glorious, positive, confident return of the captives to Zion prophesied in the restoration prophecies. Many respond to the call to leave the good life in Babylon but then falter; the vision of the restored Kingdom on earth and our working with God's blessing to bring it about just doesn't motivate us as it should.

of Israel: ⁶⁰ the children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred and fifty-two. ⁶¹ Of the children of the priests: the children of Habaiah, the children of Hakkoz, the children of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name. ⁶² These sought their place among those who were registered by genealogy, but they were not found: therefore were they deemed polluted and put from the priesthood. ⁶³ The governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things, until there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim. ⁶⁴ The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty, ⁶⁵ besides their male servants and their female servants, of whom there were seven thousand three hundred and thirty-seven: and they had two hundred singing men and singing women. ⁶⁶ Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six;

their mules, two hundred and forty-five; ⁶⁷ their camels, four hundred and thirty-five; their donkeys, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.

More Offerings for the Temple

⁶⁸ Some of the heads of fathers' households, when they came to the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem, offered willingly for God's house to set it up in its place: ⁶⁹ they gave after their ability into the treasury of the work sixty-one thousand darics of gold, five thousand minas of silver and one hundred priests' garments. ⁷⁰ So the priests, and the Levites, and some of the people, and the singers, and the porters, and the Nethinim, lived in their cities, and all Israel in their cities.

CHAPTER 3 Nov.9

Burnt Offerings Resume

When the seventh month had come and the children of Israel were in the cities, the people gath-

2:64 Haggai's criticism of the returnees is more understandable if we understand that most of them were the poor, who hadn't 'made it' in Babylon and who went to Judah hoping to get nice houses, great harvests and material blessings – rather than to rebuild *God's* house. It would be fair to infer that only the poor Jews returned from Babylon. The record here in :64-70 speaks of 42,360 people returning, along with 7,337 servants and 200 singers, making a total of 49,837. And yet only 8,100 animals went with them to transport them. This means that many would have walked. They carried 5,400 vessels for use in the temple – so the picture could be that their more wealthy brethren laded them with goods, but only the poor returned. Further, the list of towns of origin in Ezra 2 suggests it was mainly those who had originally lived in peripheral villages who returned, rather than the inhabitants of Jerusalem and larger cities. It's stressed twice that only "some" of the returned exiles supported the work of the temple (:68-70) – which was supposed to be the main reason for their return. We too can leave 'Babylon' by responding to the call of the Kingdom when actually our motivation is simply a disillusion with our present life, with life in 'Babylon', rather than a serious desire to work for the establishment of *God's* Kingdom.

3:1 As one man – Unity amongst God's people comes from all being committed to a

ered themselves together as one man to Jerusalem.² Then Jeshua the son of Jozadak stood up with his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel and his brothers, and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God.³ In spite of their fear because of the peoples of the surrounding lands, they set the altar on its base; and they offered burnt offerings on it to Yahweh, even burnt offerings morning and evening.⁴ They kept the feast of tents, as it is written, and offered the daily burnt offerings by number, according to the ordinance, as the duty of every day required;⁵ and afterwards the continual burnt offering, the offerings of the new moons, of all the set feasts of Yahweh that were consecrated, and of each one who willingly offered a freewill offering to Yahweh.⁶ From the first day of the seventh month, they began to offer burnt offerings to Yahweh; but the founda-

tion of Yahweh's temple was not yet laid.⁷ They also gave money to the masons, and to the carpenters. They also gave food, drink and oil to the people of Sidon and Tyre, to bring cedar trees from Lebanon to the sea, to Joppa, according to the grant that they had from Cyrus King of Persia.

The Rebuilding of the Temple Begins

⁸ Now in the second year of their coming to God's house at Jerusalem, in the second month, Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brothers the priests and the Levites, and all those who had come out of the captivity to Jerusalem, began the work and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work of Yahweh's house.⁹ Then Jeshua stood with his sons and his brothers, Kadmiel and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, having the oversight of the workmen in God's house: the

sacrificial life before God and a genuine desire to hear God's word and obey it (2:4).
3:3 Their fear – The promises of the restoration from Babylon had repeatedly emphasized that they were not to fear nor be dismayed because God would be behind their return – if they were returning to rebuild God's house and Kingdom rather than seek their own houses and kingdom (Jer. 30:10; Is. 41:10,13,14; 43:1,5; 44:2,8; 51:7; 54:4). This is such strong emphasis that we have to conclude that their fear was because they didn't allow God's prophetic word to influence them as they should have done.

3:7 According to the grant that they had from Cyrus King of Persia – Hag. 1:8, a prophecy given 18 years after the decree of Cyrus, orders the people to go up into the hills of Judah and get wood with which to build the temple. And yet we read here that the decree of Cyrus 18 years earlier had resulted in cedar wood being brought from Tyre and Sidon, enough for the temple to be built. Where did that wood go? Is the implication that the leadership had used it for their own wood ceilinged houses (Hag. 1:4)? It all seems so petty minded. But this is what we are tempted to do, time and again – build up our own house and leave God's house desolate and in a very poor second place.

sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brothers the Levites.¹⁰ When the builders laid the foundation of Yahweh's temple, they set the priests in their clothing with trumpets, with the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise Yahweh, according to the directions of David king of Israel.¹¹ They sang to one another in praising and giving thanks to Yahweh: For He is good, for His grace endures forever toward Israel. All the people shouted with a great shout when they praised Yahweh, because the foundation of the house of Yahweh had been laid.

Joy and Weeping

¹² But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' households, the old men who had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice. Many also shouted aloud for joy,¹³ so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard far away.

CHAPTER 4 Nov.9

Opposition to Rebuilding the Temple

Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that

the children of the captivity were building a temple to Yahweh, the God of Israel;² then they drew near to Zerubbabel, and to the heads of fathers' households and said to them, Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as you do; and we sacrifice to Him since the days of Esar Haddon king of Assyria, who brought us up here.³ But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' households of Israel, said to them, You have nothing in common with us in building a house to our God; but we ourselves together will build to Yahweh, the God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia has commanded us.⁴ Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building,⁵ and hired counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

A Letter Sent to the King of Persia

⁶ In the reign of Ahasuerus, in the beginning of his reign, they wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.⁷ In the days of Artaxerxes wrote Bishlam, Mithredath, Tabeel and the rest of his companions, to Artaxerxes king of Persia; and the writing of the letter was written in Syrian, and set forth

3:12 The young and old didn't rejoice together as required by the restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:12-13. Instead the old men wept, perhaps at how small the temple was compared even with Solomon's, at how Ezekiel's temple wasn't being rebuilt; whilst the younger ones rejoiced.

4:2 *We seek your God, as you do* – They didn't actually seek the God of Israel. The fact people have some belief in a 'god' and perform religious worship doesn't mean

in the Syrian language.⁸ Rehum the chancellor and Shimshai the scribe wrote a letter against Jerusalem to Artaxerxes the king in this way:⁹ then Rehum the chancellor, and Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their companions, the Dinaites, and the Apharsathchites, the Tarpelites, the Apharsites, the Archevites, the Babylonians, the Shushanchites, the Dehaites, the Elamites,¹⁰ and the rest of the nations whom the great and noble Osnappar brought over, and set in the city of Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River, and so forth, wrote.¹¹ This is the copy of the letter that they sent to Artaxerxes the king:

Opposition to Rebuilding Jerusalem

Your servants the men beyond the River, and so forth.¹² Be it known to the king, that the Jews who came up from you have come to us to Jerusalem; they are building the rebellious and the bad city, and have finished the walls, and repaired the foundations.¹³ Be it known now to the king that if this city is built, and the walls finished, they will not pay tribute, custom, or toll, and in the end it will be hurtful to the kings.¹⁴ Now because we eat the salt of the palace, and it is not right for us to see the king's dis-honour, therefore have we sent and informed the king;¹⁵ that search may

be made in the book of the records of your fathers: so you shall find in the book of the records, and know that this city is a rebellious city, and hurtful to kings and provinces, and that they have made rebellion within the same city from old time; for which cause this city was laid waste.¹⁶ We inform the king that if this city be built and the walls finished, because of this you shall have no portion beyond the River.

The King Orders the Rebuilding to Stop

¹⁷ Then the king sent an answer to Rehum the chancellor, and to Shimshai the scribe, and to the rest of their companions who dwell in Samaria, and in the rest of the country beyond the River: Peace, and so forth.¹⁸ The letter which you sent to us has been plainly read before me.¹⁹ I decreed, and search has been made, and it is found that this city of old time has made insurrection against kings, and that rebellion and sedition have been made in it.²⁰ There have been mighty kings also over Jerusalem, who have ruled over all the country beyond the River; and tribute, custom, and toll, was paid to them.²¹ Make a decree now to cause these men to cease, and that this city not be built, until a decree shall be made by me.²² Take heed that you not be slack herein: why should damage grow to

that the people of the true God have anything in common with them. The mantra of ‘unity’ has often been used in attempts to undermine the work of the true God. We live in a world of reductionism whereby the lowest common denominator is often used as a tool for manipulation. Yet the true God stands revealed in His word as He is and the core of the Gospel is in that sense non-negotiable.

the hurt of the kings? ²³ Then when the copy of king Artaxerxes' letter was read before Rehum and Shimshai the scribe and their companions, they went in haste to Jerusalem to the Jews, and made them to cease by force and power. ²⁴ Then ceased the work of God's house which is at Jerusalem; and it ceased until the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia.

CHAPTER 5 Nov.10

Rebuilding the Temple Starts Again

Now the prophets, Haggai the prophet, and Zechariah the son of Iddo, prophesied to the Jews who

were in Judah and Jerusalem; in the name of the God of Israel they prophesied to them. ² Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build God's house which is at Jerusalem; and with them were the prophets of God, helping them. ³ At the same time came to them Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and Shetharbozenai, and their companions, and said thus to them, Who gave you a decree to build this house, and to finish this wall? ⁴ Then we told them in this way, what the names of the men were who were making this building. ⁵ But the eye

4:24 This means that the work of rebuilding the temple was suspended for 21 years. This corresponds to the 21 days (a day representing a year) during which the Angel Gabriel worked on the prince of Persia to make him genuinely support the work of rebuilding, even though during that period the prince of Persia resisted him (Dan. 10:13). This was in response to Daniel's 21 days of prayer (Dan. 10:1,12). So although it may seem that God is distant and everything is in the hands of human rulers, in fact the Angels are actively at work, not forcing people to do what they don't want, but seeking to arrange circumstances so that they make the choices which favour God's work going forward. But because of this desire not to 'force' men, there are such delays. This is one way to explain the apparent silence of God at times in our lives, and the way that humanly, things can appear to 'go wrong'.

5:1 Ezra 4 says that the reason the temple was not further rebuilt was because of the decree of Artaxerxes suspending the building programme; then Haggai came and told Israel that the temple wasn't built because they had preferred to build their own ceiled houses (Hag. 1:4). So God had confirmed the people in the way they chose. They preferred to build their houses rather than His, so He stopped them from building His house altogether until they wholeheartedly recommitted themselves to Him. God arranges circumstances in our lives to try to bring us toward total commitment rather than a surface level devotion which is made out of social necessity.

5:2 *With them were the prophets of God, helping them* – The prophets didn't merely speak God's word and think they had done their job by relaying it; they proactively worked to as it were bring about the fulfilment of the things they predicted. We should have the same spirit, living according to the good news of the Kingdom which we preach.

5:3, 4 This is a situation very similar to that in Acts 4:18-21, where the early Christians were ordered not to preach about Christ and likewise threatened, but they felt they must do God's will above the will of man. And true believers often have this

of their God was on the elders of the Jews, and they did not make them cease, until the matter should come to Darius, and then answer should be returned by letter concerning it. ⁶ This is the copy of the letter that Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, and Shetharbozenai, and his companions the Apharsachites, who were beyond the River, sent to Darius the king.

A Letter Sent to Darius

⁷ They sent a letter to him, in which was written thus: To Darius the king, all peace. ⁸ Be it known to the king, that we went into the province of Judah, to the house of the great God, which is built with great stones, and timber is laid in the walls; and this work goes on with diligence and prospers in their hands. ⁹ Then we asked those elders, and said to them thus, Who gave you a decree to build this house, and to finish this wall? ¹⁰ We asked them their names also, to inform you that we might write the names of the men who were at their head. ¹¹ Thus they returned us answer saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and are building the house that was built these many years ago, which a great king of Israel built and finished. ¹² But after that our fathers had provoked the God of heaven to wrath, He gave them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, the Chaldean, who destroyed this

house, and carried the people away into Babylon.¹³ But in the first year of Cyrus king of Babylon, Cyrus the king made a decree to build this house of God.¹⁴ The gold and silver vessels also of God's house, which Nebuchadnezzar took out of the temple that was in Jerusalem, and brought into the temple of Babylon, those Cyrus the king took out of the temple of Babylon, and they were delivered to one whose name was Sheshbazzar, whom he had made governor;¹⁵ and he said to him, 'Take these vessels, go, put them in the temple that is in Jerusalem, and let God's house be built in its place'.¹⁶ Then the same Sheshbazzar came, and laid the foundations of God's house which is in Jerusalem: and since that time even until now has it been in building, and yet it is not completed.¹⁷ Now therefore, if it seem good to the king, let a search be made in the king's treasure house, which is there at Babylon, whether it be so, that a decree was made of Cyrus the king to build this house of God at Jerusalem; and let the king send his pleasure to us concerning this matter.

CHAPTER 6 Nov.10

The Search for Cyrus' Decree

Then Darius the king made a decree, and search was made in the house of the archives, where the treasures were laid up in Babylon.² There was found at Achmetha, in

choice; we are to seek to live obediently in the societies within which we live, but we cannot obey any command (especially relating to military service) which causes us to disobey God's principles. God's word must come before the word of men.

the palace that is in the province of Media, a scroll, and therein was thus written for a record: ³ In the first year of Cyrus the king, Cyrus the king made a decree: Concerning God's house at Jerusalem, let the house be built, the place where they offer sacrifices, and let its foundations be strongly laid; its height sixty cubits, and its breadth sixty cubits; ⁴ with three courses of great stones, and a course of new timber: and let the expenses be given out of the king's house. ⁵ Also let the gold and silver vessels of God's house, which Nebuchadnezzar took forth out of the temple which is at Jerusalem and brought to Babylon, be restored, and brought again to the temple which is at Jerusalem, each one to its place; and you shall put them in God's house.

A New Decree for the Work to Continue

⁶ Now therefore, Tattenai, governor beyond the River, Shetharbozenai, and your companions the Apharsachites, who are beyond the River, you must not hinder this matter. ⁷ Leave the work of this house of God alone;

let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in its place. ⁸ Moreover I make a decree what you shall do to these elders of the Jews for the building of this house of God: that of the king's goods, even of the tribute beyond the River, expenses be given with all diligence to these men, that they be not hindered. ⁹ That which they have need of, both young bulls, and rams, and lambs, for burnt offerings to the God of heaven; also wheat, salt, wine, and oil, according to the word of the priests who are at Jerusalem, let it be given them day by day without fail; ¹⁰ that they may offer sacrifices of pleasant aroma to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king and of his sons. ¹¹ Also I have made a decree, that whoever shall alter this word, let a beam be pulled out from his house, and let him be lifted up and fastened thereon; and let his house be made a dunghill for this: ¹² and the God who has caused His name to dwell there overthrow all kings and peoples who shall put forth their hand to alter the same, to destroy this house of God which is at Jerusalem. I Darius have made a de-

6:3 Sixty cubits – The temple which Cyrus commanded the Jews to build in Jerusalem was of different (smaller) dimensions to that of Ezekiel. Two possibilities arise here. Either Israel chose to listen to the words of man rather than those of God through Ezekiel; or perhaps God reduced the dimensions, knowing that this was within the capability of Israel to achieve. In any case, Israel were encouraged by Divine prophesy in the work of building according to the pattern which Cyrus had given (:14). God is so eager to work with men that He will work with us on our lower level, even if it is a level lower than what we are capable of. And so we should treat our weaker brethren.

6:10 Paul exhorts us to pray for kings and governors, in the very language of the LXX here about the returnees praying in the new temple for the kings of Babylon (1 Tim. 2:1,2).

cree; let it be done with all diligence. 13 Then Tattenai, the governor beyond the River, Shetharbozenai, and their companions, because Darius the king had sent a decree, did accordingly with all diligence. 14 The elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the decree of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. 15 This house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king.

Joyous Dedication of the Temple

16 The children of Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the rest of the children of the captivity, kept the dedication of this house of God with joy. 17 They offered at the dedication of this house of God one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs; and for a sin offering for all Israel, twelve male goats, according to the number of the tribes of Israel. 18 They set the priests in

their divisions, and the Levites in their courses, for the service of God, which is at Jerusalem; as it is written in the book of Moses. 19 The children of the captivity kept the Passover on the fourteenth day of the first month. 20 For the priests and the Levites had purified themselves together; all of them were pure: and they killed the Passover for all the children of the captivity, and for their brothers the priests, and for themselves. 21 The children of Israel who had come again out of the captivity, and all such as had separated themselves to them from the filthiness of the nations of the land, to seek Yahweh, the God of Israel, ate, 22 and kept the feast of unleavened bread seven days with joy: for Yahweh had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, to strengthen their hands in the work of God's house, the God of Israel.

CHAPTER 7 Nov.11

Ezra Comes to Jerusalem

Now after these things, in the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, Ezra the son of Seraiah, the son

6:21 The account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similarly to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land; by 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by 10:11 likewise; then they separate (10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Neh. 9:2; 13:3. Our natures gravitate downwards, and any personal spiritual reformation we achieve has to be consciously maintained.

6:22 *Yahweh had made them joyful, and had turned the heart of the king of Assyria –* Constantly we see evidence of God's ability to give people attitudes of mind, e.g. joy, and to affect how even unbelieving kings think about His people (Prov. 21:1). As believers in Christ, our greatest need is for spiritual mindedness, to think spiritually rather than worldly and fleshly things; and we can ask God to help us in this. For He surely has the power to change our hearts.

of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah,² the son of Shallum, the son of Zadok, the son of Ahitub,³ the son of Amariah, the son of Azariah, the son of Meraioth,⁴ the son of Zerahiah, the son of Uzzi, the son of Bukki,⁵ the son of Abishua, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the chief priest;⁶ this Ezra went up from Babylon: and he was a willing scribe in the law of Moses, which Yahweh, the God of Israel, had given; and the king granted him all his request, according to the hand of Yahweh his God on him.⁷ There went up some of the children of Israel, and of the priests, the Levites, the singers, the porters and the Nethinim, to Jerusa-

lem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king.⁸ He came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king.⁹ For on the first day of the first month began he to go up from Babylon; and on the first day of the fifth month came he to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God on him.¹⁰ For Ezra had set his heart to seek the law of Yahweh, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and ordinances.

The Letter of Artaxerxes

¹¹ Now this is the copy of the letter that the king Artaxerxes gave to Ezra the priest, the scribe, even the scribe of the words of the commandments

7:2 Son of Zadok – It could have been possible for the Messianic Kingdom to have been established at the time of the restoration, and Ezekiel's temple prophecies would then have been fulfilled. Ezekiel emphasised that the sons of Zadok were to organize priestly work in the temple (Ez. 40:46; 43:19; 44:15; 48:11); Ezra, the leader of the initial restoration, was one of the sons of Zadok. He was in a position to fulfil those prophecies, although the bulk of his brethren seem to have precluded this. Ezra was enabled to ‘beautify’ the temple (:27), the very same word used in Is. 60:7,9,13 about how God would “glorify” [s.w.] His temple with merchandise from throughout the Babylonian empire – all of which was willingly offered by Cyrus and Darius. Ez. 40-48 stress the “gates” dozens of times; and Nehemiah's account likewise stresses many times the attention he paid to setting up the “gates” [s.w.], as if he saw his work as fulfilling Ezekiel's words. Ez. 40:42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple [AV “instruments”] with the same word used for the temple vessels which were brought up out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah's ‘Kingdom’ passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20). God's relationship with Israel has in a sense been one long story of Him working out amazingly detailed and extensive potentials, which human inattention and lack of faith and vision meant didn't come true. But still He endures, trying to work with us, and is so thrilled at our attempts to respond. What relief and rejoicing and fulfilment God will have when His Son finally fulfils all these potential scenarios in their essence at His return.

7:10 For Ezra had set his heart – Ezra went up to Jerusalem with his heart set on fulfilling God's word there; and this was exactly the attitude of Jesus. It was evident from His body language that His heart was set upon going to Jerusalem to die there (Lk. 9:51,53). Ezra's single-minded focus upon his objective should be our pattern too; not gaining worldly wealth or honour, but rather the building up of God's house and people, and the things of His Kingdom.

of Yahweh, and of His statutes to Israel: ¹² Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, perfect peace and so forth. ¹³ I make a decree, that all those of the people of Israel, and their priests and the Levites, in my realm, who are minded of their own free will to go to Jerusalem, go with you. ¹⁴ Because you are sent of the king and his seven counsellors, to inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem, according to the law of your God which is in your hand, ¹⁵ and to carry the silver and gold, which the king and his counsellors have freely offered to the God of Israel whose habitation is in Jerusalem, ¹⁶ and all the silver and gold that you shall find in all the province of Babylon, with the freewill offering of the people, and of the priests, offering willingly for the house of their God which is in Jerusalem; ¹⁷ therefore you shall with all diligence buy with this money bulls, rams, lambs, with their meal offerings and their drink offerings, and shall offer them on the altar of the house of your God which is in Jerusalem. ¹⁸ Whatever shall seem good to you and to your brothers to do with the rest of the silver and the gold, do that after the will of your God. ¹⁹ The vessels that are given to you for the service of the house of your God, deliver before the God of Jerusalem. ²⁰ Whatever more shall be needful for the house of your God, which you shall have occasion to grant, grant it out of the king's treasure house. ²¹ I, even I Artaxerxes the king, do make a de-

cree to all the treasurers who are beyond the River, that whatever Ezra the priest, the scribe of the law of the God of heaven, shall require of you, it be done with all diligence, ²² to one hundred talents of silver, one hundred measures of wheat, one hundred baths of wine, one hundred baths of oil, and salt without prescribing how much. ²³ Whatever is commanded by the God of heaven, let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons? ²⁴ Also we inform you, that concerning any of the priests and Levites, the singers, porters, Nethinim, or servants of this house of God, it shall not be lawful to impose tribute, custom, or toll on them.²⁵ You, Ezra, after the wisdom of your God which is in your hand, appoint magistrates and judges who may judge all the people who are beyond the River, all such as know the laws of your God; and teach him who doesn't know them. ²⁶ Whoever will not do the law of your God, and the law of the king, let judgement be executed on him with all diligence, whether it be to death, or to banishment, or to confiscation of goods, or to imprisonment.

Ezra's Response

²⁷ Blessed be Yahweh, the God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of Yahweh which is in Jerusalem; ²⁸ and has extended grace to me before the king, his counsellors and before all the king's mighty

princes. I was strengthened according to the hand of Yahweh my God upon me, and I gathered together out of Israel chief men to go up with me.

CHAPTER 8 Nov.12

The People Who Returned with Ezra

Now these are the heads of their fathers' households, and this is the genealogy of those who went up with me from Babylon, in the reign of Artaxerxes the king: ² Of the sons of Phinehas, Gershom. Of the sons of Ithamar, Daniel. Of the sons of David, Hattush. ³ Of the sons of Shecaniah, of the sons of Parosh, Zechariah; and with him were reckoned by genealogy of the males one hundred and fifty. ⁴ Of the sons of Pahathmoab, Eliehoenai the son of Zerahiah; and with him two hundred males. ⁵ Of the sons of Shecaniah, the son of Jahaziel; and with him three hundred males. ⁶ Of the sons of Adin, Ebed the son of Jonathan; and with him fifty males. ⁷ Of the sons of Elam, Jeshiah the son of Athaliah; and with him seventy males. ⁸ Of the sons of Shephatiah, Zebadiah the son of Michael; and with him eighty males. ⁹ Of the sons of Joab, Obadiah the son of Jehiel; and with him two hundred and eighteen males. ¹⁰ Of the sons of Shelomith, the son of Josiphiah; and with him one hundred and sixty males. ¹¹ Of the sons of Bebai, Zechariah the son of Bebai; and with him twenty-eight males. ¹² Of the sons of Azgad, Johanan the son of Hakkatan; and with him one hundred and ten males. ¹³ Of the sons

of Adonikam, who were the last; and these are their names: Elihelet, Jeuel, and Shemaiah; and with them sixty males. ¹⁴ Of the sons of Bigvai, Uthai and Zabbud; and with them seventy males.

Ezra Finds Levites for the Temple

¹⁵ I gathered them together to the river that runs to Ahava; and there we encamped three days: and I viewed the people and the priests, and found there none of the sons of Levi.

¹⁶ Then sent I for Eliezer, for Ariel, for Shemaiah, and for Elnathan, and for Jarib, and for Elnathan, and for Nathan, and for Zechariah, and for Meshullam, chief men; also for Joiarib, and for Elnathan, who were teachers. ¹⁷ I sent them forth to Iddo the chief at the place Casiphia; and I told them what they should tell Iddo, and his brothers the Nethinim, at the place Casiphia, that they should bring to us ministers for the house of our God. ¹⁸ According to the good hand of our God on us they brought us a man of discretion, of the sons of Mahli, the son of Levi, the son of Israel; and Sherebiah, with his sons and his brothers, eighteen; ¹⁹ and Hashabiah, and with him Jeshiah of the sons of Merari, his brothers and their sons, twenty; ²⁰ and of the Nethinim, whom David and the princes had given for the service of the Levites, two hundred and twenty Nethinim: all of them were mentioned by name.

Fasting and Prayer

²¹ Then I proclaimed a fast there,

at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of Him a straight way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.²² For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way, because we had spoken to the king saying, The hand of our God is on all those who seek Him for good; but His power and His wrath is against all those who forsake Him.²³ So we fasted and begged our God for this: and He was entreated of us.

Offerings for the Temple

²⁴ Then I set apart twelve of the chiefs of the priests, even Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brothers with them,²⁵ and weighed to them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering for the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his princes, and all Israel there present, had offered:²⁶ I

weighed into their hand six hundred fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels one hundred talents; of gold one hundred talents;²⁷ and twenty bowls of gold, of one thousand darics; and two vessels of fine bright brass, precious as gold.²⁸ I said to them, You are holy to Yahweh, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill offering to Yahweh, the God of your fathers.²⁹ Guard and keep them, until you weigh them before the chiefs of the priests and the Levites, and the princes of the fathers' households of Israel, at Jerusalem, in the rooms of the house of Yahweh.³⁰ So the priests and the Levites received the weight of the silver and the gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem to the house of our God.

Return to Jerusalem

³¹ Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go to Jerusalem: and the

8:21 *A straight way for us* – God's people had been prophesied as returning, walking “by the rivers of waters in a *straight way*, wherein they shall *not stumble*” (Jer. 31:9). Ezra fasted for them to be given a “*straight way*”, as Jeremiah had foretold they could have. He saw the need for them to make the effort to fulfil the prophecy of Ezekiel’s vision in which the cherubim made “*straight*” progress (Ez. 1:12); the wheels on earth surely connect with how Israel should have been, moving in a straight way back to the land, in harmony with the Angel-cherubim above them likewise moving in a straight way. But they failed to “keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal. 5:25). They were to walk “each one straight before him” (Is. 57:2 Heb.), as each of the cherubim went straight ahead (Ez. 1:12). We too are not alone in this world, we are being guided by the Angels above, and are to walk in step with them.

8:22 The returning exiles had been comforted by the prophetic word: “Fear not... I will *help you*” (Is. 41:10). Ezra was ashamed to ask for *help* against Judah’s enemies, the implication being that he wanted that human help but was ashamed to ask for it from the King. He had initially believed those words of Isaiah, but found it hard to maintain that level of faith. We find ourselves so often in this situation as we struggle to believe God’s promises in the midst of our secular lives.

hand of our God was on us, and He delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the bandit by the way.³² We came to Jerusalem, and stayed there three days.³³ On the fourth day the silver and the gold and the vessels were weighed in the house of our God into the hand of Meremoth the son of Uriah the priest; and with him was Eleazar the son of Phinehas; and with them was Jozabad the son of Je-shua, and Noadiah the son of Binnui, the Levite.³⁴ Everything was counted and weighed: and all the weight was written at that time.³⁵ The children of the captivity, who had come out of exile, offered burnt offerings to the God of Israel, twelve bulls for all Israel, ninety-six rams, seventy-seven lambs and twelve male goats for a sin offering: all this was a burnt offering to Yahweh.³⁶ They delivered the king's commissions to the king's satraps, and to the governors beyond the River: and they furthered the people and God's house.

9:1 The Levites in the restored Kingdom were not to marry divorcees or Gentiles (Ez. 44:22); but they did just this (see too Mal. 2:11-16). Time and again, they didn't have the Kingdom experience because they didn't want it. All who truly love the Kingdom and want it to ultimately be real for them will have it (2 Tim. 4:8).

9:2 *For they have taken of their daughters* – This was why they were following the idols of the Gentiles (:1). Marriage out of the faith is strongly associated with adopting the religion of the unbelieving partner. Whatever exceptions there are to this rule, that is the general pattern – be it the worship of Baal in those times, or agnosticism today. This is the spiritual danger of marriage to unbelievers.

9:3 *Plucked off the hair of my head* – The very punishment for marriage out of the faith at this time (Neh. 13:25). Ezra so identified with his weak brethren that he felt as if he himself had committed the sin; he even blushed before God because of the failure of His people with whom He was so closely identified (:6). This should be our response when we encounter weakness in our brethren, rather than self-righteousness and mental or physical separation from them as persons. The Lord Jesus supremely identified with us as sinners in His time of dying; our similar identity with our sinful brethren is therefore one way of living out the spirit of the cross.

CHAPTER 9 Nov.13

Ezra Learns of Mixed Marriages

Now when these things were done, the princes drew near to me saying, The people of Israel, and the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands and are following their abominations, even those of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.² For they have taken of their daughters for themselves and for their sons, so that the holy seed have mixed themselves with the peoples of the lands. Yes, the hand of the princes and rulers has been chief in this trespass.

Ezra Is Distressed and Prays

3 When I heard this thing, I tore my garment and my robe, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down confounded.

4 Then were assembled to me all who

trembled at the words of the God of Israel, because of the transgression of those that had been carried away; and I sat confounded until the evening offering. ⁵ At the evening offering I arose up from my humiliation, even with my garment and my robe torn; and I fell on my knees, and spread out my hands to Yahweh my God; ⁶ and I said, My God, I am ashamed and blush to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have increased over our head, and our guiltiness has grown up to the heavens. ⁷ Since the days of our fathers we have been exceeding guilty to this day; and for our iniquities we, our kings and our priests, have been delivered into the hand of the kings of the lands, to the sword, to captivity, to plunder and to confusion of face, as it is this day. ⁸ Now for a little moment grace has been shown from Yahweh our God, to leave us a remnant to escape, and to give us a nail in His holy place, that our God may lighten our eyes, and give us a

little reviving in our bondage. ⁹ For we are bondservants; yet our God has not forsaken us in our bondage, but has extended loving kindness to us in the sight of the kings of Persia, to give us a reviving, to set up the house of our God, to repair its ruins, and to give us a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem. ¹⁰ Now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments ¹¹ which You have commanded by Your servants the prophets saying, ‘The land, to which you go to possess it, is an unclean land through the uncleanness of the peoples of the lands, through their abominations, which have filled it from one end to another with their filthiness. ¹² Now therefore don’t give your daughters to their sons, neither take their daughters to your sons, nor seek their peace or their prosperity forever; that you may be strong, and eat the good of the land, and leave it for an inheritance to your children forever’. ¹³ After all that has come upon us for

9:4 The sins of those who returned are called “the transgression of those that had been carried away”. Yet those who returned to the land weren’t mainly the generation who had been carried away. The intended confusion is surely to suggest that those who returned committed the same sins as had led Judah into captivity a generation earlier. Ezra comments on this fact in his subsequent prayer (:7). One sad thing about spiritual history is that so few learn the lessons from others’ failures; the entire Bible is in one sense a history of spiritual failure, written for our learning (Rom. 15:4).

9:9 Ezra referred to the Jews in Babylon as those “bondservants... in bondage” – when historical records, as well as the book of Esther and the fact Nehemiah the Jew was the king’s cupbearer, show that the Jews were very far from being servants in Babylonian society. Yet Ezra perceived the spiritual poverty and servanthood of remaining in that affluent society, compared to the freedom of giving it all up and going to rebuild the ruins of Zion.

9:13 Ezra said that God had punished them less than their iniquities deserved; yet he appears to have in mind Is. 40:2, where God said that at the time of Zion’s restoration, He would admit to having punished her “double for all her sins”. Yahweh in His love

our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since You, our God, has punished us less than our iniquities deserve, and has given us such a remnant,¹⁴ shall we again break Your commandments, and join in affinity with the peoples that do these abominations? Wouldn't You be angry with us until You had consumed us, so that there should be no remnant, nor any to escape?¹⁵ Yahweh, the God of Israel, You are righteous; for we are left a remnant that has escaped, as it is this day. Behold, we are before You in our guiltiness; for we cannot remain before You because of this.

and pity felt that He had punished them twice as much as they deserved; but Ezra realized that it was less than what they deserved. His love is so abounding that He almost rushes to take guilt for having justly punished sin. Another example is 9:8: “And now *for a little moment* grace has been shown from Yahweh”. This uses the same relatively rare Hebrew construction as in Is. 54:6-8, which likens Judah to a young wife who had been “refused” during the 70 years captivity: “For *a little moment* have I forsaken you... in a little wrath I hid My face from you *for a moment*”. Here is Yahweh, likening Himself to a faithful husband feeling more guilty than He was, taking upon Himself the fault for it all, saying that for the “small moment” of the captivity, He had forsaken His people. But Ezra saw that “little moment” as a time when they received *grace*; what may appear to some as forsaking is in fact God’s grace to us, when spiritually discerned – whether it be deep within our own lives, or in the state of affairs upon this planet.

9:14 The covenant was not to be broken in the restored Kingdom; the temple had been destroyed before because of breaking covenant with Yahweh (Ez. 44:7). But now, Judah broke covenant [s.w.] with Yahweh at the time of the restoration by marrying Gentiles and worshipping their gods.

9:15 *We cannot remain before You* – Ezra is recognizing that the prophecies of the restored Kingdom which speak of God’s returned people standing or remaining [same Hebrew words] before Him for ever were not going to come true (Is. 66:20-22; Ez. 44:15).

10:3 The suggestion to divorce their Gentile wives and send them away to their Gentile families, even with the children they had had by them (:44), was on their initiative. When there was a similar repentance about marriage out of the faith in Nehemiah’s time, this wasn’t done. There are degrees to which we can repent; the word ‘repent’ literally means a change of mind. Repentance is a matter of the heart, hence we can’t judge others’ repentance. But it will be articulated to different levels by different people. The fact there are different levels on which we can respond to God shouldn’t

CHAPTER 10 Nov.14

A Plan to End Mixed Marriages

Now while Ezra prayed and made confession, weeping and casting himself down before God’s house, there was gathered together to him out of Israel a very great assembly of men and women and children; for the people wept very bitterly.² Shecaniah the son of Jehiel, one of the sons of Elam, answered Ezra, We have trespassed against our God, and have married foreign women of the peoples of the land. Yet now there is hope for Israel concerning this thing.³ Now therefore let us make a

covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those who tremble at the commandment of our God. Let it be done according to the law.⁴ Arise; for the matter belongs to you, and we are with you. Be courageous, and do it.⁵ Then Ezra arose, and made the chiefs of the priests, the Levites, and all Israel, to swear that they would do according to this word. So they swore.⁶ Then Ezra rose up from before God's house, and went into the chamber of Jehohanan the son of Eliashib: and when he came there, he ate no bread, nor drank water; for he mourned because of the trespass of the captives.⁷ They made proclamation throughout Judah and Jerusalem to all the children of the captivity, that they should gather themselves together to Jerusalem;⁸ and that whoever didn't come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the

encourage a spirit of minimalism within us, but rather a desire to serve Him on as high a level as we can.

10:9 In the context of the restoration, Is. 66:1,2 had stated that having a humble spirit which trembled at God's word was more important than building a physical house for Him. The Jews did tremble at the word at the beginning of the rebuilding. But it was a momentary thing; they came to see the building of the walls as more important than keeping a trembling spirit. Works eclipsed spirituality. Yet Isaiah had taught that the trembling at the word was more essentially important than building temples. But Judah paid no attention in the long term.

10:13 *We are not able to stand outside* – Literally, ‘we are not strong enough to be outside’. The returned exiles were prophesied as having increased strength and energy for their task of rebuilding the temple and God's Kingdom; their strength would not fail (Is. 40:29-41:1), in contrast to how for the idolater, “his *strength fails*” (Is. 44:12). But the same word is used here about how the strength of the redeemed exiles *did* become weak; and again in Neh. 4:10 about how the Jewish builders didn't have strength to remove all the rubble to rebuild the walls. God will strengthen us in all our weakness – if we are truly committed to His work, His people, His house and His Kingdom. Resources will be provided and our personal weaknesses overcome – if these things are the true yearning of our hearts.

elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the assembly of the captives.⁹ Then all the men of Judah and Benjamin gathered themselves together to Jerusalem within the three days; it was the ninth month, on the twentieth day of the month: and all the people sat in the broad place before God's house, trembling because of this matter, and because of the great rain.¹⁰ Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, You have trespassed, and have married foreign women, to increase the guilt of Israel.¹¹ Now therefore make confession to Yahweh, the God of your fathers, and do His will; and separate yourselves from the peoples of the land, and from the foreign women.¹² Then all the assembly answered with a loud voice, As you have said concerning us, so must we do.¹³ But the people are many, and it is a time of much rain, and we are not able to stand outside; neither is this a work

of one day or two; for we have greatly transgressed in this matter.¹⁴ Let now our princes be appointed for all the assembly, and let all those who are in our cities who have married foreign women come at appointed times, and with them the elders of every city, and its judges, until the fierce wrath of our God be turned from us, until this matter is resolved.¹⁵ Only Jonathan the son of Asahel and Jahzeiah the son of Tikvah stood up against this; and Meshullam and Shabbethai the Levite helped them.¹⁶ The children of the captivity did so. Ezra the priest, with certain heads of fathers' households, after their fathers' houses, and all of them by their names, were set apart; and they sat down in the first day of the tenth month to examine the matter.¹⁷ They made an end with all the men who had married foreign women by the first day of the first month.

Those Who Had Married Foreign Wives

¹⁸ Among the sons of the priests there were found who had married foreign women: of the sons of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and his brothers, Maaseiah, and Eliezer, and Jarib, and Gedaliah.¹⁹ They gave their hand that they would put away their wives; and being guilty, they offered a ram of the flock for their guilt.²⁰ Of the sons of Immer: Hanani and Zebadiah.²¹ Of the sons of Harim: Maaseiah, and Elijah, and Shemaiah, and Jehiel, and Uzziah.²² Of the sons of Pashhur: Elioenai, Maaseiah, Ishmael, Nethanel, Jozabad, and

Elasar.²³ Of the Levites: Jozabad, and Shimei, and Kelaiah (the same is Kelita), Pethahiah, Judah, and Eliezer.²⁴ Of the singers: Eliashib. Of the porters: Shallum, and Telem, and Uri.²⁵ Of Israel: Of the sons of Parosh: Ramiah, and Izziah, and Malchijah, and Mijamin, and Eleazar, and Malchijah, and Benaiah.²⁶ Of the sons of Elam: Mattaniah, Zechariah, and Jehiel, and Abdi, and Jeremoth, and Elijah.²⁷ Of the sons of Zattu: Elioenai, Eliashib, Mattaniah, and Jeremoth, and Zabad, and Aziza.²⁸ Of the sons of Bebai: Jehohanan, Hananiah, Zabbai, Athlai.²⁹ Of the sons of Bani: Meshullam, Malluch, and Adaiah, Jashub, and Sheal, Jeremoth.³⁰ Of the sons of Pahathmoab: Adna, and Chelal, Benaiah, Maaseiah, Mattaniah, Bezalel, and Binnui, and Manasseh.³¹ Of the sons of Harim: Eliezer, Isshijah, Malchijah, Shemaiah, Shimeon,³² Benjamin, Malluch, Shemariah.³³ Of the sons of Hashum: Mattenai, Mattattah, Zabad, Eliphelet, Jeremai, Manasseh, Shimei.³⁴ Of the sons of Bani: Maadai, Amram, and Uel,³⁵ Benaiah, Bedeiah, Cheluhi,³⁶ Vaniah, Meremoth, Eliashib,³⁷ Mattaniah, Mattenai, and Jaasu,³⁸ and Bani, and Binnui, Shimei,³⁹ and Shelemiah, and Nathan, and Adaiah,⁴⁰ Machnadebai, Shashai, Sharai,⁴¹ Azarel, and Shelemiah, Shemariah,⁴² Shallum, Amariah, Joseph.⁴³ Of the sons of Nebo: Jeiel, Mattithiah, Zabad, Zebina, Iddo, and Joel, Benaiah.⁴⁴ All these had taken foreign wives; and some of them had wives by whom they had children.

NEHEMIAH

CHAPTER 1 Nov.15

Difficulties in Jerusalem

The words of Nehemiah the son of Hacaliah. Now it happened in the month Chislev, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace,² that Hanani one of my brothers came, he and certain men out of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews who had escaped, who were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem.³ They said to me, The remnant who are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach. The wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and its gates are burned with fire.

Nehemiah's Prayer

It happened, when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days. I fasted and prayed before the God of heaven⁵ and said, I beg you, Yahweh the God of heaven, the great and awesome God, Who keeps covenant and grace with those who love Him and keep His commandments:⁶ Let

1:2 Who had escaped – The urgency of ‘fleeing’ from Babylon was understood by Nehemiah; he speaks of those who had returned to the land as those who has “escaped” from Babylon – even though they had returned with every blessing from the authorities. He perceived as few did the danger of remaining in the soft life of Babylon. The call to leave Babylon is used in the New Testament as the basis of the appeal to mentally leave this world and start a journey towards the restored Kingdom of God on earth at Christ’s return.

1:10 When Nehemiah speaks of them having been redeemed by Yahweh’s “strong hand” he is using the language of Is. 40:10, regarding how Yahweh would come and save Israel from Babylon and make them ‘come to Jerusalem’ “with strong hand”. Nehemiah saw the prophecy could have been fulfilled then. The way Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; Neh. 7:5-7), Ezra (Ezra 7:8; 8:32) and Nehemiah (Neh. 2:11; 13:7) are described as ‘coming to Jerusalem’ may hint that they could have fulfilled this coming of Yah-

Your ear now be attentive, and Your eyes open, that You may listen to the prayer of Your servant which I pray before You at this time, day and night, for the children of Israel Your servants; while I confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against You. Yes, I and my father’s house have sinned.⁷ We have dealt very corruptly against You, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances which You commanded Your servant Moses.⁸ Remember, I beg You, the word that You commanded Your servant Moses saying, ‘If you trespass, I will scatter you abroad among the peoples;⁹ but if you return to Me and keep My commandments and do them, though your outcasts were in the uttermost part of the heavens, yet will I gather them from there, and will bring them to the place that I have chosen, to cause My name to dwell there’.¹⁰ Now these are Your servants and Your people whom You have redeemed by Your great power, and by Your strong hand.¹¹ Lord,

I beg You, let Your ear be attentive now to the prayer of Your servant, and to the prayer of Your servants, who delight to fear Your name; and please prosper Your servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. Now I was cup-bearer to the king.

CHAPTER 2 Nov.15

The King Allows Nehemiah to Go to Jerusalem

It happened in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes

weh to Zion; they could have been Messianic figures. So much potential was set up – and wasted – at the time of the return from exile.

1:11 Your servant – It seems that Nehemiah could have been a Messiah figure. He ‘came up’ from Babylon, and was “the servant” who ‘prospered’ Yahweh’s work (also 2:20), just as the servant prophesies required (Is. 53:10; 48:15); and he was thereby the redeemer of his brethren (5:8). He encouraged the singing of praise on the walls of Zion (9:5; 12:46), surely in a conscious effort to fulfil the words of Is. 60:18 – that Zion’s gates in Messiah’s Kingdom would be praise. He was “despised” as Messiah would be (2:19; Is. 53:3 s.w.). He entered Jerusalem on a donkey, as Messiah would (2:12 cp. Zech. 9:9); and 2:16 sounds very much like “of the people there was none with me” (Is. 63:3). The Gentiles round about came to sit at Nehemiah’s table to eat and drink (5:17), just as Isaiah had prophesied could happen on a grander scale at the restoration of the Kingdom. One wonders if the potential fulfilment of the Messianic prophecies was transferred to him? And yet Nehemiah returned to Babylon at least once, and there is no record that on his second visit to Judah he stayed on, but rather, the implication seems to be, he returned again to the service of Babylon. The total lack of Biblical information about his later life may reflect this disappointing decision. This train of thought enables us to appreciate the joy and pleasure which the Father had when finally His beloved Son lived up to all that He sought and expected. It seems Nehemiah could have been a Messiah figure but failed, as did others, to live up to what was potentially possible for him. We must seek to perceive in our lives all those things which are potentially possible for us in God’s strength.

2:2 The king’s servants were supposed to be always happy and positive in his presence. But Nehemiah’s very body language reflected the pain he felt for his impoverished and spiritually weak brethren in Judah. He didn’t allow his own wealth and comfortable social standing to isolate himself from them, and as such is a valuable example to the more wealthy and comfortable members of the body of Christ today.

2:4 So I prayed – There are times when we need to pray in a half second, with eyes open and fully engaged in a human situation. But the fact God welcomes and accepts this kind of prayer doesn’t mean that we can reduce *all* our prayer life to this level; carefully prepared, prolonged prayer is also to feature.

the king, when wine was before him, that I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad before in his presence. ² The king said to me, Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This is nothing else but sorrow of heart. Then I was very much afraid. ³ I said to the king, Let the king live forever! Why shouldn’t my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers’ tombs, lies waste, and its gates have been consumed with fire? ⁴ Then the king said to me, For what do you make

request? So I prayed to the God of heaven. ⁵ I said to the king, If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, that you would send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' tombs, that I may build it. ⁶ The king said to me (the queen was also sitting by him), How long shall your journey be? And when will you return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time. ⁷ Moreover I said to the king, If it pleases the king, let letters be given me to the governors beyond the River, that they may let me pass through until I come to Judah; ⁸ and a letter to Asaph the keeper of the king's forest, that he may give me timber to make beams for the gates of the citadel by the temple, for the wall of the city, and for the house that I shall enter into. The king granted my requests because of the good hand of my God upon me.

Nehemiah Inspects the Walls of Jerusalem

⁹ Then I came to the governors beyond the River, and gave them the king's letters. Now the king had sent with me captains of the army and horsemen. ¹⁰ When Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant,

the Ammonite, heard of it, it grieved them exceedingly, because a man had come to seek the welfare of the children of Israel. ¹¹ So I came to Jerusalem, and was there three days. ¹² I arose in the night, I and some few men with me; neither told I any man what my God put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me, except the animal that I rode on. ¹³ I went out by night by the valley gate, even toward the jackal's well, and to the dung gate, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down, and its gates which were consumed with fire. ¹⁴ Then I went on to the spring gate and to the king's pool; but there was no place for the animal that was under me to pass. ¹⁵ Then went I up in the night by the brook, and viewed the wall; and I turned back, and entered by the valley gate, and so returned. ¹⁶ The rulers didn't know where I went, or what I did; neither had I as yet told it to the Jews, nor to the priests, nor to the nobles, nor to the rulers, nor to the rest who did the work.

Nehemiah Encourages Rebuilding

¹⁷ Then I said to them, You see the evil situation that we are in, how Je-

2:6 *The queen was also sitting by him* – The implication seems to be that she influenced him to be positive towards Nehemiah and the Jews. She may have been Esther, or some other Jewess.

2:12 God put the idea of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls into Nehemiah's heart, and yet it's clear from 2:2 (see note there) that his own conscience had led him to this idea. God therefore confirms us in the desires of our hearts, positively or negatively.

2:16 We feel here and in :12; 5:7 ("consulted with myself") Nehemiah's loneliness in his mission; a feature of all God's true servants, no matter whether or not they like Nehemiah are flanked by supporters and resources to perform their mission.

rusalem lies waste and its gates are burned with fire. Come, let us build up the wall of Jerusalem, that we won't be disgraced.¹⁸ I told them of the hand of my God which was for good upon me, as also of the king's words that he had spoken to me. They said, Let us arise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for the good work.¹⁹ But when Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the servant, the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, heard it, they ridiculed us and despised us and said, What is this thing that you are doing? Will you rebel against the king?²⁰ Then I answered them and said to them, The God of heaven will prosper us. Therefore we, His servants, will arise and build; but you have no portion, nor right, nor memorial, in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 3 Nov.16

Those Who Rebuilt the Wall

Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the sheep gate. They sanctified it, and set up its doors;

even to the tower of Hammeah they sanctified it, to the tower of Hananel.² Next to him built the men of Jericho. Next to them built Zaccur the son of Imri.³ The sons of Hassenaah built the fish gate; they laid its beams, and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars.⁴ Next to them, Meremoth the son of Uriah, the son of Hakkoz made repairs. Next to them, Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel made repairs. Next to them, Zadok the son of Baana made repairs.⁵ Next to them, the Tekoites made repairs; but their nobles didn't put their necks to the work of their Lord.⁶ Joiada the son of Paseah and Meshullam the son of Besodeiah repaired the old gate. They laid its beams, and set up its doors, and its bolts, and its bars.⁷ Next to them, Melatiah the Gibeonite, and Jadon the Meronothite, the men of Gibeon and of Mizpah, repaired the residence of the governor beyond the River.⁸ Next to him, Uzziel the son of Harhaiah, goldsmiths, made repairs. Next to him, Hananiah one of the perfumers made repairs, and

2:20 Gentiles didn't come and help the Jews in building. It could be that their refusal of Gentile help to build the temple, insisting that *only* Jews work in it (see too Ezra 4:3), was actually going too far; by being so exclusive, they were disallowing the fulfilment of the prophecies both in Zech. 6 and in Isaiah, that Gentiles would help in the final rebuilding of Zion.

3:5 *Their nobles didn't put their necks to the work of their Lord* – All these centuries later, God still has note of who amongst His people were true workers and who weren't (He noted too that some “earnestly” did the work, :20). Significantly it was the nobles, the lords and leaders of the people, who found it hard to submit beneath the Lord and Master. The higher our social standing and the more human respect we command in this world, in whatever context, the harder it will be for us to recognize that we are merely humble servants beneath the Lord of all creation.

3:8 Goldsmiths and perfumers were hardly civil engineers and building site labourers; neither were the wealthy daughters of a ruler (:12). But God's work at times requires

they fortified Jerusalem even to the broad wall. ⁹ Next to them, Rephaiah the son of Hur, the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, made repairs. ¹⁰ Next to them, Jedaiah the son of Harumaph made repairs across from his house. Next to him, Hattush the son of Hashabneiah made repairs. ¹¹ Malchijah the son of Harim, and Hasshub the son of Pahathmoab, repaired another portion, and the tower of the furnaces. ¹² Next to him, Shallum the son of Hallohesh, the ruler of half the district of Jerusalem, he and his daughters, made repairs. ¹³ Hanun and the inhabitants of Zanoah repaired the valley gate. They built it, and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and one thousand cubits of the wall to the dung gate. ¹⁴ Malchijah the son of Rechab, the ruler of the district of Beth Haccherem, repaired the dung gate. He built it, and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars.

Those Who Rebuilt the Southern Part

¹⁵ Shallun the son of Colhozeh, the ruler of the district of Mizpah, repaired the spring gate. He built it and covered it, and set up its doors, its bolts, and its bars, and the wall of the pool of Shelah by the king's

garden, even to the stairs that go down from the city of David. ¹⁶ After him, Nehemiah the son of Azbuk, the ruler of half the district of Beth Zur, made repairs to the place opposite the tombs of David, and to the pool that was made, and to the house of the mighty men. ¹⁷ After him the Levites, Rehum the son of Bani, made repairs. Next to him, Hashabiah, the ruler of half the district of Keilah, made repairs for his district. ¹⁸ After him, their brothers, Bavvai the son of Henadad, the ruler of half the district of Keilah, made repairs. ¹⁹ Next to him, Ezer the son of Jeshua, the ruler of Mizpah, repaired another portion, across from the ascent to the armoury at the turning of the wall. ²⁰ After him, Baruch the son of Zabbai earnestly repaired another portion, from the turning of the wall to the door of the house of Eliashib the high priest. ²¹ After him, Meremoth the son of Uriah the son of Hakkoz repaired another portion, from the door of the house of Eliashib even to the end of the house of Eliashib. ²² After him, the priests, the men of the Plain, made repairs. ²³ After them, Benjamin and Hasshub made repairs across from their house. After them, Azariah the son of

us to do what is quite against the grain of our natural inclination; resulting as it did here in men and women of totally different backgrounds, social positions and specialisms working together to do His work. It should be the same in the ecclesia of today.

3:15 The emphasis in the record on bars, gates and locks was perhaps to highlight how the restoration prophecies of Ezekiel, of a people living confidently without those things, had actually not been fulfilled; and therefore the prophesied events of Ez. 38-40 didn't happen – i.e. an invasion of a restored Judah, dwelling without bars and gates, which would lead in to the rebuilding of the temple and establishment of the Kingdom.

Maaseiah the son of Ananiah made repairs beside his own house.²⁴ After him, Binnui the son of Henadad repaired another portion, from the house of Azariah to the turning of the wall, and to the corner.²⁵ Palal the son of Uzai made repairs opposite the turning of the wall, and the tower that stands out from the upper house of the king, which is by the court of the guard. After him Pedaiah the son of Parosh made repairs.²⁶ (Now the Nethinim lived in Ophel, to the place over against the water gate toward the east, and the tower that stands out.)²⁷ After him the Tekoites repaired another portion, over against the great tower that stands out, and to the wall of Ophel.²⁸ Above the horse gate, the priests made repairs, each one across from his own house.²⁹ After them, Zadok the son of Immer made repairs across from his own house. After him, Shemaiah the son of Shecaniah, the keeper of the east gate, made repairs.³⁰ After him, Hananiah the son of Shelemiah, and Hanun the sixth son of Zalaph, repaired another portion. After him,

Meshullam the son of Berechiah made repairs across from his place.³¹ After him, Malchijah one of the goldsmiths to the house of the Nethinim, and of the merchants, made repairs over against the Muster gate, and to the ascent of the corner.³² Between the ascent of the corner and the sheep gate, the goldsmiths and the merchants made repairs.

CHAPTER 4 Nov.17

Opposition to the Work

But it happened that when Sanballat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry, and took great indignation, and mocked the Jews.² He spoke before his brothers and the army of Samaria and said, What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they fortify themselves? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, since they are burned?³ Now Tobiah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, What they are building? If a fox climbed up it, he would break down their stone wall.⁴ Hear, our God; for

3:31 Nehemiah did his best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception of what was going on; that the coming of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. No fewer than 24 times in Ez. 40-48 are we told that the temple was to be built by 'measure' (e.g. Ez. 40:3,5,10,21,22,24,28,29); and the same word occurs frequently in describing how Nehemiah gave various groups of Jews their own "portion" [s.w. 'measure'] in the work of rebuilding Jerusalem (:11,19,20,22,24,27). He arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31-34 had commanded there to be. He built *miphkad*, "the Muster Gate", the "appointed place" [s.w.] of Ez. 43:21. As he 'measured out' the work of rebuilding Jerusalem, he must have been conscious of the Kingdom prophecy of Jer. 31:38-40. It could have been fulfilled, this could have been the potential Kingdom of God, and he set about to seek to fulfil it; but those places were not kept "holy unto the Lord", and therefore the Jews were to be again plucked up and thrown down.

we are despised. Turn back their reproach on their own head, give them up for a spoil in a land of captivity.⁵ Don't cover their iniquity, and don't let their sin be blotted out from before You; for they have insulted the builders.⁶ So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together to half its height; for the people had a mind to work.⁷ But it happened that when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabians, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, and that the breaches began to be filled, then they were very angry.⁸ They conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to cause confusion therein.⁹ But we made our prayer to our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them.¹⁰ Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is fading, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall.¹¹ Our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, until we come into their midst, and kill them, and cause the work to cease.¹² It happened that when the Jews who lived by them came, they said to us ten times from all places, Wherever you turn, they will attack

us.¹³ Therefore set I in the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in the open places, I set the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows.¹⁴ I looked, and rose up, and said to the nobles, and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Don't be afraid of them! Remember the Lord, Who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

Opposition Is Overcome

¹⁵ It happened, when our enemies heard that it was known to us, and God had brought their counsel to nothing, that we returned all of us to the wall, each one to his work.¹⁶ It happened from that time onwards, that half of my servants worked in the work, and half of them held the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the coats of mail; and the rulers were behind all the house of Judah.¹⁷ They all built the wall while those who bore burdens loaded themselves; each one with one of his hands toiled in the work, and with the other held his weapon;¹⁸ and the builders, each one wore his sword at his side, and so built. He who sounded the trumpet was by me.¹⁹ I said to the nobles, to

4:4 Is. 51:3-11 is clearly in a restoration context: “For Yahweh shall comfort Zion: He will comfort all her waste places... Hearken unto me, you that know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law; fear not the reproach of men [s.w. Neh. 1:3; 2:17; 4:4; 5:9 about the reproach of the Gentiles against the partially rebuilt Jerusalem], neither be afraid of their reviling”. Insofar as Nehemiah and the Jews knew this prophecy, they would have taken great encouragement. But maybe they were unfamiliar with it, and yet still did the work, although lacking the encouragement which they could have had. Our familiarity with God’s word becomes of great value when in a difficult situation we suddenly perceive how we are being spoken to directly by God’s prophetic word.

the rulers and to the rest of the people, The work is great and large, and we are separated on the wall, one far from another. ²⁰ Wherever you hear the sound of the trumpet, rally there to us. Our God will fight for us. ²¹ So we worked at rebuilding. Half of them held the spears from the rising of the morning until the stars appeared. ²² Likewise at the same time said I to the people, Let each one with his servant lodge within Jerusalem, that in the night they may be a guard to us, and may labour in the day. ²³ So I, my brothers, my servants, and the men of the guard who followed me, did not take off our clothes except to wash.

CHAPTER 5 Nov.18

The Poor Are Suffering

Then there arose a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brothers the Jews. ² For there were some that said, We, our sons and our daughters, are many. Let us get grain, that we may eat and live. ³ Some also there were that said, We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our houses. Let us get

grain, because of the famine. ⁴ There were also some who said, We have borrowed money for the king's tribute using our fields and our vineyards as collateral. ⁵ Yet our flesh is as the flesh of our brothers, our children as their children. Indeed, we have to bring into bondage our sons and our daughters to be servants. Some of our daughters have already been brought into bondage. Neither is it in our power to get out of it; for other men have our fields and our vineyards.

Nehemiah Has a Just Solution

⁶ I was very angry when I heard their cry and these words. ⁷ Then I considered the matter, then contended with the nobles and the rulers and said to them, You exact usury, each one from his brother. I held a great assembly against them. ⁸ I said to them, We, as much as we could, have redeemed our brothers the Jews that were sold to the nations. Would you really sell your brothers, and should they be sold to us? Then they held their peace, and found never a word to answer. ⁹ Also I said, The thing

5:1-5 The prophecies of the restored Kingdom emphasized that the princes would not then oppress the people (Ez. 45:8,9; 46:18); but we see here that they did (see too Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5). Jer. 7:3-7 made it clear that Judah's return to the land was to be conditional upon them not oppressing the poor – only “*then* will I cause you to dwell in this place”. Yet in His grace and zeal for His people, it seems God overlooked that condition – for the returned exiles *did* oppress each other, and yet they returned to the land. And yet they would've dwelt in Zion “for ever and ever” (Jer. 7:7) if they had not been abusive to others and truly loved God. Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi all record social injustice as being the order of the day at the time of the restoration.

5:7 See on 2:16.

5:8 *We... have redeemed our brothers* – God redeemed the exiles from Babylon (Is. 48:20; 51:11; 52:9; 62:12), and our response to that redemption should be to redeem others and not abuse them.

that you do is not good. Ought you not to walk in the fear of our God, because of the reproach of the nations our enemies? ¹⁰ For this reason, I my brothers and my servants lend them money and grain. Please let us stop this usury. ¹¹ Please restore to them, even this day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive groves, and their houses, also the hundredth part of the money, and of the grain, the new wine, and the oil, that you are charging them. ¹² Then they said, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do, even as you say. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they would do according to this promise. ¹³ Also I shook out my lap and said, So may God shake out every man from His house and from His work that doesn't perform this promise; even thus may he be shaken out, and emptied. All the assembly said, Amen, and praised Yahweh. The people did according to this promise.

Nehemiah's Unselfishness

¹⁴ Moreover from the time that I was appointed to be their governor in the land of Judah, from the twentieth year even to the thirty second year of Artaxerxes the king, that is, twelve

5:15 Is. 58:1,2 is a criticism of Judah in exile and also of those who did return to the land – they sought God daily, and yet abused their brethren (Is. 58:6), just as recorded here. If they had ceased from their sins, “*Then shall your light break forth as the morning*”, if they had fed the hungry etc, *then* would’ve been fulfilled the Messianic Kingdom prophecies of the light of Zion rising above the Gentiles etc (Is. 58:10,12 cp. Is. 60:1). These Kingdom predictions will ultimately come true at Christ’s return to earth and the establishment of His Kingdom here, but we will only be there if we learn the lessons from Judah’s failure and don’t abuse our brethren.

6:1 *There was no breach left* – Amos 9:11-15 refers to this: “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I

years, I and my brothers did not eat the bread of the governor. ¹⁵ But the former governors who were before me were supported by the people, and took bread and wine from them, besides forty shekels of silver. Yes, even their servants ruled over the people: but I didn’t do so, because of the fear of God. ¹⁶ Yes, also I continued in the work of this wall, neither bought we any land; and all my servants were gathered there to the work. ¹⁷ Moreover there were at my table, of the Jews and the rulers, one hundred and fifty men, besides those who came to us from among the nations that were around us. ¹⁸ Now that which was prepared for one day was one ox and six choice sheep; also fowls were prepared for me, and once in ten days store of all sorts of wine. Yet for all this I didn’t demand the bread due to the governor, because the bondage was heavy on this people. ¹⁹ Remember me, my God, for good, for all that I have done for this people.

CHAPTER 6 Nov.18

Plots against Nehemiah

It was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah, and to Geshem the Arabian, and to the rest of our enemies, that I

had built the wall, and that there was no breach left therein (though even to that time I had not set up the doors in the gates). ² Then Sanballat and Geshem sent to me saying, Come, let us meet together in the villages in the plain of Ono. But they intended to harm me. ³ I sent messengers to them saying, I am doing a great work, so that I can't come down. Why should the work cease while I leave it, and come down to you? ⁴ They sent to me four times in this manner; and I kept giving them the same answer. ⁵ Then, again Sanballat sent his servant to me the fifth time with an open letter in his hand, ⁶ in which was written, It is reported among the na-

tions, and Gashmu says it, that you and the Jews intend to rebel. Because of that, you are building the wall. You would be their king, according to this report. ⁷ You have also appointed prophets to speak up for you at Jerusalem saying, ‘There is a king in Judah!’ Now it will be reported to the king according to these words. Come now therefore, and let us take counsel together. ⁸ Then I sent to him, saying, ‘There are no such things done as you say, but you imagine them out of your own heart’. ⁹ For they all would have made us afraid, saying, Their hands will be weakened from the work, that it not be done. But now, may my hands be

will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old”. The passage goes on to prophecy a time of great fertility and victory over “Edom”. “I will *raise up*” uses a Hebrew word commonly featured in the records of the restoration, when the people were exhorted to “arise up and build” (Ezra 1:5; 3:2; 10:4,15; Neh. 2:18,20). The statement that they would “close up the breaches thereof” is exactly the language of Neh. 6:1, which records that the walls were rebuilt so that there was no breach [s.w.] therein. It was after the Babylonian invasion that Zion was “fallen” and ‘ruined’ (s.w. Jer. 31:18; 45:4; Lam. 2:2,17). “I will build it” is exactly the theme of the records of the return from Babylon (Ezra 1:2,3,5; 3:2,10; 4:1-4; Neh. 2:5,17,18,20; 3:1-3, 13-15; 4:1,3,5,6,10,17,18; 6:1,6; 7:1). Surely Amos 9 is saying that at the rebuilding at the time of the restoration, God’s people could have ushered in the Kingdom age of agricultural plenty and victory over their Arab neighbours. But they intermarried with Edom, and suffered drought because they didn’t fulfil the requirements to rebuild Zion correctly. But the words of Amos were still to come true in some form – they are given an application in Acts 15:17 which may appear to be way out of context, i.e. to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Thus words which could have had a plain fulfilment at the restoration were given a delayed fulfilment; but they were not fulfilled in a literal sense, but in a spiritual one. And so it may be with many prophecies about us today; they *could be fulfilled if* God’s people are more ‘fulfilling’ of them.

6:3 Why should the work cease – This should be our perspective in such times of conflict; cries of unity and reconciliation can be used as a mantra to make God’s work cease, and we shouldn’t be afraid to see them for what they are. The way the opponents of God’s work created a false allegation – that Nehemiah was setting himself up as king – and then tried to blackmail him over it (:7,8) is typical of what happens in these situations. We can simply insist we are telling the truth and not be afraid to name false accusation for what it is (:8).

strengthened.¹⁰ I went to the house of Shemaiah the son of Delaiah the son of Mehetabel, who was shut in at his home; and he said, Let us meet together in God's house, within the temple, and let us shut the doors of the temple; for they will come to kill you. Yes, in the night will they come to kill you.

Nehemiah Is Not Afraid

¹¹ I said, Should such a man as I flee? Who is there that, being such as I, would go into the temple to save his life? I will not go in. ¹² I perceived that God had not sent him; but that he pronounced this prophecy against me. Tobiah and Sanballat had hired him. ¹³ He was hired so that I would be afraid, follow his advice, and sin. Thus they would have material for an evil report, that they might reproach me. ¹⁴ Remember, my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these their works, and also the prophetess Noadiah, and the rest of the prophets, that would have put me in fear.

The Wall is Finished

¹⁵ So the wall was finished in the

twenty-fifth day of Elul, in fifty-two days. ¹⁶ It happened that when all our enemies heard of it, then all the nations that were about us were afraid, and were much cast down in their own eyes; for they perceived that this work was done of our God. ¹⁷ Moreover in those days the nobles of Judah sent many letters to Tobiah, and Tobiah's letters came to them. ¹⁸ For there were many in Judah sworn to him, because he was the son-in-law of Shecaniah the son of Arah; and his son Jehohanan had taken the daughter of Meshullam the son of Berechiah as wife. ¹⁹ Also they spoke of his good deeds before me, and reported my words to him. Tobiah sent letters to put me in fear.

CHAPTER 7 Nov.19

Protection for Jerusalem

Now it happened, once the wall was built and I had set up the doors, and the porters and the singers and the Levites were appointed,² that I put my brother Hanani, and Hananiah the governor of the castle, in charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man, and feared God

6:11 As eunuchs weren't allowed within the temple, this could suggest Nehemiah was a eunuch; for he says that for a man like him to enter the temple would be a sin (:13). He would likely have had to be made one in order to be the king's cupbearer (1:11), but he used the limitations which this world had unreasonably placed upon him in order to funnel his creative energy into God's work and the welfare of His people and the things of His Kingdom.

7:2 Nehemiah's brother Hanani was given "charge over Jerusalem: for he was a faithful man" – not just because he was the boss's brother, which is how the nepotism of those times would have usually required. It can be that human qualification, e.g. being a successful businessman, or the brother of a leading brother, is related to positions of eldership amongst us. Yet the Nehemiah passage shows that although sometimes there may be overlap between both spiritual and human qualification, it is the spiritual qualification which must be paramount.

above many.³ I said to them, Don't let the gates of Jerusalem be opened until the sun is hot. While they stand guard, let them shut the doors, and you bar them; and appoint watches of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, everyone in his watch, with everyone near his house.

A List of Those Who Had Returned

⁴ Now the city was wide and large; but the people were few therein, and the houses were not built. ⁵ My God put into my heart to gather together the nobles, and the rulers, and the people, that they might be reckoned by genealogy. I found the book of the genealogy of those who came up at the first, and I found written therein: ⁶ These are the children of the province, who went up out of the captivity of those who had been carried away, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away, and who returned to Jerusalem

and to Judah, each one to his city. ⁷ They came with Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Azariah, Raamiah, Nahamani, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mispereth, Bigvai, Nehum, Baanah. The number of the men of the people of Israel: ⁸ The children of Parosh, two thousand one hundred and seventy-two. ⁹ The children of Shephatiah, three hundred and seventy-two. ¹⁰ The children of Arah, six hundred and fifty-two. ¹¹ The children of Pahathmoab, of the children of Jeshua and Joab, two thousand eight hundred and eighteen. ¹² The children of Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four. ¹³ The children of Zattu, eight hundred and forty-five. ¹⁴ The children of Zaccai, seven hundred and sixty. ¹⁵ The children of Binnui, six hundred and forty-eight. ¹⁶ The children of Bebai, six hundred and twenty-eight. ¹⁷ The children of Azgad, two thousand three hundred and twenty-two. ¹⁸ The children of

7:5 Nehemiah made a special study of the genealogies in order to find an acceptable priesthood (:5), and perhaps this was the basis for the genealogies written up in the early chapters of 1 Chronicles. So there were Israel returning from captivity, led by a faithful remnant of the priests, looking back through their history, right back to Abraham and beyond, and seeing that their history was shot through with failure. Such self-examination extended even to considering the names parents gave their children.

7:6 Seeing that the majority of the Jews chose the soft life and remained in Babylon, God was especially sensitive to those who returned; and for over 2500 years these names have been recorded in His word. Such is His awareness of all those who respond to the call of the Kingdom and to forsake this world. Note how the numbers are recorded very exactly. God was sensitive to each and every one who returned.

7:7 This describes Zerubbabel as being at the head of twelve leaders of the returning exiles, who are called “the people of Israel” (cp. Ezra 2:2). Whilst it was Judah who had been taken into captivity, it seems that some of the ten tribes [who had been taken into captivity in Assyria some time earlier] also returned with them; it was God’s intention to create a new, unified Israel in the restored Kingdom. But most of God’s people then as today chose not to participate in the unity plan He had desired for His people.

Adonikam, six hundred and sixty-seven.¹⁹ The children of Bigvai, two thousand and sixty-seven.²⁰ The children of Adin, six hundred and fifty-five.²¹ The children of Ater, of Hezekiah, ninety-eight.²² The children of Hashum, three hundred and twenty-eight.²³ The children of Bezai, three hundred and twenty-four.²⁴ The children of Hariph, one hundred and twelve.²⁵ The children of Gibeon, ninety-five.²⁶ The men of Bethlehem and Netophah, one hundred and eighty-eight.²⁷ The men of Anathoth, one hundred and twenty-eight.²⁸ The men of Beth Azmaveth, forty-two.²⁹ The men of Kiriath Jearim, Chephirah, and Beeroth, seven hundred and forty-three.³⁰ The men of Ramah and Geba, six hundred and twenty-one.³¹ The men of Michmas, one hundred and twenty-two.³² The men of Bethel and Ai, a hundred and twenty-three.³³ The men of the other Nebo, fifty-two.³⁴ The children of the other Elam, one thousand two hundred and fifty-four.³⁵ The children of Harim, three hundred and twenty.³⁶ The children of Jericho, three hundred and forty-five.³⁷ The children of Lod, Hadid, and Ono, seven hundred and twenty-one.³⁸ The children of Senaah, three thousand nine hundred and thirty.³⁹ The priests: The children of

Jedaiah, of the house of Jeshua, nine hundred and seventy-three.⁴⁰ The children of Immer, one thousand and fifty-two.⁴¹ The children of Pashhur, one thousand two hundred and forty-seven.⁴² The children of Harim, one thousand and seventeen.⁴³ The Levites: the children of Jeshua, of Kadmiel, of the children of Hodavah, seventy-four.⁴⁴ The singers: the children of Asaph, one hundred and forty-eight.⁴⁵ The porters: the children of Shallum, the children of Ater, the children of Talmon, the children of Akkub, the children of Hatita, the children of Shobai, one hundred and thirty-eight.⁴⁶ The Nethinim: the children of Ziha, the children of Hasupha, the children of Tabbaoth,⁴⁷ the children of Keros, the children of Sia, the children of Padon,⁴⁸ the children of Lebana, the children of Hagaba, the children of Salmai,⁴⁹ the children of Hanan, the children of Giddel, the children of Gahar,⁵⁰ the children of Reaiah, the children of Rezin, the children of Nekoda,⁵¹ the children of Gazzam, the children of Uzza, the children of Paseah.⁵² The children of Besai, the children of Meunim, the children of Nephushesim,⁵³ the children of Bakbuk, the children of Hakupha, the children of Harhur,⁵⁴ the children of Bazlith, the children of Mehida, the children

7:54 Comparing the list of names in the list of returnees in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, we find that a number of names recur in both lists, e.g. Bazluth (Ezra 2:52; Neh. 7:54). It could be that some went from Babylon to Judah with Ezra, then returned to Babylon, and returned with Nehemiah. This hardly sounds like the glorious, positive, confident return of the captives to Zion prophesied in the restoration prophecies. Like us at times, God's people lost their nerve in quitting this world and dedicating themselves to the things of His Kingdom.

of Harsha,⁵⁵ the children of Barkos, the children of Sisera, the children of Temah,⁵⁶ the children of Neziah, the children of Hatipha.⁵⁷ The children of Solomon's servants: the children of Sotai, the children of Sophereth, the children of Perida,⁵⁸ the children of Jaala, the children of Darkon, the children of Giddel,⁵⁹ the children of Shephatiah, the children of Hattil, the children of Pochereth Hazzebaim, the children of Amon.⁶⁰ All the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants, were three hundred and ninety-two.⁶¹ These were those who went up from Tel Melah, Tel Harsha, Cherub, Addon, and Immer; but they could not prove their fathers' houses nor their genealogies, whether they were of Israel:⁶² The children of Delaiah, the children of Tobiah, the children of Nekoda, six hundred and forty-two.⁶³ Of the priests: the children of Hobaiah, the children of Hakkoz, the children of Barzillai, who took a wife of the daughters of Barzillai the Gileadite, and was called after their name.⁶⁴ These searched for their genealogical records, but couldn't find them. Therefore were they deemed polluted and put from the priesthood.⁶⁵ The governor told them that they should not eat of the most holy things until there stood up a priest with Urim and Thummim.⁶⁶ The whole assembly together was forty-two thousand three hundred and sixty,⁶⁷ besides their male and their female servants, of whom there were seven thousand

three hundred and thirty-seven: and they had two hundred and forty-five singing men and singing women.⁶⁸ Their horses were seven hundred and thirty-six; their mules, two hundred and forty-five;⁶⁹ their camels, four hundred and thirty-five; their donkeys, six thousand seven hundred and twenty.⁷⁰ Some from among the heads of fathers' households gave to the work. The governor gave to the treasury one thousand darics of gold, fifty basins and five hundred and thirty priests' garments.⁷¹ Some of the heads of fathers' households gave into the treasury of the work twenty thousand darics of gold, and two thousand two hundred minas of silver.⁷² That which the rest of the people gave was twenty thousand darics of gold, and two thousand minas of silver, and sixty-seven priests' garments.⁷³ So the priests, the Levites and the porters, and the singers, and some of the people, and the Nethinim, and all Israel, lived in their cities. When the seventh month had come, the children of Israel were in their cities.

CHAPTER 8 Nov.20

Ezra Reads God's Law to the People

All the people gathered themselves together as one man into the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spoke to Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which Yahweh had commanded to Israel.² Ezra the priest

8:1 As one man – Genuine desire to accept God's word and repent for failure (:)9) is what brings unity amongst His people.

brought the law before the assembly, both men and women, and all who could hear with understanding, on the first day of the seventh month. ³ He read therein before the broad place that was before the water gate from early morning until noon, in the presence of the men and the women, and of those who could understand. The ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law. ⁴ Ezra the scribe stood on a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiah and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah, Mishael, Malchijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. ⁵ Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; for he was above all the people; and when he opened it, all the people stood up. ⁶ Ezra blessed Yahweh, the great God. All the people answered, Amen, Amen, with the lifting up of their hands. They bowed their heads, and worshipped Yahweh with their faces to the ground.

⁷ Also Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah and the Levites

caused the people to understand the law; and the people stayed in their place.⁸ They read in the book, in the law of God, with interpretation; and they gave the sense, so that they understood the reading. ⁹ Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest, the scribe, and the Levites who taught the people, said to all the people, This day is holy to Yahweh your God. Don't mourn, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. ¹⁰ Then he said to them, Go your way. Eat the fat, drink the sweet, and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy to our Lord. Don't be grieved; for the joy of Yahweh is your strength. ¹¹ So the Levites stilled all the people saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be grieved. ¹² All the people went their way to eat and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great joy, because they had understood the words that were declared to them.

The Feast of Booths

¹³ On the second day were gathered together the heads of fathers' households of all the people, the priests,

8:10 *Send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared* – The receipt of forgiveness from God should lead to our being materially generous to others. Hence Paul urges the Corinthians to be materially generous to their poorer brethren because of God's grace to them, thus making a play on the fact that the Greek word translated "grace" essentially means a gift. God's gift of forgiveness to us leads to our giving to others.

The joy of Yahweh – In the context, this refers to His desire to forgive His people; He actually is joyful in forgiving us, as we should be in our forgiveness of others; not doing it from a sense of grudging necessity.

8:12 *Because they had understood the words* – The need for correct understanding of God's word is because it motivates to action in practice. See 10:28.

and the Levites, to Ezra the scribe, even to give attention to the words of the law.¹⁴ They found written in the law, how that Yahweh had commanded by Moses, that the children of Israel should dwell in booths in the feast of the seventh month;¹⁵ and that they should publish and proclaim in all their cities, and in Jerusalem saying, Go out to the mountain, and get olive branches, and branches of wild olive, and myrtle branches, and palm branches, and branches of thick trees, to make booths, as it is written.¹⁶ So the people went out, and brought them, and made themselves booths, each one on the roof of his house, and in their courts, and in the courts of God's house, and in the broad place of the water gate, and in the broad place of the gate of Ephraim.¹⁷ All the assembly of those who had come again out of the captivity made booths, and

lived in the booths; for since the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day the children of Israel had not done so. There was very great gladness.¹⁸ Also day by day, from the first day to the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. They kept the feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according to the ordinance.

CHAPTER 9 Nov.21

The People Confess Their Sins

Now in the twenty-fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackcloth, and earth on them.² The seed of Israel separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers.³ They stood up in their place, and read in the book of the law of Yahweh their God a fourth part of the day; and a

8:14-17 Ez. 45:25 had specifically prophesied that the feast of the seventh month would be strictly kept in the restored Kingdom. The fact they hadn't done so until now shows how they didn't want to fulfil the restoration prophecies because the immediate daily issues of life took them away from obedience to God's will. Note that Zech. 7:5 criticised the Jews for keeping this feast only externally, and not "unto Me". Hag. 2:1 records how on the 21st day of the 7th month – i.e. once the seven day feast that began on the 15th had finished – Haggai was sent to rebuke "the prince", Zerubbabel, for being so slack in fulfilling Ezekiel's vision. They subconsciously switched off to Ezekiel's words; just as we can all do. They reasoned that "the time" of which he spoke hadn't come – even though the temple had miraculously been enabled to be rebuilt, for no human benefit at all to Cyrus (Is. 45:13 "not for price nor reward"). Like us, they failed to see the personal reality of God's word to their situation.

9:2 The account of Judah's separation from the surrounding peoples reads similarly to that of the purges from idolatry during the reign of the kings. They separated / purged, and then, within a few years, we read of them doing so again. Initially, the exiles separated from the peoples of the land (Ezra 6:21); by Ezra 9:1 they are in need of separating again; and by Ezra 10:11 likewise; then they separate (Ezra 10:16), only to need another call to separation by the time of Nehemiah 9:2; 13:3. Our spiritual progress often has too much of this kind of pseudo repentance associated with it.

fourth part they confessed, and worshipped Yahweh their God. ⁴ Then Jeshua, Bani, Kadmiel, Shebaniah, Bunni, Sherebiah, Bani, and Chenani of the Levites stood up on the stairs, and cried with a loud voice to Yahweh their God.

An Account of God's Care of Israel

⁵ Then the Levites, Jeshua, Kadmiel, Bani, Hashabneiah, Sherebiah, Hodiah, Shebaniah and Pethahiah said, Stand up and bless Yahweh your God from everlasting to everlasting! Blessed be Your glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise! ⁶ You are Yahweh, even You alone. You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their army, the earth and all things that are on it, the seas and all that is in them, and You preserve them all. The army of heaven worships You. ⁷ You are Yahweh, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldees, and gave him the name of Abraham, ⁸ and found his heart faithful before You, and made a covenant with him to give the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, and the Perizzite, and the Jebusite, and the Girgashite, to give it to his seed; and have performed Your words; for You are righteous.⁹ You saw the affliction of our fathers in Egypt, and heard their cry by the Red Sea.

¹⁰ You showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh, and against all his servants, and against all the people of his land; for You knew that they dealt arrogantly against them, and made a name for Yourself, as it is this day. ¹¹ You divided the sea before them, so that they went through the midst of the sea on the dry land; and You cast their pursuers into the depths, as a stone into the mighty waters. ¹² Moreover, You led them by day in a pillar of cloud; and in a pillar of fire by night, to give them light in the way in which they should go. ¹³ You came down also on Mount Sinai and spoke with them from heaven, and gave them right ordinances and true laws, good statutes and commandments. ¹⁴ You made known to them Your holy Sabbath, and commanded them commandments, and statutes, and a law, by Moses Your servant. ¹⁵ You gave them bread from the sky for their hunger, and brought forth water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and commanded them that they should go in to possess the land which You had sworn to give them. ¹⁶ But they and our fathers dealt proudly and hardened their neck, didn't listen to Your commandments ¹⁷ and refused to obey, neither were they mindful of Your wonders that You did among them, but hardened their neck, and in their rebel-

9:6 You are Yahweh, even You alone – There is archaeological evidence that there was another god called ‘Yahweh’ worshipped by the Canaanites; hence the confession here that Yahweh God of Israel was the only true Yahweh. There are in our world many things which can appear as the true God when they are but fake imitations.

9:10 Made a name for Yourself – God’s Name isn’t simply a word, it is His entire personality as historically demonstrated and articulated in human history.

lion appointed a captain to return to their bondage. But You are a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger, abundant in grace, and didn't forsake them.¹⁸ Yes, they had made them a molten calf and said, 'This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt' and had committed awful blasphemies;¹⁹ yet You in Your many mercies didn't forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud didn't depart from over them by day, to lead them in the way; neither the pillar of fire by night, to show them light, and the way in which they should go.²⁰ You gave also Your good Spirit to instruct them, and didn't withhold Your manna from their mouth, and gave them water for their thirst.²¹ Yes, forty years You sustained them in the wilderness. They lacked nothing. Their clothes didn't grow old, and their feet didn't swell.²² Moreover You gave them kingdoms and peoples which You allotted according to their portions. So they possessed the land of Sihon, even the land of the king of Heshbon, and the land of Og king of Bashan.²³ You also multiplied their children as the stars of the sky, and brought them into the land concerning which You had said to their fathers, that they should go in to possess it.²⁴ So the children went in and possessed the land, and You subdued before them the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, and gave them into their hands, with their kings,

and the peoples of the land, that they might do with them as they pleased.²⁵ They took fortified cities, and a rich land, and possessed houses full of all good things, cisterns dug out, vineyards, olive groves and fruit trees in abundance. So they ate, were filled, became fat, and delighted themselves in Your great grace.

Disobedience and Deliverance

26 Nevertheless they were disobedient and rebelled against You, and cast Your law behind their back, and killed your prophets that testified against them to turn them again to You, and they committed awful blasphemies.²⁷ Therefore You delivered them into the hand of their adversaries, who distressed them. In the time of their trouble, when they cried to You, You heard from heaven; and according to Your many mercies You gave them saviours who saved them out of the hand of their adversaries.²⁸ But after they had rest, they did evil again before You; therefore You left them in the hand of their enemies, so that they had the dominion over them. Yet, when they returned and cried to You, You heard from heaven; and many times You delivered them according to Your mercies,²⁹ and testified against them, that You might bring them again to Your law. Yet they dealt proudly, and didn't listen to Your commandments, but sinned against Your ordinances, which, if a man does, he shall live

9:19 *Yet the pillar of cloud didn't depart from over them – Even in periods of sin and failure, God still tries to lead His people towards the Kingdom rather than totally disassociating from them.*

in them, turned their backs, stiffened their neck, and would not hear.³⁰ Yet many years You put up with them, and testified against them by Your spirit through Your prophets. Yet would they not give ear. Therefore You gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands.

Confession of Sins

³¹ Nevertheless in Your many mercies You did not make a full end of them, nor forsake them; for You are a gracious and merciful God.³² Now therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and grace, don't let all the travail seem little before You, that has come on us, on our kings, on our princes, priests, prophets, and on our fathers, and on all Your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria to this day.³³ However You are just in all that has come on us; for You have dealt truly, but we have done wickedly.³⁴ Neither have our kings, our princes, our priests, nor our fathers kept Your law, nor listened to Your commandments and Your testimonies that You pronounced against them.³⁵ For they have not served You in their kingdom, and in Your great goodness that You gave them, and

in the large and rich land which You gave before them, neither did they turn from their wicked works.³⁶ Indeed, we are servants this day, and as for the land that You gave to our fathers to eat its fruit and its good, we are servants in it.³⁷ It yields much increase to the kings whom You have set over us because of our sins. They also have power over our bodies, and over our livestock, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress.³⁸ Yet for all this, we make a sure covenant, and write it; and our princes, our Levites, and our priests, seal it.

CHAPTER 10 Nov.22

The People Make a Covenant

Now those who sealed were: Nehemiah the governor, the son of Hacaliah, and Zedekiah,² Seraiah, Azariah, Jeremiah,³ Pashur, Amariah, Malchijah,⁴ Hattush, Shebaniah, Malluch,⁵ Harim, Meremoth, Obadiah,⁶ Daniel, Ginnethon, Baruch,⁷ Meshullam, Abijah, Mijamin,⁸ Maaziah, Bilgai, Shemaiah; these were the priests.⁹ The Levites: namely, Jeshua the son of Azaniah, Binnui of the sons of Henadad, Kadmiel;¹⁰ and their brothers, Shebaniah, Hodiah, Kelita, Pelaiah, Hanan,¹¹ Mica, Rehob, Hashabiah,

9:30 *Your Spirit through Your prophets* – The prophets, whose words we have in the Bible, were inspired by God through the process of Divine inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16). Their words which we read in the Bible are thereby God's words and a channel of His Spirit to us.

9:37 Faithful men like Nehemiah felt so identified with the sinful people that they could speak of “*our sins*”. If we are true members of His people then we will feel the state of the community as being our state, rather than seeing ourselves as somehow separate from them. Nehemiah was therefore the first to seal the covenant of repentance (10:1).

12 Zaccur, Sherebiah, Shebaniah,
 13 Hodiah, Bani, Beninu. 14 The
 chiefs of the people: Parosh, Pahath-
 moab, Elam, Zattu, Bani, 15 Bunni,
 Azgad, Bebai, 16 Adonijah, Big-
 vai, Adin, 17 Ater, Hezekiah, Azzur,
 18 Hodiah, Hashum, Bezai, 19 Har-
 iph, Anathoth, Nobai, 20 Magpiash,
 Meshullam, Hezir, 21 Meshezabel,
 Zadok, Jaddua, 22 Pelatiah, Hanan,
 Anaiah, 23 Hoshea, Hananiah, Has-
 shub, 24 Hallohes, Pilha, Shobek,
 25 Rehum, Hashabnah, Maaseiah,
 26 Ahiah, Hanan, Anan, 27 Malluch,
 Harim and Baanah. 28 The rest of
 the people, the priests, the Levites,
 the porters, the singers, the Neth-
 inim, and all those who had sepa-
 rated themselves from the peoples of
 the lands unto the law of God, their
 wives, their sons, and their daugh-
 ters, each one who had knowledge,
 and understanding— 29 they joined
 with their brothers, their nobles, and
 entered into a curse, and into an oath,
 to walk in God’s law, which was given
 by Moses the servant of God, and to
 observe and do all the command-
 ments of Yahweh our Lord, and His
 ordinances and His statutes; 30 and
 that we would not give our daughters

to the peoples of the land, nor take
 their daughters for our sons; 31 and if
 the peoples of the land bring wares
 or any grain on the Sabbath day to
 sell, that we would not buy of them
 on the Sabbath, or on a holy day; and
 that we would forego the seventh
 year, and the exaction of every debt.

Various Offerings for the House of God

32 Also we made ordinances for our-
 selves, to charge ourselves yearly
 with the third part of a shekel for
 the service of the house of our God;
 33 for the show bread, and for the
 continual meal offering, and for the
 continual burnt offering, for the Sab-
 baths, for the new moons, for the set
 feasts, and for the holy things, and for
 the sin offerings to make atonement
 for Israel, and for all the work of the
 house of our God. 34 We cast lots, the
 priests, the Levites, and the people,
 for the wood offering, to bring it into
 the house of our God, according to
 our fathers’ houses, at times appoint-
 ed, year by year, to burn on the altar
 of Yahweh our God, as it is written in
 the law; 35 and to bring the first fruits
 of our ground, and the first fruits of

10:28, 29 The people “separated themselves *from* the peoples of the lands *unto* the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters... they *joined* with their brothers”. Close fellowship with our brethren arises from having gone out *from* the surrounding world and being separated *unto* the things of God’s word. The Hebrew idea of “holiness” carries the idea of being separated *from* the things of this world *unto* the things of God. We see that happening here; separation isn’t a merely negative idea. The separation is positively *unto* other things.

Each one who had knowledge, and understanding – See on 8:12.

10:32, 33 The Mosaic Law had required a half shekel temple tax, but this was reduced here, apparently with God’s blessing – such was His desire to work with them and have them as His people (Ex. 30:11-16).

all fruit of all kinds of trees, year by year, to the house of Yahweh; ³⁶ also the first born of our sons, and of our livestock, as it is written in the law, and the first born of our herds and of our flocks, to bring to the house of our God, to the priests who minister in the house of our God; ³⁷ and that we should bring the first fruits of our dough, and our wave offerings, and the fruit of all kinds of trees, the new wine and the oil, to the priests, to the rooms of the house of our God; and the tithes of our ground to the Levites; for they, the Levites, take the tithes in all the cities of our tillage. ³⁸ The priest the son of Aaron shall be with the Levites, when the Lev-

ites take tithes; and the Levites shall bring up the tithe of the tithes to the house of our God, to the rooms, into the treasure house. ³⁹ For the children of Israel and the children of Levi shall bring the wave offering of the grain, of the new wine, and of the oil, to the rooms, where are the vessels of the sanctuary, and the priests who minister, and the porters, and the singers. We will not forsake the house of our God.

CHAPTER 11 Nov.23

People Who Lived in Jerusalem

The princes of the people lived in Jerusalem. The rest of the people also cast lots, to bring one-tenth to

10:39 They divorced their Gentile wives, and then took more (in the times of Ezra, Nehemiah and Malachi). They vowed not to forsake the house of their God, and yet Nehemiah concludes with the record that this is exactly what they did (13:11). They were slack paying the tithes, then they paid them, they slacked again, then they paid them, then Malachi records how they again didn't – several times this cycle is recorded. Likewise the withholding of agricultural blessing occurred several times – in 5:2,3 (as prophesied in Is. 51:19), in Haggai's time, and later in Malachi 3:10,12; when the restored Zion could have been as the garden of Eden, i.e. paradise restored on earth (Is. 51:3). Here we see frightening similarities with ourselves. We know, but often don't do. We sense this cycle of failure, crying out for mercy, receiving it, failing again, crying for mercy, receiving it, failing again...we see it in Israel, in our brethren and those around us, and in ourselves. We can expound it, lament it, feel the shame and tragedy of it all...and yet continue to have a part in it. Eventually, the people stayed in this groove so long that they degenerated into how they were at the time of Malachi – self-righteous, with no sense of failure any more, living self-centred lives of petty materialism, earning wages as they did in Haggai's time, to put into pockets with holes in, life without satisfaction, achieving nothing, passively angry. This is what Malachi clearly portrays. It's a terrible picture, and one which we at times can sail dangerously close to identifying with.

11:1 Neh. 7:4 obliquely comments on the tragedy – that the city was large and great, but the people who returned from Babylon were few who lived in it, and the houses weren't rebuilt there. When "the time to favour Zion" came, at the end of the 70 years, God's servants were to "take pleasure in her stones, and favour [even] the dust thereof"; and then, "when the Lord shall build up Zion, He shall appear in His glory" (Ps. 102:13-16). But the few Jews who returned chose not to live in Jerusalem, preferring to carve out for themselves farmsteads in the countryside, and the strength of those

dwell in Jerusalem the holy city, and nine-tenths in the other cities.² The people blessed all the men who willingly offered themselves to dwell in Jerusalem.³ Now these are the chiefs of the province who lived in Jerusalem. However, in the cities of Judah each person lived in his possession in their cities: Israel, the priests, and the Levites, and the Nethinim, and the children of Solomon's servants.⁴ In Jerusalem lived some of the children of Judah, and of the children of Benjamin. Of the children of Judah: Athaiah the son of Uzziah, the son of Zechariah, the son of Amariah, the son of Shephatiah, the son of Mahalalel, of the children of Perez;⁵ and Maaseiah the son of Baruch, the son of Colhozez, the son of Hazaiah, the son of Adaiah, the son of Joiarib, the son of Zechariah, the son of the Shilonite.⁶ All the sons of Perez who lived in Jerusalem were four hundred and sixty-eight valiant men.⁷ These are the sons of Benjamin: Sallu the son of Meshullam, the son of Joed, the son of Pedaiah, the son of Kolaiyah, the son of Maaseiah, the son of Ithiel, the son of Jeshaiah.⁸ After him Gabbai, Sallai, nine hundred and twenty-eight.⁹ Joel the son of Zichri was their overseer; and Judah the

son of Hassenuah was second over the city.¹⁰ Of the priests: Jedaiah the son of Joiarib, Jachin,¹¹ Seraiah the son of Hilkiah, the son of Meshullam, the son of Zadok, the son of Meraioth, the son of Ahitub, the ruler of God's house,¹² and their brothers who did the work of the house, eight hundred and twenty-two; and Adaiah the son of Jeroham, the son of Pelaliah, the son of Amzi, the son of Zechariah, the son of Pashhur, the son of Malchijah,¹³ and his brothers, chiefs of fathers' households, two hundred and forty-two; and Amashsai the son of Azarel, the son of Ahzai, the son of Meshillemoth, the son of Immer,¹⁴ and their brothers, mighty men of valour, one hundred and twenty-eight; and their overseer was Zabdiel, the son of Haggidolim.¹⁵ Of the Levites: Shemaiah the son of Hasshub, the son of Azrikam, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Bunni;¹⁶ and Shabbethai and Jozabad, of the chiefs of the Levites, who had the oversight of the outside business of God's house;¹⁷ and Mattaniah the son of Mica, the son of Zabdi, the son of Asaph, who was the praise leader who began the thanksgiving in prayer, and Bakbukiah, the second among his brothers; and Abda the son

that shifted the rubble in Jerusalem decayed... they saw her dust and scattered stones as a nuisance, and didn't take pleasure in them (4:10). And so the Lord could not then appear in glory. Short term attitudes, satisfied with our little lives and homes, rather than the bigger picture of God's glory, a failure to perceive our potential as individuals and as a community – this is what limits so many possibilities which God has potentially enabled. God was therefore especially sensitive to those who had the faith to live in Jerusalem, and for millennia He has recorded their names and brought them before Bible readers – hence the detailed list of their names in this chapter. Note that the list of names of those who lived in the towns outside Jerusalem isn't so detailed (25-33).

of Shammua, the son of Galal, the son of Jeduthun.¹⁸ All the Levites in the holy city were two hundred and eighty-four.¹⁹ Moreover the porters, Akkub, Talmon, and their brothers, who kept watch at the gates, were one hundred and seventy-two.²⁰ The rest of Israel, of the priests, the Levites, were in all the cities of Judah, each one in his inheritance.²¹ But the Nethinim lived in Ophel; and Ziha and Gishpa were over the Nethinim.²² The overseer also of the Levites at Jerusalem was Uzzi the son of Bani, the son of Hashabiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Mica, of the sons of Asaph, the singers, over the business of God's house.²³ For there was a commandment from the king concerning them, and a settled provision for the singers, as every day required.²⁴ Pethahiah the son of Meshezabel, of the children of Zerah the son of Judah, was at the king's hand in all matters concerning the people.

Other Places Where People Settled

25 As for the villages, with their fields, some of the children of Judah lived in Kiriyath Arba and its towns, and in Dibon and its towns, and in Jekabzeel and its villages,²⁶ and in Jeshua, and in Moladah, and Beth Pelet,²⁷ and in Hazar Shual, and in Beersheba and its towns,²⁸ and in Ziklag, and in Meconah and in its towns,²⁹ and in En Rimmon, and in Zorah, and in Jarmuth,³⁰ Zanoah, Adullam, and their villages, Lachish and its fields, Azekah and its towns. So they encamped from Beersheba to the valley of Hinnom.³¹ The chil-

dren of Benjamin also lived from Geba onward, at Michmash and Aija, and at Bethel and its towns,³² at Anathoth, Nob, Ananiah,³³ Hazor, Ramah, Gittaim,³⁴ Hadid, Zeboim, Neballat,³⁵ Lod, and Ono, the valley of craftsmen.³⁶ Of the Levites, certain divisions in Judah settled in Benjamin's territory.

CHAPTER 12 Nov.24

List of Priests and Levites

Now these are the priests and the Levites who went up with Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua: Seraiah, Jeremiah, Ezra,² Amariah, Malluch, Hattush,³ Shecaniah, Rehum, Meremoth,⁴ Iddo, Ginnethoi, Abijah,⁵ Mijamin, Maadiah, Bilgah,⁶ Shemaiah, and Joiarib, Jedaiah.⁷ Sallu, Amok, Hilkiah, Jedaiah. These were the chiefs of the priests and of their brothers in the days of Jeshua.⁸ Moreover the Levites: Jeshua, Binnui, Kadmiel, Sherebiah, Judah, and Mattaniah, who was the praise leader, he and his brothers.⁹ Also Bakbukiah and Unno, their brothers, were over against them according to their offices.¹⁰ Jeshua became the father of Joiakim, and Joiakim became the father of Eliashib, and Eliashib became the father of Joiada,¹¹ and Joiada became the father of Jonathan, and Jonathan became the father of Jaddua.¹² In the days of Joiakim there were priests, heads of fathers' households: of Seraiah, Meraiah; of Jeremiah, Hananiah;¹³ of Ezra, Meshullam; of Amariah, Jehohanan;¹⁴ of Malluchi, Jonathan; of Shebaniah, Joseph; ¹⁵ of

Harim, Adna; of Meraioth, Helkai; ¹⁶ of Iddo, Zechariah; of Ginnethon, Meshullam; ¹⁷ of Abijah, Zichri; of Miniamin, of Moadiah, Piltai; ¹⁸ of Bilgah, Shammua; of Shemaiah, Jehonathan; ¹⁹ and of Joiarib, Mattanai; of Jedaiah, Uzzi; ²⁰ of Sallai, Kallai; of Amok, Eber; ²¹ of Hilkiah, Hashabiah; of Jedaiah, Nethanel. ²² As for the Levites, in the days of Eliashib, Joiada, and Johanan, and Jaddua, there were recorded the heads of fathers' households; also the priests, in the reign of Darius the Persian. ²³ The sons of Levi, heads of fathers' households, were written in the book of the chronicles, even until the days of Johanan the son of Eliashib. ²⁴ The chiefs of the Levites: Hashabiah, Sherebiah, and Jeshua the son of Kadmiel, with their brothers over against them, to praise and give thanks, according to the commandment of David the man of God, watch next to watch. ²⁵ Mattaniah, and Bakbukiah, Obadiah, Meshullam, Talmon, Akkub, were porters keeping the watch at the storehouses of the gates. ²⁶ These were in the days of Joiakim the son of Jeshua, the son of Jozadak, and in the days of Nehemiah the governor, and of Ezra the priest the scribe.

The Wall of Jerusalem Is Dedicated

²⁷ At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them

to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with giving thanks, and with singing, with cymbals, stringed instruments, and with harps. ²⁸ The sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain around Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophasites; ²⁹ also from Beth Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth. The singers had built themselves villages around Jerusalem. ³⁰ The priests and the Levites purified themselves; and they purified the people, and the gates, and the wall. ³¹ Then I brought up the princes of Judah on the wall, and appointed two great companies who gave thanks and went in procession. One went on the right hand on the wall toward the dung gate; ³² and after them went Hoshaiah, and half of the princes of Judah, ³³ and Azariah, Ezra, and Meshullam, ³⁴ Judah, and Benjamin, and Shemaiah, and Jeremiah, ³⁵ and some of the priests' sons with trumpets: Zechariah the son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph; ³⁶ and his brothers, Shemaiah, and Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, and Judah, Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God; and Ezra the scribe was before them. ³⁷ By the spring gate, and straight before them, they went up by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of

12:30 Those who purify others must firstly purify themselves. Whatever spiritual work we try to do for others must be based upon our first having achieved it in our own lives; otherwise our appeal to others will lack integrity and power of persuasion. In our context, our purification is through baptism into Christ.

the wall, above the house of David, even to the water gate eastward. 38 The other company of those who gave thanks went to meet them, and I after them, with the half of the people, on the wall, above the tower of the furnaces, even to the broad wall, 39 and above the gate of Ephraim, and by the old gate, and by the fish gate, and the tower of Hananel, and the tower of Hammehah, even to the sheep gate; and they stood still in the gate of the guard. 40 So stood the two companies of those who gave thanks in God's house, and I, and the half of the rulers with me; 41 and the priests, Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets; 42 and Maaseiah, and Shemaiah, and Eleazar, and Uzzi, and Jehohanan, and Malchijah, and Elam, and Ezer. The singers sang loud, with Jezrahiah their overseer. 43 They offered great sacrifices that day, and rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy; and the women also and the children rejoiced; so that the joy of Jerusalem was heard even afar off. 44 On that day were men appointed

over the rooms for the treasures, for the wave offerings, for the first fruits, and for the tithes, to gather into them, according to the fields of the cities, the portions appointed by the law for the priests and Levites; for Judah rejoiced for the priests and for the Levites who waited. 45 They performed the duty of their God, and the duty of the purification, and so did the singers and the porters, according to the commandment of David, and of Solomon his son. 46 For in the days of David and Asaph of old there was a chief of the singers, and songs of praise and thanksgiving to God. 47 All Israel in the days of Zerubbabel, and in the days of Nehemiah, gave the portions of the singers and the porters, as every day required: and they set apart that which was for the Levites; and the Levites set apart that which was for the sons of Aaron.

CHAPTER 13 Nov.25

The Mixed Multitude Separated from Israel

On that day they read in the book of Moses in the audience of the people; and therein was found writ-

12:39 Ez. 48:31–34 envisaged the 12 gates of Jerusalem being named after the 12 tribes of Israel. But it seems no accident that twelve separate gates of the city are mentioned in the restoration record – but they weren't renamed after the tribes of Israel. Here are the names of the city gates in Nehemiah: valley (3:13); horse (3:28); east (3:29); Miphkad / muster (3:31); water (8:16); dung (12:31); fountain (12:37); Ephraim, old, fish, sheep and prison gates (12:39). No wonder some wept when the rebuilt temple was finally dedicated – the pattern of Ezekiel's vision hadn't been followed, even on such basic matters as the names of the twelve gates of Jerusalem. They could have renamed them, but lacked the willingness to see God's prophetic word as relevant in detail to their lives, just as we can wish to constantly place a distance between God's word, the black print on white paper, and our lives today.

12:43 *They... rejoiced; for God had made them rejoice with great joy* – God is able and willing to confirm us in the mental attitudes we choose to have.

ten, that an Ammonite and a Moabite should not enter into the assembly of God forever,² because they didn't meet the children of Israel with bread and with water, but hired Balaam against them, to curse them; however our God turned the curse into a blessing.³ It came to pass, when they had heard the law, that they separated from Israel all the mixed multitude.

Nehemiah Makes Other Changes

⁴ Now before this, Eliashib the priest, who was appointed over the rooms of the house of our God, being allied to Tobiah,⁵ had prepared for him a great room, where before they laid the meal offerings, the frankincense, and the vessels, and the tithes of the

grain, the new wine, and the oil, which were given by commandment to the Levites, and the singers, and the porters; and the wave offerings for the priests.⁶ But in all this, I was not at Jerusalem; for in the two and thirtieth year of Artaxerxes king of Babylon I went to the king: and after certain days asked I leave of the king.⁷ When I returned to Jerusalem, and understood the evil that Eliashib had done for Tobiah, in preparing him a room in the courts of God's house,⁸ it grieved me severely: therefore I cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the room.⁹ Then I commanded, and they cleansed the rooms; and there brought I again the vessels of God's house, with the

13:1 Their ignorance of God's word seems amazing (cp. 8:17). This may partly be because in an illiterate society, access to God's word depended upon the few literate ones reading it and faithfully explaining it to them. We note that despite ignorance of parts of God's word, and thereby disobedience to them (and sins of ignorance were still counted as sins), God still accepted them. This shouldn't lead us to personal complacency, but to tolerance and patience with those who are disobedient to and even ignorant of parts of God's word.

13:7-9 In the restored Kingdom, there were to be "holy chambers" in the temple for the Levites (Ez. 46:19 and very often in Ezekiel 40-48). The uncircumcised Gentiles were not to be brought into the sanctuary (Ez. 44:7). It was God's intention that when Judah returned from Babylon, the uncircumcised would not come into Zion (the temple), and the Kingdom would be established (Is. 52:1,11). There was to be no Canaanite in the house of Yahweh (Zech. 14:21). Yet Tobiah the Ammonite was given a chamber in the temple for him to use as an office for undermining God's people. All this wasted potential is so tragic; and if it is to us who read from such a great distance in time and understanding, how much more was it for God. We can therefore sense His eagerness to work with us who have vowed to be His new Israel and become the seed of Abraham through baptism (Gal. 3:27-29).

13:8 *It grieved me severely* – Hearts that bleed will feel not only for the world, but for our brethren too. His grief led him to discipline Tobiah. Grief should likewise be the motive for ecclesial discipline today (as in 1 Cor. 5:2). The same word is translated "sad" in 2:3. The King observed that his "sorrow of heart" was written all over his face, even though he was trying to conceal it. His sadness for his weak people was engraved in his body language. Instead of being naggingly critical of our brethren, there should be this genuine grief.

meal offerings and the frankincense. ¹⁰ I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them; so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled everyone to his field. ¹¹ Then I contended with the rulers and said, Why is God's house forsaken? I gathered them together, and set them in their place. ¹² Then brought all Judah the tithe of the grain and the new wine and the oil to the treasuries. ¹³ I made treasurers over the treasuries, Shelemiah the priest, and Zadok the scribe, and of the Levites, Pedaiah. Next to them was Hanan the son of Zaccur, the son of Mattaniah; for they were counted faithful, and their business was to distribute to their brothers. ¹⁴ Remember me, my God, concerning this, and don't wipe out my good deeds that I have done for the house of my God, and for its observances.

Abuses of the Sabbath

¹⁵ In those days I saw in Judah some men treading winepresses on the Sabbath, and bringing in sheaves,

and loading donkeys; as also wine, grapes, and figs, and all kinds of burdens, which they brought into Jerusalem on the Sabbath day: and I testified against them in the day in which they sold food. ¹⁶ There also lived men of Tyre therein, who brought in fish and all kinds of wares, and sold on the Sabbath to the children of Judah, and in Jerusalem. ¹⁷ Then I contended with the nobles of Judah and said to them, What evil thing is this that you do, and profane the Sabbath day? ¹⁸ Didn't your fathers do thus, and didn't our God bring all this evil on us, and on this city? Yet you bring more wrath on Israel by profaning the Sabbath.

The Sabbath Sanctified

¹⁹ It came to pass that, when the gates of Jerusalem began to be dark before the Sabbath, I commanded that the doors should be shut, and commanded that they should not be opened until after the Sabbath. I set some of my servants over the gates, so that no burden should be brought in on

13:17, 18 The house of the restored Kingdom was not to be profaned (Ez. 44:7); but Judah profaned the Sabbath and profaned the temple by their marriage with Gentiles and their “weariness” with the temple ordinances (Mal. 1:12; 2:10,11). They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, and so they had no part in it.

13:19 Is. 60:10,11 had foretold: “And the sons of strangers shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister unto you [as happened in the decree of Cyrus]...Therefore your gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night”; and then as Ez. 43 had also described, “I will glorify the house of My glory” (Is. 60:7). But due to the Jews’ abuse of the Sabbath and their refusal to believe Yahweh would be the promised wall of protecting fire to them, the gates could not be open continually, and had to be shut at night (see too 7:3). And Antiochus quite soon after Nehemiah’s time destroyed them [which shows how the spirituality involved in what we do, e.g. the building of the wall, is the essential thing, rather than the achievement of anything in itself]. The implication of the prophecies about Zion’s open gates was that whosoever wished could then come at any time to seek Yahweh. But men were potentially turned

the Sabbath day.²⁰ So the merchants and sellers of all kinds of wares lodged outside of Jerusalem once or twice.²¹ Then I testified against them and said to them, Why do you stay around the wall? If you do so again, I will lay hands on you. From that time on, they didn't come on the Sabbath.²² I commanded the Levites that they should purify themselves, and that they should come and keep the gates, to sanctify the Sabbath day. Remember me, my God, for this also, and spare me according to the greatness of Your loving grace.

Foreign Influences Removed

²³ In those days I also saw Jews who had married women of Ashdod, of Ammon, and of Moab:²⁴ and their children spoke half in the speech of Ashdod, and could not speak in the Jews' language, but according to the language of each people.²⁵ I contended with them and cursed them, and struck certain of them, and plucked off their hair, and made them swear

by God, You shall not give your daughters to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons, or for yourselves.²⁶ Didn't Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him that was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless foreign women caused even him to sin.²⁷ Shall we then listen to you to do all this great evil, in breaking covenant with our God in marrying foreign wives?²⁸ One of the sons of Joiada, the son of Eliashib the high priest, was son-in-law to Sanballat the Horonite: therefore I chased him from me.²⁹ Remember them, my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.³⁰ Thus I cleansed them from all foreigners, and appointed duties for the priests and for the Levites, each one in his work;³¹ and for the wood offering, at times appointed, and for the first fruits. Remember me, my God, for good.

away from Him, and His Kingdom not realized... just because greedy, materialistic Jews wanted to have a few more coins in their pocket as a result of their trading on the Sabbath. And so with us, our meanness towards God's word, our selfishness, our desire to have more than we need to cover us in the case of any eventuality, all this effectively shuts up the Kingdom against men. If the Pharisees could do just this, it is possible for us to do it. The salvation of others has been delegated into our hands.

13:19, 20 Ez. 46:3 had predicted that "The people of the land shall worship at the door of this gate before the Yahweh in the Sabbaths and in the new moons". But encouraged by the materialism of the Jews, "the people of the land" hung around the gates of the city on the Sabbath in order to do some trading of goods. Petty materialism was one factor which led even to Christ's betrayal; and it so easily does so time and again in the lives of God's children.

13:27 Nehemiah stridently criticized Israel for yet again marrying Gentiles. He described their action as "breaking covenant with our God in marrying strange wives"; the Levites likewise "defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood" (:29) by their marriages. Marriage out of the Faith is this serious; it is a breaking covenant with God.

ESTHER

CHAPTER 1 Nov.26

The King Makes a Feast

Now it happened in the days of Ahasuerus (this is Ahasuerus who reigned from India even to Ethiopia, over one hundred and twenty-seven provinces),² that in those days, when the King Ahasuerus sat on the throne of his kingdom which was in Shushan the palace,³ in the third year of his reign, he made a feast for all his princes and his servants; the powerful ones of Persia and Media, the nobles and princes of the provinces, being before him.⁴ He displayed the riches of his glorious kingdom and the honour of his excellent majesty many days, even one hundred and eighty days.⁵ When those days were fulfilled, the king made a seven day feast for all the people who were present in Shushan the palace, both great and small, in the court of the garden of the king's palace.⁶ There

were hangings of white, green and blue material, fastened with cords of fine linen and purple to silver rings and marble pillars. The couches were of gold and silver, on a pavement of red, white, yellow and black marble.⁷ They gave them ample drinks in golden vessels of various kinds, including the wine of the kingdom, according to the bounty of the king.⁸ In accordance with the law, the drinking was not compulsory; for so the king had instructed all the officials of his house, that they should do according to every man's pleasure.⁹ Also Vashti the queen made a feast for the women in the royal house which belonged to King Ahasuerus.

Queen Vashti Disobeys the King

¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the heart of the king was merry with wine, he commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha,

1:6 The language here is exactly that used about God's tabernacle and temple. The cups used in :7 may well have been those taken from Yahweh's temple in Jerusalem (Jer. 52:19; Dan. 5:2). The Persian empire is therefore being presented as a fake Kingdom of God on earth. God's people living there had to break from it and obey the command to return to the desolate land of Judah and rebuild God's true Kingdom there. We have the same call in responding to the Gospel today, in leaving this world, which appears to be God's Kingdom but isn't, and take the hard, self-sacrificial journey in life towards His true Kingdom which will be re-established on earth at Christ's return. "His glorious kingdom" (:4) uses the same two Hebrew words as in Ps. 145:11,12, where we read [in a Psalm that may well have been written or used by the righteous remnant in Babylon] that it is *Yahweh* God of Israel who has a Kingdom of glory, and who ultimately hears the cry of His people in distress, as Ahasuerus did. The Kingdom of Media and Persia had books in which the good and bad deeds of the citizens were written (10:2); and so in the one true Kingdom, there are 'books' from which the ultimate King will judge His people. Clearly, the Kingdom of Ahasuerus is being set up as an anti-Kingdom of God, with an antichrist figure ruling it, faking the Kingdom of God.

Zethar and Carcass, the seven eunuchs who served in the presence of Ahasuerus the king,¹¹ to bring Vashti the queen before the king with the royal crown, to show the people and the princes her beauty; for she was beautiful.¹² But the queen Vashti refused to come at the king's commandment by the eunuchs. Therefore the king was very angry, and his anger burned in him.¹³ Then the king said to the wise men who knew the times, (for it was the king's custom to consult those who knew law and judgement;¹⁴ and those next to him were Carshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena, and Memucan, the seven princes of Persia and Media, who saw the king's face, and sat first in the kingdom),¹⁵ What shall we do to the queen Vashti according to law, because she has not done the bidding of the King Ahasuerus by the eunuchs?¹⁶ Memucan answered before the king and the princes, Vashti the queen has not done wrong to only the king, but also to all the princes, and to all the people who are in all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus.¹⁷ For this deed of the queen will become known to all women, causing them to show contempt for their husbands when it is reported, 'King Ahasuerus commanded Vashti the queen to be brought in before him, but she didn't come'.¹⁸ Today, the princesses of Persia and Media who have heard of the queen's deed will likewise tell all the king's princes. This will cause much contempt and wrath.

The King's Decree

¹⁹ If it please the king, let a royal commandment go from him and let it be written among the laws of the Persians and the Medes, so that it cannot be altered, that Vashti may never again come before King Ahasuerus; and let the king give her royal estate to another who is better than she.²⁰ When the king's decree which he shall make is published throughout all his kingdom (for it is great), all the wives will give their husbands honour, both great and small.²¹ This advice pleased the king and the princes, and the king did according to the word of Memucan:²² for he sent letters into all the king's provinces, into every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language, that every man should rule his own house, and that it should be published in the language of each people.

CHAPTER 2 Nov.27

The King Seeks a New Queen

After these things, when the wrath of King Ahasuerus was pacified, he remembered Vashti and what she had done, and what was decreed against her.² Then the king's servants who served him said, Let beautiful young virgins be sought for the king.³ Let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the beautiful young virgins to the citadel of Susa, to the women's house, to the custody of Hegai the king's eunuch, keeper of the women. Let cosmetics be given them;⁴ and let the maiden

who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti. The thing pleased the king, and he did so.

Mordecai and Esther

⁵ There was a certain Jew in the citadel of Susa, whose name was Mordecai, son of Jair, son of Shimei, son of Kish a Benjamite, ⁶ who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captives who had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. ⁷ He brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter; for she had neither father nor mother. The maiden was fair and beautiful; and when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter. ⁸ So it happened that when the king's commandment and his decree was heard, and when many maidens were gathered together to the citadel of Susa, to the custody of Hegai, Esther was taken into the king's house, to the custody of Hegai, keeper of the women. ⁹ The maiden pleased him, and she obtained kindness from

him. He quickly gave her cosmetics and her portions of food, and the seven choice maidens who were to be given her out of the king's house. He moved her and her maidens to the best place in the women's house. ¹⁰ Esther had not made known her people nor her relatives, because Mordecai had instructed her that she should not make it known. ¹¹ Mordecai walked every day in front of the court of the women's house, to find out how Esther was doing, and what would become of her.

Esther Is Made Queen

¹² Each young woman's turn came to go in to King Ahasuerus after her purification for twelve months (for so were the days of their purification accomplished, six months with oil of myrrh, and six months with sweet fragrances and with preparations for beautifying women). ¹³ The young woman then came to the king like this: whatever she desired was given her to go with her out of the women's house to the king's house. ¹⁴ In the evening she went, and on the

2:5 Mordecai – So much of later Isaiah is taken up with mockery and criticism of the Babylonian gods and the Marduk cult. The book of Esther, with Mordecai as the joint hero, named as he was after Marduk, demonstrates how caught up were the Jews with the Babylonian gods. Ezekiel repeatedly reveals the idolatry of the Jewish captives. Isaiah was therefore an appeal for the Jews to quit the Marduk cult and believe in the radical prophecies about the overthrow of Babylon. The situation is analogous to how the New Testament is full of references to the Roman imperial cult of empire worship. So much of the Bible is like Isaiah and the New Testament – a radical, counter-cultural call to see our present world for what it is, and to perceive that the ways of God simply can't be mixed in, watered down or compromised with the way of this world.

2:7 ‘Esther’ in Persian means ‘star’ and appears a reference to Ishtar or to the Persian *stara*, or ‘star’, the Babylonian goddess of love. Even her Hebrew name Hadassah means ‘myrtle’, a tree which is a native of Babylon, not Israel.

2:9 See on 4:1-3.

next day she returned into the second women's house, to the custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who kept the concubines. She came in to the king no more, unless the king delighted in her, and she was called by name.¹⁵ Now when the turn of Esther, the daughter of Abihail the uncle of Mordecai, who had taken her for his daughter, came to go in to the king, she required nothing but what Hegai the king's eunuch, the keeper of the women, advised. Esther obtained favour in the sight of all those who looked at her.¹⁶ So Esther was taken to King Ahasuerus into his royal house in the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.¹⁷ The king loved Esther more than all the women, and she obtained favour and kindness in his sight more than all the virgins; so that he set the royal crown on her head, and made her queen instead of Vashti.¹⁸ Then the king made a great feast for all his princes and his servants, even Esther's feast; and he proclaimed a holiday in the provinces, and gave gifts according to the king's bounty.

Mordecai Saves the King's Life

19 When the virgins were gathered together the second time, Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate.²⁰ Esther had not yet made known her relatives nor her people, as Mordecai had commanded her; for Esther obeyed Mordecai, like she did when she was brought up by him.²¹ In those days, while Mordecai was sitting in the king's gate, two of the

king's eunuchs who were doorkeepers, Bigthan and Teresh, were angry, and sought to lay hands on the King Ahasuerus.²² This thing became known to Mordecai, who informed Esther the queen; and Esther informed the king in Mordecai's name.²³ When this matter was investigated, and it was found to be so, they were both hanged on a tree; and it was written in the book of the chronicles in the king's presence.

CHAPTER 3 Nov.28

Haman Seeks to Destroy the Jews

After these things King Ahasuerus promoted Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, and advanced him, and set his seat above all the princes who were with him.² All the king's servants who were in the king's gate bowed down, and paid homage to Haman; for the king had so commanded concerning him. But Mordecai didn't bow down or pay him homage.³ Then the king's servants who were in the king's gate said to Mordecai, Why do you disobey the king's commandment?⁴ Now it came to pass, when they spoke daily to him and he didn't listen to them, that they told Haman, to see whether Mordecai's position would stand; for he had told them that he was a Jew.⁵ When Haman saw that Mordecai didn't bow down nor pay him homage, Haman was full of wrath.⁶ But he scorned the thought of laying hands on Mordecai alone, for they had made known to him Mordecai's people. Therefore Haman sought to destroy all

the Jews who were throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus, even Mordecai's people. ⁷ In the first month, which is the month Nisan, in the twelfth year of King Ahasuerus, they cast Pur, that is, the lot, before Haman from day to day, and from month to month, and chose the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. ⁸ Haman said to King Ahasuerus, There is a certain people scattered abroad and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom, and their laws are different from other people's. They don't keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not for the king's profit to allow them to remain. ⁹ If it pleases the king, let it be written that they be destroyed; and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who are in charge of the

king's business, to bring it into the king's treasures.

The Decree to Destroy the Jews

¹⁰ The king took his ring from his hand, and gave it to Haman the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, the Jews' enemy. ¹¹ The king said to Haman, The silver is given to you, the people also, to do with them as it seems good to you. ¹² Then the king's scribes were called in on the first month, on the thirteenth day of the month; and all that Haman commanded was written to the king's satraps and to the governors who were over every province, and to the princes of every people, to every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language. It was written in the name of King Ahasuerus, and it was sealed with the king's ring.

3:7 See on 4:1-3; 7:8. Haman decided on his plan to kill the Jews in the first month, Nisan, but his roll of the dice dictated that he execute it in the 12th month. This gave the Jews and Esther / Mordecai nearly a whole year to try to get out of the situation. The fact this plan was made around Jewish Passover time [hence the mention of the month Nisan] perhaps suggested to the thoughtful that God would work a similar Passover deliverance as He had from Egypt. Here we see providence, a Divine hand intervening (Prov. 16:33). And that Divine hand intervenes and works even through our own failure.

3:9 It's apparent that the Jews were no longer sitting weeping by the rivers of Babylon, but had become influential and wealthy throughout the empire – hence Haman's desire to kill and plunder them. The vast sum he offered to the King for permission to do this was presumably on the basis that a percentage of the plunder would be given to the King; for Herodotus estimated Haman's offer to approximate to two thirds of the annual income of the Persian empire. The only way he could realistically have offered this would've been on the basis that the Jews were wealthy and he would totally plunder them. Hence when the whole plan was reversed, the Jews were allowed to plunder their enemies (8:11). They certainly didn't take any wealth with them into captivity; they must have experienced meteoric prosperity and success in all their business dealings. Hence their desire to materially support the exiles who wished to return, but most of them were too caught up in the good life to heed the call to come out from Babylon / Persia. And we, faced with that same call in these last days, must enquire whether we're not the same.

¹³ Letters were sent by couriers into all the king's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day, even on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, and to plunder their possessions. ¹⁴ A copy of the letter, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published to all the peoples, that they should be prepared against that day. ¹⁵ The couriers went forth in haste by the king's commandment, and the decree was given out in the citadel of Susa. The king and Haman sat down to drink; but the city of Shushan was perplexed.

CHAPTER 4 Nov.28

Mordecai Informs Esther about the King's Decree

Now when Mordecai found out all that was done, Mordecai

tore his clothes and put on sackcloth with ashes, and went out into the midst of the city, and wailed loudly and bitterly.² He came even before the king's gate; for no one was allowed inside the king's gate clothed with sackcloth.³ In every province, wherever the king's commandment and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, and fasting, weeping and wailing; and many lay in sackcloth and ashes.⁴ Esther's maidens and her eunuchs came and told her this, and the queen was exceedingly grieved. She sent clothing to Mordecai, to replace his sackcloth; but he didn't receive it.⁵ Then Esther called for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs, whom he had appointed to attend her, and commanded him to go to Mordecai, to find out what this was, and why it was.⁶ So Hathach went out to Mordecai, to the city square which was before the king's

3:13 The decree was made to “destroy... and cause to perish” the Jews throughout the provinces of Persia / Babylon (3:13; 7:4). This phrase uses the two Hebrew words which we find together three times in the list of curses to be brought upon a disobedient Israel (Dt. 28:20,51,63). Yet by her wonderful self-sacrificial mediation, Esther brought about the deferment and even annulment of those justifiable curses. God’s prophetic word was again changed – due to a mediator, who of course pointed both backwards to Moses, and forwards to the Lord Jesus. God is so eager to save us that He is willing to change His stated purpose about sinners.

4:1-3 The complete absence of God’s Name in Esther indicates how they had forgotten the Name of their God in Babylon. It’s also odd that there is no mention of prayer in the story – when prayer was the obvious recourse of God’s people. The omission is so obvious – as if to point out that the Jews were not the prayerful community which they should’ve been. When we read of Mordecai rending his clothes and putting on sackcloth and ashes, we expect to read of him praying – for prayer accompanies those two things in 2 Kings 19:1-4 and Joel 1:14. Even Esther appears to accept her possible destruction in a fatalistic way rather than in faith – “If I perish, I perish” (:16). There’s a contrast with Daniel, who gathered his friends and gave himself to prayer before going in to the King; she gathered her friends and asked them to fast, but there’s no specific mention of prayer. What she did was brave, but it seems to be more human

gate. ⁷ Mordecai told him of all that had happened to him, and the exact sum of money that Haman had promised to pay to the king's treasures for the destruction of the Jews. ⁸ He also gave him the copy of the writing of the decree that was given out in Shushan to destroy them, to show it to Esther, and to declare it to her, and to urge her to go in to the king to make supplication to him, to make request before him for her people.

Messages between Mordecai and Esther

⁹ Hathach came and told Esther the words of Mordecai. ¹⁰ Then Esther spoke to Hathach and gave him a message to Mordecai: ¹¹ All the king's servants and the people of the king's provinces know that whoever,

whether man or woman, comes to the king into the inner court without being invited, there is one law for him, that he be put to death; except those to whom the king might hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live. I have not been called to come in to the king these thirty days. ¹² They told to Mordecai Esther's words. ¹³ Then Mordecai asked them to return answer to Esther, Don't think to yourself that you will escape in the king's house any more than all the Jews. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent now, then relief and deliverance will come to the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. Who knows if you haven't come to the kingdom for such a time as this? ¹⁵ Then Esther asked them to answer Mordecai, ¹⁶ Go, gather together all

bravery than an act of spiritual faith. The omission of any mention of prayer seems intentional – to highlight that the Jewish community were simply not prayerful as they should've been. The book of Esther was surely to encourage the Jews that despite their weakness, God was prepared to work with them. Esther appears to have slept with ['went in unto'] the King before he married her; eaten unclean food (2:9; cp. Dan. 1:5, 8), and finally married a Gentile. And she didn't tell her husband that she was Jewish for the first 5 years of their marriage (2:16; 3:7). It's almost certain that she would've acted like a Persian woman religiously in order for this to be the case; she certainly wasn't an observant keeper of the Mosaic law. She's almost set up in contrast with Daniel, who refused to defile himself in these ways and maintained his conscience in the same environment at whatever cost. But the point of Esther is to show that God was eager to work with such as Esther, He hadn't quit on His people. And of course if Esther and Mordecai had done the right thing and returned to Judah as commanded, the whole situation would never have arisen, and there would've been no Jews left in Babylon to persecute. It seems that the history in the book of Esther is an example of how God sent 'fishers and hunters' to encourage the Jews to return as He commanded them (Jer. 16:16) – but even then, they didn't.

4:8 God had said that He would cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, "where I will not show you favour" (Jer. 16:13). But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there [s.w. Esther 4:8; 8:5]. God was gracious [s.w. 'show favour'] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). Here we see God's pure grace to His weak people.

4:16 See on :1-3.

the Jews who are present in Shushan and fast for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day. I and my maidens will also fast the same way. Then I will go in to the king, which is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.¹⁷ So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

CHAPTER 5 Nov.29

Esther Invites the King and Haman to a Banquet

Now it happened on the third day that Esther put on her royal clothing, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, next to the king's house. The king sat on his royal throne in the royal house, next to the entrance of the house.² When the king saw Esther the queen standing in the court, she obtained favour in his sight; and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther came near, and touched the top of the sceptre.³ Then the king asked her, What would you like, queen Esther? What is your

request? It shall be given you even to the half of the kingdom.⁴ Esther said, If it seems good to the king, let the king come with Haman today to the banquet that I have prepared for him.⁵ Then the king said, Bring Haman quickly, so that it may be done as Esther has said. So the king and Haman came to the banquet that Esther had prepared.⁶ The king said to Esther at the banquet of wine, What is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed.⁷ Then Esther answered and said, My petition and my request is this.⁸ If I have found favour in the sight of the king, and if it please the king to grant my petition and to perform my request, let the king and Haman come to the banquet that I will prepare for them, and I will do tomorrow as the king has said.

Haman Plots to Have Mordecai Hanged

⁹ Then Haman went out that day joyful and glad of heart, but when Ha-

5:4 When Esther's nerve failed and she cops out of making her request by asking the King and Haman to come to a banquet, she finds herself saying: "Let the King come with Haman today". The Hebrew text reads: "Ybw' Hmlk Whmn Hywm" – the first letters of those four Hebrew words spells YHWH, the Name of God which never occurs in the book of Esther. Truly God's strength is made perfect in human weakness. In that very moment of failure, the cop out, God was revealed in His essence. And He proceeded to work through the element of suspense which her request created... to pique the King's desire to help, and to raise Haman's pride at having been invited, so that he would act even more foolishly, leading to his downfall. It could also be noted that Esther's entire intercession could so easily have been spoilt if Haman had suspected her machinations against him. But he didn't; he felt very honoured to have been invited by Esther to the banquet, and he boasted about it. In other words, Esther concealed her true feelings towards him. And where did she learn to do that? Surely in a lifetime of concealing her true Jewish identity and religious feelings, when actually she shouldn't have done so.

man saw Mordecai in the king's gate, that he didn't stand up nor move for him, he was filled with wrath against Mordecai.¹⁰ Nevertheless Haman restrained himself, and went home. There, he sent and called for his friends and Zeresh his wife.¹¹ Haman recounted to them the glory of his riches, the multitude of his children, all the things in which the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king.¹² Haman also said, Yes, Esther the queen let no man come in with the king to the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and tomorrow I am also invited by her together with the king.¹³ Yet all this avails me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate.¹⁴ Then Zeresh his wife and all his friends said to him, Let a gallows be made fifty cubits high, and in the morning speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on it. Then go in merrily with the king to the banquet. This pleased Haman, so he had the gallows made.

CHAPTER 6 Nov.29

The King Remembers Mordecai

On that night, sleep fled from the king. He commanded the book of records of the chronicles to be brought, and they were read to the king.² It was found written that Mordecai had told of Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's eunuchs, who were doorkeepers, who had tried to lay hands on the King Ahasuerus.³ The king said, What honour and dignity has been bestowed on Mor-

decai for this? Then the king's servants who attended him said, Nothing has been done for him.⁴ The king said, Who is in the court? Now Haman had come into the outer court of the king's house, to speak to the king about hanging Mordecai on the gallows that he had prepared for him.⁵ The king's servants said to him, Behold, Haman stands in the court. The king said, Let him come in.⁶ So Haman came in. The king said to him, What shall be done to the man whom the king delights to honour? Now Haman said in his heart, Who would the king delight to honour more than myself?⁷ Haman said to the king, For the man whom the king delights to honour,⁸ let royal clothing be brought which the king wears, and the horse that the king rides on, and on the head of which a crown royal is set.⁹ Let the clothing and the horse be delivered to the hand of one of the king's most noble princes, that they may array the man whom the king delights to honour with them, and have him ride on horseback through the city square, and proclaim before him, 'Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour!'

Mordecai Is Honoured But Haman Mourns

¹⁰ Then the king said to Haman, Hurry and take the clothing and the horse, as you have said, and do this for Mordecai the Jew, who sits at the king's gate. Let nothing fail of all that you have spoken.¹¹ Then Haman took the clothing and the horse,

and arrayed Mordecai, and had him ride through the city square, and proclaimed before him, Thus shall it be done to the man whom the king delights to honour! ¹² Mordecai came back to the king's gate, but Haman hurried to his house, mourning and having his head covered. ¹³ Haman recounted to Zeresh his wife and all his friends everything that had happened to him. Then his wise men and Zeresh his wife said to him, If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall is of Jewish descent, you will not prevail against him, but you will surely fall before him. ¹⁴ While they were yet talking with him, the king's eunuchs came, and hurried to bring Haman to the banquet that Esther had prepared.

CHAPTER 7 Nov.30

Esther Reveals Haman's Plot to the King

So the king and Haman came to banquet with Esther the queen. ² The king said again to Esther on the second day at the banquet of wine, What is your petition, queen Esther? It shall be granted you. What

is your request? Even to the half of the kingdom it shall be performed. ³ Then Esther the queen answered, If I have found favour in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. ⁴ For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish. But if we had been sold for bondservants and bondmaids, I would have held my peace, although the adversary could not have compensated for the king's loss. ⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen, Who is he, and where is he who dared presume in his heart to do so? ⁶ Esther said, The adversary and the enemy is even this wicked Haman!

Haman Put to Death

Then Haman was afraid before the king and the queen. ⁷ The king arose in his wrath from the banquet of wine and went into the palace garden. Haman stood up to make request for his life to Esther the queen; for he saw that there was evil determined against him by the king. ⁸ Then the king returned out of the palace gar-

7:3 Esther made her request for “my life... my people” in parallel; and when her own safety was assured, she didn’t just relax and mop her brow with relief, she went on to petition for them – with all the risks this involved for her (see too 8:3). We can’t possibly just rejoice in our own salvation, that we have found the Lord and are secured in Him; if we have truly experienced this, we will wish to share it with others.

7:4 Esther, in an eloquent type of Christ’s mediation for us, risked her life because she felt that “we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed”. If she’d have kept her mouth shut, *she* wouldn’t have been destroyed. But she fought and won the same battle as we have daily or weekly before us: to identify ourselves with our weaker and more suffering brethren.

7:6 The Septuagint here calls the man Haman *ho diabolos* – the devil (with the definite article), referring to Haman, not to any supernatural being. The word simply means an enemy.

den into the place of the banquet of wine; and Haman had fallen on the couch where Esther was. Then the king said, Will he even assault the queen in front of me in the house? As the word went out of the king's mouth, they covered Haman's face.⁹ Then Harbonah, one of the eunuchs who were with the king said, Behold, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman has made for Mordecai, who spoke good for the king, is standing at Haman's house. The king said, Hang him on it!¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified.

CHAPTER 8 Nov.30

Esther Pleads for Her People

On that day, King Ahasuerus gave the house of Haman, the Jews' enemy, to Esther the queen. Mordecai came before the king; for Esther had told what he was to her.² The king took off his ring, which he had taken from Haman, and gave

it to Mordecai. Esther set Mordecai over the house of Haman.³ Esther spoke yet again before the king, and fell down at his feet, and begged him with tears to put away the mischief of Haman the Agagite, and his device that he had devised against the Jews.⁴ Then the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre. So Esther arose, and stood before the king.⁵ She said, If it pleases the king, and if I have found favour in his sight, and the thing seem right to the king, and I am pleasing in his eyes, let it be written to reverse the letters devised by Haman, the son of Hammedatha the Agagite, which he wrote to destroy the Jews who are in all the king's provinces.⁶ For how can I endure to see the evil that would come to my people? How can I endure to see the destruction of my relatives?

The King Grants Esther's Wish

7 Then King Ahasuerus said to Esther the queen and to Mordecai the Jew, If I have freely granted you all that was

7:8 Although Esther was weak spiritually, yet God worked through her to save His undeserving people. The story brings out a number of coincidences which on reflection could only have been from God. The way Haman collapses and it appears he's tried to rape Esther is one such. Another is the way that Mordecai isn't rewarded for revealing the plot to kill the King – the King seems to have forgotten about it, overlooked it, and therefore he was all the more inclined to do Esther and Mordecai a real favour when required. This is all especially remarkable when we read historian Herodotus' note that Ahasuerus [or Xerxes] was noted for rewarding loyalty. It was surely no mere human co-incidence that the very morning the King has had a bad night and remembered Mordecai and decides to honour him, that Haman arrives to request Mordecai's death. See on 3:7.

8:5 See on 4:8.

8:7 The God who has given us His Son will, through His mediation, surely "freely give us all things" in response to our prayers (Rom. 8:32-34). This passage is alluding to the LXX here: "If I have freely granted you all that was Haman's, because he laid his hand on the Jews, and hanged him on a gallows [cp. the cross], what do you fur-

Haman's, because he laid his hand on the Jews, and hanged him on a gallows, what do you further seek? ⁸ Write also to the Jews, as it pleases you, in the king's name, and seal it with the king's ring; for the writing which is written in the king's name, and sealed with the king's ring, may not be reversed by any man. ⁹ Then the king's scribes were called at that time, in the third month Sivan, on the twenty-third day of the first month, which is Nisan; and it was written according to all that Mordecai commanded to the Jews, and to the satraps, the governors and princes of the provinces which are from India to Ethiopia, one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, to every province according to its writing, and to every people in their language, and to the Jews in their writing and in their language. ¹⁰ He wrote in the name of King Ahasuerus, and sealed it with the king's ring, and sent letters by courier on horseback, riding on royal horses that were bred from swift steeds.

The Jews Are to Defend Themselves

¹¹ In those letters, the king granted the Jews who were in every city to gather themselves together, and to defend their life, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish all the power of the people and province that would assault them, their little ones and women, and to plunder their

“what do you further seek?”; and the King then gives Esther whatever she requests. Note the repetition of ideas: if death on a cross had been granted, then all other things would be freely granted to the mediator / intercessor, for the good of her / His people.

possessions, ¹² on one day in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, which is the month Adar. ¹³ A copy of the letter, that the decree should be given out in every province, was published to all the peoples, that the Jews should be ready for that day to avenge themselves on their enemies. ¹⁴ So the couriers who rode on royal horses went out, hastened and pressed on by the king's commandment. The decree was given out in the citadel of Susa. ¹⁵ Mordecai went out of the presence of the king in royal clothing of blue and white, and with a great crown of gold, and with a robe of fine linen and purple; and the city of Susa shouted and was glad. ¹⁶ The Jews had light, gladness, joy, and honour. ¹⁷ In every province, and in every city, wherever the king's commandment and his decree came, the Jews had gladness, joy, a feast, and a good day. Many from among the peoples of the land became Jews; for the fear of the Jews was fallen on them.

CHAPTER 9 Dec. 1

The Jews Destroy Their Enemies

Now in the twelfth month, which is the month Adar, on the thirteenth day of the month, when the king's commandment and his decree drew near to be put into effect, on the day that the enemies of the Jews hoped to conquer them, (but it was turned about so that the oppo-

site happened- the Jews conquered those who hated them), ² the Jews gathered themselves together in their cities throughout all the provinces of the King Ahasuerus, to lay hands on those who wanted to harm them. No one could withstand them, because the fear of them had fallen on all the people. ³ All the princes of the provinces, the satraps, the governors, and those who did the king's business helped the Jews, because the fear of Mordecai had fallen on them. ⁴ For Mordecai was great in the king's house, and his fame went out throughout all the provinces; for the man Mordecai grew greater and greater. ⁵ The Jews struck all their enemies with the stroke of the sword, and with slaughter and destruction, and did what they wanted to those who hated them. ⁶ In the citadel of Susa, the Jews killed and destroyed five hundred men. ⁷ They killed Parshandatha, Dalphon, Aspatha, ⁸ Poratha, Adalia, Aridatha, ⁹ Parmashta, Arisai, Aridai and Vaizatha, ¹⁰ the ten sons of Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Jew's enemy; but they didn't lay their hand on the plunder. ¹¹ On that day, the number of those who were slain in the citadel of Susa was brought before the king. ¹² The king said to Esther the queen, The Jews have slain and destroyed five hundred men in the citadel of Susa, including the ten sons of Haman; what then have they done in the rest of the king's provinces! Now what is your petition? It shall be granted you. What is your further request? It shall be done. ¹³ Then

Esther said, If it pleases the king, let it be granted to the Jews who are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according to this day's decree, and let Haman's ten sons be hanged on the gallows. ¹⁴ The king commanded this to be done. A decree was given out in Shushan; and they hanged Haman's ten sons. ¹⁵ The Jews who were in Shushan gathered themselves together on the fourteenth day also of the month Adar, and killed three hundred men in Shushan; but they didn't lay their hand on the spoil. ¹⁶ The other Jews who were in the king's provinces gathered themselves together, defended their lives, had rest from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them; but they didn't lay their hand on the plunder.

The Custom of Purim Begins

¹⁷ This was done on the thirteenth day of the month Adar; and on the fourteenth day of that month they rested and made it a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁸ But the Jews who were in Shushan assembled together on the thirteenth and on the fourteenth days of the month; and on the fifteenth day of that month, they rested, and made it a day of feasting and gladness. ¹⁹ Therefore the Jews of the villages, who lived in the un-walled towns, made the fourteenth day of the month Adar a day of gladness and feasting, a good day, and a day of sending presents of food to one another. ²⁰ Mordecai wrote these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of the

king Ahasuerus, both near and far, 21 to enjoin them that they should keep the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the month Adar yearly, 22 as the days in which the Jews had rest from their enemies, and the month which was turned to them from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning into a good day; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, and of sending presents of food to one another, and gifts to the needy. 23 The Jews accepted the custom that they had begun, as Mordecai had written to them; 24 because Haman the son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of all the Jews, had plotted against the Jews to destroy them, and had cast Pur, that is, the lot, to consume them, and to destroy them; 25 but when this became known to the king, he commanded by letters that his wicked device, which he had devised against the Jews, should return upon his own head, and that he and his sons should be hanged on the gallows. 26 Therefore they called these days Purim, from the word ‘Pur’. Therefore because of all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and that which had come to them, 27 the Jews established and imposed on themselves and on their descendants, and on all those who joined themselves to them, so that it should not fail, that they would keep

these two days according to what was written, and according to its appointed time, every year; 28 and that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor their memory perish from their seed. 29 Then Esther the queen, the daughter of Abihail, and Mordecai the Jew, wrote with all authority to confirm this second letter of Purim. 30 He sent letters to all the Jews, to the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, with words of peace and truth, 31 to confirm these days of Purim in their appointed times, as Mordecai the Jew and Esther the queen had decreed, and as they had imposed upon themselves and their descendants, in the matter of the fastings and their cry. 32 The commandment of Esther confirmed these matters of Purim; and it was written in the book.

CHAPTER 10 Dec. 1

The Greatness of King Ahasuerus and Mordecai

King Ahasuerus laid a tribute on the land, and on the islands of the sea. 2 All the acts of his power and of his might, and the full account of the greatness of Mordecai to which the king advanced him,

10 Ezekiel had prophesied that those who survived the famine and invasion of Judah would go into captivity, “and I will draw out a sword after them” (Ez. 5:2,12). We would expect from this that the exiles would be persecuted and slain in captivity, and this surely was God’s intended judgment. But in Esther we find the exiles in prosperity, in positions of power and respected by their captors; and Jeremiah concludes

aren't they written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Media and Persia? ³ For Mordecai the Jew was next to King Ahasuerus, and great

among the Jews, and accepted by the multitude of his brothers, seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all his descendants.

his prophecy with the information that Jehoiachin, Judah's exiled King, was exalted "above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon" and he was given special favour and honour by the King of Babylon (Jer. 52:31-34). We can only understand these things as pure grace. God showed tenderness and favour to His people in captivity, far above what He had intended or what they deserved. And He does the same with us – He gives us so much more than we deserve. And yet most of Judah abused that grace; they were so taken up with the good life God gave them in captivity that they chose to remain there and not participate in the restoration. And we *so* easily can end up abusing His grace likewise. In this sense the book of Esther has a sad ending – the Jews are even more popular, even richer. Our loving Father gives us as His children what we beg Him for materially – but so often, it's not for our good spiritually. God must be *so* torn – between giving us what we want, what we whine for, what humanly we obviously need and would desperately like to have... and yet knowing that this is not for our spiritual good. We wonder what happened to Esther. Ahasuerus was slain soon after the events of the book of Esther – typically, the wife and supporters of the King would've been slain or persecuted. Was this not another prod from God for Esther and Mordecai to return to Judah?

JOB

CHAPTER 1 Dec. 2

The Prologue: Yahweh, Job and the Satan

There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job. That man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and turned away from the evil. ² There were born to him seven sons and three daughters. ³ His possessions also were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys and a very great household; so that this man

was the greatest of all the children of the east. ⁴ His sons went and held a feast in the house of each one on his birthday; and they sent and called for their three sisters to eat and to drink with them. ⁵ It was so, when the days of their feasting had come to an end, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and renounced God in their hearts. Job did so continually. ⁶ Now it hap-

1:6 The common idea that Satan in Job was a sinful cosmic being who brought evil upon Job against God's will and tried to make him sin is wrong. "Satan" is only mentioned in the first two chapters of Job and nowhere in the book is he defined as a fallen angel. The word means 'adversary' and of itself has no negative connotation; it can be used about good people (Mt. 16:21-23). "Sons of God" can refer to believers (Rom. 8:14; 2 Cor. 6:17-18; 1 Jn. 3:7). Angels do not bring false accusations against believers "before the Lord" (2 Pet. 2:11). It cannot be conclusively proved that Satan was a son of God – he "came among them". Satan is described as "going to and fro in the earth" – but there is no implication that he was doing anything sinful; Zech. 1:11 implies that this is a Hebraism for observing. How can Satan be in heaven and also on earth in Job's time when, according to popular belief, he was thrown out at the time of Adam, or in 1914, according to some? There cannot be sin or rebellion against God in heaven (Ps. 5:4-5; Hab. 1:13; Mt. 6:10; Ps. 103:19-21); Angels don't sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23). The major theme of the book of Job is that *God* brought the problems into Job's life and eventually they made him more righteous (2:10; 16:11; 19:21; 23:16; 42:11). Job did not believe that only good things came from God; he nowhere complains about Satan bringing the problems. Job realized that his sufferings had made him come to know God in practice rather than just in theory (42:5). Seeing that problems make us more righteous people if we respond correctly to them (Heb. 12:5-11), why would a sinful, wicked being, who wants to turn us away from God, bring these things into our lives, when actually they only make us more righteous and closer to God? The fact that Satan and the sons of God were in "the presence of the Lord" and presented themselves "before the Lord" (2:7; 1:6) does not necessarily mean that they were in heaven. The representatives of God carry the name of God, e.g. the angel which led Israel through the wilderness was called "the Lord" because it carried God's name (Ex. 23:20-21), but it was not God Himself in person (Ex. 33:12,20). Similarly, priests represent God (2 Chron. 19:6) and to come before them was to come "before the Lord" (Dt. 19:17). Cain "went out from the presence of

pened on the day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh, that Satan also came among them.⁷ Yahweh said to Satan,

the Lord” (Gen. 4:16) – not out of heaven but probably away from the presence of the angel – cherubim. Jesus was presented as a baby “before the Lord” (Lk. 2:22) – i.e. before the priest. Satan had to get power from God (2:3-6); he had none in his own right, indeed, God brought Job to Satan’s notice (1:8). Job often comments about God being the source of his sufferings (9:24). Job didn’t believe anyone apart from God was responsible. There is no indication that anything Satan did was sinful. Satan never actually says or does anything wrong; he simply makes the observation that there may well be a relationship between Job’s service of God and the material blessing which God has given him. He is then empowered by God to bring calamities into Job’s life. Time and again it is stressed that *God* brought the problems upon Job, not satan independently (1:12,16; 2:3,10; 6:4; 8:4; 19:21; 42:18). Even if the “satan” (adversary) to Job was an angel, there is no reason to think it was sinful. An angel asked Abraham to offer Isaac to find out exactly how obedient Abraham would be (Gen. 22:12; see too Dt. 8:2). A righteous angel was called a “satan” in Num. 22:22. If we follow through the argument of the book, the orthodox view requires that the logical answer of Job to the friends’ allegations would have been “I’m suffering because Satan has it in for me! He’s doing this, not God!” For the friends were reasoning that God was bringing such affliction into Job’s life because Job was a sinner. The fact Job doesn’t make this obvious retort indicates that “the Satan” wasn’t understood by either Job nor the friends as a personal supernatural being of evil. The “sons of God” – the believers at that time – presented themselves before a priest or angel, perhaps at a religious feast. Someone there, maybe one of the worshippers, reflected that it was not surprising that Job was such a strong believer, seeing that God had so richly blessed him. God gave that person the power to afflict Job, to demonstrate that Job’s love of God was not proportionate to the blessings God had given him. Maybe the Satan was composed of Job’s three “friends” – they are rebuked at the end of the book (notice that “satan” is not rebuked there by name). Their discussions with Job indicate that they had their doubts as to his integrity and suspected that his faith was now weak because God had taken away the blessings from him (4:5,7). The prologue to Job is a literary device to place theological problems before us, e.g. of the relationship between service of God and receipt of blessing, and sin and suffering. The friends insist that “the destroyer” [by which they surely meant an early equivalent to ‘the devil’ of popular belief today] had touched Job – whereas Job insists that it is *God* who had destroyed him (15:21 cp. 19:10; 13:21). In some ways the book of Job is a deconstruction of the popular Persian and Canaanite myths about a ‘satan’ figure. Job, both in the story of his sufferings and his specific words, seeks to demonstrate that the essential issue in life is being “just with God”, and not whether or not we are touched by the hand of an evil being; for the hand of God which touched Job (19:21) is the hand of ‘satan’ into which God delivered Job temporarily (1:12). Job says that the attitude of the friends is wrong – they should be looking into themselves, rather than fantasizing about the action of some unseen evil being they imagined (19:28,29). The book of Job is a dialogue concerning evil and suffering, with three popular views being represented by the three friends. These views are examined and corrected by the personal history of Job, as

Where have you come from? Then Satan answered Yahweh and said, From going back and forth in the earth, and from walking up and down in it.⁸ Yahweh said to Satan, Have you considered my servant, Job? For there is none like him in the land, a blameless and an upright man, one who fears God, and turns away from evil.⁹ Then Satan answered Yahweh and said, Does Job fear God for nothing?¹⁰ Haven't You made a hedge around him and around his family, and around all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.¹¹ But put forth Your hand now and touch all that he has, and he will renounce You to Your face.¹² Yahweh said to Satan, Behold, all that he has is in your power. Only on himself don't put forth your hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of Yahweh.

Tragedy Strikes Job

¹³ It fell on a day when his sons and his daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house,¹⁴ that there came a messenger to Job and said, The oxen were

ploughing and the donkeys feeding beside them,¹⁵ and the Sabeans attacked and took them away. Yes, they have killed the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you.¹⁶ While he was still speaking, there also came another and said, The fire of God has fallen from the sky and has burned up the sheep and the servants, and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you.¹⁷ While he was still speaking, there came also another and said, The Chaldeans made three bands, and swept down on the camels, and have taken them away, yes, and killed the servants with the edge of the sword; and I alone have escaped to tell you.¹⁸ While he was still speaking, there came also another and said, Your sons and your daughters were eating and drinking wine in their eldest brother's house,¹⁹ and behold, there came a great wind from the wilderness, and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young men, and they are dead. I alone have escaped to tell you.²⁰ Then Job arose, and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and fell down on the ground and worshiped.

well as by the epilogue and prologue to the book. Eliphaz seems to be representative of the idea that Job is being hit by supernaturally controlled evil – Eliphaz speaks of a force of darkness (22:10,11) and sinful or faulty Angels living in an unclean Heaven (4:18; 15:15). Yet the *answer* to all this is that the Satan figure is under God's control, all Job's misfortunes come from *God*, and His Angels – one of whom may have been called 'the adversary' ('Satan') – are in fact perfectly obedient to Him and not disobedient. And finally, Eliphaz and the friends are rebuked for their various wrong understandings, with God declaring Himself supreme and ultimate sovereign. Bildad's view of Angels in 25:5 "The stars are not pure in God's eyes" is corrected by God in Job 38:7, when He says that "the morning stars sang together and all the Sons of God shouted for joy".

21 He said, Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. Yahweh gave, and Yahweh has taken away. Blessed be the name of Yahweh. 22 In all this, Job did not sin, nor charge God with wrongdoing.

CHAPTER 2 Dec. 2

Job's Health is Taken Away

Again it happened on the day when the sons of God came to present themselves before Yahweh, that Satan came also among them to present himself before Yahweh. 2 Yahweh said to Satan, Where have you come from? Satan answered Yahweh and said, From going back and forth in the land, and from walking up and down in it. 3 Yahweh said to Satan, Have you considered My servant Job? For there is none like him in the land, a blameless and an upright man, one who fears God and turns away from evil. He still maintains his integrity, although you incited Me against him, to ruin him without cause. 4 Satan answered

Yahweh and said, Skin for skin. Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. 5 But put forth Your hand now and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will renounce You to Your face. 6 Yahweh said to Satan, Behold, he is in your hand. Only spare his life. 7 So Satan went forth from the presence of Yahweh, and struck Job with painful sores from the sole of his foot to his head. 8 He took for himself a potsherd to scrape himself with, and he sat among the ashes. 9 Then his wife said to him, Do you still maintain your integrity? Renounce God, and die. 10 But he said to her, You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this Job didn't sin with his lips.

The Three Friends Arrive

11 Now when Job's three friends heard of all this evil that had come on him, they each came from his own place: Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, and Zophar the

2:3 To ruin him without cause – We learn here that God can bring suffering into the lives of His children for reasons other than because they have sinned. There is no direct relationship between sin and suffering in this life; for the wicked often prosper. The day of judgment and reward for how life has been lived is ultimately at the final day of judgment when Christ returns. As Job struggles with the question of ‘Why suffering?’, he is progressively driven to a clearer understanding of the future day of judgment and resurrection of the dead to get the reward which God’s justice requires. Thus he was driven by experience and reflection on life to the doctrinal truths which are made explicit in the New Testament. Job begins the book presented as a complete spiritual person and he ends the book presented the same way. The reason for suffering isn’t always so that we personally may develop through it; in Job’s case, it was so that others would learn principles, not least the friends and the ‘satan’ character, and us the readers of subsequent generations. Some experiences and sufferings we have are perhaps more for the benefit of others who are observing, rather than for our own development.

Naamathite, and they made an appointment together to come to sympathize with him and to comfort him. 12 When they lifted up their eyes from a distance and didn't recognize him, they raised their voices and wept; and they each tore his robe, and sprinkled dust on their heads toward the sky. 13 So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spoke a word to him, for they saw that his grief was very great.

CHAPTER 3 Dec. 3

Job Wishes to Die

After this Job opened his mouth, and cursed the day of his birth. 2 Job responded: 3 Let the day perish in which I was born, the night in which it was said, ‘There is a boy conceived’. 4 Let that day be darkness. Don’t let God from above seek for it, neither let the light shine on it. 5 Let darkness and the shadow of death claim it for their own. Let a

cloud dwell on it. Let all that makes black the day terrify it. 6 As for that night, let thick darkness seize on it. Let it not rejoice among the days of the year. Let it not counted in the number of the months. 7 Behold, let that night be barren. Let no joyful voice come therein. 8 Let them curse it who curse the day, who are ready to rouse up Leviathan. 9 Let the stars of its twilight be dark. Let it look for light, but have none, neither let it see the eyelids of the morning, 10 because it didn’t shut up the doors of my mother’s womb, nor did it hide trouble from my eyes. 11 Why didn’t I die from the womb? Why didn’t I give up the spirit when my mother bore me? 12 Why did the knees receive me? Or why the breast, that I should nurse? 13 For now should I have lain down and been quiet. I should have slept, then I would have been at rest, 14 with kings and counsellors of the earth, who built up waste places for themselves;

3:3 Job’s depressive lament and desire to die in this chapter is quoted and alluded to by Jeremiah when he too was in severe depression and struggling with suicidal tendencies (Jer. 15:10; 20:14). Depression happens to God’s people; one simple lesson from all this is that depression itself isn’t a sin. It’s how we respond to it which can become a moral issue. Jeremiah’s way of coping was to associate himself with the words of a depressed faithful believer like Job. Our familiarity with Bible characters will pay great dividends in our hard times, as we see that history – spiritual history, God’s patterns of working with men – is repeating; and the sense of existential loneliness, utter aloneness, which is part of the nexus of depression will to some extent be alleviated. Note too that Job’s suicidal tendencies here and bitterness that God wouldn’t take away his life are not criticized by God; He comments at the end that Job spoke what was right (42:7,8). Yet Job says many hard things about God as the story proceeds; but by grace, God imputed righteousness to him; or made allowance for the pressures upon Job. This isn’t to justify any kind of situational ethic – ‘I did it because the situation forced me to and I had no choice’. Rather does it simply show God’s compassionate, gracious appreciation of situational pressure; and we should bear the same in mind in our consideration of others’ words and behaviour under pressure.

15 or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver: 16 or as a hidden untimely birth I had not been, as infants who never saw light.¹⁷ There the wicked cease from troubling. There the weary are at rest.¹⁸ There the prisoners are at ease together. They don't hear the voice of the taskmaster.¹⁹ The small and the great are there. The servant is free from his master.²⁰ Why is light given to him who is in misery, life to the bitter in soul,²¹ who long for death, but it doesn't come; and dig for it more than for hidden treasures,²² who rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?²³ Why is light given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in?²⁴ For my sighing comes before I eat. My groanings are poured out like water.²⁵ For the thing which

I fear comes upon me, that of which I was afraid has happened to me.²⁶ I was not at ease, neither was I quiet, neither had I rest; but trouble came.

CHAPTER 4 Dec. 3

Eliphaz's First Speech

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered,² If someone ventures to talk with you, will you be grieved? But who can withhold himself from speaking?³ Behold, you have instructed many, you have strengthened the weak hands.⁴ Your words have supported him who was falling, you have strengthened the feeble knees.⁵ But now it has come to you, and you faint. It touches you, and you are troubled.⁶ Isn't your piety your confidence? Isn't the integrity of your ways your hope?⁷ Remember now, whoever perished, being

3:23 There are many connections between Isaiah and the book of Job; those in Is. 40 are especially marked. Is. 40:14 = Job 21:22; 40:17 = 6:18; 40:22 = 9:8; 40:23 = 12:21; 40:24 = 14:8; 40:26 = 25:3; 40:31 = 29:20. The link between Is. 40:27 and Job 3:23 is most significant: "Why do you say, O Jacob, and speak, O Israel, My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgement is passed over from my God?". These are the words of Job here. Thus Job is the prototype of the suffering servant and represents Israel. Israel in captivity in Babylon (which is the context of Isaiah 40) are being bid look to Job, whose family and home were also destroyed by the Chaldeans (1:17) because of their sin. As Job sat in grief and perplexity, so did Judah by the rivers of Babylon. The message of the book of Job to the faithful remnant in captivity was therefore that God had ultimately brought this calamity, and finally He would restore the fortunes of His people. We too in our exiles can see in Job the essence of our own pain, and thereby the sure, ultimate hope of restoration. See on 4:7; 5:14; 21:7; 30:26; 33:27.

3:26 Job complains that although he didn't have a peaceful life anyway, now yet more trouble had come upon him. And yet the impression given by 1:14 is that the animals were quietly grazing and Job was at peace. The simple lesson is that those who appear to others to have a calm, quiet life often have issues going on which are very

4:7 *Whoever perished, being innocent* – The friends were reasoning from the position that suffering only comes as a punishment for sin; and therefore, they concluded, Job must have been a huge secret sinner. Therefore they laid false guilt upon him, and urged him to repent for things he hadn't done. We too live in a world which often

innocent? Or where were the upright cut off? ⁸ According to what I have seen, those who plough iniquity and sow trouble, reap the same. ⁹ By the breath of God they perish. By the blast of His anger are they consumed. ¹⁰ The roaring of the lion and the voice of the fierce lion, the teeth of the young lions, are broken. ¹¹ The old lion perishes for lack of prey. The cubs of the lioness are scattered abroad. ¹² Now a thing was secretly brought to me; my ear received a whisper of it. ¹³ In thoughts from the visions of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, ¹⁴ fear came on me, and trembling, which made all my bones shake. ¹⁵ Then a spirit passed before my face. The hair of my flesh stood up. ¹⁶ It stood still, but I couldn't discern its appearance. A form was before my eyes. Silence; then I heard a voice saying, ¹⁷ ‘Shall mortal man be more just than God?’

Shall a man be more pure than his Maker? ¹⁸ Behold, He puts no trust in His servants. He charges His angels with folly. ¹⁹ How much more those who dwell in houses of clay, whose foundation is in the dust, who are crushed before the moth! ²⁰ Between morning and evening they are destroyed. They perish forever without any regarding it. ²¹ Isn't their tent cord plucked up within them? They die, and that without wisdom’.

CHAPTER 5 Dec. 4

Eliphaz Continues his Speech

Call now; is there any who will answer you? To which of the holy ones will you appeal? ² For resentment kills the foolish man, and jealousy kills the simple. ³ I have seen the foolish taking root, but suddenly I cursed his habitation. ⁴ His children are far from safety. They are crushed in the gate. Neither is there

loads us with false guilt. We must take guilt for our actual sins, and allow the reality of our personal relationship with God to free us from the false guilt others wish to place upon us. The righteous remnant in exile had struggled with the question of how the righteous had perished in the Babylonian invasion (Is. 57:1), and the book of Job was an answer to their struggle over this (see on 3:23).

4:8 According to what I have seen – Eliphaz appeals to personal experience and secular history and wisdom – hence he asks Job to “remember”, to think back and realize, that only the wicked perish (:7). One theme of the book of Job is that God’s ways, as revealed in His word and in His history, contradict human wisdom and traditional conclusions.

4:18 He charges His angels with folly – These are Eliphaz’s words, and God at the end says that he didn’t speak what was right about God (42:7,8). There cannot be sin or rebellion against God in heaven (Ps. 5:4-5; Hab. 1:13; Mt. 6:10; Ps. 103:19-21); Angels don’t sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23). The book of Job actually deconstructs such notions, revealing God as the ultimate source of suffering.

5:4 His children are far from safety – The friends often allude to Job’s situation in describing the fate of the wicked. They assumed that because Job’s children had been killed, therefore he was wicked. This kind of indirect hitting on a person is very hurtful; when we experience it, we can think of Job.

any to deliver them,⁵ whose harvest the hungry eats up, and take it even out of the thorns. They snare gapes for their substance.⁶ For affliction doesn't come forth from the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground;⁷ but man is born to trouble, as the arrows of the sons of Resheph fly upward.⁸ But as for me, I would seek God. I would commit my cause to God,⁹ who does great things that can't be fathomed, marvellous things

without number;¹⁰ who gives rain on the earth, and sends waters on the fields;¹¹ so that He sets up on high those who are low; those who mourn are exalted to safety.¹² He frustrates the devices of the crafty, so that their hands can't perform their enterprise.¹³ He takes the wise in their own craftiness; the counsel of the cunning is carried away headlong.¹⁴ They meet with darkness in the day time, and grope at noonday

5:7 The sons of Resheph – Significantly, it is the friends who make allusion to the ‘Satan’ figures and gods as if they are real, whereas Job in his responses always denies their reality and sees God as the direct source of His sufferings. Eliphaz here blames Job’s troubles upon the “sons of Resheph”; Bildad speaks of how Job’s troubles are to be associated with “the king of terrors” (18:14); but Job’s response is that the source of the evil in his life is ultimately from *God* and not any such being. Resheph was known as “the lord of the arrow” and the Ugaritic tablets associate him with archery. Job’s response is that “The arrows of the Almighty are in me” (6:4), and he laments that God is an archer using him as His target for practice (7:20; 16:12,13). Job refuses to accept Eliphaz’s explanation that Job is a victim of Resheph’s arrows. For Job, if God is “the Almighty” then there is no space left for Resheph. Each blow he received, each arrow strike, was from God and not Resheph.

5:12, 13 The New Testament references to Job suggest that he was seen as a symbol of the Jewish system of reliance on human status, self righteousness and works, which all has to be humbled and no longer trusted if we accept God’s grace. Thus Paul quotes these verses in 1 Cor. 1:19: “For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent”. Eliphaz is explaining why he thinks Job and his view of life have been brought to nothing. Thus Paul read Job as a type of those who were influenced by the pseudo-wisdom of the Judaizers. Paul continues: “Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world?” (1 Cor.1:20). Job’s constant desire to dispute with God and the friends, and the claims both he and they made to possessing wisdom, show Job was clearly in Paul’s mind. “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?” he concludes, maybe thinking of the humbled Job. Job was the greatest of the men of the east (1:3), people who were renowned in the ancient world for their wisdom (Mt.2:1; 1 Kings 4:30). Thus Job would have been full of worldly wisdom, and this is maybe behind Paul’s words of 1 Cor.3:18,19: “If any man among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written [quoting Job 5:13, which is Eliphaz speaking about Job], He takes the wise in their own craftiness”.

5:14 Darkness at noon was understood as Divine judgment; hence when this happened at Christ’s death, we are invited to understand His death as being the judgment of this

as in the night.¹⁵ But He saves from the sword of their mouth, even the needy from the hand of the mighty.¹⁶ So the poor has hope, and injustice shuts her mouth.¹⁷ Behold, happy is the man whom God corrects! Therefore do not despise the chastening of the Almighty.¹⁸ For He wounds, and binds up. He injures, and His hands make whole.¹⁹ He will deliver you in six troubles; yes, in seven no evil shall touch you.²⁰ In famine He will redeem you from death; in war, from the power of the sword.²¹ You shall be hidden from the scourge of the tongue, neither shall you be afraid of destruction when it comes.²² At destruction and famine you shall laugh, neither shall you be afraid of the animals of the earth.²³ For you shall be allied with the stones of the field. The animals of the field shall be at peace with you.²⁴ You shall know that your tent is in peace. You shall visit your fold, and shall miss nothing.²⁵ You shall know also that your

seed shall be great, your offspring as the grass of the earth.²⁶ You shall come to your grave in a full age, like a sheaf of grain comes in its season.²⁷ Look this, we have examined it, so it is. Hear it, and know it for your good.

CHAPTER 6 Dec. 5

Job's Response to Eliphaz

Then Job answered,² Oh that my anguish were weighed, and all my calamity laid in the balances!³ For now it would be heavier than the sand of the seas; therefore have my words been rash.⁴ For the arrows of the Almighty are within me. My spirit drinks up their poison. The terrors of God set themselves in array against me.⁵ Does the wild donkey bray when he has grass? Or does the ox low over his fodder?⁶ Can that which has no flavour be eaten without salt? Or is there any taste in the white of an egg?⁷ My soul refuses to touch them. They are as loathsome

world (Jn. 12:31). To come before Christ on the cross is to come before our judgment; hence the connection between self-examination at the breaking of bread and at the last day. There are also links between Job and Deuteronomy 28, as if Job was the personification of Israel suffering for their sins (see on 3:23). Yet he was personally spotless to God (1:1,2). Thus he was a type of Christ, who although personally sinless was totally identified with sinful humanity. Suffering darkness at noon and groping in the daytime as in the night = Dt. 28:29; Job's fits of blindness (22:10,11) = Dt. 29:29; boils from head to foot (2:7) = Dt. 28:35; made an astonishment (= Dt. 28:37) and a byword (17:6; 30:9) = Dt. 28:37; wishing for night in the morning and for the morning at night (7:4) = Dt. 28:67; Job's of children and cattle = Dt. 28:41,51.

6:3 *Therefore have my words been rash* – Job excuses himself by saying that his rash words were an inevitable result of the situational pressure upon him; he likens himself to a donkey who inevitably neighs when there is no grass (:5). Yet seeing the situations came from God, this was effectively blaming God for his failure. We must recognize that sin isn't inevitable. We can only blame ourselves, not the situations which we have caved in to.

6:4 See on 5:7.

food to me. ⁸ Oh that I might have my request, that God would grant the thing that I long for, ⁹ even that it would please God to crush me; that He would let loose His hand, and cut me off! ¹⁰ Be it still my consolation, yes, let me exult throughout my unending pain, that I have not denied the words of the Holy One. ¹¹ What is my strength, that I should wait further? What is my end, that I should be patient? ¹² Is my strength the strength of stones? Or is my flesh of brass? ¹³ Isn't it that I have no help in me, that wisdom is driven quite from me? ¹⁴ To him who is ready to faint, kindness should be shown from his friend; even to him who forsakes the fear of the Almighty. ¹⁵ My brothers have dealt deceitfully as a brook, as the channel of brooks that pass away; ¹⁶ which are black by reason of the ice, in which the snow hides itself. ¹⁷ In the dry season, they vanish. When it is hot, they are consumed out of their place. ¹⁸ The caravans that travel beside them turn aside. They go up into the waste, and perish. ¹⁹ The caravans of Tema looked. The companies of Sheba waited for them. ²⁰ They were distressed because they were confident. They came there, and were confounded. ²¹ For now you are nothing. You see a terror, and are afraid. ²² Did I say, 'Give to me?' or, 'Offer a present for me from your substance?' ²³ or, 'Deliver me from the adversary's hand?' or, 'Redeem

me from the hand of the oppressors?'. ²⁴ Teach me, and I will hold my peace. Cause me to understand wherein I have erred. ²⁵ How forcible are words of uprightness! But your reproof, what does it reprove? ²⁶ Do you intend to reprove words, since the speeches of one who is desperate are as wind? ²⁷ Yes, you would even cast lots for the fatherless, and make merchandise of your friend. ²⁸ Now therefore be pleased to look at me, for surely I shall not lie to your face. ²⁹ Please rethink. Let there be no injustice. Yes, think again. My cause is righteous. ³⁰ Is there injustice on my tongue? Can't my taste discern mischievous things?

CHAPTER 7 Dec. 5

Job Continues His Response to Eliphaz

Isn't a man forced to labour on Earth? Aren't his days like the days of a hired hand? ² As a servant who earnestly desires the shadow, as a hireling who looks for his wages, ³ so am I made to possess months of misery, wearisome nights are appointed to me. ⁴ When I lie down, I say, 'When shall I arise, and the night be gone?' I toss and turn until the dawning of the day. ⁵ My flesh is clothed with worms and clods of dust. My skin closes up, and breaks out afresh. ⁶ My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope. ⁷ Oh remember that

6:25, 26 Job seems to be saying that there is nothing tangible for him to be reproved over apart from some rash words (:3). Thus he minimizes poor speaking; whereas Christ taught that by our words we are justified or condemned, so important are they (Mt. 12:37).

my life is a breath. My eye shall no more see good.⁸ The eye of him who sees me shall see me no more. Your eyes shall be on me, but I shall not be.⁹ As the cloud is consumed and vanishes away, so he who goes down to Sheol shall come up no more.¹⁰ He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more.¹¹ Therefore I will not keep silent. I will speak in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul.¹² Am I a sea, or a sea monster, that You put a guard over me?¹³ When I say, ‘My bed shall comfort me. My couch shall ease my complaint’;¹⁴ then You scare me with dreams, and terrify me through visions:¹⁵ so that my soul chooses strangling, death rather than to see my bones.¹⁶ I loathe my life. I don’t want to live forever. Leave me alone, for my days are but a breath.¹⁷ What is man, that You should magnify him, that You should

set Your mind on him,¹⁸ that You should visit him every morning, and test him every moment?¹⁹ How long will You not look away from me, nor leave me alone until I swallow down my spittle?²⁰ If I have sinned, what do I do to You, You watcher of men? Why have You set me as an archer’s target for You, so that I am a burden to myself?²¹ Why do You not pardon my disobedience, and take away my iniquity? For now shall I lie down in the dust. You will seek me diligently, but I shall not be.

CHAPTER 8 Dec. 6

Bildad’s First Speech

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered,² How long will you speak these things? Shall the words of your mouth be a mighty wind?³ Does God pervert justice? Or does the Almighty pervert righteousness?⁴ If your children have sinned against him, He has delivered them into the

7:17 That You should set Your mind on him – The Hebrew for ‘to set the mind on’ is also translated “consider” in 2:3, where God asks the ‘satan’ whether he has “considered My servant Job..?” Thus Job sees God as considering him, whilst we are told earlier that satan / the adversary was told to do this. Thus whoever the ‘satan’ or adversary figure was, Job saw this being as ultimately representing God.

7:18 Test him every moment – God’s level of involvement in our lives is amazing, considering His greatness and our smallness.

7:20, 21 Job makes several wrong statements here. In his depression, he wonders why God should be so worried about sin, seeing He is so great. But this is exactly the point – God despite His greatness is so highly sensitive to human behaviour. Job takes comfort in his idea that death will as it were hide him from God (:21), and as he doesn’t want to live for ever (:16), therefore, Job thinks, he will not. But he totally underestimated God’s grace, His desire for us, and to live eternally with us. These things were said by Job in depression and in the grip of suicidal desires (:15); yet at the end, God doesn’t rebuke Job but rather justifies him (42:7). This shows the extent to which God does accept depression as a state which leads to a person saying things which aren’t reflective of the real person, the one whom God sees, loves and judges. It also reflects the extent of the righteousness which God imputes to those He loves.

hand of their disobedience.⁵ If you want to seek God diligently, make your supplication to the Almighty.⁶ If you were pure and upright, surely now He would awaken for you, and make the habitation of your righteousness prosperous.⁷ Though your beginning was small, yet your latter end would greatly increase.⁸ Please inquire of past generations. Find out about the learning of their fathers.⁹ For we are but of yesterday, and know nothing, because our days on earth are a shadow.¹⁰ Shall they not teach you, tell you, and utter words out of their heart?¹¹ Can the papyrus grow up without mire? Can the rushes grow without water?¹² While it is yet in its greenness, not cut down, it withers before any other reed.¹³ So are the paths of all who forget God. The hope of the godless man shall perish,¹⁴ whose confidence shall break apart, whose trust is in a spider's web.¹⁵ He shall lean on his house, but it shall not stand. He shall cling to it, but it shall not endure.¹⁶ He is green before the sun. His shoots go forth over his garden.¹⁷ His roots are wrapped around the rock pile. He sees the place of stones.¹⁸ If he is destroyed from his

place, then it shall deny him, saying, 'I have not seen you'.¹⁹ Behold, this is the joy of his way: out of the earth, others shall spring.²⁰ Behold, God will not cast away a blameless man, neither will He uphold the evildoers.²¹ He will still fill your mouth with laughter, your lips with shouting.²² Those who hate you shall be clothed with shame. The tent of the wicked shall be no more.

CHAPTER 9 Dec. 7

Job's Response to Bildad

Then Job answered,² Truly I know that it is so, but how can man be just with God?³ If He wishes to contend with him, he can't answer Him one time in a thousand.⁴ God who is wise in heart, and mighty in strength: who has hardened himself against Him, and prospered?⁵ He removes the mountains, and they don't know it, when He overturns them in His anger.⁶ He shakes the earth out of its place. Its pillars tremble.⁷ He commands the sun, and it doesn't rise, and seals up the stars.⁸ He alone stretches out the heavens, and treads on the back of Yam.⁹ He makes the Bear, Orion, and the Pleiades, and the rooms of the south.

8:6 *If you were pure and upright* – The words of the friends suggest that their view was in fact that of the satan in the prologue; a case can be made that they are in fact the 'satan' / adversary figure. Satan quibbled with God's pronunciation of Job as perfect and upright (1:8). And here Bildad likewise seems to allude to this when he comments that if Job were indeed pure and upright, then God would help him.

8:8–10 Bildad emphasizes the view of traditional wisdom; and one theme of Job is that traditionally accepted ideas about God are shown by His word and by actual experience to be wrong. Bildad insists that Job must have sinned because traditional wisdom taught that calamity is always the result of sin. We see here how wrong understandings lead to damaged personal relationships and tragic misjudgements in practice.

10 He does great things past finding out; yes, marvellous things without number. 11 Behold, He goes by me, and I don't see Him. He passes on also, but I don't perceive Him. 12 Behold, He snatches away. Who can hinder Him? Who will ask Him, 'What are you doing?'. 13 God will not withdraw His anger. The cohorts of Rahab stoop under Him. 14 How much less shall I answer Him, and choose my words to argue with Him? 15 Though I were righteous, yet I wouldn't answer Him. I would make supplication to my judge. 16 If I had called, and He had answered me, yet I wouldn't believe that He listened to my voice. 17 For He bruises me with a storm, and multiplies my wounds without cause. 18 He will not allow me to catch my breath, but fills me with bitterness. 19 If it is a matter of

strength, behold, He is mighty! If of justice, 'Who', says He, 'will summon me?'. 20 Though I am righteous, my own mouth shall condemn me. Though I am blameless, it shall prove me perverse. 21 I am blameless. I don't respect myself. I despise my life. 22 It is all the same. Therefore I say that He destroys the blameless and the wicked. 23 If the scourge kills suddenly, He will mock at the trial of the innocent. 24 The earth is given into the hand of the wicked. He covers the faces of its judges. If it be not He, then who is it? 25 Now my days are swifter than a runner. They flee away, they see no good, 26 they have passed away as the swift ships, as the eagle that swoops on the prey. 27 If I say, 'I will forget my complaint, I will put off my sad face, and cheer up'; 28 I am afraid of all my sorrows,

9:16 *I wouldn't believe that He listened to my voice* – In times of depression, even clearly answered prayer fails to spiritually register with us. And the ending of the book of Job shows that God in His grace understands that.

9:21 See on 21:7.

9:24 The G.N.B. puts it: "If God didn't do it, who did?". This is a key verse in understanding the book of Job. After all the theories of 'Who's responsible for all this evil in Job's life?', Job concludes that the source simply has to be God – and not anyone else. If He truly is all powerful, then who else could ultimately be responsible? Job states that "the cohorts of Rahab [a Canaanite 'Satan' figure] shall stoop under [God]" (:13), clearly alluding to the helpers of Tiamat in the Babylonian myth. "God alone stretches out the heavens, and treads on the back of Yam" – the sea, or sea-monster (:8). Job believed that it was God who was seeking to swallow him up in death (10:8) – surely alluding to how Mot, the god of death, was thought to have jaws encompassing the earth and swallowing up people at their death into the underworld. But Job rejected that myth – he saw God as the swallower, and death as a return to the dust, albeit in hope of bodily resurrection at the last day (19:25-27).

9:28 *I know that You* – Note the change of pronoun. As Job talks about God as "He" in replying to Bildad, he moves on to address himself directly to God (see too 16:5-7). Dialogue with others about our faith and turmoils often leads to our direct approach to Him in a way which would never have happened if we'd not bothered to have that dialogue but stored all these things up internally.

I know that You will not hold me innocent. ²⁹ I shall be condemned. Why then do I labour in vain? ³⁰ If I wash myself with snow, and cleanse my hands with lye, ³¹ yet You will plunge me in the ditch. My own clothes shall abhor me. ³² For He is not a man, as I am, that I should

answer Him, that we should come together in judgment. ³³ There is no umpire between us, that might lay his hand on us both. ³⁴ Let Him take his rod away from me. Let His terror not make me afraid, ³⁵ then I would speak, and not fear Him; but I am not in such a position within myself.

9:32 Come together in judgment – The prologue opens with the court of Heaven. The ‘Satan’ figure is not in itself evil, but could refer to an Angel [a ‘good’ one, as there are no ‘sinful’ Angels], or an Angel representative of a fellow worshipper on earth. The debates in Heaven between the Angels are reflected and carried out on earth – rather like how in Daniel 1-6 we have events on earth described in historical terms, and then we are given an insight into what’s been going on in Heaven in Daniel 7-12. Yet the court / legal language continues throughout the book – e.g. Job is “perfect”, i.e. legally blameless. Job appeals for ‘witnesses’ (:33-35; 16:18-22; 19:20-27), an advocate in Heaven (:33), denies his guilt and demands a legal list of his sins (13:19), wishes for God to come to trial (:3), and thus Job is described as a man who has taken out a ‘case’ with God (23:4; 40:2). Job 29-31 is effectively Job’s declaration of legal innocence and an appeal to God to hear his case more sympathetically (31:35). God pronounces a final legal verdict at the end (42:7). It’s as if the whole experience of Job was [at least partly] in order to test out the Canaanite theories of ‘Satan’, suffering and evil in the court of Heaven. The friends represent the traditional views of evil, and often make reference to the myths of their day about ‘Satan’ figures. They speak as if *they* are the final court – Eliphaz speaks of how the judges and elders of their day, the “holy ones”, had concluded Job was guilty, and that they, the friends, were right: “To which of the holy ones will you appeal [legal language]?... we have [legally] examined this, and it [Job’s guilt] is true” (5:1,27). This is of great comfort to those who feel misjudged by man – above them in Heaven the ultimate Heavenly court is considering our case, and that is all that matters. Job perhaps perceived this, even though the vision of the court of Heaven in chapters 1 and 2 was presumably unknown to him as he endured his sufferings; for in response to the friends’ wrong judgment of him, he comments that “God covers the faces of the judges of the earth” (9:24). The final summing up speeches from both God and Job simply emphasize the omnipotence of God; how ultimately *He* has been the adversary to Job, and there is no room in the cosmos of His creation for any other power, especially any of the various personal ‘Satan’ figures believed in by the worlds of both Canaan and Babylon. The heavenly court of “sons of God” is paralleled with all the stars in 38:7. Bear in mind that the stars were understood as pagan deities. The whole pagan understanding of the cosmos is being deconstructed. The stars are paralleled with the Angelic sons of God who are all totally under God’s control; they are *His* Heavenly court.

9:33 There is no umpire between us – Job’s sufferings and mental torments led him to perceive the need for a mediator; he was led through it all to understand his need for Christ. And our experiences are designed the same way. See on 10:4.

CHAPTER 10 Dec. 8***Job Continues His Response to Bildad***

My soul is weary of my life. I will give free course to my complaint. I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.² I will tell God, ‘Do not condemn me. Show me why You contend with me.³ Is it good to You that You should oppress, that You should despise the work of Your hands, and smile on the counsel of the wicked?⁴ Do You have eyes of flesh? Or do You see as man sees?⁵ Are Your days as the days of mortals, or Your years as man’s years,⁶ that You inquire after my iniquity, and search after my sin?⁷ Although You know that I am not wicked, there is no one who can deliver out of Your hand.⁸ Your hands have framed me

and fashioned me altogether, yet You swallow me up.⁹ Remember, I beg You, that You have fashioned me as clay. Will You bring me into dust again?¹⁰ Haven’t You poured me out like milk, and curdled me like cheese?¹¹ You have clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews.¹² You have granted me life and grace. Your visitation has preserved my spirit.¹³ Yet You hid these things in Your heart. I know that this is with You:¹⁴ If I sin, then You mark me. You will not acquit me from my iniquity.¹⁵ If I am wicked, woe to me. If I am righteous, I still shall not lift up my head, being filled with disgrace, and conscious of my affliction.¹⁶ If my head is held high, You hunt me like a lion. Again You show Yourself wonderful to me.

10:4 See on 9:33. Job through his sufferings came to so wish that God could fully appreciate things from a human perspective. Unknown to him at the time, Job was coming to long for the real, Biblical Christ – a man of our nature yet God’s Son, our representative who could empathize with us and reveal the human face of God.

10:8 See on 9:24.

10:9 Will You bring me into dust again – Job had no belief in an ‘immortal soul’; he believed the Biblical position, that we are made from dust and will return to dust again, with no inherent immortality. This is alluding to Gen.3:19 – the curse upon sinful Adam that he would return to the dust. Job seems to be admitting that he is like Adam in that it appeared God was going to end his life as a result of his sin – return him to the dust. But he reasons that this is unfair, seeing he has not sinned (10:7,14,15). Thus he oscillates between saying he has sinned and is like Adam, and then claiming that although he is being treated like Adam this is unfair. Similarly Job complains “He bruises me...without cause” (9:17); the same word translated “bruise” in Gen.3:15, thus implying that he is receiving the result of the punishment in Eden for no reason. 27:2-4 also alludes to the record of God’s creation of Adam in Gen.2:7. In 31:33 Job denies that he is like Adam in that unlike him, he has no sin to hide: “If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity...”. And yet like Adam he was humiliated by God’s questioning at the end of the book. See on 13:20-22; 14:20. We too oscillate between accepting our sinfulness and yet considering our judgment for it as unfair. We are all brought like Job to the crushing and total acceptance of it in the end.

10:16 Again You show Yourself wonderful to me – Job felt as we sometimes do that

17 You renew Your witnesses against me, and increase Your indignation on me. Changes and warfare are within me. 18 ‘Why, then, have You brought me forth out of the womb? I wish I had given up the spirit, and no eye had seen me. 19 I should have been as though I had not been. I should have been carried from the womb to the grave. 20 Aren’t my days few? Cease then. Leave me alone, that I may find a little comfort, 21 before I go where I shall not return from, to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death; 22 the land dark as midnight, of the shadow of death, without any order, where the light is as midnight’.

CHAPTER 11 Dec. 9

Zophar's First Speech

Then Zophar the Naamathite responded, 2 Shouldn’t the multitude of words be answered? Should a man full of talk be justified? 3 Should your boastings make men hold their peace? When you mock, shall no man make you ashamed? 4 For you say, ‘My doctrine is pure. I am clean in Your eyes’. 5 But oh that God would speak, and open His lips against you, 6 that He would show you the secrets of wisdom! For true wisdom has two sides. Know therefore that God exacts of you less

than your iniquity deserves. 7 Can you fathom the mystery of God? Or can you probe the limits of the Almighty? 8 They are high as heaven. What can you do? They are deeper than Sheol. What can you know? 9 Its measure is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea. 10 If He passes by, or confines, or convenes a court, then who can oppose Him? 11 For He knows false men. He sees iniquity also, even though He doesn’t consider it. 12 An empty-headed man becomes wise when a man is born as a wild donkey’s colt. 13 If you set your heart aright, stretch out your hands toward Him. 14 If iniquity is in your hand, put it far away. Don’t let unrighteousness dwell in your tents. 15 Surely then you shall lift up your face without spot; yes, you shall be steadfast, and shall not fear: 16 for you shall forget your misery. You shall remember it as waters that are passed away. 17 Life shall be clearer than the noonday. Though there is darkness, it shall be as the morning. 18 You shall be secure, because there is hope. Yes, you shall search, and shall take your rest in safety. 19 Also you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. Yes, many shall court your favour. 20 But the eyes of the wicked shall fail. They shall have

one moment God is tender and gracious, but the next almost violent and rough with us. But this is only because we fail to perceive the full picture of God.

10:21 *I go where I shall not return from* – Job’s faith in resurrection and ultimate salvation oscillated; for in 19:25–27 he is very clear about it. It could be, however, that Job was forced to a belief in resurrection, judgment and reward at the last day by his sustained reflection on the fact that he as a basically good man was so suffering, the wicked were prospering, and yet God is a God who [for all Job’s doubts of the moment] must ultimately reward the righteous and the wicked.

no way to flee. Their hope shall be the giving up of the spirit.

CHAPTER 12 Dec. 10

Job Responds to Zophar

Then Job answered, ² No doubt, but you are the people, and wisdom shall die with you. ³ But I have understanding as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Yes, who doesn't know such things as these? ⁴ I am like one who is a joke to his neighbour, because I called on God, and He answered. The just, the blameless man is a joke. ⁵ In the thought of him who is at ease there is contempt for misfortune. It is ready for them whose foot slips. ⁶ The tents of robbers prosper. Those who provoke God are secure, who carry their God in their hands. ⁷ But ask the animals now, and they shall teach you; the birds of the sky, and they shall tell you. ⁸ Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach you. The fish of the sea shall declare to you. ⁹ Who doesn't know that in all these, the hand of Yahweh has done this, ¹⁰ in whose hand is the life of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind? ¹¹ Doesn't the ear try words, even

as the palate tastes its food? ¹² With aged men is wisdom, in length of days understanding. ¹³ With God is wisdom and might. He has counsel and understanding. ¹⁴ Behold, He breaks down, and it can't be built again. He imprisons a man, and there can be no release. ¹⁵ Behold, He withholds the waters, and they dry up. Again, He sends them out, and they overturn the earth. ¹⁶ With Him is strength and wisdom. The deceived and the deceiver are His. ¹⁷ He leads counsellors away stripped. He makes judges fools. ¹⁸ He loosens the bond of kings. He binds their waist with a belt. ¹⁹ He leads priests away stripped, and overthrows the mighty. ²⁰ He removes the speech of those who are trusted, and takes away the understanding of the elders. ²¹ He pours contempt on princes, and loosens the belt of the strong. ²² He uncovers deep things out of darkness, and brings out to light the shadow of death. ²³ He increases the nations, and He destroys them. He enlarges the nations, and He leads them captive. ²⁴ He takes away understanding from the chiefs of the people of the earth, and causes them to wander in

11:10 *If He... convenes a court... who can oppose Him?* – Job disagreed. He felt as did Moses and others that we can enter dialogue with God, disagree with Him, ask Him to change His mind. Zophar is reasoning from the perspective that all we can do is to submit to God, in an almost Islamic sense. Yet God thirsts for relationship with us; and therefore we can reason with God, even in the court of Heaven.

12:3 *I am not inferior to you* – Job repeats this in 13:2. Job refused to take false guilt, nor to feel himself inferior to those who accused him of sinning and who insisted he take their advice and adopt their perspectives. He realized that those who were trying to push him down beneath them were mere men like him. We too at times have to consciously refuse to be psychologically pushed down beneath others.

12:19 See on 13:26-28.

a wilderness where there is no way.
 25 They grope in the dark without light. He makes them stagger like a drunken man.

CHAPTER 13 Dec. 11

Job Continues His Speech

Behold, my eye has seen all this. My ear has heard and understood it. 2 What you know, I know also. I am not inferior to you. 3 Surely I would speak to the Almighty. I desire to reason with God. 4 But you are forgers of lies. You are all physicians of no value. 5 Oh that you would be completely silent! Then you would be wise. 6 Hear now my reasoning. Listen to the pleadings of my lips. 7 Will you speak unrighteously for God, and talk deceitfully for Him? 8 Will you show partiality to Him? Will you contend for God? 9 Is it good that He should search you out? Or as one deceives a man, will you deceive Him? 10 He will

surely reprove you if you secretly show partiality. 11 Shall not His majesty make you afraid, and His dread fall on you? 12 Your memorable sayings are proverbs of ashes, your defences are defences of clay. 13 Be silent, leave me alone, that I may speak. Let come on me what will. 14 Why should I take my flesh in my teeth, and put my life in my hand? 15 Even if He slays me, still I will trust in Him. Nevertheless, I will justify my ways before Him. 16 This also shall be my salvation, in that a Godless man shall not come before Him. 17 Hear diligently my speech. Let my declaration be in Your ears. 18 See now, I have set my cause in order. I know that I am righteous. 19 Who is he who will contend with me? For then would I hold my peace and give up the spirit. 20 Only don't do two things to me; then I will not hide myself from Your face: 21 withdraw Your hand far from me; and

13:15 Even if He slays me, still I will trust in Him – The language of ‘slaying’ takes us back to the Mosaic commands about how a ‘slayer’ of a man might be killed by the ‘avenger of blood’ (Dt. 19:6). Job saw God as slaying him; yet he also sees God as the ‘witness’ in the case (16:19), and the avenger of Job’s blood (19:25). Job even asks God to not let the earth cover his blood, so that God as the avenger of Job’s blood may avenge Job’s death (16:18). Job does *not* see ‘Satan’ as his slayer, and God as the avenger of his blood. Instead Job – in a quite breathtaking set of associations – sees God in all these things: the slayer, the legal witness to the slayer, the avenger of blood, and the One who will enforce the doing of justice in this case, the One who will not let the earth cover Job’s blood. If Job really believed in a superhuman Satan, in Satan as the bad guy and God as the avenger of the injustice, he surely would’ve expressed himself differently. As Job imagines God as it were taking vengeance on Himself, so he came to portray for all time the way that evil and good are indeed both ultimately from God.

13:20-22 This alludes to the fall of Adam in Eden. Job was recognizing that he had sinned, that he knew that the sense of spiritual limbo he was in paralleled Adam’s hiding from God in Eden, but that he would only respond to God’s call and come out of hiding to confess his sin as he knew God wanted him to, if God withdrew His

don't let Your terror make me afraid.
 22 Then call, and I will answer; or let me speak, and You answer me.
 23 How many are my iniquities and sins? Make me know my disobedience and my sin.
 24 Why do You hide Your face, and hold me for Your enemy?
 25 Will You harass a driven leaf? Will You pursue the dry stubble?
 26 For You write bitter things against me, and make me inherit the iniquities of my youth:
 27 You also put my feet in the stocks, and mark all my paths. You set a mark on the soles of my feet,
 28 though I am decaying like a rotten thing, like a garment that is moth-eaten.

CHAPTER 14 Dec. 12

Further Words from Job

Man, who is born of a woman, is of few days, and full of trou-

ble. 2 He comes forth like a flower, and is cut down. He also flees like a shadow, and doesn't continue. 3 Do You open your eyes on such a one, and bring me into judgment with You? 4 Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one. 5 Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months is with You, and You have appointed his bounds that he can't pass; 6 look away from him, that he may rest, until he shall accomplish, as a hireling, his day. 7 For there is hope for a tree, If it is cut down, that it will sprout again, that the tender branch of it will not cease. 8 Though its root grows old in the earth, and its stock dies in the ground, 9 yet through the scent of water it will bud, and put forth boughs like a plant.¹⁰ But man dies, and is laid low. Yes, man gives up

hand – i.e. relieved him of the immediate trials he was then experiencing. Thus Job was trying to barter with God – wanting Him to withdraw the trials in return for Job making the confession which he knew God wanted. See on 10:9; 14:20. In various but differing ways, we all madly struggle against the call to totally repent; whether by pure stubbornness, misinterpreting Scripture, or whatever twisted logic and sophistry. One lesson of the book of Job is the way God seeks to bring us to total and utter repentance.

13:27 The mark on him that was a witness wherever he went echoes that which God put on Cain. God's preservation of Cain from death also finds a parallel in Job's feeling that God is preserving him unnaturally (3:21-23; 10:9-15). As with the similarities with Adam (see on 10:9), Job complains that although he is associated with Cain, this is not really fair. "You set a mark on the soles of my feet" because, Job complains, God observes him with unnecessary detail. Zophar possibly recognized that Job was like Cain in that his face had fallen and he was so angry, although also fearful of God (Gen. 4:5); he said that if Job repented he would "lift up his face and not fear" (11:15). See on 16:17,18. As noted on 13:20-22, all feelings we have that our suffering is unfair are all part of our stubborn refusal to face the enormity and just consequences of our sin.

14:4 *Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?* – Job seems to be justifying his sins by arguing that sin is inevitable because of our nature. This is just a theological form of the stubborn refusal to face up to our sinfulness as noted on 13:20-22. The

the spirit, and where is he? ¹¹ As the waters fail from the sea, and the river wastes and dries up, ¹² so man lies down and doesn't rise. Until the heavens are no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep. ¹³ Oh that You would hide me in Sheol, that You would keep me secret, until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! ¹⁴ If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my warfare would I wait, until my release should come. ¹⁵ You would call, and I would answer You. You would have a desire to the work of Your hands. ¹⁶ But now You number my steps. Don't You watch over my sin? ¹⁷ My disobedience is sealed up in a bag. You fasten up my iniquity. ¹⁸ But the mountain falling comes to nothing. The rock is removed out of its place; ¹⁹ the waters wear away the stones. The torrents of it wash away the dust of the earth. So

You destroy the hope of man. ²⁰ You forever prevail against him, and he departs. You change his face, and send him away. ²¹ His sons come to honour, and he doesn't know it. They are brought low, but he doesn't perceive it about them. ²² But his flesh on him has pain, and his soul within him mourns.

CHAPTER 15 Dec. 13

Eliphaz's Second Speech

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered, ² Should a wise man answer with vain knowledge, and fill himself with the east wind? ³ Should he reason with unprofitable talk, or with speeches with which he can do no good? ⁴ Yes, you do away with fear, and hinder devotion before God. ⁵ For your iniquity teaches your mouth, and you choose the language of the crafty. ⁶ Your own mouth condemns you, and not I. Yes, your own lips testify against

Lord Jesus had our nature and yet didn't sin; all that we say about human nature we say about Him. We aren't inevitable sinners, victims of a human nature which wasn't our fault as it were. See on 15:14,15.

14:12 *So man lies down and doesn't rise* – Job's faith in and desire for a future resurrection develops throughout the book; in 19:25-27 he is very clear about it and his earnest longing for it.

14:20 The reference to change and sending away refers to Adam being sent out of Eden, or also to Cain's countenance falling and then being sent away from God. Yet in :15 Job is alluding to God's calling to Adam in the garden; and Job is full of reasons which he will give God of his own rightness and innocence. So at this stage, Job is torn between recognizing his sinfulness and yet justifying it, perhaps only seeing it in terms of being a victim of the consequences of Adam's sin in Eden. As the book progresses, he is brought to the total acceptance of personal sinfulness and the justness of Divine punishment which God seeks to bring us all to.

15:6 These words are alluded to by Jesus when He taught that our words will be the basis of our condemnation or acceptance (Mt. 12:37). He also picks up this verse in His words to the one-talent man in the parable: "Out of your own mouth will I judge you" (Lk. 19:22). The only ones to be rejected at the last day are those whose words in

you. ⁷ Are you the first man who was born? Or were you brought forth before the hills? ⁸ Have you heard the secret counsel of God? Do you limit wisdom to yourself? ⁹ What do you know, that we don't know? What do you understand, which is not in us? ¹⁰ With us are both the gray-headed and the very aged men, much elder than your father. ¹¹ Are the consolations of God too small for you, even the word that is gentle toward you? ¹² Why does your heart carry you away? Why do your eyes flash, ¹³ that you turn your spirit against God, and let such words go out of your mouth? ¹⁴ What is man, that he should be clean? What is he who is born of a woman, that he should be righteous? ¹⁵ Behold, He puts no trust in His holy ones. Yes, the heavens are not clean in His sight; ¹⁶ how much less one who is abominable and corrupt, a man who drinks iniquity like water! ¹⁷ I will show you, listen to me; that which I have seen I will declare, ¹⁸ which wise men have told by their fathers, and have not hidden it; ¹⁹ to whom alone the land was given, and no stranger passed among them: ²⁰ the wicked man writhes in pain all his days, even the number of years that are laid up for the op-

pressor. ²¹ A sound of terrors is in his ears. In prosperity the destroyer shall come on him. ²² He doesn't believe that he shall return out of darkness. He is waited for by the sword. ²³ He wanders abroad for bread, saying, 'Where is it?'. He knows that the day of darkness is ready at his hand. They prevail against him, as a king ready to the battle. ²⁵ Because he has stretched out his hand against God, and behaves himself proudly against the Almighty; ²⁶ he runs at Him with a stiff neck, with the thick shields of his bucklers; ²⁷ because he has covered his face with his fatness, and gathered fat on his thighs. ²⁸ He has lived in desolate cities, in houses which no one inhabited, which were ready to become heaps. ²⁹ He shall not be rich, neither shall his substance continue, neither shall their possessions be extended on the earth. ³⁰ He shall not depart out of darkness. The flame shall dry up his branches. By the breath of God's mouth shall he go away. ³¹ Let him not trust in emptiness, deceiving himself; for emptiness shall be his reward. ³² It shall be accomplished before his time. His branch shall not be green. ³³ He shall shake off his unripe grape as the vine, and shall cast

this life have asked for it. Our words will as it were be quoted back to us in that day. This is how important they are.

15:14, 15 Eliphaz's view of both human beings and Angels was wrong. We aren't inevitable sinners just because of our nature; it's no sin to be human, to be alive, and the wrath of God isn't kindled upon every baby who is conceived and born just because they are humans. See on 14:4. God perhaps answers the wrong idea that Angels sin by commenting that *all* of them rejoiced in His creation (38:7).

15:21 Eliphaz says that Job's sudden problems amid his prosperity were what would happen to all the wicked. This seems to be alluded to in 1 Thess.5:3 concerning the sudden destruction of rich, spiritually self confident 'believers' at Christ's return.

off his flower as the olive tree.³⁴ For the company of the Godless shall be barren, and fire shall consume the tents of bribery.³⁵ They conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. Their heart prepares deceit.

CHAPTER 16 Dec. 14

Job Responds to Eliphaz

Then Job answered,² I have heard many such things. You are all miserable comforters!³ Shall vain words have an end? Or what provokes you that you answer?⁴ I also could speak as you do. If your soul were in my soul's place, I could join words together against you, and shake my head at you,⁵ but I would strengthen you with my mouth. The solace of my lips would relieve you.⁶ Though I speak, my grief is not subsided. Though I forbear, what am I eased?⁷ But now, God, you have surely worn me out. You have made desolate all my company.⁸ You have shrivelled me up. This is a witness

against me. My leanness rises up against me. It testifies to my face.⁹ He has torn me in His wrath, and persecuted me. He has gnashed on me with His teeth. My adversary sharpens His eyes on me.¹⁰ They have gaped on me with their mouth. They have struck me on the cheek reproachfully. They gather themselves together against me.¹¹ God delivers me to the ungodly, and casts me into the hands of the wicked.¹² I was at ease, and He broke me apart. Yes, He has taken me by the neck, and dashed me to pieces. He has also set me up for His target.¹³ His archers surround me. He splits my kidneys apart, and does not spare. He pours out my gall on the ground.¹⁴ He breaks me with blow after blow. He runs on me like a giant.¹⁵ I have sewed sackcloth on my skin, and have thrust my horn in the dust.¹⁶ My face is red with weeping. Deep darkness is on my eyelids.¹⁷ Although there is no violence in my hands, and my prayer is

15:35 *They conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity. Their heart prepares deceit –* Sin is often described as being conceived within the human heart (Acts 5:4; James 1:13-15). Sin is totally our fault; it proceeds out of the human heart (Mk. 7:15-23), not because of any cosmic ‘Satan’ being making us sin.

16:5-7 See on 9:28.

16:9 *My adversary sharpens His eyes on me –* The Hebrew word *satan* means ‘adversary’. Although a different Hebrew word is used here, Job clearly saw God as his adversary and not any wicked cosmic being.

16:9-14 It was so hard for Job to accept that God and not any orthodox ‘Satan’ figure was his adversary. It’s one thing to deduce from the Bible that both good and disaster comes from the Lord, as taught in Is. 45:5-7. It’s of course quite another to accept it in real life, and Job is an inspiring example. The poetry here speaks of Job’s awesome and even angry realization that *God* is in fact [in a sense] his enemy / adversary. See on 19:26.

16:17, 18 Here Job associates himself with unfairly persecuted Abel; he likens his cry for justice to the crying of Abel’s blood from the ground in Gen.4:10. He is trying to justify his refusal to recognize that he, a relatively righteous man, was in fact a serious

pure.¹⁸ Earth, don't cover my blood. Let my cry have no place to rest.¹⁹ Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven. He who vouches for me is on high.²⁰ My friends scoff at me. My eyes pour out tears to God,²¹ that He would maintain the right of a man with God, of a son of man with his neighbour!²² For when a few years have come, I shall go the way of no return.

CHAPTER 17 Dec. 14

Job Continues His Response to Eliphaz

My spirit is consumed. My days are extinct, and the grave is ready for me.² Surely there are mockers with me. My eye dwells on their provocation.³ Now give a pledge, be collateral for me with Yourself. Who is there who will strike hands with me?⁴ For You have hidden their heart from understanding, therefore You shall not exalt them.⁵ He who denounces his friends for a prey, even the eyes of his children shall fail.⁶ But He has made me a byword of the people. They spit in my face.⁷ My eye also is dim by reason of sorrow. All my members are as a shadow.⁸ Upright men shall be astonished at this. The innocent shall stir up himself against the godless.⁹ Yet shall the righteous hold on to his way. He who has clean hands shall grow stronger and stronger.¹⁰ But as for you all, come on now again; I shall not find a wise man among you.¹¹ My days are past, my plans are broken off, as are the thoughts of my heart.¹² They change the night into day, saying 'The light is near' in the presence of darkness.¹³ If I look for Sheol as my house, if I have spread my couch in the darkness,¹⁴ if I have said to corruption, 'You are my father'; to the worm, 'My mother', and 'my sister';¹⁵ where then is my hope? As for my hope, who shall see it?¹⁶ Shall it go down with me to the gates of Sheol, or descend together into the dust?

eous hold on to his way. He who has clean hands shall grow stronger and stronger.¹⁰ But as for you all, come on now again; I shall not find a wise man among you.¹¹ My days are past, my plans are broken off, as are the thoughts of my heart.¹² They change the night into day, saying 'The light is near' in the presence of darkness.¹³ If I look for Sheol as my house, if I have spread my couch in the darkness,¹⁴ if I have said to corruption, 'You are my father'; to the worm, 'My mother', and 'my sister';¹⁵ where then is my hope? As for my hope, who shall see it?¹⁶ Shall it go down with me to the gates of Sheol, or descend together into the dust?

CHAPTER 18 Dec. 15

Bildad's Second Speech

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered,
T² How long will you hunt for words? Consider, and afterwards we will speak.³ Why are we counted as animals, which have become unclean in your sight?⁴ You who tear yourself in your anger, shall the earth be forsaken for you? Or shall the rock be removed out of its place?⁵ Yes, the light of the wicked shall be put out, the spark of his fire shall not shine.⁶ The light shall be dark in his tent. His lamp above him shall be put out.⁷ The steps of his strength

sinner. It's perhaps easier for those the world considers sinners to come to repentance than it is for those whom the world considers 'normal' and even righteous. This includes many of us; hence the biting relevance of Job to us. See on 13:20-22.

17:9 Shall grow stronger and stronger – There is an upward spiral in spiritual life, and also a downward spiral, in which, e.g., God hides correct understanding from people (4) in response to their not really wanting it. Thus He can even delude people to believe lies (2 Thess. 2:11).

shall be shortened. His own counsel shall cast him down.⁸ For he is cast into a net by his own feet, and he wanders into its mesh.⁹ A snare will take him by the heel. A trap will catch him.¹⁰ A noose is hidden for him in the ground, a trap for him in the way.¹¹ Terrors shall make him afraid on every side, and shall chase him at his heels.¹² His strength shall be famished. Calamity shall be ready at his side.¹³ The members of his body shall be devoured. The firstborn of death shall devour his members.¹⁴ He shall be rooted out of his tent where he trusts. He shall be brought to the king of terrors.¹⁵ There shall dwell in his tent that which is none of his. Sulphur shall be scattered on his habitation.¹⁶ His roots shall be dried up beneath. Above shall his branch be cut off.¹⁷ His memory shall perish from the earth. He shall have

no name in the street.¹⁸ He shall be driven from light into darkness, and chased out of the world.¹⁹ He shall have neither son nor grandson among his people, nor any remaining where he lived.²⁰ Those who come after shall be astonished at his day, as those who went before were frightened.²¹ Surely such are the dwellings of the unrighteous. This is the place of him who doesn't know God.

CHAPTER 19 Dec. 15

Job Responds to Bildad

Then Job answered,² How long will you torment me, and crush me with words?³ You have reproached me ten times. You aren't ashamed that you attack me.⁴ If it is true that I have erred, my error remains with myself.⁵ If indeed you will magnify yourselves against me, and plead against me my reproach;

18:14 *The king of terrors* – Bildad blamed Job's calamity upon pagan versions of the ‘Satan’ myth such as this supposed king, and the “firstborn of death” (:13). One intention of the book of Job is to deconstruct these ideas and to present God as the ultimate source of both good and disaster.

18:19 Bildad throughout this chapter is alluding to Job’s loss of his home and family, and is certain that the next step is for Job himself to die without descendants – because, he assumes, Job has sinned. The restoration of Job’s health and the gift of a new family at the end of the book proves Bildad so wrong. We need to learn the lesson not to assume things about others’ relationship with God nor about the meaning of events in their lives.

19:2 *Crush me with words* – We should never assume that words are harmless. One lesson from the book of Job, as we see his mental agony progressing throughout his responses to the friends, is that words do indeed crush and hurt; they are often remembered for years after they have been spoken or written. God’s law is unique amongst legal codes for criminalizing words and thoughts as much as actions.

19:4 *My error remains with myself* – A very true observation. It’s often the case that when someone sins against one individual, others, or indeed a whole congregation, consider that the sin has been against them and that they somehow are called to forgive the sin and to demand repentance towards them. By doing so they are making the same mistake as the friends. We are to forgive sin against ourselves, and not take upon ourselves other sins as if they were against us personally.

6 know now that God has subverted me, and has surrounded me with His net. 7 Behold, I cry out because of injustice, but I am not heard. I cry for help, but there is no justice. 8 He has walled up my way so that I can't pass, and has set darkness in my paths. 9 He has stripped me of my glory, and taken the crown from my head. 10 He has broken me down on every side, and I am gone. My hope He has plucked up like a tree. 11 He has also kindled His wrath against me. He counts me among His adversaries. 12 His troops come on together, build a siege ramp against me, and encamp around my tent. 13 He has put my brothers far from me. My acquaintances are wholly estranged from me. 14 My relatives have gone away. My familiar friends have forgotten me. 15 Those who dwell in my house, and my maids, count me for a stranger. I am an alien in their

sight. 16 I call to my servant, and he gives me no answer. I beg him with my mouth. 17 My breath is offensive to my wife. I am loathsome to the children of my own mother. 18 Even young children despise me. If I arise, they speak against me. 19 All my familiar friends abhor me. They whom I loved have turned against me. 20 My bones stick to my skin and to my flesh. I have escaped by the skin of my teeth. 21 Have pity on me, have pity on me, you my friends; for the hand of God has touched me. 22 Why do you persecute me as God, and are not satisfied with my flesh? 23 Oh that my words were now written! Oh that they were inscribed in a book! 24 That with an iron pen and lead they were engraved in the rock forever! 25 But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end, he will stand upon the earth. 26 After my skin is destroyed, then in my

19:8 Num. 22:22 describes how an Angel of God stood in a narrow, walled path before Balaam, so that his donkey fell down beneath him. That Angel is described as a “satan”, an adversary, to Balaam. Job comments how the sufferings which the ‘satan’ brought upon him were God ‘walling up my way that I cannot pass’. The connection is clear – and may indicate that Job’s satan was a satan-Angel, acting on God’s behalf as an adversary to Job just as such an Angel did to Balaam. Job and Balaam have certain similarities – both were prophets (in Job’s case see 4:4; 23:12; 29:4 cp. 15:8; Amos 3:7; James 5:10,11); both had genuine difficulty in understanding God’s ways, but they to varying degrees consciously rebelled against what they did understand; both thus became angry with God, and were reproved by God through being brought to consider the Angel-controlled natural creation. Job should’ve learnt from Balaam – or *vice versa* – that God’s walling us in is because He wants us to go His way, and we shouldn’t try to force our way past Him.

19:21 *The hand of God has touched me* – God put Job into the hand of the ‘satan’ (1:12). Job saw the satan as basically God in action, not as a cosmic being outside of God’s control and not performing His bidding.

19:26 In 2:4-6 we have the ‘Satan’ commenting that Job’s flesh and skin need to be harmed; but here we have Job stating his faith that even though *God* destroys his flesh and skin, yet God shall ultimately save him.

flesh shall I see God,²⁷ whom I, even I, shall see for myself. My eyes shall see it, and not a stranger's. My heart is consumed within me.²⁸ If you say, ‘How we will persecute him!'; because the root of the matter is found in me,²⁹ be afraid of the sword, for wrath brings the punishments of the sword, that you may know there is a judgment.

CHAPTER 20 Dec. 16

Zophar's Second Speech

Then Zophar the Naamathite answered,² Therefore do my thoughts make me answer, even by reason of my haste that is in me.³ I have heard the reproof which seeks to shame me. The spirit of my understanding makes me answer.⁴ Don't you know this from old time, since man was placed on earth,⁵ that the triumphing of the wicked is short, the joy of the godless but for a moment?⁶ Though his height mount up to the heavens, and his head reach to the clouds,⁷ yet he shall perish forever like his own dung. Those who have seen him shall say, ‘Where is

he?'.⁸ He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found. Yes, he shall be chased away like a vision of the night.⁹ The eye which saw him shall see him no more, neither shall his place any more see him.¹⁰ His children shall seek the favour of the poor. His hands shall give back his wealth.¹¹ His bones are full of his youth, but youth shall lie down with him in the dust.¹² Though wickedness is sweet in his mouth, though he hide it under his tongue,¹³ though he spare it, and will not let it go, but keep it still within his mouth;¹⁴ yet his food in his bowels is churned. It is cobra venom within him.¹⁵ He has swallowed down riches, and he shall vomit them up again. God will cast them out of his belly.¹⁶ He shall suck cobra venom. The viper's tongue shall kill him.¹⁷ He shall not look at the rivers, the flowing streams of honey and butter.¹⁸ That for which he laboured he shall restore, and shall not swallow it down. According to the substance that he has gotten, he shall not rejoice.¹⁹ For he has oppressed and forsaken the poor.

19:27 The light at the end of our tunnel is that we will personally see God, with our own eyes we will behold Him, and not through anyone else's eyes (see too Is. 33:17). Job understood God as a personal being.

20:19 Job denies doing these things; if he had, it's unlikely that God would describe his earlier life in such positive terms (1:2). Zophar was once Job's friend, but he now speaks with a seething anger against him and claims all kind of false things against Job – which as his “friend” he surely knew weren't true. This radical change was related to Zophar's false understanding that suffering always comes as a result of sin. He became convinced Job was a sinner, and when he couldn't prove that, he simply fabricated things in his mind and then became persuaded they were true. If Zophar had to admit that Job was righteous, then he would have to revise his view of suffering; admit he had been wrong; and be prepared to accept that suffering may strike him too, despite his own apparent righteousness. And it would seem that his jealousy at Job's wealth was then vented out. He felt that if Job was a sinner, then he could treat him in

He has violently taken away a house, and he shall not build it up.²⁰ Because he knew no quietness within him, he shall not save anything of that in which he delights.²¹ There was nothing left that he didn't devour, therefore his prosperity shall not endure.²² In the fullness of his sufficiency, distress shall overtake him. The hand of each one who is in misery shall come on him.²³ When he is about to fill his belly, God will cast the fierceness of His wrath upon him. It will rain on him while he is eating.²⁴ He shall flee from the iron weapon. The bronze arrow shall strike him through.²⁵ He draws it forth, and it comes out of his body. Yes, the glittering point comes out of his liver. Terrors are upon him.²⁶ All darkness is laid up for his treasures. An unfanned fire shall devour him. It shall consume that which is left in

his tent.²⁷ The heavens shall reveal his iniquity. The earth shall rise up against him.²⁸ The increase of his house shall depart. They shall rush away in the day of His wrath.²⁹ This is the portion of a wicked man from God, the heritage appointed to him by God.

CHAPTER 21 Dec. 17

Job Responds to Zophar

Then Job answered,² Listen diligently to my speech. Let this be your consolation.³ Allow me, and I also will speak; after I have spoken, mock on.⁴ As for me, is my complaint to man? Why shouldn't I be impatient?⁵ Look at me, and be astonished. Lay your hand on your mouth.⁶ When I remember, I am troubled. Horror takes hold of my flesh.⁷ Why do the wicked live, become old, yes, and grow mighty in

a less than human way. Fear of revising ones' own understandings, admission of being wrong forced upon people by others' experiences, dashed expectations and false assumptions... can lead to this kind of seething hatred and false accusation, and is the root of much relationship breakdown today.

21:4 Why shouldn't I be impatient? – Job falls into the trap of justifying poor behaviour because of the extremity of the circumstances. Eventually he is led to the final climax of chapter 42, where he stops making excuses, blaming his nature, his situation and the machinations of others – and accepts his sinfulness *in toto*. It was so hard for him to do this because relatively speaking he was righteous. But spiritually middle class believers who keep their noses clean publically and avoid major personal scandals have got to all the same radically repent; and this is the pointed relevance of Job to so many believers today.

21:7 In 9:21 and by implication in other places, Job effectively says that there is no point in serving God or striving for obedience to God. This is what the priests of Israel later said at the time of the restoration from exile (Mal. 3:14). Malachi is alluding to Job's words here and in 9:21. Note that Elihu also claimed that Job had said that serving God was of no profit (34:9). Job has much relevance to the returning exiles – see on 3:23. Job was ignoring the very fine sensitivity of God to human behaviour; the fact He is so high and we are so morally low doesn't mean that our behaviour is irrelevant. Job's problem was a refusal to repent, and he is here making the excuse that

power? ⁸ Their child is established with them in their sight, their offspring before their eyes. ⁹ Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them. ¹⁰ Their bulls breed without fail. Their cows calve, and don't miscarry. ¹¹ They send forth their little ones like a flock. Their children dance. ¹² They sing to the tambourine and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the pipe. ¹³ They spend their days in prosperity. In an instant they go down to Sheol. ¹⁴ They tell God, ‘Depart from us, for we don't want to know about Your ways. ¹⁵ What is the Almighty, that we should serve Him? What profit should we have, if we pray to Him?’ ¹⁶ Behold, their prosperity is not in their hand. The counsel of the wicked is far from me. ¹⁷ How often is it that the lamp of the wicked is put out, that their calamity comes on them, that God distributes sorrows to them in His anger? ¹⁸ How often is it that they are as stubble before the wind, as chaff that the storm carries away? ¹⁹ You say, ‘God lays up his iniquity for his children’. Let him recompense it to himself, that he may know it. ²⁰ Let his own eyes see his destruction. Let him drink of the wrath of the Almighty. ²¹ For what does he care for his house after him, when the number of his months is cut off? ²² Shall any teach God knowledge, since He judges those who are high? ²³ One dies in his full strength, being wholly at ease and

quiet. ²⁴ His pails are full of milk. The marrow of his bones is moistened. ²⁵ Another dies in bitterness of soul, and never tastes of good. ²⁶ They lie down alike in the dust. The worm covers them. ²⁷ Behold, I know your thoughts, the devices with which you would wrong me. ²⁸ For you say, ‘Where is the house of the prince? Where is the tent in which the wicked lived?’ ²⁹ Haven't you asked wayfaring men? Don't you know their evidences, ³⁰ that the evil man is reserved to the day of calamity, that they are led forth to the day of wrath? ³¹ Who shall declare his way to his face? Who shall repay him what he has done? ³² Yet he will be carried to the grave. Men shall keep watch over the tomb. ³³ The clods of the valley shall be sweet to him. All men shall draw after him, as there were innumerable before him. ³⁴ So how can you comfort me with nonsense, because in your answers there remains only falsehood?

CHAPTER 22 Dec. 18

Eliphaz's Third Speech

Then Eliphaz the Temanite answered, ² Can a man be profitable to God? Surely he who is wise is profitable to himself. ³ Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that you are righteous? Or does it benefit Him, that you make your ways perfect? ⁴ Is it for your piety that He reproves you, that He enters with you into judgment? ⁵ Isn't your wickedness

God's insensitivity to sin meant he didn't have to repent. We must learn the lesson – God's sensitivity to sin is the very reason we should repent of it.

22:3 Is it any pleasure to the Almighty, that you are righteous? – See on 21:7.

great? Neither is there any end to your iniquities.⁶ For you have taken pledges from your brother for nothing, and stripped the naked of their clothing.⁷ You haven't given water to the weary to drink, and you have withheld bread from the hungry.⁸ But as for the mighty man, he had the earth from you. The honourable man, he lived in it.⁹ You have sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless you have broken.¹⁰ Therefore snares are around you. Sudden fear troubles you,¹¹ or darkness, so that you can not see, and floods of waters cover you.¹² Isn't God in the heights of heaven? See the height of the stars, how high they are!¹³ You say, 'What does God know? Can He judge through the thick darkness?¹⁴ Thick clouds are a covering to Him, so that He

doesn't see. He walks on the vault of the sky'.¹⁵ Will you keep the old way, which wicked men have trodden,¹⁶ who were snatched away before their time, whose foundation was poured out as a stream,¹⁷ who said to God, 'Depart from us'; and, 'What can the Almighty do for us?'.¹⁸ Yet He filled their houses with good things, but the counsel of the wicked is far from me.¹⁹ The righteous see it, and are glad. The innocent ridicule them,²⁰ saying, 'Surely those who rose up against us are cut off. The fire has consumed their remnant'.²¹ Acquaint yourself with Him, now, and be at peace. Thereby good shall come to you.²² Please receive instruction from His mouth, and lay up His words in your heart.²³ If you return to the Almighty, you shall be built up, if you put away unright-

22:6 *You have taken pledges from your brother for nothing, and stripped the naked –* This was absolutely not the case. But Eliphaz was so convinced that suffering comes as a result of sin that he concluded Job must have sinned and therefore imagined these things until he became convinced Job had done them. People who start imagining false things about others because of gut feelings about them end up genuinely believing those things are true. It all arises from an inability to accept we may be wrong in our worldview and therefore in our judgment of others.

22:13 *You say, 'What does God know?'* – The fact God sees and knows all things leads us to right behaviour. Eliphaz here is reasoning that because Job refused to accept that sin and suffering were related in his case, therefore this implied something about Job's view of God. We must be careful of extrapolating like this – if you believe X then you believe Y about God which means you think God is Z. Such false logic leads to a perilous path of reasoning which results in the breakdown of relationships, slander, misrepresentation and judgmentalism which in itself is so wrong before God. If Eliphaz had left judgment to God and focused instead upon practically helping Job, he wouldn't have slid into this path of false logic.

22:22 *Please receive instruction from His mouth* – Eliphaz is playing God here. What he means is, 'Please receive instruction from me'; he assumes too quickly that his views are God's. If we accept the Bible as God's word, then our own intuitions and life wisdom must be seen by us as just that – and not God's word. The very specific existence of God's word means quite simply that our word isn't His.

eousness far from your tents. ²⁴ Lay your treasure in the dust, the gold of Ophir among the stones of the brooks. ²⁵ The Almighty will be your treasure, and precious silver to you. ²⁶ For then you will delight yourself in the Almighty, and shall lift up your face to God. ²⁷ You shall make your prayer to Him, and He will hear you. You shall pay your vows. ²⁸ You shall also decree a thing, and it shall be established to you. Light shall shine on your ways. ²⁹ When they cast down, you shall say, ‘Be lifted up’. He will save the humble person. ³⁰ He will even deliver him who is not innocent. Yes, he shall be delivered through the cleanness of your hands.

CHAPTER 23 Dec. 19

Job's Response to Eliphaz

Then Job answered, ² Even today my complaint is grievous. His hand is heavy in spite of my groaning. ³ Oh that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come even to His seat! ⁴ I would set my cause in

order before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments. ⁵ I would know the words which He would answer me, and understand what He would tell me. ⁶ Would He contend with me in the greatness of His power? No, but He would listen to me. ⁷ There the upright might reason with Him, so I should be delivered forever from my judge. ⁸ If I go east, He is not there; if west, I can't find Him; ⁹ He works to the north, but I can't see Him. He turns south, but I can't catch a glimpse of Him. ¹⁰ But He knows the way that I take. When He has tried me, I shall come forth like gold. ¹¹ My foot has held fast to His steps. I have kept His way, and not turned aside. ¹² I haven't gone back from the commandment of His lips. I have treasured up the words of His mouth more than my necessary food. ¹³ But He stands alone, and who can oppose Him? What His soul desires, even that He does. ¹⁴ For He performs that which is appointed for me. Many such things are with Him. ¹⁵ Therefore I am terrified at His presence.

23:10 *When He has tried me, I shall come forth like gold* – The allusion may be to a refiner of gold who heats the gold until the dross is purged and becomes so pure that he sees his own face reflected in the molten gold. This is what the heat of trial is intended to achieve in our lives. Job perceived God and not any evil ‘satan’ being as responsible for his trials, and he realized even in his depression that they had a purpose – to bring forth God’s likeness in him.

23:12 *The words of His mouth more than my necessary food* – As eating is a regular necessity which we automatically find time for, so our feeding upon God’s word each day should likewise be regular and natural. In our generation, it ought to be that we can’t easily lay our head down each night unless we have read or heard His word some time during the day.

23:15 *I am terrified at His presence* – Job’s speeches are full of contradictions. He feels he is in God’s presence, right before His judgment seat; but at other times he feels he’s desperately searching for God and trying to get an audience, but God is being elusive (:8,9). These oscillations in perception of God are part of depression and

When I consider, I am afraid of Him.¹⁶ For God has made my heart faint. The Almighty has terrified me.¹⁷ Because I was not cut off before the darkness, neither did He cover my face with the thick darkness.

CHAPTER 24 Dec. 19

Job Continues His Response

Why aren't times laid up by the Almighty? Why don't those who know Him perceive His days?² There are people who remove the landmarks. They violently take away flocks, and feed them.³ They drive away the donkey of the fatherless, and they take the widow's ox for a pledge.⁴ They turn the needy out of the way. The poor of the earth all hide themselves.⁵ Behold, as wild donkeys in the desert, they go forth to their work, seeking diligently for food. The wilderness yields them bread for their children.⁶ They cut

their provender in the field. They glean the vineyard of the wicked.⁷ They lie all night naked without clothing, and have no covering in the cold.⁸ They are wet with the showers of the mountains, and embrace the rock for lack of a shelter.⁹ There are those who pluck the fatherless from the breast, and take a pledge of the poor,¹⁰ so that they go around naked without clothing. Being hungry, they carry the sheaves.¹¹ They make oil within the walls of these men. They tread wine presses, and suffer thirst.¹² From out of the populous city, men groan. The soul of the wounded cries out, yet God doesn't regard the folly.¹³ These are of those who rebel against the light. They don't know its ways, nor stay in its paths.¹⁴ The murderer rises with the light. He kills the poor and needy. In the night he is like a thief.¹⁵ The eye also of the adulterer waits for the

the bi-polar problems Job was obviously experiencing; hence he one moment eagerly looks ahead to the resurrection, at others he denies a resurrection can happen, or says he doesn't want to participate in it. Through it all, God loved and accepted him, so that at the end of the book He commands Job (42:7). In spiritual terms, we're all bi-polar. If we rejoice in God's gracious acceptance of us and His focus upon our better side, we urgently need to have this attitude to our brethren, whose weaker side is often right in our face.

24:1 Whilst God may work according to time periods, those periods aren't known by man. We don't know how long we nor anyone else shall live, nor the exact date of Christ's return. Any study of prophetic 'time periods' should bear this in mind; that God wishes us to live as it were in an eternal now, not pacing ourselves according to our expectations of time, but fully devoted to Him each moment.

24:2 Job in this chapter labours the point that the wicked prosper in this life, and yet because sin is significant to God, Job concluded that death is the punishment for their sin. This is stated explicitly in the New Testament (Rom. 6:23). We shouldn't miss the significance of death; it is in the end the answer as to why the wicked appear to prosper in this life. Again, by implication and inference, Job is driven towards hope in a resurrection from the dead and a recompense in this earth as the result of living righteously before God.

twilight, saying, ‘No eye shall see me’. He disguises his face. ¹⁶ In the dark they dig through houses. They shut themselves up in the daytime. They don’t know the light. ¹⁷ For the morning is to all of them like thick darkness, for they know the terrors of the thick darkness. ¹⁸ They are foam on the surface of the waters. Their portion is cursed in the earth. They don’t turn into the way of the vineyards. ¹⁹ Drought and heat consume the snow waters, so does Sheol those who have sinned. ²⁰ The womb shall forget him. The worm shall feed sweetly on him. He shall be no more remembered. Unrighteousness shall be broken as a tree. ²¹ He devours the barren who don’t bear. He shows no kindness to the widow. ²² Yet God preserves the mighty by His power. He rises up who has no assurance of life. ²³ God gives them security, and they rest in it. His eyes are on their ways. ²⁴ They are exalted; yet a little while, and they are gone. Yes, they are brought low, they are taken out of the way as all others, and are cut off as the tops of the ears of grain. ²⁵ If it isn’t so now, who will prove

me a liar, and make my speech worth nothing?

CHAPTER 25 Dec. 20

Bildad’s Third Speech

Then Bildad the Shuhite answered, ² Dominion and fear are with Him. He makes peace in His high places. ³ Can His armies be counted? On whom does His light not arise? ⁴ How then can man be just with God? Or how can he who is born of a woman be clean? ⁵ Behold, even the moon has no brightness, and the stars are not pure in His sight; ⁶ how much less man, who is a worm, the son of man, who is a worm!

CHAPTER 26 Dec. 20

Job’s Response to Bildad

Then Job answered, ² How have you helped him who is without power! How have you saved the arm that has no strength! ³ How have you counselled him who has no wisdom, and plentifully declared sound knowledge! ⁴ To whom have you uttered words? Whose spirit came forth from you? ⁵ Those who are deceased tremble, those beneath the waters

25:4 The argument here presented is that because God is so great, man can never be right with Him. Job who had lived a good life and been declared as righteous by God must therefore have been driven to wonder how he could be right with God when he was a sinner, whilst also accepting God’s supreme moral height and the depth of human failure to be like Him. The answer he was surely driven to is that God would have to impute His very own righteousness to man. And this is what He does to those reckoned as “in” Christ. Again we see how the sufferings of Job’s life and his struggle to understand them led him by inference to the essence of the Christian Gospel, even if it wasn’t specifically revealed to him in so many words. For the Gospel of imputed righteousness in Christ had in essence been preached to Abraham (Rom. 4:9; Gal. 3:8).

26:6 Job is alluding to the myths about the supposed ‘satan’ figure Mot having the underworld open before him and pushing into it whoever he wishes. When he speaks of how “Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering” he is saying that God

and all that live in them.⁶ Sheol is naked before God, and Abaddon has no covering.⁷ He stretches out the north over empty space, and hangs the earth upon nothing.⁸ He binds up the waters in His thick clouds, and the cloud is not burst under them.⁹ He encloses the face of His throne, and spreads His cloud upon it.¹⁰ He

has defined a boundary on the surface of the waters, and to the confines of light and darkness.¹¹ The pillars of heaven tremble and are astonished at His rebuke.¹² He stirs up the sea with His power, and by His understanding He strikes through Rahab.¹³ By His Spirit the heavens are garnished. His hand has pierced the swift serpent.

and not Mot has this power; and in that context speaks as if God is the real attacker, not, therefore, Mot or any other such being. Num. 16:31–35 likewise describes *God* as swallowing up Korah, Dathan and Abiram into death in the earth – as if to deconstruct the idea that Mot did things like this.

26:10 Job understands that it is *God* who sends the good and evil, the light and the darkness, into his life (30:26). Significantly, he states his faith that *God even marks out the boundary between light and darkness* – a similar idea in essence to the reassurance of Is. 45:5 that God creates both light and darkness. The ‘darkness’, however we experience and understand it, is framed and limited by God; it is not a power or being with independent existence outside the realm of God’s power. God confirms Job’s understanding later, when He says that it is He who can swaddle the sea [another figure for uncontrollable evil in pagan thought] in bands of darkness (38:9) – as if to say that it is God who gives things like darkness and the sea their sinister appearance and perception by men; but He is in control of them, using them in His hand. Job’s idea that God fixes limits for the darkness is repeated by God saying that He sets limits for the raging sea (38:10). God controls evil, or human perception of it (e.g. of the sea as being evil), and He sets limits for it – which was exactly what He did to the power of ‘Satan’ in the prologue to Job. All these statements by God about His use of and power over things like darkness and sea, which were perceived as being independent forces of evil, are quite different to Canaanite and Babylonian worldviews. In them, gods like Baal had to fight Yam, the evil sea god, with clubs provided by other deities; in the Babylonian version, Marduk has to arm himself with various weapons in order to try to get supremacy over Tiamat. But Yahweh as revealed in the book of Job has utter and absolute power over the sea [monster] and the [supposed god of] darkness – for He created the sea and the darkness and uses them creatively for His purpose. That’s the whole purpose of the many ‘nature passages’ in the book of Job.

26:11–14 Job understood God to be in control in Heaven; he rejects the idea of a cosmic conflict going on ‘up there’ which the friends seem to allude to. More specifically, Job speaks here of how God’s hand forms and can pierce the “crooked serpent” and smite any monster. It’s as if Job is mocking the idea that God has let him go into the hands of the cosmic monsters which the friends believed in. For Job so often stresses that it is the “hand of God” which has brought His affliction (19:21; 23:2). That Divine hand was far greater than any mythical ‘Satan’ figure. The theme of his speech in Job 28 is that Yahweh alone is to be feared throughout the entire cosmos. Nobody else – such as the ‘Satan’ figures alluded to by the friends – needed to be feared.

26:13 *His Spirit... His hand* – The Spirit of God isn’t a person nor any part of a sup-

14 Behold, these are but the outskirts of His ways. How small a whisper do we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?

CHAPTER 27 Dec. 21

Job's Parables Continue

Job again took up his parable and said, ² As God lives, who has taken away my right, the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter. ³ For the length of my life is still in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils; ⁴ surely my lips shall not speak unrighteousness, neither shall my tongue utter deceit. ⁵ Far be it from me that I should justify you. Until I die I will not put away my integrity from me. ⁶ I hold fast to my righteousness, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live. ⁷ Let my enemy be as the wicked. Let him who rises up against me be as the unrighteous. ⁸ For what is the hope of the godless, when he is

cut off, when God takes away his life? ⁹ Will God hear his cry when trouble comes on him? ¹⁰ Will he delight himself in the Almighty, and call on God at all times? ¹¹ I will teach you about the hand of God. That which is with the Almighty will I not conceal. ¹² Behold, all of you have seen it yourselves; why then have you become altogether vain? ¹³ This is the portion of a wicked man with God, the heritage of oppressors, which they receive from the Almighty. ¹⁴ If his children are multiplied, it is for the sword. His offspring shall not be satisfied with bread. ¹⁵ Those who remain of him shall be buried in death. His widows shall make no lamentation. ¹⁶ Though he heap up silver as the dust, and prepare clothing as the clay; ¹⁷ he may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver. ¹⁸ He builds his house as the moth, as a booth which the watchman makes.

posed ‘Trinity’ – a word which never occurs in the Bible. His Spirit is His ‘hand’, His power in practical operation.

26:14 *How small a whisper do we hear of Him!* – We must ever bear this in mind when speaking of ‘the truth’ and the need for correct Biblical interpretation. When in difference with other believers about Biblical interpretation, we must remember that we ourselves only know a fraction of God’s truth. We mustn’t assume that because we know the Gospel and have responded to it, therefore we know all the truth there is to know. We know just a whisper about the final fullness of God.

27:2-4 See on 10:9.

27:14 Job comments that if the children of the wicked “are multiplied, it is for the sword”. Seeing his own children had been destroyed, Job presumably was accepting that he was among the “wicked”, as he does elsewhere (e.g. 9:2). Hos. 9:13,16 repeats such language regarding the punishment of sinful Israel: “Ephraim shall bring forth his children to the murderer”. Dt. 28:41 has the same idea. Job was a symbol of the suffering servant, Israel, struggling in Babylon to come to terms with their sinfulness and the rightness of God’s judgments against them (see on 3:23). On a personal level, Job is here moving closer to the final total acceptance of sinfulness and personal guilt which brings his sufferings to a close in chapter 42.

19 He lies down rich, but he shall not do so again. He opens his eyes, and he is not. 20 Terrors overtake him like waters. A storm steals him away in the night. 21 The east wind carries him away, and he departs. It sweeps him out of his place. 22 For it hurls at him, and does not spare, as he flees away from his hand. 23 Men shall clap their hands at him, and shall hiss him out of his place.

CHAPTER 28 Dec. 22

Job's Parable about Wisdom

Surely there is a mine for silver, and a place for gold which they refine. 2 Iron is taken out of the earth, and copper is smelted out of the ore. 3 Man sets an end to darkness, and searches out, to the furthest bound of thick darkness, in order to find the stones of obscurity. 4 He breaks open a shaft away from where people live. They are forgotten by the foot walking above. They hang far from men, they swing back and forth. 5 As for the earth, out of it comes bread; underneath it is turned up as it were by fire. 6 Sapphires come from its rocks. It has dust of gold. 7 That path no bird of prey knows, neither has the falcon's eye seen it. 8 The proud animals have not trodden it, nor has the fierce lion passed by there. 9 He puts forth his hand on the flinty rock, and he overturns the mountains by the roots. 10 He cuts out channels among the rocks. His eye sees every precious thing. 11 He binds the streams

that they don't trickle. The thing that is hidden he brings forth to light. 12 But where shall wisdom be found? Where is the place of understanding? 13 Man doesn't know its price; neither is it found in the land of the living. 14 The deep says, 'It isn't in me'. The sea says, 'It isn't with me'. 15 It can't be gotten for gold, neither shall silver be weighed for its price. 16 It can't be valued with the gold of Ophir, with the precious onyx, or the sapphire. 17 Gold and glass can't equal it, neither shall it be exchanged for jewels of fine gold. 18 No mention shall be made of coral or of crystal. Yes, the price of wisdom is above rubies. 19 The topaz of Ethiopia shall not equal it, neither shall it be valued with pure gold. 20 Where then does wisdom come from? Where is the place of understanding? 21 Seeing it is hidden from the eyes of all living, and kept close from the birds of the sky. 22 Destruction and Death say, 'We have heard a rumour of it with our ears'. 23 God understands its way, and He knows its place. 24 For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees under the whole sky. 25 He establishes the force of the wind. Yes, He measures out the waters by measure. 26 When He made a decree for the rain, and a way for the lightning of the thunder; 27 then He saw it, and declared it. He established it, yes, and searched it out. 28 To man He said, 'Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom. To depart from evil is understanding'.

28:28 This verse is the crunch line of this chapter's lengthy description of how wisdom cannot be found in any specific location or hidden part of the planet. The very length of the preamble is only to build up to the colossal significance of this verse: that

CHAPTER 29 Dec. 22***Job Describes His Earlier Life***

Job again took up his parable and said, ² Oh that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me; ³ when His lamp shone on my head, and by His light I walked through darkness, ⁴ as I was in the ripeness of my days, when the friendship of God was in my tent, ⁵ when the Almighty was yet with me, and my children were around me, ⁶ when my steps were washed with butter, and the rock poured out streams of oil for me, ⁷ when I went

forth to the city gate, when I prepared my seat in the street. ⁸ The young men saw me and hid themselves. The aged rose up and stood. ⁹ The princes refrained from talking, and laid their hand on their mouth. ¹⁰ The voice of the nobles was hushed, and their tongue stuck to the roof of their mouth. ¹¹ For when the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it commended me: ¹² because I delivered the poor who cried, and the fatherless also, who had none to help him, ¹³ the blessing of him who was ready to perish came

wisdom isn't located anywhere, it is experienced in the life of the person who fears God and departs from evil. Especially in the age of over information in which we live, the idea is strongly felt in us all that wisdom is a set of facts, theological propositions, pithy sayings, located with somebody, in the care of some group of people, in some book. But the point is that wisdom isn't theoretical nor abstract, but intensely practical. We would all far rather make an academic study of something 'spiritual' than in practice root out evil from our lives; in this lies the attraction of intellectualizing spirituality. But wisdom as defined here is in experience; hence Job realizes that before his sufferings, he had only heard of God in the ear, but through practical experience he had as it were seen Him (42:5).

29:12 *I delivered the poor who cried* – False allegation leads us to self defence, and Job seems to fall into the trap of being so self-defensive, listing his good works in such detail, that he forgets his own sinfulness. False accusation, refusal to accept false guilt, not being understood and being rejected by others mustn't lead us to forget our real and actual sins. In the bigger picture, God used the false accusations to try to make Job take a serious inward look at his life in order to try to bring him to total repentance for what he actually had done wrong. But it seems Job didn't respond, he got caught up on the level of answering the false accusations and didn't allow the process of self-examination to go any further as God intended.

29:13 Job's words of 30:1 certainly smack of arrogance: "Whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs". This would mean that his merciful acts to the poor were done in a 'charitable' spirit, thinking that such public acts declared him outwardly righteous; he thought that his charity towards the widow were thereby his righteousness, a clothing and diadem of glory and beauty. This has clear reference to the clothing of the Mosaic High Priest with his outward show of righteousness. God was trying to lead Job beyond this to a trust in the righteousness which God imputes and which isn't our own – see on 25:4. There are times when he realizes this, but the need he felt to clear himself before the friends led him to overlook it; it took God's final intervention to bring him to throw himself totally upon God's righteousness and not his own.

on me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.¹⁴ I put on righteousness, and it clothed me. My justice was as a robe and a diadem.¹⁵ I was eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame.¹⁶ I was a father to the needy. The cause of him who I didn't know, I searched out.¹⁷ I broke the jaws of the unrighteous, and plucked the prey out of his teeth.¹⁸ Then I said, 'I shall die in my own house, I shall number my days as the sand.'¹⁹ My root is spread out to the waters. The dew lies all night on my branch.²⁰ My glory is fresh in me. My bow is renewed in my hand'.²¹ Men listened to me, waited, and kept silence for my counsel.²² After my words they didn't speak again. My speech fell on them.²³ They waited for me as for the rain. Their mouths drank as with the spring rain.²⁴ I smiled on them when they had no confidence. They didn't reject the light of my face.²⁵ I chose out their way, and sat as chief. I lived as a king in the army, as one who comforts the mourners.

CHAPTER 30 Dec. 23

Job Describes His Present Situation

But now those who are younger than I have me in derision, whose fathers I would have disdained to put with my sheep dogs.² Of what use is the strength of their hands to me, men in whom ripe age has perished?³ They are gaunt from lack and famine. They gnaw the dry

ground, in the gloom of waste and desolation.⁴ They pluck salt herbs by the bushes. The roots of the broom are their food.⁵ They are driven out from the midst of men. They cry after them as after a thief;⁶ so that they dwell in frightful valleys, and in holes of the earth and of the rocks.⁷ Among the bushes they bray; and under the nettles they are gathered together.⁸ They are children of fools, yes, children of base men. They were flogged out of the land.⁹ Now I have become their song. Yes, I am a byword to them.¹⁰ They abhor me, they stand aloof from me, and don't hesitate to spit in my face.¹¹ For He has untied his cord, and afflicted me; and they have thrown off restraint before me.¹² On my right hand rise the rabble. They thrust aside my feet, they cast up against me their ways of destruction.¹³ They mar my path, they set forward my calamity, without anyone's help.¹⁴ As through a wide breach they come, in the midst of the ruin they roll themselves in.¹⁵ Terrors have turned on me. They chase my honour as the wind. My welfare has passed away as a cloud.¹⁶ Now my soul is poured out within me. Days of affliction have taken hold on me.¹⁷ In the night season my bones are pierced in me, and the pains that gnaw me take no rest.¹⁸ By great force is my garment disfigured. It binds me about as the collar of my coat.¹⁹ He has cast me into

29:16 *The cause of him who I didn't know, I searched out – Our goodness to others shouldn't be merely a positive response to their requests; rather should we like God think and plan how we can show grace to others, and therefore 'search out' their situations and how we could be kind and gracious to them.*

the mire. I have become like dust and ashes.²⁰ I cry to You, and You do not answer me. I stand up, and You gaze at me.²¹ You have turned to be cruel to me. With the might of Your hand You persecute me.²² You lift me up to the wind, and drive me with it. You dissolve me in the storm.²³ For I know that You will bring me to death, to the house appointed for all living.²⁴ However, doesn't one stretch out a hand to stop a fall? Or in his calamity therefore cry for help?²⁵ Didn't I weep for him who was in trouble? Wasn't my soul grieved for the needy?²⁶ When I looked for good, then evil came; when I waited for light, there came darkness.²⁷ My heart is troubled, and doesn't rest. Days of affliction have come on me.²⁸ I go mourning without the sun. I

stand up in the assembly, and cry for help.²⁹ I am a brother to jackals, and a companion to ostriches.³⁰ My skin grows black and peels from me. My bones are burned with heat.³¹ Therefore my harp has turned to mourning, and my pipe into the voice of those who weep.

CHAPTER 31 Dec. 23

Job Clears Himself

I made a covenant with my eyes,
How then should I look lustfully
at a young woman?² For what is
the portion from God above, and
the heritage from the Almighty on
high?³ Is it not calamity to the un-
righteous, and disaster to the work-
ers of iniquity?⁴ Doesn't He see my
ways, and number all my steps?⁵ If I
have walked with falsehood, and my

30:19 *I have become like dust and ashes* – But we are by nature “dust and ashes”. Job came to realize his own humanity through his sufferings; God often teaches us those basic truths again and again because we like to see ourselves as more than we really are.

30:21 Job recognized that his trials came from the hand of God, but knew that His hand would not kill him (:24). This was exactly the brief given to ‘satan’ in the prologue – God put Job into Satan’s ‘hand’ in order to try Job, but commanded ‘satan’: “preserve his life”. Again we see that God was effectively the satan or adversary to Job. In similar vein God (in the Angel of the presence) “was turned to be (Israel’s) enemy” because of their sin (Is. 63:10). Job complains that God through the satan-Angel has “turned to be cruel to me”.

30:26 *When I looked for good, then evil came; when I waited for light, there came darkness* – Job is learning, slowly. He had previously thought that only good would come because of his righteousness. He even expected blessing from God; he believed as do many today who have swallowed the prosperity Gospel. But he learnt otherwise; and he learnt the truth which God tried to teach Judah in captivity, that good and evil, light and darkness, all come from God (Is. 45:5-7); see on 3:23.

31:4 *Doesn't He see my ways, and number all my steps?* – Job dismissed as monstrous the idea that he had committed adultery or even looked lustfully upon a woman – simply because God sees and knows all things. We cannot passively accept that fact; it will mean that sexual sin, which for the most part is committed in ‘secret’, cannot be a serious option for us because nothing in our lives is secret before God.

foot has hurried to deceit⁶ (let me be weighed in an even balance, that God may know my integrity);⁷ if my step has turned out of the way, if my heart walked after my eyes, if any defilement has stuck to my hands,⁸ then let me sow, and let another eat. Yes, let the produce of my field be rooted out.⁹ If my heart has been enticed by a woman, and I have laid wait at my neighbour's door,¹⁰ then let my wife grind for another, and let others sleep with her.¹¹ For that would be a heinous crime. Yes, it would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges:¹² for it is a fire that consumes to destruction, and would root out all my increase.¹³ If I have despised the cause of my male servant or of my female servant, when they contended with me;¹⁴ what then shall I do when God rises up? When He visits, what shall I answer Him?¹⁵ Didn't He who made me in the womb make him? Didn't One fashion us in the womb?¹⁶ If I have withheld the poor from their desire, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail,¹⁷ or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless has not eaten of it¹⁸ (no, from my youth he grew up with me as with a father, her have I guided from my mother's womb);¹⁹ if I have seen any perish for want of clothing, or that the needy had no covering;²⁰ if his heart

hasn't blessed me, if he hasn't been warmed with my sheep's fleece;²¹ if I have lifted up my hand against the fatherless, because I saw my help in the gate,²² then let my shoulder fall from the shoulder blade, and my arm be broken from the bone.²³ For calamity from God is a terror to me. Because of His majesty, I can do nothing.²⁴ If I have made gold my hope, and have said to the fine gold, 'You are my confidence';²⁵ if I have rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because my hand had gotten much;²⁶ if I have seen the sun when it shined, or the moon moving in splendour,²⁷ and my heart has been secretly enticed, and my hand threw a kiss from my mouth,²⁸ this also would be an iniquity to be punished by the judges; for I should have denied the God who is above.²⁹ If I have rejoiced at the destruction of him who hated me, or lifted up myself when evil found him;³⁰ (yes, I have not allowed my mouth to sin by asking his life with a curse);³¹ if the men of my tent have not said, 'Who can find one who has not been filled with his meat?'³² (the foreigner has not lodged in the street, but I have opened my doors to the traveller);³³ if like Adam I have covered my transgressions, by hiding my iniquity in my heart,³⁴ because I feared the great multitude, and the contempt

31:33 See on 10:9.

31:34 *Because I feared the great multitude* – It's so often the fear of losing face and image, the fear of the multitude, which stops us from confessing sin. But seeing that all will be open to all our brethren eternally, we should have no need to be hypocritical in this life. God glories to forgive us, so we should have the same openness and zeal in repentance.

of families terrified me, so that I kept silence, and didn't go out of the door—³⁵ oh that I had one to hear me! Behold, here is my signature, let the Almighty answer me; let the accuser write my indictment!³⁶ Surely I would carry it on my shoulder; and I would bind it to me as a crown.³⁷ I would declare to Him the number of my steps. As a prince would I go near to Him.³⁸ If my land cries out against me, and its furrows weep together;³⁹ if I have eaten its fruits without money, or have caused its owners to lose their life,⁴⁰ let briars grow instead of wheat, and stink-weed instead of barley. The words of Job are ended.

CHAPTER 32 Dec. 24

Elihu Is Introduced

So these three men ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.² Then the wrath of Elihu the son of Barachel, the Buzite, of the family of Ram, was kindled against Job. His wrath was kindled because he justified himself rather than God.³ Also his wrath was kindled against his three friends, because they had found no answer, and yet had condemned Job.⁴ Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were elder than he.

⁵ When Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouth of these three men, his wrath was kindled.⁶ Elihu the son of Barachel the Buzite answered, I am young, and you are very old; therefore I held back, and didn't dare show you my opinion.⁷ I said, 'Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom'.⁸ But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding.⁹ It is not the great who are wise, nor the aged who understand justice.¹⁰ Therefore I said, 'Listen to me; I also will show my opinion'.¹¹ Behold, I waited for your words, and I listened for your reasoning, while you searched out what to say.¹² Yes, I gave you my full attention, but there was no one who convinced Job, or who answered his words, among you.¹³ Beware lest you say, 'We have found wisdom, God may refute him, not man';¹⁴ for he has not directed his words against me; neither will I answer him with your speeches.¹⁵ They were amazed. They answered no more. They didn't have a word to say.⁶ Shall I wait, because they don't speak, because they stand still, and answer no more?¹⁷ I also will answer my part, and I also will show my opinion.¹⁸ For I am full of words. The spirit within me

31:38 *If my land cries out against me* – Job was sensitive to the natural creation, even to his land, in the way he farmed it.

32:18 It's unclear whether Elihu refers to his own spirit, or the fact that he was inspired to speak by God's Spirit, and therefore like Jeremiah (Jer. 6:11) was weary at trying not to speak forth the words he was inspired to speak. If we accept Elihu as speaking on God's behalf, as the mediator which Job so begged for, then we have to take a somewhat negative view of Job – in that Elihu is critical of Job and accuses him of arrogant self-righteousness. Note that in God's final summing up, the friends and

constrains me.¹⁹ Behold, my breast is as wine which has no vent; like new wineskins it is ready to burst. ²⁰ I will speak, that I may be refreshed. I will open my lips and answer. ²¹ Please don't let me respect any man's person, neither will I give flattering titles to any man. ²² For I don't know how to give flattering titles; or else my Maker would soon take me away.

CHAPTER 33 Dec. 25

Elihu Criticizes Job

However, Job, please hear my speech, and listen to all my words. ² See now, I have opened my mouth. My tongue has spoken in my mouth. ³ My words shall utter the uprightness of my heart. That which my lips know they shall speak sincerely. ⁴ The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life. ⁵ If you can, answer me. Set your words in order before me, and stand forth. ⁶ Behold, I am toward God even as you are. I am also formed out of the clay. ⁷ Behold, my terror shall not make you afraid, neither shall my pressure be heavy on you. ⁸ Surely you have spoken in my hearing, I have heard the voice

of your words, saying, ⁹ 'I am clean, without disobedience. I am innocent, neither is there iniquity in me.' ¹⁰ Behold, He finds occasions against me. He counts me for His enemy. ¹¹ He puts my feet in the stocks. He marks all my paths'. ¹² Behold, I will answer you. In this you are not just, for God is greater than man. ¹³ Why do you strive against Him, because He doesn't give account of any of His matters? ¹⁴ For God speaks once, yes twice, though man pays no attention. ¹⁵ In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men, in slumbering on the bed; ¹⁶ then He opens the ears of men, and seals their instruction, ¹⁷ that He may withdraw man from his purpose, and hide pride from man. ¹⁸ He keeps back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword. ¹⁹ He is chastened also with pain on his bed, with continual strife in his bones; ²⁰ so that his life hates bread, and his soul dainty food. ²¹ His flesh is so consumed away, that it can't be seen. His bones that were not seen stick out. ²² Yes, his soul draws near to the pit, and his life to the destroyers. ²³ If there is beside him an angel, an interpreter, one among a thou-

Job are criticized, but He says nothing against Elihu. In this case, God's final commendation of Job in 42:7 would be strictly within the context of Job's repentance. However, whilst Elihu often speaks in harmony with God's direct words later in the book, he remains somewhat enigmatic; for his fierce criticism of Job, mixed with what appears to be youthful arrogance and dogmatism, is hard to fully square with God's opening and closing statement that Job was spotless in His sight. Perhaps God didn't want to have to personally intervene in revealing Job's sinfulness to him; He always seeks to work through people rather than by direct intervention. And so perhaps God sent this arrogant young man to Job as a final attempt to appeal to him.

33:13 All refusal to repent is a striving against God in that He is constantly working in our lives to bring us to repentance.

sand, to show to man what is right for him;²⁴ then God is gracious to him, and says, ‘Deliver him from going down to the pit, I have found a ransom’.²⁵ His flesh shall be fresher than a child’s. He returns to the days of his youth.²⁶ He prays to God, and He is gracious to him, so that he sees His face with joy. He restores to man his righteousness.²⁷ He sings before men, and says, ‘I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it didn’t profit me.’²⁸ He has redeemed my soul from going into the pit. My life shall see the light’.²⁹ Behold, God works all these things, twice, yes three times, with a man,³⁰ to bring back his soul from the pit, that he may be enlightened with the light of the living.³¹ Mark well, Job, and listen to me. Hold your peace, and I will speak.³² If you have anything to say, answer me. Speak, for I desire to justify you.

³³ If not, listen to me. Hold your peace, and I will teach you wisdom.

CHAPTER 34 Dec. 26

Elihu Criticizes the Friends

Moreover Elihu answered,² Hear my words, you wise men. Give

ear to me, you who have knowledge.³ For the ear tries words, as the palate tastes food.⁴ Let us choose for us that which is right. Let us know among ourselves what is good.⁵ For Job has said, ‘I am righteous, God has taken away my right:⁶ notwithstanding my right I am considered a liar. My wound is incurable, though I am without disobedience’.⁷ What man is like Job, who drinks scorn like water,⁸ who goes in company with the workers of iniquity, and walks with wicked men?⁹ For he has said, ‘It profits a man nothing that he should delight himself with God’.¹⁰ Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding: far be it from God, that He should do wickedness, from the Almighty, that He should commit iniquity.¹¹ For the work of a man He will render to him, and cause every man to find according to his ways.¹² Yes surely, God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert justice.¹³ Who put Him in charge of the earth? Or who has appointed Him over the whole world?¹⁴ If He set His heart on Himself, if He gathered to Himself His spirit and His breath,¹⁵ all

33:27 Job’s decision to say “I have sinned... and it didn’t profit me” connects with the prodigal son (Lk. 15:21), thus again associating Job with the Jews in their suffering, repentance and final return to God from exile in the Gentile world; see on 3:23.

34:8 *Goes in company with the workers of iniquity, and walks with wicked men* – This wasn’t true of Job. Elihu may however be sarcastically referring to the three friends of Job as “wicked men”.

34:9 See on 21:7.

34:14 *If He set His heart on Himself* – If God were selfish, He wouldn’t have created nor maintain the world. We therefore see God’s unselfishness and outgiving grace every microsecond of our existence.

If He gathered to Himself His spirit and His breath – The Spirit of God is His breath, His power by which He sustains all creation. It isn’t a person, as the false doctrine of

flesh would perish together, and man would turn again to dust. ¹⁶ If now you have understanding, hear this. Listen to the voice of my words. ¹⁷ Shall even one who hates justice govern? Will you condemn him who is righteous and mighty? ¹⁸ Who says to a king, ‘Vile!’ or to nobles, ‘Wicked!’? ¹⁹ Who doesn’t respect the persons of princes, nor respects the rich more than the poor; for they all are the work of His hands. ²⁰ In a moment they die, even at midnight. The people are shaken and pass away. The mighty are taken away without a hand. ²¹ For His eyes are on the ways of a man. He sees all his goings. ²² There is no darkness, nor thick gloom, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. ²³ For He doesn’t need to consider a man further, that he should go before God in judgment. ²⁴ He breaks in pieces mighty men in ways past finding out, and sets others in their place. ²⁵ Therefore He takes knowledge of their works. He overturns them in the night, so that they are destroyed. ²⁶ He strikes them as wicked men in the open sight of others; ²⁷ because they turned aside from following Him, and wouldn’t pay attention to any of His ways, ²⁸ so that they caused the cry of the poor to come

to Him. He heard the cry of the afflicted. ²⁹ When He gives quietness, who then can condemn? When He hides His face, who then can see Him? Alike whether to a nation, or to a man, ³⁰ that the Godless man may not reign, that there be no one to ensnare the people. ³¹ For has any said to God, ‘I am guilty, but I will not offend any more.’ ³² Teach me that which I don’t see. If I have done iniquity, I will do it no more?’ ³³ Shall His recompense be as you desire, that you refuse it? For you must choose, and not I. Therefore speak what you know. ³⁴ Men of understanding will tell me, yes, every wise man who hears me: ³⁵ ‘Job speaks without knowledge. His words are without wisdom’. ³⁶ I wish that Job were tried to the end, because of his answering like wicked men. ³⁷ For he adds rebellion to his sin. He claps his hands among us, and multiplies his words against God.

CHAPTER 35 Dec. 26

Elihu Appeals for Job to Repent

Moreover Elihu answered, ² Do you think this to be your right, or do you say, ‘My righteousness is more than God’s’, ³ that you ask, ‘What advantage will it be to you? What profit shall I have, if I had not

the Trinity supposes; although at times His Spirit, His power, can be personified as many abstract things are.

34:23 The day of judgment is therefore not in order for God to acquire knowledge or facts about us; He knows that already. The process of judgment day will be for our benefit. For if Christ came and we immediately entered the Kingdom without that necessary process, we would have so little appreciation of His grace nor of each other nor of ourselves. The purpose of judgment, even when it is received in part in this life as in Job’s case, is to teach us, rather than provide God with information.

sinned?’⁴ I will answer you, and your companions with you.⁵ Look to the heavens, and see. See the skies, which are higher than you.⁶ If you have sinned, what effect do you have against Him? If your transgressions are multiplied, what do you do to Him?⁷ If you are righteous, what do you give Him? Or what does He receive from your hand?⁸ Your wickedness may hurt a man as you are, and your righteousness may profit a son of man.⁹ By reason of the multitude of oppressions they cry out. They cry for help by reason of the arm of the mighty.¹⁰ But none says, ‘Where is God my Maker, who gives songs in the night,¹¹ who teaches us more than the animals of the earth, and makes us wiser than the birds of the sky?’¹² There they cry, but none gives answer, because of the pride of evil men.¹³ Surely God will not hear an empty cry, neither will the Almighty regard it.¹⁴ How much less when you say you don’t see Him. The cause is before Him, and you wait for Him!¹⁵ But now, because He has not visited in His anger, neither does He greatly regard arrogance-¹⁶ therefore Job opens his mouth with empty talk, and he multiplies words without knowledge.

CHAPTER 36 Dec. 27

Elihu Speaks Up for God

Elihu also continued and said,
² Bear with me a little, and I will

show you; for I still have something to say on God’s behalf.³ I will get my knowledge from afar, and will ascribe righteousness to my Maker.⁴ For truly my words are not false. One who is perfect in knowledge is with you.⁵ Behold, God is mighty, and doesn’t despise anyone. He is mighty in strength of understanding.⁶ He doesn’t preserve the life of the wicked, but gives to the afflicted their right.⁷ He doesn’t withdraw His eyes from the righteous, but with kings on the throne, He sets them forever, and they are exalted.⁸ If they are bound in fetters, and are taken in the cords of afflictions,⁹ then He shows them their work, and their transgressions, that they have behaved themselves proudly.¹⁰ He also opens their ears to instruction, and commands that they return from iniquity.¹¹ If they listen and serve Him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.¹² But if they don’t listen, they shall perish by the sword; they shall die without knowledge.¹³ But those who are Godless in heart lay up anger. They don’t cry for help when He binds them.¹⁴ They die in youth. Their life perishes among the unclean.¹⁵ He delivers the afflicted by their affliction, and opens their ear in oppression.¹⁶ Yes, He would have allured you out of distress, into a broad place, where there is no restriction. That which is set on your table would be full of fatness.¹⁷ But you

36:15 *He opens their ear in oppression* – Our sensitivity to and understanding of God’s word is heightened during times of trial. Sadly we are such empirical learners that we have to suffer many things to make us open our ear to His word; and we needn’t suffer them if we accepted with full meaning the simple foundation truth that

are full of the judgment of the wicked. Judgment and justice take hold of you.¹⁸ Don't let riches entice you to wrath, neither let the great size of a bribe turn you aside.¹⁹ Would your wealth sustain you in distress, or all the might of your strength?²⁰ Don't desire the night, when people are cut off in their place.²¹ Take heed, don't regard iniquity; for you have chosen this rather than affliction.²² Behold, God is exalted in His power. Who is a teacher like Him?²³ Who has prescribed His way for Him? Or who can say, 'You have committed unrighteousness?'²⁴ Remember that you magnify His work, whereof men have sung.²⁵ All men have looked thereon. Man sees it afar off.²⁶ Behold, God is great, and we don't know Him. The number of His years is unsearchable.²⁷ For He draws up the drops of water, which distil in rain from His vapour,²⁸ which the skies pour down and which drop on man abundantly.²⁹ Yes, can any understand the spreading of the clouds,

and the thunderings of His pavilion?³⁰ Behold, He spreads His light around Him. He covers the bottom of the sea.³¹ For by these He judges the people. He gives food in abundance.³² He covers His hands with the lightning, and commands it to strike the mark.³³ Its noise tells about Him, and the livestock also concerning the storm that comes up.

CHAPTER 37 Dec. 28

Elihu Speaks of God's Power

Yes, at this my heart trembles, and is moved out of its place.² Hear, oh, hear the noise of His voice, the sound that goes out of His mouth.³ He sends it forth under the whole sky, and His lightning to the ends of the earth.⁴ After it a voice roars. He thunders with the voice of His majesty. He doesn't hold back anything when His voice is heard.⁵ God thunders marvellously with His voice. He does great things, which we can't comprehend.⁶ For He says to the snow, 'Fall on the earth'; likewise to

the Bible is indeed God's word speaking to us. The wonder of the very existence of God's inspired word ought to of itself make us open our ears in sensitivity to it. But because we fail to believe it as we ought to in practice, we are sent tribulation to make us sensitive to it.

36:30, 31 *He covers the bottom of the sea. For by these He judges the people* – The sea was seen by ancient peoples as the abode of 'satan' type gods of evil. God is showing that He is in full control of the sea, and any beings there which people might imagine would be in any case under His total control and not hidden from Him.

36:33 *The storm that comes up* – A thunderstorm was brewing as Elihu spoke. Lightning and thunderstorms were seen as the wrath of supposed gods of evil, who were similar to the 'satan' being many believe in today. The point of the thunderstorm was to demonstrate that it was God in control, it was from Him, and not from the 'satan' entities people generally believed in at that time. See on 37:2,15.

37:2 *Hear the noise of His voice* – See on 36:33. The crash of the thunder in the storm which came down upon them wasn't the voice of any radically independent god of evil, but *God's voice*.

the shower of rain, and to the showers of His mighty rain. ⁷ He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom He has made may know it. ⁸ Then the animals take cover, and remain in their dens. ⁹ Out of its room comes the storm, and cold out of the north. ¹⁰ By the breath of God, ice is given, and the breadth of the waters is frozen. ¹¹ Yes, He loads the thick cloud with moisture. He spreads abroad the cloud of His lightning. ¹² It is turned around by His guidance, that they may do whatever He commands them on the surface of the habitable world, ¹³ whether it is for correction, or for His land, or for grace, that He causes it to come. ¹⁴ Listen to this, Job. Stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God. ¹⁵ Do you know how God controls them, and causes the lightning of His cloud to shine? ¹⁶ Do you know the workings of the clouds, the wondrous works of Him who is perfect in knowledge? ¹⁷ You whose clothing is warm, when the earth is still by reason of the south wind? ¹⁸ Can you, with Him, spread out the sky, which is strong as a cast metal mirror? ¹⁹ Teach us what we shall tell Him, for we can't make our case by

reason of darkness. ²⁰ Shall it be told Him that I would speak? Or should a man wish that he were swallowed up? ²¹ Now men don't see the light which is bright in the skies, but the wind passes, and clears them. ²² Out of the north comes golden splendour. With God is awesome majesty. ²³ We can't reach the Almighty. He is exalted in power. In justice and great righteousness, He will not oppress. ²⁴ Therefore men revere Him. He doesn't regard any who are wise of heart.

CHAPTER 38 Dec. 29

God Himself Speaks about His Creation

Then Yahweh answered Job out of the whirlwind, ² Who is this who makes counsel dark by words without knowledge? ³ Brace yourself like a man, for I will question you, then you answer Me! ⁴ Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if you have understanding. ⁵ Who determined its measures, if you know? Or who stretched the line on it? ⁶ Whereupon were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone, ⁷ when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of

37:7 *He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom He has made may know it* – Our hand or power is often limited by God through weakness, illness, dysfunction of ourselves or others, so that we may know the strength of His hand and power.

37:15 *Do you know how God controls them, and causes the lightning* – See on 36:33; the natural creation isn't just ticking on clockwork, God is actively in control of it all. We are therefore never far from evidence of God's active, passionate awareness and power.

38:7 See on 9:32.

All the sons of God shouted for joy – Note that all the Angels are obedient to God and on His side as it were. Angels don't sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23).

God shouted for joy? ⁸ Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth from the womb, ⁹ when I made clouds its garment, and wrapped it in thick darkness, ¹⁰ marked out for it My bound, set bars and doors, ¹¹ and said, ‘Here you may come, but no further. Here your proud waves shall be stayed?’ ¹² Have you commanded the morning in your days, and caused the dawn to know its place; ¹³ that it might take hold of the ends of the earth, and shake the wicked out of it? ¹⁴ It is changed as clay under the seal, and stands forth as a garment. ¹⁵ From the wicked, their light is withheld. The high arm is broken. ¹⁶ Have you entered into the springs

of the sea? Or have you walked in the recesses of the deep? ¹⁷ Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the gates of the shadow of death? ¹⁸ Have you comprehended the earth in its breadth? Declare, if you know it all. ¹⁹ What is the way to the dwelling of light? As for darkness, where is its place, ²⁰ that you should take it to its bound, that you should discern the paths to its house? ²¹ Surely you know, for you were born then, and the number of your days is great! ²² Have you entered the treasures of the snow, or have you seen the treasures of the hail, ²³ which I have reserved against the time of trouble, against the day

38:8-11 *Who shut up the sea with doors, when it broke forth from the womb* – The supposed sea gods of evil (see on 36:30,31) were under God’s control and limitation even if they existed, just as He specified and limited the power of ‘satan’ in the prologue. There are several allusions in Job to Babylonian legends concerning Marduk – indicating that the book may have been re-written in Babylon with allusion to these legends in order to deconstruct them. The *Enuma Elish* 4.139,140 speaks of how Marduk limited the waters of Tiamat, and set up a bar and watchmen so that the waters wouldn’t go further than he permitted. But this very language is applied to God here and in 7:12. One of the purposes of Job was to urge Judah that Yahweh was greater than Marduk, He and not Marduk was to be Israel’s God. The sea was understood to be the abode of evil monsters. Yet Job stresses how God is in control of the raging sea. Just look out for all the references to the sea in Job. God artlessly claims to have created the sea. In the Canaanite pantheon, Baal was seen as well matched in conflict by Yam, the sea god. But it’s emphasized by God that He created the sea, shuts it up within bounds, brought it out from the womb. In Canaanite myth, Aquhat [another ‘Satan’ figure in their theology] could alone “count the months” – but the same phrase is used in 39:2 about how God alone has this power. As God ‘shut up’ Job (1:10 Heb.), so He could ‘shut up’ the sea, with all the evil associated with it in peoples’ minds at the time (38:8). For at creation, He had commanded the waters where to go and they obeyed just one word from Him. God is using poetry to reframe these pagan myths in the context of His omnipotence, to show that His awesome power means that there’s no room left for these supposed beings to exist. Often the Bible speaks of the power of God over raging seas – for the sea was so deeply associated with evil in the minds of Semitic peoples (e.g. Ps. 77:19; 93:4 and the fact that three of the Gospels emphasize how Jesus walked over raging sea – Mt. 8:23-27; Mk. 4:36-41; Lk. 8:22-25).

38:10 See on 26:10.

of battle and war? ²⁴ By what way is the lightning distributed, or the east wind scattered on the earth? ²⁵ Who has cut a channel for the flood water, or the path for the thunderstorm; ²⁶ to cause it to rain on a land where no man is; on the wilderness, in which there is no man; ²⁷ to satisfy the waste and desolate ground, to cause the tender grass to spring forth? ²⁸ Does the rain have a father? Or who fathers the drops of dew? ²⁹ Out of whose womb came the ice? The gray frost of the sky, who has given birth to it? ³⁰ The waters become hard like stone, when the surface of the deep is frozen. ³¹ Can you bind the cluster of the Pleiades, or loosen the cords of Orion? ³² Can you lead forth the constellations in their season? Or can you guide the Bear with her cubs? ³³ Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you establish its dominion over the earth? ³⁴ Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover you? ³⁵ Can you send forth lightnings, that they may go? Do they report to you, ‘Here we are?’ ³⁶ Who has put wisdom in the inward parts? Or who has given understanding to the mind? ³⁷ Who can number the clouds by wisdom? Or who can pour out the bottles of the sky, ³⁸ when the dust runs into a mass, and the clods of earth stick together?

God Speaks about the Animals

³⁹ Can you hunt the prey for the lioness, or satisfy the appetite of the

young lions, ⁴⁰ when they crouch in their dens, and lie in wait in the thicket? ⁴¹ Who provides for the raven his prey, when his young ones cry to God, and wander for lack of food?

CHAPTER 39 Dec. 30

Do you know the time when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears fawns? ² Can you number the months that they fulfil? Or do you know the time when they give birth? ³ They bow themselves, they bring forth their young, they end their labour pains. ⁴ Their young ones become strong. They grow up in the open field. They go forth, and don’t return again. ⁵ Who has set the wild donkey free? Or who has loosened the bonds of the swift donkey, ⁶ whose home I have made the wilderness, and the salt land his dwelling place? ⁷ He scorns the tumult of the city, neither does he hear the shouting of the driver. ⁸ The range of the mountains is his pasture, he searches after every green thing. ⁹ Will the wild ox be content to serve you? Or will he stay by your feeding trough? ¹⁰ Can you hold the wild ox in the furrow with his harness? Or will he till the valleys after you? ¹¹ Will you trust him, because his strength is great? Or will you leave to him your labour? ¹² Will you confide in him, that he will bring home your seed, and gather the grain of your threshing floor? ¹³ The wings of the ostrich wave proudly; but are

38:29 Out of whose womb – One of many places where God likens Himself to a woman.

they the feathers and plumage of love? ¹⁴ For she leaves her eggs on the earth, warms them in the dust, ¹⁵ and forgets that the foot may crush them, or that the wild animal may trample them. ¹⁶ She deals harshly with her young ones, as if they were not hers. Though her labour is in vain, she is without fear, ¹⁷ because God has deprived her of wisdom, neither has He imparted to her understanding. ¹⁸ When she lifts up herself on high, she scorns the horse and his rider. ¹⁹ Have you given the horse might? Have you clothed his neck with a quivering mane? ²⁰ Have you made him to leap as a locust? The glory of his snorting is awesome. ²¹ He paws in the valley, and rejoices in his strength. He goes out to meet the armed men. ²² He mocks at fear, and is not dismayed, neither does he turn back from the sword. ²³ The quiver rattles against him, the flashing spear and the javelin. ²⁴ He eats up the ground with fierceness and rage, neither does he stand still at the sound of the trumpet. ²⁵ As often as the trumpet sounds he snorts, ‘Aha!’. He smells the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting. ²⁶ Is it by your wisdom that the hawk soars, and stretches her wings toward the south? ²⁷ Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up, and makes his nest on high? ²⁸ On the cliff he dwells, and makes his home, on the point of the cliff, and the stronghold. ²⁹ From there he spies out the prey.

His eyes see it afar off. ³⁰ His young ones also suck up blood. Where the slain are, there he is.

CHAPTER 40 Dec. 31

Moreover Yahweh answered Job, ² Shall he who argues contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it.

Job Admits He Cannot Answer

3 Then Job answered Yahweh, ⁴ Behold, I am of small account. What shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth. ⁵ I have spoken once, and I will not answer; Yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.

God Questions Job

6 Then Yahweh answered Job out of the whirlwind, ⁷ Now brace yourself like a man. I will question you, and you will answer Me. ⁸ Will you even annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me, that you may be justified? ⁹ Or do you have an arm like God? Can you thunder with a voice like Him? ¹⁰ Now deck yourself with excellency and dignity. Array yourself with honour and majesty. ¹¹ Pour out the fury of your anger. Look at each one who is proud, and bring him low. ¹² Look at each one who is proud, and humble him. Crush the wicked in their place. ¹³ Hide them in the dust together. Bind their faces in the hidden place. ¹⁴ Then I will also admit to you that your own right hand can save you. ¹⁵ See now, Behemoth,

40:8 Will you condemn Me, that you may be justified? – God is as it were placed in the dock by our allegation that we have not sinned as He claims, and that our sufferings are unjustified. Paul plays on this idea throughout the legal language of Romans 1-8.

which I made as well as you. He eats grass like an ox.¹⁶ Look now, his strength is in his thighs. His force is in the muscles of his belly.¹⁷ He moves his tail like a cedar. The sinews of his thighs are knit together.¹⁸ His bones are like tubes of brass. His limbs are like bars of iron.¹⁹ He is the chief of the ways of God. He who made him gives him His sword.²⁰ Surely the mountains produce food for him, where all the animals of the field play.²¹ He lies under the lotus trees, in the cover of the reed, and

the marsh.²² The lotuses cover him with their shade. The willows of the brook surround him.²³ Behold, if a river overflows, he doesn't tremble. He is confident, though the Jordan swells even to his mouth.²⁴ Shall any take him when he is on the watch, or pierce through his nose with a snare?

CHAPTER 41 Dec. 31

Leviathan

Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook, or press down his tongue with a cord?² Can you put

41:1 God almost jokes with Job, that he had been trying to draw out Leviathan with a fish hook; this is a commentary upon so many human attempts to get a handle on the way God is the adversary / satan figure in our lives. Shrugging it off as chance and bad luck, believing in a personal Satan in the sea or in Heaven, thinking God is punishing us... all this is trying to capture Leviathan with a mere fishing rod. The book of Job isn't an explanation for specific human suffering – and many who turn to the book looking for that come away disappointed. Rather is it an account of God's sovereign power, putting meaning into the word "All-mighty" when applied to God. On a 'doctrinal' level it is indeed a deconstruction of the ideas of supernatural 'Satan' figures. But on a more personal level, it challenges us to follow in Job's faithful footsteps, as it challenged Judah in captivity. The monster figures of Leviathan and Behemoth appear at the end of the book of Job, forming a kind of *inclusio* with the opening reference to Satan; and they are clearly part of God's final answer to Job's "case". Behe-mot can be understood as a reference to Mot, the Canaanite god of death; and Leviathan appears to be the Canaanite version of the orthodox 'Satan' figure, perhaps a reference to the 'Lotan' of the Ugaritic myths. In great detail, these figures are deconstructed. They are shown to be *created* beings – created by the one almighty God of the Old Testament, to be completely under His control to the point that He can even tease them, so enormously greater is His power than theirs. These Canaanite 'Satan' figures are thereby shown to have no significant existence; and they certainly don't exist as opposed to God. They are totally under His control. 'Evil' in a form independent of Him, in radical opposition to Him, simply isn't there. It is He who not only created Behemoth, but can effortlessly control him in accord with His purpose (40:15). That's the comfort of the message. Indeed the descriptions of the natural world which lead up to the Leviathan / Behemoth passages are there to underline this point; and it's interesting that those passages zoom in upon the cruelties and even brutalities within nature. Yet these are all of God's ultimate design and creation, and under His providential control. Job had earlier perceived this; for he responds to the friends' allusions to an evil 'Satan' figure as the source of his suffering by observing: "Ask the animals... the birds of the air... [they show that] the hand of the Lord [and not any supernatural 'Satan'] has done

a rope into his nose, or pierce his jaw through with a hook? ³ Will he make many petitions to you, or will he speak soft words to you? ⁴ Will he make a covenant with you, that you should take him for a servant forever? ⁵ Will you play with him as with a bird? Or will you bind him for your girls? ⁶ Will traders barter for him? Will they part him among the

merchants? ⁷ Can you fill his skin with barbed irons, or his head with fish spears? ⁸ Lay your hand on him. Remember the battle, and do so no more. ⁹ Behold, the hope of binding him is vain. Won't one be cast down even at the sight of him? ¹⁰ None is so fierce that he dare stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before Me? ¹¹ Who has first given to

this" (12:7-9). The same Hebrew words are used about God's binding and loosing of the stars [which were thought to control evil on earth] and His binding, loosing and opening of Leviathan's mouth (38:31 cp. 40:29). Whether or not Leviathan / a 'Satan' figure, or the bad stars, are for real... God is in utter control of them, and there is thus no conflict, no war in Heaven, no ultimate dualism at all in the cosmos. Which is just the message we would expect from a monotheistic Old Testament book. Israel's God is truly the Almighty. Just as Job is described as God's "servant" (1:8), so is Leviathan (40:28; 41:4). No evil power uncontrolled by God is at work in Job's life. We also need to give due weight to the fact that God speaks the Leviathan / Behemoth passages "out of the storm", which had been gathering since 37:2. This is significant because storms were seen as manifestations of evil powers. Yet here (and elsewhere in Scripture), the one true God speaks out of such storms, to demonstrate how far greater He is than any storm god; and showing by implication that such storm gods don't exist, and the 'evil' which supposedly came from them was in fact under His control. Much of the language used about Leviathan and Behemoth is also used about God's manifestation of Himself: Smoke from nostrils, flame from mouth (41:11,12) is said about God in Ps. 18:8; Strength before and dismay behind (Job 41:14) = Hab. 3:5; Strong ones and leaders cringe in fear (41:17 Heb.) = Ps. 18:7; Hab. 3:6; Deep sea stirred up (41:23,24 Heb.) = Ps. 18:5; terrible teeth = 16:9 about God; breath that carries men away = 15:30 about God; none his equal (41:33) = true about God. Leviathan is called the 'cruel one' (41:10) – and the very same word is used by Job about God in His afflicting of Job (30:21). Leviathan, the seemingly overbearing power of evil in the world, is in fact a manifestation of God to such an intense degree that effectively it 'is' God; God, ultimately, is the adversary / satan to Job. The epilogue and prologue to Job are evidently related. Job begins sitting in dust and ashes and ends repenting in dust and ashes (2:8; 42:4). The silence of the friends at the opening of the book is matched by the silence after God has finally spoken (40:4). Job intercedes for his children (1:5) and ends up interceding for his friends. Job begins with the description of being the Lord's servant; and the book concludes on the same note (42:7,8). The question of course is: 'So what's the equivalent of the 'Satan' figure in the epilogue?'. The omission is intended and obvious. Ultimately the answer is the essence of the whole book: the 'satan', the adversary, is none other than God Himself, in His love.

41:3 *Will he speak soft words to you* – The emphasis is on *you*. The animals speak softly to God; He is in dialogue with them. All around us, God is in active communication.

Me, that I should repay him? Everything under the heavens is Mine.¹² I will not keep silence concerning his limbs, nor his mighty strength, nor his goodly frame.¹³ Who can strip off his outer garment? Who shall come within his jaws?¹⁴ Who can open the doors of his face? Around his teeth is terror.¹⁵ Strong scales are his pride, shut up together with a close seal.¹⁶ One is so near to another, that no air can come between them.¹⁷ They are joined one to another. They stick together, so that they can't be pulled apart.¹⁸ His sneezing flashes out light. His eyes are like the eyelids of the morning.¹⁹ Out of his mouth go burning torches. Sparks of fire leap forth.²⁰ Out of his nostrils a smoke goes, as of a boiling pot over a fire of reeds.²¹ His breath kindles coals. A flame goes forth from his mouth.²² There is strength in his neck. Terror dances before him.²³ The flakes of his flesh are joined together. They are firm on him. They can't be moved.²⁴ His heart is as firm as a stone, yes, firm as the lower millstone.²⁵ When he raises himself up, the mighty are afraid. They retreat before his thrashing.²⁶ If one attacks him with the sword, it can't prevail; nor the spear, the dart, nor the pointed shaft.²⁷ He

counts iron as straw; and brass as rotten wood.²⁸ The arrow can't make him flee. Sling stones are like chaff to him.²⁹ Clubs are counted as stubble. He laughs at the rushing of the javelin.³⁰ His undersides are like sharp potsherds, leaving a trail in the mud like a threshing sledge.³¹ He makes the deep to boil like a pot. He makes the sea like a pot of ointment.³² He makes a path shine after him. One would think the deep had white hair.³³ On earth there is not his equal, that is made without fear.³⁴ He sees everything that is high. He is king over all the sons of pride.

CHAPTER 42

Job Repents

Then Job answered Yahweh,² I know that You can do all things, and that no purpose of Yours can be restrained.³ You asked, ‘Who is this who hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I didn't know.⁴ You said, ‘Listen, now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you will answer Me’.⁵ I had heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You.⁶ Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

42:2 Job came to realize the massive practical extent of what he had previously known in theory, what he had heard “by the hearing of the ear”. Now his eye saw / perceived that truly no plan of God can be thwarted, by any of the various ‘Satan’ monsters imagined by men. We too may say that we believe in the omnipotence of God; but such a belief requires us to throw out all beliefs in supernatural satan figures. And that's not a merely intellectual exercise; to see the tragedies and cruelties of our lives as being ultimately from God and under His control is something which shakes us to the core.

42:5 *My eye sees You* – All the theory we may know about God must be transformed into personal relationship with God – and that is the purpose of the sufferings of our lives.

Job Is Restored

⁷ It was so, that after Yahweh had spoken these words to Job, Yahweh said to Eliphaz the Temanite, My wrath is kindled against you, and against your two friends; for you have not spoken of Me the thing that is right, as My servant Job has. ⁸ Now therefore, take to yourselves seven bulls and seven rams, and go to My servant Job, and offer up for yourselves a burnt offering; and My servant Job shall pray for you, for I will accept him, that I not deal with you according to your folly. For you have not spoken of me the thing that is right, as My servant Job has. ⁹ So Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite went, and did what Yahweh commanded them, and Yahweh accepted Job. ¹⁰ Yahweh turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends. Yahweh gave Job twice as much as he had before. ¹¹ Then came there to him all his brothers, and all his sisters,

and all those who had been of his acquaintance before, and ate bread with him in his house. They comforted him, and consoled him concerning all the evil that Yahweh had brought on him. Each one also gave him a piece of money, and each one a ring of gold. ¹² So Yahweh blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand female donkeys. ¹³ He had also seven sons and three daughters. ¹⁴ He called the name of the first, Jemimah; and the name of the second, Keziah; and the name of the third, Keren Happuch. ¹⁵ In all the land were no women found so beautiful as the daughters of Job. Their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers. ¹⁶ After this Job lived one hundred and forty years, and saw his sons, and his sons' sons, to four generations. ¹⁷ So Job died, being old and full of days.

42:7 Although Job did not speak wrongly about God (see too 2:10) and kept patiently speaking the word of God despite the mockery it brought from the friends (James 5:10,11), this does not mean that Job or all that he said was blameless. The friends are not reprimanded for speaking wrongly about Job, but about God. Thus there was probably a fair degree of truth in their accusations concerning Job's self righteousness. Elihu also severely rebukes him for this, and unlike the three friends he is not rebuked for anything in the final analysis by God in Job 42; not to mention the accusation of 'darkening counsel without knowledge' (38:2) by God Himself, backed up by four chapters of heavy reprimand of Job's reliance on human strength and wisdom. This led to Job retracting much of what he had said (40:4,5; 42:3-6). This clearly establishes that much of Job's reasoning was faulty, although what he spoke before God was correct. Therefore the final comment that God had spoken of God "the thing that is right" could refer to his final repentance. To repent is to admit that God is right; to refuse to repent is to effectively declare Him wrong. And all his wrong understanding and hard words about God were overlooked because of that.

42:15 *Gave them an inheritance among their brothers* – Job's understanding of the value and meaning of the human person meant that he valued his daughters as much as his sons, and gave them equal inheritances – unusual, surely, for those days.

THE PSALMS

BOOK I

Psalm 1 Jan. 1

¹ Blessed is the man who doesn't walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the way of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in Yahweh's law. On His law he meditates day and night. ³ He will be like a tree planted by the streams of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also does not wither; whatever he does shall prosper. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like the chaff which the wind drives away. ⁵ Therefore the wicked shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. ⁶ For Yahweh knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish.

Psalm 2 Jan. 1

¹ Why do the nations rage, and the peoples plot a vain thing? ² The kings of the earth take a stand, and the rulers take counsel together, against Yahweh, and against His Anointed saying, ³ Let's break their bonds apart, and cast their cords from us. ⁴ He who sits in the heavens will laugh. The Lord will have them in derision. ⁵ Then He will speak to them in His anger, and terrify them in His wrath: ⁶ Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion. ⁷ I will tell of the decree. Yahweh said to me, You are My son. Today I have become your father. ⁸ Ask of Me, and I will give the nations for your inheritance, the uttermost ends of the earth for your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron,

1:5 *The wicked shall not stand in the judgment* – This may have a literal fulfilment at the day of judgment. We will all naturally fall before Jesus then (Rom. 14:11), but the righteous will be stood up (Lk. 21:36), perhaps by an Angel, in the same way as Daniel had a foretaste of the day of judgment and was stood on his feet and reassured of God's acceptance by an Angel (Dan. 10). Those who come to the judgment will be those who are responsible to God, who have known His ways; yet the wicked amongst them will be swept away like the chaff (:4), which is the judgment which will come upon the kingdoms of men, the Gentile world at large (Dan. 2:35,44). They will share the judgment of this world with which they chose to identify in this life of opportunity to serve God (1 Cor. 11:32).

2:2 *His Anointed* – The Greek word “Christ” means ‘anointed’. This Psalm is quoted in the New Testament in various contexts – e.g. to the Roman and Jewish rulers trying to destroy Christ at His death (Acts 4:26); to the resurrection of Christ (2:7 = Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5); to the opposition to Christ’s people as they preached the Gospel (Acts 4:25) and to the situation soon after His return, when the rebellious nations will seek to overthrow Christ’s rule (2:9 = Rev. 2:27). What this shows is that Old Testament scripture can have multiple interpretations, in the same way as different people at different times can find the same Scripture speaking personally to them; and as we can find a single Bible passage amazingly relevant to us in different contexts and various times of our lives.

you shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.¹⁰ Now therefore be wise, you kings; be instructed, you judges of the earth.¹¹ Serve Yahweh with respect and rejoice with trembling.¹² Give sincere homage to the Son, lest he be angry and you perish in the way, for His wrath will soon be kindled. Blessed are all those who take refuge in Him.

Psalm 3 Jan. 2

A Psalm by David, when he fled from Absalom his son.

¹ Yahweh, how my adversaries have increased! Many are those who rise up against me. ² Many there are who say of my soul, There is no help for him in God! Selah. ³ But You, Yahweh, are a shield around me, my glory, and the one who lifts up my head. ⁴ I cry to Yahweh with my voice, and He answers me out of His holy hill. Selah. ⁵ I laid myself down and slept; I awoke, because Yahweh sustains me. ⁶ I will not be afraid of tens of thousands of people who have set themselves against me on every side. ⁷ Arise, Yahweh! Save me, my God! For You have struck all of my enemies on the cheek bone. You have broken the teeth of the wicked. ⁸ Salvation belongs to Yahweh. Your blessing be on Your people. Selah.

3:2 Selah – The Psalms were originally sung, and this appears to be a musical instruction requiring a pause. For readers, it effectively means ‘Pause and meditate on this’.

4:4 Be angry, and don't sin – This verse [from the Septuagint] is applied to us by Paul in Eph. 4:26. He interprets it as meaning that anger is not in itself wrong, but because it can so easily lead us to sin, it is better to not go to sleep whilst angry. This kind of daily self-discipline is vital in the spiritual life; the Psalms often comment upon the importance of how we start and end each day.

Psalm 4 Jan. 2

For the Chief Musician; on stringed instruments. A Psalm by David.

¹ Answer me when I call, God of my righteousness. Give me relief from my distress. Have mercy on me, and hear my prayer. ² You sons of men, how long shall my glory be turned into dishonour? Will you love vanity, and go seeking after falsehood? Selah. ³ But know that Yahweh has set apart for Himself him who is Godly: Yahweh will hear when I call to Him. ⁴ Be angry, and don't sin. Search your own heart on your bed, and be still. Selah. ⁵ Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, put your trust in Yahweh. ⁶ Many say, Who will show us any good? Yahweh, let the light of Your face shine on us. ⁷ You have put gladness in my heart, more than when their grain and their new wine are increased. ⁸ In peace I will both lay myself down and sleep, for You, Yahweh alone, make me live in safety.

Psalm 5 Jan. 2

For the Chief Musician, with the flutes. A Psalm by David.

¹ Give ear to my words, Yahweh. Consider my meditation. ² Listen to the voice of my cry, my King and my God; for to You do I pray. ³ Yahweh,

in the morning You shall hear my voice; in the morning I will lay my requests before You, and will watch expectantly.⁴ For You are not a God who has pleasure in wickedness, evil can't live with You. ⁵ The arrogant shall not stand in Your sight; you hate all workers of iniquity. ⁶ You will destroy those who speak lies; Yahweh abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man. ⁷ But as for me, in the abundance of Your grace I will come into Your house. I will bow toward Your holy temple in reverence of You. ⁸ Lead me, Yahweh, in Your righteousness because of my enemies. Make Your way straight before my face. ⁹ For there is no faithfulness in their mouth. Their heart is destruction. Their throat is an open tomb. They flatter with their tongue. ¹⁰ Hold them guilty, God. Let them fall by their own advice; thrust them out in the multitude of their transgressions, for they have rebelled against You. ¹¹ But let all those who take refuge in You rejoice, let them always shout for joy, because You defend them. Let them also who love Your name be joyful in You. ¹² For You will bless the righteous. Yah-

weh, You will surround him with favour as with a shield.

Psalm 6 Jan. 3

For the Chief Musician; on stringed instruments, upon the eight-stringed lyre. A Psalm by David.

¹ Yahweh, don't rebuke me in Your anger, neither discipline me in Your wrath. ² Have mercy on me, Yahweh, for I am faint. Yahweh, heal me, for my bones are troubled. ³ My soul is also in great anguish. But You, Yahweh—how long? ⁴ Return, Yahweh. Deliver my soul, and save me for Your grace' sake. ⁵ For in death there is no memory of You. In Sheol, who shall give You thanks? ⁶ I am weary with my groaning; each night I flood my bed, I drench my couch with my tears. ⁷ My eye wastes away because of grief, it grows old because of all my adversaries. ⁸ Depart from me, all you workers of iniquity, for Yahweh has heard the voice of my weeping. ⁹ Yahweh has heard my supplication, Yahweh accepts my prayer. ¹⁰ May all my enemies be ashamed and dismayed. They shall turn back, they shall be disgraced suddenly.

5:4 Evil can't live with You – There are therefore no sinful beings in Heaven, contrary to the popular belief of many.

6:5 Even a righteous man like David didn't look forward to conscious survival of death. He wanted to keep on living in this life because he wanted to praise God; and this should be our motivation for asking God for health and victory against illness. If the righteous immediately praise God in Heaven after death, then David's words and reasoning here make no sense. Instead he looked forward to the Biblical hope of resurrection at Christ's return and the establishment of His Kingdom on earth. Note too that *sheol*, the Hebrew word translated "hell" in some Bibles, is clearly understood as referring to death or the grave. As righteous David expected to go there after death, it isn't the place where sinners go after death.

Psalm 7 Jan. 3

A meditation by David, which he sang to Yahweh, concerning the words of Cush the Benjamite.

1 Yahweh my God, I take refuge in You. Save me from all those who pursue me and deliver me,² lest they tear apart my soul like a lion, ripping it in pieces while there is none to deliver.³ Yahweh, my God, if I have done this, if there is iniquity in my hands,⁴ if I have rewarded evil to him who was at peace with me (yes, if I have delivered him who without cause was my adversary),⁵ let the enemy pursue my soul, and overtake it; yes, let him tread my life down to the earth, and lay my glory in the dust. Selah.⁶ Arise, Yahweh, in Your anger; lift up Yourself against the rage of my adversaries. Awake for me; You have commanded judgment.⁷ Let the congregation of the peoples surround You. Rule over them on high.⁸ Yahweh administers judgment to the peoples. Judge me, Yahweh, according to my righteousness, and to my integrity that is in me.⁹ Oh let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, but establish the righteous; their minds and hearts are searched by the righteous God.¹⁰ My shield is with God, who saves the upright in heart.¹¹ God is a righteous judge,

7 Concerning the words of Cush – David's response to hurtful words and false accusation (:3) was to share his situation with God, rather than brood on the words.

7:4 Him who without cause was my adversary – A reference to Saul's senseless persecution of David.

7:8 Judge me, Yahweh – David didn't fear the day of judgment, but rather he eagerly looked forward to it, as we should. He was secure in his relationship with God, and so that day wasn't a day of terrible uncertainty ever before him – and neither need it be for us.

yes, a God who has indignation every day.¹² If a man doesn't relent, He will sharpen His sword; He has bent and strung His bow.¹³ He has also Himself prepared the instruments of death, He makes ready His burning arrows.¹⁴ Behold, he travails with iniquity. Yes, he has conceived mischief, and brought forth falsehood.¹⁵ He has dug a hole, and has fallen into the pit which he made.¹⁶ The trouble he causes shall return upon his own head, his violence shall come down on the crown of his own head.¹⁷ I will give thanks to Yahweh according to His righteousness, and will sing praise to the name of Yahweh Most High.

Psalm 8 Jan. 3

For the Chief Musician; on an instrument of Gath. A Psalm by David.

1 Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth, You who has set Your glory above the heavens!² From the lips of babes and infants You have established strength, because of Your adversaries, that You might silence the enemy and the avenger.³ When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained;⁴ what is man,

that You are mindful of him, and the son of man, that You care for him? 5 For You have made him a little lower than the Angels, and crowned him with glory and honour. 6 You make him ruler over the works of Your hands. You have put all things under his feet: 7 all sheep and cattle, yes, and the animals of the field, 8 the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and whatever passes through the paths of the seas. 9 Yahweh our Lord, how majestic is Your name in all the earth!

Psalm 9 Jan. 4

*For the Chief Musician. Set to
The Death of the Son. A Psalm by
David.*

1 I will give thanks to Yahweh with my whole heart. I will tell others of all Your marvellous works. 2 I will be glad and rejoice in You, I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High. 3 When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish in Your presence. 4 For You have maintained my just cause. You sit on the throne judging righteously. 5 You have rebuked the nations, You have destroyed the wicked, You have blotted out their

name forever and ever. 6 The enemy is overtaken by endless ruin. The very memory of the cities which You have overthrown has perished. 7 But Yahweh reigns forever, He has prepared His throne for judgment. 8 He will judge the world in righteousness, He will administer judgment to the peoples in uprightness. 9 Yahweh will also be a high tower for the oppressed; a high tower in times of trouble. 10 Those who know Your name will put their trust in You, for You, Yahweh, have not forsaken those who seek You. 11 Sing praises to Yahweh who dwells in Zion, and declare among the people what He has done. 12 For He who avenges blood remembers them. He doesn't forget the cry of the afflicted. 13 Have mercy on me, Yahweh. See my affliction by those who hate me, and lift me up from the gates of death; 14 that I may show forth all Your praise. In the gates of the daughter of Zion I will rejoice in Your salvation. 15 The nations have sunk down in the pit that they made. In the net which they hid, their own foot is taken. 16 Yahweh has made Himself known; He has executed judgment. The

8:4 This verse is applied to Jesus as the “son of man” in Heb. 2:6-9 in order to prove that He was of human nature and was not an Angel, as some thought and still think.

8:5 *The Angels* – This translates the Hebrew word *elohim*, which is usually translated “God”. This word can therefore be applied to those who manifest God, although they aren’t God Himself. This is why Angels, men and God’s Son, Jesus, can be called “God” without them being God Himself in person.

9:4 God’s judgment is ongoing; it’s not that God is somehow passive and not paying attention now and will only open the books and consider everything when Christ returns. He is passionately involved in our issues and judges them as they happen.

9:8 *He will judge the world in righteousness* – Quoted in Acts 17:31 about how God will judge the world through Jesus when He returns to earth.

9:16 *Yahweh has made Himself known; He has executed judgment* – In observing how

wicked is snared by the work of his own hands. Meditation. Selah. 17 The wicked shall be turned back to Sheol, even all the nations that forget God. 18 For the needy shall not always be forgotten, nor the hope of the poor perish forever. 19 Arise, Yahweh! Don't let man prevail. Let the nations be judged in Your sight. 20 Put them in fear, Yahweh, and let the nations know that they are only men. Selah.

Psalm 10 Jan. 4

¹ Why do You stand far off, Yahweh? Why do You hide Yourself in times of trouble? ² In arrogance the wicked hunt down the weak. They are caught up in the schemes that they devise. ³ For the wicked boasts of his heart's cravings; he blesses the greedy, and condemns Yahweh. ⁴ The wicked, in the pride of his face, has no room in his thoughts for God. ⁵ His ways are prosperous at all times. He is proud, and Your laws are far from his sight. As for all his adversaries, he sneers

at them. ⁶ He says in his heart, I shall not be shaken. For generations I shall have no trouble. ⁷ His mouth is full of cursing, deceit, and oppression; beneath his tongue is mischief and iniquity. ⁸ He lies in wait near the villages. From ambushes, he murders the innocent, his eyes are secretly set against the helpless. ⁹ He lurks in secret as a lion in his ambush. He lies in wait to catch the helpless. He catches the helpless, when he draws him in his net. ¹⁰ The helpless are crushed. They collapse. They fall under his strength. ¹¹ He says in his heart, God has forgotten. He hides His face. He will never see it. ¹² Arise, Yahweh! God, lift up Your hand! Don't forget the helpless. ¹³ Why does the wicked person condemn God and say in his heart, God won't call me into account? ¹⁴ But You do see trouble and grief. You consider it to take it into Your hand to deal with. You help the victim and the fatherless. ¹⁵ Break the arm of the wicked, as for the evil man, seek out

God has judged people and nations, we come to know Him better (see too :20). This is why the final judgment of individuals will be in a sense public; the whole purpose of the judgment seat will be for our collective as well as individual benefit, to teach us of the essence of God and prepare us to enter eternity. If we simply entered eternity at Christ's return without this educational process of participating in and observing the judgment process, we would simply not appreciate His grace as we should.

10:3 Condemns Yahweh – Not consciously, in so many words. But when we face God's principles and decide whether or not we will live by them or believe them, we effectively place God in the dock, and by doing so the wicked condemn Him. But when He is condemned by human judgment, God overcomes at the last (Rom. 3:4).

10:4 Pride is a sin because it pushes God out of our consciousness, replacing Him with self.

10:7,8 These verses are clearly about the “wicked” who rebel against God; and yet before we shake our heads too disapprovingly, remember that they are quoted about us all in Rom. 3:14. For at some times and in some ways, we are all this wicked – if we examine ourselves properly.

his wickedness until You find none.
 16 Yahweh is King forever and ever!
 The nations will perish out of His land.
 17 Yahweh, You have heard the desire of the humble. You will prepare their heart. You will cause Your ear to hear,¹⁸ to judge the fatherless and the oppressed, that man who is of the dust may terrify no more.

Psalm 11 Jan. 5

For the Chief Musician. By David.

1 In Yahweh I take refuge. How can you say to my soul, Flee as a bird to Your mountain! 2 For, behold, the wicked bend their bows and set their arrows on the strings, that they may shoot in darkness at the upright in heart. 3 If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do? 4 Yahweh is in His holy temple. Yahweh is on His throne in heaven. His eyes observe, His eyes examine the children of men. 5 Yahweh examines the righteous, but the wicked and him who loves violence His soul hates. 6 On the wicked He will rain blazing coals; fire, sulphur, and

scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup. 7 For Yahweh is righteous, He loves righteousness. The upright shall see His face.

Psalm 12 Jan. 5

For the Chief Musician; upon an eight-stringed lyre. A Psalm of David.

1 Help, Yahweh; for the Godly man is fading away, the faithful fail from among the children of men. 2 Everyone lies to his neighbour, they speak with flattering lips, and with a double heart. 3 May Yahweh cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaks great things, 4 who have said, With our tongue we will prevail. Our lips are our own, who is lord over us? 5 Because of the oppression of the weak and because of the groaning of the needy, I will now arise, says Yahweh; I will set him in safety from those who malign him. 6 The words of Yahweh are flawless words, as silver refined in a clay furnace, purified seven times. 7 You will keep them, Yahweh. You will preserve

10:18 Man who is of the dust – One basic outcome of believing in man’s mortality and origin from “dust” is that we won’t fear people.

11:4 We are invited to see God enthroned in a Heavenly court which is sitting 24/7, judging multiple cases at once as they occur worldwide.

11:7 Shall see His face – This in a literal sense was the ultimate hope of David (17:5), Job (Job 19:27) and all the faithful (Rev. 22:4); for God exists in a personal, corporeal form, in whose image we are made.

12:3 This verse is alluded to us in James 3:5, which speaks of the tongue being such a small part of the body and yet boasting great things, having spiritual effect far out of proportion to its size; James 1:8 and 4:8 also use the idea of double mindedness being reflected in our words. Note how the tongue is here put for the person – for God will cut off wicked speaking persons, rather than excise tongues from mouths. Our words really are to be identified with us; we needn’t think that we can get away with being one person within and yet projecting a quite different image through carefully calculated words.

them from this generation forever.
 8 The wicked walk on every side,
 when what is vile is exalted among
 the sons of men.

Psalm 13 Jan. 5

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

¹ How long, Yahweh? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? ² How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart every day? How long shall my enemy triumph over me? ³ Look, and answer me, Yahweh my God. Give light to my eyes, lest I sleep in death; ⁴ lest my enemy say, I have prevailed against him; lest my adversaries rejoice when I fall. ⁵ But I trust in Your grace. My heart rejoices in Your salvation. ⁶ I will sing to Yahweh, because He has been good to me.

Psalm 14 Jan. 6

For the Chief Musician. By David.

¹ The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt. They have done abominable works. There is none who does good. ² Yahweh looked down from heaven on the

children of men, to see if there were any who understood, who sought after God. ³ They have all gone aside. They have together become corrupt. There is none who does good, no, not one. ⁴ Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and don't call on Yahweh? ⁵ There they were in great fear because God is in the generation of the righteous. ⁶ You frustrate the plan of the poor, because Yahweh is his refuge. ⁷ Oh that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When Yahweh restores the fortunes of His people, then Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

Psalm 15 Jan. 6

A Psalm by David.

¹ Yahweh, who shall dwell in Your sanctuary? Who shall live on Your holy hill? ² He who walks blamelessly, does what is right, and speaks truth in his heart; ³ he who doesn't slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his friend, nor casts slurs against his fellow man; ⁴ in whose eyes a vile man is despised, but who respects those who fear Yahweh; he who keeps an oath even when it

13:2, 6 David could have sorrow in his heart and yet rejoice in his heart because he knew that God was listening to his prayers and would one day answer. This is the almost schizophrenic experience of all believers.

14:1 Atheism was almost unheard of in early Israel. Yet the fool who quietly within his heart thinks as if there is no God is effectively as atheistic as the most hardened scientific atheist of our times.

There is none who does good – This is the result of atheism. And yet, frighteningly for those of us who would insist we are not atheists, this is quoted about each of us in Rom. 3:12. We are all atheists at times, in practice, and must throw ourselves upon God's grace to save us.

15:4 *He who keeps an oath even when it hurts, and doesn't change* – This is very much the language the Bible often uses about how God keeps His covenant promises

hurts, and doesn't change; ⁵ he who doesn't lend out his money for usury, nor take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be shaken.

Psalm 16 Jan. 6

A Poem by David.

¹ Preserve me, God, for in You do I take refuge. ² My soul, you have said to Yahweh, You are my Lord. Apart from You I have no good thing. ³ As for the saints who are in the earth, they are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight. ⁴ Their sorrows shall be multiplied who give gifts to another god. Their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, nor take their names on my lips. ⁵ Yahweh assigned my portion and my cup, you made my inheritance secure. ⁶ The lines have fallen to me in pleasant places; truly I have a good inheritance. ⁷ I will bless Yahweh, who has given me counsel. Yes, my heart instructs

me in the night seasons. ⁸ I have set Yahweh always before me; because He is at my right hand, I shall not be moved. ⁹ Therefore my heart is glad, and my tongue rejoices. My body shall also lay to rest in hope. ¹⁰ For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, neither will You allow Your holy one to see corruption. ¹¹ You will show me the path of life. In Your presence is fullness of joy, in Your right hand there are pleasures forevermore.

Psalm 17 Jan. 7

A Prayer by David.

¹ Hear, Yahweh, my righteous plea; give ear to my prayer, that doesn't go out of deceitful lips. ² Let my sentence come forth from Your presence, let Your eyes look on integrity. ³ You have proved my heart. You have visited me in the night. You have tried me, and found nothing. I have resolved that my mouth shall not disobey. ⁴ As for the works of men,

of grace to us. When we are tempted to go back on our word, we must remember how God doesn't do that to us.

16:3 *They are the excellent ones in whom is all my delight* – David often speaks of how he loves others who also love God, and he speaks of them in terms of great respect (15:4). We likewise should find ourselves naturally attracted to other believers, and should always be respectful towards them because of the fact they are loved by God. We cannot believe and keep ourselves in isolation from them, physically or mentally.

16:8-11 These verses are quoted about the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, of whom David was a type (Acts 2:27). Jesus is now at God's right hand offering our prayers to God (Rom. 8:34); and yet this is described here as His eternal pleasure (:11). Jesus takes great joy in offering our prayers to God, and this alone should inspire our prayer life.

17:2 We are invited to see our coming before God's throne in prayer as a foretaste of the judgment day, when we shall in reality come before His throne. The positive answer to our prayers now – the sentence going forth from the court of Heaven in response to God having as it were judged them – is therefore an encouragement of our final acceptance in that day.

by the word of Your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent. ⁵ My steps have held fast to Your paths, my feet have not slipped. ⁶ I have called on You, for You will answer me, God. Turn Your ear to me, hear my words. ⁷ Show Your marvellous grace, You who save those who take refuge under Your right hand from their enemies. ⁸ Keep me as the apple of Your eye, hide me under the shadow of Your wings, ⁹ from the wicked who oppress me, my deadly enemies, who surround me. ¹⁰ They close up their callous hearts. With their mouth they speak proudly. ¹¹ They have now surrounded us in our steps, they set their eyes to cast us down to the earth. ¹² He is like a lion that is greedy of his prey, as it were a young lion lurking in secret places. ¹³ Arise, Yahweh, confront him. Cast him down. Deliver my soul from the wicked by Your sword; ¹⁴ from men by Your hand, Yahweh, from men of the world, whose portion is in this life. You fill the belly of Your cherished ones. Your sons have plenty, and they store up wealth for their children. ¹⁵ As for me, I

shall see Your face in righteousness. I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with seeing Your form.

Psalm 18 Jan. 8

For the Chief Musician. By David the servant of Yahweh, who spoke to Yahweh the words of this song in the day that Yahweh delivered him from the hand of all his enemies, and from the hand of Saul. He said,

¹ I love You, Yahweh, my strength. ² Yahweh is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower. ³ I call on Yahweh, who is worthy to be praised; and I am saved from my enemies. ⁴ The cords of death surrounded me, the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. ⁵ The cords of Sheol were around me, the snares of death came on me. ⁶ In my distress I called on Yahweh, and cried to my God. He heard my voice out of His temple; my cry before Him came into His ears. ⁷ Then the earth shook and trembled, the foundations also of the mountains quaked and were shaken, because

17:4 *The word of Your lips I have kept myself* – Constant reflection upon God's word is the way to victory against temptation, as Jesus showed by continually quoting from Scripture during His wilderness temptations (Ps. 119:11).

17:8 *The apple of Your eye* – God is simply so sensitive to us.

Hide me under the shadow of Your wings – Alluding to the wings of the cherubim covering the ark, where the blood of atonement (representing Christ's blood) was sprinkled. David saw himself as living in the most holy presence of God wherever he was.

17:15 *Seeing Your form* – Another indication God exists in a literal tangible form, and we shall see Him.

18:5 'Sheol' is the Hebrew word translated "hell" in some Bibles; it is paralleled here with "death" (:4, "the cords of death" are "the cords of Sheol") and is elsewhere translated "the grave". It's not a place where the wicked go for eternal torment; David was a righteous man, and he too went to the grave, or *sheol*.

He was angry. ⁸ Smoke went out of His nostrils, consuming fire came out of His mouth; coals were kindled by it. ⁹ He bowed the heavens also, and came down, thick darkness was under His feet. ¹⁰ He rode on a cherub, and flew. Yes, He soared on the wings of the wind. ¹¹ He made darkness His hiding place, His pavilion around Him, darkness of waters, thick clouds of the skies. ¹² At the brightness before Him His thick clouds passed, hailstones and coals of fire. ¹³ Yahweh also thundered in the sky, the Most High uttered His voice: hailstones and coals of fire. ¹⁴ He sent out His arrows, and scattered them; yes, great lightning bolts, and defeated them. ¹⁵ Then the channels of waters appeared, the foundations of the world were laid bare at Your rebuke, Yahweh, at the blast of the breath of Your nostrils. ¹⁶ He sent from on high. He took me, He drew me out of many waters. ¹⁷ He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me; for they were too mighty for me. ¹⁸ They came on me in the day of my calamity, but Yahweh was my support.

¹⁹ He brought me forth also into a large place. He delivered me, because He delighted in me. ²⁰ Yahweh has judged me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands has He recompensed me. ²¹ For I have kept the ways of Yahweh, and have not wickedly departed from my God. ²² For all His ordinances were before me, I didn't put away His statutes from me. ²³ I was also blameless with Him, I kept myself from my iniquity. ²⁴ Therefore Yahweh has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to the cleanness of my hands in His eyesight. ²⁵ With the merciful You will show Yourself merciful. With the perfect man, You will show Yourself perfect. ²⁶ With the pure, You will show Yourself pure; with the crooked You will show Yourself shrewd. ²⁷ For You will save the afflicted people, but the proud eyes You will bring down. ²⁸ For You will light my lamp, Yahweh. My God will light up my darkness. ²⁹ For by You I advance through a troop. By my God, I leap over a wall. ³⁰ As for God, His way is perfect. The word

18:16 *He drew me out of many waters* – This is an allusion to the name ‘Moses’ which means just this (Ex. 2:10); :19 alludes to how Israel were brought out of Egypt to the large place of Canaan, and there are many other Moses / Exodus allusions in this Psalm. We like David are to see similarities between our lives and those of Bible characters, taking them as our warnings, inspiration and friends, as David evidently understood Moses. And of course we will one day eternally be united with our heroes and encouragers in faith.

18:22–24 David speaks like this of his own righteousness, although this Psalm was written in later life, after his sin with Bathsheba (:1 = 2 Sam. 22:1). He can only speak like this because he had learnt the lesson that God’s righteousness really is imputed to us who are sinners; and he rejoices in this reality, believing it to the point that he really felt it and his self-perception reflected it.

18:30 *The word of Yahweh is tried in the furnace* – The experiences of our lives are

of Yahweh is tried in the furnace. He is a shield to all those who take refuge in Him. ³¹ For who is God, except Yahweh? Who is a rock besides our God, ³² the God who arms me with strength, and makes my way perfect? ³³ He makes my feet like deer's feet, and sets me on my high places. ³⁴ He teaches my hands to war, so that my arms bend a bow of bronze. ³⁵ You have also given me the shield of Your salvation. Your right hand sustains me. Your gentleness has made me great. ³⁶ You have enlarged my steps under me, My feet have not slipped. ³⁷ I will pursue my enemies, and overtake them. Neither will I turn again until they are consumed. ³⁸ I will strike them through, so that they will not be able to rise. They shall fall under my feet. ³⁹ For You have armed me with strength to the battle, You have subdued under me those who rose up against me. ⁴⁰ You have also made my enemies turn their backs to me, that I might cut off those who hate me. ⁴¹ They cried, but there was none to save;

even to Yahweh, but He didn't answer them. ⁴² Then I beat them small as the dust before the wind. I cast them out as the mire of the streets. ⁴³ You have delivered me from the strivings of the people, You have made me the head of the nations. A people whom I have not known shall serve me. ⁴⁴ As soon as they hear of me they shall obey me; the foreigners shall submit themselves to me. ⁴⁵ The foreigners shall fade away, and shall come trembling out of their close places. ⁴⁶ Yahweh lives; and blessed be my rock. Exalted be the God of my salvation, ⁴⁷ even the God who executes vengeance for me, and subdues peoples under me. ⁴⁸ He rescues me from my enemies. Yes, You lift me up above those who rise up against me. You deliver me from the violent man. ⁴⁹ Therefore I will give thanks to You, Yahweh, among the nations, and will sing praises to Your name. ⁵⁰ He gives great deliverance to His king, and shows grace to His anointed, to David and to his seed, forevermore.

like the intense fire of a furnace, and God's word like gold comes through those tests; it is proved not only true but wonderful and beautiful, time and again.

18:43 *You have made me the head of the nations* – But David speaks in :44 as if this had not yet happened. He imagined the things he prayed for as having already happened, just as Jesus taught we should too (Mt. 21:22 Gk.). God speaks of those things which don't exist as if they do, so certain are they of coming to pass (Rom. 4:17), and we are asked to have this same perspective when it comes to prayer.

18:49 *I will give thanks to You, Yahweh, among the nations* – God's intention was that Israel should be a missionary nation, the light of the Gentile world. But generally they failed to perceive this; David was one of the few who did, because his Psalms often speak of telling the Gentile nations how great God is. He came to this simply from the colossal desire he had to praise God as widely and far as possible because of what God had done for him personally by grace. We should be likewise motivated to take the Gospel to the world around us, on the basis of simply *having* to tell others the wonderful things which we personally have experienced from God.

Psalm 19 Jan. 9

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God, the expanse above shows His handiwork. ² Day after day they pour forth speech, and night after night they display knowledge. ³ There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. ⁴ Their voice has gone out through all the earth, their words to the end of the world. In them He has set a tent for the sun, ⁵ which is as a bridegroom coming out of his room, like a strong man rejoicing to run his course. ⁶ His going forth is from the end of the heavens, his circuit to its ends; there is nothing hidden from its heat. ⁷ Yahweh's law is perfect, restoring the soul. Yahweh's testimony is sure, making wise the simple. ⁸ Yahweh's precepts are right, rejoicing the heart. Yahweh's commandment is pure, enlightening the eyes. ⁹ The fear of Yahweh is clean, enduring forever. Yahweh's ordinances are true, and righteous altogether. ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold, yes, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the extract of the honeycomb. ¹¹ Moreover by them is Your

servant warned; in keeping them there is a great reward. ¹² Who can discern his own errors? Forgive me from sins of ignorance. ¹³ Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins, let them not have dominion over me. Then I will be upright, I will be blameless and innocent of the great transgression. ¹⁴ Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, Yahweh, my rock and my redeemer.

Psalm 20 Jan. 9

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

¹ May Yahweh answer you in the day of trouble. May the name of the God of Jacob set you up on high, ² send you help from the sanctuary, grant you support from Zion, ³ remember all your offerings and accept your burnt sacrifice. Selah. ⁴ May He grant you your heart's desire, and fulfil all your word. ⁵ We will triumph in Your salvation, in the name of our God, we will set up our banners. May Yahweh grant all your requests. ⁶ Now I know that Yahweh saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven, with the saving strength of His right hand.

19:4 This is quoted in Rom. 10:18 about the preaching of the Gospel into all the world. Thus in the same way as the sun and stars witness to God's existence worldwide, so the Gospel is to be taken world-wide. The Psalm therefore moves on to talk about the power of God's word (:7,8) which is being preached.

19:12 If we hope for forgiveness for sins of ignorance, we are accepting that we will be forgiven without specific repentance. As we forgive, according to the principles we apply to forgiving others, so we will be forgiven. If we hope ourselves for forgiveness for sins we've not specifically repented of, because we are unaware of them, we likewise must forgive others the sins they do against us without repentance. To insist that we will only forgive others if they repent would mean that we would be unable to pray this prayer.

⁷ Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust the name of Yahweh our God. ⁸ They are bowed down and fallen, but we rise up, and stand upright. ⁹ Save, Yahweh! Let the King answer us when we call!

Psalm 21 Jan. 9

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

¹ The king rejoices in Your strength, Yahweh! How greatly he rejoices in Your salvation! ² You have given him his heart's desire, and have not withheld the request of his lips. Selah. ³ For You meet him with the blessings of goodness, You set a crown of fine gold on his head. ⁴ He asked life of You, You gave it to him, even length of days forever and ever. ⁵ His glory is great in Your salvation; You lay honour and majesty on him, ⁶ for You make him most blessed forever. You make him glad with joy in Your presence; ⁷ for the king trusts in Yahweh. Through the grace of the Most

High, he shall not be moved. ⁸ Your hand will find out all of Your enemies; Your right hand will find out those who hate You. ⁹ You will make them as a fiery furnace in the time of Your anger. Yahweh will swallow them up in His wrath, the fire shall devour them. ¹⁰ You will destroy their descendants from the land, their posterity from among the children of men. ¹¹ For they intended evil against You, they plotted evil against You which cannot succeed. ¹² For You will make them turn their back when You aim drawn bows at their face. ¹³ Be exalted, Yahweh, in Your strength; so we will sing and praise Your power.

Psalm 22 Jan. 10

For the Chief Musician; set to The Doe of the Morning. A Psalm by David.

¹ My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from helping me, and from the

20:7 Solomon speaks of “my father David” so often that it appears he was dominated by the need he felt to live out David’s parental expectations of him. But Solomon’s obsession with chariots and horses shows that he didn’t follow David in real spiritual terms, just externally. Those whose parents were believers and were raised to believe must ask themselves whether they too are merely living out parental expectation externally.

21:4 David felt that he had been given eternal life in the sense that the covenant blessings had an eternal quality to them (:6). And yet he often speaks about death as the end of conscious existence. We have here an Old Testament equivalent to Christ’s teaching that we can now have eternal life (Jn. 6:54); we will die, in hope of resurrection to eternal life, but we can live now the kind of life which we will eternally live. Hence the parables of the Kingdom of God teach about how life can be lived right now.

22:1 Quoted by Christ on the cross (Mt. 27:46). The way Christ calls God “my God” (see :10 also) and prays to Him is not only disproof of the Trinitarian view of Christ; it enables us to find in Christ true inspiration and comfort knowing that He was our representative, of our nature. We are also comforted that to have doubts, even a crisis of faith and understanding as to why God isn’t acting, isn’t a sin; for Christ had these

words of my groaning? ² My God, I cry in the daytime, but You don't answer; in the night season, and am not silent. ³ But You are holy, You who inhabit the praises of Israel. ⁴ Our fathers trusted in You- they trusted, and You delivered them, ⁵ they cried to You, and were delivered. They trusted in You, and were not disappointed. ⁶ But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people. ⁷ All those who see me mock me, they insult me with their lips, they shake their heads and say, ⁸ He trusts in Yahweh; let Him deliver him. Let Him rescue him, since He delights in him. ⁹ But You brought me out of the womb, You made me trust at my mother's breasts. ¹⁰ I was thrown on You from my mother's womb; You are my God since my mother bore me. ¹¹ Don't be far from me, for trouble is near; for there is none else to help. ¹² Many bulls have surrounded me,

strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. ¹³ They open their mouths wide against me, lions tearing prey and roaring. ¹⁴ I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax; it is melted within me. ¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a shard of pottery; my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You have brought me into the dust of death. ¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded me, a company of evildoers have enclosed me; they have pierced my hands and feet. ¹⁷ I can count all of my bones, they look and stare at me. ¹⁸ They divide my garments among them, they cast lots for my clothing. ¹⁹ But don't be far off, Yahweh. You are my help: hurry to help me. ²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog! ²¹ Save me from the lion's mouth! Yes, from the horns of the wild oxen, You have answered me. ²² I will declare Your name to my

feelings and yet never sinned. Christ said these words “about the ninth hour” (Mt. 27:46), and yet He died at the ninth hour (Mk. 15:34). That He had some sense of crisis at the very end adds the ultimate in drama to the crucifixion account, and makes His final victory yet more glorious.

22:8 Quoted against Christ on the cross (Mt. 27:43). We are encouraged by the New Testament application of this Psalm to Christ to see the whole Psalm as giving a unique window into the thoughts of God's Son in His time of dying.

22:14 *My bones are out of joint* – The Messianic Psalms often stress the pain Christ felt in His bones; crucifixion was designed to make the bones of the crucified suffer. We who are baptized into the body of Christ are described as His bones (Eph. 5:30); and yet not one of Christ's bones was broken (Jn. 19:36). In all this we have profound encouragement. We are to suffer with Christ, sharing His cross; and yet ultimately we will not be broken, but rise again to eternity, just as His body and bones did. From the awkward and unnatural position of the crucified, Christ could look down upon His literal bones and feel they were as persons looking at Him (:17); thus it seems He had an awareness of us as He hung there.

22:18 Fulfilled in Mt. 27:35; Jn. 19:24.

22:22 This is quoted in Heb. 2:12 to demonstrate Christ's identity with us, having had

brothers, in the midst of the congregation I will praise You.²³ You who fear Yahweh, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him! Stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel!²⁴ For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, neither has He hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him, He heard.²⁵ Of You comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him.²⁶ The humble shall eat and be satisfied, they who seek after Him shall praise Yahweh. May your hearts live forever.²⁷ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to Yahweh, all the families of nations shall worship before You.²⁸ For the kingdom is Yahweh's, He is the ruler over the nations.²⁹ All the rich ones of the earth shall eat and worship, all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who can't keep his own soul alive.³⁰ Posterity shall serve Him, future generations shall be told about the Lord.³¹ They shall come and shall declare His righteousness to a people that shall be born, for He has finished it.

human nature. He was especially close to us in His death, and we likewise can look to Him there and feel close to Him and His closeness to us. The tone of the Psalm now becomes more positive, as Christ comes to think of us, the “congregation” [LXX *ekklesia*, the church] who would be brought into being on account of His suffering. It could be that He quoted the entire Psalm out loud; “He has finished it” (:31) in the LXX is “It is finished”, which were the very last words of Christ (Jn. 19:30).

23:5 A table before me in the presence of my enemies – Sometimes in the depths of despair God will provide an amazing grace to us; and He did this when David fled from his own son through the wilderness, and Barzillai unexpectedly laid out a feast table for David in the semi-desert (2 Sam. 17:27-29). This act of kindness transformed the dry terrain into “green meadows” for David (:2). Our thoughtful grace to others can do the same for them.

Psalm 23 Jan. 11

A Psalm by David.

¹ Yahweh is my shepherd: I shall be in need of nothing.² He makes me lie down in green meadows, He leads me beside still waters.³ He restores my soul, He guides me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake.⁴ Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and staff, they comfort me.⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil, My cup runs over.⁶ Surely goodness and grace shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in Yahweh's house forever.

Psalm 24 Jan. 11

A Psalm by David.

¹ The earth is Yahweh's, with all its fullness; the world, and they who dwell in it.² For He has founded it on the seas, and established it on the floods.³ Who may ascend to Yahweh's hill? Who may stand in His holy place?⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart; who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and

has not sworn deceitfully.⁵ He shall receive a blessing from Yahweh, namely righteousness from the God of his salvation.⁶ This is the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face—even that of the God of Jacob. Selah.⁷ Lift up your heads, you gatekeepers! Be lifted up, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory will come in.⁸ Who is the King of glory? Yahweh strong and mighty, Yahweh mighty in battle.⁹ Lift up your heads, you gatekeepers; yes, lift them up, you everlasting doors, and the King of glory will come in.¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? Yahweh of Armies is the King of glory! Selah.

Psalm 25 Jan. 11

By David.

¹ To You, Yahweh, do I lift up my soul. ² My God, I have trusted in You; don't let me be shamed. Don't let my enemies triumph over me. ³ Truly, no one who waits for You shall be shamed. They shall be shamed who deal treacherously without cause. ⁴ Show me Your ways, Yahweh, teach me Your paths. ⁵ Guide me in Your truth, and teach me, for You are the

God of my salvation; I wait for You all day long.⁶ Yahweh, remember Your tender mercies and Your grace, for they are from old times.⁷ Don't remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions. Remember me according to Your grace, for Your goodness' sake, Yahweh.⁸ Good and upright is Yahweh, therefore He will instruct sinners in the way.⁹ He will guide the humble in justice; He will teach the humble His way.¹⁰ All the ways of Yahweh are grace and truth to such as keep His covenant and His testimonies.¹¹ For Your name's sake, Yahweh, pardon my iniquity, for it is great.¹² What man is he who fears Yahweh? He shall instruct him in the way that he shall choose.¹³ His soul shall dwell at ease, His descendants shall inherit the land.¹⁴ The friendship of Yahweh is with those who fear Him; He will show them His covenant.¹⁵ My eyes are ever on Yahweh, for He will pluck my feet out of the net.¹⁶ Turn to me, and have mercy on me, for I am desolate and afflicted.¹⁷ The troubles of my heart are enlarged. Oh bring me out of my distresses!¹⁸ Consider my affliction and my travail, forgive all

24:5 God's blessing is defined here as His righteousness; the blessing of God promised to Abraham and his seed involves the blessing of forgiveness of sins (Acts 3:25,26). This is achieved by God counting His righteousness to us, looking at us another way—and this becomes possible for us who are baptized into Christ, whereby His righteous character is counted to us.

25:8, 9 *He will instruct sinners in the way... He will teach the humble His way*—The humble here therefore refer to repentant sinners. This is the frame of mind which makes us most teachable by God, and in this way God works through sin, in that repentance for it makes people more open to His teaching.

25:10 The more we live daily life in harmony with God's will, the more we will perceive that all His ways, His workings, both over history and in our lives, reflect His grace. We will not see Him as hard and unreasonable.

my sins.¹⁹ Consider my enemies, for they are many; they hate me with total hatred.²⁰ Oh keep my soul, and deliver me; let me not be disappointed, for I take refuge in You.²¹ Let integrity and uprightness preserve me, for I wait for You.²² Redeem Israel, God, out all of His troubles.

Psalm 26 Jan. 12

By David.

¹ Judge me, Yahweh, for I have walked in my integrity. I have trusted also in Yahweh without wavering.² Examine me, Yahweh, and prove me; test my heart and my mind.³ For Your grace is before my eyes, I have walked in Your truth.⁴ I have not sat with deceitful men, neither will I go in with hypocrites.⁵ I hate the assembly of evildoers, and will not sit with the wicked.⁶ I will wash my hands in innocence, so I will go around Your altar, Yahweh;⁷ that I may make the voice of thanksgiving to be heard, and tell of all Your wondrous works.⁸ Yahweh, I love the habitation of Your dwelling place, the place where Your glory dwells.⁹ Don't gather my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloodthirsty men;¹⁰ in whose hands is wickedness, their right hand is full

of bribes.¹¹ But as for me, I will walk in my integrity. Redeem me, and be merciful to me.¹² My foot stands in an even place; in the congregations I will bless Yahweh.

Psalm 27 Jan. 12

By David.

¹ Yahweh is my light and my salvation- whom shall I fear? Yahweh is the strength of my life- of whom shall I be afraid?² When evildoers came at me to eat up my flesh, even my adversaries and my foes, they stumbled and fell.³ Though an army should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear. Though war should rise against me, even then I will be confident.⁴ One thing I have asked of Yahweh, that I will seek after: That I may dwell in the house of Yahweh all the days of my life, to see Yahweh's beauty, and to inquire in His temple.⁵ For in the day of trouble He will keep me secretly in His pavilion, under the shadow of His tabernacle He will hide me. He will lift me up on a rock.⁶ Now my head will be lifted up above my enemies around me, I will offer sacrifices of joy in His tent. I will sing, yes, I will sing praises to Yahweh.⁷ Hear, Yahweh, when I

25:22 *Redeem Israel, God* – Many of the Psalms are David's personal pleas for mercy, but they merge towards the end of them into a request for God to show mercy to all His people. He looked out of his own sufferings to those of others, and took comfort in the fact that God's ultimate plan is to have a redeemed people living eternally on earth.

26:1 *Without wavering* – This Psalm appears very self-righteous, with David considering himself separate from sinners (:9); it contrasts with the Psalms written after the sin with Bathsheba, which often talk of David's desire to reach out to sinners rather than about separating from them.

26:3 God's truth refers to a way of life and being, rather than to a set of pure theological propositions. "Truth" is paralleled here with "grace", which is the ultimate truth.

cry with my voice. Have mercy also on me, and answer me. ⁸ When You said, Seek my face, my heart said to You, I will seek Your face, Yahweh. ⁹ Don't hide Your face from me; don't put Your servant away in anger. You have been my help, don't abandon me, neither forsake me, God of my salvation. ¹⁰ When my father and my mother forsake me, then Yahweh will take me up. ¹¹ Teach me Your way, Yahweh. Lead me in a straight path, because of my enemies. ¹² Don't deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen up against me, such as breathe out cruelty. ¹³ I am still confident of this: I will see the goodness of Yahweh in the land of the living. ¹⁴ Wait for Yahweh, be strong, and let your heart take courage. Yes, wait for Yahweh.

Psalm 28 Jan. 12

By David.

¹ To You, Yahweh, I call. My rock,

don't be deaf to me; lest, if You are silent to me, I would become like those who go down into the pit. ² Hear the voice of my petitions when I cry to You, when I lift up my hands toward Your Most Holy Place. ³ Don't draw me away with the wicked, with the workers of iniquity who speak peace with their neighbours, but mischief is in their hearts. ⁴ Give them according to their work, and according to the wickedness of their doings. Give them according to the working of their own hands; bring back on them what they deserve. ⁵ Because they don't respect the works of Yahweh, nor the working of His hands, He will break them down and not build them up. ⁶ Blessed be Yahweh, because He has heard the voice of my petitions. ⁷ Yahweh is my strength and my shield. My heart has trusted in Him, and I have been helped; therefore my heart greatly rejoices. With my song I will thank Him. ⁸ Yahweh is their strength, He is a stronghold

27:9 *Don't abandon me* – Contrast this with the utter confidence expressed elsewhere in this Psalm. We can have the emotions of fear, even of panic, and yet at the same time feel deep faith in God. In this time of need, David reflected how God had earlier delivered him (:2), and this should feature in our response to crises.

27:10 The classic middle aged crisis of loneliness as parents die, the links with the past being cut, is here resolved in the feeling of God's personal parenthood toward us.

27:14 *Wait* – So often the Psalms speak of the need to "wait" for God. We assume His response must be immediate, but the 'gap' between our prayer and His response is necessary, for the sake of the development of our faith. It maintains that appropriate distance which has to be between God and man at this stage.

28:2 *Hear the voice of my petitions* – Yet within the same prayer, David can rejoice that God "has heard the voice of my petitions" (:6). We are to pray for things believing and feeling that we have received them (Mk. 11:24); we are to have the perspective of God Himself, who speaks of things which currently aren't as if they are (Rom. 4:17). Therefore David can conclude this prayer with praise that God has actually answered it already (:7).

28:8, 9 Again David looks out of himself in his immediate need to others, rejoicing as

of salvation to His anointed. ⁹ Save Your people, and bless Your inheritance. Be their shepherd also, and bear them up forever.

Psalm 29 Jan. 13

A Psalm by David.

¹ Ascribe to Yahweh, you sons of the mighty, ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength. ² Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due to His name. Worship Yahweh in holy array. ³ Yahweh's voice is on the waters. The God of glory thunders, even Yahweh on many waters. ⁴ Yahweh's voice is powerful. Yahweh's voice is full of majesty. ⁵ The voice of Yahweh breaks the cedars. Yes, Yahweh breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon. ⁶ He also makes them to skip like a calf; Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild ox. ⁷ Yahweh's voice strikes with flashes of lightning. ⁸ Yahweh's voice shakes the wilderness, Yahweh shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. ⁹ Yahweh's voice makes the deer

calve, and strips the forests bare. In His temple everything says, Glory! ¹⁰ Yahweh sat enthroned at the flood; truly, Yahweh sits as King forever. ¹¹ Yahweh will give strength to His people, Yahweh will bless His people with peace.

Psalm 30 Jan. 13

A Psalm. A Song for the Dedication of the Temple. By David.

¹ I will extol You, Yahweh, for You have raised me up, and have not made my enemies to rejoice over me. ² Yahweh my God, I cried to You, and You have healed me. ³ Yahweh, You have brought up my soul from Sheol. You have kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit. ⁴ Sing praise to Yahweh, You saints of His, give thanks to His holy name. ⁵ For His anger is but for a moment; His grace is for all our lifetime. Weeping may stay for the night, but joy comes in the morning. ⁶ As for me, I said in my prosperity, I shall never

he often does at the end of his Psalms that *his* positive experience of God will be that of all God's people. We can at least take the lesson that we are to look out of ourselves to others rather than be swamped by the immediacy of our own issues.

29:5 Here and in :8 we have “the voice of Yahweh” paralleled with Yahweh in person. God is His word – hence we read that “the word was God” (Jn. 1:1). Our attitude to God’s word is our attitude to God; it’s therefore not possible to claim to be in relationship with God if we ignore His word as we now have it in the Bible. There’s much talk about “God” but unless this is based upon His word, we are believing in a ‘God’ of our own creation rather than the true God who is revealed in the Bible.

30:6 David seems to be reflecting upon some life threatening illness he suffered after his sin with Bathsheba (:2,3); the title of the Psalm shows he wrote this as he was preparing for his son Solomon to build the temple, towards the end of his life. He is reflecting how he had fallen into sin as a result of assuming that he could never fall from the spiritual place he felt he was at. Whilst we should be confident that if Christ returns today we shall be saved by grace, we cannot assume that we shall always be where we are now spiritually, and we should always maintain a keen sense of the eternity we may miss if we turn away.

be moved. ⁷ You, Yahweh, when You favoured me, made my mountain stand strong; but when You hid Your face, I was troubled. ⁸ I cried to You, Yahweh; to Yahweh I made supplication: ⁹ What profit is there in my destruction, if I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise You? Shall it declare Your truth? ¹⁰ Hear, Yahweh, and have mercy on me. Yahweh, be my helper. ¹¹ You have turned my mourning into dancing for me. You have removed my sackcloth, and clothed me with gladness, ¹² To the end that my heart may sing praise to You, and not be silent. Yahweh my God, I will give thanks to You forever!

Psalm 31 Jan. 14

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

¹ In You, Yahweh, I take refuge. Let me never be disappointed. Deliver me in Your righteousness. ² Bow down Your ear to me, deliver me quickly. Be to me a strong rock, a house of defence to save me. ³ For You are my rock and my fortress, therefore for

Your name's sake lead me and guide me. ⁴ Pluck me out of the net that they have laid secretly for me, for You are my stronghold. ⁵ Into Your hand I commend my spirit. You have redeemed me, Yahweh, God of truth. ⁶ I hate those who regard lying vanities, but I trust in Yahweh. ⁷ I will be glad and rejoice in Your grace, for You have seen my affliction. You have known my soul in adversities. ⁸ You have not shut me up into the hand of the enemy, You have set my feet in a large place. ⁹ Have mercy on me, Yahweh, for I am in distress. My eye, my soul, and my body waste away with grief. ¹⁰ For my life is spent with sorrow, my years with sighing. My strength fails because of my sin, my bones are wasted away. ¹¹ Because of all my adversaries I have become utterly contemptible to my neighbours, a fear to my acquaintances. Those who saw me on the street fled from me. ¹² I am forgotten from their hearts like a dead man; I am like broken pottery. ¹³ For I have heard the slander of many, terror on every side, while they con-

30:7 Mountain – Used in Scripture to refer to a Kingdom or family; David's 'mountain' in this sense was "troubled" as a result of his sin with Bathsheba.

30:9 This request indicates that David didn't go to Heaven on death (Acts 2:34), but understood death as total unconsciousness until Christ's return.

31:2, 3 Be to me a strong rock... for You are my rock – David is asking God to be to him in practice what he accepted God to be theoretically. Time and again we seek to make this same conversion from theory to practical reality as we face life's situations.

31:5 Into Your hand I commend my spirit – Chosen by Jesus as His last words from the cross as He died (Lk. 23:46). Perhaps the next half of the sentence were His first thoughts on awaking in resurrection: "You have redeemed me, Yahweh, God of truth".

31:7 You have known my soul in adversities – God as it were gets to know us when He sees us in crises. Although He knows all things, we reveal ourselves to Him by how we feel and respond in those times.

spire together against me, they plot to take away my life.¹⁴ But I trust in You, Yahweh. I said, You are my God.¹⁵ My times are in Your hand. Redeem me from the hand of my enemies, and from those who persecute me.¹⁶ Make Your face to shine on Your servant; save me in Your grace.¹⁷ Let me not be disappointed, Yahweh, for I have called on You. Let the wicked be disappointed, may they be silent in Sheol.¹⁸ Let the lying lips be mute, which speak against the righteous insolently, with pride and contempt.¹⁹ Oh how great is Your goodness, which You have laid up for those who fear You, which You have worked for those who take refuge in You, before the sons of men!²⁰ In the shelter of Your presence You will hide them from the plotting of man. You will keep them secretly in a dwelling away from the strife of tongues.²¹ Praise be to Yahweh, for He has shown me His marvellous grace in a fortified city.²² As for me, I said in my haste, I am cut off from before Your eyes. Nevertheless You

heard the voice of my petitions when I cried to You.²³ Oh love Yahweh, all you His saints! Yahweh preserves the faithful, and fully recompenses him who behaves arrogantly.²⁴ Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who hope in Yahweh.

Psalm 32 Jan. 15

By David. A contemplative psalm.

¹ Blessed is he whose iniquity is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man to whom Yahweh doesn't impute iniquity, in whose spirit there is no deceit. ³ When I kept silence, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night Your hand was heavy on me, my strength was dried as in the heat of summer. Selah. ⁵ I acknowledged my sin to You, I didn't hide my iniquity. I said, I will confess my transgressions to Yahweh, and You forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah. ⁶ For this, let each one who is Godly pray to You in a time when You may be found. Surely when the great waters overflow, they

31:15 *Redeem me* – But David has stated that God had already redeemed him (:5). So often in the Psalms we encounter this struggle to believe and feel as if our prayer has been heard before it actually is; and it is the same struggle we daily have in our prayer life.

31:21 *He has shown me His marvellous loving kindness in a fortified city* – David saw the similarities between himself and the spies who entered the fortified city of Jericho and found themselves trapped within it, with no human way of escape.

32:1, 2 This is a soliloquy, David talking to himself as he meditated upon God's forgiveness of his sin with Bathsheba. But it is quoted in Rom. 4:7 with a subtle change of pronoun; “blessed is he” (:1) is changed to “blessed are *they*”. Thus David's sin with Bathsheba and in murdering Uriah her husband becomes representative of all our sins, and we have received the same amazing grace which David did, seeing that there was no legal way out of what he had done – he deserved only death. See on 38:4.

32:4 This refers to the period of time between the sin and the visit of Nathan which convicted David of his sin (2 Sam. 12).

shall not reach to him. ⁷ You are my hiding place, You will preserve me from trouble, You will surround me with songs of deliverance. Selah. ⁸ I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go, I will counsel you with my eye on you. ⁹ Don't be like the horse or like the mule which have no understanding, who are controlled by bit and bridle, or else they will not come near to you. ¹⁰ Many sorrows come to the wicked, but grace shall surround him who trusts in Yahweh. ¹¹ Be glad in Yahweh, and rejoice, you righteous! Shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart!

Psalm 33 Jan. 16

¹ Rejoice in Yahweh, you righteous! Praise is fitting for the upright. ² Give thanks to Yahweh with the lyre, sing praises to Him with the harp of ten strings. ³ Sing to Him a new song, play skilfully with a shout of joy! ⁴ For the word of Yahweh is right, all His work is done in faithfulness. ⁵ He loves righteousness and justice; the earth is full of the grace of Yah-

weh. ⁶ By Yahweh's word the heavens were made; all their army by the breath of His mouth. ⁷ He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deeps in storehouses. ⁸ Let all the earth fear Yahweh, let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him. ⁹ For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood firm. ¹⁰ Yahweh brings the counsel of the nations to nothing; He makes the thoughts of the peoples to be of no power. ¹¹ The counsel of Yahweh stands fast forever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations. ¹² Blessed is the nation whose God is Yahweh, the people whom He has chosen for His own inheritance. ¹³ Yahweh views from heaven; He sees all the sons of men. ¹⁴ From the place of His habitation He looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, ¹⁵ He who fashions all of their hearts; and He considers all of their works. ¹⁶ There is no king saved by the multitude of an army; a mighty man is not delivered by great strength. ¹⁷ A horse is a vain thing for safety, neither does he deliver any by his great

32:6 *Let each one who is Godly pray to You* – David's experience of sin and utter forgiveness should inspire each sinner to repent; but the repentant sinner is here described as “Godly”. Godliness doesn't mean we are sinless, but rather that we believe in God's forgiveness and are willing to repent.

32:8 David's experience of forgiveness became the motive for his preaching of it to others. Isaiah, Peter, the disciples and many others were given preaching commissions immediately after having been convicted of their own sinfulness. For this is the attitude of mind which makes preaching powerful and usable by God.

33:6 *By Yahweh's word the heavens were made* – This alludes to how the Genesis record of creation states that “God said” and things came into existence (:9). It explains how “all things” were made by God's word (Jn. 1:3). That same word which created all around us is likewise powerful to create a new creation within the formless darkness of our own lives and minds (2 Cor. 5:17). By reading and responding to God's word we expose ourselves to colossal and awesome creative power.

power. ¹⁸ Behold, Yahweh's eye is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His grace; ¹⁹ to deliver their soul from death, to keep them alive in famine. ²⁰ Our soul has waited for Yahweh; He is our help and our shield. ²¹ For our heart rejoices in Him, because we have trusted in His holy name. ²² Let Your grace be on us, Yahweh, according as we have hope in You.

Psalm 34 Jan. 17

By David; when he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he departed.

¹ I will bless Yahweh at all times; His praise will always be in my mouth. ² My soul shall boast in Yahweh. The humble shall hear of it, and be glad. ³ Oh magnify Yahweh with me, let us exalt His name together! ⁴ I sought Yahweh and He answered me, and delivered me from all my fears. ⁵ They looked to Him, and were radiant; their faces shall never be covered with shame. ⁶ This poor

man cried, and Yahweh heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷ The angel of Yahweh encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them. ⁸ Oh taste and see that Yahweh is good. Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him. ⁹ Oh fear Yahweh, you His saints, for there is no lack to those who fear Him. ¹⁰ The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger, but those who seek Yahweh shall not lack any good thing. ¹¹ Come, you children, listen to me. I will teach you the fear of Yahweh. ¹² Who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? ¹³ Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking lies. ¹⁴ Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. ¹⁵ Yahweh's eyes are toward the righteous, His ears listen to their cry. ¹⁶ Yahweh's face is against those who do evil, to cut off their memory from the earth. ¹⁷ The righteous cry, and Yahweh hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. ¹⁸ Yahweh is near to those who

33:22 God's grace is realized and effective in our lives according to our belief in its extent. It is we and not God who are limiting what is possible. If Abraham had prayed for Sodom to be saved for the sake of just the one righteous man there (Lot), perhaps he would've been heard; the man who thought the Lord's ability to heal was limited by His power was taught that the opposite is true, in that all things are possible but are limited by human faith (Mk. 9:22,23).

34:7 This suggests that we have a guardian Angel permanently settled down (Heb.) around us; the early church believed this (Acts 12:15). The Angels minister to us in order to bring us towards salvation (Heb. 1:14). The reference to Yahweh's "eyes" (:15) may also refer to our guardian Angels.

34:17 The righteous cry, and Yahweh hears – This parallels David's statement that *he* had cried and Yahweh had heard him (:6). Again he looks out of his own issues and sees them in the wider context of God's people; He has delivered them historically, so He will deliver us; if He delivers us, He will deliver His people in the future, and so we can reason from our personal testimony to persuade them to trust Him as we have. The Psalms are songs, and David was using them to share his faith with others.

have a broken heart, and saves those who have a crushed spirit.¹⁹ Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but Yahweh delivers him out of them all.²⁰ He protects all of his bones; not one of them is broken.²¹ Evil shall kill the wicked; those who hate the righteous shall be condemned.²² Yahweh redeems the soul of His servants; none of those who take refuge in Him shall be condemned.

Psalm 35 Jan. 18

By David.

¹ Contend, Yahweh, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me.² Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for my help.³ Brandish the spear and block those who pursue me. Tell my soul, I am Your salvation.⁴ Let those who seek after my soul be disappointed and brought to dishonour. Let those who plot my ruin be turned back and confounded.⁵ Let them be as chaff before the wind, Yahweh's

angel driving them on.⁶ Let their way be dark and slippery, Yahweh's angel pursuing them.⁷ For without cause they have hidden their net in a pit for me, without cause they have dug a pit for my soul.⁸ Let destruction come on him unawares. Let his net that he has hidden catch himself; let him fall into that destruction.⁹ My soul shall be joyful in Yahweh, I shall rejoice in His salvation.¹⁰ All my bones shall say, Yahweh, who is like You, who delivers the poor from him who is too strong for him; yes, the poor and the needy from him who robs him?¹¹ Unrighteous witnesses rise up; they accuse me of things that I know nothing about.¹² They reward me evil for good, to the be-reaving of my soul.¹³ But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth, I afflicted my soul with fasting. My prayer returned into my own bosom.¹⁴ I behaved myself as though it had been my friend or my brother. I bowed down mourn-

34:20 This was supremely fulfilled in the fact that no bone of Jesus was broken by the crucifixion process (Jn. 19:36). See on 22:14.

35:3 *Tell my soul, “I am Your salvation”* – David so often tells himself and us that God is indeed his salvation. But here he is asking God to speak directly to his heart and persuade him deeper of this truth. We too can ask God to directly increase our faith.

35:5, 6 Threshing and winnowing the wheat from the chaff is a common Biblical metaphor for the final day of judgment. The rejected will be chased away from Christ by the Angels into darkness (:6). The Bible teaches that Jesus will return from Heaven to judge us with the Angels with Him; they will play a part in the judgment process, which will be appropriate as they have been our guardians and stood with us through every moment of our lives (see on 34:7). There are frequent Biblical descriptions of the punishment of the wicked, wallowing at least for some period in darkness, rejected from the Lord they so wish to now be with [hence they are chased away from Him, as Adam was out of Eden, again by Angels]. These aren't to scare us into obedience, but to bring constantly before us the sober importance of the eternal issues which we face (see 2 Cor. 5:11).

ing, as one who mourns his mother. ¹⁵ But in my adversity, they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together. The attackers gathered themselves together against me, and I didn't know it. They tore at me, and didn't cease. ¹⁶ Like the profane mockers in feasts, they gnashed their teeth at me. ¹⁷ Lord, how long will You look on? Rescue my soul from their destruction, my precious life from the lions. ¹⁸ I will give You thanks in the great assembly, I will praise You among many people. ¹⁹ Don't let those who are my enemies wrongfully rejoice over me; neither let those who hate me without a cause wink their eyes. ²⁰ For they don't speak peace, but they devise deceitful words against those who are quiet in the land. ²¹ Yes, they opened their mouth wide against me. They said, Aha! Aha! Our eye has seen it! ²² You have seen it, Yahweh. Don't keep silent, Lord, don't be far from me. ²³ Wake up! Rise up to defend me, my God! My Lord, contend for me! ²⁴ Vindicate me, Yahweh my God, according to Your righteousness. Don't let them gloat over me. ²⁵ Don't let them say in their heart, Aha! That's just the way we want it! Don't let them say, We have swallowed him up! ²⁶ Let

them be disappointed and confounded together who rejoice at my calamity. Let them be clothed with shame and dishonour who magnify themselves against me. ²⁷ Let them shout for joy and be glad, who favour my righteous cause. Yes, let them say continually, Yahweh be magnified, who has pleasure in the prosperity of His servant! ²⁸ My tongue shall talk about Your righteousness and about Your praise all day long.

Psalm 36 Jan. 19

*For the Chief Musician. By David,
the servant of Yahweh.*

¹ An oracle is within my heart about the disobedience of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes. ² For he flatters himself in his own eyes, too much to detect and hate his sin. ³ The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit; he has ceased to be wise and to do good. ⁴ He plots iniquity on his bed, he sets himself up in a way that is not good. He doesn't hate evil. ⁵ Your grace, Yahweh, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. ⁶ Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are like a great deep. Yahweh, You preserve man and animal. ⁷ How precious is

35:14 *I bowed down mourning, as one who mourns his mother* – David speaks in the context of his love for Saul despite the endless persecution he received from him, and here alludes to his famous lament over Saul at his death (2 Sam. 1). A man mourning for his mother, rather than a woman for her mother or a father for his son, is a carefully chosen similitude. For a man's mourning for his mother features the bitter regret that 'I didn't appreciate her as I should've done'. And this was how David felt for Saul at his end. In this we see a most unusual level of love and sensitivity. And yet even that is but a dim reflection of the colossal love of God and Jesus for us, and their sensitivity to us and appreciation of our feeble spirituality.

Your grace, O God! The children of men take refuge under the shadow of Your wings.⁸ They shall be abundantly satisfied with the abundance of Your house; You will make them drink of the river of Your pleasures.⁹ For with You is the spring of life; in Your light shall we see light.¹⁰ Oh continue Your grace to those who know You, Your righteousness to the upright in heart.¹¹ Don't let the foot of pride come against me; don't let the hand of the wicked drive me away.¹² There the workers of iniquity are fallen, they are thrust down, and shall not be able to rise.

Psalm 37 Jan. 20

By David.

¹ Don't fret because of evildoers, neither be envious against those who work unrighteousness.² For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither like the green plant.³ Trust in Yahweh, and do good. Dwell in the land, and enjoy

safe pasture.⁴ Also delight yourself in Yahweh, and He will give you the desires of your heart.⁵ Commit your way to Yahweh. Trust also in Him, and He will do this:⁶ He will make your righteousness go forth as the light, and your justice as the noon day sun.⁷ Rest in Yahweh, and wait patiently for Him. Don't fret because of him who prospers in his way, because of the man who makes wicked plots happen.⁸ Cease from anger, and forsake wrath. Don't fret, it leads only to evildoing.⁹ For evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for Yahweh shall inherit the land.¹⁰ For yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more. Yes, though you look for his place, he isn't there.¹¹ But the humble shall inherit the land, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.¹² The wicked plots against the just, and gnashes at him with his teeth.¹³ The Lord will laugh at him, for He sees that his day is coming.¹⁴ The wicked have

36:9 In Your light shall we see light – Our worldview is to be that of God; His perspective is to be ours.

36:12 There the workers of iniquity are fallen – The obvious question of the Bible student to the statement “there” is “Where?” And the context seems to provide no answer. But David was imagining in his own mind the final destruction of the wicked at judgment day, as he often does in the Psalms. “There”, in his mind’s eye, he sees them fallen and without resurrection to eternal life. And this gives him perspective on his sufferings at their hands. We too can usefully play ‘Bible television’ and try to imagine the scene at judgment day. Whether we get all the details correct or not isn’t so important; the exercise provides huge perspective for us in our present life experiences.

37:4 He will give you the desires of your heart – This isn’t a blank cheque promise that we will get whatever we ask from God. If we delight in Him, then our greatest desires will be forgiveness from Him, to see His glory extended, and to have a place in His eternal Kingdom. And it is this latter desire which this Psalm speaks of frequently, comforting us in the hope of eternity in God’s Kingdom on earth; a hope which means that we will not be jealous of the wicked who are briefly prospering in this very short life (:1). See on 38:9.

drawn out the sword and have bent their bow to cast down the poor and needy, to kill those who are upright in the way.¹⁵ Their sword shall enter into their own heart. Their bows shall be broken.¹⁶ Better is a little that the righteous has, than the abundance of many wicked.¹⁷ For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but Yahweh upholds the righteous.¹⁸ Yahweh knows the days of the perfect. Their inheritance shall be forever.¹⁹ They shall not be disappointed in the time of evil; in the days of famine they shall be satisfied.²⁰ But the wicked shall perish, the enemies of Yahweh shall be like the passing beauty of the fields. They will vanish—vanish like smoke.²¹ The wicked borrow, and don't pay back, but the righteous give generously.²² For such as are blessed by Him shall inherit the land. Those who are cursed by Him shall be cut off.²³ A man's goings are established by Yahweh; He delights

in his way.²⁴ Though he stumble, he shall not fall, for Yahweh holds him up with His hand.²⁵ I have been young, and now am old, yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his children begging for bread.²⁶ All day long he deals graciously, and lends. His seed is blessed.²⁷ Depart from evil, and do good. Live securely forever.²⁸ For Yahweh loves justice, and doesn't forsake His saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off.²⁹ The righteous shall inherit the land, and live in it forever.³⁰ The mouth of the righteous talks of wisdom, his tongue speaks justice.³¹ The law of his God is in his heart, none of his steps shall slide.³² The wicked watches the righteous, and seeks to kill him.³³ Yahweh will not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.³⁴ Wait for Yahweh, and keep His way, and He will exalt you to inherit the land.

37:21 *The righteous give generously* – The inspiration for generosity in this life is that we shall eternally inherit the Kingdom on earth (:22). If we really believe that we shall and do even now partake in this ultimate Divine generosity, we will naturally be generous in the few things God has entrusted to us in this life.

37:23 *He delights in his way* – God delights in our life path, even though that path includes stumbling (:24).

37:25, 26 Just as Israel were provided with basic bread, water and clothing for their wilderness journey towards the promised land, so God has promised to provide us with such basic necessities. We can take colossal comfort from this, although it so easily becomes obscured by our materialistic society, bent as it is on acquisition. The fact that most of us are no longer agriculturally self-sufficient likewise tempts us to doubt this promise. Having this assurance, we can ‘afford’ to be generous (:26), not just rising to it occasionally, but as a characteristic of our lives, the very spirit by which we live (“all day long”).

37:29 This is a clear proof text that the hope of the righteous is eternal life on earth, not in Heaven. The allusion is clearly to the promises to Abraham of eternal inheritance of the land, and these promises are the basis of the Christian Gospel to which we stand related by baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:8, 27-29).

When the wicked are cut off, you shall see it.³⁵ I have seen the wicked in great power, spreading himself like a green tree in its native soil.³⁶ But he passed away, and behold, he was not. Yes, I sought him, but he could not be found.³⁷ Note the perfect man, and see the upright, for there is a future for the man of peace.³⁸ As for transgressors, they shall be destroyed together. The future of the wicked shall be cut off.³⁹ But the salvation of the righteous is from Yahweh; He is their stronghold in the time of trouble.⁴⁰ Yahweh helps them, and rescues them. He rescues them from the wicked, and saves them, because they have taken refuge in Him.

Psalm 38 Jan. 21

A Psalm by David, for a memorial.

¹ Yahweh, don't rebuke me in Your wrath, neither chasten me in Your hot displeasure. ² For Your arrows have pierced me, Your hand presses hard on me. ³ There is no soundness in my flesh because of Your indignation, neither is there any health in my bones because of my sin. ⁴ For my sins have gone over my head; as

a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me.⁵ My wounds are loathsome and corrupt because of my foolishness.⁶ I am pained and bowed down greatly. I go mourning all day long.⁷ For my waist is filled with burning, there is no soundness in my body.⁸ I am faint and severely bruised; I have groaned by reason of the anguish of my heart.⁹ Lord, all my desire is before You; my groaning is not hidden from You.¹⁰ My heart throbs, my strength fails me. As for the light of my eyes, it has also left me.¹¹ My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my plague, my kinsmen stand far away.¹² They also who seek after my life lay snares, those who seek my hurt speak mischievous things, and meditate deceipts all day long.¹³ But I, as a deaf man, don't hear. I am as a mute man who doesn't open his mouth.¹⁴ Yes, I am as a man who doesn't hear, in whose mouth are no reproofs.¹⁵ For in You, Yahweh, do I hope. You will answer, Lord my God.¹⁶ For I said, Don't let them gloat over me, or exalt themselves over me when my foot slips.¹⁷ For I am ready to fall; my pain is continually before me.¹⁸ For I will declare

38:4 As a heavy burden, they are too heavy for me – This is applied to all of us by Jesus when He invites we the heavy burdened to come to Him and find relief for that heavy load (Mt. 11:28). David is talking of his sins related to Bathsheba and Uriah; and again we find them being understood as typical of all our sins (see on 32:1,2).

38:9 All my desire is before You – All David's desire was for forgiveness; see on 37:4.

38:11 The consequence of sin is that it separates and isolates the sinner, as David found after his sin with Bathsheba, which resulted in the breakup of his family and his son conspiring to kill him and take over the kingdom. Some may sin and apparently not experience this isolation; but they feel it internally. That sin isolates the sinner, literally or psychologically, is designed by God; for it is in that isolation and self-analysis that the sinner has the opportunity to reconnect with God on a deeply personal level.

my iniquity, I will be sorry for my sin.¹⁹ But my enemies are vigorous and many. Those who hate me without reason are numerous.²⁰ They who also render evil for good are adversaries to me, because I follow what is good.²¹ Don't forsake me, Yahweh. My God, don't be far from me.²² Hurry to help me, Lord, my salvation.

Psalm 39 Jan. 22

For the Chief Musician. For Jeduthun. A Psalm by David.

¹ I said, I will watch my ways, so that I don't sin with my tongue. I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me.² I was mute with silence; I held my peace, even from good. My sorrow was stirred.³ My heart was hot within me. While I meditated, the fire burned: I spoke with my tongue:⁴ Yahweh, show me my end, what is the measure of my days. Let me know how frail I am.⁵ Behold, you have made my days mere handbreadths. My lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely every man stands as a breath. Selah.⁶ Surely every man walks like a shad-

ow. Surely they busy themselves in vain. He heaps up, and doesn't know who shall gather.⁷ Now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.⁸ Deliver me from all my transgressions. Don't make me the reproach of the foolish.⁹ I was mute. I didn't open my mouth, because You did it.¹⁰ Remove Your scourge away from me; I am overcome by the blow of Your hand.¹¹ When You rebuke and correct man for iniquity, You consume his days like a moth. Surely every man is but a breath. Selah.¹² Hear my prayer, Yahweh, and give ear to my cry. Don't be silent at my tears. For I am a stranger with You, a foreigner, as all my fathers were.¹³ Oh spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go away, and exist no more.

Psalm 40 Jan. 22

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

¹ I waited patiently for Yahweh. He turned to me, and heard my cry.² He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay. He set my feet on a rock, and gave me a firm

39:1 *Keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me* – We need to think ahead as to our likely weaknesses, recognizing that being in the presence of some people is going to provoke us to speak badly. In all our spiritual battles we should talk to ourselves like David did, and be aware of how upcoming situations are likely to lead us into temptation.

39:4-6 David reminded himself of man's mortality in order to steel himself against the temptation to talk wrongly; he realized that sinning with the tongue can lead to losing our hope of eternity, and so he reminded himself of this in the face of the upcoming meeting he was going to have with people who would tempt him to misuse his tongue. We can do the same.

39:13 David didn't go to Heaven at death (Acts 2:34); he understood death as total unconsciousness.

place to stand.³ He has put a new song in my mouth, even praise to our God. Many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in Yahweh.⁴ Blessed is the man who makes Yahweh his trust and doesn't respect the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.⁵ Many, Yahweh my God, are the wonderful works which You have done, and Your thoughts which are toward us. They can't be declared back to You. If I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.⁶ Sacrifice and offering You didn't desire. You have digged my ears. You have not required burnt offering and sin offering.⁷ Then I said, Behold, I have come. It is written about me throughout the book in the scroll.⁸ I delight to do Your will, my God. Yes, Your law is within my heart.⁹ I have proclaimed glad news of righteousness in the great assembly. Behold, I will not seal my lips, Yahweh, You know.¹⁰ I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart. I have declared Your

faithfulness and Your salvation. I have not concealed Your grace and Your truth from the great assembly.¹¹ Don't withhold Your tender mercies from me, Yahweh; let Your grace and Your truth continually preserve me.¹² For innumerable evils have surrounded me. My iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to look up. They are more than the hairs of my head. My heart has failed me.¹³ Be pleased, Yahweh, to deliver me. Hurry to help me, Yahweh.¹⁴ Let them be disappointed and confounded together who seek after my soul to destroy it. Let them be turned backward and brought to dishonour who delight in my hurt.¹⁵ Let them be desolate by reason of their shame that tell me, Aha! Aha!¹⁶ Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You. Let such as love Your salvation say continually, Let Yahweh be exalted!¹⁷ But I am poor and needy. May the Lord think about me. You are my help and my deliverer. Don't delay, my God.

40:3 *Many shall see it* – David perceived the influence his spiritual victory or failure would have upon others. Without encouraging posturing and posing, we should also be aware of this dimension to life and be motivated by it in our spiritual battles.

40:6 *You have digged my ears* – An allusion to the Law's provision for a servant to decide to permanently remain in his master's household and be adopted into the family – see Ex. 21:5,6.

40:6-8 Quoted in Heb. 10:5-8 about the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Notice how Jesus addressed God as "my God" – another difficulty for Trinitarian theology. Yet the initial context was David reflecting that his sin with Bathsheba and Uriah couldn't be atoned for by any sacrifice; for there was none prescribed for what he had done. He simply vowed to give himself completely to God and declare God's grace to all men (:9,10). Yet this was fulfilled by Jesus in the death of the cross, which ended the need for animal sacrifices. Indeed many of the Bathsheba Psalms are applied to Jesus in His time of dying on the cross. He there knew fully the feelings of David and every desperate sinner; not that He sinned, but so identified was He with us there that He entered into the feelings of every sinner.

Psalm 41 Jan. 23***For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.***

¹ Blessed is he who considers the poor. Yahweh will deliver him in the day of evil. ² Yahweh will preserve him, and keep him alive. He shall be blessed on the earth, and he will not surrender him to the will of his enemies. ³ Yahweh will sustain him on his sickbed, and restore him from his bed of illness. ⁴ I said, Yahweh, have mercy on me! Heal me, for I have sinned against You. ⁵ My enemies speak evil against me: When will he die, and his name perish? ⁶ If he comes to see me, he speaks falsehood. His heart gathers iniquity to itself. When he goes outside, he tells it. ⁷ All who hate me whisper together against me. They imagine the worst for me. ⁸ An evil disease, they say, has afflicted him. Now that he lies he

shall rise up no more. ⁹ Yes, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate bread with me, has lifted up his heel against me. ¹⁰ But You, Yahweh, have mercy on me, and raise me up, that I may repay them. ¹¹ By this I know that You delight in me, because my enemy doesn't triumph over me. ¹² As for me, You uphold me in my integrity, and set me in Your presence forever. ¹³ Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting and to everlasting! Amen and amen.

BOOK II**Psalm 42** Jan. 23***For the Chief Musician. A contemplation by the sons of Korah.***

¹ As the deer pants for the water brooks, so my soul pants after You,

41:1 “The day of evil” ultimately refers to the day of judgment. In that day we will be as the poor who beg us for grace in this life; we should therefore be generous to them, even if their poverty, like our spiritual poverty, is ultimately the result of their own poor decision making and sin.

41:9 *My own familiar friend* – Quoted as Christ’s feelings about Judas in Jn. 13:18. Jesus called Judas his “friend” at the moment of betrayal (Mt. 26:50). The question is how could Jesus ‘trust’ Judas and feel hurt at the betrayal when He knew from the beginning who should betray Him (Jn. 6:70,71). One window on this is to remember that Jesus shared our human nature, and we have the possibility within that nature to know something very well about a person, and yet our love for them means that we still trust them. Samson’s love and trust in Delilah, when it was obvious she was going to betray him, is a parade example. The love of Christ was and is surpassing in its depth. Love isn’t cynical, but hopes all things; and He hoped for Judas, that somehow the humanly inevitable wouldn’t happen; just as God told prophets like Ezekiel from the start that Israel wouldn’t hear them, and yet He appeals for Israel to hear the words of those prophets. That same hopeful love is focused on us who are in Christ; that is the practical encouragement and comfort we can take from this insight into the Lord’s thinking about Judas.

42 Korah died in the wilderness and is often highlighted as the ringleader of the rebellion against Moses. But his sons were faithful, and they or their descendants wrote

God. ² My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When shall I come and appear before God? ³ My tears have been my food day and night, while they continually ask me, Where is your God? ⁴ These things I remember and pour out my soul within me, how I used to go with the crowd, and led them to God's house, with the voice of joy and praise, a multitude keeping a holy day. ⁵ Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! For I shall still praise Him for the saving help of His presence. ⁶ My God, my soul is in despair within me. Therefore I remember You from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon, from the hill Mizar. ⁷ Deep calls to deep at the noise of Your waterfalls. All Your waves and Your billows have swept over me. ⁸ Yahweh will command His grace in the daytime. In the night His song shall be with me: a prayer to the God of my life. ⁹ I will ask God, my rock, Why have You forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? ¹⁰ As with a sword in my bones, my adversaries reproach me, while they continually ask me, Where is your God? ¹¹ Why

are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! For I shall still praise Him, the saving help of my countenance, and my God.

Psalm 43 Jan. 23

¹ Vindicate me, God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation. Oh, deliver me from deceitful and wicked men. ² For You are the God of my strength. Why have You rejected me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? ³ Oh, send out Your light and Your truth. Let them lead me. Let them bring me to Your holy hill, to Your great tent. ⁴ Then I will go to the altar of God, to God, my exceeding joy. I will praise You on the harp, God, my God. ⁵ Why are you in despair, my soul? Why are you disturbed within me? Hope in God! For I shall still praise Him: my saviour, my helper, and my God.

Psalm 44 Jan. 24

For the Chief Musician. By the sons of Korah. A contemplative psalm.

¹ We have heard with our ears, God; our fathers have told us, what work

psalms which are preserved within the book of Psalms. The lesson is that we can rise above our backgrounds and the influence of unbelieving parents, even when it seems that humanly speaking we are victims of our backgrounds. But in Christ we can be a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

42:9 Even in times of doubt and misunderstanding at God's apparent silence, we are to still feel that God is our rock.

43:5 *Why are you in despair; my soul?* – We all talk to ourselves. It's important that our self talk is positive, urging ourselves spiritually onwards, rather than reflecting on the empty things of life which lead nowhere. Note how these prayers recorded in the Psalms merge between addressing God and addressing ourselves; prayer is a time of reflection and openness before God, not simply a list of requests baldly presented to Him.

You did in their days, in the days of old. ² You drove out the nations with Your hand, but You planted them. You afflicted the peoples, but You spread them abroad. ³ For they didn't get the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them; but Your right hand, and Your arm, and the light of Your face, because You were favourable to them. ⁴ You are my King, God. Command victories for Jacob! ⁵ Through You will we push down our adversaries. Through Your name will we tread them under who rise up against us. ⁶ For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me. ⁷ But You have saved us from our adversaries, and have shamed those who hate us. ⁸ In God we have made our boast all day long, we will give thanks to Your name forever. Selah. ⁹ But now You rejected us, and brought us to dishonour, and don't go out with our armies. ¹⁰ You make us turn back from the adversary. Those who hate us take spoil for themselves. ¹¹ You have made us like

sheep for food, and have scattered us among the nations. ¹² You sell Your people for nothing, and have gained nothing from their sale. ¹³ You make us a reproach to our neighbours, a scoffing and a derision to those who are around us. ¹⁴ You make us a by-word among the nations, a shaking of the head among the peoples. ¹⁵ All day long my dishonour is before me, and shame covers my face ¹⁶ at the taunt of one who reproaches and verbally abuses, because of the enemy and the avenger. ¹⁷ All this has come on us, yet have we not forgotten You, neither have we been false to Your covenant. ¹⁸ Our heart has not turned back, neither have our steps strayed from Your path, ¹⁹ though You have crushed us in the haunt of jackals, and covered us with the shadow of death. ²⁰ If we have forgotten the name of our God, or spread forth our hands to a strange god; ²¹ won't God search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart. ²² Yes, for Your sake we are killed all day long. We are regarded as sheep for the slaughter.

44:3 They didn't get the land in possession by their own sword – This alludes to how Jacob's final words were a claim that he had taken possession in the land by his own sword and bow (Gen. 48:22). Note how :4 says that it was God who gave Jacob his victories. Jacob was a faithful man who will be in the Kingdom, and yet he didn't achieve perfection, and died with weakness and misunderstanding on his lips. Without encouraging complacency, we can take comfort that we will not of ourselves attain moral perfection and will die with some weaknesses and spiritual blind points; and yet still be saved by God's grace if we abide faithful to Him in our hearts. But in this case it is for us to learn the lesson of Jacob's failure – the Psalm goes on to teach us that our inheritance of the Kingdom will be by grace and not by our own sword and strength (:6).

44:22 For Your sake we are killed all day long – Quoted in Rom. 8:36 in the context of teaching that even though we are killed all day long, this cannot separate us from the saving love of Christ. The context of Ps. 44:22 is speaking of how Israel suffered for their sins in being slaughtered by their enemies. So Paul in Romans is comforting

ter. ²³ Wake up! Why do You sleep, Lord? Arise! Don't reject us forever. ²⁴ Why do You hide Your face, and forget our affliction and our oppression? ²⁵ For our soul is bowed down to the dust. Our body clings to the earth. ²⁶ Rise up to help us. Redeem us for Your grace' sake.

Psalm 45 Jan. 25

For the Chief Musician. Set to The Lilies. A contemplation by the sons of Korah. A wedding song.

¹ My heart overflows with a noble theme. I recite my verses for the king. My tongue is like the pen of a skilful writer. ² You are the most excellent of the sons of men. Grace has anointed your lips, therefore God has blessed you forever. ³ Strap your sword on your thigh, mighty one, in your splendour and your majesty. ⁴ In your majesty ride victoriously on behalf of truth, humility, and righteousness. Let your right hand display awesome deeds. ⁵ Your arrows are sharp. The nations fall under you, with arrows in the heart of the king's enemies. ⁶ Your throne, God, is for-

ever and ever. A sceptre of equity is the sceptre of your kingdom. ⁷ You have loved righteousness, and hated wickedness; therefore God, even your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness above your fellows. ⁸ All your garments smell like myrrh, aloes, and cassia. Out of the ivory palaces the stringed instruments have made you glad. ⁹ Kings' daughters are among your honourable women. At your right hand the queen stands in gold of Ophir. ¹⁰ Listen, daughter, consider, and turn your ear. Forget your own people, and also your father's house. ¹¹ So the king will desire your beauty; honour him, for he is your lord. ¹² The daughter of Tyre comes with a gift, the rich among the people entreat your favour. ¹³ The princess inside is all glorious. Her clothing is interwoven with gold. ¹⁴ She shall be led to the king in embroidered work. The virgins, her companions who follow her, shall be brought to you. ¹⁵ With gladness and rejoicing they shall be led; they shall enter into the king's palace. ¹⁶ Your sons will take the place of your fa-

us that although we may suffer for our sins, even those sufferings do not separate us from the saving love of Christ who quite simply so earnestly wants to save us in the end.

45:6, 7 Quoted in Heb. 1:8,9 to demonstrate the greatness and humanity of Christ. He is clearly not God Himself because God the Father is referred to as Christ's God ("your God"). Yet the term "God" is applied to Him in :6, in the sense that the Hebrew word here translated "God" means simply a "mighty one", a term which has just been used about Christ in :3. We are the "fellows" of Jesus (:7), and He was only exalted above us by God, not because He Himself was in nature above us. This exaltation was not at His birth but at the end of His mortal life, in which He had demonstrated His love for righteousness. He was "anointed" in that He was "made... Christ", which means 'anointed', by God, after His resurrection (Acts 2:36).

45:11 A spiritual man will perceive beauty in a woman in relation to how far she has separated from the things of the world (:10) and is separated unto God's things.

thers; you shall make them princes in all the land.¹⁷ I will make your name to be remembered in all generations. Therefore the peoples shall give you praise forever and ever.

Psalm 46 Jan. 26

For the Chief Musician. By the sons of Korah. According to Alamoth.

¹ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ² Therefore we won't be afraid though the earth shakes, though the mountains are shaken into the heart of the seas; ³ though its waters roar and are troubled, though the mountains tremble with their swelling. Selah. ⁴ There is a river, the streams of which make the city of God glad, the holy place of the tents of the Most High. ⁵ God is in her midst, she shall not be moved. God will help her at dawn. ⁶ The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved. He lifted His voice, and the earth melted. ⁷ Yahweh of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah. ⁸ Come, see Yahweh's works, what desola-

tions He has made in the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He breaks the bow, and shatters the spear. He burns the chariots in the fire. ¹⁰ Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth. ¹¹ Yahweh of Armies is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah.

Psalm 47 Jan. 26

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by the sons of Korah.

¹ Oh clap your hands, all you nations. Shout to God with the voice of triumph! ² For Yahweh Most High is awesome. He is a great King over all the earth. ³ He subdues nations under us, and peoples under our feet. ⁴ He chooses our inheritance for us, the glory of Jacob whom He loved. Selah. ⁵ God has gone up with a shout, Yahweh with the sound of a trumpet. ⁶ Sing praise to God, sing praises. Sing praises to our King, sing praises. ⁷ For God is the King of all the earth. Sing praises with understanding. ⁸ God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne. ⁹ The

46:5 *God will help her at dawn* – The return of Christ to earth is likened to the rising of the sun at daybreak (Mal. 4:2). The final visible intervention of God in response to our prayers will be at this time. The earthquakes and tidal waves spoken of in :2,3 may refer to the time of trouble which will come on earth just prior to Christ's return.

47:4 *Jacob whom He loved. Selah* – We are to meditate ("Selah") upon the fact that God so loved Jacob, and was and is the God who was Jacob's God. There are so many references to Jacob in the Psalms. Jacob was spiritually weak for much of his life, and was led by God to a final spiritual maturity, although Jacob responded very slowly and weakly to this leading over the decades of his life. The Psalms encourage us that our God is the God who stuck with and dearly loved Jacob. Abraham showed more faith and spirituality than Jacob, but God is more frequently referred to as Jacob's God rather than Abraham's.

48:8 *God will establish it forever. Selah* – The point of meditation here ("Selah") is that Jerusalem will last forever – because God promised David that his great son, the

princes of the peoples are gathered together, the people of the God of Abraham. For the shields of the earth belong to God. He is greatly exalted!

Psalm 48 Jan. 26

A Song. A Psalm by the sons of Korah.

¹ Great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised in the city of our God, in His holy mountain. ² Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion, on the north sides, the city of the great King. ³ God has shown Himself in her citadels as a refuge. ⁴ For, behold, the kings assembled themselves, they passed by together. ⁵ They saw it, then they were amazed. They were dismayed. They hurried away. ⁶ Trembling took hold of them there, pain, as of a woman in travail. ⁷ With the east wind, You break the ships of Tarshish. ⁸ As we have heard, so we have seen, in the city of Yahweh of Armies, in the city of our God. God will establish it forever. Selah. ⁹ We have thought about Your grace, God, in the midst of Your temple. ¹⁰ As is Your name, God, so is Your praise to the ends of the earth. Your right hand is full of righteousness. ¹¹ Let

Mount Zion be glad! Let the daughters of Judah rejoice because of Your judgments. ¹² Walk about Zion, and go around her. Number its towers. ¹³ Mark well her bulwarks. Consider her palaces, that you may tell it to the next generation. ¹⁴ For this God is our God forever and ever. He will be our guide even to death.

Psalm 49 Jan. 27

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by the sons of Korah.

¹ Hear this, all you peoples. Listen, all you inhabitants of the world, ² both low and high, rich and poor together. ³ My mouth will speak words of wisdom, my heart shall utter understanding. ⁴ I will bend my ear to a proverb, I will open my riddle on the harp. ⁵ Why should I fear in the days of evil, when iniquity barks at my heels, surrounding me? ⁶ Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches— ⁷ none of them can by any means redeem his brother, nor give God a ransom for him. ⁸ For the redemption of their life is costly, no payment is ever enough, ⁹ that he should live on forever, that he should not see corruption. ¹⁰ For He sees that wise men

Lord Jesus, would reign on his throne, i.e. in Jerusalem, forever (2 Sam. 7:12-16). For all the metaphor and symbology of the Bible, there are some basic literal realities we are to ever keep in mind; and one of these is that Christ shall literally reign for ever from Jerusalem over God's Kingdom on earth.

48:10 The content of our praise is to be the Name of God, which is His characteristics (Ex. 34:4-6).

49:8 It may seem obvious that money can't buy a place in God's Kingdom, but whilst everybody would agree to that statement, effectively those who trust in wealth to the exclusion of faith in God are saying just this. The price of redemption is far more than money – it was ultimately in the blood of God's dear Son.

die; likewise the fool and the senseless perish, and leave their wealth to others.¹¹ Their inward thought is that their houses will endure forever, and their dwelling places to all generations. They name their lands after themselves.¹² But man, despite his riches, doesn't endure. He is like the animals that perish.¹³ This is the destiny of those who are foolish, and of those who approve their sayings. Selah.¹⁴ They are appointed as a flock for Sheol. Death shall be their shepherd. The upright shall have dominion over them in the morning. Their beauty shall decay in Sheol, far from their mansions.¹⁵ But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol, for He will receive me. Selah.¹⁶ Don't be afraid when a man is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased.¹⁷ For when he

dies he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him.¹⁸ Though while he lived he blessed his soul—and men praise you when you do well for yourself—¹⁹ he shall go to the generation of his fathers. They shall never see the light.²⁰ A man who has riches without understanding is like the animals that perish.

Psalm 50 Jan. 28

A Psalm by Asaph.

¹ The Mighty One, God, Yahweh, speaks, and calls the earth from sunrise to sunset. ² Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth. ³ Our God comes, and does not keep silent. A fire devours before Him, it is very stormy around Him. ⁴ He calls to the heavens above, to the earth, that He may judge His people:

49:11 We live under the illusion that we are somehow rational, logical and sensible in our decision making and attitudes. But in fact we are not. Human beings can be incredibly stupid and live in denial of the obvious. We shall die and in that sense lose whatever wealth or property we have acquired on the earth. But the inward thought of people is that somehow, that wealth remains personally attached to them after their death. This is a penetrating psychological insight. It mocks at any desire to attain personal wealth which will endure after our death; now is the time to use whatever we have in the Lord's service.

49:12 *He is like the animals that perish* – A proof of man's mortal nature, disproving the myths of reincarnation and life in Heaven after death.

49:19,20 Those who don't understand God's ways and aren't therefore responsible to His judgment will remain dead for ever like the animals.

50:1 *Speaks, and calls the earth* – God created the world through the medium of His word, He spoke and it was done. But He hasn't as it were turned away from His creation; the cycles within the natural creation may appear to be clockwork, but in a sense God consciously brings them forth again by the medium of His word. That word as manifest to us through the Bible is equally active and powerful in an ongoing and always creative way. The idea of our living in an active universe, in which all things are consciously within God's awareness and a result of the ongoing activity of His word, means that truly God is never far from us; we simply need to look out at the natural creation to feel again His active involvement in our world. See on 65:6.

5 Gather My saints together to Me, those who have made a covenant with Me by sacrifice. **6** The heavens shall declare His righteousness, for God Himself is judge. Selah. **7** Hear, My people, and I will speak; Israel, and I will testify against you. I am God, your God. **8** I don't rebuke you for your sacrifices. Your burnt offerings are continually before Me. **9** I have no need for a bull from your stall, nor male goats from your pens. **10** For every animal of the forest is Mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. **11** I know all the birds of the mountains. The wild animals of the field are Mine. **12** If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world is Mine, and all that is in it. **13** Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? **14** Offer to God the sacrifice of thanksgiving, pay your vows to the Most High. **15** Call on Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour Me. **16** But to the wicked God says, What right do you have to declare My statutes and to have taken My covenant on your lips, **17** since you hate instruction, and throw My words behind you? **18** When you saw a thief,

you consented with him, and have participated with adulterers. **19** You give your mouth to evil, your tongue frames deceit. **20** You sit and speak against your brother, you slander your own mother's son. **21** You have done these things, and I kept silent. You thought that I was just like you. I will rebuke you, and accuse you in front of your eyes. **22** Now consider this, you who forget God, lest I tear you into pieces, and there be none to deliver. **23** Whoever offers the sacrifice of thanksgiving glorifies Me, and prepares his way so that I will show God's salvation to him.

Psalm 51 Jan. 29

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David, when Nathan the prophet came to him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.

1 Have mercy on me, God, according to Your grace. According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, blot out my transgressions. **2** Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, cleanse me from my sin. **3** For I acknowledge my transgressions; my sin is constantly before me. **4** Against You, and You only, have I sinned, and done

50:5 When Christ returns, the faithful will be gathered to judgment (Mt. 24:31); and it is the gathering of the faithful which this Psalm has in view. But this is only part of the wider Biblical picture, which speaks of all those responsible to God being also gathered to judgment.

50:15 *Call on Me in the day of trouble* – This is the sacrifice which God wants. Rather than us giving things to God, He wants us to *trust* in Him, to turn to Him before turning to anything else.

50:21 The apparent silence of God can deceive the wicked into thinking they will not give account to Him. But there will be in some sense a going through with the wicked of all their deeds (Mt. 25:43). This will be such an awful experience for them that it will of itself be their punishment; for ultimately, they will return to the dust never to exist again, seeing that the wages for sin is ultimately death (Rom. 6:23).

that which is evil in Your sight; that You may be proved right when You speak, and justified when You judge.

⁵ Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity. In sin my mother conceived me.

⁶ Behold, You desire truth in the inward parts; You teach me wisdom in the innermost place.

⁷ Purify me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

⁸ Let me hear joy and gladness, so that the bones which You have broken may rejoice.

⁹ Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all of my iniquities.

¹⁰ Create in me a clean heart, O God, renew a right spirit within me.

¹¹ Don't throw me out from Your presence, and don't take Your spirit of holiness from me.

¹² Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, uphold me with a willing spirit.

¹³ Then I will teach transgressors Your ways, sinners shall be converted to You.

¹⁴ Deliver me from blood guiltiness, O God, the God of my salvation. My tongue shall sing aloud of Your righteousness.

¹⁵ Lord, open my lips; my mouth shall declare Your praise.

¹⁶ For You don't delight in sacrifice, or else I would give it; You have no pleasure in burnt offering.

¹⁷ The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.

¹⁸ Do well in Your good pleasure to Zion, build the walls of Jerusalem.

¹⁹ Then You will delight in the sacrifices of righteousness, in burnt offerings and in whole burnt offerings. Then they will offer bullocks on Your altar.

Psalm 52 Jan. 29

For the Chief Musician. A contemplation by David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, David has come to Abimelech's house.

¹ Why do you boast of mischief, mighty man? God's grace endures continually.

² Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.

³ You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking the truth. Selah.

⁴ You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue.

⁵ God will likewise destroy you for

51:6 *Truth in the inward parts* – The innermost truth we can come to know is that we really have sinned and been forgiven; this is the ultimate “wisdom” rather than any intellectual knowledge or theological purity.

51:10 God can act directly on our hearts and create mindsets and attitudes, in response to our desire for them.

51:13 David vowed to respond to God's gracious forgiveness of him by preaching to others. Our motivation for witness should be our own very personal awareness of having received forgiveness and grace which we never possibly deserved.

51:16 There was no sacrifice under the Mosaic law which could cleanse David from the sins he had committed.

52:4 *You deceitful tongue* – David is addressing Doeg (see the Psalm title), but he speaks of Doeg as if Doeg is his tongue. We are identified with our words, they are us, just as God's word is Him (Jn. 1:3). We can't therefore excuse ourselves from bad speaking by reasoning that in our hearts we are not like that. Our words reflect us, and therefore by them we will be condemned or justified in the last judgment (Mt. 12:37).

ever. He will take you up, and pluck you out of your tent, and root you out of the land of the living. Se-lah. ⁶ The righteous also will see it, and fear, and laugh at him, saying, ⁷ Behold, this is the man who didn't make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. ⁸ But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in God's house. I trust in God's grace forever and ever. ⁹ I will give You thanks forever, because You have done it. I will hope in Your name, for it is good, in the presence of Your saints.

Psalm 53 Jan. 30

For the Chief Musician. To the tune of Mahalath. A contemplation by David.

¹ The fool has said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, and have done abominable iniquity. There is no one who does good. ² God looks down from heaven on the children of men, to see if there are any who un-

derstood, who seek after God. ³ Every one of them has gone back. They have become filthy together. There is no one who does good, no, not one. ⁴ Have the workers of iniquity no knowledge, who eat up my people as they eat bread, and don't call on God? ⁵ There they were in great fear, where no fear was, for God has scattered the bones of him who encamps against you. You have put them to shame, because God has rejected them. ⁶ Oh that the salvation of Israel would come out of Zion! When God brings back His people from captivity, then Jacob shall rejoice, and Israel shall be glad.

Psalm 54 Jan. 30

For the Chief Musician. On stringed instruments. A contemplation by David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Isn't David hiding himself among us?

¹ Save me, God, by Your name. Vindicate me in Your might. ² Hear my prayer, God. Listen to the words of

52:8 *I am like a green olive tree in God's house* – But David at this time was on the run from Saul in the wilderness, and was not calmly sitting in the tabernacle; nor was he physically “in the presence of Your saints” (:9). And yet within his own heart, David felt identified with God’s people and in His presence. This is a comfort for those who may be isolated from church life and from other believers; we can really be there in spirit, as David was in his wilderness years.

53:2 *Who understood, who seek after God* – To seek for God, thereby recognizing that we don’t understand Him to perfection, is considered by Him to be understanding Him.

53:3 These verses speak of a category of people who in their heart are at times pure atheists (:1), and who are described as “filthy” and do no good. We are therefore shocked to find Paul quoting these words about every one of us (Rom. 3:12). There in Romans Paul is seeking to challenge the attitude that ‘I may be a sinner, but I’m not like them’. He does so in order to convict us of our sin, and the just sentence of death which is upon us; in order to help us gasp with more wonder and gratitude at God’s amazing grace in having counted us as righteous because we are baptized into Christ.

my mouth. ³ For strangers have risen up against me, violent men have sought after my soul. They haven't set God before them. Selah. ⁴ Behold, God is my helper, the Lord is the one who sustains my soul. ⁵ He will repay the evil to my enemies; destroy them in Your truth. ⁶ With a free will offering, I will sacrifice to You. I will give thanks to Your name, Yahweh, for it is good. ⁷ For He has delivered me out of all trouble. My eye has seen triumph over my enemies.

Psalm 55 Jan. 30

*For the Chief Musician.
On stringed instruments. A
contemplation by David.*

¹ Listen to my prayer, God. Don't hide Yourself from my supplication. ² Attend to me, and answer me. I am restless in my complaint and moan, ³ because of the words of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they bring suffering on me, in anger they hold a grudge against me. ⁴ My heart is severely pained within

me, the terrors of death have come upon me. ⁵ Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, horror has overwhelmed me. ⁶ I said, Oh that I had wings like a dove! Then I would fly away, and be at rest. ⁷ Behold, then I would wander far off, I would lodge in the wilderness. Selah. ⁸ I would hurry to a shelter from the stormy wind and storm. ⁹ Confuse them, Lord, and confound their language, for I have seen violence and strife in the city. ¹⁰ Day and night they prowl around on its walls, malice and abuse are also within her. ¹¹ Destructive forces are within her, threats and lies don't depart from her streets. ¹² For it was not an enemy who insulted me, then I could have endured it; neither was it he who hated me who raised himself up against me, then I would have hidden myself from him. ¹³ But it was you, a man like me, my companion, and my familiar friend. ¹⁴ We took sweet fellowship together, we walked to God's house in company. ¹⁵ Let death come suddenly on them,

55:3 Because of the words – The mental suffering David describes in these verses was largely because of the words of his enemies; words really can make people feel like dying and lead them to suicidal thoughts. Words can never be treated as ‘only words’; they have a real power, and therefore we have a deep responsibility for our words. We must remember this, living as we do in a society which judges behaviour far harder than it does ‘mere’ words. No threat in this sense is ever an ‘empty threat’, because words are of themselves so destructive.

55:9 Confound their language – Exactly what God did to those who built the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:7). We like David need to see our abusers in Biblical terms, seeing how in essence our abusers are so similar to those in Biblical incidents.

55:13, 14 This refers to David's betrayal by Ahithophel, Bathsheba's grandfather, and his own one time confidante (2 Sam. 15:31; 1 Chron. 27:33). It is clearly typical of Christ's betrayal by Judas, whom he also calls his “friend” (Mt. 26:50); as to why Christ in this sense trusted Judas so as to be so hurt by his betrayal, see on 41:9. The historical record simply states Ahithophel's betrayal of David, but here we see how David didn't just take it stoically, but was deeply hurt by it and poured out his soul

let them go down alive into Sheol. For wickedness is in their dwelling, in their midst. ¹⁶ As for me, I will call on God. Yahweh will save me. ¹⁷ Evening, morning, and at noon, I will cry out in distress; He will hear my voice. ¹⁸ He has redeemed my soul in peace from the battle that was against me, although there are many who oppose me. ¹⁹ God, who is enthroned forever, will hear, and answer them. Selah. They never change, those who don't fear God. ²⁰ He raises his hands against his friends, he has violated his covenant. ²¹ His mouth was smooth as butter, but his heart was war. His words were softer than oil, yet they were drawn swords. ²² Cast your burden on Yahweh, and He will sustain you. He will never allow the righteous to be moved. ²³ But You, God, will bring them down into the pit of destruction. Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days, but I will trust in You.

Psalm 56 Jan. 31

For the Chief Musician. To the tune of Silent Dove in Distant Lands. A poem by David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath.

¹ Be merciful to me, God, for man wants to swallow me up. All day long he attacks and oppresses me.

to God in hurt and pain. We need to imagine the feelings of the Biblical characters as they went through the events which are historically recorded.

56:8 Tear bottles were kept by mourners at funerals; they put their tears in a bottle which they then kept in memory of the deceased. But David says that *his* tears are in *God's* bottle. The idea was that *your* tears went into *your* bottle. But David was so intimate with God that he perceived that *his* tears were in fact *God's*. The intimacy David achieved with God is absolutely possible for us too.

² My enemies want to swallow me up all day long, for they are many who fight proudly against me. ³ When I am afraid, I will put my trust in You. ⁴ In God, I praise His word. In God do I put my trust. I will not be afraid—what can flesh do to me? ⁵ All day long they twist my words, all their thoughts are against me for evil. ⁶ They conspire and lurk, watching my steps, they are eager to take my life. ⁷ Shall they escape by iniquity? In anger cast down the peoples, God. ⁸ You number my wanderings, You put my tears into Your bottle. Aren't they in Your book? ⁹ Then my enemies shall turn back in the day that I call. I know this, that God is for me. ¹⁰ In God, I will praise His word. In Yahweh, I will praise His word. ¹¹ I have put my trust in God; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? ¹² Your vows are on me, God. I will give thank offerings to You. ¹³ For You have delivered my soul from death, and prevented my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living.

Psalm 57 Jan. 31

For the Chief Musician. To the tune of Do Not Destroy. A poem by David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.

¹ Be merciful to me, God, be merci-

ful to me, for my soul takes refuge in You. Yes, in the shadow of Your wings I will take refuge, until disaster has passed.² I cry out to God Most High, to God who accomplishes my requests for me.³ He will send from heaven and save me, He rebukes the one who is pursuing me. Selah. God will send out His grace and His truth.⁴ My soul is among lions. I lie among those who are set on fire, even the sons of men, whose teeth are spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword.⁵ Be exalted, God, above the heavens! Let Your glory be above all the earth!⁶ They have prepared a net for my steps. My soul is bowed down, they dig a snare before me. They fall into its midst themselves. Selah.⁷ My heart is steadfast, God, my heart is steadfast. I will sing, yes, I will sing praises.⁸ Wake up, my glory! Wake up, psaltery and harp! I will wake up the dawn.⁹ I will give thanks to You, Lord, among the peoples, I will sing praises to You among the nations.¹⁰ For Your great grace reaches to the heavens, and Your truth to the skies.¹¹ Be exalted, God, above the

heavens. Let Your glory be over all the earth.

Psalm 58 Feb. 1

For the Chief Musician. To the tune of Do Not Destroy. A poem by David.

¹ Do you indeed speak righteousness, silent ones? Do you judge blamelessly, you sons of men?² No, in your heart you plot injustice. You measure out the violence of your hands in the earth.³ The wicked go astray from the womb. They are wayward as soon as they are born, speaking lies.⁴ Their poison is like the poison of a snake; like a deaf cobra that stops its ear,⁵ which doesn't listen to the voice of charmers, no matter how skilful the charmer may be.⁶ Break their teeth, God, in their mouth. Break out the great teeth of the young lions, Yahweh.⁷ Let them vanish as water that flows away. When they draw the bow, let their arrows be made blunt.⁸ Let them be like the path of a snail which melts and passes away, like the stillborn child, who has not seen the sun.⁹ Before your pots can feel the heat of the thorns,

57:1 David didn't see the physical cave he was hiding in (see Psalm title) as his refuge, but rather perceived God as his refuge. We may use medicines, doctors and all kinds of human things in our times of need, but we must perceive God as our true helper and final saviour rather than any of those things.

57:4 The vagabonds who supported David during his wilderness years were unspiritual men, and David so desperately longed for spiritual company. But David in his heart was ecstatic at God's presence, and must've composed these words whilst laying with those men in the cave. This is a parade example to us of spiritual mindedness in unspiritual company.

58:1 *Silent ones* – There is a time to keep silence, but if we don't speak out for the abused at times we are paralleled with those who are proactively abusive. So much evil happens because 'good' people do nothing.

he will sweep away the green and the burning alike.¹⁰ The righteous shall rejoice when he sees the vengeance. He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked;¹¹ so that men shall say, Most certainly there is a reward for the righteous. Most certainly there is a God who judges the earth.

Psalm 59 Feb. 1

For the Chief Musician. To the tune of Do Not Destroy. A poem by David, when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him.

¹ Deliver me from my enemies, my God; lift me on high from those who rise up against me. ² Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, save me from the bloodthirsty men. ³ For, behold, they lie in wait for my soul. The mighty gather themselves together against me, not for my disobedience, nor for my sin, Yahweh. ⁴ I have done no wrong, yet they are ready to attack me. Rise up, behold, and help me! ⁵ You, Yahweh God of Armies, the God of Israel, rouse

Yourself to punish the nations. Show no mercy to the wicked traitors. Selah. ⁶ They return at evening, howling like dogs, and prowl around the city. ⁷ Behold, they spew with their mouth; swords are in their lips, For, they say, who hears us? ⁸ But You, Yahweh, laugh at them. You scoff at all the nations. ⁹ Oh my Strength, I watch for You, for God is my high tower. ¹⁰ My God will go before me with His grace. God will let me look at my enemies in triumph. ¹¹ Don't kill them immediately, or my people may forget. Scatter them by Your power, and bring them down, Lord our shield. ¹² For the sin of their mouth, and the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride, for the curses and lies which they utter. ¹³ Consume them in wrath, consume them, and they will be no more. Let them know that God rules in Jacob, to the ends of the earth. Selah. ¹⁴ At evening let them return. Let them howl like a dog, and go around the city. ¹⁵ They shall wander up and

58:10 Our natural unease at reading these kinds of things is a reflection of our underestimate of the seriousness of sin, and the desperate need which there is for justice to be done. If we have such a perspective, then we will rejoice to see it done at the last day.

59:14, 15 This seems to speak of the rejected at the last day. Just as the rejected virgins knock at the door earnestly wanting Jesus to open to them (Mt. 25:11), as Cain dwelt at the east of Eden in the hope of being readmitted to Paradise (Gen. 4:16), so the wicked of David's time [who were Israelites, members of God's covenant people] will walk around the holy city wishing to be let in, howling like desperate dogs. Rev. 22:15 using the same figure for the rejected – dogs outside God's city. In that final day of eternal truth, nobody will be indifferent; all present there will desperately wish to be in God's Kingdom. If our final destiny is to stand before God desperately desiring to be in His Kingdom, we must live our lives today with the same passion; for we make the answer now. All too late the rejected will come to really believe in God's eternal Kingdom on earth (:13); but it will be too late to change anything, for the judgment is ongoing now.

down for food, and howl all night because they aren't satisfied.¹⁶ But I will sing of Your strength. Yes, I will sing aloud of Your grace in the morning. For You have been my high tower, a refuge in the day of my distress.¹⁷ To You, my strength, I will sing praises. For God is my high tower, the God of my mercy.

Psalm 60 Feb. 2

For the Chief Musician. To the tune of The Lily of the Covenant. A teaching poem by David, when he fought with Aram Naharaim and with Aram Zobah, and Joab returned, and killed twelve thousand of Edom in the Valley of Salt.

¹ God, You have rejected us. You have broken us down, You have been angry. Restore us again. ² You have made the land tremble, You have torn it. Mend its fractures, for it quakes. ³ You have shown Your people hard things, You have made us drink the wine that makes us stagger. ⁴ You have given a banner to those who fear You, that it may be displayed because of the truth. Selah. ⁵ So that Your beloved may be delivered, save with Your right hand, and answer us.

60:3 *You have made us drink the wine* – Being given a cup of wine to drink is a double symbol; it speaks of either our eternal blessing (1 Cor. 10:16) or condemnation. The communion service is therefore designed to bring us up against the two possible futures which there are for us; blessing or condemnation. We therefore drink either to our blessing or to our condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29). It is therefore a powerful aid towards self-examination.

60:9 *Who has led me to Edom?* – The Psalm title shows that this was a song written in response to Israel's victory over Edom, but in it David continually emphasizes how their earlier attempt had failed because of their sin. Even when God does great things for us, we must be ever aware of our sins and unworthiness of any victory He gives us.

⁶ God has spoken from His sanctuary: I will triumph. I will divide Shechem, and measure out the valley of Succoth. ⁷ Gilead is Mine and Manasseh is Mine. Ephraim also is the helmet of My head. Judah is My sceptre. ⁸ Moab is My wash basin. I will throw My shoe on Edom, I shout in triumph over Philistia. ⁹ Who will bring me into the strong city? Who has led me to Edom?¹⁰ Haven't You, God, rejected us? You don't go out with our armies, God. ¹¹ Give us help against the adversary, for the help of man is vain. ¹² Through God we shall do valiantly, for it is He who will tread down our adversaries.

Psalm 61 Feb. 2

For the Chief Musician. For a stringed instrument. By David.

¹ Hear my cry, God. Listen to my prayer. ² From the end of the land I will call to You when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. ³ For You have been a refuge for me, a strong tower from the enemy. ⁴ I will dwell in Your tent forever, I will take refuge in the shelter of Your wings. Selah. ⁵ For You, God, have heard my vows. You have given me the heritage of those

who fear Your name.⁶ You will prolong the king's life; his years shall be for generations.⁷ He shall be enthroned in God's presence forever. Appoint Your grace and truth that they may preserve him.⁸ So I will sing praise to Your name forever, that I may fulfil my vows daily.

Psalm 62 Feb. 3

For the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm by David.

¹ My soul rests in God alone. My salvation is from Him. ² He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress—I will never be greatly shaken. ³ How long will you assault a man, would all of you throw him down, like a leaning wall, like a tottering fence? ⁴ They fully intend to throw him down from his high place. They delight in lies; they bless with their mouth, but they

curse inwardly. Selah.⁵ My soul, wait in silence for God alone, for my expectation is from Him. ⁶ He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress. I will not be shaken. ⁷ With God is my salvation and my honour. The rock of my strength, and my refuge, is in God. ⁸ Trust in Him at all times, you people. Pour out your heart before Him. God is a refuge for us. Selah.⁹ Surely men of low degree are just a breath, and men of high degree are a lie. In the balances they will go up; they are together lighter than a breath.¹⁰ Don't trust in oppression, don't become vain in robbery. If riches increase, don't set your heart on them.¹¹ God has spoken once; twice I have heard this, that power belongs to God.¹² Also to You, Lord, belongs grace, for You reward every man according to his work.

61:6, 7 Although David clearly expected to die, as other Psalms indicate, he understood that he had been promised eternal life in that the promises to him were that he would see his great descendant, the Lord Jesus, reigning eternally in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:16). This necessitated a resurrection to eternal life. The idea of eternal life is found in the Old Testament because it is required by the promises to Abraham and David which were the basis of God's covenant; it didn't just arise in the New Testament. The future life, death and resurrection of Christ was the basis upon which those earlier promises of eternity had been made, but the basic promise of eternal salvation had begun to be offered in Genesis.

62:1 *God alone* – The Hebrew word translated “alone” also means “one”. The fact that God is one isn't merely a numerical statement. Because there is only one God, we are to trust Him alone. In life's crises we are to turn to God alone, quite simply because there is only one God. Our belief in the unity of God isn't merely a theological position, it has huge practical meaning – especially in a world where there are so many attempts to replace trust in God, be it through insurance policies, clever lawyers, smart doctors or roadside rescue services.

62:12 *You reward every man according to his work* – Quoted in Rev. 22:12 about what will happen at the judgment seat of Christ at His return. Because God has this principle, of judging according to behaviour, we thereby see His grace – for despite this, He will still save us. And that, therefore, must be by His grace alone.

Psalm 63 Feb. 3*A Psalm by David, when he was in the desert of Judah.*

¹ God, You are my God; I will earnestly seek You. My soul thirsts for You, my flesh longs for You, in a dry and weary land, where there is no water. ² So I have seen You in the sanctuary, watching Your power and Your glory. ³ Because Your grace is better than life, my lips shall praise You. ⁴ So I will bless You while I live, I will lift up my hands in Your name. ⁵ My soul shall be satisfied as with the richest food. My mouth shall praise You with joyful lips ⁶ when I remember You on my bed, and think about You in the night watches. ⁷ For You have been my help; I will rejoice in the shadow of Your wings. ⁸ My soul stays close to You, Your right hand upholds me. ⁹ But those who seek my soul to destroy it shall go into the lower parts of the earth. ¹⁰ They shall be given over to the power of the sword. They shall be jackal food. ¹¹ But the king shall rejoice in God. Everyone who swears by Him will praise Him, for

the mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped.

Psalm 64 Feb. 4*For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.*

¹ Hear my voice, God, in my complaint. Preserve my life from fear of the enemy. ² Hide me from the conspiracy of the wicked, from the noisy crowd of the ones doing evil; ³ who sharpen their tongue like a sword, and aim their arrows, deadly words, ⁴ to shoot innocent men from ambushes. They shoot at him suddenly and fearlessly. ⁵ They encourage themselves in evil plans. They talk about laying snares secretly. They say, Who will see them? ⁶ They plot injustice, saying, We have made a perfect plan! Surely man's mind and heart are cunning. ⁷ But God will shoot at them, they will be suddenly struck down with an arrow. ⁸ Their own tongues shall ruin them; all who see them will shake their heads. ⁹ All mankind shall be in awe. They shall declare the work of God, and shall wisely ponder what He has

63:11 *The mouth of those who speak lies shall be stopped* – This is quoted about all of us in Rom. 3:19, where Paul reasons that because we're all sinners, we're all liars – for untruth is the essence of sin. By doing so we're not being true to ourselves, to God, to His word, to our brethren... we profess covenant relationship with God, to be His people, and yet we fail to keep the terms of that covenant. In the context, Paul is teaching that the Law of Moses convicted all God's people of this, and in this way led them to the need for Christ. Yet Is. 52:15 prophesied that the crucified Jesus would result in men shutting their mouths. The righteousness and perfection displayed there in one Man, the very human Lord Jesus, has the same effect upon us as the Law of Moses – we shut our mouths, convicted of sin.

64:9 *All mankind shall be in awe* – We wonder how “all mankind” will be in awe at the judgment of some Israelites in David's time who abused him. The fact is that they will be resurrected and judged, and the judgment will in some sense be public, before all (Rev. 16:15). It will be an amazing teaching mechanism, seeing the lives of billions

done.¹⁰ The righteous shall be glad in Yahweh, and shall take refuge in Him. All the upright in heart shall praise Him!

Psalm 65 Feb. 4

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David. A song.

¹ Praise waits for You, God, in Zion. To You shall vows be performed. ² You who hear prayer, to You all men will come. ³ Sins overwhelmed me, but You atoned for our transgressions. ⁴ Blessed is the person whom You choose and cause to come near, that he may live in Your courts. We will be filled with the goodness of Your house, Your holy temple. ⁵ By awesome deeds of righteousness You answer us, God of our salvation. You who are the hope of all the ends of the earth, of those who are far away on the sea; ⁶ who by His power forms the mountains, having armed Yourself with strength; ⁷ who stills the roaring of the seas, the crashing

of their waves, and the turmoil of the nations. ⁸ They also who dwell in distant places are afraid at Your wonders. You call the morning's dawn and the evening with songs of joy. ⁹ You visit the earth, and water it; You greatly enrich it. The river of God is full of water. You provide them grain, for so You have ordained it. ¹⁰ You drench its furrows, You level its ridges, You soften it with showers, You bless it with a crop. ¹¹ You crown the year with Your bounty, Your carts overflow with abundance. ¹² The wilderness grasslands overflow, the hills are clothed with gladness. ¹³ The pastures are covered with flocks, the valleys also are clothed with grain. They shout for joy! They also sing.

Psalm 66 Feb. 5

For the Chief Musician. A song. A Psalm.

¹ Make a joyful shout to God, all the earth! ² Sing to the glory of His

of people played back and analyzed, and observing the condemnation of the wicked. It will prepare us for entry to God's eternal Kingdom, understanding His principles and grace in a way which we have perhaps not risen to in this life – even though His judgments are in His word and are even now made manifest.

65:3 *You atoned for our transgressions* – The atonement for sin was achieved through the death of Christ, who hadn't died at David's time. But God forgave sin in Old Testament times on the basis that He foresaw the death of Christ, who as it were was slain from the beginning (Rev. 13:8). God speaks of things which don't exist as though they do (Rom. 4:17), because He views from outside the limitations of human time. This is why He can speak of things and persons (not least His Son) as existing before they did. This doesn't mean they pre-existed in any literal sense, but they existed in His plan and purpose.

65:6 *By His power forms the mountains* – God didn't just form the mountains at the time of Genesis 1 and leave them, He is actively forming mountains to this day. A theme of this Psalm is that God is actively at work in the natural creation; the water cycle doesn't as it were run on clockwork but rather as a result of God's active, conscious and passionate involvement (:9-11) – see on 50:1.

name! Offer glory and praise! ³ Tell God, How awesome are Your deeds! Through the greatness of Your power, Your enemies submit themselves to You. ⁴ All the earth will worship You, and will sing to You; they will sing to Your name. Selah. ⁵ Come and see God's deeds— awesome work on behalf of the children of men. ⁶ He turned the sea into dry land, they went through the river on foot. There we rejoiced in Him. ⁷ He rules by His might forever, His eyes watch the nations. Don't let the rebellious rise up against Him. Selah. ⁸ Praise our God, you peoples! Make the sound of His praise heard, ⁹ who preserves our life among the living, and doesn't allow our feet to be moved. ¹⁰ For You, God, have tested us. You have refined us, as silver is refined. ¹¹ You brought us into prison, You laid a burden on our backs. ¹² You allowed men to ride over our heads. We went through fire and through water, but You brought us to the place of abundance. ¹³ I

will come into Your temple with burnt offerings. I will pay my vows to You, ¹⁴ which my lips promised and my mouth spoke, when I was in distress. ¹⁵ I will offer to You burnt offerings of fat animals, with the offering of rams, I will offer bulls with goats. Selah. ¹⁶ Come and hear, all you who fear God; I will declare what He has done for my soul. ¹⁷ I cried to Him with my mouth. He was extolled with my tongue. ¹⁸ If I cherished sin in my heart, the Lord wouldn't have listened. ¹⁹ But most certainly, God has listened. He has heard the voice of my prayer. ²⁰ Blessed be God, who has not turned away my prayer, nor His grace from me.

Psalm 67 Feb. 5

For the Chief Musician. With stringed instruments. A Psalm. A song.

¹ May God be merciful to us, bless us, and cause His face to shine on us. Selah. ² That Your way may be known on earth, and Your salvation

66:1, 2 Often the Psalms invite the Gentile world to join with Israel in their praise of God as their saviour (also :5). Israel were intended to be a light to the Gentiles around them, and to bring them to faith and covenant relationship with God. They failed in this, for the most part, despite these faithful Psalmists who sought to do so through the medium of producing songs which they hoped would penetrate into the surrounding nations. The great commission bids each of us to take the same message into the Gentile darkness around us.

66:6 *We rejoiced in Him* – Often in the Psalms we are invited to consider ourselves as Israel in Egypt, subsequently rejoicing at the Red Sea deliverance; hence the Psalmist speaks of “us” as having gone through Israel’s experience of suffering and salvation (:11,12). The New Testament likewise invites us to see our baptism as a passing through the Red Sea, and our lives today as like their wilderness journey towards the Kingdom (1 Cor. 10:1-4). We are to act as if we were play ‘Bible television’, imagining the events as if we were there historically; for spiritually, it is all equally true for us in our salvation from this world of sin.

67:2 *Your salvation among all nations* – See on 66:1,2.

among all nations,³ let the peoples praise You, God. Let all the peoples praise You.⁴ Oh let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for You will judge the peoples with equity, and govern the nations on earth. Selah.⁵ Let the peoples praise You, God. Let all the peoples praise You.⁶ The earth has yielded its increase. God, even our own God, will bless us.⁷ God will bless us. All the ends of the earth shall fear Him.

Psalm 68 Feb. 6

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David. A song.

¹ Let God arise! Let His enemies be scattered! Let them who hate Him also flee before Him. ² As smoke is driven away, so drive them away. As wax melts before the fire, so let the wicked perish at the presence of God. ³ But let the righteous be glad, may they rejoice before God; yes, let them rejoice with gladness. ⁴ Sing to God! Sing praises to His name! Extol Him

who rides on the clouds: to Yah, His name! Rejoice before Him!⁵ A father of the fatherless, and a defender of the widows, is God in His holy habitation. ⁶ God sets the lonely in families. He brings out the prisoners with singing, but the rebellious dwell in a sun-scorched land. ⁷ God, when You went forth before Your people, when You marched through the wilderness... Selah. ⁸ The earth trembled. The sky also poured down rain at the presence of the God of Sinai—at the presence of God, the God of Israel. ⁹ You, God, sent a plentiful rain. You confirmed Your inheritance when it was weary. ¹⁰ Your congregation lived therein. You, God, prepared Your goodness for the poor. ¹¹ The Lord announced the word; the women who proclaimed it are a great company. ¹² Kings of armies flee! They flee! The women who wait at home divide the spoil- ¹³ while you men sleep among the campfires- the wings of a dove sheathed with silver, her

67:4 Applied in Acts 17:31 to the judgment of the world at Christ's return.

68:6 *God sets the lonely in families* – He did this when He brought His prisoner people out from Egyptian bondage. The numbering of the tribes after they had crossed the Red Sea implies that every Israelite had a family group. Those who were alone were therefore placed within families. The community of God's people today, who have likewise passed through the water of baptism as Israel crossed the Red Sea, should likewise be characterized by inclusiveness and a binding of individuals together in a new spiritual family in Christ. Cliques based around existing families or friendship groups mustn't be allowed to stop this unique unity occurring – for it is this mysterious Christian unity which is powerful enough to convert the world if it is lived out as it should be (Jn. 17:21).

68:11 There is here and in :12,25 a strong emphasis on the participation of women in the spreading of the good news of God's redemption of His people. The idea was quite radical in that conservative, male dominated world. The broad picture we are to take away is that absolutely all of us, men and women, whether or not others consider us appropriate witnesses, are to share the good news of God's salvation with the entire world.

feathers with shining gold.¹⁴ When the Almighty scattered kings in her, it snowed on Zalmon.¹⁵ The mountains of Bashan are majestic mountains, the mountains of Bashan are rugged.¹⁶ Why do you look in envy, you rugged mountains, at the mountain where God chooses to reign? Yes, Yahweh will dwell there forever.¹⁷ The chariots of God are tens of thousands and thousands of thousands. The Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the sanctuary.¹⁸ You have ascended on high, You have led away captives in your victory train, You have received gifts to distribute among men, yes, among the rebellious also, that Yah God might dwell there.¹⁹ Blessed be the Lord, who daily bears our burdens, even the God who is our salvation. Selah.²⁰ God is to us a God of deliverance; to Yahweh the Lord belongs escape from death.²¹ But God will strike through the head of His enemies, the hairy scalp of such a one as still continues in his guiltiness.²² The Lord said, I will bring you again from Bashan, I will bring you again from the depths of the sea;²³ that you may crush them, dipping your foot in blood, that the tongues of your dogs may have their portion from your enemies.²⁴ They have seen Your processions, God, even the pro-

cessions of my God, my King, into the sanctuary.²⁵ The singers went before, the minstrels followed after in the midst of the ladies playing with tambourines, singing²⁶ Bless God in the congregations, even the Lord in the assembly of Israel!²⁷ There is little Benjamin, their ruler, the princes of Judah, their council, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali.²⁸ Your God has commanded your strength. Strengthen, God, that which You have done for us.²⁹ Because of Your temple at Jerusalem kings shall bring presents to You.³⁰ Rebuke the wild animal of the reeds, the multitude of the bulls, with the calves of the peoples. Being humbled, may they bring tribute of bars of silver. Scatter the nations that delight in war.³¹ Princes shall come out of Egypt, Ethiopia shall hurry to stretch out her hands to God.³² Sing to God, you kingdoms of the earth! Sing praises to the Lord! Selah.³³ To Him who rides on the heaven of heavens, which are of old; behold, He utters His voice, a mighty voice.³⁴ Ascribe strength to God! His excellency is over Israel, His strength is in the skies.³⁵ You are awesome, God, in Your sanctuaries. The God of Israel gives strength and power to His people. Praise be to God!

68:18 This is applied in Eph. 4:8 to the ascension of Christ in order to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit which He then gave to the first century church, in order to prepare it to be a place where God might dwell. Whilst the miraculous gifts were withdrawn once the church was established, Christ's parables teach that we have each been given some gift by Him which we are to use to prepare for God's Kingdom and to enable His dwelling amongst men on earth (Mt. 25:15). We have each been given something as a result of Christ's sacrifice and victorious ascension to Heaven, and we are therefore to ensure that we use it.

Psalm 69 Feb. 7***For the Chief Musician. To the tune of Lilies. By David.***

¹ Save me, God, for the waters have come up to my neck! ² I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. ³ I am weary with my crying. My throat is dry. My eyes fail, looking for my God. ⁴ Those who hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of my head. Those who want to cut me off, being my enemies wrongfully, are mighty. I have to restore what I didn't take away. ⁵ God, You know my foolishness. My sins aren't hidden from You. ⁶ Don't let those who wait for You be shamed on my account, Lord Yahweh of Armies. Don't let those who seek You be brought to dishonour through me, God of Israel. ⁷ Because for Your sake I have borne reproach. Shame has covered my face. ⁸ I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's children. ⁹ For the zeal of Your house consumes me. The reproaches of those who

reproach You have fallen on me. ¹⁰ When I wept and I fasted, that was to my reproach. ¹¹ When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. ¹² Those who sit in the gate talk against me; I am the song of the drunkards. ¹³ But as for me, my prayer is to You, Yahweh, in an acceptable time. God, in the abundance of Your grace, answer me in the truth of Your salvation. ¹⁴ Deliver me out of the mire, and don't let me sink. Let me be delivered from those who hate me, and out of the deep waters. ¹⁵ Don't let the flood waters overwhelm me, neither let the deep swallow me up. Don't let the pit shut its mouth on me. ¹⁶ Answer me, Yahweh, for Your grace is good. According to the multitude of Your tender mercies, turn to me. ¹⁷ Don't hide Your face from Your servant, for I am in distress. Answer me speedily! ¹⁸ Draw near to my soul, and redeem it. Ransom me because of my enemies. ¹⁹ You know my reproach, my shame, and my dishonour; my adversaries are all before You. ²⁰ Reproach has bro-

69:9 *For the zeal of Your house consumes me* – Applied to Jesus in Jn. 2:17; so many verses in this Psalm are relevant to Him. Verse 8 refers to His estrangement from His half brothers and natural family (Jn. 7:5). “The reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me” is referred to Christ in Rom. 15:3, and is therefore applied to us who are in Him – in that we are to be so concerned with others’ salvation and welfare that we can rise above the experience of personal reproach and insult rather than being obsessed by it and paralyzed from being of service.

69:14–16 The urgent desire for immediate deliverance is here in the context of a Psalm definitely speaking of Christ’s sufferings on the cross. There was certainly a sense of urgency, crisis and desire for immediate deliverance which wasn’t answered immediately (see too 22:1). He knew there the crisis of unanswered prayer; He there shared the quintessence of all our crises.

69:20 This looking for comforters and finding none must mean that these verses describe Christ at the very end of the hours of crucifixion, when John and Mary had

ken my heart, and I am full of heaviness. I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; for comforters, but I found none. ²¹ They also gave me gall for my food; in my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink. ²² Let their table before them become a snare, may it become a retribution and a trap. ²³ Let their eyes be darkened, so that they can't see; may their backs be continually bent. ²⁴ Pour out Your indignation on them; let the fierceness of Your anger overtake them. ²⁵ Let their habitation be desolate, may no one dwell in their tents. ²⁶ For they persecute him whom You have wounded. They tell of the sorrow of those whom You have hurt. ²⁷ Add iniquity to their iniquity; don't let them come into Your righteousness. ²⁸ Let them be blotted out of the book of life, and not be written with the righteous. ²⁹ But I am in pain and distress. Let Your salvation, God, protect me. ³⁰ I will praise the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving. ³¹ It will please Yahweh better than an ox, or a bull that has horns and hoofs. ³² The humble

have seen it, and are glad. You who seek after God, let your heart live. ³³ For Yahweh hears the needy, and doesn't despise His captive people. ³⁴ Let heaven and earth praise Him; the seas, and everything that moves therein! ³⁵ For God will save Zion, and build the cities of Judah. They shall settle there, and own it. ³⁶ The children also of His servants shall inherit it. Those who love His name shall dwell therein.

Psalm 70 Feb. 8

*For the Chief Musician. By David.
A reminder.*

¹ Hurry, God, to deliver me. Come quickly to help me, Yahweh. ² Let them be disappointed and confounded who seek my soul. Let those who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace. ³ Let them be turned back because of their shame who say, Aha! Aha! ⁴ Let all those who seek You rejoice and be glad in You. Let those who love Your salvation continually say, Let God be exalted! ⁵ But I am poor and needy. Come to me quickly, God. You are my help and my deliverer. Yahweh, don't delay.

walked away. The reproaches shouted by mindless, small minded people in the crowd broke His heart, such was His amazing sensitivity to words, so eager was He to be accepted by Israel as their Messiah.

69:21 Clearly relevant to the offer of vinegar to Christ in response to His plea “I thirst” (Jn. 19:28,29).

69:22 Applied to the Jews who crucified Christ in Rom. 11:9.

69:25 The LXX of this verse is quoted in Acts 1:20 and applied to Judas for his betrayal of Christ.

69:27 God counts those who believe in Him as righteous because He imputes righteousness to them; but He also counts sinners as increasingly sinful. Thus there is both an upward and downward spiral in life; we are always moving one way or the other, and never static.

Psalm 71 Feb. 8

¹ In You, Yahweh, I take refuge. Never let me be disappointed. ² Deliver me in Your righteousness and rescue me. Turn Your ear to me and save me. ³ Be to me a rock of refuge to which I may always go. Give the command to save me, for You are my rock and my fortress. ⁴ Rescue me, my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. ⁵ For You are my hope, Lord Yahweh; my confidence from my youth. ⁶ I have relied on You from the womb. You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. I will always praise You. ⁷ I am a marvel to many, but You are my strong refuge. ⁸ My mouth shall be filled with Your praise, with Your honour all the day. ⁹ Don't reject me in my old age. Don't forsake me when my strength fails. ¹⁰ For my enemies talk about me, they who watch for my soul conspire together ¹¹ saying, God has forsaken him. Pursue and take him, for no one will rescue him. ¹² God,

don't be far from me. My God, hurry to help me. ¹³ Let my accusers be disappointed and consumed. Let them be covered with disgrace and scorn who want to harm me. ¹⁴ But I will always hope, and will add to all of Your praise. ¹⁵ My mouth will tell others about Your righteousness and Your salvation all day, though I don't know its full measure. ¹⁶ I will declare the mighty acts of the Lord Yahweh. I will make mention of Your righteousness, even of Yours alone. ¹⁷ God, You have taught me from my youth. Up until now I have declared Your wondrous works. ¹⁸ Yes, even when I am old and gray-haired, God, don't forsake me, until I have declared Your strength to the next generation, Your might to everyone who is to come. ¹⁹ Your righteousness also, God, reaches to the heavens; You have done great things. God, who is like You? ²⁰ You, who have shown us many and bitter troubles, You will let me live. You will bring us up again from the depths of

71:11 *God has forsaken him*— David did indeed feel that God had forsaken him (22:1). David, like all of us, was very sensitive to what others said about him – for his many complaints at his being slandered reflect how significant it was for him. We must be secure in our relationship with God, so that others' discounting of our relationship with Him doesn't influence us.

71:15 *I don't know its full measure* – Like us, David preached of things which he believed and yet openly admitted he didn't fully understand. This humility and recognition of our own limited understanding will make our witness the more compelling, rather than if we arrogantly give the impression of total knowledge.

71:18 David wanted to remain alive so that he could continue his work of teaching and preaching God's grace and salvation to others. This too should be our purpose of living.

71:20 *Bring us up again from the depths of the earth* – David's hope was clearly in the resurrection of the body, which he may have deduced as necessary on reflection that he would see with his own eyes his Messiah son reigning for ever on his throne (2 Sam. 7:16).

the earth,²¹ increase my honour, and comfort me again.²² I will praise You with the harp for Your faithfulness, my God. I sing praise to You with the lyre, Holy One of Israel.²³ My lips shall shout for joy! My soul, which You have redeemed, sings praises to You!²⁴ My tongue will also talk about Your righteousness all day long, for they are disappointed and they are confounded who want to harm me.

Psalm 72 Feb. 9

A Psalm for Solomon.

¹ God, give the king Your justice; Your righteousness to the royal son.
² He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice.³ The mountains shall bring prosperity to the people, the hills will bring the fruit of righteousness.
⁴ He will judge the poor of the peo-

ple, he will save the children of the needy and will break the oppressor in pieces.⁵ They shall fear You while the sun endures; and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.⁶ He will come down like rain on the mown grass, as showers that water the earth.⁷ In his days, the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more.⁸ He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, from the River to the ends of the land.⁹ Those who dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; his enemies shall lick the dust.¹⁰ The kings of Tarshish and of the islands will bring tribute, the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.¹¹ Yes, all kings shall fall down before him, all nations shall serve him.¹² For he will deliver the needy when he cries; the poor, who has no helper.¹³ He will have pity on the poor and needy,

71:22 *I will praise you... I sing praise to You* – David imagines how after the resurrection at his future glorification, he *will*, at that future time, praise God; and yet he says he praises God *now*. We have here an example of living the Kingdom life now. In New Testament terms, this is how we can “have eternal life” now, even though we shall die; for we can live now the kind of life which we will eternally live, the Kingdom life.

72 A Psalm for Solomon – These are David’s prophetic desires for his son, and yet clearly they have reference to the Kingdom of Christ rather than Solomon, even though the Psalm has a limited fulfilment in Solomon. The promises to David in 2 Sam. 7:12-16 stated that the son of David would also be son of God, and David would eternally live in the presence of his great descendant, who would reign eternally from David’s throne. It seems that David came to see these promises as having hope of fulfilment in his son Solomon, although the New Testament is clear that their main fulfilment is in Christ (Lk. 1:31-35). Thus David lost his focus upon the future Messiah because of his obsession with his son Solomon; and Solomon was damaged by this in that his spirituality and works for God were a living out of parental expectation, but at the end of his life he turned away to other gods and according to Ecclesiastes, lost all hope of a future Kingdom of God on earth. This Psalm however remains a wonderful prophecy of Christ’s future Kingdom, based around the land of Israel and His rulership in Jerusalem.

72:8 In Solomon’s time, the territory of Israel was larger than at any other time.

72:10 Fulfilled by the visit of the Queen of Sheba to Solomon (1 Kings 10).

he will save the needy persons.¹⁴ He will redeem their soul from oppression and violence, their blood will be precious in his sight.¹⁵ They shall live, and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba. Men shall pray for him continually, they shall bless him all day long.¹⁶ Abundance of grain shall be throughout the land, its fruit sways like Lebanon. Let it flourish, thriving like the grass of the field!¹⁷ His name endures forever, his name continues as long as the sun. Men shall be blessed in him, all nations will call him blessed.¹⁸ Praise be to Yahweh God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvellous deeds.¹⁹ Blessed be His glorious name forever! Let the whole earth be filled with His glory! Amen and amen.²⁰ This ends the prayers by David, the son of Jesse.

BOOK III

Psalm 73 Feb. 10

A Psalm by Asaph.

¹ Surely God is good to Israel, to those who are pure in heart. ² But as for me, my feet were almost gone, my steps had nearly slipped. ³ For I

was envious of the arrogant, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.⁴ For there are no struggles in their death, but their strength is firm.⁵ They are free from the burdens of men, neither are they plagued like other men.⁶ Therefore pride is like a chain around their neck, violence covers them like a garment.⁷ Their eyes bulge with fat, their minds pass the limits of conceit.⁸ They scoff and speak with malice; in arrogance, they threaten oppression.⁹ They have set their mouth in the heavens, their tongue walks through the earth.¹⁰ Therefore their people return to them, and they drink up waters of abundance.¹¹ They say, How does God know? Is there knowledge in the Most High?¹² Behold, these are the wicked. Being always at ease, they increase in riches.¹³ Surely in vain I have cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocence,¹⁴ for all day long have I been plagued, and punished every morning.¹⁵ If I had said, I will speak thus; behold, I would have betrayed the generation of Your children.¹⁶ When I tried to understand this, it was too painful for me;¹⁷ until I entered God's

72:13, 14 Solomon perhaps consciously tried to fulfil this in his gracious judgment between the two prostitutes (1 Kings 3:16-28); but later in his reign, his bitterness and selfishness led him to abuse his people (1 Kings 12:4). Thus Solomon by his own behaviour disallowed himself from fulfilling this Kingdom prophecy.

72:17 *Men shall be blessed in him* – Fulfilled in how those baptized “in Christ” become Abraham’s seed and receive the blessing of God’s grace and forgiveness (Acts 3:25,26; Gal. 3:27-29).

73:17 Asaph as a temple servant would have had access to the altar, which was plated with the censers of those sinners who had rebelled against God in the desert (Num. 16:38). There the earth suddenly opened and swallowed them up – alluded to in :18,19. Looking at those plates, he saw that finally judgment does come to the wicked,

sanctuary, and considered their latter end.¹⁸ Surely You set them in slippery places, You threw them down to destruction.¹⁹ How they were suddenly destroyed! They were completely swept away with terrors.²⁰ As a dream when one wakes up, so, Lord, when You awake, You will despise their fantasies.²¹ For my soul was grieved, I was embittered in my heart.²² I was so senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before You.²³ Nevertheless, I am continually with You. You have held my right hand,²⁴ You will guide me with Your word, and afterwards receive me in glory.²⁵ Whom do I have in heaven? There is no one on earth whom I desire besides You.²⁶ My flesh and my heart fails, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.²⁷ For, behold, those who are far from You shall perish. You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.²⁸ But it is good for me to come close to God. I have made the Lord Yahweh my refuge, that I may tell of all Your works.

and even those who appear to die in peace will ultimately be judged. The apparent prosperity of the wicked and the way that they don't always receive judgment in this life simply deepens our faith in the reality of a judgment to come, at which the wicked will be resurrected and judged for their actions in this life. Seeing that God judges sin, and yet sinners don't always get judged in this life, forces us to this understanding – which is in any case presented specifically in the Bible. Asaph admits throughout the Psalm that his jealousy of the wealthy and prosperous sinners had eaten him up to the point of obsession and spiritual destruction; but he came to his senses by realizing the reality of future judgment. That basic doctrine should mean the same for us too.

74:9 This statement is strange seeing that there were prophets at the time when the temple was burnt by the Babylonians (:7) – not least Jeremiah, who had prophesied that Judah would be in captivity for 70 years (Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10). Daniel too appears not to have been immediately aware of Jeremiah's prophecies (Dan. 9:2). There are times when God's people seem not to have been in much contact with each other even though they lived near each other – Melchizedek and Abraham are an example. The

Psalm 74 Feb. 11

A contemplation by Asaph.

¹ God, why have You rejected us forever? Why does Your anger smoulder against the sheep of Your pasture?² Remember Your congregation which You purchased of old, which You have redeemed to be the tribe of Your inheritance; Mount Zion, in which You have lived.³ Lift up Your feet on the perpetual ruins, see all the evil that the enemy has done in the sanctuary.⁴ Your adversaries have roared in the midst of Your assembly. They have set up their standards as signs.⁵ They behaved like men wielding axes, cutting through a thicket of trees.⁶ Now they break all its carved work down with hatchet and hammers.⁷ They have burned Your sanctuary to the ground, they have profaned the dwelling place of Your Name.⁸ They said in their heart, We will crush them completely. They have burned up all the places in the land where God was worshiped.⁹ We see no miraculous signs. There is no longer any prophet, neither is

there among us anyone who knows how long.¹⁰ How long, God, shall the adversary reproach? Shall the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?¹¹ Why do You draw back Your hand, even Your right hand? Take it out of Your pocket and consume them!¹² Yet God is my King of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.¹³ You divided the sea by Your strength. You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters.¹⁴ You broke the heads of Leviathan in pieces. You gave him as food to people and desert creatures.¹⁵ You opened up spring and stream. You dried up mighty rivers.¹⁶ The day is Yours, the night is also Yours; You have prepared the light and the sun.¹⁷ You have set all the boundaries of the earth. You have made summer and winter.¹⁸ Remember this, that the enemy has mocked You, Yahweh. Foolish people have blasphemed Your name.¹⁹ Don't deliver the soul of Your dove to wild beasts, don't forget the life of Your poor forever.²⁰ Honour Your covenant, for haunts of violence fill the dark places of the

land.²¹ Don't let the oppressed return ashamed; let the poor and needy praise Your name.²² Arise, God! Plead Your own cause. Remember how the foolish man mocks You all day.²³ Don't forget the voice of Your adversaries; the tumult of those who rise up against You ascends continually.

Psalm 75 Feb. 12

For the Chief Musician. To the tune of Do Not Destroy. A Psalm by Asaph. A song.

¹ We give thanks to You, God. We give thanks, for Your Name is near. Men tell about Your wondrous works.² When I choose the appointed time, I will judge blamelessly.³ The earth and all its inhabitants quake. I firmly uphold its pillars. Selah.⁴ I said to the arrogant, Don't boast!; I said to the wicked, Don't lift up the horn.⁵ Don't lift up your horn on high, don't speak with a stiff neck.⁶ For neither from the east, nor from the west, nor yet from the south, comes exaltation.⁷ But God is the judge. He puts down one, and lifts up an-

dysfunction and division we see within the church is lamentable and wrong, but these things happen, and the divided parties still remain God's people – just as Asaph and Jeremiah were.

74:12 This Psalm is a record of how Asaph reasoned with himself. The destruction of the temple by the Babylonians meant that he felt God had totally and permanently rejected His people; and yet he takes comfort in the wonders God has done for His people in the past (:13-15). As a member of God's people he felt that those historical wonders had in a sense been done to him too – hence he reflects that "Yet God is my King of old". In times when the apparent distance and silence of God is so unbearable, we have to remember what He has done for us and for His people in the past. We can also reflect that the ongoing wonders of creation, the sun's rising and setting, is a sign that God is in fact constantly active (:16,17), even if He's not active for us in the ways we desperately want.

75:7 *God is the judge. He puts down one, and lifts up another* – We shouldn't think

other. ⁸ For in the hand of Yahweh there is a cup, full of foaming wine mixed with spices. He pours it out; indeed the wicked of the earth drink and drink it to its very dregs. ⁹ But I will declare this forever: I will sing praises to the God of Jacob. ¹⁰ I will cut off all the horns of the wicked, but the horns of the righteous shall be lifted up.

Psalm 76 Feb. 12

For the Chief Musician. On stringed instruments. A Psalm by Asaph. A song.

¹ In Judah God is known, His name is great in Israel. ² His tabernacle is also in Salem; His dwelling place in Zion. ³ There He broke the flaming arrows of the bow, the shield and the sword and the weapons of war. Selah. ⁴ Glorious are You and excellent, more than mountains of game. ⁵ Valiant men lie plundered, they have slept their last sleep. None of the men of war can lift their hands. ⁶ At Your rebuke, God of Jacob, both chariot and horse are cast into a deep

sleep. ⁷ You, even You, are to be feared. Who can stand in Your sight when You are angry? ⁸ You pronounced judgment from heaven: the earth feared and was silent ⁹ when God arose to judgment, to save all the afflicted ones of the earth. Selah. ¹⁰ Surely the wrath of man praises You. The survivors of Your wrath are restrained. ¹¹ Make vows to Yahweh your God, and fulfil them! Let all of His neighbours bring presents to Him who is to be feared. ¹² He will cut off the spirit of princes, He is feared by the kings of the land.

Psalm 77 Feb. 13

For the Chief Musician. To Jeduthun. A Psalm by Asaph.

¹ My cry goes to God! Indeed, I cry to God for help, and for Him to listen to me. ² In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord. My hand was stretched out in the night, and didn't retract. My soul refused to be comforted. ³ I remember God, and I groan. I complain, and my spirit is overwhelmed. Selah. ⁴ You hold

that God isn't watching this world, and will only open the books and consider everything when Christ returns. The judgment is ongoing, right now we are standing before Him and He is judging; the future judgment day will be the revelation of the judgments He has already reached as He watched our faith and behaviour in this life.

75:8 A cup – See on 60:3.

76:1 Judah and Israel are often paralleled. Judah refers to the two tribe kingdom based around the tribes of Judah, Benjamin and the half tribe of Manasseh; while Israel refers to the ten tribe kingdom. This division of God's people was a tragedy; and yet from God's perspective they were one, hence His frequent parallel of them. All divisions within the body of Christ are likewise only real from an earthly perspective; God sees His people as one, as we should.

76:3 This reference to a dramatic military victory by God in the Jerusalem area and the subsequent plundering of the invaders, resulting in the neighbouring kings bringing presents to Jerusalem (:11) is all relevant to the situation when the Assyrians were destroyed by God at the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 32:23).

my eyelids open. I am so troubled that I can't speak. ⁵ I have considered the days of old, the years of ancient times. ⁶ I remember my song in the night. I consider in my own heart; my spirit diligently inquires: ⁷ Will the Lord reject us forever? Will He no more be gracious? ⁸ Has His grace vanished forever? Does His promise fail for generations? ⁹ Has God forgotten to be gracious? Has He, in anger, withheld His compassion? Selah. ¹⁰ Then I thought, I will appeal to this: the years of the right hand of the Most High. ¹¹ I will remember Yah's deeds; for I will remember Your wonders of old. ¹² I will also meditate on all Your work, and consider Your doings. ¹³ Your way, God, is in the sanctuary. What god is great like God? ¹⁴ You are the God who does wonders, You have made Your strength known among the peoples. ¹⁵ You have redeemed Your people with Your arm, the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Selah. ¹⁶ The waters saw You, God, the waters saw You, and they writhed, the depths also convulsed. ¹⁷ The clouds poured out water. The skies resounded with thunder, Your arrows also flashed around. ¹⁸ The voice of Your thunder was in the whirlwind, the lightnings

lit up the world, the earth trembled and shook. ¹⁹ Your way was through the sea, Your paths through the great waters; Your footsteps were not known. ²⁰ You led Your people like a flock, by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 78 Feb. 14

A contemplation by Asaph.

¹ Hear my teaching, my people; turn your ears to the words of my mouth. ² I will open my mouth in a parable, I will utter dark sayings of old, ³ which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. ⁴ We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of Yahweh, His strength, and His wondrous works that He has done. ⁵ For He established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a teaching in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; ⁶ that the generation to come might know, even the children who should be born; who should arise and tell their children, ⁷ that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments, ⁸ and might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation,

77:10 *I will appeal to this* – The faithful have always known God as a God open to dialogue. Asaph feels that God has as it were forgotten His graciousness (:9), and so He appeals to God to remember how in the past He saved His people at the Red Sea, even though they were spiritually weak at the time. He thus appeals to God's consistent love for His people as a basis for requesting God to act again in gracious salvation. If God has acted with His right hand over history, why not now? There was no unquestioning submission to the Almighty God as required by Islam and some legalistic forms of Christianity; rather do God's people respectfully engage Him in dialogue and struggle with Him in prayer.

a generation that didn't make their hearts loyal, whose spirit was not steadfast with God. ⁹ The children of Ephraim, being armed and carrying bows, turned back in the day of battle. ¹⁰ They didn't keep God's covenant, and refused to walk in His law. ¹¹ They forgot His doings, His wondrous works that He had shown them. ¹² He did marvellous things in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt, in the field of Zoan. ¹³ He split the sea, and caused them to pass through. He made the waters stand as a heap. ¹⁴ In the daytime He also led them with a cloud, and all night with a light of fire. ¹⁵ He split rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as out of the depths. ¹⁶ He brought streams also out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers. ¹⁷ Yet they still went on sinning against Him, rebelling against the Most High in the desert. ¹⁸ They put God to the test in their heart by asking food according to their lust. ¹⁹ Yes, they spoke

against God. They said, Can God prepare a table in the wilderness? ²⁰ Behold, He struck the rock, so that waters gushed out, and streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Will He provide flesh for His people? ²¹ Therefore Yahweh heard, and was angry. A fire was kindled against Jacob, anger also went up against Israel, ²² because they didn't believe in God, and didn't trust in His salvation. ²³ Yet He commanded the skies above, and opened the doors of heaven. ²⁴ He rained down manna on them to eat, and gave them food from the sky. ²⁵ Man ate the bread of angels; He sent them food to the full. ²⁶ He caused the east wind to blow in the sky, by His power He guided the south wind. ²⁷ He rained also flesh on them as the dust; winged birds as the sand of the seas. ²⁸ He let them fall in the midst of their camp, around their dwelling places. ²⁹ So they ate, and were well filled; He gave them their own desire. ³⁰ They didn't turn from their cravings. Their

78:9, 10 Israel turned back in the day of battle, they lost their confidence and nerve, because “they didn't keep God's covenant”. Keeping the covenant had an effect upon the crises of life. And keeping it was not a matter of mere outward obedience, it was rather a state of the heart. Thus “their heart was not right with him, neither were they faithful in His covenant” (:37). The covenants / promises made to Abraham and David above all take a grip upon the heart – and we have to keep remembering that those same covenants are made with all who are in Christ as they are the basis of the Gospel (Gal. 3:8).

78:18, 19 Their attitudes to God in their hearts became verbalized in words. How we think about God is so important; we could say that spiritual mindedness is the essence of what Christianity is about.

78:22 *They didn't believe in God* – Israel weren't atheists; but by not trusting that He will ultimately save us, we are effectively atheistic.

78:28 *Around their dwelling places* – We see here the sensitivity of God, not only giving them food but bringing it right to their door. That they and so many others should have become bitter with a God of such gentle grace and kindness is indeed tragic.

food was yet in their mouths ³¹ when the anger of God went up against them, killed some of their fattest, and struck down the young men of Israel. ³² For all this they still sinned, and didn't believe in His wondrous works. ³³ Therefore He consumed their days in vanity, and their years in terror. ³⁴ When He slew them, then they inquired after Him; they relented and sought God earnestly. ³⁵ They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer. ³⁶ But they flattered Him with their mouth, and lied to Him with their tongue. ³⁷ For their heart was not right with Him, neither were they faithful in His covenant. ³⁸ But He, being merciful, forgave iniquity, and didn't destroy them. Yes, many times He turned His anger away, and didn't stir up all His wrath. ³⁹ He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes away, and doesn't come

again. ⁴⁰ How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert! ⁴¹ They turned around and put God to the test, and provoked the Holy One of Israel. ⁴² They didn't remember His hand, nor the day when He redeemed them from the adversary; ⁴³ how He set His signs in Egypt, His wonders in the field of Zoan; ⁴⁴ He turned their rivers and streams into blood so that they could not drink. ⁴⁵ He sent among them swarms of beetles, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them. ⁴⁶ He gave also their increase to the caterpillar, and their labour to the locust. ⁴⁷ He destroyed their vines with hail, their sycamore fig trees with frost. ⁴⁸ He gave over their livestock also to the hail, and their flocks to hot thunderbolts. ⁴⁹ He threw on them the fierceness of His anger, wrath, indignation, trouble, and a band of angels of evil.

78:30 Like a parent giving in to the unwise requests of a child just because they love the child, so God gave Israel the food they craved. Yet giving in to lust or wrong desire doesn't make it go away; Israel were given their desire (:29) but their craving remained. In our battles with temptation, let us never reason that if we give in, the lust will go away. It's simply not true. The very experience of sin makes the next sin even easier and the voice of conscience yet weaker.

78:31 *Killed some of their fattest* – It was the fat ones who were complaining they were perishing from hunger and that God was somehow unreasonable to His children. God had obviously provided very well for them with the manna; but this wasn't enough to satisfy their endless craving to tickle their taste buds and ever be titillating their fancy with something new.

78:49 *Angels of evil* – God's Angels don't sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23). They are all doing His work (103:19-21; Heb. 1:14); there is no sin before God's presence in Heaven (Hab. 1:13). The text here doesn't speak of 'sinful Angels', but rather Angels responsible for bringing "evil" in the sense of calamity or disaster. We are often reminded that God brings the good and also creates "evil" in this sense (Is. 45:5-7). And He does it through His Angels. The reference in the context here is to the plagues God brought on Egypt; the work of the "Angels of evil" refers to the killing of the firstborn sons of Egypt by the Lord's Angel.

50 He made a path for His anger, He didn't spare their soul from death, but gave their life over to the pestilence,⁵¹ and struck all the firstborn in Egypt, the chief of their strength in the tents of Ham.⁵² But He led forth His own people like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like a flock.⁵³ He led them safely so that they weren't afraid, but the sea overwhelmed their enemies.⁵⁴ He brought them to the border of His sanctuary, to this mountain, which His right hand had purchased.⁵⁵ He also drove out the nations before them, allotted them for an inheritance by line, and made the tribes of Israel to dwell in their tents.⁵⁶ Yet they put to the test and rebelled against the Most High God, and didn't keep His testimonies,⁵⁷ but turned back, and dealt treacherously like their fathers. They were turned aside like a deceitful bow.⁵⁸ For they provoked Him to anger with their high places, and moved Him to jealousy with their engraved images.⁵⁹ When God heard this, He was angry, and greatly abhorred Israel;⁶⁰ so that He forsook the tent of Shiloh, the tent which He placed among men;⁶¹ and delivered His strength into captivity, His glory into the adversary's hand.⁶² He also gave His people over to the sword,

and was angry with His inheritance.⁶³ Fire devoured their young men, their young women had no wedding song.⁶⁴ Their priests fell by the sword, and their widows couldn't weep.⁶⁵ Then the Lord awakened as one out of sleep, like a mighty man who shouts by reason of wine.⁶⁶ He struck His adversaries backward, He put them to a perpetual reproach.⁶⁷ Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph and didn't choose the tribe of Ephraim,⁶⁸ but chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved.⁶⁹ He built His sanctuary like the heights, like the earth which He has established forever.⁷⁰ He also chose David His servant and took him from the sheepfolds;⁷¹ from following the ewes that have their young, He brought him to be the shepherd of Jacob His people, and Israel His inheritance.⁷² So he was their shepherd according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.

Psalm 79 Feb. 15

A Psalm by Asaph.

1 God, the nations have come into Your inheritance, they have defiled Your holy temple, they have laid Jerusalem in heaps. 2 They have given the dead bodies of Your serv-

78:54 Had purchased – It had as it were cost God something to give Israel the Kingdom or “mountain”. The same Hebrew word occurs in 74:2 and Gen. 14:22. The cost of our redemption, our place in the Kingdom, was the precious blood of Christ with which we were “bought” (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18,19). God who knows the future is outside our kind of time, and so in a sense, Christ was as it were the lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). God's pain and sacrifice started right from the beginning, and when He offered Israel the forgiveness and Kingdom which He did, this offer was not without pain and immense cost to Him. Their rejection of it was therefore even more tragic and painful for Him.

ants to be food for the birds of the sky, the flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the land.³ Their blood they have shed like water around Jerusalem, there was no one to bury them.⁴ We have become a reproach to our neighbours, a scoffing and derision to those who are around us.⁵ How long, Yahweh? Will You be angry forever? Will Your jealousy burn like fire?⁶ Pour out Your wrath on the nations that don't know You, on the kingdoms that don't call on Your name;⁷ for they have devoured Jacob, and destroyed his homeland.⁸ Don't hold the iniquities of our forefathers against us; let Your tender mercies speedily meet us, for we are in desperate need.⁹ Help us, God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name. Deliver us and forgive our sins, for Your name's sake.¹⁰ Why should the nations say, Where is their God? Let it be known among the nations, before our eyes, that vengeance for Your servants'

blood is being poured out.¹¹ Let the sighing of the prisoner come before You. According to the greatness of Your power, preserve those who are sentenced to death.¹² Pay back to our neighbours seven times into their lap their reproach with which they have reproached You, Lord.¹³ So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever. We will praise You forever, to all generations.

Psalm 80 Feb. 15

For the Chief Musician. To the tune of The Lilies of the Covenant. A Psalm by Asaph.

¹ Hear us, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock, You who sit above the cherubim, shine forth.² Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your might! Come to save us!³ Turn us again, God. Cause Your face to shine, and we will be saved.⁴ Yahweh God of Armies, How long will

79:8 *Don't hold the iniquities of our forefathers against us* – Ez. 18 criticizes the Jews at the time of the destruction of the temple (:1) for complaining that their sufferings were because of their fathers' sins, and God rejoins that this wasn't the case, He was punishing that generation for their actual personal sins. But Asaph was under the impression that his generation were relatively innocent; likewise his complaint that he doesn't know "how long" the sufferings would last appears to reveal an ignorance of Jer. 25:11,12; 29:10. See on 74:9. We can get some things wrong, be wilfully ignorant of others in our self-justification; and yet still be counted by God as faithful, just as Asaph was. And we must remember this in managing our irritations with others' spiritual immaturity.

79:9 *Because of how God is*, as revealed in His Name of Yahweh, because mercy and forgiveness are paramount within the texture of His very personality which His Name reveals (Ex. 34:4-6)... therefore, we should repent. Reflection on the Name inspired Asaph's faith in forgiveness and thus helped his repentance. It did the same for David (25:11) and for Jeremiah (Jer. 14:7,21), and it can do so for us too. Because God's Name proclaims God as above all merciful and forgiving, therefore we should repent and ask for forgiveness.

You be angry against the prayer of Your people? ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in large measure. ⁶ You make us a source of derision to our neighbours, our enemies laugh among themselves. ⁷ Turn us again, God of Armies. Cause Your face to shine, and we will be saved. ⁸ You brought a vine out of Egypt, You drove out the nations and planted it. ⁹ You cleared the land for it. It took deep root, and filled the land; ¹⁰ the mountains were covered with its shadow. Its boughs were like God's cedars. ¹¹ It sent out its branches to the sea, its shoots to the River. ¹² Why have You broken down its walls, so that all those who pass by the way pluck it? ¹³ The boar out of the wood ravages it, the wild beasts of the field feed on it. ¹⁴ Turn again, we beg You, God of Armies. Look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine, ¹⁵ the stock which Your right hand planted, the branch that You made strong for Yourself. ¹⁶ It's

burned with fire. It's cut down. They perish at Your rebuke. ¹⁷ Let Your hand be on the man of Your right hand, on the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself. ¹⁸ So we will not turn away from You; accept us, and we will call on Your name. ¹⁹ Turn us again, Yahweh God of Armies. Cause Your face to shine, and we will be saved.

Psalm 81 Feb. 16

For the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. By Asaph.

¹ Sing aloud to God, our strength! Make a joyful shout to the God of Jacob! ² Raise a song, and bring here the tambourine, the pleasant lyre with the harp. ³ Blow the trumpet at the New Moon, at the full moon, on our feast day. ⁴ For it is a statute for Israel, an ordinance of the God of Jacob. ⁵ He appointed it in Joseph for a testimony, when he went out over the land of Egypt, I heard a language that I didn't know. ⁶ I removed his shoulder from the burden, his hands

80:9 *You cleared the land for it* – Potentially, God drove out all the nations in the land of Canaan so that the vine of Israel could grow there without contamination and be spiritually fruitful. But in fact Israel failed to drive out many of the tribes and they remained to be a spiritual thorn to Israel's spirituality. In potential, so much was made possible, just as it is for God's people today; but it requires us to go and realize that potential in faith.

80:12 *Why have You broken down its walls* – Surely Asaph knew that the nations around the borders of Israel had been allowed by God to invade because of Judah's sinfulness. Asaph in several Psalms appears to underestimate the seriousness of Judah's sin and the rightness and necessity of God's judgment, despite the prophets of his time making these things crystal clear. Yet for all his misunderstanding and wilful ignorance, he still displays faith and God worked with him and inspired the recording of his Psalms. For all *our* ignorance and misunderstandings [and those of others amongst God's people], God still hears our prayers.

81:5 *I heard a language that I didn't know* – God of course understands every language and thought of man, including Egyptian. Yet He so identifies with His people

were freed from the basket.⁷ You called in trouble, and I delivered you. I answered you in the secret place of thunder, I tested you at the waters of Meribah. Selah.⁸ Hear My people and I will testify to you, Israel, if you would have listened to Me!⁹ There shall be no strange god with you, neither shall you worship any foreign god.¹⁰ I am Yahweh your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it.¹¹ But My people didn't listen to My voice, Israel desired none of Me.¹² So I let them go after the stubbornness of their hearts, that they might walk in their own counsels.¹³ Oh that My people would have listened to me, that Israel would have walked in my ways!¹⁴ I would quickly have subdued their enemies, and turned My hand against their adversaries.¹⁵ The haters of

Yahweh would have cringed before Him, and their punishment would have lasted forever.¹⁶ But He would have also fed them with the finest of the wheat, I would have satisfied you with honey out of the rock.

Psalm 82 Feb. 16

A Psalm by Asaph.

¹ God presides in the great assembly. He judges among the gods.² How long will you judge unjustly, and show partiality to the wicked? Selah.³ Defend the weak, the poor, and the fatherless, maintain the rights of the poor and oppressed.⁴ Rescue the weak and needy, deliver them out of the hand of the wicked.⁵ They don't know, neither do they understand; they wander back and forth in darkness. All the foundations of the earth are shaken.⁶ I said, You are gods, all of you are sons of the Most High.

that He speaks from their limited perspective. He has the ability to see and feel life from our viewpoint here on earth. He isn't therefore distant from us.

81:11 God ("me") is paralleled with His voice; if we disregard His word, this is our attitude to Him. We can't divorce our relationship with Him from our relationship with His word. True believers can therefore be nothing but Bible lovers and searchers.

81:14 *I would quickly have* – We have in these verses the amazing fact that God knows all possible futures; He knew all the things that would have happened if they had been obedient – and He often mentions this in the prophets. In this we have another window into the pain and tragedy of God. We mourn more for those who die young than for those who die in fulfilled old age, because we think of all that might have been. And so it is for God, to an infinitely greater extent. He planned even to give Israel fine wheat as well as manna, and honey as well as water out of the smitten rock (:16); but Israel would not. And yet God continues to plan all kinds of intricate and wonderful possible futures for each of us; and individually and collectively we as His beloved people so often don't enable them to happen because of our short term, faithless attitudes.

82:6 *You are gods* – The Hebrew word *elohim* means 'mighty ones'; sometimes it is translated "God", other times it refers to men, in this case the sinful judges of Israel (:1,7). When the Jews falsely accused Jesus of making Himself God, He denied it by quoting this verse. His point was, 'In the Old Testament, men are called God; I'm only saying I'm the Son of God, so what's your problem?' (Jn. 10:34,35). He not only de-

7 Nevertheless you shall die like men, and fall like one of the rulers.
 8 Arise, God, judge the earth, for You shall inherit all of the nations.

Psalm 83 Feb. 17

A song. A Psalm by Asaph.

¹ God, don't keep silent. Don't keep silent and don't be still, God. ² For, behold, Your enemies are stirred up, those who hate You have lifted up their heads. ³ They conspire with cunning against Your people, they plot against Your cherished ones. ⁴ Come, they say, and let's destroy them as a nation, that the name of Israel may be remembered no more. ⁵ For they have conspired together with one mind, they form an alliance against You. ⁶ The tents of Edom and the Ishmaelites; Moab, and the Hagarites; ⁷ Gebal, Ammon, and Amalek; Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre; ⁸ Assyria also is joined with them. They have helped the children of Lot. Selah. ⁹ Do to them as You did to Midian, as to Sisera, as to Jabin, at

nied being God Himself in any Trinitarian sense; He thus demonstrated that the term “God” can be applied to men, and even if it is used about Him, it doesn’t make Him God Himself in person.

83:13 Like chaff before the wind – The language of Dan. 2:35,44 about the destruction of the ten toes of the image, representing Israel’s latter day enemies, at Christ’s return. Psalm 83 likewise features ten nations who will be bound together against Israel and then be dramatically destroyed by direct Divine intervention. It is tempting to equate these ten nations with the ten toes of the image of Dan. 2, and the ten horns of the latter day beast which we meet in Daniel and Revelation. These ten nations are geographically located in the peoples which currently surround the state of Israel, and the rhetoric they are prophesied as using is exactly the same as that used by the Palestinians and Israel’s Arab enemies. The situation around Israel is therefore a sure sign that Christ will soon return.

83:16 That they may seek Your name – The latter day judgments against Israel’s enemies, like all God’s judgments, are so that those nations may repent and come to relationship with God; they aren’t a mere outbreak of anger from an exasperated God.

the river Kishon; ¹⁰ who perished at Endor, who became as dung for the earth. ¹¹ Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb; yes, all their princes like Zebah and Zalmunna; ¹² who said, Let us take possession of God’s pasturelands. ¹³ My God, make them like tumbleweed; like chaff before the wind. ¹⁴ As the fire that burns the forest, as the flame that sets the mountains on fire, ¹⁵ so pursue them with Your tempest, and terrify them with Your storm. ¹⁶ Fill their faces with confusion, that they may seek Your name, Yahweh. ¹⁷ Let them be disappointed and dismayed forever. Yes, let them be confounded and perish; ¹⁸ that they may know that You alone, whose name is Yahweh, are the Most High over all the earth.

Psalm 84 Feb. 17

For the Chief Musician. On an instrument of Gath. A Psalm by the sons of Korah.

¹ How lovely are Your dwellings, Yahweh of Armies! ² My soul longs

and even faints for the courts of Yahweh. My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God. ³ Yes, the sparrow has found a home and the swallow a nest for herself where she may have her young, near Your altars, Yahweh of Armies, my King, and my God. ⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in Your house; they are always praising You. Selah. ⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in You; who have set their hearts on a pilgrimage. ⁶ Passing through the valley of Weeping, they make it a place of springs. Yes, the autumn rain covers it with blessings. ⁷ They go from strength to strength, each one of them appears before God in Zion. ⁸ Yahweh, God of Armies, hear my prayer; listen, God of Jacob. Selah. ⁹ Behold, God our shield, look at the face of Your anointed. ¹⁰ For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand. I would rather be a doorkeeper in the tent of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness. ¹¹ For Yahweh God is a sun and a shield, Yahweh will give grace and glory. He withholds no good thing from those who

walk blamelessly. ¹² Yahweh of Armies, blessed is the man who trusts in You.

Psalm 85 Feb. 18

For the Chief Musician.

A Psalm by the sons of Korah.

¹ Yahweh, You have been favourable to Your land. You have restored the fortunes of Jacob, ² You have forgiven the iniquity of Your people; You have covered all their sin. Selah. ³ You have taken away all Your wrath, You have turned from the fierceness of Your anger. ⁴ Turn us, God of our salvation, and cause Your indignation toward us to cease. ⁵ Will You be angry with us forever? Will You draw out Your anger to all generations? ⁶ Won't You revive us again, that Your people may rejoice in You? ⁷ Show us Your grace, Yahweh. Grant us Your salvation. ⁸ I will hear what God, Yahweh, will speak, for He will speak peace to His people, His saints; but let them not turn again to folly. ⁹ Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him, so that glory may dwell in our land. ¹⁰ Mer-

84:10 Just one day in God's presence would be better than thousands of days lived in this present world; and yet the wonder of it all is that we shall live eternally with God in His Kingdom. 2 Pet. 3:8 alludes here.

85:4 Although God had potentially turned from His anger (:3), Israel still had to turn to God to make this come true in their personal experience.

85:10 *Mercy and truth* – Somehow it seems that both individually and collectively we cannot achieve this fusion. We are either too soft and compromise and lose the Faith, or we are too hard and lose the spirit of Christ, without which we are “none of His” (Rom. 8:9). The result of this is that whenever God’s Truth is revived, that community is in a sense born to roll downhill; after two or three generations the Truth is lost. Either they destroy themselves through bitter subdivision, or they compromise with error and lose the Faith. Perhaps it is God’s plan that no one community should hold the Faith through many generations. But the challenge is of showing “grace and truth”

cy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.¹¹ Truth springs out of the earth, righteousness has looked down from heaven.¹² Yes, Yahweh will give that which is good. Our land will yield its increase.¹³ Righteousness goes before Him, and prepares the way for His steps.

Psalm 86 Feb. 18

A Prayer by David.

¹ Hear, Yahweh, and answer me, for I am poor and needy. ² Preserve my soul, for I am Godly. You, my God, save Your servant who trusts in You. ³ Be merciful to me Lord, for I call to You all day long. ⁴ Bring joy to the soul of Your servant, for to You, Lord, do I lift up my soul. ⁵ For You, Lord, are good and ready to forgive; abundant in grace to all those who call on You. ⁶ Hear, Yahweh, my prayer; listen to the voice of my petitions. ⁷ In the day of my trouble I will call on You, for You will answer me. ⁸ There is no one like You among the gods, Lord, nor any deeds like

Your deeds. ⁹ All nations You have made will come and worship before You, Lord. They shall glorify Your name. ¹⁰ For You are great, and do wondrous things, You alone are God. ¹¹ Teach me Your way, Yahweh; I will walk in Your truth. Make my heart undivided to fear Your name. ¹² I will praise You, Lord my God, with my whole heart; I will glorify Your name forever. ¹³ For Your grace is great toward me, You have delivered my soul from the lowest Sheol. ¹⁴ God, the proud have risen up against me; a company of violent men have sought after my soul, and they don't hold regard for You before them. ¹⁵ But You, Lord, are a merciful and gracious God, slow to anger, and abundant in grace and truth. ¹⁶ Turn to me, and have mercy on me! Give Your strength to Your servant, save the son of Your handmaid. ¹⁷ Show me a sign of Your goodness, that those who hate me may see it and be shamed, because You, Yahweh, have helped me and comforted me.

in our thinking and judging, even though we cannot fully achieve it; and in the process we are led to appreciate more the beauty and wonder of the way in which these two concepts are linked together in the Father and His Son, and to yearn more to perceive and enter into the glory of God's Name, which totally incorporates these two humanly opposed aspects (Ex. 34:6,7; Rom. 11:22).

86:3 There are verses which speak of many daily prayers as being just one prayer (86:3,6; 88:1,2); prayer is a way / spirit of life, not just something specific which occurs for a matter of minutes each day. The commands to “pray without ceasing” simply can't be literally obeyed (1 Thess. 5:17). “Watch and pray *always*” (Lk. 21:36) in the last days likewise connects prayer with *watchfulness*, which is an attitude of mind rather than something done on specific occasions. This is not to say that prayer *in no sense* refers to formal, specific prayer. Evidently it does, but it is only a verbal crystallization of our general spirit of life.

86:14 God of course knew all this, but part of the healing therapy of prayer is that we verbalize our situations and tell God about them.

Psalm 87 Feb. 19*A Psalm by the sons of Korah; a Song.*

¹ His foundation is in the holy mountains. ² Yahweh loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. ³ Glorious things are spoken about you, city of God. Selah. ⁴ I will record Rahab and Babylon among those who acknowledge me. Behold, Philistia, Tyre and also Ethiopia: This one was born there. ⁵ Yes, of Zion it will be said, This one and that one was born in her; the Most High Himself will establish her. ⁶ Yahweh will count, when He writes up the peoples, This one was born there. Selah. ⁷ Those who sing as well as those who dance say, All my springs are in You.

Psalm 88 Feb. 19*A Song. A Psalm by the sons of Korah. For the Chief Musician. To the tune of The Suffering of Affliction. A contemplation by Heman, the Ezrahite.*

¹ Yahweh, the God of my salvation, I

have cried day and night before You. ² Let my prayer enter into Your presence, turn Your ear to my cry; ³ for my soul is full of troubles, my life draws near to Sheol. ⁴ I am counted among those who go down into the pit. I am like a man who has no help, ⁵ set apart among the dead, like the slain who lie in the grave, whom You remember no more- they are cut off from Your hand. ⁶ You have laid me in the lowest pit, in the darkest depths. ⁷ Your wrath lies heavily upon me; You have afflicted me with all Your waves. Selah. ⁸ You have taken my friends from me, You have made me an abomination to them; I am shut in and I can't escape. ⁹ My eyes are dim from grief; I have called on You daily, Yahweh. I have spread out my hands to You. ¹⁰ Do You show wonders to the dead? Do the dead rise up and praise You? Selah. ¹¹ Is Your grace declared in the grave? Or Your faithfulness in Destruction? ¹² Are Your wonders made known in the dark? Or Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness? ¹³ But

87:5 This verse and the whole Psalm may refer to the way that the judgment throne of Christ will be established in Jerusalem, and therefore all those who will live eternally will have in that sense been born again there, in that they began the physical experience of immortal life in that city.

88:2 It's an amazing thought that the words of our prayers enter into God's personal presence. This was symbolized by the way the incense (representing prayer, Rev. 8:3,4) burnt in the holy place permeated into the Most Holy Place.

88:9 *I have spread out my hands to You* – This is a good physical posture to adopt in our prayers, signifying as it does our openness to God's answer, whatever it may be; and the openness of our heart to Him.

88:10 The faithful Psalmist knew that death was unconsciousness; he wanted to remain alive so as to keep on praising God. And this should also be our very reason for being alive.

88:13 *In the morning* – Starting each day in prayer is a vital habit of the spiritually successful person. How we start the day affects how that day proceeds spiritually.

to You, Yahweh, I have cried. In the morning, my prayer comes before You.¹⁴ Yahweh, why do You reject my soul? Why do You hide Your face from me?¹⁵ I am afflicted and ready to die from my youth up; while I suffer Your terrors, I am distracted.¹⁶ Your fierce wrath has gone over me. Your terrors have cut me off.¹⁷ They came around me like water all day long, they completely engulfed me.¹⁸ You have put lover and friend far from me, and my friends into darkness.

Psalm 89 Feb. 20

A contemplation by Ethan, the Ezrahite.

¹ I will sing of the grace of Yahweh forever. With my mouth I will make known Your faithfulness to all generations. ² I indeed declare, Love stands firm forever because You established the skies; Your faithfulness is in them. ³ I have made a covenant with My chosen one, I have sworn to David My servant, ⁴ ‘I will establish Your seed forever, and build up Your throne to all generations’. Selah. ⁵ The skies will praise Your wonders, Yahweh; Your faithfulness also in the assembly of the holy ones. ⁶ For who in the skies can be compared to Yahweh? Who among the sons of the heavenly beings is like

Yahweh,⁷ a very awesome God in the council of the holy ones, to be feared above all those who are around Him?⁸ Yahweh, God of Armies, who is a mighty one like You? Yah, Your faithfulness is around You.⁹ You rule the pride of the sea; when its waves rise up, You calm them.¹⁰ You have broken Rahab in pieces, like one of the slain. You have scattered Your enemies with Your mighty arm.¹¹ The heavens are Yours, the earth also is Yours; the world and its fullness; You have founded them.¹² The north and the south, You have created them; Tabor and Hermon rejoice in Your name.¹³ You have a mighty arm, Your hand is strong and Your right hand is exalted.¹⁴ Righteousness and justice are the foundation of Your throne; grace and truth go before Your face.¹⁵ Blessed are the people who learn to acclaim You; they shall walk in the light of Your face, Yahweh.¹⁶ In Your name they rejoice all day. In Your righteousness, they are exalted.¹⁷ For You are the glory of their strength. In Your favour, our horn will be exalted.¹⁸ For our shield belongs to Yahweh; our king to the Holy One of Israel.¹⁹ Then You spoke in vision to Your saints and said, I have bestowed strength on the warrior. I have exalted a young

89:2 We often doubt God’s love and whether He will really keep His covenant with us. Yet the very existence of creation, that it’s not been destroyed despite human sin, should be a constant reminder to us of God’s faithfulness – if we let ourselves perceive it.

89:12 This shows how God reckons the points of the compass with reference to Jerusalem; He is believer-centric, so central are we to His thinking. We are never forgotten by Him.

man from the people. ²⁰I have found David My servant, I have anointed him with My holy oil, ²¹with whom My hand shall be established; My arm will also strengthen him. ²²No enemy will tax him, no wicked man will oppress him. ²³I will beat down his adversaries before him, and strike those who hate him. ²⁴But My faithfulness and My grace will be with him; in My name, his horn will be exalted. ²⁵I will set his hand also on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. ²⁶He will call to me, ‘You are my Father, my God, and the rock of my salvation!’. ²⁷I will also appoint him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. ²⁸I will keep My grace for him forever. My covenant will stand firm through him. ²⁹I will also make his seed endure forever and his throne as the days of heaven. ³⁰If his children forsake My law and

don’t walk in My ordinances, ³¹if they break My statutes and don’t keep My commandments; ³²then I will punish their sin with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. ³³But I will not completely take My grace away from him, nor allow My faithfulness to fail. ³⁴I will not break My covenant, nor alter what My lips have uttered. ³⁵Once have I sworn by My holiness that I will not lie to David. ³⁶His seed will endure forever, his throne like the sun before Me. ³⁷It will be established forever like the moon, the faithful witness in the sky. Selah. ³⁸But you have rejected and spurned, You have been angry with Your anointed. ³⁹You have renounced the covenant of Your servant; You have defiled his crown in the dust. ⁴⁰You have broken down all his hedges, You have brought his strongholds to ruin.

89:20 *I have found David My servant* – God is in search of man; this is a repeated theme of the prophets (Hos. 9:10; Dt. 32:1; Is. 50:2; 65:1,2; 66:4). So it’s not us as it were reaching out to God; He is fervently reaching out to us, and we have to come to realize that. We don’t so much as find God, as realize that He already is earnestly with us. And yet we of course feel that we are or have been searching for God, for the ultimate Truth. Yet God is searching for us; in conversion to Christ, God and man meet in a profound way; for there, in Christ, God finds us and we find Him.

89:26–32 This is clearly a commentary on the promises to David concerning his great descendant, who was also to be God’s Son (2 Sam. 7:12–16). They were fulfilled in Christ (Lk. 1:31–35). The fact Christ called God “my God” and God was His salvation, His saviour from death through resurrection, is all more evidence that the Trinitarian understanding of Jesus is wrong. Jesus wasn’t God Himself in person.

89:35 The promises God makes involve a solemn commitment by Him to us – the serious, binding nature of His oath to us is easy to forget. God swore to David “by My holiness”. The Hebrew for “holiness” is the same word translated “dedication”. David’s response to God’s dedication to him was to dedicate [s.w.] all the silver and gold which he had won from this world, to the service of God’s house (1 Kings 7:51; 1 Chron. 26:26; 2 Chron. 5:1). Our response to God’s dedication to us should be a like dedication of what we have to Him. Covenant relationship with God requires much of both Him and us.

41 All who pass by the way rob him; he has become a reproach to his neighbours. 42 You have exalted the right hand of his adversaries, You have made all of his enemies rejoice. 43 Yes, you turn back the edge of his sword and haven't supported him in battle. 44 You have ended his splendour, and cast his throne down to the ground. 45 You have shortened the days of his youth, You have covered him with shame. Selah. 46 How long, Yahweh? Will You hide Yourself forever? Will Your wrath burn like fire? 47 Remember how short my time is! For what vanity have You created all the children of men! 48 What man is he who shall live and not see death, who shall deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah. 49 Lord, where are Your former graces which You swore to David in Your faithfulness? 50 Remember, Lord, the reproach of Your servants, how I bear in my heart the taunts of all the mighty peoples, 51 with which Your enemies have mocked, Yahweh, with which they have mocked the footsteps of Your anointed one. 52 Blessed be Yahweh forever. Amen, and Amen.

BOOK IV

Psalm 90 Feb. 21

A Prayer by Moses, the man of God.

¹ Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. ² Before the mountains were brought forth, before You had formed the land and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God. ³ You turn man to destruction saying, Return, you children of men. ⁴ For a thousand years in Your sight are just like yesterday when it is past, like a watch in the night. ⁵ You sweep them away as they sleep; in the morning they sprout like new grass. ⁶ In the morning it sprouts and springs up; by evening, it is withered and dry. ⁷ For we are consumed in Your anger, we are troubled in Your wrath. ⁸ You have set our iniquities before You, our secret sins in the light of Your face. ⁹ For all our days have passed away in Your wrath, we bring our years to an end as a sigh. ¹⁰ The days of our years are seventy, or even by reason of strength eighty years; yet their pride is but labour and sorrow, for it passes quickly,

89:52 *Blessed be Yahweh forever* – Despite all the doubts about God expressed in this Psalm, the faithful writer is still committed to thanking and praising God. His apparent silence in specific areas of our lives shouldn't ever stop us from praising Him for who He is.

90:1 There is a repeated Biblical theme that the believer's relationship with God is essentially *mutual*. We dwell in God, and He dwells in us (1 Cor. 3:16). Thus "he that lives in love lives in God, and God in him" (1 Jn. 4:15,16).

90:10 This is one of many Biblical reasons for understanding the urgency of our need to devote our time to the Lord and not fritter it away. We must number our days, realize their number is only 70 years, and therefore apply our hearts unto wisdom (:10 cp. :12). "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom" (Prov. 4:7).

and we pass away. ¹¹ Who knows the power of Your anger, Your wrath according to the fear that is due to You? ¹² So teach us to number our days so that we may gain a heart of wisdom. ¹³ Relent, Yahweh! How long? Have compassion on Your servants! ¹⁴ Satisfy us in the morning with Your grace, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. ¹⁵ Make us glad for as many days as You have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen evil. ¹⁶ Let Your work appear to Your servants; Your glory to their children. ¹⁷ Let the grace of the Lord our God be upon us; establish the work of our hands for us; yes, establish the work of our hands.

Psalm 91 Feb. 21

¹ He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. ² I will say of Yahweh, He is my refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust. ³ For He will deliver you from the snare

of the fowler, and from the deadly plague. ⁴ He will cover you with His feathers, beneath His wings you will take refuge; His faithfulness is your shield and rampart. ⁵ You shall not be afraid of the terror by night, nor of the arrow that flies by day; ⁶ nor of the plagues that stalks in darkness, nor of the destruction that wastes at noonday. ⁷ A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you. ⁸ You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked. ⁹ Because you have made Yahweh your refuge and the Most High your dwelling place, ¹⁰ no evil shall happen to you, neither shall any plague come near your dwelling. ¹¹ For He will put His angels in charge of you, to guard you in all your ways; ¹² they will bear you up in their hands, so that you won't dash your foot against a stone. ¹³ You will tread on the lion and cobra, you will trample the young lion and the ser-

90:13 Relent – Moses several times persuaded God to change His stated purpose concerning Israel, and here once again he is trying to persuade God not to allow the rebellious generation of Israel to perish in the wilderness. The prayer wasn't answered, but it's a fine example of someone very intimate with God pleading with Him to change His mind.

91:1 This Psalm is connected with Ps. 90, and appears to also be part of that prayer of Moses. It's especially addressed to Joshua, who during the wilderness journey lived in the tabernacle (Ex. 33:11), and was one of the few who survived the judgment of the unfaithful generation dying in the wilderness. The situation in :3-7 describes how one by one, that generation died in the wilderness, but Joshua was preserved because he had believed that Israel could inherit the promised land.

91:11, 12 Jesus was tempted to misinterpret these words as meaning that whatever He did from whatever motives, God would somehow preserve Him (Mt. 4:6). Temptation is very subtle; for the believer, misusing God's words in order to justify whatever we feel like doing in the heat of a moment is a common form of temptation. This Psalm was encouragement to Joshua (see on :1), the Hebrew form of 'Jesus'; so it's understandable that Jesus would've been especially aware of these words.

pent underfoot.¹⁴ Because he has set His love on Me, therefore I will deliver him. I will set him on high, because he has known My name.¹⁵ He will call on Me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will deliver him and honour him.¹⁶ I will satisfy him with long life, and show him My salvation.

Psalm 92 Feb. 22

A Psalm. A song for the Sabbath day.

¹ It is a good thing to give thanks to Yahweh, to sing praises to Your name, Most High; ² to proclaim Your grace in the morning and Your faithfulness every night,³ with the ten-stringed lute, with the harp, and with the melody of the lyre.⁴ For You, Yahweh, have made me glad through Your work; I will triumph in the works of Your hands!⁵ How great are Your works, Yahweh! Your thoughts are very deep.⁶ A senseless man doesn't know, neither does a fool understand this:⁷ though the wicked spring up as the grass and all the evildoers flourish, they will be destroyed forever.⁸ But You, Yahweh, are on high forever.⁹ For, be-

hold, Your enemies, Yahweh, for, behold, Your enemies shall perish; all the evildoers will be scattered.¹⁰ But You have exalted my horn like that of the wild ox; I am anointed with fresh oil.¹¹ My eye has also seen my enemies, my ears have heard of the wicked enemies who rise up against me.¹² The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree, he will grow like a cedar in Lebanon.¹³ They are planted in Yahweh's house, they will flourish in our God's courts.¹⁴ They will still bring forth fruit in old age. They will be full of sap and green,¹⁵ to show that Yahweh is upright. He is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in Him.

Psalm 93 Feb. 22

¹ Yahweh reigns! He is clothed with majesty! Yahweh is armed with strength. The world also is established to stand firm, so that it can't be moved.² Your throne is established from long ago; You are from everlasting.³ The floods have lifted up, Yahweh, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their waves.⁴ Above the voices of many waters, the mighty breakers of

91:14 Joshua (see on :1) was preserved because he believed that God would really give His people the promised Kingdom; but this faith is here described as loving God and knowing His Name. Joshua wanted Israel to inherit the Kingdom because he loved God, not because he wanted any personal benefit for himself. We see here how the New Testament triad of faith, hope and love were all interwoven within the character of Joshua.

92:2 A regular regime of morning and evening ‘quiet time’ with God is so important; spiritual life is really all about having the right habits.

93:1 A proof that God will not destroy the earth but will be faithful to His covenant purpose to establish His eternal Kingdom here. Just as the earth stands firm for ever, so does God's word of promise (:5).

the sea, Yahweh on high is mighty.
 5 Your words stand firm. Holiness adorns Your house, Yahweh, forever.

Psalm 94 Feb. 23

¹ Yahweh, You God to whom alone vengeance belongs, You God to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth. ² Rise up, You judge of the earth, repay the proud what they deserve. ³ Yahweh, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph? ⁴ They pour out arrogant words; all the evildoers boast. ⁵ They break Your people in pieces, Yahweh, and afflict Your heritage. ⁶ They kill the widow and the alien, and murder the fatherless. ⁷ They say, Yah will not see, neither will Jacob's God consider. ⁸ Consider, you senseless among the people; you fools, when will you be wise? ⁹ He who implanted the ear, won't He hear? He who formed the eye, won't He see? ¹⁰ He who disciplines the nations, won't He punish? He who teaches man knows; ¹¹ Yahweh knows the thoughts of man, that they are futile. ¹² Blessed is the man whom You dis-

cipline, Yah, and teach out of Your law; ¹³ that You may give him rest from the days of adversity, until the pit is dug for the wicked. ¹⁴ For Yahweh won't reject His people, neither will He forsake His inheritance. ¹⁵ For justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart shall follow it. ¹⁶ Who will rise up for me against the wicked? Who will stand up for me against the evildoers? ¹⁷ Unless Yahweh had been my help, my soul would have soon been silenced. ¹⁸ When I said, My foot is slipping! Your grace, Yahweh, held me up. ¹⁹ In the multitude of my thoughts within me, Your comforts delight my soul. ²⁰ Shall the throne of wickedness have fellowship with You, which brings about mischief by statute? ²¹ They gather themselves together against the soul of the righteous, and condemn the innocent blood. ²² But Yahweh has been my high tower, my God, the rock of my refuge. ²³ He has brought on them their own iniquity, and will cut them off in their own wickedness. Yahweh, our God, will cut them off.

94:1 David sees Yahweh as the God of revenge, the one *alone* to whom vengeance belongs. Our response to this is to believe that truly vengeance is God's and therefore we will *not* avenge ourselves (Rom. 12:19). This applies to all the micro-level 'takings of vengeance' which we so easily do in our words, body language, attitudes etc., in response to the hurt received from others.

94:9 One implication of believing that we were created by God as a special, purposefully designed creation is that we will believe that God sees and knows all things; the designer of the eyes and ears which we have 24/7 can surely see and hear everything going on in our lives.

94:12 True hearkening to the word is a chastening experience. It isn't easy; not as easy as reading a book called the Bible and going through the process of interpretation. Our sufferings make sense and are worked through by God insofar as we are open to and aware of His word; for they are designed to assist us in our being conformed to His word.

Psalm 95 Feb. 23

¹ Oh come, let's sing to Yahweh, let's shout aloud to the rock of our salvation! ² Let's come before His presence with thanksgiving, let's extol Him with songs! ³ For Yahweh is a great God, a great King above all gods. ⁴ In His hand are the deep places of the earth; the heights of the mountains are also His. ⁵ The sea is His, and He made it; His hands formed the dry land. ⁶ Oh come, let's worship and bow down; let's kneel before Yahweh, our Maker, ⁷ for He is our God. We are the people of His pasture, and the sheep in His care. Today, oh that you would hear His voice! ⁸ Don't harden your heart, as at Meribah, as in the day of Massah in the wilderness, ⁹ when your fathers tempted Me, tested Me and saw My work. ¹⁰ Forty long years I was grieved with that generation and said, It is a people that errs in their heart. They have not known My ways. ¹¹ Therefore I swore in My wrath, They will not enter into My rest.

95:7 The urgency of hearing “today” applied to Israel in the wilderness, to the community at the time of Ps. 95, and to the first century believers to whom it is applied specifically in Heb. 3:7,15; 4:7. The urgency of the call continues to our “today”. God’s word has a unique way of speaking to us in a kind of eternal present; as if we were there in the wilderness, in the time of Ps. 95, and in the first century church.

96:6 Idols are characterized here as being ultimately unable to create anything. Whilst we may not be tempted to worship literal idols, we have many other potential idols in our lives which take us away from God – endless surfing the internet, involvement in social networking, following sport and celebrities, making money, absorbing hobbies. These are uncreative, ultimately; serving God is the only truly creative thing we can do with our lives.

96:10 *Say among the nations* – The Psalmist was intent on preaching to the Gentiles. See on 18:49.

Psalm 96 Feb. 24

¹ Sing to Yahweh a new song! Sing to Yahweh, all the earth. ² Sing to Yahweh! Bless His name! Proclaim His salvation from day to day! ³ Declare His glory among the nations, His marvellous works among all the peoples. ⁴ For great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised! He is to be feared above all gods. ⁵ For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but Yahweh made the heavens. ⁶ Honour and majesty are before Him, strength and beauty are in His sanctuary. ⁷ Ascribe to Yahweh, you families of nations, ascribe to Yahweh glory and strength. ⁸ Ascribe to Yahweh the glory due to His name, bring an offering and come into His courts. ⁹ Worship Yahweh in holy array, tremble before Him, all the earth. ¹⁰ Say among the nations, Yahweh reigns! The world is also established, so that it can’t be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity. ¹¹ Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, let the sea roar, and its fullness! ¹² Let the field and all that is in it exult! Then all the trees of the

woods shall sing for joy¹³ before Yahweh; for He comes, for He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, the peoples with His truth.

Psalm 97 Feb. 24

¹ Yahweh reigns! Let the earth rejoice! Let the multitude of islands be glad! ² Clouds and darkness are around Him, righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne. ³ A fire goes before Him and burns up His adversaries on every side. ⁴ His lightnings light up the world; the earth sees, and trembles. ⁵ The mountains melt like wax at the presence of Yahweh, at the presence of the Lord of the whole earth. ⁶ The heavens declare His righteousness; all the peoples have seen His glory. ⁷ Let all them be shamed who serve engraved images, who boast in their idols. Worship Him, all you gods! ⁸ Zion heard and was glad. The

daughters of Judah rejoiced, because of Your judgments, Yahweh. ⁹ For You, Yahweh, are most high above all the earth. You are exalted far above all gods. ¹⁰ You who love Yahweh, hate evil. He preserves the souls of His saints. He delivers them out of the hand of the wicked. ¹¹ Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. ¹² Be glad in Yahweh, you righteous people! Give thanks to His holy Name.

Psalm 98 Feb. 24

A Psalm.

¹ Sing to Yahweh a new song, for He has done marvellous things! His right hand and His holy arm have worked salvation for Him. ² Yahweh has made known His salvation, He has openly shown His righteousness in the sight of the nations. ³ He has remembered His grace and His faithfulness toward the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the

96:13 Applied to Christ's return in judgment in Acts 17:31.

97:7 *Worship Him, all you gods* – Here as often in the Psalms, the language presupposes that the gods / idols of the nations are real and living, but Yahweh's greatness is such that effectively they have no power or significance. Yet the Bible clearly teaches that these gods / idols had no real existence. The same principle is used in the way the New Testament speaks about demons, who were also associated with idols (1 Cor. 10:20,21). They are spoken of as if they have some real existence, but the evident power of God in Christ's miracles was such that they were effectively declared as having no real existence or at best being powerless and insignificant.

98:3 The “salvation” spoken of in :1-3 isn't God's saving of Himself, but His salvation of His people through Jesus [the Hebrew form of ‘Jesus’ means ‘Yah’s salvation’]. It is our personal experience of that salvation which should be the witness which persuades the Gentile world to praise Him. It was God's intention that His salvation of His people from Egypt would have this effect; but Israel despised that salvation, in their hearts reversed it by constantly wanting to return to Egypt, and so they didn't declare His salvation and so the Gentiles didn't hear. We can't keep our experience of salvation to ourselves; we will declare it to the whole world if we really grasp the wonder of it all.

salvation of our God. ⁴ Make a joyful noise to Yahweh, all the earth! Burst out and sing for joy, yes, sing praises! ⁵ Sing praises to Yahweh with the harp, with the harp and the voice of melody. ⁶ With trumpets and sound of the ram's horn make a joyful noise before the King, Yahweh. ⁷ Let the sea roar with its fullness; the world, and those who live therein. ⁸ Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing for joy together. ⁹ Let them sing before Yahweh, for He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with equity.

Psalm 99 Feb. 24

¹ Yahweh reigns! Let the nations tremble. He sits enthroned between the cherubim: let the earth be moved. ² Yahweh is great in Zion, He is high above all the peoples. ³ Let them praise Your great and awesome name: He is Holy! ⁴ The King's strength also loves justice; You establish equity, You execute justice and righteousness in Jacob. ⁵ Exalt Yahweh our God, worship at

His footstool. He is Holy! ⁶ Moses and Aaron were among His priests, Samuel among those who call on His name; they called on Yahweh, and He answered them. ⁷ He spoke to them in the pillar of cloud. They kept His testimonies, the statute that He gave them. ⁸ You answered them, Yahweh our God; You are a God who forgave them, although You took vengeance for their doings. ⁹ Exalt Yahweh our God. Worship at His holy hill, for Yahweh, our God, is holy!

Psalm 100 Feb. 25

A Psalm of thanksgiving.

¹ Shout for joy to Yahweh, all you lands! ² Serve Yahweh with gladness, come before His presence with singing. ³ Know that Yahweh, He is God. It is He who has made us and not we ourselves, and we are His. We are His people, and the sheep of His pasture. ⁴ Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, into His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, and bless His name. ⁵ For Yahweh is good, His grace endures forever, His faithfulness to all generations.

99:4 You execute justice and righteousness – This is the language of judgment, whereby a judge ‘establishes’ principles. The fact God is enthroned means that He is our constant judge and we are always living our lives before His ongoing judgment. His throne is a throne of judgment, so whenever man is before God – which is always – He is our insistent judge, right now.

99:7 They kept His testimonies – This is in the context of the time when Israel were in the wilderness and God spoke to them in the cloud. They didn’t keep His law then, as the prophets and historical record make clear. The Psalmist is reflecting how God imputed righteousness to His people at this time (Num. 23:21), just as He does for us who cross the Red Sea of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

100:3 The fact that God Himself created us, as His sheep, “and not we ourselves” (a comment applicable, in essence, to theories of atheistic evolution) should lead us to ecstatic singing of praise before Him. Likewise 96:2,5, and so many other examples, invite us to enthusiastically praise God, simply because “the Lord made the heavens”.

Psalm 101 Feb. 25*A Psalm by David.*

¹ I will sing of grace and justice. To You, Yahweh, I will sing praises. ² I will be careful to live a blameless life. When will You come to me? I will walk within my house with a blameless heart. ³ I will set no vile thing before my eyes; I hate the deeds of faithless men. They will not cling to me. ⁴ A perverse heart will be far from me. I will have nothing to do with evil. ⁵ I will silence whoever secretly slanders his neighbour. I won't tolerate one who is haughty and conceited. ⁶ My eyes will be on the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me. He who walks in a perfect way, he will serve me. ⁷ He who practices deceit won't dwell within my house. He who speaks falsehood won't be established before my eyes. ⁸ Morning by morning, I will destroy all the wicked of the land; to cut off all the workers of iniquity from Yahweh's city.

Psalm 102 Feb. 26*A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed and pours out his complaint before Yahweh.*

¹ Hear my prayer, Yahweh! Let my

God as creator results in joy and praise amongst those of His creation who recognize Him as creator.

101:3 *I will set no vile thing before my eyes* – The context is David speaking of how he strove to be spiritually minded, and he realized that our thoughts are influenced by what we see or watch. These ancient words are so relevant to us who live in the internet generation, where we can privately view many ‘vile things’ with our eyes. If we want to be spiritually minded, then what we allow ourselves to view must be consciously controlled.

102:13 *The set time has come* – The Psalmist is writing maybe in captivity in Babylon as the predicted 70 years of Judah’s captivity there came to a close, and he looks forward to the promised restoration and rebuilding of Jerusalem.

cry come in to You. ² Don’t hide Your face from me in the day of my distress, turn Your ear to me. Answer me quickly in the day when I call. ³ For my days consume away like smoke, my bones are burned as a torch. ⁴ My heart is blighted like grass and withered, for I forget to eat my bread. ⁵ By reason of the voice of my groaning, my bones stick to my skin. ⁶ I am like a pelican of the wilderness, I have become as an owl of the waste places. ⁷ I watch, and have become like a sparrow that is alone on the housetop. ⁸ My enemies reproach me all day, those who are mad at me use my name as a curse. ⁹ For I have eaten ashes like bread and mixed my drink with tears ¹⁰ because of Your indignation and Your wrath; for You have taken me up, and thrown me away. ¹¹ My days are like a long shadow, I have withered like grass. ¹² But You, Yahweh, will remain forever; Your renown endures to all generations. ¹³ You will arise and have mercy on Zion; for it is time to have pity on her, yes, the set time has come. ¹⁴ For Your servants take pleasure in her stones, and have pity on her dust. ¹⁵ So the nations will fear the name of Yahweh;

all the kings of the earth Your glory.
 16 For Yahweh has built up Zion;
 He has appeared in His glory. 17 He
 has responded to the prayer of the
 destitute, and has not despised their
 prayer. 18 This will be written for the
 generation to come. A people which
 will be created will praise Yah.
 19 For He has looked down from the
 height of His sanctuary; from heav-
 en, Yahweh saw the earth; 20 to hear
 the groans of the prisoner; to free
 those who are condemned to death;
 21 that men may declare the name of
 Yahweh in Zion, and His praise in
 Jerusalem, 22 when the peoples are
 gathered together, the kingdoms, to
 serve Yahweh. 23 He weakened my
 strength along the course, He short-
 ened my days. 24 I said, My God,
 don't take me away in the midst of
 my days. Your years are through-

out all generations. 25 Of old, You
 laid the foundation of the earth, the
 heavens are the work of Your hands.
 26 They perish, but You will endure.
 Yes, all of them will wear out like a
 garment. You will change them like
 a cloak, and they will be changed.
 27 But You are the same, Your years
 will have no end. 28 The children of
 Your servants will continue, their
 seed will be established before You.

Psalm 103 Feb. 27

By David.

¹ Praise Yahweh, my soul! All that
 is within me, praise His holy name!
² Praise Yahweh, my soul, and don't
 forget all His benefits; ³ who forgives
 all your sins; who heals all your dis-
 eases; ⁴ who redeems your life from
 destruction; who crowns you with
 grace and tender mercies; ⁵ who sat-

102:16 *Yahweh has built up Zion* – He had not then done so (:13); the earlier part of the Psalm laments this. But the Psalmist believed in God's prophecies of doing so, and considered them as good as already fulfilled. Faith is all about adopting God's perspective, seeing future promises as if they have already been fulfilled, thereby enabling us to live the Kingdom life now in its essence.

102:25 The language of laying foundations is nearly always used about the laying of the foundations of the new, rebuilt temple at the time of return from exile (Ezra 3:10-12; 5:16; Is. 44:28; Hag. 2:18; Zech. 4:9; 8:9); and this is the context of this Psalm (see on :13 and :16). The 'heavens and earth' refer to Israel (Is. 1:2) and the temple. Although they had 'perished' in the Babylonian invasion and destruction of the first temple, God remained and would, the Psalmist believed, install a new temple system (as outlined in Ez. 40-48). However, this never quite happened as God intended due to Judah's weakness, and so these prophecies were reapplied to how the entire Jewish system based around the temple and Law of Moses would 'perish' and God's new temple system based around the exalted Lord Jesus would come into existence (Heb. 1:10 and context).

103:2 The Hebrew translated "benefits" is also translated "praise". The things God gives us are therefore imperatives in themselves to praise Him. Giving thanks before meals is a wonderful habit to get into. As we receive His gifts, or more to the point, *perceive* the receipt of them, the heart breaks forth into a deep thankfulness. This is the true praise.

isfies your desire with good things, so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.⁶ Yahweh executes righteous acts, and justice for all who are oppressed.⁷ He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the children of Israel.⁸ Yahweh is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abundant in grace.⁹ He will not always accuse; neither will He stay angry forever.¹⁰ He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor repaid us for our iniquities.¹¹ For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is His grace toward those who fear Him.¹² As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.¹³ Like a father has compassion on His children, so Yahweh has compassion on those who fear Him.¹⁴ For He knows how we are made, He remembers that we are dust.¹⁵ As for man, His days are like grass, as a flower of the field, so he flourishes.¹⁶ For the wind passes over it, and it is gone. Its place remembers it no more.¹⁷ But Yahweh's grace is from everlasting to everlasting with those who fear Him, His righteousness to children's children;¹⁸ to those who keep His covenant,

to those who remember to obey His precepts.¹⁹ Yahweh has established His throne in the heavens, His kingdom rules over all.²⁰ Praise Yahweh, you angels of His, who are mighty in strength, who fulfil His word, obeying the voice of His word.²¹ Praise Yahweh, all you armies of His, you servants of His, who do His will.²² Praise Yahweh, all you works of His, in all places of His dominion. Praise Yahweh, my soul!

Psalm 104 Feb. 28

¹ Bless Yahweh, my soul. Yahweh, my God, You are very great. You are clothed with honour and majesty.² He covers Himself with light as with a garment, He stretches out the heavens like a curtain.³ He lays the beams of His rooms in the waters, He makes the clouds His chariot, He walks on the wings of the wind.⁴ He makes His Angels winds; His servants flames of fire.⁵ He laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be moved forever.⁶ You covered it with the deep sea as with a cloak. The waters stood above the mountains.⁷ At Your rebuke they fled, at the voice of Your thunder they hurried

103:20,21 The emphasis is that *all* the Angels are obedient to God and do His will (Heb. 1:14). There aren't two groups of Angels, some good and some sinful. God tolerates no sin in His presence in Heaven (Hab. 1:13). Sin brings death and yet the Angels cannot die, therefore they cannot sin; our hope is to be made like them in this sense after the resurrection at Christ's return (Lk. 20:35,36). See 148:2.

103:22 *Praise Yahweh, my soul* – David sees himself as in league with the Angels, who likewise are all praising God (:20,21).

104:4 *His Angels winds* – The Hebrew word translated “wind” is that translated “spirit”. God's Spirit works in many ways, but one of those ways is through His Angels. If we were to ask how, mechanically as it were, God's Spirit operates, how He is everywhere present, how He does things – the answer to some extent is that He achieves all these things through His armies of Angels.

away. ⁸ The mountains rose, the valleys sank down, to the place which You had assigned to them. ⁹ You have set a boundary that they may not pass over; that they don't turn again to cover the earth. ¹⁰ He sends forth springs into the valleys, they run among the mountains. ¹¹ They give drink to every animal of the field, the wild donkeys quench their thirst. ¹² The birds of the sky nest by them, they sing among the branches. ¹³ He waters the mountains from His rooms, the earth is filled with the fruit of Your works. ¹⁴ He causes the grass to grow for the livestock, and plants for man to cultivate, that He may bring forth food out of the earth: ¹⁵ wine that makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face to shine, and bread that strengthens man's heart. ¹⁶ Yahweh's trees are well watered, the cedars of Lebanon, which He has planted, ¹⁷ where the birds make their nests. The stork makes its home in the fir trees. ¹⁸ The high

mountains are for the wild goats, the rocks are a refuge for the rock badgers. ¹⁹ He appointed the moon for seasons, the sun knows when to set. ²⁰ You make darkness, and it is night, in which all the animals of the forest prowl. ²¹ The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God. ²² The sun rises, and they steal away and lay down in their dens. ²³ Man goes forth to his work, to his labour until the evening. ²⁴ Yahweh, how many are Your works! In wisdom have You made them all. The earth is full of Your riches. ²⁵ There is the sea, great and wide, in which are innumerable living things, both small and large animals. ²⁶ There the ships go, and leviathan, whom You formed to play there. ²⁷ These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. ²⁸ You give to them; they gather. You open Your hand; they are satisfied with good. ²⁹ You hide Your face: they are troubled; You take away their

104:20 *You make darkness* – The rising and setting of the sun is a conscious expenditure of energy by God, rather than happening by some clockwork mechanism which God set up and then withdrew from. He consciously makes the grass grow (:14), and consciously feeds the animals (:28). Likewise the water cycle is not mere clockwork, unstoppable natural law; the rivers are sent forth consciously by God as they bubble over the rocks (:10). This view of creation means that it's easier to believe that the God who consciously does these things every moment can intervene in them at any time in any way; we aren't the helpless victims of a nature which has a life and will of her own.

104:29 *You take away their breath: they die, and return to the dust* – The Hebrew words for “breath” and “spirit” are the same. God made man from the dust and put into him the breath or spirit of life (Gen. 2:7). When we die, that spirit, that life force, returns to God and our bodies to the dust. There is no conscious survival of death, no inherent immortality within man. Life and immortality have only been revealed to some men through the Gospel of Christ and the hope of resurrection to immortality which there is in Him (Rom. 2:7; 2 Tim. 1:10). All theories or hopes of reincarnation are disallowed by Bible teaching about the nature of man.

breath: they die, and return to the dust. ³⁰ You send forth Your Spirit: they are created, You renew the face of the ground. ³¹ Let the glory of Yahweh endure forever, let Yahweh rejoice in His works. ³² He looks at the earth, and it trembles. He touches the mountains, and they smoke. ³³ I will sing to Yahweh as long as I live, I will sing praise to my God while I have any being. ³⁴ Let your meditation be sweet to Him. I will rejoice in Yahweh. ³⁵ Let sinners be consumed out of the earth. Let the wicked be no more. Bless Yahweh, my soul. Praise Yah!

Psalm 105 Mar. 1

¹ Give thanks to Yahweh! Call on His name! Make His doings known among the peoples. ² Sing to Him, sing praises to Him! Tell of all His marvellous works. ³ Glory in His holy name, let the heart of those who seek Yahweh rejoice. ⁴ Seek Yahweh and His strength, seek His face forever more. ⁵ Remember His marvellous works that He has done; His wonders, and the judgments of

His mouth, ⁶ you seed of Abraham His servant, you children of Jacob, His chosen ones. ⁷ He is Yahweh, our God; His judgments are in all the earth. ⁸ He has remembered His covenant forever, the word which He commanded to a thousand generations, ⁹ the covenant which He made with Abraham, His oath to Isaac, ¹⁰ and confirmed the same to Jacob for a statute; to Israel for an everlasting covenant ¹¹ saying, To you I will give the land of Canaan, the lot of your inheritance; ¹² when they were but a few men in number, yes, very few, and foreigners in it. ¹³ They went about from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another people. ¹⁴ He allowed no one to do them wrong. Yes, He reproved kings for their sakes, ¹⁵ Don't touch my anointed ones! Do my prophets no harm! ¹⁶ He called for a famine on the land, He destroyed the piles of food. ¹⁷ He sent a man before them- Joseph, who was sold for a slave. ¹⁸ They bruised his feet with shackles; his soul was locked in iron, ¹⁹ until the time that His word came true, and Yahweh's

105:17-23 In the context of the Psalm, God is comforting Israel that all their sufferings had been experienced by Joseph. Israel as a nation are often spoken of as being in prison in a Gentile world (Ps. 79:11; 102:20; Is. 42:7,22; 49:9); just as Joseph was. Prison and death are often associated because a spell in prison was effectively a death sentence, so bad were the conditions. Israel being in prison is therefore a symbol of a living death. Just as God had delivered Joseph, so God's people are to take comfort that when the right time comes, we too will be delivered from our present oppression.

105:18 This highlights the mental aspects of Joseph's suffering. The Hebrew for "hurt" means 'to browbeat or depress'; thus his soul was in iron, trapped, oppressively boxed in as he lay in the darkness. Joseph was in this situation until the determined time came for God to suddenly deliver him thanks to the unexpected word from a king; and so Judah, depressed in Babylon, were being comforted that when the predicted 70 years captivity were ended, they too would be likewise delivered – which came true in the decree of king Cyrus for them to return to their land with his every blessing.

word proved Him true. ²⁰ The king sent and freed him; even the ruler of peoples, and let him go free. ²¹ He made him lord of his house, and ruler of all of his possessions; ²² to discipline his princes at his pleasure, and to teach his elders wisdom. ²³ Israel also came into Egypt, Jacob lived in the land of Ham. ²⁴ He increased his people greatly, and made them stronger than their adversaries. ²⁵ He turned their heart to hate His people, to conspire against His servants. ²⁶ He sent Moses His servant, and Aaron whom He had chosen. ²⁷ They performed miracles among them, and wonders in the land of Ham. ²⁸ He sent darkness, and made it dark. They didn't rebel against His words. ²⁹ He turned their waters into blood, and killed their fish. ³⁰ Their land swarmed with frogs, even in the rooms of their kings. ³¹ He spoke, and swarms of beetles came, and lice in all their borders. ³² He gave them hail for rain, with lightning in their land. ³³ He struck their vines and also their fig trees, and shattered the trees of their country. ³⁴ He spoke, and the locusts came, and the grasshoppers

without number ³⁵ ate up every plant in their land and devoured the fruit of their ground. ³⁶ He struck also all the firstborn in their land, the first fruits of all their manhood. ³⁷ He brought them forth with silver and gold, there was not one feeble person among His tribes. ³⁸ Egypt was glad when they departed, for the fear of them had fallen on them. ³⁹ He spread a cloud for a covering, fire to give light in the night. ⁴⁰ They asked, and He brought quails, and satisfied them with the bread of the sky. ⁴¹ He opened the rock, and waters gushed out; they ran as a river in the dry places. ⁴² For He remembered His holy word, and Abraham His servant. ⁴³ He brought forth His people with joy, His chosen with singing. ⁴⁴ He gave them the lands of the nations. They took the labour of the peoples in possession, ⁴⁵ that they might keep His statutes, and observe His laws. Praise Yah!

Psalm 106 Mar. 2

¹ Praise Yahweh! Give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good, for His grace endures forever. ² Who can utter the mighty acts of Yahweh, or fully

105:19 God has arranged our lives according to a pattern; we have specific times in our lives for various situations. Looking back at the Biblical record of Joseph and Moses, whose life was divided clearly into three periods of 40 years, we see this clearly; but it's of course harder to discern in our own lives as we are still living through it. But God is in control and has a plan for us, desiring only our eternal good in our latter end.

105:37 *There was not one feeble person among His tribes* – Amazingly, there was nobody sick amongst the three million or so who left Egypt that night. At our exodus from this world through our Red Sea baptism into Christ, we are made spiritually strong – and must abide in that strength.

105:45 *That they might keep His statutes* – The whole purpose of being in the Kingdom is so that we might be perpetually obedient to God's word; this is the core reason for our wanting to be there.

declare all His praise? ³ Blessed are those who keep justice. Blessed is the one who does what is right at all times. ⁴ Remember me, Yahweh, with the grace that You show to Your people; visit me with Your salvation, ⁵ that I may see the prosperity of Your chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of Your nation, that I may glory with Your inheritance. ⁶ We have sinned with our fathers. We have committed iniquity. We have done wickedly. ⁷ Our fathers didn't understand Your wonders in Egypt. They didn't remember the multitude of Your graces, but were rebellious at the sea, even at the Red Sea. ⁸ Nevertheless He saved them for His name's sake, that He might make His mighty power known. ⁹ He rebuked the Red Sea also, and it was dried up; so He led them through the depths, as through a desert.

¹⁰ He saved them from the hand of him who hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. ¹¹ The waters covered their adversaries, there was not one of them left. ¹² Then they believed His words, they sang His praise. ¹³ They soon forgot His works, they didn't wait for His word, ¹⁴ but gave in to their craving in the desert, and tested God in the wasteland. ¹⁵ He gave them their request, but sent leanness into their soul. ¹⁶ They envied Moses also in the camp, and Aaron, Yahweh's saint. ¹⁷ The earth opened and swallowed up Dathan, and covered the company of Abiram. ¹⁸ A fire was kindled in their company, the flame burned up the wicked. ¹⁹ They made a calf in Horeb, and worshiped a molten image. ²⁰ Thus they exchanged their glory for an image of a bull that eats grass. ²¹ They forgot God

106:3 *At all times* – Consistency is most important in spiritual life rather than occasional flashes of devotion and obedience.

106:5 *That I may see the prosperity of Your chosen* – The Psalmist's desire for salvation wasn't merely because he or she wanted to live eternally. There was a desire to see all God's people glorying in salvation. Salvation is made possible in that God's people as a whole have been redeemed; there is such a thing as spiritual selfishness, desiring the Kingdom merely for what it means to us. But if we have the perspective of God's glory, we will desire the coming of salvation because all of us will be glorified. Hence Paul could say that the joy he would have in the Kingdom would be related to his joy that his brethren were also there (1 Thess. 2:19).

106:6 Continuing the thought of :5, the Psalmist felt that he personally was somehow involved in the sin of God's people ("we have sinned"). We aren't called to smug self righteousness, but rather we are to feel a personal involvement in the failures and successes of God's people as a whole.

106:7 *Even at the Red Sea* – Even at the very moment of their salvation they were rebellious. God didn't save them because they had reached a certain level of righteousness, but because of His grace. The Red Sea crossing represents our baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2); God has saved us by His grace, not because of our righteousness.

106:15 *But sent leanness into their soul* – If we fulfil our fleshly craving, we will become internally and spiritually hungry. Giving in to our cravings isn't the way to happiness.

their Saviour who had done great things in Egypt,²² wondrous works in the land of Ham and awesome things by the Red Sea.²³ Therefore He said that He would destroy them, had not Moses His chosen stood before Him in the breach, to turn away His wrath, so that He wouldn't destroy them.²⁴ Yes, they despised the pleasant land. They didn't believe His word,²⁵ but murmured in their tents, and didn't listen to Yahweh's voice.²⁶ Therefore He swore to them that He would overthrow them in the wilderness,²⁷ that He would overthrow their seed among the nations, and scatter them in the gentile lands.²⁸ They joined themselves also to Baal Peor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead.²⁹ Thus they provoked Him to anger with their deeds. The plague broke in on them.³⁰ Then Phinehas stood up, and executed judgment, so the plague was stopped.³¹ That was credited to him for righteousness, for all generations to come.³² They angered Him also at the waters of Meribah, so that Moses was troubled for their sakes;³³ because they were rebellious against His spirit, he spoke rashly with his lips.³⁴ They didn't destroy the peoples as Yahweh commanded them,³⁵ but mixed themselves with the nations, and learned their works.³⁶ They served their idols, which became a snare to them.³⁷ Yes, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons.³⁸ They

shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan. The land was polluted with blood.³⁹ Thus were they defiled with their works, and prostituted themselves in their deeds.⁴⁰ Therefore Yahweh burned with anger against His people, He abhorred His inheritance.⁴¹ He gave them into the hand of the nations. Those who hated them ruled over them.⁴² Their enemies also oppressed them, they were brought into subjection under their hand.⁴³ Many times He delivered them, but they were rebellious in their ways, and were brought low in their iniquity.⁴⁴ Nevertheless He regarded their distress, when He heard their cry.⁴⁵ He remembered for them His covenant, and relented according to the multitude of His graces.⁴⁶ He made them also to be pitied by all those who carried them captive.⁴⁷ Save us, Yahweh, our God, gather us from among the nations, to give thanks to Your holy name, to triumph in Your praise!⁴⁸ Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting! Let all the people say, Amen. Praise Yah!

BOOK V

Psalm 107 Mar. 3

¹ Give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good, for His grace endures forever.
² Let the redeemed by Yahweh say

106:37 Demons refer to idols (:36). Demons or idols have no real existence (1 Cor. 8:4; 10:20). Therefore when we read of demons being cast out in the Gospel records, this is the language of the day used for healing various illnesses rather than any evidence that demons actually exist.

so, whom He has redeemed from the hand of the adversary³ and gathered out of the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.⁴ They wandered in the wilderness in a desert way, they found no city to live in.⁵ Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.⁶ Then they cried to Yahweh in their trouble and He delivered them out of their distresses,⁷ He led them also by a straight way, that they might go to a city to live in.⁸ Let them praise Yahweh for His grace, for His wonderful works to the children of men!⁹ For He satisfies the longing soul, He fills the hungry soul with good.¹⁰ Some sat in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron,¹¹ because they

rebelled against the words of God, and condemned the counsel of the Most High.¹² Therefore He brought down their heart with labour, they fell down, and there was none to help.¹³ Then they cried to Yahweh in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses.¹⁴ He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death and broke their bonds in sunder.¹⁵ Let them praise Yahweh for His grace, for His wonderful works to the children of men!¹⁶ For He has broken the gates of brass and cut through bars of iron.¹⁷ Fools are afflicted because of their disobedience and because of their iniquities.¹⁸ Their soul abhors every kind of food, they draw near to the gates of death.¹⁹ Then they cry to Yahweh in

107:4 *They found no city to live in* – The LXX of this phrase is quoted about us in Heb. 13:14. We too are on a wilderness journey after our Red Sea baptism, and find no place we can call home in that journey. Our place of rest and settling down isn't in this life, but in the Kingdom which is to come at Christ's return. The implication could be that Israel wanted to settle in the wilderness. They didn't want to return to Egypt (although they did at times), they didn't really desire the unknown promised land... so, they wanted to just settle down there in the wilderness. And so it can be with us. We can be happy with the way to the Kingdom, it can be that the social aspect of the Christian life suites us... we are content with it, and yet it can be that for all that, we lack a real sense of direction towards the Kingdom. The Christian life is but a path leading towards an end, and the end destination is the Kingdom. *If we believe surely that we will be there, we will live lives which reflect this sense of concrete direction and aim.*

107:9 Mary quoted this verse about how she had been filled with good things (Lk. 1:53); but Zacharias quoted the next verse, :10, shortly afterwards (Lk. 1:79). Surely Mary had gotten him thinking in the same paths as she did. Our spirituality can influence others positively, consciously and unconsciously. This is why it's important to mix in spiritual company.

107:11 *Condemned the counsel of the Most High* – This is one of a number of Biblical verses which suggest that we as it were stand in judgment upon God when we encounter His word. He overcomes every claim that His word is untrue and that therefore He is to be condemned (Rom. 3:4). That we mere humans should judge God the judge of all is an arresting concept; but this is what we are in effect doing when we consider His claims, His promises of saving us which are throughout His word.

their trouble, He saves them out of their distresses.²⁰ He sends His word and heals them, and delivers them from their graves.²¹ Let them praise Yahweh for His grace, for His wonderful works to the children of men!²² Let them offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare His works with singing.²³ Those who go down to the sea in ships, who do business in great waters;²⁴ these see Yahweh's works, and His wonders in the deep.²⁵ For He commands, and raises the stormy wind which lifts up its waves.²⁶ They mount up to the sky; they go down again to the depths. Their soul melts away because of trouble.²⁷ They reel back and forth and stagger like a drunken man, all their wisdom disappears.²⁸ Then they cry to Yahweh in their trouble and He brings them out of their distress.²⁹ He makes the storm a calm, so that its waves are still.³⁰ Then they are glad because it is calm, and so He brings them to their desired haven.³¹ Let them praise Yahweh for His grace, for His wonderful works for the children of men!³² Let them exalt Him also in the gathering of the people, and praise Him in the seat of the elders.³³ He turns rivers into a desert, water springs into a thirsty ground,³⁴ and a fruitful land into a salt waste because of the wickedness of those who dwell in it.³⁵ He turns a desert into a pool of water, and a

dry land into water springs.³⁶ There He makes the hungry live, that they may prepare a city to live in,³⁷ sow fields, plant vineyards, and reap the fruits of increase.³⁸ He blesses them also, so that they are multiplied greatly; He doesn't allow their livestock to decrease.³⁹ Again, they are diminished and bowed down through oppression, trouble, and sorrow.⁴⁰ He pours contempt on princes, and causes them to wander in a trackless waste.⁴¹ Yet He lifts the needy out of their affliction, and increases their families like a flock.⁴² The upright will see it, and be glad. All the wicked will shut their mouths.⁴³ Whoever is wise will pay attention to these things; they will reflect upon the graces of Yahweh.

Psalm 108 Mar. 4

A Song. A Psalm by David.

¹ My heart is steadfast, God. I will sing and I will make music with my soul. ² Wake up, harp and lyre! I will wake up the dawn. ³ I will give thanks to You, Yahweh, among the nations, I will sing praises to You among the peoples. ⁴ For Your grace is great above the heavens, Your faithfulness reaches to the skies. ⁵ Be exalted, God, above the heavens! Let Your glory be over all the earth. ⁶ That Your beloved may be delivered, save with Your right hand, and answer us. ⁷ God has spoken from

107:30 The idea of God stilling a storm and getting terrified sailors immediately to their port clearly had fulfilment in how Christ stilled the storm on the lake of Galilee (Jn. 6:18-21). This doesn't mean that He is God Himself, but rather that Old Testament statements about God were fulfilled in His Son, who manifested the Father to perfection.

His sanctuary: In triumph I will divide Shechem, and measure out the valley of Succoth.⁸ Gilead is mine. Manasseh is mine. Ephraim also is my helmet. Judah is my sceptre.⁹ Moab is my wash pot, I will toss my sandal on Edom, I will shout over Philistia.¹⁰ Who will bring me into the fortified city? Who has led me to Edom?¹¹ Haven't You rejected us, God? You don't go forth, God, with our armies.¹² Give us help against the enemy, for the help of man is vain.¹³ Through God we will do valiantly, for it is He who will tread down our enemies.

Psalm 109 Mar. 4

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

¹ God of my praise, don't remain silent,² for they have opened the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of deceit against me. They have spoken to me with a lying tongue.³ They have also surrounded me with words of hatred, and fought against me

without a cause.⁴ In return for my love, they are my adversaries; but I am in prayer.⁵ They have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love.⁶ Set a wicked man over him, let an adversary stand at his right hand.⁷ When he is judged, let him come forth guilty, let his prayer be turned into sin.⁸ Let his days be few, let another take his office.⁹ Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow;¹⁰ may his children be wandering beggars, let them be sought from their ruins.¹¹ Let the creditor seize all that he has, let strangers plunder the fruit of his labour.¹² Let there be nobody to extend kindness to him, neither let there be anyone to have pity on his fatherless children.¹³ Let his posterity be cut off, in the next generation may their name be blotted out.¹⁴ Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered by Yahweh, don't let the sin of his mother be blotted out.¹⁵ Let them be before Yahweh continually, that He may cut off their memory from the earth;

108:13 The structure of the Psalm is significant in that it begins with praise and then goes on to desperately plead for God's action. There is an intentional double meaning in the Hebrew word translated "hear"; it is also translated "answer". There should be real comfort for us in knowing that prayer really is 'heard'; the hearing is, in a sense, the answer / response, with which a man should be content. Therefore David desired to praise God even before the answer was received; the knowledge God was really hearing him gave such confidence (see too 109:30). We aren't to hide behind the excuse that unanswered prayer just means that God has heard but not answered.

109:6 *An adversary* – The Hebrew word translated "adversary" here is *satan*. 'Satan' is simply a Hebrew word meaning an adversary, totally neutral in meaning; it doesn't of itself refer to any sinful being.

109:8 This is quoted about Judas in Acts 1:20. The disciples saw the similarities with Judas and then decided to concretely take action according to those similarities – they proactively decided to find someone to take his place as this verse requires. We need to use the Bible in this same way – see the similarities between our situations and Biblical precedents, and then act on them accordingly.

16 because he didn't remember to show kindness, but persecuted the poor and needy man, the broken in heart, to kill them. ¹⁷ Yes, he loved cursing, and it came to him. He didn't delight in blessing, and so it was far from him. ¹⁸ He clothed himself also with cursing as with his garment; it came into his inward parts like water, like oil into his bones. ¹⁹ Let it be to him as the clothing with which he covers himself, like the belt that is always around him. ²⁰ This is the reward of my adversaries from Yahweh, of those who speak evil against my soul. ²¹ But deal with me, Yahweh the Lord, for Your name's sake; because Your grace is good, deliver me; ²² for I am poor and needy. My heart is wounded within me. ²³ I fade away like an evening shadow, I am shaken off like a locust. ²⁴ My knees are weak through fasting, my body is thin and lacks fat. ²⁵ I have also become a reproach to them; when they see me, they shake their head. ²⁶ Help me, Yahweh, my God. Save me ac-

cording to Your grace; ²⁷ that they may know that this is Your hand; that You, Yahweh, have done it. ²⁸ They may curse, but You bless. When they arise, they will be shamed, but Your servant shall rejoice. ²⁹ Let my adversaries be clothed with dishonour, may they cover themselves with their own shame as with a robe. ³⁰ I will give great thanks to Yahweh with my mouth, truly I will praise Him among the multitude. ³¹ For He will stand at the right hand of the needy, to save him from those who judge his soul.

Psalm 110 Mar. 5

A Psalm by David.

¹ Yahweh says to my Lord, Sit at My right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet. ² Yahweh will send forth the rod of your strength out of Zion. Rule in the midst of your enemies! ³ Your people offer themselves willingly in the day of your power, in holy attire. Out of the womb of the morning, you have the dew of your youth. ⁴ Yahweh has

109:30 See on 108:13.

110:1 This verse is quoted in Mt. 22:44 and Acts 2:34,35 with the understanding that David's "lord" or master was Jesus, who was bidden sit in Heaven at His right hand after His resurrection, declared a priest for us in the order of Melchizedek, until He returns to earth to be King in Jerusalem ("Zion") and destroy all God's enemies.

110:2 *Rule in the midst of your enemies* – This supports the impression we get from Psalm 2, that when Christ returns He will establish His Kingdom but there will initially be opposition to Him, and the nations will gather together against Him, surrounding Jerusalem (cp. Rev. 20:9). It's amazing how much humanity wants to carry on as it is, with all their religions, and not be disturbed by the intervention of God in their lives. And this feature of our world will be revealed in their attitudes to Christ at His return.

110:3 The exhortation of Ps. 110 is powerful: because Jesus is now seated at the Father's right hand, His people offer themselves as freewill offerings in this, the day of His power. They are arrayed in "holy attire" because *He* has been made the Priest after the order of Melchizedek – they share in the work which His exaltation has enabled.

110:4 This is repeatedly applied to Christ (Heb. 5:6,10; 6:20; 7:11,17,21). The priests

sworn, and will not change His mind: You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.⁵ The Lord is at your right hand; He will crush kings in the day of His wrath.⁶ He will judge among the nations, He will heap up dead bodies, He will crush the ruler of the whole earth.⁷ He will drink of the brook in the way; therefore He will lift up His head.

Psalm 111 Mar. 5

¹ Praise Yah! I will give thanks to Yahweh with my whole heart, in the council of the upright, and in the congregation. ² Yahweh's works are great, pondered by all those who delight in them. ³ His work is honour and majesty, His righteousness endures forever. ⁴ He has caused His wonderful works to be remembered; Yahweh is gracious and merciful. ⁵ He has given food to those who fear Him; He is ever mindful of His covenant. ⁶ He has shown His people the power of His works, in giv-

ing them the heritage of the nations. ⁷ The works of His hands are truth and justice; all His precepts are sure, ⁸ they are established forever and ever. They are done in truth and uprightness. ⁹ He has sent redemption to His people, He has ordained His covenant forever. His name is holy and awesome!¹⁰ The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom. All those who do His work have a good understanding. His praise endures forever!

Psalm 112 Mar. 5

¹ Praise Yah! Blessed is the man who fears Yahweh, who delights greatly in His commandments. ² His seed will be mighty in the land, the generation of the upright will be blessed. ³ Wealth and riches are in His house; His righteousness endures forever. ⁴ Light dawns in the darkness for the upright, gracious, merciful, and righteous. ⁵ It is well with the man who deals graciously and lends; he will maintain his cause in judgment.

were from the tribe of Levi, whereas Christ was from Judah. Melchizedek was king of Jerusalem and yet also a priest; but he wasn't a Levite. He is therefore chosen as an appropriate type of Christ, the ultimate king-priest. This argument is deployed in Hebrews to answer the Jewish objection that Christ can't be a priest because He wasn't a Levite.

111:5 God is thinking about the covenant made with us *all* the time! And yet how often in daily life do we reflect upon the fact that we really are in covenant relationship with God... how often do we recollect the part we share in the promises to Abraham, how frequently do we feel that we really are in a personal covenant with God Almighty?

111:10 *Those who do His work have a good understanding* – There is an upward spiral in spirituality. The more we do God's work, the more we will come to understand Him. The very process of working with Him reveals more of Him to us.

112:5 *The man who deals graciously and lends* – Our generosity must reflect that of God, because “He has dispersed, He has given to the poor” (:9). His generosity to us is largely over matters in which we are responsible for the problem we end up in, and the deeper we realize this the less we will be tempted to be mean to others because we consider their poverty to be ‘their fault’.

6 For he will never be shaken; the righteous will be remembered forever. 7 He will not be afraid of evil news; his heart is steadfast, trusting in Yahweh. 8 His heart is established; he will not be afraid in the end when he sees his adversaries. 9 He has dispersed, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever, His horn will be exalted with honour. 10 The wicked will see it, and be grieved. He shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away. The desire of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 113 Mar. 6

1 Praise Yah! Praise, you servants of Yahweh, praise the name of Yahweh. 2 Blessed be the name of Yahweh, from this time forth and forever. 3 From the rising of the sun to the going down of it, Yahweh's name is to be praised. 4 Yahweh is high above all nations, His glory above the heavens. 5 Who is like Yahweh our God, who has His seat on high, 6 who stoops down to view both heaven and earth? 7 He raises up the poor out of the dust and lifts up the

needy from the ash heap; 8 that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people. 9 He settles the barren woman in her home, as a joyful mother of children. Praise Yah!

Psalm 114 Mar. 6

1 When Israel went forth out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of foreign language; 2 Judah became His sanctuary, Israel His kingdom. 3 The sea saw it, and fled. The Jordan was driven back. 4 The mountains skipped like rams, the little hills like lambs. 5 What was it, you sea, that you fled? You Jordan, that you turned back? 6 You mountains, that you skipped like rams; you little hills, like lambs? 7 Tremble, you earth, at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, 8 who turned the rock into a pool of water, the flint into a spring of waters.

Psalm 115 Mar. 7

1 Not to us, Yahweh, not to us, but to Your name give glory, for Your

112:9 *He has given to the poor* – Quoted in 2 Cor. 9:9 about how God has given His grace of forgiveness and salvation to us the spiritually poor. The Greek word for “grace” also means “gift”. In the context, Paul is urging the early Christians to be materially generous to their poorer brethren because of the grace they have received from God. His spiritual generosity to us is to be reflected in our material generosity to others (see on :5).

114:2 *Israel His kingdom* – Israel were declared God’s Kingdom on earth with Him as their King, exercising total sovereignty over them (Ex. 19:5,6). But they wanted a human king and worshipped other gods, so that God overturned that Kingdom with the intention to re-establish it on earth at Christ’s return to eternally reign on David’s throne in Jerusalem (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:6). The future Kingdom of God on earth will be a re-establishment of the Kingdom that once was, again inviting us to understand it as an entity to be literally established on *earth*. The Bible doesn’t teach that the righteous go to Heaven at death to enjoy their salvation there.

the sake of Your grace and truth. ² Why should the nations say, Where is their God now? ³ But our God is in the heavens. He does whatever He pleases. ⁴ Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands; ⁵ they have mouths, but they don't speak, they have eyes, but they don't see. ⁶ They have ears, but they don't hear, they have noses, but they don't smell. ⁷ They have hands, but they don't feel; they have feet, but they don't walk, neither do they speak through their throat. ⁸ Those who make them will be like them; yes, everyone who trusts in them. ⁹ Israel, trust in Yahweh! He is their help and their shield. ¹⁰ House of Aaron, trust in Yahweh! He is their help and their shield. ¹¹ You who fear Yahweh, trust in Yahweh! He is their help and their shield. ¹² Yahweh remembers us; He will bless us, He will bless the house of Israel, He will bless the house of Aaron. ¹³ He will bless those who fear Yahweh, both small and great. ¹⁴ May Yahweh increase you more and more, you and your children. ¹⁵ Blessed are you by Yahweh, who made heaven and earth. ¹⁶ The heav-

ens are the heavens of Yahweh; but the earth has He given to the children of men. ¹⁷ The dead don't praise Yah, neither any who go down into silence; ¹⁸ but we will bless Yah, from this time forth and forevermore. Praise Yah!

Psalm 116 Mar. 7

¹ I love Yahweh, because He listens to my voice and my cries for mercy. ² Because He has turned His ear to me, therefore I will call on Him as long as I live. ³ The cords of death surrounded me, the pains of Sheol got a hold on me, I found trouble and sorrow. ⁴ Then I called on the name of Yahweh: Yahweh, I beg You, deliver my soul. ⁵ Yahweh is gracious and righteous; yes, our God is merciful. ⁶ Yahweh preserves the simple; I was brought low, and He saved me. ⁷ Return to your rest, my soul, for Yahweh has dealt bountifully with you. ⁸ For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. ⁹ I will walk before Yahweh in the land of the living. ¹⁰ I believed, therefore I said, I was greatly afflicted. ¹¹ I

115:8 Those who make them will be like them – We become like what we worship. The Gentile idols are often described in the Bible as “vanities”; we may not worship literal idols but we can easily give our hearts over to obsession with the many vain things which crowd this world and the internet. If we do so, we will become as lost and lacking in direction as they are.

115:11 Who fear Yahweh, trust in Yahweh – The implication is that some believed in and feared Yahweh, but had yet to trust Him. We need likewise to convert our acceptance of God's existence into practical faith in Him.

116:2 Because He has turned His ear to me, therefore – The experience of answered prayer is an upward spiral; because prayer is answered, we are inspired to pray the more.

116:11 I said in my haste, “All men are liars” – This verse likely strikes a chord with most of us; we have all likewise at times felt that relationships in this world are useless, nobody is to be trusted.

said in my haste, All men are liars. ¹² What will I give to Yahweh for all His benefits toward me? ¹³ I will take the cup of salvation, and call on the name of Yahweh. ¹⁴ I will pay my vows to Yahweh, yes, in the presence of all His people. ¹⁵ Precious in the sight of Yahweh is the death of His saints. ¹⁶ Yahweh, truly I am Your servant, I am Your servant, the son of Your handmaid. You have freed me from my chains. ¹⁷ I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call on the name of Yahweh. ¹⁸ I will pay my vows to Yahweh, yes, in the presence of all His people, ¹⁹ in the courts of Yahweh's house, in the midst of you, Jerusalem. Praise Yah!

Psalm 117 Mar. 8

¹ Praise Yahweh, all you nations! Ex-tol Him, all you peoples! ² For His grace is great toward us, Yahweh's faithfulness endures forever. Praise Yah!

Psalm 118 Mar. 8

¹ Give thanks to Yahweh for He is good, for His grace endures forever.

² Let Israel now say that His grace endures forever. ³ Let the house of Aaron now say that His grace endures forever. ⁴ Now let those who fear Yahweh say that His grace endures forever. ⁵ Out of my distress, I called on Yah; Yah answered me with freedom. ⁶ Yahweh is on my side, I will not be afraid; what can man do to me? ⁷ Yahweh is on my side among those who help me. Therefore I will look in triumph at those who hate me. ⁸ It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to put confidence in man. ⁹ It is better to take refuge in Yahweh than to put confidence in princes. ¹⁰ All the nations surrounded me, but in the name of Yahweh, I cut them off. ¹¹ They surrounded me, yes, they surrounded me. In the name of Yahweh I indeed cut them off. ¹² They surrounded me like bees but they are quenched like the burning thorns. In the name of Yahweh I cut them off. ¹³ You pushed me back hard to make me fall, but Yahweh helped me. ¹⁴ Yah is my strength and song, He has become my salvation. ¹⁵ The voice of rejoicing and salva-

116:13 *I will take the cup of salvation* – This cup was an allusion to one of the cups used at the Passover. In response to all God has done for us, we likewise respond by taking the cup at the communion service. Although our feelings and situations vary each time we take that cup, one strand of motivation within us for doing it should be our desire to do so in gratitude for all the Lord has done for us spiritually and physically.

116:14 *In the presence of all His people* – As in :18, our devotion to God is to be expressed within the context of other believers. Out of church Christianity is a contradiction in terms; we cannot retreat into our own homes and consider we are Christians in the privacy of our hearts. Difficult as it often is, and notwithstanding all the dysfunctions of the church, the community of believers is to be the arena in which we make our response to God's grace. Of course there may be multiple reasons why physical attendance at a literal gathering isn't possible, all of which are appreciated by God, but so far as we can, we should in whatever way seek to be "in the presence of all His people".

tion is in the tents of the righteous: The right hand of Yahweh does valiantly. ¹⁶ The right hand of Yahweh is exalted! The right hand of Yahweh does valiantly! ¹⁷ I will not die, but live, and declare Yah's works. ¹⁸ Yah has punished me severely, but He has not given me over to death. ¹⁹ Open to me the gates of righteousness: I will enter into them. I will give thanks to Yah. ²⁰ This is the gate of Yahweh; the righteous will enter into it. ²¹ I will give thanks to You, for You have answered me, and have become my salvation. ²² The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. ²³ This is Yahweh's doing, it is marvellous in our eyes. ²⁴ This is the day that Yahweh has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it! ²⁵ Save us now, we beg You, Yahweh! Yahweh, we beg

You, send prosperity now. ²⁶ Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh! We have blessed you out of the house of Yahweh. ²⁷ Yahweh is God, and He has given us light. Bind the sacrifice with cords, even to the horns of the altar. ²⁸ You are my God, and I will give thanks to You; You are my God, I will exalt You. ²⁹ Oh give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good, for His grace endures forever.

Psalm 119 Mar. 9

ALEPH ¹ Blessed are those whose ways are blameless, who walk according to Yahweh's law. ² Blessed are those who keep His statutes, who seek Him with their whole heart. ³ Yes, they do nothing wrong; they walk in His ways. ⁴ You have commanded Your precepts, that we should fully obey them. ⁵ Oh that

118:22 *The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner –* Quoted by Jesus about Himself in Mt. 21:42. The Jews were the “builders” (Acts 4:11) who rejected Christ by crucifying Him, but He resurrected to become the corner stone of the new spiritual temple which is being built (Eph. 2:20; 1 Pet. 2:6,7). Non-Christian religions cannot be the way to God because the foundation and critical point of our spiritual building can only be the resurrected Christ.

118:25 *Save us now –* ‘Hosanna’ is the Greek word for ‘Save now!’. This and :26 “Blessed is he who comes in the name of Yahweh!” were quoted by the crowds in Mt. 21:9. They perceived Jesus as Messiah in the terms of this Psalm, but that same crowd were screaming “Crucify Him!” just days later. This is how fickle our nature is.

119:1 *Yahweh's law –* Every verse in this Psalm contains some reference to God's law. It is arranged according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, perhaps to indicate how our words, our alphabet, our whole formulation of thought and verbalization, should be dominated by God's word. It was also done in this way to aid memorization; for in illiterate societies, the Psalms would've been memorized. It's a good thing for us to personally memorize parts of God's word.

119:5 *Oh that my ways were steadfast to obey Your statutes –* This is one of many places in this Psalm (:136) where David laments his own failure to obey God's word completely at all times. And yet the Psalm also speaks of the faithful as being totally obedient to God's word, e.g. “they do nothing wrong” (:3). One resolution of this is that David believed in imputed righteousness, whereby God counts His people as

my ways were steadfast to obey Your statutes! ⁶ Then I wouldn't be ashamed when I obey all of Your commandments. ⁷ I will give thanks to You with uprightness of heart, when I learn Your righteous judgments. ⁸ I will observe Your statutes; don't utterly forsake me.

BET ⁹ How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to Your word. ¹⁰ With my whole heart I have sought You; don't let me wander from Your commandments. ¹¹ I have hidden Your word in my heart, that I might not sin against You. ¹² Blessed are You, Yahweh; teach me Your statutes. ¹³ With my lips I have declared all the ordinances of Your mouth. ¹⁴ I have rejoiced in the way of Your testimonies, as much as in all riches. ¹⁵ I will meditate on Your precepts, and consider Your ways. ¹⁶ I will delight myself in Your

statutes, I will not forget Your word. **GIMEL** ¹⁷ Do good to Your servant; I will live to obey Your word. ¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things out of Your law. ¹⁹ I am a stranger on the earth, don't hide Your commandments from me. ²⁰ My soul is consumed with longing for Your ordinances at all times. ²¹ You have rebuked the proud who are cursed, who wander from Your commandments. ²² Take reproach and contempt away from me, for I have kept Your statutes. ²³ Though princes sit and slander me, Your servant will meditate on Your statutes. ²⁴ Indeed Your statutes are my delight and my counsellors.

DALED ²⁵ My soul is laid low in the dust; revive me according to Your word! ²⁶ I declared my ways, and You answered me. Teach me Your statutes. ²⁷ Let me understand the teach-

totally obedient to His word even though they are not; Ps. 32:2 cp. Rom. 4:8 indicates David understood this principle well.

119:6 *Then I wouldn't be ashamed when I obey all of Your commandments* – The result of moments or periods of obedience to God is that we become ashamed of all the times we are *not* obedient. Spiritual maturity thus involves an ever increasing awareness of our past sins; it doesn't lead to self-righteousness but the very opposite.

119:11 *That I might not sin* – The presence of God's word within our hearts gives strength against temptation, as demonstrated by Christ's overcoming of the wilderness temptations by quoting from God's word.

119:14 *As much as in all riches* – The Psalm often contrasts material wealth with the love of God's law (:36, 72, 127). So many sell their souls to employers, taking demanding jobs or second jobs so as to get more money than they need. And inevitably they have little time or mental energy for the things of God's word. Others lament their lack of wealth; but the simple truth is that the true riches are those of God's word.

119:18 *Open my eyes* – In his search for spiritual mindedness, so often David in this Psalm asks God to directly work on his heart so that he might correctly understand God's word and be obedient to it (:29 "Keep me", :36 "Turn my heart", :133 "establish my footsteps"). God hasn't merely given us the Bible and left us to get on with the job of understanding and obeying it; He is eager to help us in those things.

119:27 David often makes this link between appreciation of God's ways and the in-

ing of Your precepts! Then I will talk of Your wondrous works.²⁸ My soul is weary with sorrow: strengthen me according to Your word.²⁹ Keep me from the way of deceit. Grant me Your law graciously!³⁰ I have chosen the way of truth, I have set Your ordinances before me.³¹ I cling to Your statutes, Yahweh; don't let me be disappointed.³² I run in the path of Your commandments, for You have set my heart free.

HEY³³ Teach me, Yahweh, the way of Your statutes; I will keep them to the end.³⁴ Give me understanding, and I will keep Your law; yes, I will obey it with my whole heart.³⁵ Direct me in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in them.³⁶ Turn my heart toward Your statutes, not toward selfish gain.³⁷ Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things. Revive me in Your ways.³⁸ Fulfill Your promise to Your servant, that You may be feared.³⁹ Take

away my disgrace that I dread, for Your ordinances are good.⁴⁰ Behold, I long for Your precepts! Revive me in Your righteousness.

WAW Mar. 10⁴¹ Let Your grace also come to me, Yahweh, Your salvation, according to Your word⁴² so I will have an answer for him who reproaches me, for I trust in Your word.⁴³ Don't take the word of truth out of my mouth, for I put my hope in Your ordinances;⁴⁴ so I will obey Your law continually, forever and ever.⁴⁵ I will walk in liberty, for I have sought Your precepts.⁴⁶ I will also speak of Your statutes before kings, and will not be disappointed.⁴⁷ I will delight myself in Your commandments, because I love them.⁴⁸ I reach out my hands for Your commandments which I love; I will meditate on Your statutes.

ZAYIN⁴⁹ Remember Your word to Your servant, because You give me hope.⁵⁰ This is my comfort in my

evitable witness this will result in. The community of believers is not to simply amass intellectual, theological purity by Bible reading – it must be told forth to others.

119:33 *Teach me, Yahweh, the way of Your statutes; I will keep them* – The better we understand God's word, the more empowered we are to obey it. Understanding and correct interpretation aren't therefore merely of academic interest, or just for those interested in that kind of thing. By the same token, true understanding isn't simply academic, it issues in practical obedience.

119:37 *Turn my eyes away from looking at worthless things* – A prayer for our internet, entertainment mad, screen transfixed generation.

119:46 *Before kings* – This is one of several indications that parts of this Psalm reflects David's feelings whilst at the court of Saul as a young man (:100, :161), whereby speaking up for God's word could result in a javelin being thrown at him to kill him if he just happened to touch the conscience of the manic king Saul (1 Sam. 18:11).

119:48 David didn't groan at the number of God's commandments, struggling with a steel will to obey some of them; he so loved God that he asked God to show him more and more of those commandments. Often the verses of this Psalm imply that David sought to know more of God's requirements because they are designed to help us be more obedient to all of them *in toto*.

affliction, for Your word has revived me.⁵¹ The arrogant mock me excessively, but I don't swerve from Your law.⁵² I remember Your ordinances of old, Yahweh, and have comforted myself.⁵³ Indignation has taken hold on me because of the wicked who forsake Your law.⁵⁴ Your statutes have been my songs in the house of my pilgrimage.⁵⁵ I have remembered Your name, Yahweh, in the night, and I obey Your law.⁵⁶ This is my life's way, keeping Your precepts.

CHEΤ ⁵⁷ Yahweh is my portion; I promised to obey Your words.⁵⁸ I sought Your favour with my whole heart; be merciful to me according to Your word.⁵⁹ I considered my ways and turned my steps to Your statutes.⁶⁰ I will hurry, and not delay, to obey Your commandments.⁶¹ The ropes of the wicked bind me, but I won't forget Your law.⁶² At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You because of Your righteous ordinances.⁶³ I am a friend of all those who fear You, of those who observe Your precepts.⁶⁴ The earth is full of Your grace, Yahweh; teach me Your commands.

TET ⁶⁵ Do good to Your servant according to Your word, Yahweh.⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in Your commandments.⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted, I went astray; but now I observe Your word.⁶⁸ You are good,

and do good; teach me Your statutes.⁶⁹ The proud have smeared a lie upon me, but with my whole heart I will keep Your precepts.⁷⁰ Their heart is callous and fat, but I delight in Your law.⁷¹ It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes.⁷² The law of Your mouth is better to me than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.

YUD ⁷³ Your hands have made me and formed me; give me understanding, that I may learn Your commandments.⁷⁴ Those who fear You will see me and be glad, because I have put my hope in Your word.⁷⁵ Yahweh, I know that Your judgments are righteous, that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.⁷⁶ Please let Your grace be for my comfort, according to Your word to Your servant.⁷⁷ Let Your tender mercies come to me, that I may live; for Your law is my delight.⁷⁸ Let the proud be disappointed, for they have overthrown me wrongfully; but I will meditate on Your precepts.⁷⁹ Let those who fear You turn to me; they will know Your statutes.⁸⁰ Let my heart be blameless toward Your decrees, that I may not be ashamed.

KAF Mar. 11 ⁸¹ My soul faints for Your salvation; I hope in Your word.⁸² My eyes fail for Your word; I say, When will You comfort me?⁸³ For I have become like a wineskin in the

119:63 Even within the people of God, we must choose our friends well.

119:64 David didn't see grace and law as opposed; rather he understood those commandments as ultimately reflective of God's grace.

119:73 David realized that because he had been made in God's physical image he had a duty to be spiritually reformed in His moral image; and thus he sought strength to be obedient to God's will.

smoke, but I don't forget Your statutes.⁸⁴ How many are the days of Your servant? When will You execute Your word on those who persecute me?⁸⁵ The proud have dug pits for me, contrary to Your law.⁸⁶ All of Your commandments are faithful. They persecute me wrongfully. Help me!⁸⁷ They had almost wiped me from the earth, but I didn't forsake Your precepts.⁸⁸ Preserve my life according to Your grace, so I will obey the statutes of Your mouth.

LAMED ⁸⁹ Yahweh, Your word is settled in heaven forever.⁹⁰ Your faithfulness is to all generations. You have by a word established the earth, and it remains.⁹¹ Your laws remain to this day, for all things serve You.⁹² Unless Your law had been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.⁹³ I will never forget Your precepts, for with them You have revived me.⁹⁴ I am Yours. Save me, for I have sought Your precepts.⁹⁵ The wicked have waited for me to destroy me; I will consider Your statutes.⁹⁶ I have seen a limit to all perfection, but Your commands are boundless.

MEM ⁹⁷ How I love Your law! It is my meditation all day.⁹⁸ Your commandments make me wiser than my enemies, for Your commandments are always with me.⁹⁹ I have more

understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.¹⁰⁰ I understand more than the aged, because I have kept Your precepts.¹⁰¹ I have kept my feet from every evil way, that I might observe Your word.¹⁰² I have not turned aside from Your ordinances, for You have taught me.¹⁰³ How sweet are Your promises to my taste, more than honey to my mouth!¹⁰⁴ Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.

NUN ¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light for my path.¹⁰⁶ I have sworn, and have confirmed it, that I will obey Your righteous ordinances.¹⁰⁷ I am afflicted very much. Revive me, Yahweh, according to Your word.¹⁰⁸ Accept, I beg You, the willing offerings of my mouth. Yahweh, teach me Your ordinances.¹⁰⁹ My soul is continually in my hand, yet I won't forget Your law.¹¹⁰ The wicked have laid a snare for me, yet I haven't gone astray from Your precepts.¹¹¹ I have taken Your testimonies as a heritage forever, for they are the joy of my heart.¹¹² I have set my heart to perform Your statutes forever, even to the end.

SAMEKH ¹¹³ I hate double-minded men, but I love Your law.¹¹⁴ You are my hiding place and my shield.

119:88 The whole purpose of our lives, and of our eternal living in God's Kingdom, is to be obedient to God's word. We should have that spirit in our lives now, therefore.

119:96 God's law isn't therefore a limitation which we resentfully have to accept, but rather the way to ultimate freedom. In New Testament terms, we changed masters at baptism; from sin to Christ, and through our bondage to Him we paradoxically find ultimate freedom.

119:105 *My feet... my path* – God's word directs both our short term immediate decisions ("my feet") and also our general direction in life ("my path").

I hope in Your word.¹¹⁵ Depart from me, You evildoers, that I may keep the commandments of my God.¹¹⁶ Uphold me according to Your word, that I may live. Let me not be ashamed of my hope.¹¹⁷ Hold me up and I will be safe, and will have respect for Your statutes continually.¹¹⁸ You reject all those who stray from Your statutes, for their deceit is in vain.¹¹⁹ You put away all the wicked of the earth like dross. Therefore I love Your testimonies.¹²⁰ My flesh trembles for fear of You; I am afraid of Your judgments.

AYIN ¹²¹ I have done what is just and righteous. Don't leave me to my oppressors.¹²² Ensure Your servant's well-being. Don't let the proud oppress me.¹²³ My eyes fail looking for Your salvation, for Your righteous word.¹²⁴ Deal with Your servant according to Your grace, teach me Your statutes.¹²⁵ I am Your servant. Give me understanding, that I may know Your testimonies.¹²⁶ It is time to act, Yahweh, for they break Your law.¹²⁷ Therefore I love Your commandments more than gold, yes, more than pure gold.¹²⁸ Therefore I consider all of Your precepts to be right; I hate every false way.

PEY Mar. 12¹²⁹ Your testimonies are wonderful, therefore my soul keeps them.¹³⁰ The entrance of Your words gives light, it gives understanding to the simple.¹³¹ I opened my mouth wide and panted, for I longed for Your commandments.¹³² Turn to me and have mercy on me, as You always do to those who love Your name.¹³³ Establish my footsteps in Your word; don't let any iniquity have dominion over me.¹³⁴ Redeem me from the oppression of man, so that I will observe Your precepts.¹³⁵ Make Your face shine on Your servant. Teach me Your statutes.¹³⁶ Streams of tears run down my eyes, because they don't observe Your law.

TZADI ¹³⁷ You are righteous, Yahweh; Your judgments are upright.¹³⁸ You have commanded Your statutes in righteousness; they are fully trustworthy.¹³⁹ My zeal wears me out, because my enemies ignore Your words.¹⁴⁰ Your promises have been thoroughly tested, and Your servant loves them.¹⁴¹ I am small and despised but I don't forget Your precepts.¹⁴² Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness; Your law is truth.¹⁴³ Trouble and

119:120 God is again paralleled with His word; our attitude to His word is our attitude to Him.

119:128 Accepting the truths of God's word leads us to perceive and proactively reject that which is false, rather than simply accepting truth and being ambivalent to error.

119:130 There is no 'light within' us, our exposure to ultimate truth comes from God's word.

119:140 Because the word is so pure, *therefore* we love it. Our acceptance of the Bible as Divinely inspired rather than a human document therefore encourages our obedience to it; if we continually doubt and question its truth, we will hardly be motivated to obedience.

anguish have taken hold of me, but Your commandments are my delight. ¹⁴⁴ Your testimonies are righteous forever. Give me understanding, that I may live.

KUF ¹⁴⁵ I have called with my whole heart. Answer me, Yahweh! I will keep Your statutes. ¹⁴⁶ I have called to You. Save me! I will obey Your statutes. ¹⁴⁷ I rise before dawn and cry for help, I put my hope in Your words. ¹⁴⁸ My eyes stay open through the night watches, that I might meditate on Your word. ¹⁴⁹ Hear my voice according to Your grace. Revive me, Yahweh, according to Your ordinances. ¹⁵⁰ They draw near who follow after wickedness, they are far from Your law. ¹⁵¹ You are near, Yahweh. All Your commandments are truth. ¹⁵² Of old I have known from Your testimonies, that You have founded them forever.

RESH ¹⁵³ Consider my affliction and deliver me, for I don't forget Your law. ¹⁵⁴ Plead my cause, and redeem me! Revive me according to Your promise. ¹⁵⁵ Salvation is far from the wicked, for they don't seek Your statutes. ¹⁵⁶ Great are Your tender mercies, Yahweh. Revive me according to Your ordinances. ¹⁵⁷ Many are

my persecutors and my adversaries, but I haven't swerved from Your testimonies. ¹⁵⁸ I look at the faithless with loathing, because they don't observe Your word. ¹⁵⁹ Consider how I love Your precepts. Revive me, Yahweh, according to Your grace. ¹⁶⁰ All of Your words are truth, every one of Your righteous ordinances endures forever.

SIN AND SHIN ¹⁶¹ Princes have persecuted me without a cause, but my heart stands in awe of Your words. ¹⁶² I rejoice at Your word, as one who finds great spoil. ¹⁶³ I hate and abhor falsehood but I love Your law. ¹⁶⁴ Seven times a day I praise You because of Your righteous ordinances. ¹⁶⁵ Those who love Your law have great peace; nothing causes them to stumble. ¹⁶⁶ I have hoped for Your salvation, Yahweh. I have done Your commandments. ¹⁶⁷ My soul has observed Your testimonies because I love them exceedingly. ¹⁶⁸ I have obeyed Your precepts and Your testimonies, for all my ways are before You.

TAV ¹⁶⁹ Let my cry come near before You, Yahweh. Give me understanding according to Your word. ¹⁷⁰ Let my supplication come before You

119:143 So often David says that he refuses life's crises to take him away from his meditation on God's word.

119:160 In God's word we see His judgments – how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. The final day of judgement shouldn't therefore be a worrying mystery to us; we know how God will judge, for we have in the Bible His word, His judgments.

119:169 *Come near before You* – Prayer is described here as coming near to God; and yet God “is” near already (75:1). Prayer, therefore, is a way of making us realize the presence of the God who is always present.

and deliver me according to Your word.¹⁷¹ Let my lips utter praise, for You teach me Your statutes.¹⁷² Let my tongue sing of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness.¹⁷³ Let Your hand be ready to help me, for I have chosen Your precepts.¹⁷⁴ I have longed for Your salvation, Yahweh. Your law is my delight.¹⁷⁵ Let my soul live, that I may praise You. Let Your ordinances help me.¹⁷⁶ I have gone astray like a lost sheep. Seek Your servant, for I don't forget Your commandments.

Psalm 120 Mar. 13

A Song of Ascents.

¹ In my distress, I cried to Yahweh. He answered me. ² Deliver my soul, Yahweh, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue. ³ What will be given to you, and what will be done more to you, you deceitful tongue? ⁴ Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper. ⁵ Woe is me, that I live in Meshech, that I dwell among the tents of Kedar! ⁶ My soul has had her dwelling too long with him who

hates peace.⁷ I am for peace, but when I speak, they are for war.

Psalm 121 Mar. 13

A Song of Ascents.

¹ I will lift up my eyes to the hills. Where does my help come from?² My help comes from Yahweh, who made heaven and earth. ³ He will not allow your foot to be moved; He who keeps you will not slumber.⁴ Behold, He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. ⁵ Yahweh is your keeper, Yahweh is your shade on your right hand. ⁶ The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.⁷ Yahweh will keep you from all evil; He will keep your soul.⁸ Yahweh will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth and forever.

Psalm 122 Mar. 13

A Song of Ascents. By David.

¹ I was glad when they said to me, Let's go up to Yahweh's house!² Our feet shall stand within your gates, Jerusalem;³ Jerusalem, that is built

120 Song of Ascents – These Psalms (120-134) were recited as the Israelite worshippers went ‘up’ to the temple to keep the feasts (122:2,3). However the word translated “Ascents” also means “Degrees”, and may well have been written by Hezekiah when the shadow on the sundial went ten degrees backward as a sign that God had healed him (2 Kings 20:11). In response to this, Hezekiah composed or rearranged songs for the temple worship (Is. 38:20). His sickness was at the same time as the Assyrian invasion, and therefore many of these songs allude to the situation at that time.

121:2 Belief in God as creator (rather than in atheistic evolution) inspires our faith in His ability to likewise creatively deliver us from the crises of our lives.

121:5 *Yahweh is your shade* – Alluding to how on the wilderness journey, God provided the pillar of cloud as a shade to Israel (105:39). Our lives are repeatedly described in the Bible as being like the wilderness journey towards the promised land. The allusion is also to how God was a shade or shadow to Hezekiah when the shadow on the sundial went backward (Is. 38:8); what He did for Hezekiah He can in essence do for all His people.

as a city that is compact together;
⁴ where the tribes go up, even Yah's
 tribes, according to an ordinance for
 Israel, to give thanks to the name of
 Yahweh. ⁵ For there are set thrones
 for judgment, the thrones of David's
 house. ⁶ Pray for the peace of Jerusa-
 lem; those who love you will pros-
 per. ⁷ Peace be within your walls,
 and prosperity within your palaces.
⁸ For my brothers' and companions'
 sakes I will now say, Peace be within
 you. ⁹ For the sake of the house of
 Yahweh our God, I will seek your
 good.

Psalm 123 Mar. 13

A Song of Ascents.

¹ To You I do lift up my eyes, You
 who sit in the heavens. ² Behold,
 as the eyes of servants look to the
 hand of their master, as the eyes of
 a maid to the hand of her mistress;
 so our eyes look to Yahweh our God
 until He has mercy on us. ³ Have
 mercy on us, Yahweh, have mercy
 on us, for we have endured much
 contempt. ⁴ Our soul is exceedingly
 filled with the scoffing of those who
 are at ease, with the contempt of the
 proud.

Psalm 124 Mar. 13

A Song of Ascents. By David.

¹ If it had not been Yahweh who was
 on our side, let Israel now say, ² if it
 had not been Yahweh who was on
 our side when men rose up against
 us; ³ then they would have swal-
 lowed us up alive, when their wrath
 was kindled against us; ⁴ then the
 waters would have overwhelmed us,
 the stream would have gone over our
 soul; ⁵ then the proud waters would
 have gone over our soul. ⁶ Blessed
 be Yahweh, who has not given us as
 a prey to their teeth. ⁷ Our soul has
 escaped like a bird out of the fowl-
 er's snare. The snare is broken, and
 we have escaped. ⁸ Our help is in the
 name of Yahweh, who made heaven
 and earth.

Psalm 125 Mar. 14

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Those who trust in Yahweh are as
 Mount Zion which can't be moved
 but remains forever. ² As the moun-
 tains surround Jerusalem, so Yahweh
 surrounds His people from this time
 forth and forever. ³ For the sceptre of
 wickedness won't remain over the
 allotment of the righteous; so that the

122:6 Jerusalem's peace will only be when Christ reigns there on David's throne over God's Kingdom on earth; this is the day the faithful should daily plead for.

123:4 This scoffing likely referred to that of Rabshakeh outside the walls of Jerusalem at the time of Hezekiah's illness and Judah's invasion (2 Kings 18:19-25).

125:3 This is amazing encouragement, echoed in 1 Cor. 10:13, that we will never be tested so hard that our sinning is inevitable. In the heat of temptation we persuade ourselves that our situations are too hard for us to endure and that we have no option given our humanity but to sin. But God here promises that He will never allow circumstances to be too great for our spiritual strength; we are left with no option but to accept full, total responsibility for our sins, with nobody and nothing to blame them on apart from ourselves.

righteous won't put forth their hands to do evil. ⁴ Do good, Yahweh, to those who are good, to those who are upright in their hearts. ⁵ But as for those who turn aside to their crooked ways, Yahweh will lead them away with the workers of iniquity. Peace be on Israel.

Psalm 126 Mar. 14

A Song of Ascents.

¹ When Yahweh brought back those who returned to Zion, we were like those who dream. ² Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing. Then they said among the nations, Yahweh has done great things for them. ³ Yahweh has done great things for us, and we are glad. ⁴ Restore our fortunes again, Yahweh, like the streams in the Negev. ⁵ Those who sow in tears will reap in joy. ⁶ He who goes out weeping, carrying seed for sowing, will certainly come again with joy carrying his sheaves.

Psalm 127 Mar. 14

A Song of Ascents. By Solomon.

¹ Unless Yahweh builds the house, they labour in vain who build it. Unless Yahweh watches over the city, the watchman guards it in vain. ² It is vain for you to rise up early, to stay up late, eating the bread of toil; for He gives sleep to His beloved ones. ³ Behold, children are a heritage of Yahweh. The fruit of the womb is His reward. ⁴ As arrows in the hand of a mighty man, so are the children of youth. ⁵ Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them; they won't be

ashamed when they speak with their enemies in the gate.

Psalm 128 Mar. 15

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Blessed is each one who fears Yahweh, who walks in His ways. ² For you will eat the labour of your hands; you will be happy, and it will be well with you. ³ Your wife will be as a fruitful vine in the innermost parts of your house; your children like olive plants around your table. ⁴ Behold, thus is the man blessed who fears Yahweh. ⁵ May Yahweh bless you out of Zion, and may you see the good of Jerusalem all the days of your life. ⁶ Yes, may you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel.

Psalm 129 Mar. 15

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Many times they have afflicted me from my youth up. Let Israel now say, ² many times they have afflicted me from my youth up, yet they have not prevailed against me. ³ The ploughers ploughed on my back; they made their furrows long. ⁴ Yahweh is righteous; He has cut apart the cords of the wicked. ⁵ Let them be disappointed and turned backward, all those who hate Zion. ⁶ Let them be as the grass on the housetops, which withers before it grows up; ⁷ with which the reaper doesn't fill his hand, nor the binder of sheaves his belt. ⁸ Neither do those who go by say, The blessing of Yahweh be on you. We bless you in the name of Yahweh.

Psalm 130 Mar. 15*A Song of Ascents.*

¹ Out of the depths I have cried to You, Yahweh. ² Lord, hear my voice. Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my petitions. ³ If You, Yah, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? ⁴ But there is forgiveness with You, therefore You are feared. ⁵ I wait for Yahweh. My soul waits. I hope in His word. ⁶ My soul longs for the Lord more than watchmen long for the morning; more than watchmen for the morning. ⁷ Israel, hope in Yahweh, for with Yahweh there is grace, with Him is abundant redemption. ⁸ He will redeem Israel from all their sins.

Psalm 131 Mar. 16*A Song of Ascents. By David.*

¹ Yahweh, my heart isn't haughty, nor my eyes lofty; nor do I concern myself with great matters, or things too wonderful for me. ² Surely I have stilled and quieted my soul, like a

weaned child with his mother, like a weaned child is my soul within me. ³ Israel, hope in Yahweh, from this time forth and forever.

Psalm 132 Mar. 16*A Song of Ascents.*

¹ Yahweh, remember David and all his affliction, ² how he swore to Yahweh, and vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob: ³ Surely I will not come under the roof of my house, nor go up into my bed; ⁴ I will not give sleep to my eyes, or slumber to my eyelids; ⁵ until I find out a place for Yahweh, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob. ⁶ Behold, we heard of it in Ephrathah. We found it in the field of Jaar: ⁷ We will go into His dwelling place. We will worship at His footstool. ⁸ Arise, Yahweh, into Your resting place; You, and the ark of Your strength. ⁹ Let Your priests be clothed with righteousness, let Your saints shout for joy! ¹⁰ For Your servant David's sake, don't turn away the

130:3 God doesn't keep a record or legal list of sins in the sense that He doesn't hold them against us; it's not that He as it were erases those parts of His 'memory', for His word is full of the memory of human sin which He has forgiven. The LXX is applied to each of us in 1 Cor. 13:5 – we too are not to keep a record of others' wrongs against us. God's forgiveness of us is to be the template for our forgiveness of others. It's not possible to forget them, in the sense that we have no power over our brain's mechanism of forgetting; but we can forgive them in the sense that we do not count them any longer against the person.

132 The mutuality possible between God and man is brought out by the structure of several of the Psalms, in which God and David are shown to be involved in a dynamic, two way relationship. Consider this Psalm: A (:1,2) David swears to God; B (:3-5) What David swore; C (:6,7) Search for a dwelling place; D (:8) Prayer to enter into rest; E (:9) Prayer for priests; F (:9) Prayer for saints / holy ones; G (:10) Prayer for Messiah. This was responded to by God: A1 (:11) God swears to David; B1 (:11,12) What God swore; C1 (:13) Designation of the dwelling place; D1 (:14,15) Answer to prayer in D; I (:16) Answer to prayer in E; F1 (:16) Answer to prayer in F; G1 (:17,18) Answer to prayer in G.

face of Your anointed one.¹¹ Yahweh has sworn to David in truth, He will not turn from it: I will set the fruit of your body on your throne.¹² If your children will keep My covenant, My testimony that I will teach them, their children also will sit on your throne forever.¹³ For Yahweh has chosen Zion, He has desired it for His habitation.¹⁴ This is my resting place forever. Here I will live, for I have desired it.¹⁵ I will abundantly bless her provision. I will satisfy her poor with bread.¹⁶ Her priests I will also clothe with salvation, her holy people will shout aloud for joy.¹⁷ There I will make the horn of David to bud. I have ordained a lamp for my anointed.¹⁸ I will clothe his enemies with shame, but on himself, his crown will be splendid.

Psalm 133 Mar. 16

A Song of Ascents. By David.

¹ See how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to live together in unity!² It is like the precious oil on the head, that ran down on the beard, even Aaron's beard; that came down on the edge of his robes;³ like the dew of Hermon, that comes down on the hills of Zion: for there Yahweh gives the blessing, even life forever.

Psalm 134 Mar. 16

A Song of Ascents.

¹ Look! Praise Yahweh, all you serv-

ants of Yahweh, who stand by night in Yahweh's house!² Lift up your hands in the sanctuary. Praise Yahweh!³ May Yahweh bless you from Zion; even He who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 135 Mar. 17

¹ Praise Yah! Praise the name of Yahweh! Praise Him, you servants of Yahweh,² you who stand in the house of Yahweh, in the courts of our God's house.³ Praise Yah, for Yahweh is good. Sing praises to His name, for that is pleasant.⁴ For Yah has chosen Jacob for Himself; Israel for His own possession.⁵ For I know that Yahweh is great, that our Lord is above all gods.⁶ Whatever Yahweh pleased, that He has done, in heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps;⁷ who causes the clouds to rise from the ends of the land; who makes lightnings with the rain; who brings forth the wind out of His treasures;⁸ who struck the firstborn of Egypt, both of man and animal;⁹ who sent signs and wonders into the midst of you, Egypt, on Pharaoh, and on all his servants;¹⁰ who struck many nations, and killed mighty kings,¹¹ Sihon king of the Amorites, Og king of Bashan and all the kingdoms of Canaan,¹² and gave their land for a heritage, a heritage to Israel, His people.¹³ Your name, Yahweh, endures forever; Your renown,

135:13 God's Name refers to His essential character, which is distinguished firstly by His grace and forgiveness (Ex. 34:4-6). This is unchanging; God isn't going to turn around and show us another face as it were. His Name is paralleled here with His renown, the reputation He has developed throughout Biblical history by acting consistently with His essential character. The Name of God isn't therefore simply the

Yahweh, throughout all generations.
¹⁴ For Yahweh will judge His people, and be sorry for His servants.
¹⁵ The idols of the nations are silver and gold, the work of men's hands.
¹⁶ They have mouths, but they can't speak; they have eyes, but they can't see.
¹⁷ They have ears, but they can't hear; neither is there any breath in their mouths.
¹⁸ Those who make them will be like them; yes, everyone who trusts in them.
¹⁹ House of Israel, praise Yahweh! House of Aaron, praise Yahweh!
²⁰ House of Levi, praise Yahweh! You who fear Yahweh, praise Yahweh!
²¹ Blessed be Yahweh from Zion, He who dwells at Jerusalem. Praise Yah!

Psalm 136 Mar. 17

¹ Give thanks to Yahweh, for He is good; for His grace endures forever.
² Give thanks to the God of gods; for His grace endures forever.
³ Give thanks to the Lord of lords; for His

grace endures forever: ⁴ to Him who alone does great wonders; for His grace endures forever: ⁵ to Him who by understanding made the heavens; for His grace endures forever: ⁶ to Him who spread out the earth above the waters; for His grace endures forever: ⁷ to Him who made the great lights; for His grace endures forever: ⁸ the sun to rule by day; for His grace endures forever; ⁹ the moon and stars to rule by night; for His grace endures forever: ¹⁰ to Him who struck down the Egyptian firstborn; for His grace endures forever; ¹¹ and brought out Israel from among them; for His grace endures forever; ¹² with a strong hand, and with an outstretched arm; for His grace endures forever: ¹³ to Him who divided the Red Sea apart; for His grace endures forever; ¹⁴ and made Israel to pass through its midst; for His grace endures forever; ¹⁵ but overthrew Pharaoh and His army in the Red Sea; for His grace

word Yahweh or Jehovah. That is far too simplistic; the pronunciation and transliteration of Hebrew letters one way or another is irrelevant compared to the essence of the Name itself.

135:14 This parallels the Lord judging His people with His feeling sorry for them. In this sense judgment to come is a comfort not a threat.

135:19, 20 This parallels all Israel with the priestly family. As it was God's intention that Israel were to develop into an entire nation of priests to the rest of the world, so the new Israel likewise are to *all* discharge the priestly functions of teaching their brethren (Ex. 19:6 cp. 1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:9,10). Under the new covenant, we should *all* teach and admonish one another (Col. 3:16), rather than just leave it to specialists.

136:8 In this hard and graceless world, we have only to look at the sun and moon, indeed at all of creation, to see God's sensitive grace constantly active.

136:10 The death of the Egyptian firstborn and their army (:15) was a reflection of God's grace to Israel. We may struggle with this but ultimately it is a challenge to our perceptions and understanding rather than any bad reflection against God (see 143:12). We are reminded of how the flood was brought to destroy the world of Noah's day in order to save him (2 Pet. 2:5), so that he was as it were saved by that water just as the water of baptism saves us (1 Pet. 3:19-21).

endures forever: ¹⁶ to Him who led His people through the wilderness; for His grace endures forever: ¹⁷ to Him who struck great kings; for His grace endures forever; ¹⁸ and killed mighty kings; for His grace endures forever: ¹⁹ Sihon king of the Amorites; for His grace endures forever; ²⁰ Og king of Bashan; for His grace endures forever; ²¹ and gave their land as an inheritance; for His grace endures forever; ²² even a heritage to Israel His servant; for His grace endures forever: ²³ who remembered us in our low estate; for His grace endures forever; ²⁴ and has delivered us from our adversaries; for His grace endures forever: ²⁵ who gives food to every creature; for His grace endures forever. ²⁶ Oh give thanks to the God of heaven; for His grace endures forever.

Psalm 137 Mar. 18

¹ By the rivers of Babylon there we sat down, and yes, we wept when we remembered Zion. ² On the willows in its midst we hung up our harps. ³ For there, those who led us captive asked us for songs. Those who tormented us demanded us songs

of joy: Sing us one of the songs of Zion! ⁴ How could we sing Yahweh's song in a foreign land? ⁵ If I forget you, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill. ⁶ Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth if I don't remember you; if I don't prefer Jerusalem above my chief joy. ⁷ Remember, Yahweh, against the children of Edom, the day of Jerusalem; who said, Raze it! Raze it even to its foundation! ⁸ Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, he will be happy who rewards you as you have served us. ⁹ Happy shall he be, who takes and dashes your little ones against the rock.

Psalm 138 Mar. 18

By David.

¹ I will give You thanks with my whole heart. Before the mighty ones I will sing praises to You. ² I will bow down toward Your holy temple, and give thanks to Your Name for Your grace and for Your truth; for You have exalted above all things your name and your word. ³ In the day that I called, You answered me; You encouraged me with strength in my soul. ⁴ All the kings of the land will

136:23, 24 Understood by Mary as having fulfilment in the birth of Christ as our ultimate deliverer (Lk. 1:48).

137:8, 9 This extreme language may seem hard to square with the spirit of grace in the New Testament. However, vengeance upon God's enemies is also taught in the New Testament, especially in Revelation. These words are applied in Rev. 18:8,21 to what will finally happen to Babylon. Her spiritual children will be dashed against the rock of Christ, the stone of Dan. 2:44, at His return. Another perspective to explore is that it may also be that the Psalmist's attitude was simply wrong, even though the recording of these words was inspired. David likewise spoke words of great grace and also of bitter vengeance against his enemies; the experience of trauma and real evil in life usually makes the sufferer give vent to such extreme feelings.

give You thanks, Yahweh, for they have heard the words of Your mouth. ⁵ Yes, they will sing of the ways of Yahweh; for great is Yahweh's glory. ⁶ For though Yahweh is high, yet He looks after the lowly; but the proud, He knows from afar. ⁷ Though I walk in the midst of trouble, You will revive me; You will stretch forth Your hand against the wrath of my enemies. Your right hand will save me. ⁸ Yahweh will fulfil that which concerns me; Your grace, Yahweh, endures forever. Don't forsake the works of Your own hands.

Psalm 139 Mar. 18

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

¹ Yahweh, You have searched me and You know me. ² You know my sitting down and my rising up, You perceive my thoughts from afar. ³ You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. ⁴ For there is not a word on my tongue, but, behold, Yahweh, You know it altogether. ⁵ You

hem me in behind and before, You have laid Your hand on me. ⁶ This knowledge is beyond me. It is lofty and beyond me. ⁷ Where could I go from Your Spirit? Or where could I flee from Your presence? ⁸ If I ascend up into heaven, You are there. If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the dawn, and settle in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will hold me. ¹¹ If I say, Surely the darkness will overwhelm me then the light around me will be night; ¹² even the darkness doesn't hide from You, but the night shines as the day; the darkness is like light to You. ¹³ For You formed my inmost being, You knit me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful and my soul knows that very well. ¹⁵ My frame wasn't hidden from You when I was made in secret, woven together in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my body. In Your

138:8 *That which concerns me* – God has a specific plan for each of us, in the same way as He has given each of us specific talents (Mt. 25:15) and has specified “good works” for us to achieve in our lives (Eph. 2:10). On His part, God will likewise fulfil what He has planned uniquely and individually for each of us – in accordance with our response to the possibilities He has potentially enabled.

139:2 We are *now* in God's presence, and can't escape from it; and the presence of God is judgment language (Acts 3:19; 2 Thess. 1:9; 2:19; Jude 24; Rev. 14:10). He not only sees and knows everything in our lives but is judging it too.

139:7-9 Jonah knew the Psalms; his prayer from inside the fish is packed with allusion to them. And yet he thought he could flee from God's presence (Jonah 1:3) – even though these verses almost prophesy of Jonah, that nobody can flee from God's presence; neither the sea itself nor geographical distance can hide from God. Jonah knew this. But he simply acted in a way diametrically opposed to that knowledge. We read the same words he did, and are faced with the same choice as to whether we truly believe them or merely know them.

book my body parts were all written and the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there were none of them.¹⁷ How precious to me are Your thoughts, God! How vast is their sum!¹⁸ If I would count them, they are more in number than the sand. When I wake up, I am still with You.¹⁹ If only You, God, would kill the wicked. Get away from me, you bloodthirsty men!²⁰ For they speak against You wickedly, Your enemies take Your name in vain.²¹ Yahweh, don't I hate those who hate You? Am I not grieved with those who rise up against You?²² I hate them with complete hatred; they have become my enemies.²³ Search me, God, and know my heart; test me, and know my thoughts.²⁴ See if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way.

Psalm 140 Mar. 19

For the Chief Musician. A Psalm by David.

¹ Deliver me, Yahweh, from the evil man. Preserve me from the violent man² and those who devise mischief

in their hearts. They continually gather themselves together for war,³ they have sharpened their tongues like a serpent. Viper's poison is under their lips. Selah.⁴ Yahweh, keep me from the hands of the wicked. Preserve me from the violent men who have determined to trip my feet.⁵ The proud have hidden a snare for me, they have spread the cords of a net by the path, they have set traps for me. Selah.⁶ I said to Yahweh, You are my God. Listen to the cry of my petitions, Yahweh.⁷ Yahweh, the Lord, the strength of my salvation, You have covered my head in the day of battle.⁸ Yahweh, don't grant the desires of the wicked. Don't let their evil plans succeed, or they will become proud. Selah.⁹ As for the heads of those who surround me, let the mischief of their own lips cover them.¹⁰ Let burning coals fall upon them! Let them be cast into fire, into miry pits, no more to rise.¹¹ An evil tongue won't be established in the land; evil will hunt the violent man to overthrow him.¹² I know that Yahweh will maintain

139:15, 16 If this is the level of intention and planning which God put into us, we at least can draw the certain conclusion: life is not aimless. God has a purpose for us and we therefore ought to be living a purposeful life, not just drifting from experience to experience as in a half-conscious dream. God is focused upon us and we should be upon Him.

139:24 *Wicked way* – The Hebrew translated “wicked” also means ‘sorrow’ or ‘pain’. The way of sin, the path to quick pleasure, is in fact the way of pain and sorrow.

140:11 *An evil tongue* – The reference is not to the small piece of flesh within our mouths, but to an evil speaking *person*, paralleled with “the violent *man*”. But the tongue is put for the person because our words really are a reflection of who we are, in that our words ultimately reflect our hearts (Lk. 6:45) despite our best efforts to insist there's a distance between our real self and our words. Ultimately there isn't, for all our occasional posturing and hypocrisy. How we really think comes out in our words in the end, and thus we ‘are’ our tongue.

the cause of the afflicted, and justice for the needy.¹³ Surely the righteous will give thanks to Your name. The upright will dwell in Your presence.

Psalm 141 Mar. 19

A Psalm by David.

1 Yahweh, I have called on You. Come to me quickly! Listen to my voice when I call to You. 2 Let my prayer be set before You like incense; the lifting up of my hands like the evening sacrifice. 3 Set a watch, Yahweh, before my mouth, keep the door of my lips. 4 Don't incline my heart to any evil thing, to practice deeds of wickedness with men who work iniquity; don't let me eat of their delicacies. 5 Let the righteous strike me, it is a kindness; let him reprove me, it is like oil on the head; don't let my head refuse it.; and my prayer will be for them in their calamities. 6 When their judges are thrown over the cliff, then they shall hear my words, for they are pleasant. 7 As when one ploughs and breaks up the earth, our bones are scattered at the mouth of Sheol; 8 but my eyes are on

You, Yahweh, the Lord. In You I take refuge; don't leave my soul destitute. 9 Keep me from the snare which they have laid for me, from the traps of the workers of iniquity. 10 Let the wicked fall together into their own nets, while I pass on by.

Psalm 142 Mar. 19

A contemplation by David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer.

1 I cry with my voice to Yahweh, with my voice I ask Yahweh for mercy. 2 I pour out my complaint before Him, I tell Him my troubles. 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, You knew my path. In the way in which I walk, they have hidden a snare for me. 4 Look on my right hand and see; for there is no one who is concerned for me. Refuge has fled from me, no one cares for my soul. 5 I cried to You, Yahweh. I said, You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living. 6 Listen to my cry, for I am in desperate need; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than me. 7 Bring my soul out of prison, that I may give thanks

141:2 Prayer is likened to carefully prepared sacrifice, to painstakingly composed incense, beaten small, mixed in just the right proportions. The penalty for not making the incense properly was death. The lesson is that forethought will precede real prayer; it is an offering to God.

142:2 *I tell Him my troubles* – It's therapeutic to tell God our life situation, saying it out loud or writing it down as David did. We know that He already knows, but this exercise is good because it enables *us* to feel we have opened up before Him. The chronic, existential loneliness of people today could be solved by this opening up to God.

142:4 *No one cares for my soul* – This was indeed how David felt and perhaps it was really so; and yet he recognized that there were a group of people in existence called “the righteous” (:7). Even if we feel none of God’s people are helping us as they should, it doesn’t mean they aren’t God’s people or that nobody at all is righteous apart from us.

to Your name. The righteous will surround me, for You will be good to me.

Psalm 143 Mar. 20

A Psalm by David.

¹ Hear my prayer, Yahweh. Listen to my petitions. In Your faithfulness and righteousness, relieve me. ² Don't enter into judgment with Your servant, for in Your sight no man living is righteous. ³ For the enemy pursues my soul; he has struck my life down to the ground. He has made me live in dark places, as those who have been long dead. ⁴ Therefore my spirit is overwhelmed within me. My heart within me is desolate. ⁵ I remember the days of old, I meditate on all Your doings, I contemplate the work of Your hands. ⁶ I spread forth my hands to You. My soul thirsts for You, like a parched land. Selah. ⁷ Hurry to answer me, Yahweh. My spirit fails. Don't hide Your face from me, so that I don't become like those who go down into the pit. ⁸ Cause me to hear Your grace in the morning, for I trust in You. Cause me to know

the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You. ⁹ Deliver me, Yahweh, from my enemies. I flee to You to hide me. ¹⁰ Teach me to do Your will, for You are my God. Your Spirit is good; lead me in the land of uprightness. ¹¹ Revive me, Yahweh, for Your name's sake. In Your righteousness, bring my soul out of trouble. ¹² In Your loving kindness, cut off my enemies, and destroy all those who afflict my soul, for I am Your servant.

Psalm 144 Mar. 20

By David.

¹ Blessed be Yahweh, my rock, who teaches my hands to war, and my fingers to battle: ² my source of grace, my fortress, my high tower, my deliverer, my shield and He in whom I take refuge; who subdues my people under me. ³ Yahweh, what is man, that You care for him? Or the son of man, that You think of him? ⁴ Man is like a breath, his days are like a shadow that passes away. ⁵ Part Your heavens, Yahweh, and come down; touch the mountains, and they will

143:10 *Your Spirit is good; lead me* – David felt very strongly that he was being led, and he was confident that although he didn't understand exactly where he was going in the short term, God is fundamentally good and wishes us only good in our latter end. The “spirit” here may refer to an Angel (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7), whom David felt was leading him in his wilderness life under persecution from Saul (:3) just as an Angel led Israel in the wilderness.

143:12 The death of David's enemies was seen by him as God's “kindness”. See on 136:10.

144:1, 2 *My rock... my fortress, my high tower* – There are references in the historical record to how David took refuge from Saul (:3) and other enemies in these things (1 Sam. 23:29; 2 Sam. 5:7,9). But David saw that the essence of his safety was not in them but in God. We may use medicines, doctors, insurance, emergency phone numbers... but the essence is that God is our saviour, even if He works through those things.

smoke. ⁶ Throw out lightning and scatter them. Send out Your arrows and defeat them. ⁷ Stretch out Your hand from above, rescue me and deliver me out of great waters, out of the hands of foreigners; ⁸ whose mouths speak deceit, whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood. ⁹ I will sing a new song to You, God, on a ten-stringed lyre I will sing praises to You. ¹⁰ You are He who gives salvation to kings, who rescues David His servant from the deadly sword. ¹¹ Rescue me, and deliver me out of the hands of foreigners, whose mouths speak deceit, whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood. ¹² Then our sons will be like well-nurtured plants, our daughters like corner stones carved to adorn a palace. ¹³ Our barns will be full, filled with all kinds of provision; our sheep will bring forth thousands and ten thousands in our fields. ¹⁴ Our oxen will pull heavy loads, there will be no breaking in and no going away,

and no crying in our streets. ¹⁵ Happy are the people who are in such a situation. Happy are the people whose God is Yahweh.

Psalm 145 Mar. 21

A praise psalm by David.

¹ I will exalt You my God as the King. I will praise Your name forever and ever. ² Every day I will praise You, I will extol Your name forever and ever. ³ Great is Yahweh, and greatly to be praised! His greatness is unsearchable. ⁴ One generation will commend Your works to another, and will declare Your mighty acts. ⁵ Of the glorious majesty of Your honour, of Your wondrous works, I will meditate. ⁶ Men will speak of the might of Your awesome acts; I will declare Your greatness. ⁷ They will utter the memory of Your great goodness and will sing of Your righteousness. ⁸ Yahweh is gracious, merciful, slow to anger, and of great grace. ⁹ Yahweh is good to all, His

144:12 David must have shocked many by singing of how our sons shall be as plants and our daughters as corner stones. For the corner stones of a family were perceived to be the male head of the family. The Biblical view of women always sharply contrasted with that of the surrounding world at the time; such is God's valuing of each of His children regardless of their gender or perception within society.

145:1 *You my God as the King* – David was king of Israel, but that meant little to him compared to the greatness of God's sovereign Kingship. It may be that we are exalted a little bit in life, in career, social standing or even respect amongst God's people. An awareness of God's greatness will keep this in perspective for us; we will see it as nothing compared to God's exaltation and our subsequent smallness.

145:5 *Of Your wondrous works, I will meditate* – The rest of this Psalm speaks of David enthusiastically telling others about these things. But the motivation for preaching, the impetus for overcoming the inertia we often face in raising spiritual subjects in conversation, is our personal meditation upon these things, of telling ourselves within our own self-talk of God's greatness and the things of His Kingdom. The more public expression of these things to others will then come naturally without needing to be forced.

tender mercies are over all His works.¹⁰ All Your works will give thanks to You, Yahweh; Your saints will extol You.¹¹ They will speak of the glory of Your kingdom, and talk about Your power;¹² to make known to the sons of men His mighty acts, the glory of the majesty of His kingdom.¹³ Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, Your dominion endures throughout all generations. Yahweh is faithful in all His words, and loving in all His deeds.¹⁴ Yahweh upholds all who fall, and raises up all those who are bowed down.¹⁵ The eyes of all wait for You; You give them their food in due season.¹⁶ You open Your hand to satisfy the desire of every living thing.¹⁷ Yahweh is righteous in all His ways, and gracious in all His works.¹⁸ Yahweh is near to all those who call on Him, to all who call on Him in truth.¹⁹ He will fulfil the desire of those who fear Him, He will also hear their cry and save them.²⁰ Yahweh preserves all those who love Him, but all the wicked He will destroy.²¹ My mouth will speak the praise of Yahweh; let all flesh bless His holy name forever and ever.

145:19 This isn't a blank cheque promise to give us whatever we pray for; the “desire” of God's people is paralleled here with salvation. “I want to live forever in God's Kingdom more than anything else in the world” should be our credo; and if this is really the case in our hearts, we shall receive it (2 Tim. 4:8).

146:4 This clearly teaches that death is unconsciousness; we have no ‘immortal soul’ which consciously exists after death. The allusion is to how God made man from the dust and put into him the breath or spirit of life (Gen. 2:7). When we die, this spirit or life force returns to God, and we return to dust. The practical implication of correctly understanding human mortality is that we won't trust in people, but rather in God; for we will realize their weakness and ultimate inability to save.

147:2 The Jews returned from Babylon to the land of their own volition; but it was Yahweh who gathered them back, as if He called them almost of *His* volition rather

Psalm 146 Mar. 21

¹ Praise Yah! Praise Yahweh, my soul. ² While I live, I will praise Yahweh. I will sing praises to my God as long as I exist. ³ Don't put your trust in princes, each merely a son of man in whom there is no help. ⁴ His spirit departs, and he returns to the dust. In that very day, his thoughts perish. ⁵ Happy is he who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in Yahweh his God: ⁶ who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps truth forever; ⁷ who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. Yahweh frees the prisoners, ⁸ Yahweh opens the eyes of the blind, Yahweh raises up those who are bowed down, Yahweh loves the righteous. ⁹ Yahweh preserves the strangers, He upholds the fatherless and widow, but the way of the wicked He turns upside down. ¹⁰ Yahweh will reign forever; your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise Yah!

Psalm 147 Mar. 21

¹ Praise Yah, for it is good to sing praises to our God; for it is pleasant and fitting to praise Him. ² Yah-

weh builds up Jerusalem, He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. ³ He heals the broken in heart, and binds up their wounds. ⁴ He counts the number of the stars, He calls them all by their names. ⁵ Great is our Lord, and mighty in power; His understanding is infinite. ⁶ Yahweh upholds the humble; He brings the wicked down to the ground. ⁷ Sing to Yahweh with thanksgiving, sing praises on the harp to our God, ⁸ who covers the sky with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass grow on the mountains. ⁹ He provides food for the livestock, and for the young ravens when they call. ¹⁰ He doesn't delight in the strength of the horse, He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. ¹¹ Yahweh takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His grace. ¹² Praise Yahweh, Jerusalem! Praise your God, Zion! ¹³ For He has strengthened the bars of your gates, He has blessed your children within you. ¹⁴ He makes peace in your borders, He fills you with the finest of the wheat. ¹⁵ He sends out His commandment to the earth; His

word runs very swiftly. ¹⁶ He gives snow like wool, and scatters frost like ashes. ¹⁷ He hurls down His hail like pebbles- who can stand before His cold? ¹⁸ He sends out His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters flow. ¹⁹ He shows His word to Jacob, His statutes and His ordinances to Israel. ²⁰ He has not done this for any other nation; they don't know His ordinances. Praise Yah!

Psalm 148 Mar. 22

¹ Praise Yah! Praise Yahweh from the heavens! Praise Him in the heights! ² Praise Him, all His angels! Praise Him, all His army! ³ Praise Him, sun and moon! Praise Him, all you shining stars! ⁴ Praise Him, you heavens of heavens, You waters that are above the skies. ⁵ Let them praise the name of Yahweh, for He commanded, and they were created. ⁶ He has also established them forever and ever. He has made a decree which will not pass away. ⁷ Praise Yahweh from the earth, you great sea creatures, and all depths! ⁸ Lightning and hail, snow and clouds; stormy wind, fulfilling

than theirs. They rebuilt Jerusalem; but actually, Yahweh did, through His confirmation of all the freewill effort of men like Ezra and Nehemiah. In our exodus from this world and journey to the Kingdom, God is willing and able to confirm every freewill effort we make in every aspect of our lives. The returning exiles had to strengthen the bars of Jerusalem's gates as is emphasized throughout Neh. 3; but God worked through them (:13).

148:2 All the Angels are obedient to God; there are no sinful Angels in Heaven; see on 103:20,21.

148:6 God will never destroy the earth and heavens; it is His declared purpose to establish His eternal Kingdom on earth at Christ's return (Dan. 2:44). Any references to the destruction of 'heavens and earth' are using this term in a symbolic sense to describe a system of things on earth (Is. 1:2).

His word; ⁹ mountains and all hills; fruit trees and all cedars; ¹⁰ wild animals and all livestock; small creatures and flying birds; ¹¹ kings of the earth and all peoples; princes and all judges of the earth; ¹² both young men and young women; old men and children: ¹³ let them praise the name of Yahweh, for His name alone is exalted; His glory is above the earth and the skies. ¹⁴ He has lifted up the horn of His people, inspiring the praise of all His saints, even of the children of Israel, a people near to Him. Praise Yah!

Psalm 149 Mar. 22

¹ Praise Yahweh! Sing to Yahweh a new song, His praise in the assembly of the saints. ² Let Israel rejoice in Him who made him, let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. ³ Let them praise His name in the dance! Let them sing praises to Him with tambourine and harp! ⁴ For Yahweh takes pleasure in His people, He crowns the humble with salva-

tion. ⁵ Let the saints rejoice in glory, let them sing for joy on their beds. ⁶ May the high praises of God be in their mouths, and a two-edged sword in their hand; ⁷ to execute vengeance on the nations, and punishments on the peoples; ⁸ to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron; ⁹ to execute on them the judgment written. All His saints have this honour. Praise Yah!

Psalm 150 Mar. 22

¹ Praise Yah! Praise God in His sanctuary! Praise Him in His heavens for His acts of power! ² Praise Him for His mighty acts! Praise Him according to His excellent greatness! ³ Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet! Praise Him with harp and lyre! ⁴ Praise Him with tambourine and dancing! Praise Him with stringed instruments and flute! ⁵ Praise Him with loud cymbals! Praise Him with resounding cymbals! ⁶ Let everything that has breath praise Yah! Praise Yah!

148:14 *Saints* refers to all God's people, not just a few very righteous people.

149:2 *Be joyful in their King* – This Psalm would've been written and used when Israel had a human king. But the Psalmist, perhaps king David, wanted them to understand that whatever system of human leadership there is amongst God's people, He is their ultimate King and His Kingship was to be personally felt by every one of His people, so that they might eternally be His Kingdom, the entity of persons over which He extends rulership and sovereign authority.

150:3-5 The idea is that everything using all methods should praise God. We should never therefore limit the way others praise God, nor be critical of it because it's not our method.

PROVERBS

CHAPTER 1 Mar. 23

The Purpose of the Book

The proverbs of Solomon, the son of David, king of Israel: ² to know wisdom and instruction; to discern the words of understanding; ³ to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; ⁴ to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young man: ⁵ that the wise man may be obedient, and increase in learning; that the man of understanding may attain to sound counsel: ⁶ to understand a proverb, and parables, the words and riddles of the wise. ⁷ The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of knowledge; but the foolish despise wisdom and instruction.

Embrace Wisdom

⁸ My son, listen to your father's instruction, and don't forsake your mother's teaching: ⁹ for they will be a garland to grace your head, and chains around your neck. ¹⁰ My son, if sinners entice you, don't consent. ¹¹ If they say, Come with us, let's lay in wait for blood; let's lurk secretly for the innocent without cause; ¹² let's swallow them up alive like Sheol, and whole, like those who

go down into the pit. ¹³ We'll find all kinds of wealth. We'll fill our houses with spoil. ¹⁴ You shall cast your lot among us, we'll all have one purse. ¹⁵ My son, don't walk in the way with them. Keep your foot from their path, ¹⁶ for their feet run to evil. They hurry to shed blood. ¹⁷ For in vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird: ¹⁸ but these lay wait for their own blood. They lurk secretly for their own lives. ¹⁹ So are the ways of everyone who is greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its owners.

Do Not Reject Wisdom

²⁰ Wisdom calls aloud in the street. She utters her voice in the public squares. ²¹ She calls at the head of busy places, at the entrance of the city gates she utters her words: ²² How long, you simple ones, will you love simplicity? How long will mockers delight themselves in mockery and fools hate knowledge? ²³ Turn at my reproof. Behold, I will pour out my spirit on you, I will make known my words to you. ²⁴ Because I have called, and you have refused; I have stretched out my hand, and no one has paid attention; ²⁵ but

1:5 That the wise man may be obedient – There is an upward spiral in spiritual life, whereby God's commandments are designed to lead the wise to yet more obedience if they are obeyed; wisdom leads to more wisdom.

1:12 Sheol is the Hebrew word translated "hell" in some Bibles; it is also translated "the grave", and is here parallel with "the pit". It refers simply to the grave and not to any place of eternal torment.

1:23 My spirit... my words – The Bible is written by inspiration of God. God's words are a vehicle by which His Spirit works in the lives of His children (Jn. 6:63).

you have ignored all my counsel, and wished none of my reproof; ²⁶ I also will laugh at your disaster. I will mock when calamity overtakes you; ²⁷ when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when your disaster comes on like a whirlwind; when distress and anguish come on you. ²⁸ Then will they call on me, but I will not answer. They will seek me diligently, but they will not find me; ²⁹ because they hated knowledge, and didn't choose the fear of Yahweh. ³⁰ They wished for none of my counsel, they despised all my reproof. ³¹ Therefore they will eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with the fruit of their own schemes. ³² For the back-sliding of the simple will kill them. The careless ease of fools will destroy them. ³³ But whoever listens to me will dwell securely and will be at ease, without fear of harm.

CHAPTER 2 Mar. 24

The Benefits of Wisdom

My son, if you will receive my commandments within you ² so as to turn your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; ³ yes, if you cry out for wisdom, and lift up your voice for understanding; ⁴ if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures: ⁵ then you will understand the fear of Yahweh, and find the knowledge of God. ⁶ For Yahweh gives wisdom. Out of His mouth comes knowledge and understanding. ⁷ He lays up sound wisdom for the upright, He is a shield to those who walk in integrity; ⁸ that He may guard the paths of justice, and preserve the way of His saints. ⁹ Then you will understand righteousness and justice, equity and every good path. ¹⁰ For wisdom will enter into

1:26 Mock... laugh – God will mock and laugh at the Gentile nations who come against Him in the last day (Ps. 2:4), and yet He will do just the same to those of His people who refuse wisdom's voice. If we are not separate from this world now, we will not be separated from them when the judgments fall. We will be “Condemned with the world...” (1 Cor. 11:32). If we don’t come out from Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4).

1:28 Then will they call on me, but I will not answer – In the day of judgment, everybody will desperately want to be in God’s Kingdom, to live eternally in the way of wisdom. The rejected will urgently seek acceptance, but it will be too late (Mt. 25:11; Lk. 13:25).

1:29 Hated knowledge – They ‘despise’ wisdom (:30); but they likely never said so in those words. In their lives they lived in “careless ease” (:32), but this is tantamount to proactively hating spiritual knowledge.

2:3 Wisdom cries out loud to be heard (8:1), and yet the righteous man cries after wisdom, and lifts up his voice for understanding; there is thus a sense of mutuality here between God’s wisdom and the sincere seeker. Every genuine believer will have felt this; we urgently cry for wisdom, and yet God’s word is crying out to teach us. If this is our attitude, the things of God’s word will be our life (4:13). As Israel were to talk about the word as they went out and came in and as they walked along the way, so should the new Israel (7:2,3).

your heart, knowledge will be pleasant to your soul.¹¹ Discretion will watch over you. Understanding will keep you,¹² to deliver you from the way of evil, from the men who speak perverse things;¹³ who forsake the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness;¹⁴ who rejoice to do evil, and delight in the perverseness of evil;¹⁵ who are crooked in their ways, and wayward in their paths:¹⁶ to deliver you from the Gentile woman, even from the foreigner who flatters with her words;¹⁷ who forsakes the friend of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God:¹⁸ for her house leads down to death, her paths to the dead.¹⁹ None who go to her return again, neither do they attain to the paths of life:²⁰ that you may walk in the way of good men, and keep the paths of the righteous.²¹ For the upright will dwell in the land; the perfect will eternally remain in it.²² But the wicked will be cut off from the land, the deceitful will be rooted out of it.

CHAPTER 3 Mar. 25

More Benefits of Wisdom

My son, don't forget my teaching but let your heart keep my commandments:² for length of days and years of life, and peace, will they add to you.³ Don't let grace and truth forsake you. Bind them around your neck. Write them on the tablet of your heart.⁴ So you will find favour and good understanding in the sight of God and man.⁵ Trust in Yahweh with all your heart, and don't lean on your own understanding.⁶ In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight.⁷ Don't be wise in your own eyes. Fear Yahweh, and depart from evil.⁸ It will be health to your body, and nourishment to your bones.⁹ Honour Yahweh with your substance, with the first fruits of all your increase:¹⁰ so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine.¹¹ My son, don't despise Yahweh's discipline, neither be weary of His reproof:¹² for whom

2:16, 17 Solomon was inspired to write the Proverbs in his youth, and yet he did the very things he warns others against. Here he teaches that wisdom would save a man from the Gentile woman who made a covenant with the God of Israel in her youth (in order to marry an Israelite, by implication), but soon forgot it. This was exactly the case of Solomon, who married Gentile women in his youth; yet he just couldn't see the personal relevance of his own wisdom to himself. The more spiritual knowledge we have, the more prone we are to make this same mistake.

3:4 This is alluded to in Lk. 2:52, where we read that Jesus grew in wisdom and in favour with God and man. The “my Son” spoken of in Proverbs can therefore be understood as *the Son*, the Lord Jesus. It could be that the various warnings to the son about not getting involved with Gentile women, not getting in with bad company in his youth etc. were all speaking directly to temptations the Lord Jesus encountered in His youth. In this case we could build up some picture of the experiences of the Lord’s early life on the basis of the “my son” exhortations of Proverbs.

3:11 All Scripture is recorded for *our* learning and comfort (Rom. 15:4). The exhortation here in Prov. 3:11 “speaks unto *you* as unto children...” (Heb. 12:5). We are to constantly personalize Scripture and hear God speaking to *us* directly.

Yahweh loves, He reproves; even as a father reproves the son in whom he delights.¹³ Happy is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gets understanding.¹⁴ For her good profit is better than getting silver, and her return is better than fine gold.¹⁵ She is more precious than rubies. None of the things you can desire are to be compared to her.¹⁶ Length of days is in her right hand, in her left hand are riches and honour.¹⁷ Her ways are ways of pleasantness, all her paths are peace.¹⁸ She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her. Happy is each one who retains her.¹⁹ By wisdom Yahweh founded the earth, by understanding He established the heavens.²⁰ By His knowledge the depths were broken up and the skies drop down the dew.²¹ My son, let them not depart from your eyes. Keep sound wisdom and discretion:²² so they will be life to your soul, and grace for your neck.²³ Then you shall walk in your way securely; your foot won't stumble.²⁴ When you lie down, you will not be afraid. Yes, you will lie down, and your sleep will be sweet.²⁵ Don't be afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation

of the wicked when it comes:²⁶ for Yahweh will be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being taken.²⁷ Don't withhold good from those to whom it is due when it is in the power of your hand to do it.²⁸ Don't say to your neighbour, Go, and come again; tomorrow I will give it to you, when you have it by you.²⁹ Don't devise evil against your neighbour, since he dwells securely by you.³⁰ Don't strive with a man without cause if he has done you no harm.³¹ Don't envy the man of violence; choose none of his ways.³² For the perverse person is an abomination to Yahweh, but His friendship is with the upright.³³ Yahweh's curse is in the house of the wicked, but He blesses the habitation of the righteous.³⁴ Surely He mocks the mockers, but He gives grace to the humble.³⁵ The wise will inherit glory, but shame will be the promotion of fools.

CHAPTER 4 Mar. 26

The Supremacy of Wisdom

Listen, sons, to a father's instruction. Pay attention and know understanding;² for I give you sound learning. Don't forsake my law.

3:20 *And the skies drop down the dew* – The historical creation of all things by God's word of command is ongoing, in that His word in an ongoing way commands the dew to fall just as His word re-arranged the waters as recorded in Genesis 1. The idea of :19,20 is that the same word which God used as the agency of physical creation – He said, and it was done – is ongoing in our lives if we respond to the word of wisdom, thereby becoming a new creation through that same word, centred as it is in the Lord Jesus as that word made flesh (2 Cor. 5:17; Jn. 1:14).

3:34 *He gives grace to the humble* – Quoted in James 4:5,6 in an appeal to us not to be envious but rather to be humble. The truly humble aren't envious; God's gift of grace to them in Christ is so wonderful that we have quite enough to personally glory in, and there will be no envy of others.

³ For I was a son to my father, tender and an only child in the sight of my mother. ⁴ He taught me, and said to me: Let your heart retain my words. Keep my commandments, and live. ⁵ Get wisdom. Get understanding. Don't forget, neither swerve from the words of my mouth. ⁶ Don't forsake her, and she will preserve you. Love her, and she will keep you. ⁷ Wisdom is supreme. Get wisdom. Yes, though it costs all your possessions, get understanding. ⁸ Esteem her, and she will exalt you. She will bring you to honour when you embrace her. ⁹ She will give to your head a garland of grace. She will deliver a crown of splendour to you. ¹⁰ O my son, receive my sayings; and the years of your life shall be many. ¹¹ I have taught you in the way of wisdom, I have led you in straight paths. ¹² When you go, your steps will not be hampered. When you run, you will not stumble. ¹³ Take firm hold of instruction. Don't let her go. Keep her, for she is your life. ¹⁴ Don't enter into the path of the wicked. Don't walk in the way

of evil men. ¹⁵ Avoid it, and don't pass by it; turn from it, and pass on. ¹⁶ For they don't sleep, unless they do evil. Their sleep is taken away, unless they make someone fall. ¹⁷ For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. ¹⁸ But the path of the righteous is like the light of the dawn, that shines more and more until the perfect day. ¹⁹ The way of the wicked is like darkness. They don't know what they stumble over. ²⁰ My son, attend to my words. Turn your ear to my sayings. ²¹ Let them not depart from your eyes. Keep them in the midst of your heart. ²² For they are life to those who find them, and health to their whole body. ²³ Keep your heart with all diligence, for out of it is the wellspring of life. ²⁴ Put away from yourself a perverse mouth, put corrupt lips far from you. ²⁵ Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. ²⁶ Make the path of your feet level. Let all of your ways be established. ²⁷ Don't turn to the right hand nor to the left, remove your foot from evil.

4:4–9 This is Solomon quoting to *his* children what his father David had taught him about wisdom. He was raising his children as he had been raised, which is what all parents inevitably tend to do by default. But Solomon himself lived without personally applying the wisdom to himself; all he says is true, but the lesson is that we can accept theoretical truth, pass it on to others with great conviction, and yet be unmoved by it ourselves.

4:16 Doing evil is defined as making another fall. The sinfulness of sin is especially in the negative effect we have upon others.

4:23 The heart is used in the Bible as a metaphor for the mind. To be spiritually minded is the essence of Christianity. How we think now will affect our eternal future.

4:26 *Make the path of your feet level* – Quoted in Heb. 12:13 about the need to do this so that *others* don't stumble in the way of life. Our personal life path must be straight not only for ourselves to reach the Kingdom, but so that others can follow us there. Again we see that spirituality is never limited to ourselves; it always affects others.

CHAPTER 5 Mar. 27*The Dangers of Adultery*

My son, pay attention to my wisdom, turn your ear to my understanding: ² that you may maintain discretion, that your lips may preserve knowledge. ³ For the lips of an adulteress drip honey. Her mouth is smoother than oil, ⁴ but in the end she is as bitter as wormwood, and as sharp as a two-edged sword. ⁵ Her feet go down to death, her steps lead straight to Sheol. ⁶ She gives no thought to the way of life. Her ways are crooked, and she doesn't know it. ⁷ Now therefore, my sons, listen to me. Don't depart from the words of my mouth. ⁸ Remove your way far from her. Don't come near the door of her house, ⁹ lest you give your honour to others, and your years to the cruel one; ¹⁰ lest foreigners feast on your wealth, and your labours enrich another man's house. ¹¹ You will groan at your latter end, when your flesh and your body are consumed, ¹² and say, How I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; ¹³ neither have I obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor turned my ear to those who instructed me! ¹⁴ I have

5:5 Sheol is translated in some Bibles as “hell”, but the word refers simply to the grave, which is how it is often translated. Here it is parallel with “death”, as in 7:27. It doesn't refer to any place of eternal conscious torment.

5:15 *Springing water out of your own spring* – The metaphor likens the man's wife to a spring of ever fresh water which is personally for himself. A husband should find in his wife something ever fresh, and thus marriages blessed by God don't default into the same old scene scenario, there's always something fresh and new for us in each other if we perceive our partners as we should.

5:21 *For the ways of man are before the eyes of Yahweh* – Sexual unfaithfulness is precluded by the fact that God sees and knows all things; Job likewise answered a false accusation of marital infidelity by saying that this wasn't possible for him, because he lived in the constant presence of the God who sees all things (Job 31:1-4).

come to the brink of utter ruin, in the midst of the gathered assembly. ¹⁵ Drink water out of your own cistern, springing water out of your own spring. ¹⁶ Should your springs overflow in the streets, streams of water in the public squares? ¹⁷ Let them be for yourself alone, not for strangers with you. ¹⁸ Let your spring be blessed. Rejoice in the wife of your youth. ¹⁹ A loving doe and a graceful deer— let her breasts satisfy you at all times. Be captivated always with her love. ²⁰ For why should you, my son, be captivated with an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another? ²¹ For the ways of man are before the eyes of Yahweh, He examines all his paths. ²² The evil deeds of the wicked ensnare him. The cords of his sin hold him firmly. ²³ He will die for lack of instruction. In the greatness of his own folly he will go astray.

CHAPTER 6 Mar. 28*Avoiding the Trap of Debt and Being Industrious*

My son, if you have become collateral for your neighbour, if you have struck your hands in pledge

for a stranger,² you are trapped by the words of your mouth. You are ensnared with the words of your mouth.³ Do this now my son and deliver yourself, since you have come into the hand of your neighbour. Go, humble yourself. Press your plea with your neighbour.⁴ Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids.⁵ Free yourself, like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter, like a bird from the snare of the fowler.⁶ Go to the ant, you sluggard. Consider her ways, and be wise;⁷ which having no chief, overseer or ruler,⁸ yet provides her bread in the summer and gathers her food in the harvest.⁹ How long will you sleep, lazy one? When will you arise out of your sleep?¹⁰ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep:¹¹ so your poverty will come as a robber, and your scarcity as an armed man.¹² A worthless person, a man of iniquity, is he who walks with a perverse mouth;¹³ who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, who motions with his fingers;¹⁴ in whose heart is perverseness, who devises evil continually,

who always sows discord.¹⁵ Therefore his calamity will come suddenly. He will be broken suddenly, and that without remedy.¹⁶ There are six things which Yahweh hates; yes, seven which are an abomination to Him:¹⁷ proud eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood;¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to mischief,¹⁹ a false witness who utters lies, and he who sows discord among brothers.

The Dangers of Promiscuity

20 My son, keep your father's commandment, and don't forsake your mother's teaching.²¹ Bind them continually on your heart. Tie them around your neck.²² When you walk, it will lead you. When you sleep, it will watch over you. When you awake, it will talk with you.²³ For the commandment is a lamp, and the law is light. Reproofs of instruction are the way of life,²⁴ to keep you from the immoral woman, from the flattery of the wayward wife's tongue.²⁵ Don't lust after her beauty in your heart, neither let her

6:7 Having no chief, overseer or ruler – We can learn from meditating upon the natural creation. Human beings tend to work best when overseen by a human leader; but in spiritual life, we are to work for God from self motivation, regardless of whether or not we have good leadership within the family of God.

6:13 God is sensitive to the body language of people, and so should we be.

6:14 Who always sows discord – In terms of the sentence structure, this is the crowning characteristic of the wicked man introduced in :12. Division and fracture of human relationships is perceived by God as the end result of sinfulness – thus indicating the huge value He places upon unity amongst His children. Divisiveness is the very essence of sinfulness. Likewise the seven things which God hates culminate in the sin of sowing discord amongst brothers (:16-18). Indeed, :16 could imply that this seventh sin is the ultimate abomination to Him.

6:25 Neither let her captivate you with her eyelids – The blindness of Solomon is driv-

capture you with her eyelids.²⁶ For a prostitute reduces you to a piece of bread. The adulteress hunts for your precious life.²⁷ Can a man scoop fire into his lap, and his clothes not be burned?²⁸ Or can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be scorched?²⁹ So is he who goes in to his neighbour's wife. Whoever touches her will not be unpunished.³⁰ Men don't despise a thief, if he steals to satisfy himself when he is hungry:³¹ but if he is found, he shall restore seven times. He shall give all the wealth of his house.³² He who commits adultery with a woman is void of understanding. He who does it destroys his own soul.³³ He will get wounds and dishonour, his reproach will not be wiped away.³⁴ For jealousy arouses the fury of the husband. He won't spare in the day of vengeance.³⁵ He won't regard any ransom, neither

will he rest content, though you give many gifts.

CHAPTER 7 Mar. 29

Beware of the Adulteress

My son, keep my words. Lay up my commandments within you. ² Keep my commandments and live! Guard my teaching as the apple of your eye. ³ Bind them on your fingers, write them on the tablet of your heart. ⁴ Tell wisdom, You are my sister. Call understanding your relative,⁵ that they may keep you from the strange woman, from the foreigner who flatters with her words. ⁶ For at the window of my house I looked out through my lattice. ⁷ I saw among the simple ones. I discerned among the youths a young man void of understanding,⁸ passing through the street near her corner, he went the way to her house,⁹ in the twilight, in the

en home time and again. He warned the young man about being captivated by the eyelids of the Gentile woman; yet it was the eyes of his Egyptian lover that he openly admitted stole his heart (Song 4:9; 6:5). The Gentile woman has words like a honeycomb (5:3); and yet this is exactly how Solomon found his woman's words (Song 4:11).

6:27 These verses powerfully pierce deeply into the psychology of sin, especially sexual sin. We reason that we can go *so* far into it, but not *too* far. But once we launch into sin, we will be damaged by it. The call of wisdom is to total abstinence from it, rather than spiritual brinkmanship.

7:2 The idea of keeping commandments in order to live is a reference back to the many Deuteronomy passages where Moses pleads with Israel to keep *God's* commands and live. But Solomon came to perceive his father David's commands as those of God, and in his generation he watered this down in his own mind until he assumed that *his* commands to his children were to be treated by them as the law of God – no matter how far he had strayed himself from God's law. It's a gripping, frightening psychology. "O my son, receive my sayings; and the years of your life shall be many" (4:10) is alluding to the promise of long life for the obedient to *God's* laws; but never does Solomon make the admission that his laws are only a repetition of God's laws. He was playing God by implying that *his* words carried the weight of *God's* words. He taught his son obedience to him as a father, but not to God Himself.

evening of the day, in the middle of the night and in the darkness.¹⁰ Behold, there a woman met him with the attire of a prostitute, and with crafty intent.¹¹ She is loud and defiant. Her feet don't stay in her house.¹² Now she is in the streets, now in the squares, and lurking at every corner.¹³ So she caught him, and kissed him. With an impudent face she said to him:¹⁴ Sacrifices of peace offerings are with me. This day I have paid my vows.¹⁵ Therefore I came out to meet you, to diligently seek your face, and I have found you.¹⁶ I have spread my couch with carpets of tapestry, with striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt.¹⁷ I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes, and cinnamon.¹⁸ Come, let's take our fill of loving until the morning. Let's solace ourselves with loving.¹⁹ For my husband isn't at home. He has gone on a long journey.²⁰ He has taken a bag of money with him; he will come home at the full moon.²¹ With persuasive words she led him astray. With the flattering of her lips, she seduced him.²² He followed her immediately, as an ox goes to the slaughter, as a fool stepping into a noose.²³ Until an arrow strikes through his liver, as a bird hurries to the snare,

and doesn't know that it will cost his life.²⁴ Now therefore, sons, listen to me. Pay attention to the words of my mouth.²⁵ Don't let your heart turn to her ways. Don't go astray in her paths,²⁶ for she has thrown down many wounded. Yes, all her slain are a mighty army.²⁷ Her house is the way to Sheol, going down to the rooms of death.

CHAPTER 8 Mar. 30

Wisdom Personified

Doesn't wisdom cry out? Doesn't understanding raise her voice?² On the top of high places by the way, where the paths meet, she stands.³ Beside the gates, at the entry of the city, at the entry doors, she cries aloud:⁴ To you people I call! I send my voice to the sons of mankind.⁵ You simple, understand prudence. You fools, be of an understanding heart.⁶ Hear, for I will speak excellent things. The opening of my lips is for right things.⁷ For my mouth speaks truth. Wickedness is an abomination to my lips.⁸ All the words of my mouth are in righteousness. There is nothing crooked or perverse in them.⁹ They are all plain to him who understands, right to those who find knowledge.¹⁰ Re-

7:14 *Sacrifices of peace offerings are with me* – It is the mixing of spirituality and sensuality which is such a powerful temptation; in the same way as Israel never totally rejected Yahweh, but mixed His worship with that of idols. Likewise many false doctrines contain a mixture of truth and error.

7:16 *With striped cloths of the yarn of Egypt* – Solomon perceived the association of Egypt with failure with women; and yet made the very same mistake which he so well perceived and eloquently preached against to others.

7:18 *Let's solace ourselves with loving* – The justification of any sin, but especially sexual sin, is that we have had hard lives and deserve some break, some solace, some human comfort.

ceive my instruction rather than silver; knowledge rather than choice gold.¹¹ For wisdom is better than rubies. All the things that may be desired can't be compared to it.¹² I, wisdom, have made prudence my dwelling. Find out knowledge and discretion.¹³ The fear of Yahweh is to hate evil. I hate pride, arrogance, the evil way, and the perverse mouth.¹⁴ Counsel and sound knowledge are mine. I have understanding and power.¹⁵ By me kings reign, and princes decree justice.¹⁶ By me princes rule; nobles, and all the righteous rulers of the earth.¹⁷ I love those who love me. Those who seek me diligently will find me.¹⁸ With me are riches, honour, enduring wealth, and prosperity.¹⁹ My fruit is better than gold, yes, than fine gold; my yield than choice silver.²⁰ I walk in the way of righteousness, in the midst of the paths of justice;²¹ that I may give wealth to those who love me. I fill their treasuries.²² Yahweh possessed me in the

beginning of His work, before His deeds of old.²³ I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, before the earth existed.²⁴ When there were no depths, I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water.²⁵ Before the mountains were settled in place, before the hills, I was brought forth;²⁶ while as yet He had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the beginning of the dust of the world.²⁷ When He established the skies, I was there; when He set a circle on the surface of the deep,²⁸ when He established the clouds above, when the springs of the deep became strong,²⁹ when He gave to the sea its boundary, that the waters should not violate His commandment, when He marked out the foundations of the earth;³⁰ then I was the craftsman by His side. I was a delight day by day, always rejoicing before Him,³¹ rejoicing in His whole world. My delight was with the sons of men.³² Now therefore,

8:11 Often Solomon's Proverbs bring out the tension between wealth and wisdom, and the need to choose wisdom (see too 16:16). But whilst he was inspired to write this, and true as it all was, it is inevitable that Solomon said all this with his mind on the way that he had rejected wealth for wisdom when in his youth he was asked by God for his wish (1 Kings 3:11,12). He thought that his right choice in early life [cp. Christian baptism] justified him in later loving wealth rather than wisdom. He taught that wisdom filled the treasures of the wise (:21) – just as his treasures were filled with wealth. Yet in his old age in Ecclesiastes he says that he amassed wealth for himself to see if he could find fulfilment in it – and he seems to have done that because now in his younger days he thought that amassing wealth was justified because he loved the possession of wisdom. Many a middle aged businessman, baptized in his youth and knowing God's truths very well in theory, has made just the same tragic mistake.

8:32 *Now therefore, my sons, listen to me* – These are words attributed to wisdom, but they are the words Solomon uses about his own instruction of his sons in 5:7. Solomon came to assume that he personally was wisdom personified. He had been given wisdom, but the very possession of it led him to assume that he was somehow infallible and spiritually invincible. This was his downfall. The fact we may possess God's

my sons, listen to me, for blessed are those who keep my ways.³³ Hear instruction, and be wise. Don't refuse it.³⁴ Blessed is the man who hears me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at my door posts.³⁵ For whoever finds me finds life, and will obtain favour from Yahweh.³⁶ But he who sins against me wrongs his own soul. All those who hate me love death.

CHAPTER 9 Mar. 30

Wisdom and Foolishness Both Invite Us

Wisdom has built her house, she has carved out her seven pillars,² she has prepared her bread, she has mixed her wine. She has also set her table,³ she has sent out her maidens, she cries from the highest places of the city:⁴ Whoever is simple, let him turn in here! As for him who is void of understanding, she says to him,⁵ Come, eat some of my bread, drink some of the wine which

I have mixed!⁶ Leave your simple ways, and live. Walk in the way of understanding.⁷ He who corrects a mocker invites insult; he who reproves a wicked man invites abuse.⁸ Don't reprove a scoffer, lest he hate you. Reprove a wise man, and he will love you;⁹ instruct a wise man, and he will be still wiser. Teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.¹⁰ The fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom, the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.¹¹ For by me your days will be multiplied. The years of your life will be increased.¹² If you are wise, you are wise for yourself. If you mock, you alone will bear it.¹³ The foolish woman is loud, undisciplined, and knows nothing.¹⁴ She sits at the door of her house, on a seat in the high places of the city,¹⁵ to call to those who pass by, who go straight on their ways,¹⁶ Whoever is simple, let him turn in here. As for him who

Truth doesn't mean that we personally are thereby infallible in every aspect of life. We hold those truths in clay, fallible vessels (2 Cor. 4:7).

9:1 In this chapter we have a classic example of where something abstract – like wisdom – is personified. Personification is widely used in the New Testament, where abstract things like sin and God's power, the Holy Spirit, are spoken of as persons even though they aren't.

9:5 An invitation to bread and wine represents fellowship together. The bread and wine of the communion service likewise speak of our fellowship with God and His Son, and our willingness to learn of them.

9:7-9 These verses appear to be the advice of wisdom to her young women who preach her message (:3). We begin the whole enterprise of sharing wisdom with the recognition that we are likely to be rejected and abused by some who hear our message. Wisdom is calling to everyone, it's not that she advises her preachers to ignore people they consider wicked. But she warns her representatives ahead of time that they can expect rejection and hurt as a result of their work.

9:8 An ability to take criticism is required if we are to become wise. But as people increasingly withdraw within themselves in modern society, this is a characteristic increasingly rarely seen.

is void of understanding, she says to him,¹⁷ Stolen water is sweet. Food eaten in secret is pleasant.¹⁸ But he doesn't know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.

CHAPTER 10 Mar. 31

The Proverbs of Solomon The Righteous and the Wicked— Their Attitudes Contrasted

The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a glad father; but a foolish son brings grief to his mother.² Treasures of wickedness profit nothing, but righteousness delivers from death.³ Yahweh will not allow the soul of the righteous to go hungry, but He thrusts away the desire of the wicked.⁴ He becomes poor who works with a lazy hand, but the hand of the diligent brings wealth.⁵ He who gathers in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during the harvest is a son who causes shame.⁶ Blessings are on the head of the righteous, but violence covers the mouth of the

wicked.⁷ The memory of the righteous is blessed, but the name of the wicked will rot.⁸ The wise in heart accept commandments, but a chattering fool will fall.⁹ He who walks blamelessly walks surely, but he who perverts his ways will be found out.¹⁰ One winking with the eye causes sorrow, and a chattering fool will fall.¹¹ The mouth of the righteous is a spring of life, but violence covers the mouth of the wicked.¹² Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all wrongs.¹³ Wisdom is found on the lips of him who has discernment, but a rod is for the back of him who is void of understanding.¹⁴ Wise men lay up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near ruin.

A Disciplined Life

15 The rich man's wealth is his fortified city; the destruction of the poor is their poverty.¹⁶ The labour of the righteous leads to life; the increase of the wicked leads to sin.¹⁷ He is in the way of life who heeds correction,

10:1 Solomon has himself in view here, for he was known internationally for his wisdom. Yet much of his apparent spirituality and zeal for God seems to have been a result of living out David's parental expectation. The emphasis he places in Proverbs upon pleasing fathers reflects Solomon's personal living out of parental hopes. Hence his collapse of faith later in life.

10:11 Our words really can be the water of life to others; this is why how we speak is so important.

10:12 *Love covers all wrongs* – The first and second halves of the verses in Proverbs are often related to each other. The way of love is not to turn a blind eye; but it covers wrongs in the sense that it doesn't 'stir up strife' in the sense of continually exposing the fault lines which there are in every relationship, but rather covers them.

10:15, 16 These verses speak of attitudes to wealth; the rich trust in their wealth and become isolated by it, like a man within a fortified city. The poor are soul destroyed because they are poor, and because they think that not having wealth means they are nothing. However, the righteous labour for God with eternal life as their end in view (:16), thus making their economic status simply not an item in their self-perception.

but he who forsakes reproof leads others astray.¹⁸ He who hides hatred has lying lips; he who utters a slander is a fool.¹⁹ In the multitude of words there is no lack of disobedience, but he who restrains his lips does wisely.²⁰ The tongue of the righteous is like choice silver; the heart of the wicked is of little worth.²¹ The lips of the righteous feed many, but the foolish die for lack of understanding.

Life Expanded by the Fear of God

²² Yahweh's blessing brings wealth, and He adds no trouble to it.²³ It is a fool's pleasure to do wickedness, but wisdom is a man of understanding's pleasure.²⁴ What the wicked fear will overtake them, but the desire of the righteous will be granted.²⁵ When the whirlwind passes, the wicked is no more; but the righteous stand firm forever.²⁶ As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to those who send him.²⁷ The fear of Yahweh prolongs days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened.²⁸ The prospect of the righteous is joy, but the hope of the wicked will perish.²⁹ The way of Yahweh is a stronghold to the

upright, but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity.³⁰ The righteous will never be removed, but the wicked will not dwell in the land.³¹ The mouth of the righteous brings forth wisdom, but the perverse tongue will be cut off.³² The lips of the righteous know what is acceptable, but the mouth of the wicked is perverse.

CHAPTER 11 Apr. 1

The Righteous and the Wicked— Their Behaviour and Destiny Contrasted

A false balance is an abomination to Yahweh, but accurate weights are His delight.² When pride comes then comes shame, but with humility comes wisdom.³ The integrity of the upright shall guide them, but the perverseness of the treacherous shall destroy them.⁴ Riches don't profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.⁵ The righteousness of the blameless will direct his way, but the wicked shall fall by his own wickedness.⁶ The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them, but the unfaithful will be trapped by evil desires.⁷ When a wicked man dies, hope perishes, and

10:20 Note the frequent parallel in Proverbs between the tongue and the heart. Our words reflect how we think; we can't think badly and never reflect it in our speech. Jesus understood, maybe from studying Proverbs, that our mouth speaks in reflection of our heart (Lk. 6:45).

11:4 *The day of wrath* – A reference to the final day of judgment at Christ's return. As we bow there naked before God's Son, it's bizarre to think that bank accounts, home ownership or wealth of any kind will be in the slightest bit relevant.

11:5 *Will direct his way* – If we live according to God's principles, we will not have the rudderless spirit which there is in this world. Somehow our life path becomes naturally clear to us.

11:7 *Hope perishes* – The Bible doesn't teach universal salvation nor some automatic

expectation of power comes to nothing.⁸ A righteous person is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked walks into it in his place.⁹ With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbour, but the righteous will be delivered through knowledge.¹⁰ When it goes well with the righteous, the city rejoices. When the wicked perish, there is shouting.¹¹ By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted, but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked.¹² One who despises his neighbour is without wisdom, but a man of understanding holds his peace.¹³ One who brings gossip betrays a confidence, but one who is of a trustworthy spirit is one who keeps a secret.¹⁴ Where there is no wise guidance the nation falls, but in the multitude of counsellors there is victory.¹⁵ He who is collateral for a stranger will suffer for it, but he who refuses pledges of collateral is secure.¹⁶ A gracious woman obtains honour, but violent men obtain riches.

Base Your Life on God

17 The merciful man does good to his own soul, but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh.¹⁸ Wicked people earn deceitful wages, but one who

sows righteousness reaps a sure reward.¹⁹ He who is truly righteous gets life; he who pursues evil gets death.²⁰ Those who are perverse in heart are an abomination to Yahweh, but those whose ways are blameless are His delight.²¹ Most certainly, the evil man will not be unpunished, but the seed of the righteous will be delivered.²² Like a gold ring in a pig's snout, so is a beautiful woman who lacks discretion.²³ The desire of the righteous is only for good; the expectation of the wicked is wrath.²⁴ There is one who scatters, and increases yet more. There is one who withholds more than is appropriate, but gains poverty.²⁵ The generous soul shall be made fat; he who waters shall be watered also himself.²⁶ People curse someone who withholds grain, but blessing will be on the head of him who sells it.²⁷ He who diligently seeks good seeks favour, but he who searches after evil, it shall come to him.²⁸ He who trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous shall flourish as the green leaf.²⁹ He who troubles his own house shall inherit the wind. The foolish shall be servant to the wise of heart.³⁰ The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; he who is wise wins souls.

reincarnation of the person after death. The wicked will ultimately remain dead without hope.

11:9 The tongue is more powerful than we think; people can be destroyed by others' words; even whole communities can be (:11). But the righteous will not be destroyed by such words, because their focus instead is on their knowledge or relationship with God.

11:26 A reference to Joseph's wisdom in selling grain to the starving.

11:30, 31 We can be to others as the tree of life was in Eden. We can win people for eternal life; their eternity is delegated by God to us. Such is the power and importance

31 Behold, the righteous shall be repaid in the earth; how much more the wicked and the sinner!

CHAPTER 12 Apr. 2

The Basis of a Righteous Life

Whoever loves correction loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid. **2** A good man shall obtain favour from Yahweh, but He will condemn a man of wicked devices. **3** A man shall not be established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous shall not be moved. **4** A worthy woman is the crown of her husband, but a disgraceful wife is as rottenness in his bones. **5** The thoughts of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful. **6** The words of the wicked are about lying in wait for blood, but the speech of the upright rescues them. **7** The wicked are overthrown, and are no more, but the house of the righteous shall stand. **8** A man shall be commended according to his wisdom, but he who has a warped mind shall be despised. **9** Better is he who is lightly esteemed and has a servant, than he who honours himself, and

of preaching. It is our fruit which becomes the fruit which gives eternal life. The fruit of the Spirit as seen in our characters is what will attract people to the eternal life, because we are living now how we will eternally live.

12:10 A gracious and sensitive spirit will be reflected in how we treat the natural creation.

12:14 The way we talk is here paralleled with our works, what we do with our hands. How we speak is really so important; good actions don't displace bad speaking.

12:15 *Right in his own eyes* – What seems right to us isn't necessarily so. We aren't born with any natural wisdom; unless we have a teachable spirit, open to God's teaching, then we will have only our very dysfunctional natural senses to guide us.

12:17 *He who is truthful testifies honestly* – This may seem to be obvious; but the idea is that the person who is truthful as a way of life, within their own heart, is going to also be truthful when it comes to having to testify in court.

lacks bread. **10** A righteous man respects the life of his animal, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel. **11** He who tills his land shall have plenty of bread, but he who chases fantasies is void of understanding. **12** The wicked desires the plunder of evil men, but the root of the righteous flourishes.

The Importance of Truthfulness

13 An evil man is trapped by the sinfulness of his lips, but the righteous shall come out of trouble. **14** A man shall be satisfied with good by the fruit of his mouth; the work of a man's hands shall be rewarded to him. **15** The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but he who is wise listens to counsel. **16** A fool shows his annoyance the same day, but one who overlooks an insult is prudent. **17** He who is truthful testifies honestly, but a false witness lies. **18** There is one who speaks rashly like the piercing of a sword, but the tongue of the wise heals. **19** Truth's lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only momentary. **20** Deceit is in the heart of those who plot evil,

but joy comes to the promoters of peace. ²¹ No mischief shall happen to the righteous, but the wicked shall be filled with evil. ²² Lying lips are an abomination to Yahweh, but those who do the truth are His delight. ²³ A prudent man keeps his knowledge, but the hearts of fools proclaim foolishness. ²⁴ The hands of the diligent ones shall rule, but laziness ends in slave labour. ²⁵ Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a kind word makes it glad. ²⁶ A righteous person is cautious in friendship, but the way of the wicked leads them astray. ²⁷ The slothful man doesn't roast his game, but the possessions of diligent men are prized. ²⁸ In the way of righteousness is life; in its path there is no death.

CHAPTER 13 Apr. 3 *Discipline, Instruction and Prosperity*

A wise son listens to his father's instruction, but a scoffer doesn't

listen to rebuke. ² By the fruit of his lips, a man enjoys good things; but the unfaithful crave violence. ³ He who guards his mouth guards his soul; one who opens wide his lips comes to ruin. ⁴ The soul of the sluggard desires, and has nothing, but the desire of the diligent shall be fully satisfied. ⁵ A righteous man hates lies, but a wicked man brings shame and disgrace. ⁶ Righteousness guards the way of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner. ⁷ There are some who are made rich, yet have nothing. There are some who are made poor, yet have great wealth. ⁸ The ransom of a man's life is his riches, but the poor hear no threats. ⁹ The light of the righteous shines brightly, but the lamp of the wicked is snuffed out. ¹⁰ Pride only breeds quarrels, but with ones who take advice is wisdom. ¹¹ Wealth gained dishonestly dwindles away, but he who gathers by hand makes it grow. ¹² Hope deferred makes the heart

12:25 *A kind word makes it glad* – Here and in :18 we see how powerful good words can be (Job 6:25). There's a positive power in words, even just one word, which we are prone to ignore, thinking that actions are so much more important than words.

12:28 *In its path there is no death* – We have here an Old Testament equivalent of the times when Jesus says we can have eternal life right now. It doesn't mean that the righteous don't die. They do, and will be resurrected to eternal life at Christ's return. But we can start living right now the kind of Kingdom life which we will eternally live. In this sense we "have eternal life", and there is "no death" in the way of life of the righteous.

13:3 *He who guards his mouth guards his soul* – In this sense as Jesus put it, we will be eternally justified or eternally condemned by our words (Mt. 12:37).

13:7 This last phrase is quoted about the Lord Jesus, who made Himself poor on the cross (2 Cor. 8:9). And yet Solomon, who made himself rich, was the very anti-Christ. These words are also part quoted in Phil. 2:7, about how on the cross, the Lord Jesus made himself poor, of no reputation, and now has been so highly exalted. Our living out of the Lord's cross is shown in our making of ourselves poor, in whatever sense. That is surely the unmistakable teaching of this allusion.

sick, but when longing is fulfilled, it is a tree of life.¹³ Whoever despises instruction will pay for it, but he who respects a command will be rewarded.¹⁴ The teaching of the wise is a spring of life, to turn others away from the snares of death.¹⁵ Good understanding wins favour; but the way of the unfaithful is hard.¹⁶ Every prudent man acts from knowledge, but a fool exposes folly.¹⁷ A wicked messenger falls into trouble, but a trustworthy envoy gains healing.¹⁸ Poverty and shame come to him who refuses discipline, but he who heeds correction shall be honoured.¹⁹ Longing fulfilled is sweet to the soul, but fools detest turning from evil.²⁰ One who walks with wise men grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.²¹ Misfortune pursues sinners, but prosperity rewards the righteous.²² A good man leaves an inheritance to his children's children, but the wealth of the sinner is stored for the righteous.²³ An abundance of food is in poor people's fields, but injustice sweeps it away.²⁴ One who spares the rod

hates his son, but one who loves him is careful to discipline him.²⁵ The righteous one eats to the satisfying of his soul, but the belly of the wicked goes hungry.

CHAPTER 14 Apr. 4

Fools: Their Characteristics and Destiny

Every wise woman builds her house, but the foolish one tears it down with her own hands.² He who walks in his uprightness fears Yahweh, but he who is perverse in his ways despises Him.³ The fool's talk brings a rod to his back, but the lips of the wise protect them.⁴ Where no oxen are, the crib is clean, but much increase is by the strength of the ox.⁵ A truthful witness will not lie, but a false witness pours out lies.⁶ A scoffer seeks wisdom, and doesn't find it, but knowledge comes easily to a discerning person.⁷ Stay away from a foolish man, for you won't find knowledge on his lips.⁸ The wisdom of the prudent is to think about his way, but the folly of fools is deceit.⁹ Fools mock at making

13:14 We have it within our power to disentangle people from the snare of eternal death. And we do this by teaching them. See on 14:27.

13:16 *A fool exposes folly* – The fact something is wrong or foolish doesn't mean that we should therefore always expose it. The way of wisdom is to decide when to speak and when to be silent.

13:19 *Longing fulfilled* – The opposite of this is to “detest turning from evil”. The “longing” is therefore for spiritual growth, for victory against sin. And this is what is the sweetest thing in spiritual experience.

14:7 *Stay away from a foolish man* – This is typical of many such commands in Proverbs. But we should remember that Solomon was writing to Israelites living within the people of God. Just because someone is part of God's people doesn't make them wise; we still have to decide wisely as to with whom we will closely walk in life.

14:8 Folly is here parallel with a lack of serious self-examination. In our day, the breaking of bread service is designed to provoke self-examination (1 Cor. 11:28).

atonement for sins, but among the upright there is good will.¹⁰ The heart knows its own bitterness and joy; he will not share these with a stranger.¹¹ The house of the wicked will be overthrown, but the tent of the upright will flourish.¹² There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.¹³ Even in laughter the heart may be sorrowful, and mirth may end in heaviness.

Consider Carefully Every Word

14 The unfaithful will be repaid for his own ways; likewise a good man will be rewarded for his ways.¹⁵ A simple man believes everything, but the prudent man carefully considers his ways.¹⁶ A wise man fears, and shuns evil, but the fool is hotheaded and reckless.¹⁷ He who is quick to become angry will commit folly, and a crafty man is hated.¹⁸ The simple inherit folly, but the prudent are crowned with knowledge.¹⁹ The evil bow down before the good, and the wicked at the gates of the righteous.²⁰ The poor person is shunned even by his own neighbour, but the rich person has many friends.²¹ He

who despises his neighbour sins, but blessed is he who has pity on the poor.²² Don't they go astray who plot evil? But love and faithfulness belong to those who plan good.²³ In all hard work there is profit, but the talk of the lips leads only to poverty.²⁴ The crown of the wise is their riches, but the folly of fools crowns them with folly.²⁵ A truthful witness saves souls, but a false witness is deceitful.²⁶ In the fear of Yahweh is a secure fortress, and He will be a refuge for His children.²⁷ The fear of Yahweh is a fountain of life, turning people from the snares of death.²⁸ In the multitude of people is the king's glory, but without people the prince is nothing.²⁹ He who is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a quick temper displays folly.³⁰ The life of the body is a heart at peace, but envy rots the bones.³¹ He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for his Maker, but he who is kind to the needy honours Him.³² The wicked is brought down in his calamity, but in death, the righteous has a refuge.³³ Wisdom remains in the heart of one who has understand-

14:10 The way of wisdom isn't to wear our heart on our sleeve, sharing our innermost thoughts with everyone and anyone.

14:11 Note the contrast between “the house” and “the tent”; the upright have the attitude that they are just passing through this life, with no permanent abode in this world in this present age (Heb. 13:14).

14:17 Quiet craftiness is as bad as hotheaded behaviour which is visible to everyone.

14:27 *Turning people from the snares of death* – But 13:14 says people are saved from the snares of death by our teaching them. The content of that teaching must therefore be the fear of God. His salvation is there in His word, but it becomes real for people by our teaching of it to them.

14:31 Therefore our attitude to the poor is our attitude to God. Hence Jesus teaches that He will judge us according to how we treated our poor brethren, because they represent Him (Mt. 25:40).

ing, and is even made known in the inward part of fools.³⁴ Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people.³⁵ The king's favour is toward a servant who deals wisely, but his wrath is toward one who causes shame.

CHAPTER 15 Apr. 5

The Power of the Tongue and the Fear of Yahweh

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.² The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of fools gushes out folly.³ Yahweh's eyes are everywhere, keeping watch on the evil and the good.⁴ A gentle tongue is a tree of life, but deceit in it crushes the spirit.⁵ A fool despises his father's correction, but he who heeds reproof shows prudence.⁶ In the house of the righteous is

14:33 The fool perceives wisdom in his innermost conscience, but only in passing; it doesn't remain within his consciousness as it does within the heart of the righteous. Passing interest in spirituality is very common in our world; but God's truth must abide within our heart if we are to be truly wise.

15:3 *Yahweh's eyes are everywhere* – A reference to God's presence everywhere through His Angels. This reminder is given in the context of warning us about our words; if we believe that God is really aware of absolutely everything, this will influence our words.

15:4 People are psychologically crushed when they realize that words spoken to them lacked integrity. The importance of our words is therefore because of their influence upon others. Appropriate gentleness in speech can also lead people to eternal life.

15:7 Again we see how the heart and the tongue ("lips") are paralleled; what we think really issues in our words (Lk. 6:45).

15:8 Here and elsewhere in Scripture, prayer is seen as a sacrifice. It requires the same effort and careful preparation beforehand (Heb. 13:15). The altar of incense represented the offering of prayer as a sacrifice (Rev. 8:3,4).

15:12 The implication is that people don't mix with the wise because they subconsciously fear being criticized, directly or indirectly. Those who can bear criticism relax with the wise (:31).

15:14 *Fools feed on folly* – A relevant warning to us who live in an age of constant comedy and entertainment, where folly is presented as joy (:21).

much treasure, but the income of the wicked brings trouble.⁷ The lips of the wise spread knowledge; not so with the heart of fools.⁸ The sacrifice made by the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.⁹ The way of the wicked is an abomination to Yahweh, but He loves him who follows after righteousness.¹⁰ There is stern discipline for one who forsakes the way: whoever hates reproof shall die.¹¹ Sheol and Abaddon are before Yahweh— how much more then the hearts of the children of men!

The Great Things of Life

12 A scoffer doesn't love to be reproved; he will not go to the wise.

13 A glad heart makes a cheerful face; but an aching heart breaks the spirit.

14 The heart of one who has understanding seeks knowledge, but the

mouths of fools feed on folly.¹⁵ All the days of the afflicted are wretched, but one who has a cheerful heart enjoys a continual feast.¹⁶ Better is little with the fear of Yahweh, than great treasure with trouble.¹⁷ Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fattened calf with hatred.¹⁸ A wrathful man stirs up contention, but one who is slow to anger appeases strife.¹⁹ The way of the sluggard is like a thorn patch, but the path of the upright is a highway.²⁰ A wise son makes a father glad, but a foolish man despises his mother.²¹ Folly is joy to one who is void of wisdom, but a man of understanding keeps his way straight.²² Where there is no counsel, plans fail; but in a multitude of counsellors they are established.²³ Joy comes to a man as a result of the reply of his mouth. How good is an appropriate word at the right time!²⁴ The path of life spirals upward for the wise, to keep him from going downward to Sheol.²⁵ Yahweh will uproot the house of the proud, but He will keep the widow's borders in-

tact.²⁶ Yahweh detests the thoughts of the wicked, but the thoughts of the pure are pleasing.²⁷ He who is greedy for gain troubles his own house, but he who hates bribes will live.²⁸ The heart of the righteous weighs answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes out evil.²⁹ Yahweh is far from the wicked, but He hears the prayer of the righteous.³⁰ The light of the eyes rejoices the heart; good news gives health to the bones.³¹ The ear that listens to reproof lives, and will be at home among the wise.³² He who refuses correction despises his own soul, but he who listens to reproof gets understanding.³³ The fear of Yahweh teaches wisdom; before honour is humility.

CHAPTER 16 Apr. 6

Our Lives Open before Yahweh

The plans of the heart within man,
T and the answer of the tongue,
is from Yahweh.¹ All the ways of a
man are clean in his own eyes; but
Yahweh weighs the motives.² Com-
mit your deeds to Yahweh, and your

15:26 God watches every thought of every person. Such knowledge is amazing. And we can please God Almighty in distant Heaven, just by how we are thinking. Such is the colossal significance of spiritual mindedness.

16:1 The implication is that there is an element to which God controls our thoughts and the words we come out with. This element which is beyond human effort is from God's grace through the operation of His Spirit. This same 'element' is alluded to in :4 – God somehow overrules and uses even the failures of the sinful; and in :9 we have the same theme, that there is an element of Divine direction over and above what we ourselves will in our own minds. Otherwise, salvation would be by steel-willed human effort alone rather than God's grace. This same theme, of God playing a role over and above our own efforts, concludes this chapter in :33. See on 20:24.

16:2 *Yahweh weighs the motives* – Our justification isn't on the basis that we happen to feel good about ourselves (:25); God's judgment rather than our own gut feelings is all important. Although He is Almighty, God "weighs" our motives, expending some effort in analyzing our deepest heart processes.

plans shall succeed.⁴ Yahweh has made everything for its own end—yes, even the wicked for the day of evil.⁵ Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to Yahweh: they shall certainly not be unpunished.⁶ By mercy and truth iniquity is atoned for; by the fear of Yahweh men depart from evil.⁷ When a man's ways please Yahweh, He makes even his enemies to be at peace with him.⁸ Better is a little with righteousness, than great revenues with injustice.⁹ A man's heart plans his course, but Yahweh directs his steps.

Take Life Seriously

¹⁰ Inspired judgments are on the lips of the king. He shall not betray his mouth.¹¹ Honest balances and scales are Yahweh's; all the weights in the bag are His work.¹² It is an abomination for kings to do wrong, for the throne is established by righteousness.¹³ Righteous lips are the delight of kings; they value one who speaks the truth.¹⁴ The king's wrath is as a messenger of death, but a wise man will pacify it.¹⁵ In the light of the king's face is life. His favour is like a cloud of the spring rain.¹⁶ How much better it is to get wisdom than

gold! Yes, to get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.¹⁷ The highway of the upright is to depart from evil. He who keeps His way preserves his soul.¹⁸ Pride goes before destruction, and an arrogant spirit before a fall.¹⁹ It is better to be of a humble spirit with the poor, than to divide the plunder with the proud.²⁰ He who heeds the word finds prosperity; whoever has faith in Yahweh is blessed.²¹ The wise in heart shall be called prudent. Pleasantness of the lips promotes instruction.²² Understanding is a fountain of life to one who has it, but the punishment of fools is their folly.²³ The heart of the wise instructs his mouth, and adds learning to his lips.²⁴ Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones.²⁵ There is a way which seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.²⁶ The appetite of the labouring man labours for him; for his mouth urges him on.²⁷ A worthless man devises mischief; his speech is like a scorching fire.²⁸ A perverse man stirs up strife, a gossiper separates close friends.²⁹ A man of violence entices his neighbour, and leads him in a way that is not good.³⁰ One who winks his

16:10 Solomon writes inspired truth in Proverbs, but it seems that much of what he writes was written with an eye to his own self-justification, especially about the need to respect the man who has wisdom and the wise man's superiority over all others (16). He even writes as if the king must be accepted as automatically infallible: “Inspired judgments are on the lips of the king” (see too 20:2). We too can teach God’s truths whilst also motivated in doing so by a desire for our own self-justification rather than His glory.

16:20 We see here the connection between God’s word and faith; faith comes by hearing God’s word (Rom. 10:17).

16:30 Negative body language may appear so insignificant, but it is judged by God as being “bent on evil”.

eyes to plot perversities, one who compresses his lips, is bent on evil.

³¹ Gray hair is a crown of glory; it is attained by a life of righteousness.

³² One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty; one who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city.

³³ The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh.

CHAPTER 17 Apr. 7

The Family, Relationships and Integrity

Better is a dry morsel of bread with quietness, than a house full of feasting with strife.

² A servant who deals wisely will rule over a son who causes shame, and shall have a part in the inheritance among the brothers.

³ The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, but Yahweh tests the hearts.

⁴ An evildoer heeds wicked lips; a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue.

⁵ Whoever mocks the poor reproaches his Maker. He who is glad at calamity shall not be unpunished.

⁶ Children's children are the crown of old men; the glory of children are their parents.

⁷ Arrogant speech isn't fitting for a fool, much less do lying lips

fit a prince.

⁸ A bribe is a precious stone in the eyes of him who gives it; wherever he turns, he apparently prospers.

⁹ He who covers an offence promotes love; but he who repeats a matter separates best friends.

¹⁰ A rebuke enters deeper into one who has understanding than a hundred lashes into a fool.

¹¹ An evil man seeks only rebellion; therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him.

¹² Let a bear robbed of her cubs meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly.

¹³ Whoever rewards evil for good, evil shall not depart from his house.

¹⁴ The beginning of strife is like breaching a dam, therefore stop contention before quarreling breaks out.

¹⁵ He who justifies the wicked, and he who condemns the righteous, both of them alike are an abomination to Yahweh.

¹⁶ Why is there money in the hand of a fool to buy wisdom, since he has no understanding?

The Wisdom of Silence

¹⁷ A friend loves at all times; and a brother is born for adversity.

¹⁸ A man without understanding strikes hands, and becomes collateral in the presence of his neighbour.

¹⁹ He who

16:32 *One who rules his spirit, than he who takes a city* – A reference to Samson.

17:5 The poor are God manifest to us; how we treat our poor brethren is how we treat God, and is the basis of our final judgment (M 25:40). This is a common theme in Proverbs; and we need to remember it constantly, especially as we are often tempted to consider others' poverty as the result of their own poor decision making and to think this excuses us from helping them.

17:9 *He who covers an offence* – This is paralleled in the second half of the verse with not gossiping about others' failures. It doesn't mean that we are to turn a blind eye to others' sins, rather that we shouldn't gossip about them to others.

17:14 Relationship breakdown needs to be bridged as soon as possible, as a matter of urgency; otherwise irreparable damage will be done and like water bursting from a dam, many others will be affected by it.

loves disobedience loves strife. One who builds a high gate seeks destruction.²⁰ One who has a perverse heart doesn't find prosperity, and one who has a deceitful tongue falls into trouble.²¹ He who becomes the father of a fool grieves; the father of a fool has no joy.²² A cheerful heart makes good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.²³ A wicked man receives a bribe in secret, to pervert the ways of justice.²⁴ Wisdom is before the face of one who has understanding, but the eyes of a fool wander to the ends of the earth.²⁵ A foolish son brings grief to his father, and bitterness to her who bore him.²⁶ Also to punish the righteous is not good, nor to flog officials for their integrity.²⁷ He who spares his words has knowledge. He who is even tempered is a man of understanding.²⁸ Even a fool, when he keeps silent, is counted wise. When

he shuts his lips, he is thought to be discerning.

CHAPTER 18 Apr. 8

Attitudes about Judgments and Disputes

A n unfriendly man pursues selfishness, and defies all sound judgment.² A fool has no delight in understanding, but only in revealing his own opinion.³ When wickedness comes, contempt also comes, and with shame comes disgrace.⁴ The words of a man's mouth are like deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is like a flowing brook.⁵ To be partial to the faces of the wicked is not good, nor to deprive the innocent of justice.⁶ A fool's lips come into strife, and his speech asks for beatings.⁷ A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are a snare to his soul.⁸ The words of a gossip are like tasty morsels: they go down into a

17:19 *One who builds a high gate seeks destruction* – Isolationism is actually a proactive seeking of destruction for others. In our age of retreat into ourselves, this needs to be considered carefully. 18:1 likewise exhorts against isolationism – it's a form of selfishness.

17:24 *The eyes of a fool wander to the ends of the earth* – Those whose hearts aren't focused upon God and His word are rudderless, looking worldwide for wisdom on the internet, but never finding true direction.

18:4 Words are important; yet they are so common, as we hear and speak millions of them each week, that we can easily forget their profound significance in our lives and those of others.

18:6 *His speech asks for beatings* – According to our words we will be judged at the last day (Mt. 12:37; Lk. 12:47,48); our words now may actually be as it were requesting our punishment then. We must so speak as those who will be judged, knowing that he who showed no mercy in his words will receive none (James 2:12,13); our words of mercy or condemnation, and perhaps *the way we say them*, will be the basis upon which we will be accepted or rejected. In this sense death or life are in the power of our tongue (:21).

18:8 It's attractive to us to hear gossip; the one who hears it will often not just ignore it but will take it deep within themselves.

person's innermost parts.⁹ One who is slack in his work is brother to him who is a master of destruction.¹⁰ The name of Yahweh is a strong tower: the righteous run into Him, and are safe.¹¹ The rich man's wealth is his strong city, like an unscalable wall in his own imagination.¹² Before destruction the heart of man is proud, but before honour is humility.¹³ He who gives answer before he hears, that is folly and shame to him.¹⁴ A man's spirit will sustain him in sickness, but a crushed spirit, who can bear?¹⁵ The heart of the discerning gets knowledge; the ear of the wise seeks knowledge.¹⁶ A man's gift makes room for him, and brings him before great men.¹⁷ He who pleads his cause first seems right; until another comes and questions him.¹⁸ The lot settles disputes, and keeps strong ones apart.¹⁹ A brother offended is more difficult to be won than a fortified city; and disputes are like the bars of a castle.²⁰ A man's stomach is filled with the fruit of his mouth. With the harvest of his lips he is satisfied.²¹ Death and life are in the power of the tongue; those

who love it will eat its fruit.²² Whoever finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains grace of Yahweh.²³ The poor plead for mercy, but the rich answer harshly.²⁴ A man of many companions may be ruined, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

CHAPTER 19 Apr. 9

Discipline, Poverty and Families

Better is the poor who walks in his integrity than he who is perverse in his lips and is a fool.² It isn't good to have zeal without knowledge; nor being hasty with one's feet and missing the way.³ The foolishness of man subverts his way; his heart rages against Yahweh.⁴ Wealth adds many friends, but the poor is separated from his friend.⁵ A false witness shall not be unpunished; he who pours out lies shall not go free.⁶ Many will entreat the favour of a ruler, and everyone is a friend to a man who gives gifts.⁷ All the relatives of the poor shun him: how much more do his friends avoid him! He pursues them with pleas, but they are gone.⁸ He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he

18:9 Again we see passive behaviour – in this case, laziness – paralleled with proactive destructive behaviour.

18:10 This has relevance to us in that we can be baptized into the Lord's Name.

18:11 One implication of this could be that those who trust in wealth isolate themselves from others.

18:18 The use of lots is seen positively here; they were used by the early church in Acts 1:26.

19:2 *Zeal without knowledge* – Applied by Paul to the Jews and all people who seek justification by works rather than faith in God's grace which is in Christ (Rom. 10:2), which is for us the ultimate "knowledge". This is like someone who walks earnestly but in the wrong direction, who has missed "the way", which is Christ (Jn. 14:6).

19:8 This verse is in the context of the preceding reflections that in human life, people who have wealth have friends but the poor have few friends. Whether or not we have

who keeps understanding shall find good.⁹ A false witness shall not be unpunished; he who utters lies shall perish.¹⁰ Delicate living is not appropriate for a fool, much less for a servant to have rule over princes.¹¹ The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger; it is his glory to overlook an offence.¹² The king's wrath is like the roaring of a lion, but his favour is like dew on the grass.¹³ A foolish son is the calamity of his father. A wife's quarrels are a continual dripping.¹⁴ House and riches are an inheritance from fathers, but a prudent wife is from Yahweh.¹⁵ Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep; the idle person shall suffer hunger.¹⁶ He who keeps the commandment keeps his soul, but he who is disrespectful in his ways shall die.¹⁷ He who has pity on the poor lends to Yahweh; He will reward him.¹⁸ Discipline

your son while there is hope; don't be a willing party to his death.¹⁹ A hot-tempered man must pay the penalty, for if you rescue him, you must do it again.²⁰ Listen to counsel and receive instruction, so that you may be wise in your very end.²¹ There are many plans in a man's heart, but Yahweh's counsel will prevail.²² That which makes a man to be desired is his kindness; a poor man is better than a liar.²³ The fear of Yahweh leads to life, and whoever has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm.²⁴ The lazy buries his hand in the dish; he will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.²⁵ Flog a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; rebuke one who has understanding, and he will gain knowledge.²⁶ He who robs his father and drives away his mother, is a son who causes shame and brings

popularity with others and human friendships, the wonder of finding the ultimate “understanding” of God, relationship with Him, makes that irrelevant.

19:11 We are not to take up every offence against us with others. There are times when our silence under provocation is in God's eyes our “glory”. This verse alludes to the fact that God is slow to anger and overlooks offences without always demanding our specific repentance (Ps. 103:8; 145:8). We are to reflect our experience of this to others.

19:14 *A prudent wife is from Yahweh* – Marriage is in a human sense a gamble, as we never really know our partner until we have been married some time to them. A good partnership is therefore a “grace” from God (18:22); whilst we can do our human best to have a good marriage, it is ultimately God who does the humanly impossible, of joining two different people together (Mt. 19:6); and marriage is therefore a grace from Him.

19:17 Our attitude to the poor is our attitude to God and will be the basis of our judgment (Mt. 25:40).

19:22 The implication is that the poor can still be kind; in our money-obsessed world, there's the wrong impression that generosity and kindness must involve financial giving.

19:25 *The simple will learn* – We are to learn by observing how sinners are punished even in this life.

reproach. ²⁷ If you stop listening to instruction, my son, you will stray from the words of knowledge. ²⁸ A corrupt witness mocks justice, and the mouth of the wicked gulps down iniquity. ²⁹ Penalties are prepared for scoffers, and beatings for the backs of fools.

CHAPTER 20 Apr. 10

The Deep Things of the Heart

Wine is a mocker, and beer is a brawler; whoever is led astray by them is not wise. ² The terror of a king is like the roaring of a lion; whoever provokes him to anger forfeits his own life. ³ It is an honour for a man to keep aloof from strife; but every fool will be quarrelling. ⁴ The lazy will not plough by reason of the winter; therefore he shall beg in harvest, and have nothing. ⁵ Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it out. ⁶ Many men claim to be men of unfailing love, but who can find a faithful man? ⁷ A righteous man walks in integrity; blessed

are his children after him. ⁸ A king who sits on the throne of judgment scatters away all evil with his eyes. ⁹ Who can say, I have made my heart pure. I am clean and without sin? ¹⁰ Differing weights and differing measures, both of them alike are an abomination to Yahweh. ¹¹ Even a child makes himself known by his doings, whether his work is pure, or whether it is right.

Drink from the Cup of Knowledge

¹² The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, Yahweh has made even both of them. ¹³ Don't love sleep, lest you come to poverty. Open your eyes, and you shall be satisfied with bread. ¹⁴ It's no good, it's no good, says the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasts. ¹⁵ There is gold and abundance of rubies; but the lips of knowledge are a rare jewel. ¹⁶ Take the garment of one who puts up collateral for a stranger; and hold him in pledge for a wayward woman. ¹⁷ Fraudulent food is sweet to a man, but afterwards his mouth is filled

20:1 Beer is a brawler – It is people and not liquid who brawl. The alcoholic drink is therefore put by metonymy for the alcoholic; they become identified with the substance of their addiction. Anything in human life with which we become totally identified, be it football teams or alcohol, is an addiction which takes us away from being the persons God intends us to be.

20:5 There is good wisdom within many faithful people which never becomes apparent until another person draws it out. This should be the result of good company and true spiritual fellowship – bringing out the best in each other which is often latent and would be otherwise unavailable for others' benefit.

20:6 There's much talk in the world about "love", but no word is more misunderstood. Love must be connected to faith and hope if it is to be love as God intends (1 Cor. 13:13); and faith and hope produce love in their ultimate term (Col. 3:14).

20:7 Integrity is what will most influence our children in practice.

20:16 Hold him in pledge for a wayward woman – An allusion to Judah's sin with Tamar (Gen. 38:25).

with gravel.¹⁸ Plans are established by advice; by wise guidance you wage war!¹⁹ He who goes about as a tale-bearer reveals secrets; therefore don't keep company with him who opens wide his lips.²⁰ Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp shall be put out in blackness of darkness.

Truth in the Innermost Parts

21 An inheritance quickly gained at the beginning won't be blessed in the end.²² Don't say, I will pay back evil. Wait for Yahweh, and He will save you.²³ Yahweh detests differing weights, and dishonest scales are not pleasing.²⁴ A man's steps are from Yahweh; how then can man understand his way?²⁵ It is a snare to a man to make a rash dedication, then later to consider his vows.²⁶ A wise king winnows out the wicked, and drives the threshing wheel over them.

20:22 If we are wronged, the ultimate justice will be done when we are eternally saved at the time of Christ's return – and not in this life.

20:24 There is an element of Divine guidance in our lives over and above our own efforts; see on 16:1.

20:27 Our self-examination is what reveals us to the Lord. What we think about at the memorial meeting, as we are faced with the memory of the crucified Saviour, is therefore an epitome of what we really are. If all we are thinking of is the taste of the wine, the cover over the bread, the music, what we didn't agree with in the meeting, all the external things of our Christianity; or if we are sitting there taking bread and wine as a conscience salver, doing our little religious ritual to make us feel psychologically safe – then we simply don't know Him. We are surface level believers only. And this is the message we give Him. Our spirit / attitude is the candle of the Lord, with which He searches us. Our thoughts when confronted by the cross reveal us to Him who died on it. Likewise Joseph (one of the most detailed types of the Lord Jesus) knew / discerned his brethren by his cup (Gen. 44:5). 1 Cor. 11:31,32 suggests that our self-judgment at the breaking of bread is in fact the Lord's judgment of us.

21:2 *He turns it wherever He desires* – See on 16:1.

21:4 The wicked see life within the light of their own pride; everything becomes subjected to their need to present themselves well.

27 The spirit of man is Yahweh's lamp, searching all his innermost parts.²⁸ Love and faithfulness keep the king safe; his throne is sustained by love.²⁹ The glory of young men is their strength. The splendour of old men is their gray hair.³⁰ Wounding blows cleanse away evil, and beatings purge the innermost parts.

CHAPTER 21 Apr. 11

God Know All about Us

The king's heart is in Yahweh's hand like the watercourses; He turns it wherever He desires.² Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but Yahweh weighs the hearts.³ To do righteousness and justice is more acceptable to Yahweh than sacrifice.⁴ A high look and a proud heart are the lamp of the wicked, and are sin.⁵ The plans of the diligent surely lead to profit; and everyone who is hasty surely rushes to poverty.⁶ Getting

wealth by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapour for those who seek death.
 7 The violence of the wicked will drive them away, because they refuse to do what is right. 8 The way of the guilty is devious, but the conduct of the innocent is upright.

Don't Live Just for Today

9 It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than to share a house with a contentious woman. 10 The soul of the wicked desires evil; his neighbour finds no mercy in his eyes. 11 When the mocker is punished, the simple gains wisdom. When the wise is instructed, he receives knowledge. 12 The Righteous One considers the house of the wicked, and brings the wicked to ruin. 13 Whoever stops his ears at the cry of the poor, he will also cry out, but shall not be heard. 14 A gift in secret pacifies anger; and a bribe in the cloak, strong wrath. 15 It is joy to the righteous to do justice; but it is a destruction to the workers of iniquity. 16 The man who wanders out of the way of understanding shall

remain in the assembly of the dead. 17 He who loves pleasure shall be a poor man; he who loves wine and oil shall not be rich. 18 The wicked is a ransom for the righteous; the treacherous for the upright. 19 It is better to dwell in a desert land, than with a contentious and fretful woman. 20 There is precious treasure and oil in the dwelling of the wise; but a foolish man swallows it up. 21 He who follows after righteousness and kindness finds life, righteousness, and honour. 22 A wise man scales the city of the mighty, and brings down the strength of its confidence. 23 Whoever guards his mouth and his tongue keeps his soul from troubles. 24 The proud and haughty man, scoffer is his name; he works in the arrogance of pride. 25 The desire of the lazy kills him, for his hands refuse to labour. 26 There are those who covet greedily all day long; but the righteous give and don't withhold. 27 The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination: how much more, when he brings it with a wicked mind!

21:13 We will all cry out for mercy and grace at the day of judgment. The mean may appear prosperous in this life, but we should live ever aware that we are spiritually poor because of our own bad decisions, just as the poor are often poor because of their own weaknesses and poor decision making; and we will cry out to God for His mercy at the last day. We therefore ought to be responsive to the cries of the poor today.

21:16 *Remain in the assembly of the dead* – The punishment for the wicked, including those who once walked with God, is eternal death, and not eternal conscious torment.

21:19 Solomon often interjects some comment about the misery of living with an unspiritual woman, apparently out of context with what he is writing about (:9 also). Although he was inspired in his writing, this may reflect how always weighing on his mind was the fact that his 1000 wives and concubines never brought him happiness but only a desire for isolationism from everybody (1 Kings 11:3); and he therefore keeps on making this kind of comment. Intimacy between persons can only be achieved God's way, which is through lifelong stable relationships bound together by Him (Mt. 19:6).

28 A false witness will perish, but a man who listens speaks consistently.
 29 A wicked man hardens his face; but as for the upright, he establishes his ways.
 30 There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against Yahweh.
 31 The horse is prepared for the day of battle; but victory is with Yahweh.

CHAPTER 22 Apr. 12

Discipline Provides the Answer

A good name is more desirable than great riches, and loving favour is better than silver and gold.
 2 The rich and the poor have this in common: Yahweh is the maker of them all.
 3 A prudent man sees danger, and hides himself; but the simple pass on, and suffer for it.
 4 The result of humility and the fear of Yahweh is wealth, honour, and life.
 5 Thorns and snares are in the path of the wicked: whoever guards his

soul stays away from them.
 6 Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.
 7 The rich rule over the poor; the borrower is servant to the lender.
 8 He who sows wickedness reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed.
 9 He who has a generous eye will be blessed; for he shares his food with the poor.
 10 Drive out the mocker, and strife will go out; yes, quarrels and insults will stop.
 11 He who loves purity of heart and speaks gracefully is the king's friend.
 12 The eyes of Yahweh watch over knowledge; but He frustrates the words of the unfaithful.
 13 The lazy one says, There is a lion outside! I will be killed in the streets!
 14 The mouth of an adulteress is a deep pit: he who is under Yahweh's wrath will fall into it.
 15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child: the rod of discipline drives it far from him.
 16 Whoever

22:2 One implication of believing that God is our personal creator is that we will not be envious of the rich; we will not see them as so fundamentally different from ourselves.

22:4 *Wealth, honour, and life* – The gift of “life” surely refers to eternal life; this will be given at Christ’s return along with wealth and honour.

22:5 *Thorns and snares are in the path of the wicked* – The Proverbs often allude to the Law of Moses or earlier Israelite history. Here the reference is to the only other time that “thorns and snares” occur together in the Bible, in Josh. 23:13, where Israel are warned that association and intermarriage with the pagan world around them will be as thorns and snares to them. The wicked therefore put these things in their own path; and again, Solomon makes this warning whilst failing spectacularly himself in this very thing.

22:6 God works with individuals and we are each independently judged regardless of whether we had believing or unbelieving parents, and so it cannot be that someone comes to the Kingdom simply because of faithful parents. And yet none of us will reach salvation purely by our own effort; there are other elements over and above that, and faithful parenting is one such element in the final algorithm which determines who is saved and who isn’t. It’s an endless motivation for parents, therefore, to raise their children in God’s way.

oppresses the poor for his own increase and whoever gives to the rich, both come to poverty.

The Thirty Pieces of Advice

17 Turn your ear, and listen to the words of the wise; apply your heart to my teaching. **18** For it is a pleasant thing if you keep them within you, if all of them are ready on your lips. **19** That your trust may be in Yahweh, I teach you today, even you. **20** Haven't I written to you thirty excellent things of counsel and knowledge, **21** to teach you truth, reliable words, to give sound answers to the ones who sent you? **22** Don't exploit the poor, because he is poor and don't crush the needy in court; **23** for Yahweh will plead their case, and plunder the life of those who plunder them. **24** Don't befriend a hot-tempered man, and don't associate with one who harbours anger: **25** lest you learn his ways, and ensnare your soul. **26** Don't you be one of those who strike hands, of those who are collateral for debts. **27** If you don't have means to pay, why should he take away your bed from under you? **28** Don't move the ancient boundary

stone, which your fathers have set up. **29** Do you see a man skilled in his work? He will serve kings. He won't serve obscure men.

CHAPTER 23 Apr. 13

When you sit to eat with a ruler, consider diligently what is before you; **2** put a knife to your throat, if you are a man given to appetite. **3** Don't be desirous of his dainties, since they are deceitful food. **4** Don't weary yourself to be rich; in your wisdom, show restraint. **5** Why do you set your eyes on that which is not? For it certainly sprouts wings like an eagle and flies in the sky. **6** Don't eat the food of him who has a stingy eye, and don't crave his delicacies: **7** for as he thinks about the cost, so he is. Eat and drink! he says to you, but his heart is not with you. **8** The morsel which you have eaten you shall vomit up, and lose your good words. **9** Don't speak in the ears of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of your words. **10** Don't move the ancient boundary stone; don't encroach on the fields of the fatherless; **11** for their Defender is strong, He will plead their case

22:16 *Come to poverty* – Considering that the wicked often prosper materially in this life, “poverty” must refer to poverty of spirit.

22:21 *To the ones who sent you* – People came to hear Solomon's wisdom from many nations (1 Kings 4:34), so the book of Proverbs was maybe first compiled as an answer to be sent back to them.

22:25 Bad company, even amongst the people of God, rubs off on us; we are more vulnerable to negative spiritual influences than we think.

23:5 He had all the right theory. Solomon was an active, industrious person by nature; and whilst all his many proverbs criticizing the lazy and glorifying the diligent are true as they stand, is there not in all this some element of self-justification, interpreting his own natural personality type as inherently righteous?

23:11 *He will plead their case* – God is here likened to the counsel for the defence in

against you. ¹² Apply your heart to instruction, and your ears to the words of knowledge. ¹³ Don't withhold correction from a child. If you punish him with the rod, he will not die. ¹⁴ Punish him with the rod, and save his soul from Sheol. ¹⁵ My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad, even mine: ¹⁶ yes, my heart will rejoice, when your lips speak what is right. ¹⁷ Don't let your heart envy sinners; but rather fear Yahweh all the day long. ¹⁸ Indeed surely there is a future hope, and your hope will not be cut off. ¹⁹ Listen, My son, and be wise, and keep your heart on the right path! ²⁰ Don't keep company with those who drink too much wine, or those who gorge themselves on meat; ²¹ for the drunkard and the glutton shall become poor; and drowsiness clothes them in rags. ²² Listen to your father who gave you life, and don't despise your mother when she is old. ²³ Buy the truth, and don't

sell it. Get wisdom, discipline, and understanding. ²⁴ The father of the righteous has great joy. Whoever fathers a wise child delights in him. ²⁵ Let your father and your mother be glad! Let her who bore you rejoice! ²⁶ My son, give me your heart; and let your eyes observe my ways. ²⁷ For a prostitute is a deep pit; and a Gentile woman is a narrow well. ²⁸ Yes, she lies in wait like a robber, and increases the unfaithful among men. ²⁹ Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaints? Who has needless bruises? Who has bloodshot eyes? ³⁰ Those who stay long at the wine; those who go to seek out mixed wine. ³¹ Don't look at the wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly. ³² In the end, it bites like a snake, and poisons like a viper. ³³ Your eyes will see strange things, and your mind will imagine confusing things. ³⁴ Yes, you will be as he who lies down in the midst

the final court of Divine justice. And yet He is also the judge of all. Each of the situations we find ourselves in is played out before the court of Heaven, and the judgment of the last day will be a statement of those judgments which are happening in our lives today. God hasn't as it were turned off from this world, to open the books at the end of history and see how we behaved; He is watching and passionately judging today.

23:17 Envy of others just isn't on our agenda if we are rejoicing in our relationship with God, and focused on the future hope we have of eternity in God's Kingdom at Christ's return (:18). These things eclipse any tendency to wish we were like the rich and powerful in this brief, fleeting life. See on 24:20.

23:26, 27 Even when married to Gentile women, Solomon could charge his son to "observe my ways. For... a Gentile woman is a narrow well". The fact he himself had fallen into the pit of marriage to unbelievers just didn't seem to occur to him; he was sure that he was in fact an upright example. This passage reflects more than many the extent to which Solomon's conscience was so deeply damaged. For he wasn't saying 'Do as I say but not as I do'. He was beyond that – doing the very wrong that he warned others not to do, and confidently presenting himself to them as a good example. The death of conscience is something we have to watch against all our days.

of the sea, or as he who lies on top of the rigging: ³⁵ They hit me, and I was not hurt! They beat me, and I don't feel it! When will I wake up so that I can do it again?

CHAPTER 24 Apr. 14

The Ways of the Wise

Don't be envious of evil men; neither desire to be with them: ² for their hearts plot violence, and their lips talk about mischief. ³ Through wisdom a house is built; by understanding it is established; ⁴ by knowledge the rooms are filled with all rare and beautiful treasure. ⁵ A wise man has great power and a knowledgeable man increases strength; ⁶ for by wise guidance you wage your war; and victory is in many advisors. ⁷ Wisdom is too high for a fool: he doesn't open his mouth in the gate. ⁸ One who plots to do evil will be called a schemer. ⁹ The schemes of folly are sin. The mocker is detested by men. ¹⁰ If you falter in the time of trouble, your strength is small. ¹¹ Rescue those who are being led away to death! Indeed, hold back those who are staggering to the slaughter! ¹² If you say, Behold, we didn't know

this; doesn't He who weighs the hearts consider it? He who keeps your soul, doesn't He know it? Shall He not render to every man according to his work? ¹³ My son, eat honey, for it is good; the droppings of the honeycomb, which are sweet to your taste: ¹⁴ so you shall feel wisdom to be to your soul; if you have found it, then there will be a reward, your hope will not be cut off. ¹⁵ Don't lay in wait, wicked man, against the habitation of the righteous. Don't destroy his resting place: ¹⁶ for a righteous man falls seven times, and rises up again; but the wicked are overthrown by calamity. ¹⁷ Don't rejoice when your enemy falls, don't let your heart be glad when he is overthrown; ¹⁸ lest Yahweh see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him. ¹⁹ Don't fret yourself because of evildoers; neither be envious of the wicked: ²⁰ for there will be no reward to the evil man; and the lamp of the wicked shall be snuffed out. ²¹ My son, fear Yahweh and the king. Don't join those who are rebellious: ²² for their calamity will rise suddenly; and who knows the destruction of them both?

24:12 As God keeps us from spiritual destruction, so we should try to keep others. We aren't to say within ourselves that we didn't realize that they were going wrong. This is a piercing analysis of our psychology; we hold back from the awkwardness of engagement with others about their life path because we kid ourselves that they are OK really.

24:16 The righteous fall, spiritually and materially – but rise up. This rising up again is one of the characteristics of the righteous, not being swamped by failure.

24:18 God is more angry with gloating over others' fall than over the fall itself.

24:20 Our hope of future, eternal reward at Christ's return means we will not be jealous of others (:19). See on 23:17.

Other Wise Sayings

23 These also are sayings of the wise. To show partiality in judgment is not good. **24** He who says to the wicked, You are righteous; peoples shall curse him, and nations shall abhor him—**25** but it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and a rich blessing will come on them. **26** An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips. **27** Prepare your work outside, and get your fields ready. Afterwards, build your house. **28** Don't be a witness against your neighbour without cause. Don't deceive with your lips. **29** Don't say, I will do to him as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work. **30** I went by the field of the lazy, by the vineyard of the man void of understanding; **31** behold, it was all grown over with thorns. Its

surface was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. **32** Then I saw, and considered well. I saw, and received instruction: **33** a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep; **34** so your poverty will come as a robber, and your want as an armed man.

CHAPTER 25 Apr. 15

Say the Right Thing at the Right Time

These also are proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied out. **2** It is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter. **3** As the heavens for height, and the earth for depth, so the hearts of kings are unsearchable. **4** Take away the dross from the silver, and material comes out for the refiner;

24:25 The Proverbs give so much advice about judgment. At first sight it may appear directed to the tiny minority within Israel who were called to be judges; but whilst we cannot condemn others, we are to judge righteously, to have righteous opinions and draw spiritual conclusions about life situations. This is why we have so much advice about how to ‘judge’.

24:29 *I will render to the man according to his work* – We are not to say this, because Christ is coming to judge and render to each person according to their work (Rev. 22:12). We can know great peace from resigning the need to render others their judgment.

25:3 When Solomon laments that a sinful land has many rulers, but stability comes from a wise ruler (28:2), he is stating an inspired truth; but it is inevitable that he framed it in such terms as justified his own dictatorial rule, as if his wisdom justified him in crushing any opposition leaders. It was really Solomon's self-justification. Solomon taught that the heart of kings is unsearchable, i.e., it cannot be examined, being as far above the earth as heaven is. Solomon thought that his possession of theoretical wisdom placed him in a God-like position above his people, and therefore they dare not even begin to question him or examine him; and none should therefore dare to ‘exalt himself’ in the King’s presence (:6). Truly, “knowledge puffs up”. And our very possession of ‘the truth’ of Christ and the word of God carries with it the same potential temptations, leading us to consider the world so far beneath us, that we can do what we wish with no accountability to anyone.

⁵ remove the wicked from the king's presence, and his throne will be established in righteousness. ⁶ Don't exalt yourself in the presence of the king, or claim a place among great men; ⁷ for it is better that it be said to you, Come up here, than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince, whom your eyes have seen. ⁸ Don't be hasty in bringing charges to court. What will you do in the end when your neighbour shames you? ⁹ Debate your case with your neighbour, and don't betray the confidence of another; ¹⁰ lest one who hears it put you to shame, and your bad reputation never depart. ¹¹ A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. ¹² As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover to an obedient ear. ¹³ As the cold of snow in the time of harvest, so is a faithful messenger to those who send him; for he refreshes the soul of his masters. ¹⁴ As clouds and wind without rain, so is he who boasts of gifts deceptively. ¹⁵ By patience a ruler is persuaded; a soft tongue breaks the bone.

Causes of Misery and Joy

¹⁶ Have you found honey? Eat as much as is sufficient for you, lest

you eat too much and vomit it. ¹⁷ Let your foot be seldom in your neighbour's house, lest he be weary of you and hate you. ¹⁸ A man who gives false testimony against his neighbour is like a club, a sword, or a sharp arrow. ¹⁹ Confidence in someone unfaithful in time of trouble is like a bad tooth or a lame foot. ²⁰ As one who takes away a garment in cold weather, or vinegar on soda, so is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. ²¹ If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat. If he is thirsty, give him water to drink: ²² for you will heap coals of fire on his head, and Yahweh will reward you. ²³ The north wind brings forth rain: so a backbiting tongue brings an angry face. ²⁴ It is better to dwell in the corner of the housetop, than to share a house with a contentious woman. ²⁵ Like cold water to a thirsty soul, so is good news from a far country. ²⁶ Like a muddied spring, and a polluted well, so is a righteous man who gives way before the wicked. ²⁷ It is not good to eat much honey; nor is it honourable to seek one's own honour. ²⁸ Like a city that is broken down and without walls is a man whose spirit is without restraint.

25:5 This was justifying the way Solomon killed Shimei at the establishment of his kingdom. His teaching of wisdom is constantly mixed with self-justification; our preaching must never be like this. See on 29:7.

25:7 Jesus says that this is exactly what will happen at the day of judgment (Lk. 14:10).

25:16 Solomon warns about only eating a limited amount of the honey you may find. Yet Ecclesiastes 1 and 2 show how Solomon found honey as it were, he had the opportunity to do and experience what he wanted – and he ate so much he became spiritually sick.

25:22 This is applied to each of us in Rom. 12:20.

CHAPTER 26 Apr. 16***The Folly of Fools***

Like snow in summer and as rain in harvest, so honour is not fitting for a fool.² Like a fluttering sparrow, like a darting swallow, so the undeserved curse doesn't come to rest.³ A whip is for the horse, a bridle for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools!⁴ Don't answer a fool according to his folly, lest you also be like him.⁵ Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own eyes.⁶ One who sends a message by the hand of a fool is cutting off his own feet and drinking violence.⁷ Like the legs of the lame that hang loose: so is a parable in the mouth of fools.⁸ As one who binds a stone in a sling, so is he who gives honour to a fool.⁹ Like a thorn that goes into the hand of a drunk person, so is a parable in the mouth of fools.¹⁰ As an archer who wounds all, so is he who hires a fool or he who hires those who pass by.¹¹ As a dog that returns to his vomit, so is a fool who repeats his folly.¹² Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him.¹³ The

26:4, 5 These verses don't contradict, rather the intention is to teach us that we must treat people in different ways at different times; sometimes we should say something, others we should remain silent. It is wisdom which teaches us. It's too simplistic to respond to people the same way every time.

26:11 This verse is applied in 2 Pet. 2:22 to baptized Christian believers who return to their old way of life. The implication is that at our conversion we as it were vomited up our old way of life; to return to it is as vile as a dog returning to its own vomit.

26:13 Laziness is often justified as caution.

26:16 Just assuming that we are right and refusing to be self-critical, allowing discretion or wisdom to teach us, is a form of laziness.

26:22 We all naturally like to hear gossip, we find it tasty; let's not deceive ourselves that actually, we aren't like that; we are, and must make conscious effort not to listen to it.

lazy person says, There is a lion in the road! A fierce lion roams the streets!¹⁴ As the door turns on its hinges, so does the lazy one on his bed.¹⁵ The lazy one buries his hand in the dish; he is too lazy to bring it back to his mouth.

The Power of Bad Words

16 The lazy one is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who answer with discretion.¹⁷ Like one who grabs a dog's ears is one who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own.¹⁸ Like a madman who shoots burning torches, arrows, and death,¹⁹ so is the man who deceives his neighbour and says, Am I not joking?²⁰ For lack of wood a fire goes out; without gossip, a quarrel dies down.²¹ As coals are to hot embers and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindling strife.²² The words of a whisperer are as dainty morsels, they go down into the innermost parts.²³ Like the glaze covering an earthen vessel are smooth words with an evil heart.²⁴ A malicious man disguises himself with his lips, but he harbours evil in his heart.²⁵ When his speech

is charming, don't believe him; for there are seven abominations in his heart. ²⁶ His malice may be concealed by deception, but his wickedness will be exposed in the assembly. ²⁷ Whoever digs a pit shall fall into it; whoever rolls a stone, it will come back on him. ²⁸ A lying tongue hates those it hurts; and a flattering mouth works ruin.

CHAPTER 27 Apr. 17

Faithfulness to Friends and Recognising True Values

Don't boast about tomorrow; for you don't know what a day may bring forth. ² Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips. ³ A stone is heavy and sand is a burden;

but a fool's provocation is heavier than both. ⁴ Wrath is cruel and anger is overwhelming; but who is able to stand before jealousy? ⁵ Better is open rebuke than hidden love. ⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend; although the kisses of an enemy are profuse. ⁷ A full soul loathes a honeycomb; but to a hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet. ⁸ As a bird that wanders from her nest, so is a man who wanders from his home. ⁹ Perfume and incense bring joy to the heart; so does earnest counsel from a man's friend. ¹⁰ Don't forsake your friend and your father's friend. Don't go to your brother's house in the day of your disaster: better is a neighbour who is near than a distant brother. ¹¹ Be wise, my son, and bring joy to

26:26 Exposed in the assembly – Yet the wicked prosper in this life, and often go to their graves without their deceitful words having been revealed. Yet they shall be exposed “in the assembly”. There is a theme in Bible teaching about the day of judgment, that our individual judgment will somehow be visible to all (Lk. 12:1-3; Rev. 16:15). All our secret words, thoughts and real intentions will then be made public to all; there's therefore no point to be hypocritical in this life, thinking we have cleverly hidden our real positions and feelings, because ultimately all will be public knowledge to everyone for eternity.

27:1 James 4:14,15 alludes to this verse, teaching that our speech should be characterized by frequent statements that our plans are “God willing” or “If the Lord will”.

27:5 The implication is that if we love someone, we must show it – and that may require us to rebuke them at times, as a reflection of that love we have for them (:6).

27:7 To a hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet – The context of the surrounding verses speak of loving friends rebuking their friends in love. So the idea may be that we are all spiritually hungry, and the bitterness of receiving rebuke from our friends will therefore be sweet to us. It's the spiritually proud, who consider themselves full, who have no liking for rebuke.

27:10 This whole section teaches the importance of having faithful, spiritually minded friends. True fellowship within the family of God's people means that we can relate to each other as if we really are natural family. The idea of ‘out of church Christians’ is a contradiction in terms; we are designed to develop spiritually as a result of true fellowship with other believers. Poor church experiences shouldn't lead us to retreat within ourselves, because there is no path to growth within the body of God's people if we cut ourselves off from them (Jn. 15:5).

my heart, then I can answer my tormentor.¹² A prudent man sees danger and takes refuge; but the simple pass on and suffer for it.¹³ Take his garment when he puts up collateral for a stranger; hold it for a wayward woman!¹⁴ He who blesses his neighbour with a loud voice early in the morning, it will be taken as a curse by him.¹⁵ A continual dropping on a rainy day and a contentious wife are alike:¹⁶ restraining her is like restraining the wind, or like grasping oil in his right hand.

Your Heart Shows in Your Face

¹⁷ Iron sharpens iron; so a man sharpens his friend's countenance.¹⁸ Whoever tends the fig tree shall eat its fruit; he who looks after his master shall be honoured.¹⁹ As water reflects a face, so a man's heart reflects the man.²⁰ Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied; and a man's eyes are never satisfied.²¹ The crucible is for silver, and the furnace for gold; but man is tested by his praise.²² Though you grind a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with grain, yet his foolishness will not be removed from him.²³ Know well the state of your flocks, and pay attention to your herds:²⁴ for riches are not forever, nor does even the crown endure

to all generations.²⁵ The hay is removed, and the new growth appears, the grasses of the hills are gathered in.²⁶ The lambs are for your clothing, and the goats are the price of a field.²⁷ There will be plenty of goats' milk for your food, for your family's food, and for the nourishment of your servant girls.

CHAPTER 28 Apr. 18

If You Turn Aside from God's Law

The wicked flee when no one pursues; but the righteous are as bold as a lion.² In rebellion, a land has many rulers, but order is maintained by a man of understanding and knowledge.³ A needy man who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain which leaves no crops.⁴ Those who forsake the law praise the wicked; but those who keep the law contend with them.⁵ Evil men don't understand justice; but those who seek Yahweh understand it fully.⁶ Better is the poor who walks in his integrity, than he who is perverse in his ways, and he is rich.⁷ Whoever keeps the law is a wise son; but he who is a companion of gluttons shames his father.⁸ He who increases his wealth by excessive interest gathers it for one who has pity on the poor.⁹ He who turns away his ear from hear-

27:21 How we respond to praise is an indicator of who we really are spiritually, because our response will indicate whether we are proud or humble.

28:2 See on 25:3.

28:5 *Those who seek Yahweh understand it fully* – Note the paradox between ‘seeking’ and ‘fully ‘understanding’. The seeker recognizes he hasn’t yet arrived at full understanding; but that process of humble seeking God is in fact reckoned as ‘fully understanding’.

28:9 Our attitude to God’s word is related to the effectiveness of our prayers; insofar as God’s word abides in us, we will ask for things which God will grant (Jn. 15:7), and

ing the law, even his prayer is an abomination.¹⁰ Whoever causes the upright to go astray in an evil way, he will fall into his own trap; but the blameless will inherit good.¹¹ The rich man is wise in his own eyes; but the poor who has understanding sees through him.¹² When the righteous triumph, there is great glory; but when the wicked rise, men hide themselves.¹³ He who conceals his sins doesn't prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy.¹⁴ Blessed is the man who always fears; but one who hardens his heart falls into trouble.¹⁵ As a roaring lion or a charging bear, so is a wicked ruler over helpless people.¹⁶ A tyrannical ruler lacks judgment. One who hates ill-gotten gain will have long days.¹⁷ A man who is tormented by having taken life blood will be a fugitive until death; no one will support him.¹⁸ Whoever walks blamelessly is kept safe; but one with perverse ways will fall suddenly.

Great Harm in Apparently Harmless Ways

¹⁹ One who works his land will have an abundance of food; but one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty.²⁰ A faithful man is rich with blessings; but one who is eager to be rich will not go unpunished.²¹ To show partiality is not good; yet a man will do wrong for a piece of bread.²² A stingy man hurries after riches, and doesn't know that poverty waits for him.²³ One who rebukes a man will afterward find more favour than one who flatters with the tongue.²⁴ Whoever robs his father or his mother and says, It's not wrong is a partner with a destroyer.²⁵ One who is greedy stirs up strife; but one who trusts in Yahweh will prosper.²⁶ One who trusts in himself is a fool; but one who walks in wisdom is kept safe.²⁷ One who gives to the poor has no lack; but one who closes his eyes will have many curses.²⁸ When the wicked rise, men hide

we will ask in faith, because faith comes from hearing God's word (Rom. 10:17). The various aspects of the believing life, e.g. prayer and Bible reading, mesh together to produce an upward spiritual of spiritual development.

28:11 The problem with wealth is the illusion it brings that everything can be bought for a price, including wisdom and spirituality. It's not surprising therefore that the majority of God's people have been kept poor by Him.

28:14 *Blessed is the man who always fears* – This is in designed contrast to the way :1 speaks of the righteous as bold as a lion, and the wicked as fearful. The 'fear' spoken of here must refer to a fear of God, of sinning against Him – and this, paradoxically, makes us not nervous, but bold and positive in our life path.

28:21 People will betray others and do and say awful things to them just in the hope of a tiny material advantage to them. Judas' betrayal of Christ can be read as largely motivated by a love of money, and a relatively small sum too.

28:25 Seeking after wealth is contrasted with trusting in Yahweh – i.e. in His promise to provide our daily bread and clothing.

28:27 *One who closes his eyes* – This is the opposite of 'giving to the poor'. We often fail to be generous spirited (and we can give to the poor in many ways apart from

themselves; but when they perish, the righteous thrive.

CHAPTER 29 Apr. 19

Consequences of Bad Government

He who is often rebuked and stiffens his neck will be destroyed suddenly, with no remedy.² When the righteous thrive, the people rejoice; but when the wicked rule, the people groan.³ Whoever loves wisdom brings joy to his father; but a companion of prostitutes squanders his wealth.⁴ The king by justice makes the land stable, but he who takes bribes tears it down.⁵ A man who flatters his neighbour spreads a net for his own feet.⁶ An evil man is snared by his sin, but the righteous can sing and rejoice.⁷ The righteous care about justice for the poor; the wicked aren't concerned about knowledge.⁸ Mockers stir up a city, but wise men turn away anger.⁹ If a

wise man goes to court with a foolish man, the fool rages or scoffs, and there is no peace.¹⁰ The bloodthirsty hate a man of integrity; and they seek the life of the upright.¹¹ A fool vents all of his anger, but a wise man brings himself under control.¹² If a ruler listens to lies, all of his officials are wicked.¹³ The poor man and the oppressor have this in common: Yahweh gives sight to the eyes of both.¹⁴ The king who fairly judges the poor, his throne shall be established forever.

The Value of Correction

¹⁵ The rod of correction gives wisdom, but a child left to himself causes shame to his mother.¹⁶ When the wicked increase, sin increases; but the righteous will see their downfall.¹⁷ Correct your son, and he will give you peace; yes, he will bring delight to your soul.¹⁸ Where there is no

financially) because we pretend we didn't notice human need, we close the eyes of our perception to the situations we encounter. Notice how deeply our psychology is penetrated by the Proverbs!

29:7 This sounds like a reference to the way Solomon judged the two prostitutes. See on 25:5.

29:14 Solomon is clearly referring to the promises to David, which he assumed were about him. He thought that because he had judged the poor harlots wisely, therefore he would be the promised Messiah. And this was just what David his father had hoped and expected of him. David had even asked Solomon to “do wisely” i.e. to show wisdom, in order that the promises to him about Messiah would be fulfilled (1 Kings 2:3). So *this* was surely one of Solomon’s motives in giving them justice and being ‘wise’; he sought to live out his father’s expectations and to fulfil the requirements of the Messiah figure. Solomon uses language elsewhere used about Messiah’s final judgment and applies it to himself in 20:26. He felt that his judgment must be that of God, therefore he had to be right, because he ‘had wisdom’, he ‘had the truth’; he assumed that because he was the king, therefore his heart would inevitably be guided by the Lord (21:1). Those raised in wisdom’s way often find it very hard to take criticism in later life. They find tolerance of others’ views hard; they perceive themselves to be right to an intolerant extent. Is this not a little bit of the Solomon syndrome?

Divine revelation, the people cast off restraint; but one who keeps the law is blessed.¹⁹ A servant can't be corrected by words; although he understands, yet he will not respond.²⁰ Do you see a man hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.²¹ He who pampers his servant from youth will have him become a son in the end.²² An angry man stirs up strife, and a wrathful man abounds in sin.²³ A man's pride brings him low, but one of lowly spirit gains honour.²⁴ Whoever is an accomplice of a thief is an enemy of his own soul; he takes an oath, but dares not testify.²⁵ The fear of man proves to be a snare, but whoever puts his trust in Yahweh is kept safe.²⁶ Many seek the ruler's favour, but a man's justice comes from Yahweh.²⁷ A dishonest man detests the righteous, and the upright in their ways detest the wicked.

CHAPTER 30 Apr. 20

The Words of Agur

The words of Agur the son of Jakeh, the oracle: the man said

to Ithiel, even to Ithiel and Ucal:
² Surely I am the most ignorant man, and don't have a man's understanding.³ I have not learned wisdom, neither do I have the knowledge of the Holy One.⁴ Who has ascended up into heaven, and descended? Who has gathered the wind in his fists? Who has bound the waters in his garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? What is his name, and what is his son's name, if you know?⁵ Every word of God is flawless. He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him.⁶ Don't you add to His words, lest He reprove you, and you be found a liar.⁷ Two things I have asked of You; don't deny me before I die:⁸ Remove far from me falsehood and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with the food that is needful for me;⁹ lest I be full, deny You, and say, 'Who is Yahweh?', or lest I be poor, and steal, and so dishonour the name of my God.¹⁰ Don't accuse a servant along with his master, lest he curse you, and you be held guilty.¹¹ There is a generation that curses their fa-

30:6 Although we may accept that the Bible is indeed inspired by God, we have a tendency to add to God's word in that we are tempted to look elsewhere for truth. Because God's word is true ("flawless", :5) any other word is relatively speaking untrue, a lie. Having stated that he himself is ignorant, Agur is directing his pupils to God's word; he recognized that wisdom cannot come from within a teacher, but only from God's word which is taught by the teacher.

30:8 *Feed me with the food that is needful for me* – Maybe Jesus was influenced by this in commanding us to ask God each day to give us the food necessary for the day (Mt. 6:11).

30:10 *Along with his master* – Household servants were considered as one with their master. But Agur is teaching that we shouldn't operate guilt by association, but instead recognize that even the humblest member of a community is still an individual and independent person both before God and ourselves.

30:10, 11 Curses... doesn't bless – Note how sins of omission [to not bless, in this case] are parallel with sins of commission [to curse].

ther, and doesn't bless their mother. 12 There is a generation that is pure in their own eyes, yet are not washed from their filthiness. 13 There is a generation, oh how proud are their eyes! Their eyelids are lifted up. 14 There is a generation whose teeth are like swords, and their jaws like knives, to devour the poor from the earth, and the needy from among men.

Four Things Never Satisfied

15 The leach has two daughters: 'Give, give'. There are three things that are never satisfied; four that don't say, 'Enough': 16 Sheol; the barren womb; the earth that is not satisfied with water; and the fire that doesn't say, 'Enough'. 17 The eye that mocks at his father, and scorns obedience to his mother: the ravens of the valley shall pick it out, the young eagles shall eat it.

Four Things too Amazing

18 There are three things which are too amazing for me, four which I don't understand: 19 The way of an eagle in the air; the way of a serpent on a rock; the way of a ship in the midst of the sea; and the way of a man with a maiden. 20 So is the way of an adulterous woman: she eats

30:12 The fact we may feel no conscience for sin isn't any cleansing from it; the only effective washing from sin is through baptism into Christ, not playing mind games with ourselves whereby we don't feel bad about our sins.

30:20 There's a connection between the things of :18,19 and the adulterous woman who thinks she has done no wrong. Those things of :18,19 leave no visible trace. Because there is at times no trace of sins like adultery, they fade away as the path of a ship through the sea does, we aren't to think that God doesn't notice and that they will not be brought to judgment.

and wipes her mouth, and says, 'I have done nothing wrong'.

Four Intolerable Things

21 For three things the earth trembles, and under four, it can't bear up: 22 For a servant when he is king; a fool when he is filled with food; 23 for an unloved woman when she is married; and a handmaid who is heir to her mistress.

Four Amazing Things

24 There are four things which are little on the earth, but they are exceedingly wise: 25 The ants are not a strong people, yet they provide their food in the summer. 26 The conies are but a feeble folk, yet make they their houses in the rocks. 27 The locusts have no king, yet they advance in ranks. 28 You can catch a lizard with your hands, yet it is in kings' palaces.

Four Dignified Things

29 There are three things which are stately in their march, four which are stately in going: 30 The lion, which is mightiest among animals, and doesn't turn away for any; 31 the greyhound, the male goat also; and the king against whom there is no rising up. 32 If you have done foolishly

in lifting up yourself, or if you have thought evil, put your hand over your mouth.³³ For as the churning of milk brings forth butter, and the wringing of the nose brings forth blood; so the churning of wrath brings forth judgment.

CHAPTER 31 Apr. 21

Make a Case for Justice

The words of king Lemuel; the oracle with which his mother warned him.² Oh, my son! Oh, son of my womb! Oh, son of my vows!³ Don't give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings.⁴ It is not for kings, Lemuel, it is not for kings to drink wine; nor for princes to say, 'Where is strong drink?'⁵ lest they drink and forget the law, and pervert the justice due to anyone who is afflicted.⁶ Give strong drink to him who is ready to perish; and wine to the bitter in soul:⁷ let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more.⁸ Open your mouth for the

mute, in the cause of all who are left desolate.⁹ Open your mouth, judge righteously, and serve justice to the poor and needy.

The Worthy Woman

¹⁰ Who can find a worthy woman? For her price is far above rubies.¹¹ The heart of her husband trusts in her; he shall have no lack of profit.¹² She does him good and not harm all the days of her life.¹³ She seeks wool and flax and works eagerly with her hands.¹⁴ She is like the merchant ships; she brings her food from afar.¹⁵ She rises also while it is yet night, gives food to her household and portions for her servant girls.¹⁶ She considers a field and then buys it. With the fruit of her hands she plants a vineyard.¹⁷ She arms her waist with strength and makes her arms strong.¹⁸ She perceives that her merchandise is profitable. Her lamp doesn't go out by night;¹⁹ she lays her hands to the distaff, and her hands hold the spindle.²⁰ She opens her arms to the

30:32, 33 Just as the things of :30,31 are inexorable in their march and will not be deflected by anything, so just as surely judgment will come for sin, and we must repent rather than continuing to churn up Divine judgment against us.

31:1 *Lemuel* – An equivalent name for Solomon, having a similar meaning to Solomon's other name, Jedediah (2 Sam. 12:25). This chapter would therefore be the inspired words of his mother Bathsheba.

31:3 Bathsheba was warning Solomon not to make the mistake his father David had, who destroyed his family for the sake of his adultery with Bathsheba. The warning against sinning with women under the influence of alcohol, which would lead the king to forget God's law, could suggest that David sinned with Bathsheba whilst under the influence of alcohol.

31:8 There are those who whilst not physically mute are relatively voiceless; and we are to be a voice for them, to speak up for those who can't speak for themselves.

31:15 *Portions for her servant girls* – The wise woman is great because she serves those who are her servants; we see here the New Testament principle of servant leadership.

poor; yes, she extends her hands to the needy.²¹ She is not afraid of the snow for her household; for all her household are clothed with scarlet.²² She makes for herself carpets of tapestry, her clothing is fine linen and purple.²³ Her husband is respected in the gates, when he sits among the elders of the land.²⁴ She makes linen garments and sells them, and delivers sashes to the merchant.²⁵ Strength and dignity are her clothing, she laughs at the time to come.

²⁶ She opens her mouth with wisdom, faithful instruction is on her tongue.²⁷ She looks well to the ways of her household, and doesn't eat the bread of laziness.²⁸ Her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also praises her:²⁹ Many women do noble things, but you excel them all!³⁰ Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain; but a woman who fears Yahweh, she shall be praised.³¹ Give her of the fruit of her hands! Let her works praise her in the gates!

31:23 The implication is that the respect given her husband is thanks to her, for the surrounding verses are speaking of what *she* achieves for her family.

ECCLESIASTES

CHAPTER 1 Apr. 22

The Vanity of Life ‘Under the Sun’

The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem: ² Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher; Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. What does man gain from all his labour in which he labours under the sun? ⁴ One generation goes, and another generation comes; but the earth remains forever. ⁵ The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hurries to its place where it rises. ⁶ The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north. It turns around continually as it goes, and the wind returns again to its courses. ⁷ All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again. ⁸ All things are full of weariness beyond uttering. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. ⁹ That which has been is that which shall be; and that which has been done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. ¹⁰ Is there a thing of which it may be said, Behold, this is new? It has been long ago, in the

ages which were before us. ¹¹ There is no memory of the former; neither shall there be any memory of the latter that are to come, among those that shall come after.

The Preacher Decides to Search for Wisdom

¹² I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under the sky. It is a heavy burden that God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. ¹⁴ I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a chasing after wind. ¹⁵ That which is crooked can’t be made straight; and that which is lacking can’t be counted. ¹⁶ I said to myself, Behold, I have obtained for myself great wisdom above all who were before me in Jerusalem. Yes, my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. ¹⁷ I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also was a chasing after wind. ¹⁸ For in much wisdom is much grief; and he

1:4 *The earth remains forever* – It is God’s promised plan to establish His eternal Kingdom on this earth; He will not destroy it. The Biblical descriptions of “heaven and earth” being destroyed are to be read as figurative of the destruction of the present world order, rather than literally.

1:12 This book appears to be the meditations of Solomon at the end of his life. He had been given Divine wisdom and retained it (2:9), but he rejected its claim upon him personally. He therefore says much which is true, and yet he speaks with the cynicism of the person who has rejected the true faith for himself whilst still offering it to others, especially the young. This explains the apparently contradictory strands of teaching within the book.

who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

CHAPTER 2 Apr. 23

The Preacher Seeks for Satisfaction in Pleasure

I said in my heart, Come now, I will test you with mirth: therefore enjoy pleasure; and behold, this also was vanity. ² I said of laughter, It is foolishness; and of mirth, What does it accomplish?

³ I searched in my heart how to cheer my flesh with wine, my heart yet guiding me with wisdom, and how to lay hold of folly, until I might see what it was good for the sons of men that they should do under heaven all the days of their lives. ⁴ I made myself great works. I built myself houses. I planted myself vineyards. ⁵ I made myself gardens and parks, and I planted trees in them of all kinds of fruit. ⁶ I made myself pools of water, to water from it the forest where trees were reared. ⁷ I bought male servants and female servants, and had servants born in my house. I also had great possessions of herds and flocks, above all who were before me in Jerusalem; ⁸ I also gathered silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and of the provinces. I got myself male and female singers, and the delights of the sons of men—musical instruments, and that of all sorts. ⁹ So I was great, and increased more than all who were

before me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also remained with me. ¹⁰ Whatever my eyes desired, I didn't keep from them. I didn't withhold my heart from any joy, for my heart rejoiced because of all my labour, and this was my portion from all my labour. ¹¹ Then I looked at all the works that my hands had worked, and at the labour that I had laboured to do; and behold, all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was no profit under the sun.

The Preacher Despairs of Earthly Life

¹² I turned myself to consider wisdom, madness, and folly: for what can the king's successor do? Just that which has been done long ago. ¹³ Then I saw that wisdom excels folly, as far as light excels darkness. ¹⁴ The wise man's eyes are in his head, and the fool walks in darkness—and yet I perceived that one event happens to them all. ¹⁵ Then I said in my heart, As it happens to the fool, so will it happen even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart that this also is vanity. ¹⁶ For of the wise man, even as of the fool, there is no memory for ever, since in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. Indeed, the wise man must die just like the fool! ¹⁷ So I hated life, because the work that is worked under the sun was grievous to me; for all

2:9 Solomon insists that throughout his life, his wisdom had remained with him. The theoretical wisdom which he had did not affect his life practically, and thus it was as if he lacked wisdom completely. Mere possession of truth leads to great temptations – for like Solomon, we can reason that this alone justifies us in any behaviour.

is vanity and a chasing after wind. ¹⁸ I hated all my labour in which I laboured under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who comes after me. ¹⁹ Who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have rule over all of my labour in which I have laboured, and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also is vanity. ²⁰ Therefore I began to cause my heart to despair concerning all the labour in which I had laboured under the sun. ²¹ For there is a man whose labour is with wisdom, with knowledge, and with skilfulness; yet he shall leave it for his portion to a man who has not laboured for it. This also is vanity and a great evil. ²² For what has a man of all his labour, and of the striving of his heart, in which he labours under the sun? ²³ For all his days are sorrows, and his travail is grief; yes, even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity. ²⁴ There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it is from the hand of God. ²⁵ For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? ²⁶ For to the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy;

but to the sinner He gives travail, to gather and to heap up, that He may give to him who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

CHAPTER 3 Apr. 24

A Time for All Things.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven: ² a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; ³ a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; ⁴ a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; ⁵ a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; ⁶ a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; ⁷ a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; ⁸ a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace.

The Hand of God in the Midst of Human Frustrations.

⁹ What profit has he who works in that in which he labours? ¹⁰ I have seen the burden which God has giv-

2:18, 21 Solomon saw “wisdom” as something he had worked for [forgetting it was God’s gracious gift to him], and he treated it as a material possession. Because he saw that he couldn’t take it with him, he felt therefore it was useless – he didn’t, it seems, want to leave it to his son because he felt it was only for him. This was the spirit of the man who buried his talent of Divine Truth in the ground and thought that would be enough – he wouldn’t risk it with others or share it with them. And so Solomon ended up hating all his labour for wisdom because at the end of his life that mere knowledge and teaching of it to others hadn’t transformed his personal life. The rejected at the day of judgment may well, tragically, feel the same. But *now* is the time to personally apply God’s Truth to ourselves and to be *humbled* by the very possession of it.

en to the sons of men to be afflicted with.¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in their hearts, yet so that man can't find out the work that God has done from the beginning even to the end.¹² I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice, and to do good as long as they live.¹³ Also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy good in all his labour, is the gift of God.¹⁴ I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; and God has done it, that men should fear before Him.¹⁵ That which is has been long ago, and that which is to be has been long ago: and God seeks again that which is passed away.¹⁶ Moreover I saw under the sun, in the place of justice, that wickedness was there; and in the place of righteousness, that wickedness was there.¹⁷ I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked; for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.¹⁸ I said in my heart, As for the sons of men, God tests them, so that they may see that they themselves

are like animals.¹⁹ For that which happens to the sons of men happens to animals. Even one thing happens to them. As the one dies, so the other dies. Yes, they have all one breath; and man has no advantage over the animals: for all is vanity.²⁰ All go to one place. All are from the dust, and all turn to dust again.²¹ Who knows the spirit of man, whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, whether it goes downward to the earth?²² Therefore I saw that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his works; for that is his portion: for who can bring him to see what will be after him?

CHAPTER 4 Apr. 25

The Preacher Observes Oppression and Loneliness

Then I returned and saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold, the tears of those who were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter.² Therefore I praised the dead who have been long dead more than the living who

3:19 One and the same spirit – The Hebrew word translated “spirit” has a wide range of meaning, but includes the idea of “breath”. By nature, man and the animals are the same. The same thing happens when we die; and Solomon so wished that men would perceive this whilst they were alive (:18) so that they would give themselves to God the more fully. There's no difference in where the spirit goes after death, whether we are man, animal or plant (:21). We are made of dust and will return to dust; the spirit, or life force which animates us, returns to God, whether we are good or bad. Those who are responsible to God will be resurrected and judged; the wicked will die for ever, the second death, again returning to dust; and those counted righteous by God's grace will live for ever with immortal bodies in His eternal Kingdom on earth. There is no conscious survival of death taught in the Bible; we're not born with any ‘immortal soul’. This is a non-Christian idea. Immortality is only revealed to those who are in Christ (2 Tim. 1:10).

are yet alive.³ Yes, better than them both is him who has not yet been, who has not seen the evil work that is done under the sun.⁴ Then I saw all the labour and achievement that is the envy of a man's neighbour. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.⁵ The fool folds his hands together and ruins himself.⁶ Better is a handful, with quietness, than two handfuls with labour and chasing after wind.⁷ Then I returned and saw vanity under the sun.⁸ There is one who is alone, and he has neither son nor brother. There is no end to all of his labour, neither are his eyes satisfied with wealth. For whom then, do I labour, and deprive my soul of enjoyment? This also is vanity. Yes, it is a miserable business.⁹ Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labour.¹⁰ For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him who is alone when he falls, and doesn't have another to lift him up.¹¹ Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one keep warm alone?¹² If a man prevails against one who is alone, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.¹³ Better is a poor and wise

youth than an old and foolish king who doesn't know how to receive admonition any more.¹⁴ For out of prison he came forth to be king; yes, even in his kingdom he was born poor.¹⁵ I saw all the living who walk under the sun, that they were with the youth, the other, who succeeded him.¹⁶ There was no end of all the people, even of all them over whom he was—yet those who come after shall not rejoice in him. Surely this also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

CHAPTER 5 Apr. 26

The Preacher Advises to Fear God

Guard your steps when you go to God's house; for to draw near to listen is better than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they don't know that they do evil.² Don't be rash with your mouth, and don't let your heart be hasty to utter anything before God; for God is in heaven, and you on earth. Therefore let your words be few.³ For as a dream comes with a multitude of cares, so a fool's speech with a multitude of words.⁴ When you vow a vow to God, don't defer to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay that which you vow.⁵ It is better that you should not vow,

4:8 The billionaire always wants another billion... “Hell and destruction are never satisfied, and the eyes of man are never satisfied” (Prov. 27:20 RV), Solomon wrote in his youth; and then in old age, he came to basically the same conclusion, having spent his life working back to the truth that he had been taught in his youth (see too 1:8). And there are many men and women who have done the same. We all tend to be empirical learners; and yet this is the great power of God's word, that through it we don't have to learn everything through our failures; but we can receive His Truth, trust it, and simply live by it. Otherwise we shall be like Solomon...

5:2 *God is in heaven, and you on earth* – God is revealed as existing as a personal being in a specific location, Heaven. Although He is present everywhere by His Spirit, this doesn't mean that He has no personal existence.

than that you should vow and not pay.⁶ Don't allow your mouth to lead you into sin. Don't protest before the messenger that this was a mistake. Why should God be angry at your voice, and destroy the work of your hands?⁷ For in the multitude of dreams there are vanities, as well as in many words: but you must fear God.⁸ If you see the oppression of the poor, and the violent taking away of justice and righteousness in a district, don't marvel at the matter: for one official is eyed by a higher one; and there are officials over them.

The Preacher Observes Wealth

⁹ Moreover the profit of the earth is for all. The king profits from the field.¹⁰ He who loves silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he who loves abundance, with increase: this also is vanity.¹¹ When goods increase, those who eat them are increased; and what advantage is there to its owner, except to feast on them with his eyes?¹² The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eats little or much; but the abundance of the rich will not allow him to sleep.¹³ There is a grievous evil which I have seen under the sun: wealth kept by its owner to his harm.¹⁴ Those riches perish by misfortune,

and if he has fathered a son, there is nothing in his hand.¹⁵ As he came forth from his mother's womb, naked shall he go again as he came, and shall take nothing for his labour, which he may carry away in his hand.¹⁶ This also is a grievous evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go. And what profit does he have who labours for the wind?¹⁷ All his days he also eats in darkness, he is frustrated, and has sickness and wrath.¹⁸ Behold, that which I have seen to be good and proper is for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy good in all his labour, in which he labours under the sun, all the days of his life which God has given him; for this is his portion.¹⁹ Every man also to whom God has given riches and wealth, and has given him power to eat of it, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour—this is the gift of God.²⁰ For he shall not often reflect on the days of his life; because God occupies him with the joy of his heart.

CHAPTER 6 Apr. 27

Frustration from Dependency on Material Things

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, and it is heavy on men:² a man to whom God gives

5:6 Don't protest before the messenger – The Hebrew word ‘malak’ translated “messenger” is the usual word translated “angel”. It can be used of men, e.g. priests, or anyone who is a ‘messenger’. The Angels of God don’t sin (Lk. 20:35,36 cp. Rom. 6:23), but the word ‘malak’ can be applied to ordinary men, who of course can sin. The Greek word ‘aggelos’, usually translated ‘angel’, is applied to the human messengers of John the Baptist (Lk. 7:24). This confusion has led to some misunderstanding the few Bible verses which speak (in some translations) of ‘angels’ sinning; but those ‘angels’ referred to are human beings, representatives, servants or messengers of others, and don’t refer to ‘angels’ in the sense of spirit beings.

riches, wealth, and honour, so that he lacks nothing for his soul of all that he desires, yet God gives him no power to eat of it, but an alien eats it. This is vanity, and it is an evil disease.³ If a man fathers a hundred children, and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not filled with good, and moreover he has no burial; I say, that a stillborn child is better than he;⁴ for it comes in vanity, and departs in darkness, and its name is covered with darkness.⁵ Moreover it has not seen the sun nor known it. This has rest rather than the other.⁶ Yes, though he live a thousand years twice told, and yet fails to enjoy good, don't all go to one place?⁷ All the labour of man is for his mouth, and yet the appetite is not filled.⁸ For what advantage has the wise more than the fool? What has the poor man, who knows how to walk before the living?⁹ Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the desire. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.¹⁰ Whatever has been, its name was given long ago; and it is known what man is; neither can he contend with him who is mightier than he.¹¹ For there are

many words that create vanity. What does that profit man?¹² For who knows what is good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he spends like a shadow? For who can tell a man what will be after him under the sun?

CHAPTER 7 Apr. 28

Oppression, Anger and Discontent

A good name is better than fine perfume; and the day of death better than the day of one's birth.² It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting: for that is the end of all men, and the living should take this to heart.³ Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the face the heart is made good.⁴ The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.⁵ It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise, than for a man to hear the song of fools.⁶ For as the crackling of thorns under a pot, so is the laughter of the fool. This also is vanity.⁷ Surely extortion makes the wise man foolish; and a bribe destroys the understanding.⁸ Better is the end of a thing than its beginning.

6:2 Prov. 6:26 warns the young man that the Gentile woman will take his money and leave him destitute at the end. These words seem to be alluded to by Solomon years later here, where he laments that despite his wealth and success, a Gentile would have it all after his death. He saw in later life that his warnings to the young men of Israel had been in the form of painting a picture of a typical young man who epitomized youthful folly; but now he realized that he had been making a detailed prophecy of himself. Likewise in 2:18,19 he laments that his labours will achieve nothing; doubtless alluding back to his words in Prov. 5:10, where he says that the Gentile wife will make the young Israelite's labours meaningless. Sin never satisfies. We can know truth on a theoretical level as Solomon did, and yet not live it out in practice.

7:2-4 The continual emphasis of society upon 'fun' and 'entertainment' doesn't lead to wisdom before God, but the very opposite.

The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. ⁹ Don't be hasty in your spirit to be angry, for anger rests in the bosom of fools. ¹⁰ Don't say, Why were the former days better than these? For you do not ask wisely about this.

Wisdom Excels All Else

¹¹ Wisdom is as good as an inheritance. Yes, it is more excellent for those who see the sun. ¹² For wisdom is a defence, even as money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it. ¹³ Consider the work of God, for who can make that straight, which He has made crooked? ¹⁴ In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider; yes, God has made the one side by side with the other, to the end that man should not find out anything after Him. ¹⁵ All this have I seen in my days of vanity: there is a righteous man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who lives long in his evildoing. ¹⁶ Don't be overly righteous, neither make yourself overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ¹⁷ Don't be too wicked, neither be foolish. Why should you die before

your time? ¹⁸ It is good that you should take hold of this. Yes, also from that don't withdraw your hand; for he who fears God will come forth from them all. ¹⁹ Wisdom is a strength to the wise man more than ten rulers who are in a city. ²⁰ Surely there is not a righteous man on earth, who does good and doesn't sin. ²¹ Also don't take heed to all words that are spoken, lest you hear your servant curse you; ²² for often your own heart knows that you yourself have likewise cursed others. ²³ All this have I proved in wisdom. I said, I will be wise; but it was far from me. ²⁴ That which is, is far off and exceedingly deep. Who can find it out? ²⁵ I turned around, and my heart sought to know and to search out, and to seek wisdom and the scheme of things, and to know that wickedness is stupidity, and that foolishness is madness. ²⁶ I find more bitter than death the woman whose heart is snares and traps, whose hands are chains. Whoever pleases God shall escape from her; but the sinner will be ensnared by her. ²⁷ Behold, I have found this, says the Preacher, one to another, to find out the scheme; ²⁸ which my soul still seeks; but I have not found. One man among a

7:23 Solomon recognized that although he had loved the idea of wisdom, the image of a spiritual life, the wisdom of God had never really impacted him personally: "I said, I will be wise (referring back to his request for wisdom in 1 Kings 3); but it was far from me". His request for wisdom had only been so that he could do the job of leading Israel, living out the parental expectation of his father, whom he admits in Proverbs 4 had taught him to ask for wisdom.

7:28 Solomon had all the instruction he could wish for; but he didn't allow it to really sink home. He started out on the search for an ultimately satisfying woman, but out of the 1000 he had (1 Kings 11:3) he never found one, even when he sat down and analyzed each of them. And even politically, his marriages with all those Gen-

thousand have I found; but I have not found a woman among all those.
 29 Behold, this only have I found: that God made man upright; but they search for many schemes.

CHAPTER 8 Apr. 29

The Supremacy of the King.

Who is like the wise man? And who knows the interpretation of a thing? A man's wisdom makes his face shine, and the hardness of his face is changed. ² I say, Keep the king's command! because of the oath to God. ³ Don't be hasty to go out of his presence. Don't persist in an evil thing, for he does whatever pleases him, ⁴ for the king's word is supreme. Who can say to him, What are you doing? ⁵ Whoever keeps the commandment shall not come to harm, and his wise heart will know the time and procedure. ⁶ For there is a time and procedure for every purpose, although the misery of man is heavy on him. ⁷ For he doesn't know

that which will be; for who can tell him how it will be? ⁸ There is no man who has power over the spirit to contain the spirit; neither does he have power over the day of death. There is no discharge in war; neither shall wickedness deliver those who practice it.

The Destiny of the Wicked

⁹ All this have I seen, and applied my mind to every work that is done under the sun. There is a time in which one man has power over another to his hurt. ¹⁰ So I saw the wicked buried. Indeed they came also from holiness. They went and were forgotten in the city where they did this. This also is vanity. ¹¹ Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. ¹² Though a sinner commits crimes a hundred times, and lives long, yet surely I know that it will be better with those who fear

tile women didn't seem to achieve the support he desired from their home countries; Egypt gave refuge to Jeroboam, Solomon's main rival (1 Kings 11:40), even though he always acquiesced to his wives and even in his very old age he still didn't destroy the idol temples he built for them (2 Kings 23:13).

8:1 Solomon didn't see the relevance of his wisdom to his own personal family life. Yet he proudly insisted: "Who is like the wise man?", as if the possession of theoretical truth and wisdom was the ultimate possession; and he then goes on to say that this made him beyond criticism (:2-4). This is a danger for any community or individual who says they have "the truth" and who considers the possession of it to be of the utmost importance.

8:4 It is only God who cannot be questioned in this way. But Solomon felt that because he possessed God's wisdom, he could therefore act as God. :2 could suggest that he thought his commandments were in fact God's. So the possession of Truth, which we too have, can lead to an incredible arrogance, a lack of openness to others' comments upon us, and a certainty that *we* are right in all that we do and are beyond criticism in every area. The hardness of a man is changed by true wisdom (:1) but despite knowing this, Solomon became hard hearted and abused his people. He had the wisdom – but as he said, it was far from him personally.

God, who are reverent before him. ¹³ But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he lengthen days like a shadow; because he doesn't fear God. ¹⁴ There is a vanity which is done on the earth, that there are righteous men to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked. Again, there are wicked men to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also is vanity. ¹⁵ Then I commended mirth, because a man has no better thing under the sun, than to eat, and to drink, and to be joyful: for that will accompany him in his labour all the days of his life which God has given him under the sun. ¹⁶ When I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on the earth (for also there is that neither day nor night sees sleep with his eyes), ¹⁷ then I saw all the work of God, that man can't find out the work that is done under the sun, because however much a man labours to seek it out, yet he won't find it. Yes even though a wise man thinks he can comprehend it, he won't be able to find it.

CHAPTER 9 Apr. 30

Equality in Death

For all this I laid to my heart, even to explore all this: that the right-

eous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God; whether it is love or hatred, man doesn't know it; all is before them. ² All things come alike to all. There is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the good, to the clean, to the unclean, to him who sacrifices, and to him who doesn't sacrifice. As is the good, so is the sinner; he who takes an oath, as he who fears an oath. ³ This is an evil in all that is done under the sun, that there is one event to all: yes also, the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. ⁴ For to him who is joined with all the living there is hope; for a living dog is better than a dead lion. ⁵ For the living know that they will die, but the dead don't know anything, neither do they have any more a reward; for their memory is forgotten. ⁶ Also their love, their hatred, and their envy has perished long ago; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun. ⁷ Go your way—eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works. ⁸ Let your garments be always white, and don't let your head lack oil. ⁹ Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your

9:5 *The dead don't know anything* – The Bible clearly teaches that death is unconsciousness. See on 3:19.

9:6 *Neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun* – Human theories of ghosts and reincarnation aren't compatible with the Bible. The Biblical hope for life after death is in the form of a bodily resurrection to stand before God's judgment and then by grace receive eternal life in His Kingdom on earth; and this is not for all, but for those who have consciously made a covenant with God in this life.

life of vanity, which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity: for that is your portion in life, and in your labour in which you labour under the sun.¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Sheol, where you are going.¹¹ I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.¹² For man also doesn't know his time. As the fish that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare, even so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly on them.¹³ I have also seen wisdom under the sun in this way, and it seemed great to me.¹⁴ There was a little city, and few men within it; and a great king came against it, besieged it, and built great bulwarks against it.¹⁵ Now a poor wise man was found in it, and he by his wisdom delivered the city; yet no man remembered that same poor man.¹⁶ Then I said, Wisdom

is better than strength. Nevertheless the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heard.¹⁷ The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the cry of him who rules among fools.¹⁸ Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good.

CHAPTER 10 May 1

Miscellaneous Observations

Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to send forth an evil odour; so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honour.² A wise man's heart is at his right hand, but a fool's heart at his left.³ Yes also, when the fool walks by the way, his understanding fails him, and he says to everyone that he is a fool.⁴ If the spirit of the ruler rises up against you, don't leave your place; for gentleness lays great offenses to rest.⁵ There is an evil which I have seen under the sun, the sort of error which proceeds from the ruler.⁶ Folly is set in great dignity, and the rich sit in a low place.⁷ I have seen servants on horses, and princes walking like servants on the earth.⁸ He who digs a pit may fall into it; and whoever breaks through

9:10 *Sheol, where you are going* – ‘Sheol’, translated “hell” in some Bibles and “the grave” in others, is simply death; all people, good and bad, go there. It’s not a place of conscious punishment for the wicked, it refers simply to the grave.

10:1 Solomon had “honour” to an unprecedented extent (1 Kings 3:13). But in this same book he admits that he, the man famed world-wide for wisdom, gave himself to folly (2:3). He knew so well the error and folly of his ways, but he could only preach the lesson but not heed it. A true fool is one whose wisdom fails him in practice (when he “walks by the way”, :3); and especially is this acute when this “error... proceeds from the ruler” (:5). It’s all about Solomon himself. His self-analysis, like that of many an alcoholic and drug addict, was excellent. The very possession of truth and wisdom seems to be of itself a temptation to live the very opposite way, which is why believers who go wrong often end up behaving far worse than unbelievers.

a wall may be bitten by a snake.
 9 Whoever carves out stones may be injured by them. Whoever splits wood may be endangered thereby.
 10 If the axe is blunt, and one doesn't sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but skill brings success.
 11 If the snake bites before it is charmed, then is there no profit for the charmer's tongue.
 12 The words of a wise man's mouth are gracious; but a fool is swallowed by his own lips.
 13 The beginning of the words of his mouth is foolishness; and the end of his talk is mischievous madness.
 14 A fool also multiplies words. Man doesn't know what will be; and that which will be after him, who can tell him?
 15 The labour of fools wearies every one of them; for he doesn't know how to go to the city.
 16 Woe to you, land, when your king is a servant, and your princes eat in the morning!
 17 Blessed are you, land, when your king is the son of nobles, and your princes eat in due season, for strength, and not for drunkenness!
 18 By slothfulness the roof sinks in; and through idleness of the hands the house leaks.
 19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes the life glad; and money is the an-

swer for all things.
 20 Don't curse the king, no, not in your thoughts; and don't curse the rich in your bedroom: for a bird of the sky may carry your voice, and that which has wings may tell the matter.

CHAPTER 11 May 2

The Preacher Observes Generosity and Diligence.

Cast your bread on the waters; for you shall find it after many days.
 2 Give a portion to seven, yes, even to eight; for you don't know what evil will be on the earth.
 3 If the clouds are full of rain, they empty themselves on the earth; and if a tree falls toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falls, there shall it be.
 4 He who observes the wind won't sow; and he who regards the clouds won't reap.
 5 As you don't know what is the way of the wind, nor how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child; even so you don't know the work of God who does all.
 6 In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening don't withhold your hand; for you don't know which will prosper, whether this or that, or whether they both will be equally good.
 7 Truly the light is

10:16, 17 Solomon had been so confident that he was or would be the Messiah that he seems to have felt that he was beyond the possibility of sinning; real self-examination and the sense of the possibility of failure just didn't exist for him. He says that the land of Israel is happy or blessed because her king is the son of a noble, and she will be cursed if her ruler is a servant. Solomon proudly presented himself as the son of King David – and he makes a clear swipe at Jeroboam, the pretender to the throne who was a servant (1 Kings 11:26). By reasoning like this, Solomon sets himself in direct opposition to the spirit of Jesus, who declared that the servant is to be the King of all. Thus Solomon's self-justification, his self-defensiveness, his lack of focus on the future Messiah, led him to miss totally the spirit of Christ.

sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to see the sun.⁸ Yes, if a man lives many years, let him rejoice in them all; but let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many. All that comes is vanity.

The Preacher Appeals to Youth

⁹ Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth, and walk in the ways of your heart, and in the sight of your eyes; but know that for all these things there is a God who will

bring you into judgment for them.¹⁰ Therefore remove anger from your heart, and put away evil from your flesh; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity.

CHAPTER 12 May 3

Youth, Age and Life's End

Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw near, when you will say, I have no pleasure in them;² Before the sun, the light, the moon, and the stars are

11:9 *For all these things there is a God who will bring you into judgment* – Solomon knows judgment will come, at least for the young people, but he reasons as if it won't – at least not for him. He knows, but he doesn't know on the personal, experiential level. This is why there are apparently contradictory statements in Ecclesiastes. For example, the wise dies as the fool, with no more eternal remembrance than the fool (2:15,16). This, Solomon, says, is what he himself believes in his own heart. But in 7:12 he says that wisdom gives life to those who have it. But then again in 9:16-18 he observes that although wisdom can help, its benefits are easily undone, so easily as to make it useless. He knew and preached God's Truth, but for him personally, it meant nothing at all. And therefore in practice he advocated the life of self-enjoyment, acting *as if* all the other truth of wisdom was not operative in practice. His final recommendation in chapter 12 is for young people to go the way of wisdom, as this is their duty. He had evidently minimized the coming of judgment, as his obsession with himself being the Messiah had lead him to minimize the reality of the coming of Christ. How deeply do we struggle with our own humanity, and deeply long for the second coming? Has our materialism made the Hope of the Kingdom mean practically nothing? Solomon's complaint at the pointlessness of wisdom in 2:15-20 is liberally sprinkled with personal pronouns; his self-centredness was part of his materialism and lack of faith in the Kingdom. And for us too, familiarity with the glorious principles of Divine Truth with which we have been entrusted can lead us to the blasphemy of saying, in effect, that those principles are unimportant; they come to mean little to us personally, and thereby we effectively deny their value and worth.

11:10 The tragic brevity of life means that youth is vanity; we should quit the time wasting follies of youth or overgrown childhood (and the modern world is full of these), and therefore we too should remove anger from our hearts. Ecclesiastes uses the mortality of man not only as an appeal to work for our creator and quit anger, but to simply have faith in His existence (as 2 Cor. 1:9).

12:2 *And the clouds return after the rain* – Solomon's father, David, had in his old age rejoiced in the prospect of God's Kingdom coming on earth at Christ's return, which he imagined would be like the clear shining after the rain (2 Sam. 23:4). Solomon in

darkened, and the clouds return after the rain; ³ in the day when the keepers of the house shall tremble, and the strong men shall bow themselves, and the grinders cease because they are few, and those who look out of the windows are darkened, ⁴ and the doors shall be shut in the street; when the sound of the grinding is low, and one shall rise up at the voice of a bird, and all the daughters of music shall be brought low; ⁵ yes, they shall be afraid of heights, and terrors will be in the way; and the almond tree shall blossom, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail; because man goes to his everlasting home, and the mourners go about the streets: ⁶ before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is broken at the spring, or the wheel broken at the cistern, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

The Preacher's Final Thoughts

⁸ Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher. All is vanity! ⁹ Further, because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge. Yes, he pondered, sought out, and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written blamelessly, words of truth. ¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads; and like nails well fastened are words from the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd. ¹² Furthermore, my son, be admonished: of making many books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. ¹³ This is the end of the matter. All has been heard. Fear God, and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every work into judgment, with every hidden thing, whether it is good, or whether it is evil.

his old age saw only negativity, the return of the clouds, whereas David in old age looked ahead with hope to the Kingdom. Whilst Solomon spoke so often of his father David, he failed to personally grasp the wonder of the hope of Christ and His Kingdom which his father had; for this cannot be passed on through the generations, that wonder has to be learnt from experience and years of spiritual devotion.

12:3–5 This is a picture of a man in old age, perhaps based upon Solomon himself, having lost his strength and his teeth ("the grinders"), with darkened eyesight, poor of hearing and jumpy, scared of heights having lost his balance, with white hair like the almond tree and having lost sexual desire. Solomon presents this picture of man at his last end to those yet young, with the appeal to therefore not waste life ingratiating the senses, but rather in serving God.

SONG OF SOLOMON

CHAPTER 1 May 4

The Song of songs, which is Solomon's.

The Beloved

² Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth; for your lovemaking is better than wine. ³ Your oils have a pleasing fragrance. Your name is oil poured forth, therefore the virgins love you. ⁴ Take me away with you. Let's hurry. The king has brought me into his rooms!

Daughters of Jerusalem

We will be glad and rejoice in you. We will praise your love more than wine!

Beloved

They are right to love you. ⁵ I am dark, but lovely, you daughters of Jerusalem, like Kedar's tents, like Solomon's curtains. ⁶ Don't stare at me because I am dark, because the sun has scorched me. My mother's sons were angry with me. They made me keeper of the vineyards, but I haven't kept my own vineyard. ⁷ Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you graze your flock, where you rest them at noon; for why should I be as one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions?

Lover

⁸ If you don't know, most beautiful among women, follow the tracks of

The set of dialogues we have in this Song indicate that here we have a romance which went too far too quickly between Solomon and an Egyptian girl. He ought to have married an Israelite, one of the “daughters of Jerusalem”. The Song is full of tension between the girl and these “daughters”, whom she fears as being more attractive to Solomon than herself; and they speak to her sarcastically. Solomon in the Proverbs warned the Israelites about being attracted by pretty Gentile women who would lead them astray; and yet he does the very opposite of what he had taught to be true. The Song ends not with a wedding, as the genre of love poems might suggest, but with the couple parting in acrimony. Not running relationships God's way doesn't lead to satisfaction.

1:2 The Song begins by the daughters of Jerusalem and the Egyptian girl being in some kind of competition for Solomon; they both state their desire for him, and both of them compare his love to wine (:2, 4). Note how the Song doesn't begin as a romance is supposed to – with the first meeting, a love at first sight scene. As early as 1:2 she comments that “your lovemaking is more delightful than wine”. This is all a subversion of the whole genre of romance. It was all too far too fast. The Egyptian justifies her darker complexion to the Jerusalem girls, and praises her own beauty: “I am dark but lovely” (:5). She likewise yells at them not to sexually stimulate her lover, Solomon (2:7). “My beloved is *mine*” (2:16) is the same catty kind of defensiveness. The girl is jealous of how the daughters of Jerusalem admire Solomon, not least because of his fame in Israelite circles (:3,4). And the Jerusalem girls respond with sarcasm as in 6:1.

the sheep. Graze your young goats beside the shepherds' tents.⁹ I have compared you, my love, to a steed in Pharaoh's chariots.¹⁰ Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with strings of jewels.¹¹ We will make you earrings of gold, with studs of silver.

Beloved

12 While the king sat at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance.¹³ My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh, that lies between my breasts.¹⁴ My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi.

Lover

15 Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves.

Beloved

16 Behold, you are beautiful, my be-

loved, yes, pleasant; and our couch is verdant.

Lover

17 The beams of our house are cedars. Our rafters are firs.

CHAPTER 2 May 5

Beloved

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

Lover

2 As a lily among thorns, so is my darling among the daughters.

Beloved

3 As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, his fruit was sweet to my taste.⁴ He brought me to the banquet hall. His banner over me is love.⁵ Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples; for I

1:9 Solomon should have admired neither the horses nor the women of Egypt; yet he begins his Song with an unashamed breach of the command not to desire either of these things. The unashamedness of Solomon coupled with his spirituality indicates that at this time he was genuinely convinced that what he was doing was deeply spiritual; when in fact it was completely carnal. He totally ignored his own advice in Proverbs about choosing a spiritual Israelite woman as a wife.

1:11 The Song is shot through with allusion to the Law and tabernacle rituals; he speaks of making her borders on her clothes, alluding to the borders of blue to be worn by the faithful Israelite. Solomon wanted her to be a spiritual woman, and he was going to make her one in his mind, to his eyes. He wanted to see her as a spiritual woman, and eventually he became persuaded that she was just this. This is often the psychology of marriage out of the faith.

2:1 The girl says she is merely a common “rose of Sharon”, but Solomon responds that in his eyes, she is like a lily among thorns, referring to the Jerusalem girls. Ironically enough, Num. 33:55 had warned that the Gentiles within the land promised to Abraham would be “thorns” to Israel if they married them. And yet Solomon sees the Israelite women as “thorns” and the Gentile as a lily amongst them. He likewise compares her to them in 6:8,9.

am faint with love. ⁶ His left hand is under my head. His right hand embraces me. ⁷ I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, or by the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor stimulate love, until it so desires. ⁸ The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes, leaping on the mountains, skipping on the hills. ⁹ My beloved is like a roe or a young hart. Behold, he stands behind our wall! He looks in at the windows. He glances through the lattice. ¹⁰ My beloved spoke and said to me, Rise up, my love, my beautiful one, and come away. ¹¹ for, behold, the winter is past. The rain is over and gone. ¹² The flowers appear on the earth. The time of the singing has come, and the voice of the turtle-dove is heard in our land. ¹³ The fig tree ripens her green figs. The vines are in blossom. They give forth their fragrance. Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come away.

Lover

¹⁴ My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places of the moun-

2:10-13 Solomon describes her in Jewish terms, likening her to many well-known places in Israel: the Heshbon fishpools, the tower of Lebanon etc. (see too 4:1,4). He wanted to see her as an Israelite girl, and so that was how she appeared to him. Such is the self-deception we are capable of when we seek to justify ourselves. Solomon takes her on a tour of Israel (4:8), enthusing about the sights, speaking of them as the things of “our land”. See on 4:16.

2:13, 14 It was because of the impossible tension between the Egyptian girl and the Jerusalem maidens that there’s the constant theme of needing to hold meetings in secrecy, often in the countryside or mountains around Jerusalem, and to “go away” in order to be together. They appear to have slept together in the open air, beneath the trees (1:16,17; 7:11). 2:17 and 4:6 suggest they spent a night together in the hills, and then before dawn Solomon got back to Jerusalem. Illicit relationships are powerfully attractive at the time, but doomed to ultimate failure.

3:4 She walked the streets of Jerusalem whilst he was confined in the palace (:2). Her mother moved to Jerusalem from Egypt, but it wasn’t possible for Solomon and her to

tainside; let me see your face. Let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. ¹⁵ Catch foxes for us, the little foxes that spoil the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom.

Beloved

¹⁶ My beloved is mine, and I am his. He browses among the lilies. ¹⁷ Until the day is cool, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be like a roe or a young hart on the mountains of Bether.

CHAPTER 3 May 6

By night on my bed, I sought him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I didn’t find him. ² I will get up now, and go about the city; in the streets and in the squares I will seek him whom my soul loves. I sought him, but I didn’t find him. ³ The watchmen who go about the city found me; I asked, Have you seen him whom my soul loves? ⁴ I had scarcely passed from them, when I found him whom my soul

loves. I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, into the room of her who conceived me. ⁵ I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the hinds of the field, that you not stir up, nor stimulate love, until he so desires. ⁶ Who is this who comes up from the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all spices of the merchant? ⁷ Behold, it is Solomon's carriage! Sixty mighty men are around it, of the mighty men of Israel. ⁸ They all handle the sword, and are expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh, because of fear in the night. ⁹ King Solomon made himself a carriage of the wood of Lebanon. ¹⁰ He made its pillars of silver, its bottom of gold, its seat of purple, its midst being paved with love, for the daughters of Jerusalem. ¹¹ Go forth, you daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon, with the crown with which his mother has crowned him in the day of his wed-

easily be together in that house (also 8:2). 3:4 is very similar to Solomon's own warnings against Gentile marriage in Prov. 7:13,27; 5:8. We have an amazing ability to do the very opposite of what we know is right.

3:4, 11 This is her sarcastic comment to the Jerusalem girls, mocking the crown his mother Bathsheba had made for him, wishing instead that he would be under the influence of *her* mother.

4:1 Parts of the Song are very sexually explicit once the allusions are figured out. He's describing the vaginal lips of his girlfriend, his intended spouse (4:1,3,8); and he has seen "behind your veil", the symbol of her virginity. And yet he glorifies all this in his song. Quite clearly, Solomon was guilty of fornication with the one whom he wished to marry, although the ending of the Song seems to imply the relationship somehow broke up. And this was all right at the beginning of his reign.

4:4 She loves him because of his ointment, and he loves her because of her jewellery (4:). He says that deep kissing with her gives the same after effect as drinking enough wine that you talk in your sleep afterwards (7:9). It's all very human and carnal; one lesson of the Song is that superficial attraction isn't the basis for true love.

dings, in the day of the gladness of his heart.

CHAPTER 4 May 7

Lover

Behold, you are beautiful, my love. Behold, you are beautiful. Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is as a flock of goats, that descend from Mount Gilead. ² Your teeth are like a newly shorn flock, which have come up from the washing, where every one of them has twins. None is bereaved among them. ³ Your lips are like scarlet thread. Your mouth is lovely. Your temples are like a piece of a pomegranate behind your veil. Your neck is like David's tower built for an armoury, whereon a thousand shields hang, all the shields of the mighty men. ⁵ Your two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a roe, which feed among the lilies. ⁶ Until the day is cool, and the shadows flee away, I will go to the mountain of myrrh, to the hill of frankincense. ⁷ You are all beauti-

ful, my love. There is no spot in you.
 8 Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, with me from Lebanon. Look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards. 9 You have ravished my heart, my sister, my bride. You have ravished my heart with one of your eyes, with one chain of your neck. 10 How beautiful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much better is your love than wine! The fragrance of your perfumes than all kinds of spices!
 11 Your lips, my bride, drip like the honeycomb. Honey and milk are under your tongue. The smell of your garments is like the smell of Lebanon. 12 A locked up garden is my sister, my bride; a locked up spring, a sealed fountain. 13 Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates, with

precious fruits: henna with spikenard plants,¹⁴ spikenard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree; myrrh and aloes, with all the best spices,¹⁵ a fountain of gardens, a spring of living waters, flowing streams from Lebanon.

Beloved

16 Awake, north wind; and come, you south! Blow on my garden, that its spices may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and taste his precious fruits.

CHAPTER 5 May 8

Lover

I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride. I have gathered my myrrh with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk.

4:15, 16 Solomon saw her as a “paradise”, a garden with rivers and exotic fruits, surrounded by a wall – the language of Eden. And she was a fount of “living waters”, the language of Messiah. He saw her as the Kingdom / Eden personified. And yet her response to being described in this way is almost inappropriate – for she invites him to come and eat the fruit of the garden (:16), exactly after the pattern of Eve destroying Adam. Yet Solomon didn’t want to see this connection; she was the Kingdom to him, just as so many have felt that having their new partner means that *nothing*, not even the Kingdom, is meaningful any more. See on 2:10-13.

5:1 Song 5 seems to give insight into the unworthy elements of the potential bride of Christ. Notice the sequence: While she sleeps at night, the bridegroom comes and knocks [unworthy virgins sleeping instead of being awake; the Lord Jesus comes; Lk. 12:36 uses the same figure, of the Lord’s return being like a knock]. She replies that she’s not dressed properly, makes excuses about her feet, she can’t come and open [the unworthy don’t respond immediately]. He tries to open the door from the outside, putting his hand through the latch-hole [by grace, after the pattern of Lot being encouraged to leave Sodom when he hesitated, the Lord will be patient even with sleepy virgins in His desire for their salvation]. Her heart is moved with desire for him [the rejected still call Jesus ‘Lord, Lord’; they love Him emotionally]. She starts dressing herself up, and then is overtaken by desire and rushes to the door, her hands dripping all kinds of perfume and make up over the lock as she opens it [cp. the virgins going to buy oil, the unworthy trying to prepare themselves all too late, not trusting that their Lord loves them as they are at the moment of His coming]. But he’s gone , he with-

Eat, friends! Drink, yes, drink abundantly, beloved.

Beloved

² I was asleep, but my heart was awake. It is the voice of my beloved who knocks: Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my undefiled; for my head is filled with dew, and my hair with the dampness of the night.

³ I have taken off my robe. Indeed, must I put it on? I have washed my feet. Indeed, must I defile them?

⁴ My beloved thrust his hand in through the latch opening. My heart pounded for him. ⁵ I rose up to open for my beloved. My hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the lock.

draws himself [all too late, the door is shut, He never knew them]. Her soul fails [the shock of rejection]. She seeks him but doesn't find him, calls but he doesn't answer [Prov. 1:28; Hos. 5:6; the rejected call, but aren't answered; they seek the Lord early, but don't find Him]. She feels tired of her relationship with him ("sick of love"). She is persecuted by the world around her ["condemned with the world"]. If we don't immediately respond to the Lord's knock, we show ourselves to not love Him enough. If we don't open immediately, it's as if we didn't open at all. The Lord wants us as we are, bleary eyed and without our cosmetics, but with a basic overriding love of Him, and faith in the depth of His love, which will lead us to immediately go out to meet Him. This will be the ultimate and crucial divide – between those who believe in the Lord's love for us; and those who think they need to make themselves good enough for Him. Solomon called to the girl through the keyhole: "...my undefiled...". But she doesn't want to immediately come to Him because she doesn't want to meet him with 'defiled' feet (:2,3). She couldn't believe his words, that in his eyes, she was *undefiled*. And the enormity of the passion of Christ for us is likewise so hard for us to accept. In 3:1 we find the girl again at night, dreaming of having Solomon with her. But when one night he does actually come, she doesn't go to meet him immediately. And there's a warning for us. Like Israel we may 'desire the day of the Lord', study prophecy about it, write about it, enthuse about it. But when He comes, to what end will it be to us? Will we *in a moment* drop everything and go to Him, believing that He loves us just as we are? Or will we run off to buy oil, slap makeup on...? She finally realized that he had loved her for who she was, how she was. But it was tragically too late. He'd gone. We need to learn that lesson *now*, to know the love of Christ... so that in that moment when we know for sure 'He's back!', we will without hesitation *go to Him* with that perfect / mature love, that casts out fear.

⁶ I opened to my beloved; but my beloved had left; he had gone away. My heart went out when he spoke. I looked for him, but I didn't find him. I called him, but he didn't answer.

⁷ The watchmen who go about the city found me. They beat me. They bruised me. The keepers of the walls took my cloak away from me. ⁸ I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I am faint with love.

Daughters of Jerusalem

⁹ How is your beloved better than another beloved, you fairest among women? How is your beloved better than another beloved, that you so adjure us?

Beloved

10 My beloved is white and ruddy.
 The best among ten thousand.
 11 His head is like the purest gold.
 His hair is bushy, black as a raven.
 12 His eyes are like doves beside the
 water brooks, washed with milk,
 mounted like jewels. 13 His cheeks
 are like a bed of spices with towers
 of perfumes. His lips are like lilies,
 dropping liquid myrrh. 14 His hands
 are like rings of gold set with beryl.
 His body is like ivory work over-
 laid with sapphires. 15 His legs are
 like pillars of marble set on sockets
 of fine gold. His appearance is like
 Lebanon, excellent as the cedars.
 16 His mouth is sweetness; yes, he is
 altogether lovely. This is my belov-
 ed, and this is my friend, daughters
 of Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 6 May 9***Daughters of Jerusalem***

Where has your beloved gone,
 you fairest among women?
 Where has your beloved turned, that
 we may seek him with you?

Beloved

2 My beloved has gone down to his
 garden, to the beds of spices, to feed
 in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
 3 I am my beloved's, and my belov-
 ed is mine. He browses among the
 lilies.

6:13 Solomon boasts that he has many Jewish queens and concubines, but there is only one woman, the Egyptian, that he truly loves (6:8,9); he even calls her his “sister”, associating himself thereby with Egypt. Perhaps this tension between the two groups – the Jerusalem women and the Egyptian girl and her family – is behind the enigmatic reference to “the company of two armies” or “the dance of the two camps” or lines. She suspects there may be two camps in Solomon’s mind.

Lover

4 You are beautiful, my love, as
 Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome
 as an army with banners.
 5 Turn away your eyes from me, for
 they have overcome me. Your hair is
 like a flock of goats, that lie along the
 side of Gilead. 6 Your teeth are like a
 flock of ewes, which have come up
 from the washing; of which each one
 has twins; none is bereaved among
 them. 7 Your temples are like a piece
 of a pomegranate behind your veil.
 8 There are sixty queens, eighty con-
 cubines, and virgins without number.
 9 My dove, my perfect one, is unique.
 She is her mother's only daughter.
 She is the favourite one of her who
 bore her. The daughters saw her, and
 called her blessed; the queens and
 the concubines, and they praised her.
 10 Who is she who looks forth as the
 morning, beautiful as the moon, clear
 as the sun, and awesome as an army
 with banners? 11 I went down into the
 nut tree grove, to see the green plants
 of the valley, to see whether the vine
 budded, and the pomegranates were
 in flower. 12 Without realizing it, my
 desire set me with my royal people's
 chariots.

Daughters of Jerusalem

13 Return, return, Shulammite! Re-
 turn, return, that we may gaze at
 you.

Lover

Why do you desire to gaze at the Shulammite, as at the dance of Mahanaim?

CHAPTER 7 May 10

How beautiful are your feet in sandals, prince's daughter! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of the hands of a skilful workman.² Your body is like a round goblet, no mixed wine is wanting. Your waist is like a heap of wheat, set about with lilies.³ Your two breasts are like two fawns, that are twins of a roe.⁴ Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are like the pools in Heshbon by the gate of Bathrabbim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looks toward Damascus.⁵ Your head on you is like Carmel. The hair of your head is like purple. The king is held captive in its tresses.⁶ How beautiful and how pleasant you are, love, for delights!⁷ This, your stature, is like a palm tree, your breasts like its fruit.⁸ I said, I will climb up into the palm tree. I will take hold of its fruit. Let your breasts be like clusters of the vine, the smell of your breath like apples,⁹ your mouth like the best wine, that goes down smoothly for my beloved, gliding through the lips of those who are asleep.

7:12 See on 8:1.

8:1 She deeply wished that Solomon was her brother, i.e. an Egyptian, because in that case their relationship could be much more open, they would not be despised because of their love, and Solomon could come and live in her mother's house back in Egypt. Clearly she was attracted to Solomon rather than to the God of Israel. In :2,3 she seems to be saying 'I'll have sex with you, as you offered in 7:12, if you agree to be an Egyptian' (and 4:16; 5:1,4-6 could imply they *did* have intercourse).

8:5 The daughters of Jerusalem mock her by saying this. We expect a romantic song to end with the wedding; but it doesn't. It ends with the couple parting; and this dream

Beloved

¹⁰ I am my beloved's. His desire is toward me.¹¹ Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field. Let us lodge in the villages.¹² Let's go early up to the vineyards. Let's see whether the vine has budded, its blossom is open, and the pomegranates are in flower. There I will give you my love.¹³ The mandrakes give forth fragrance. At our doors are all kinds of precious fruits, new and old, which I have stored up for you, my beloved.

CHAPTER 8 May 11

Oh that you were like my brother, who nursed from the breasts of my mother! If I found you outside, I would kiss you; yes, and no one would despise me.² I would lead you, bringing you into my mother's house, who would instruct me. I would have you drink spiced wine, of the juice of my pomegranate.³ His left hand would be under my head. His right hand would embrace me.⁴ I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, that you not stir up, nor stimulate my love, until he so desires.

Daughters of Jerusalem

5 Who is this who comes up from the wilderness, leaning on her beloved?

Beloved

Under the apple tree I aroused you.
There your mother conceived you.
There she was in labour and bore
you.

Lover

⁶ Set me as a seal on your heart, as a seal on your arm; for love is strong as death. Jealousy is as cruel as Sheol. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a very flame of Yahweh. ⁷ Many waters can't quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man would give all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly scorned.

Daughters of Jerusalem

⁸ We have a little sister. She has no

breasts. What shall we do for our sister in the day when she is to be spoken for? ⁹ If she is a wall, we will build on her a turret of silver. If she is a door, we will enclose her with boards of cedar.

Beloved

¹⁰ I was a wall, and my breasts were like towers, then I found acceptance in his eyes. ¹¹ Solomon had a vineyard at Baal Hamon. He leased out the vineyard to keepers. Each was to bring a thousand shekels of silver for its fruit. ¹² My own vineyard is mine alone. The thousand are for you, Solomon; two hundred for those who tend its fruit.

wedding is no more than the Egyptian girl fantasizing. The fact the wedding ‘scene’, in the form of a dream about it, comes in the middle of the song rather than at the end is again a subversion of the whole genre of romance. The climax is in the wrong place. And this just indicates how unfulfilling are relationships which flout Divine principles.

8:12 She utters the final warning to the daughters of Jerusalem not to stimulate Solomon, and then breaks down with the lament that jealousy is cruel as death (:6) and unrequited love is impossible; Solomon's true love cannot be bought by her. The daughters of Jerusalem then speak of how they have a younger sister whose breasts aren't yet developed, but they will care for her until she is ready for Solomon (8:9). The Egyptian girl then reminisces in the past tense: “I was a wall, and my breasts were like fortress towers; then I found acceptance in his eyes” (8:10). Solomon throughout the Songs has commented positively upon her breasts; and now she is left to lament that that is all just how it was, it's all over now. She then makes the enigmatic comment about how Solomon has a vineyard which he leases out, and yet she is a vineyard which belongs to her alone. The Songs have likened her to a vineyard (2:13,15), but Solomon's vineyard, she says, was associated with Baal-Hamon, Lord / husband of a multitude. She finally realized that he was a womanizer, who would go on to have over 1000 women in his life... Lord [or husband] of a multitude. Perhaps his 1000 wives and concubines lay behind her reference to the 1000 shekels that Solomon can have for his vineyard (:12). But now she was splitting up with him, her vineyard was hers alone, her grapes were now solely at her disposal and were not his any more. The final couplet of the Song is one of bitter sarcasm, typical of the worst order of romantic breakup. Solomon says that his “companions” – the daughters of Jerusalem whom she had so hated – are listening carefully to her, as he is. And she responds by

Lover

¹³ You who dwell in the gardens,
with friends in attendance, let me
hear your voice!

Beloved

¹⁴ Go away, my beloved. Be like a
gazelle or a young stag on the moun-
tains of spices.

telling him to run away, whilst still calling him her “beloved” – for although jealousy is cruel as the grave, her love for him was unquenchable by many waters. So the Song ends with Solomon in rather a bad light – off to his next women, whilst the Egyptian girl walks off the scene bitterly protesting her love for him and how she’s a victim of circumstance and jealousy. Yet Solomon, presumably, authored the Song. We read it therefore in the same way as we do Ecclesiastes – his jaded statement of how life has been for him, how he sought fulfilment of his human lusts but it never worked out, leaving him with a tragic sense of unfulfilment because he had not gone God’s way.

ISAIAH

CHAPTER 1 May 11

The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah, kings of Judah.

Yahweh Rebukes Judah

2 Hear, heavens and listen, earth; for Yahweh has spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. **3** The ox knows his owner, and the donkey his master's crib; but Israel doesn't know Me, My people don't consider. **4** Ah sinful nation, a people loaded with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children who deal corruptly! They have forsaken Yahweh, they have despised the Holy One of Israel, they are estranged and backward. **5** Why should you be beaten more, that you revolt more and more? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart

faint. **6** From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it: wounds, welts, and open sores. They haven't been closed, neither bandaged, neither soothed with oil. **7** Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; foreigners devour your land in your presence and it is desolate, as overthrown by strangers. **8** The daughter of Zion is left like a shelter in a vineyard, like a hut in a field of melons, like a besieged city. **9** Unless Yahweh of Armies had left to us a very small remnant, we would have been as Sodom; we would have been like Gomorrah. **10** Hear the word of Yahweh, you rulers of Sodom! Listen to the law of our God, you people of Gomorrah! **11** What are the multitude of your sacrifices to Me?, says Yahweh. I have had enough of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed animals. I don't delight in the blood of

1:2 'Heaven and earth' are used here to describe a whole system of things; maybe the 'heavens' refer to the leaders of Judah, and the 'earth' the ordinary people. Verse 10 addresses the rulers and ordinary people separately in keeping with this. When we read in other Scriptures of the 'heavens and earth' being destroyed, we have to understand this figuratively, as referring to an entire system of things, human society – rather than the literal Heaven, which is God's dwelling place, and the earth, upon which He intends to establish His eternal Kingdom at Christ's return.

1:7 *Is desolate... are burned* – But this hadn't yet happened at the time Isaiah was prophesying. But so certain was God's word of fulfilment that he could speak in the present tense. We likewise should try to envisage prophesied future things as if they effectively are now – and live accordingly.

1:9 *We would have been as Sodom* – But :10 speaks to them as if they *are* Sodom. They were as Sodom to God, but for the sake of the faithful remnant, He wasn't judging them as Sodom. This shows how faithful third parties can have a huge effect upon the destiny of an unspiritual mass of God's people – so sensitive is God to the righteousness of even one man, as exemplified supremely in the achievement of Christ's work for us.

bulls, or of lambs, or of male goats. 12 When you come to appear before Me, who has required this at your hand, to trample My courts? 13 Bring no more vain offerings. Incense is an abomination to Me; new moons, Sabbaths, and holy gatherings: I can't bear with evil assemblies. 14 My soul hates your New Moons and your appointed feasts. They are a burden to Me. I am weary of bearing them. 15 When you spread forth your hands, I will hide My eyes from you. Yes, when you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. 16 Wash yourselves, make yourself clean. Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, 17 learn to do well, seek justice, relieve the oppressed judge the fatherless, plead for the widow. 18 Come now, and let us reason together, says Yahweh: Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. Though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. 19 If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; 20 but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be devoured with the sword; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it.

The Unfaithful City

21 How the faithful city has become a prostitute! She was full of justice; righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. 22 Your silver has become dross, your wine mixed

with water. 23 Your princes are rebellious, and companions of thieves. Each one loves bribes and follows after rewards. They don't judge the fatherless, neither does the cause of the widow come to them. 24 Therefore the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, the Mighty One of Israel, says: Ah, I will get relief from My adversaries, and avenge Myself of My enemies; 25 and I will turn My hand on you, thoroughly purge away your dross, and will take away all your tin. 26 I will restore your judges as at the first, and your counsellors as at the beginning. Afterwards you shall be called 'The city of righteousness, a faithful city'. 27 Zion shall be redeemed with justice, and her converts with righteousness. 28 But the destruction of transgressors and sinners shall be together, and those who forsake Yahweh shall be consumed. 29 For they shall be ashamed of the oaks which you have desired, and you shall be confounded for the gardens that you have chosen. 30 For you shall be as an oak whose leaf fades, and as a garden that has no water. 31 The strong will be like tinder, and his work like a spark. They will both burn together, and no one will quench them.

CHAPTER 2 May 13

The Mountain of the Lord

This is what Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.
2 It shall happen in the latter days,

2:2 'Mountains' are used figuratively in the Bible to refer to kingdoms. Here we have a prophecy of the future establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, centred on Jerusalem. The Bible teaches the literal return of Christ to earth to establish God's Kingdom here, rather than the righteous going to Heaven at death.

that the mountain of Yahweh's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.³ Many peoples shall go and say, Come, let's go up to the mountain of Yahweh, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem.⁴ He will judge between the nations, and will decide concerning many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plough shares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.⁵ O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the Lord!

Pride Will be Destroyed

⁶ For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled from the east with those who practice divination like the Philistines, and they shake hands with the children of foreigners.⁷ Their land is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures. Their land also is full of horses, neither is there any end of their chari-

ots.⁸ Their land also is full of idols, they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made.⁹ Man is brought low, and mankind is humbled; therefore don't forgive them.¹⁰ Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty.¹¹ The lofty looks of man will be brought low, the arrogance of men will be bowed down, and Yahweh alone will be exalted in that day.¹² For there will be a day of Yahweh of Armies for all that is proud and haughty, and for all that is lifted up; and it shall be brought low:¹³ for all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up, for all the oaks of Bashan,¹⁴ for all the high mountains, for all the hills that are lifted up,¹⁵ for every lofty tower, for every fortified wall,¹⁶ for all the ships of Tarshish and for all pleasant imagery.¹⁷ The pride of man shall be bowed down, and the arrogance of men shall be brought low; and Yahweh alone shall be exalted in that day.¹⁸ The idols shall utterly pass away.¹⁹ Men shall go into the caves of the rocks and into the holes of the earth from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the

2:5 In view of the great future hope of God's Kingdom, God's people should in this life live in the spirit of it, and walk in God's light now as they will eternally.

2:7 The reference to silver, gold, horses and chariots recalls God's forbidding of Israel to trade with other nations in order to get these things, lest they become proud and fear Yahweh alone (Dt. 17:16-20). They did exactly that – and became proud, which is the very reason God wanted to destroy them as this chapter explains in such a repeated manner. Wealth and human strength lead to pride and idolatry – that principle is just as true today. Yet we can so easily seek those things, and the worldly associations through which they can apparently be acquired... Yet humility is of the essence, and this comes from being forced to trust in God alone.

glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. ²⁰ In that day men shall cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold which have been made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats; ²¹ to go into the caverns of the rocks and into the clefts of the ragged rocks, from before the terror of Yahweh, and from the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily. ²² Stop trusting in man, whose breath is in his nostrils; for of what account is he?

CHAPTER 3 May 14

Judgement on Jerusalem and Judah

For, behold, the Lord Yahweh of Armies takes away from Jerusalem and from Judah supply and support, the whole supply of bread, and the whole supply of water; ² the mighty man, the man of war, the judge, the prophet, the diviner, the elder, ³ the captain of fifty, the honourable man, the counsellor,

the skilled craftsman and the clever enchanter. ⁴ I will give boys to be their princes, and children shall rule over them. ⁵ The people will be oppressed, everyone by another, and everyone by his neighbour. The child will behave himself proudly against the old man, and the base against the honourable. ⁶ Indeed a man shall take hold of his brother in the house of his father, saying, You have clothing, you be our ruler, and let this ruin be under your hand. ⁷ In that day he will cry out, saying, I will not be a healer; for in my house is neither bread nor clothing. You shall not make me ruler of the people. ⁸ For Jerusalem is ruined, and Judah is fallen; because their tongue and their doings are against Yahweh, to provoke the eyes of His glory. ⁹ The look of their faces testify against them. They parade their sin like Sodom. They don't hide it. Woe to their soul! For they have brought judgment upon themselves. ¹⁰ Tell the righteous Good! For they shall eat the fruit of their

2:20 In the day of Christ's return, bank accounts, property, investments etc. will be totally irrelevant, indeed people will seek to dissociate themselves from such things. Yet we live in the presence of God's glory and majesty every day of this life, if only we would perceive it.

3:9 *The look of their faces testify against them. They parade their sin* – God's intense awareness of and sensitivity to human behaviour extends even to His noticing of their body language (see too :16). Out of all the many things for which He could have condemned His people, He focuses on pride. Pride is simply so extremely abhorrent to God. “Testify against them” is legal language – their own body language as it were stands up in court in the witness box and condemns them, and in this sense they “brought judgment upon themselves”. It is they rather than God who ask for the sentence of condemnation. He as the final judge arises to proclaim the verdict (:13), but it is Judah who have asked for it. Judgment is in this sense ongoing; it's not that God will only open the books and consider our case at Christ's return. Our own behaviour right now is the statement of the witness in the box, with God now making the judgment and assessing that witness (:13).

deeds.¹¹ Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them; for the deeds of his hands will be paid back to him.¹² As for My people, children are their oppressors, and women rule over them. My people, those who lead you cause you to err, and destroy the way of your paths.

The Lord Judges His People

¹³ Yahweh stands up to contend, and stands to judge the peoples.¹⁴ Yahweh will enter into judgement with the elders of His people, and their leaders: It is you who have eaten up the vineyard. The spoil of the poor is in your houses.¹⁵ What do you mean that you crush My people, and grind the face of the poor? says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies.

A Warning to the Women

¹⁶ Moreover Yahweh said, Because the daughters of Zion are haughty, and walk with outstretched necks and flirting eyes, walking to trip as they go, jingling ornaments on their feet;¹⁷ therefore the Lord brings sores on the crown of the head of the women of Zion, and Yahweh will make their scalps bald.¹⁸ In that day the Lord will take away the beauty of their anklets, the headbands, the crescent necklaces,¹⁹ the earrings, the bracelets, the veils,²⁰ the headdresses, the ankle chains, the sashes, the perfume bottles, the charms,²¹ the signet rings,

the nose rings,²² the fine robes, the capes, the cloaks, the purses,²³ the hand mirrors, the fine linen garments, the tiaras, and the shawls.²⁴ It shall happen that instead of sweet spices, there shall be rottenness; instead of a belt, a rope; instead of well set hair, baldness; instead of a robe, a wearing of sackcloth; and branding instead of beauty.²⁵ Your men shall fall by the sword, and your mighty in the war.²⁶ Her gates shall lament and mourn; and she shall be desolate and sit on the ground.

CHAPTER 4 May 14

Seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, We will eat our own bread, and wear our own clothing: only let us be called by your name. Take away our reproach. Jerusalem To Be Restored

² In that day, Yahweh's branch will be beautiful and glorious, and the fruit of the land will be the beauty and glory of the survivors of Israel.³ It will happen, that he who is left in Zion, and he who remains in Jerusalem shall be called holy, even everyone who is written among the living in Jerusalem;⁴ when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from its midst, by the spirit of justice, and by the spirit of burning.⁵ Yahweh will create over the whole habita-

3:16 Again, God notices and condemns the body language of people, so closely does He analyze human behaviour and so hypersensitive is He to any human pride; see on :9.

4:5 The allusion is to the pillar of cloud and fire which led Israel through the wilderness. Israel's history, like our personal lives, is a wilderness journey, led by the Angel in the cloud and fire; but finally the pillar comes to rest, over Jerusalem.

tion of Mount Zion and over her assemblies a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory will be a canopy. ⁶ There will be a pavilion for a shade in the daytime from the heat, and for a refuge and for a shelter from storm and from rain.

CHAPTER 5 May 15

The Song of the Vineyard

Let me sing for my well beloved a song of my beloved about His vineyard. My beloved had a vineyard on a very fruitful hill. ² He dug it up, gathered out its stones, planted it with the choicest vine, built a tower in its midst, and also cut out a wine press therein. He looked for it to yield grapes, but it yielded wild grapes. ³ Now, inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, please judge between Me and My vineyard. ⁴ What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not

done in it? Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, did it yield wild grapes? ⁵ Now I will tell you what I will do to My vineyard. I will take away its hedge, and it will be eaten up. I will break down its wall of it, and it will be trampled down. ⁶ I will lay it a wasteland. It won't be pruned nor hoed, but it will grow briars and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it. ⁷ For the vineyard of Yahweh of Armies is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah His pleasant plant: and He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression; for righteousness, but, behold, a cry of distress.

The Evil That Men Do

8 Woe to those who join house to house, who lay field to field until there is no room, and you are made to dwell alone in the midst of the land!

9 In my ears Yahweh of Armies says: Surely many houses will be desolate,

5:3 Please judge between Me and My vineyard – At times, God invites us to judge Him (see Rom. 3:4). We may find this idea of putting God in the dock to be inappropriate and something we shy away from; but every time we doubt that in fact God has created an ideal environment for our bearing of spiritual fruit, this is in fact what we are doing.

5:4 God has done absolutely everything possible so that we His vineyard bring forth fruit. We need to remember this when we complain that if only this or that situation would be different in my life, then I could bring forth far more fruit to God. Jesus based His parable of the vineyard on this song (Mt. 21:33-41). But He concludes it rather differently. Instead of the vineyard being destroyed, the workers (the Jews) are destroyed in judgment and the vineyard is given to other workers (the body of Christ). But the same fruit is required of us as it was from them – justice and righteousness towards others (:7). In these very two things, we exalt God if we exalt the lowly by giving them justice (:16).

5:5, 6 This describes how Judah was trampled by invaders and left waste for 70 years whilst Judah were in captivity in Babylon. God's hope was that the vineyard would again be fruitful at their return, but it wasn't.

5:9 In my ears – Isaiah spoke publically what God had spoken in his ears. The spirit of the prophets should be our spirit in our testimony for Jesus (Rev. 19:10). Jesus con-

even great and beautiful ones, unoccupied.¹⁰ For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield an ephah.¹¹ Woe to those who rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; who stay late into the night, until wine inflames them!¹² The harp, lyre, tambourine, and flute, with wine, are at their feasts; but they don't respect the work of Yahweh, neither have they considered the operation of His hands.¹³ Therefore My people go into captivity for lack of knowledge. Their honourable men are famished, and their multitudes are parched with thirst.¹⁴ Therefore Sheol has enlarged its desire, and opened its mouth without measure; and their glory, their multitude, their pomp, and he who rejoices among them, descend into it.¹⁵ So man is brought low, mankind is humbled, and the eyes of the arrogant ones are humbled;¹⁶ but Yahweh of Armies is exalted in justice, and God the Holy One is sanctified in righteousness.¹⁷ Then the lambs will graze as in their pasture, and strangers will eat the ruins of the rich.¹⁸ Woe to those who draw iniquity with cords of falsehood, and wickedness as with cart rope;¹⁹ who say, Let Him make

speed, let Him hasten His work, that we may see it; and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw near and come, that we may know it!²⁰ Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet.²¹ Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!²² Woe to those who are mighty to drink wine, and champions at mixing strong drink;²³ who acquit the guilty for a bribe, but deny justice for the innocent!²⁴ Therefore as the tongue of fire devours the stubble, and as the dry grass sinks down in the flame, so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust; because they have rejected the law of Yahweh of Armies, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.²⁵ Therefore Yahweh's anger burns against His people, and He has stretched out His hand against them, and has struck them. The mountains tremble, and their dead bodies are as refuse in the midst of the streets. For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is still stretched out.²⁶ He will lift up a banner for the nations from far, and He will whistle for them from the end of the land.

firms this by telling *us* that what *we* (like Isaiah) hear in the ear, we are to openly proclaim (Mt. 10:27). It must've been hard and counter-instinctive for Isaiah to proclaim his message to a people who generally didn't want to hear nor have their comfort zones invaded – just as it is for us.

5:13 *For lack of knowledge* – This “lack” was a moral issue, not an intellectual one. To ‘know’ God doesn’t mean to amass theory, but to not follow the selfish materialism criticized in the previous verses.

5:15, 16 Humility exalts God; this paradox is found throughout the Bible, supremely in the exaltation of the supremely humble Jesus to the greatest height.

5:26 The Gentile nations situated at the end or borders of Judah came and attacked her from their own motives, but ultimately God was using them and had called them

Behold, they will come speedily and swiftly. ²⁷ None shall be weary nor stumble among them; none shall slumber nor sleep; neither shall the belt of their waist be untied, nor the latches of their shoes be broken: ²⁸ whose arrows are sharp, and all their bows bent. Their horses' hoofs will be like flint, and their wheels like a whirlwind. ²⁹ Their roaring will be like a lioness, they will roar like young lions. Yes, they shall roar and seize their prey and carry it off, and there will be no one to deliver. ³⁰ They will roar against them in that day like the roaring of the sea. If one looks to the land behold, darkness

and distress. The light is darkened in its clouds.

CHAPTER 6 May 16

God Calls to Isaiah

In the year that king Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up; and His train filled the temple. ² Above Him stood the seraphim. Each one had six wings; with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet and with two he flew. ³ One called to another and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Yahweh of Armies! The whole earth is full of His glory! ⁴ The foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of Him

to come and do His work of judgment. Total unbelievers are in God's hand and are moved around the board of life by God in relation to His intentions for His people.

6:1 In :1-4 we have a vision of “the Lord high and lifted up”, enthroned in the temple, with an earthquake, the temple filled with smoke, the doorposts that held up the veil being shaken (with the implication that the veil falls, :4). Rev. 15:5-8, building on this passage, has the veil being removed, the Most Holy opened, and the temple filled with smoke. This sends the mind straight to the rending of the temple veil at the crucifixion and the earthquake (Mt. 27:51). The Lord “high and lifted up” is a phrase that occurs later in Isaiah (52:13), concerning the crucified Lord Jesus, lifted up and exalted “very high” by the cross. John 12:37-41 tells us that Isaiah 6 is a prophetic vision of the Lord Jesus in glory; and in this passage John quotes both Isaiah 6 and 53 together, reflecting their connection and application to the same event, namely the Lord’s crucifixion. When Isaiah saw this vision he was convicted of his sinfulness, as we should be before the cross: “Woe is me, for I am undone...”. And yet the same vision comforted him with the reality of forgiveness, and inspired him to offer to go forth and witness to Israel of God’s grace. The vision of the cross convicts men of their sin, and yet inspires them to go forward in service. Rev. 4:9 alludes to the Isaiah 6 vision, and applies it to the future judgment. Yet silhouetted within the vision of the judgment throne is a slain lamb (Rev. 5:6), as if before the judgment, all will be aware of the Lord’s sacrifice. The accepted will utter praise immediately after realising the wonderful verdict pronounced for them – in terms of praising Jesus for his sacrifice, and recognising their eternal debt to the blood of His cross (Rev. 5:9). The cross, the judgment and reward are connected. In Jn. 12:31,32, in the same passage in which Isaiah 6 and 53 are connected and applied to the crucifixion, Jesus Himself foretold that His death would be “the judgment of this world”. Whenever we come before the cross we come before our judgment, and therefore self-examination at the breaking of bread service is natural.

who called, and the house was filled with smoke. ⁵ Then I said, Woe is me! For I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell amongst a people of unclean lips: for my eyes have seen the King, Yahweh of Armies! ⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. ⁷ He touched my mouth with it and said, Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin forgiven. ⁸ I heard the Lord's voice, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here I am. Send me! ⁹ He said, Go, and tell this people, 'You hear indeed, but don't understand; and you see indeed, but don't perceive'. ¹⁰ Make the heart of this people fat. Make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed. ¹¹ Then I said, Lord, how long? He answered, Until the cities are waste without inhabitant and houses without man and the land becomes utterly waste, ¹² and Yahweh has removed men far away, and the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. ¹³ If there is a tenth left in it, that also will in turn be consumed: as a terebinth, and as an oak, whose stump remains when they are felled; so the holy seed is its stump.

CHAPTER 7 May 17

Isaiah Is Sent to King Ahaz

It happened in the days of Ahaz the son of Jotham the son of Uzziah,

king of Judah, that Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel, went up to Jerusalem to war against it, but could not prevail against it. ² It was told the house of David, saying, Syria is allied with Ephraim! His heart trembled, and the heart of his people, as the trees of the forest tremble with the wind. ³ Then Yahweh said to Isaiah, Go out now to meet Ahaz, you, and Shearjashub your son, at the end of the conduit of the upper pool, on the highway of the fuller's field. ⁴ Tell him, 'Be careful, and keep calm. Don't be afraid, neither let your heart be faint because of these two tails of smoking torches, for the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria, and of the son of Remaliah. ⁵ Because Syria, Ephraim and the son of Remaliah have plotted evil against you, saying, ⁶ Let's go up against Judah and tear it apart, and let's divide it among ourselves, and set up a king in its midst, even the son of Tabeel. ⁷ This is what the Lord Yahweh says: It shall not stand, neither shall it happen. ⁸ For the head of Syria is Damascus, and the head of Damascus is Rezin; and within sixty-five years Ephraim shall be broken in pieces, so that it shall not be a people; ⁹ and the head of Ephraim is Samaria, and the head of Samaria is Remaliah's son. If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established'.

A Sign from God

¹⁰ Yahweh spoke again to Ahaz, saying, ¹¹ Ask a sign of Yahweh your God; ask it either in the depth, or in the height above. ¹² But Ahaz said, I

will not ask, neither will I tempt Yahweh.¹³ He said, Listen now, house of David. Is it not enough for you to try the patience of men, that you will try the patience of My God also? ¹⁴ Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin will conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. ¹⁵ He shall eat curds and honey when he knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good. ¹⁶ For before the child knows to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land whose two kings you abhor shall be forsaken. ¹⁷ Yahweh will bring on you, on your people and on your father's house, days that have not come, from the day that Ephraim departed from Judah; even the king of Assyria. ¹⁸ It will happen in that day that Yahweh will whistle for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. ¹⁹ They shall come, and shall all rest in the desolate valleys, in the clefts of the rocks, on all thorn hedges, and on all pastures. ²⁰ In that day the Lord will shave with a razor that is hired in the parts beyond the River Euphrates, even with the king of Assyria, the head and the hair of the feet; and it shall also consume the beard. ²¹ It shall happen in that day that a man shall keep alive a young

cow, and two sheep; ²² and it shall happen, that because of the abundance of milk which they shall give he shall eat curds: for everyone will eat curds and honey who is left in the midst of the land. ²³ It will happen in that day that every place where there were a thousand vines at a thousand silver shekels, shall be for briars and thorns. ²⁴ People will go there with arrows and with bow, because all the land will be briars and thorns. ²⁵ All the hills that were cultivated with the hoe, you shall not come there for fear of briars and thorns; but it shall be for the sending forth of oxen, and for the treading of sheep.

CHAPTER 8 May 18

The Sign of Isaiah's Son

Yahweh said to me, Take a large tablet, and write on it with a man's pen, 'For Maher Shalal Hash Baz,'² and I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to testify: Uriah the priest, and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah.³ I went to the prophetess, and she conceived, and bore a son. Then Yahweh said to me, Call his name 'Maher Shalal Hash Baz'.⁴ For before the child knows how to say, 'My father', and, 'My mother', the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be carried away by the king of Assyria.

7:12 False humility is as obnoxious to God as human pride.

7:14 This prophecy is applied to the Lord Jesus, the final "Emmanuel" ['God with us'] in Mt. 1:23. But clearly the prophecy had a primary fulfilment in the time of Isaiah (perhaps in 8:3,4). God's prophecies could be validated by those who first heard them, because they would have a fulfilment in their times (Dt. 18:22), but they also often had their major fulfilment in far distant times.

8:6 *This people have refused the waters of Shiloah* – Referring to how Isaiah had stood by the gentle waters in 7:3 and urged them not to fear the Syria-Ephraim con-

The Invasion and Warnings

Yahweh spoke to me yet again, saying, ⁶ Because this people have refused the waters of Shiloah that go softly, and rejoice in Rezin and Remaliah's son; ⁷ now therefore, behold, the Lord brings upon them the mighty flood waters of the River Euphrates: the king of Assyria and all his glory. It will come up over all its channels, and go over all its banks. ⁸ It will sweep onward into Judah. It will overflow and pass through; it will reach even to the neck; and the stretching out of its wings will fill the breadth of your land, Immanuel. ⁹ Make an uproar, you peoples, and be broken in pieces! Listen, all you from far countries: dress for battle, and be shattered! Dress for battle, and be shattered! ¹⁰ Take counsel together, and it will be brought to nothing; speak the word, and it will not stand: for God is with us. ¹¹ For Yahweh spoke thus to me with a strong hand, and instructed me not to walk in the way of this people, saying, ¹² Don't

say, ‘A conspiracy!’ concerning all about which this people say, ‘A conspiracy!’ neither fear what they fear, nor be terrorized. ¹³ Yahweh of Armies is who you must respect as holy. He is the one you must fear; He is the one you must dread. ¹⁴ He will be a sanctuary for both houses of Israel, but He will be a trap and a snare for the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁵ Many will stumble over it, fall, be broken, be snared, and be captured. ¹⁶ Wrap up the testimony. Seal the law among My disciples. ¹⁷ I will wait for Yahweh, who hides His face from the house of Jacob, and I will look for Him. ¹⁸ Behold, I and the children whom Yahweh has given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel from Yahweh of Armies, who dwells in Mount Zion. ¹⁹ When they tell you, Consult with those who have familiar spirits and with the wizards, who chirp and who mutter: shouldn't a people consult with their God? Should they consult the dead on behalf of the living? ²⁰ Turn to the law

federacy but trust in God, who for all their sins was prepared to deliver them from that threat. Yet instead they tried to find salvation from it by human means. Because of this, God was going to go ahead and bring the Assyrians upon them as He had initially planned. Notice that although He had threatened to do this from the start of Isaiah's prophecy, He gave them a potential way out by asking them to trust in Him and not fear Ephraim's threatened invasion. But they failed that test.

8:18 I and the children whom Yahweh has given me – This applies not only to Isaiah's natural children but to his “disciples” who formed a school of prophets who also preached God's word to Judah (:16). Yet this is quoted in Heb. 2:13 as a proof that Christ was of the same nature as us. We are therefore invited to see Isaiah here as a type of Christ, and us as that small group of supporters who assisted him in teaching God's word to a generally unresponsive people. We too are to be people of sign to those around us.

8:20 This is to be our attitude too – we are to assess the claims of others by how far they are in harmony with God's word. By turning to His word in this way, we are ‘consulting with our God’ rather than men (:19).

and to the testimony! If they don't speak according to this word, surely there is no light in them. ²¹ They will pass through it, very distressed and hungry; and it will happen that when they are hungry, they will worry, and curse by their king and by their God. They will turn their faces upward, ²² and look to the earth, and see distress, darkness, and the gloom of anguish. They will be driven into thick darkness.

CHAPTER 9 May 19

Unto Us a Child Is Born

But there shall be no more gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time, He brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali; but in the latter time He has made it glorious, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations. ² The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light, those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, on them the light has shined. ³ You have multiplied the nation, but You have not

increased their joy. They will rejoice before You according to the joy in harvest, as men rejoice when they divide the spoil. ⁴ For the yoke of his burden and the staff of his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, You have broken as in the day of Midian. ⁵ For all the armour of the armed man in the noisy battle and the garments rolled in blood will be for burning, fuel for the fire. ⁶ For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government will be on his shoulders. His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Divine Warrior, Father of the Eternal Age, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end, on the throne of David, and on his kingdom, to establish it, and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from that time on, even forever. The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will perform this.

Punishment

⁸ The Lord sent a word into Jacob, and it falls upon Israel. ⁹ All the peo-

9:2 Quoted in Mt. 4:13-16 about how Jesus began His ministry in the areas of northern Israel which were most despised by devout Jews for being associated with Gentiles. God loves working in this way – firstly revealing Himself to those despised by others.

9:6 *For to us a child is born* – This must have had some primary fulfilment in the promised son of sign who had been promised in Isaiah's time in previous chapters (7:14; 8:3). This son was to be known as 'God with us', 'Immanuel', but this didn't make him God Himself in person. The major fulfilment of the prophecy in Jesus likewise doesn't make Him to be God Himself. His *name* was to be called "Wonderful, Counsellor, Divine Warrior"; Jesus as God's Son carried God's Name (Jn. 5:43), and therefore all the titles of God can be applied to Him. The list of titles here seems borrowed from the traditional titles of the rulers of the surrounding nations. The point was that Messiah was to be Israel's true king, reigning on God's behalf and carrying His Name and authority.

9:7 Christ will rule "on the throne of David" in the sense that His Kingdom on earth will have a literal centre in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 7:12-16; Lk. 1:31-35).

ple will know, including Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria, who say in pride and in arrogance of heart,¹⁰ The bricks have fallen, but we will rebuild with cut stone. The sycamore fig trees have been cut down, but we will put cedars in their place.¹¹ Therefore Yahweh will set up on high against him the adversaries of Rezin, and will stir up his enemies,¹² the Syrians in front and the Philistines behind; and they will devour Israel with open mouth. For all this, His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.¹³ Yet the people have not turned to Him who struck them, neither have they sought Yahweh of Armies.¹⁴ Therefore Yahweh will cut off from Israel head and tail, palm branch and reed, in one day.¹⁵ The elder and the honourable man is the head, and the prophet who teaches lies is the tail.¹⁶ For those who lead this people lead them astray; and those who are led by them are destroyed.¹⁷ Therefore the Lord will not rejoice over their young men, neither will He have compassion on their fatherless and widows; for each one is profane and an evildoer, and every mouth speaks folly. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.¹⁸ For wickedness burns like a fire, it devours the briars and thorns; yes, it kindles in the thickets of the forest, and they roll upward in a column

of smoke.¹⁹ Through the wrath of Yahweh of Armies, the land is burnt up; and the people are the fuel for the fire. No one spares his brother.²⁰ One will devour on the right hand, and be hungry; and he will eat on the left hand, and they will not be satisfied. Everyone will eat the flesh of his own arm:²¹ Manasseh, Ephraim; and Ephraim, Manasseh; and they together shall be against Judah. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.

CHAPTER 10 May 20

Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, and to the writers who write oppressive decrees;² to deprive the needy from justice, and to rob the poor among My people of their rights, that widows may be their spoil, and that they may make the fatherless their prey!³ What will you do in the day of visitation, and in the desolation which will come from afar? To whom will you flee for help? Where will you leave your wealth?⁴ They will only bow down under the prisoners, and will fall under the slain. For all this His anger is not turned away, but His hand is stretched out still.

How God Used Assyria

5 Alas Assyrian, the rod of My anger, the staff in whose hand is My indignation!⁶ I will send him against a profane nation, and against the

9:12 With open mouth – The nations surrounding Judah are here likened to a beast; when we later read of a dramatic beast in conflict with God's people in the last days, this may also refer to a confederacy comprised of the nations which surround Israel.

10:7 He doesn't mean so – Unbelieving people and entire nations can be controlled by

people who anger Me will I give him a command to take the spoil and to take the prey, and to tread them down like the mire of the streets. ⁷ However he doesn't mean so, neither does his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and to cut off not a few nations. ⁸ For he says, Aren't all of my princes kings? ⁹ Isn't Calno like Carchemish? Isn't Hamath like Arpad? Isn't Samaria like Damascus? ¹⁰ As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols, whose engraved images exceeded those of Jerusalem and of Samaria; ¹¹ shall I not, as I have done to Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols? ¹² Therefore it will happen, that when the Lord has performed His whole work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, He will punish the fruit of the wilful proud heart of the king of Assyria, and the insolence of his arrogant looks. ¹³ For he has said, By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom; for I have understanding: and I have removed the boundaries of the peoples, and have robbed their treasures. Like a valiant man I have brought down their rulers. ¹⁴ My hand has

found the riches of the peoples like a nest, and like one gathers eggs that are abandoned, have I gathered all the earth. There was no one who moved their wing, or that opened their mouth, or chirped. ¹⁵ Should an axe brag against him who chops with it? Should a saw exalt itself above him who saws with it? As if a rod should lift those who lift it up, or as if a staff should lift up someone who is not wood. ¹⁶ Therefore the Lord Yahweh of Armies will send among his fat ones leanness; and under his glory a burning will be kindled like the burning of fire. ¹⁷ The light of Israel will be for a fire, and his Holy One for a flame; and it will burn and devour his thorns and his briars in one day. ¹⁸ He will consume the glory of his forest and of his fruitful field, both soul and body. It will be as when a standard bearer faints. ¹⁹ The remnant of the trees of his forest shall be few, so that a child could write their number.

A Remnant

²⁰ It will come to pass in that day that the remnant of Israel and those who have escaped from the house

God to do His purpose, but their hearts are far from consciously realizing the role they are playing. Assyria was used by God to punish various Gentile nations and also Judah to some extent, but when he went too far and thought he would destroy the Jerusalem temple because Yahweh was merely another idol who couldn't withstand his strength (:11-13) – then God punished him. Truly all things are for our sakes as God's people (2 Cor. 4:15), and God even watches and disciplines those unbelievers who play a role in our lives if they intend to go further than what God has intended. His level of involvement in human life is awesome. We need to remember this in those times when we may feel God to be distant and uninvolved.

10:20 *Will no more again lean on him who struck them* – God's people had a bizarre habit of worshipping the very idols which their enemies worshipped. Any worship of

of Jacob will no more again lean on him who struck them, but shall lean on Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, in truth.²¹ A remnant will return, even the remnant of Jacob, to the mighty God.²² For though your people, Israel, are like the sand of the sea, a remnant of them shall return. A destruction is determined, overflowing with righteousness.²³ For the Lord Yahweh of Armies, will make a full end as already determined, in the midst of all the earth.

The Lord Will Punish Assyria

²⁴ Therefore the Lord Yahweh of Armies, says My people who dwell in Zion, don't be afraid of the Assyrian, though he strike you with the rod, and lift up his staff against you, as Egypt did.²⁵ For yet a very little while, and the indignation against you will be accomplished, and My anger will be directed to his destruction.²⁶ Yahweh of Armies will stir up a scourge against him, as in the slaughter of Midian at the rock of Oreb. His rod

will be over the sea, and He will lift it up like He did against Egypt.²⁷ It will happen in that day, that his burden will depart from off your shoulder, and his yoke from off your neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing oil.²⁸ He has come to Aiath, he has passed through Migron; at Michmash he stores his baggage;²⁹ they have gone over the pass; they have taken up their lodging at Geba; Ramah trembles; Gibeah of Saul has fled.³⁰ Cry aloud with your voice, daughter of Gallim! Listen, Laishah! You poor Anathoth!³¹ Madmenah is a fugitive, the inhabitants of Gebim flee for safety,³² this very day he will halt at Nob. He shakes his hand at the mountain of the daughter of Zion, the hill of Jerusalem.³³ Behold, the Lord Yahweh of Armies will lop the boughs with terror. The tall will be cut down, and the lofty will be brought low.³⁴ He will cut down the thickets of the forest with iron, and Lebanon will fall by the Mighty One.

this world's idols is just as bizarre, but in the heat of our human situation, we don't see the absurdity of it as we should.

10:22 This is quoted in Rom. 9:27 and the remnant is interpreted as the minority of Israel who would believe in Christ. Always God works with relatively small numbers. Israel were one of the smallest of the nations in their world, and yet God chose them; and yet out of them, He finally worked only with a remnant. In the context of Romans 9, Paul also appears to understand God's definition of a remnant here as meaning that they were a remnant only by grace; as if even our correct belief and living before God is to some degree a result of His gracious calling.

10:25 *My anger will be directed to his destruction* – God's anger isn't emotion out of control. His anger was against Judah, and He was using Assyria to punish them; but He can assure His people that soon that anger will be redirected against the Assyrian, and He will save Jerusalem itself, although the rest of the land of Judah would be conquered – :28-30 describe the Assyrian advance through the other cities of Judah. Even whilst angry with Judah, God felt sorry for them – hence “You poor Anathoth!” (:30). In wrath He remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2).

CHAPTER 11 May 21
Perfect Justice in Messiah's Kingdom

A shoot will come out of the stock of Jesse, and a branch out of his roots will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of Yahweh will rest on him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Yahweh. ³ His delight will be in the fear of Yahweh; he will not judge by the sight of his eyes, neither decide by the hearing of his ears; ⁴ but with righteousness he will judge the poor, and decide with equity for the humble of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips he will kill the wicked. ⁵ Righteousness will be the belt of his waist and faithfulness the belt of his loins. ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat; the calf, the young lion, and the fat-tened calf together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow and the

bear will graze, their young ones will lie down together. The lion will eat straw like the ox, ⁸ the nursing child will play near a cobra's hole, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. ⁹ They will not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea.

The Exiles Will Return

¹⁰ It will happen in that day that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, who stands as a banner of the peoples; and his resting place will be glorious. ¹¹ It will happen in that day that the Lord will set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. ¹² He will set up a banner for the nations and will assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from

11:1 Jesus was the branch whose root was in David, son of Jesse; He was a literal descendant of David through Mary (Acts 2:30). He therefore couldn't have personally pre-existed before His birth of her.

11:2 These words were clearly true of Christ (Lk. 4:18).

11:4 The descriptions of how Christ in His life and future Kingdom would bring justice to the poor is set within the context of Isaiah's repeated condemnation of Judah for not doing justice to the poor (3:14; 10:2). He would be an embodiment of all that God's people ought to have been; had they followed God's commandments, they could have been His Kingdom on earth. But they failed, as we do. Therefore Christ is presented as the essence of God's Kingdom, it's even one of His titles (Lk. 17:21). If we want to understand what the Kingdom of God will essentially be like, we must look at the character of Christ. If that's not what we wish to be in ourselves 24/7, there will be no point in our being in His Kingdom. But if we long to be like that, and for the whole world to be as Him, then the coming Kingdom of God is truly good news for us.

11:9 A clear prophecy of God's future Kingdom to be established on earth under Christ's rulership – and not in Heaven.

the four corners of the earth.¹³ The envy also of Ephraim will depart, and those who persecute Judah will be cut off. Ephraim won't envy Judah, and Judah won't persecute Ephraim.¹⁴ They will fly down on the shoulders of the Philistines on the west. Together they will plunder the children of the east. They will extend their power over Edom and Moab, and the children of Ammon will obey them.¹⁵ Yahweh will utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea; and with His scorching wind He will wave His hand over the River, and will split it into seven streams, and cause men to march over in sandals.¹⁶ There will be a highway for the remnant that is left of His people from Assyria, like there was for Israel in the day that he came up out of the land of Egypt.

CHAPTER 12 May 22

Hymn of Praise

In that day you will say, I will give thanks to You, Yahweh; for though You were angry with me, Your anger has turned away and You comfort me.² Behold, God is my salvation. I will trust, and will not be afraid; for Yah, Yahweh, is my strength and song; and He has become my

salvation.³ Therefore with joy you will draw water out of the wells of salvation.⁴ In that day you will say, Give thanks to Yahweh! Call on His name. Declare His doings among the peoples. Proclaim that His name is exalted!⁵ Sing to Yahweh, for He has done excellent things! Let this be known in all the earth!⁶ Cry aloud and shout, you inhabitant of Zion; for the Holy One of Israel is great in the midst of you!

CHAPTER 13 May 23

God Will Punish Babylon

The burden of Babylon, which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw:² Set up a banner on the bare mountain! Lift up your voice to them! Wave your hand, that they may go into the gates of the nobles.³ I have commanded My consecrated ones; yes, I have called My mighty men for My anger, even My proudly exulting ones.⁴ The noise of a multitude is in the mountains, as of a great people; the noise of an uproar of the kingdoms of the nations gathered together! Yahweh of Armies is mustering the army for the battle.⁵ They come from a far country, from the uttermost part of heaven, even Yahweh, and the weapons of His indignation,

12:6 *The Holy One of Israel is great in the midst of you – God Himself personally, perhaps manifested through His Son but perhaps in person, will ultimately dwell literally in Jerusalem.*

13:1 Prophesying like this against a city like Babylon would've been as bizarre as declaring that the world's great cities such as London, Moscow or New York will soon become deserted wasteland because God is angry with their pride (:19). Isaiah's faith, and that of his hearers, would've been sorely tested in preaching and believing this message; just as our proclamation of Christ's return is a challenge to our faith when we consider its' real implications for our current world.

to destroy the whole land.⁶ Wail; for the day of Yahweh is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.⁷ Therefore all hands will be feeble, and everyone's heart will melt.⁸ They will be dismayed. Pangs and sorrows will seize them, they will be in pain like a woman in labour. They will look in amazement one at another, their faces will be faces of flickering flame.⁹ Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, cruel, with wrath and fierce anger; to make the land a desolation, and to destroy its sinners out of it.¹⁰ For the stars of the sky and its constellations will not give their light, the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.¹¹ I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will humble the arrogance of the terrible.¹² I will make people more valuable than fine gold, even a person than the pure gold of Ophir.¹³ Therefore I will make the heavens tremble, and the earth will be shaken out of its place in the wrath of Yahweh of Armies, and in the day of His fierce anger.¹⁴ It will happen that like

a hunted gazelle, and like sheep that no one gathers, they will each turn to their own people, and will each flee to their own land.¹⁵ Everyone who is found will be thrust through. Everyone who is captured will fall by the sword.¹⁶ Their infants also will be dashed in pieces before their eyes. Their houses will be ransacked, and their wives raped.¹⁷ Behold, I will stir up the Medes against them, who will not value silver, and as for gold, they will not delight in it.¹⁸ Their bows will dash the young men in pieces; and they shall have no pity on the fruit of the womb. Their eyes will not spare children.¹⁹ Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldeans' pride, will be like when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.²⁰ It will never be inhabited, neither will it be lived in from generation to generation. The Arabian will not pitch a tent there, neither will shepherds make their flocks lie down there.²¹ But wild animals of the desert will lie there, and their houses will be full of jackals. Ostriches will dwell there, and wild goats will frolic there.²² Wolves will cry in their castles, and jackals in the

13:12 *I will make people more valuable than fine gold* – The value and meaning of persons will be the principle which is to be enforced upon this earth by the destruction of all those systems which mean otherwise.

13:13 Heavens and earth are used figuratively here to describe a system of things – see on 1:2. There is nothing imperfect in Heaven which needs judgment or destruction.

13:20-22 Much has been made of the fact that the historical site of Babylon has been deserted for long periods. But there have been attempts to rebuild it at times and some dwelling there. This prophecy must therefore have its final fulfilment when Christ returns, which suggests there will be a literal Babylon in existence, persecuting God's people as did the historical Babylon. Perhaps the fall of Babylon at Christ's return which is described in Revelation has a literal element to it. Bible students therefore

pleasant palaces. Her time is near to come, and her days will not be prolonged.

CHAPTER 14 May 24

Israel Allowed to Return

For Yahweh will have compassion on Jacob, and will yet choose Israel, and set them in their own land. The foreigner will join himself with them, and they will unite with the house of Jacob.² The peoples will take them, and bring them to their place. The house of Israel will possess them in Yahweh's land for servants and for handmaids. They will take as captives those whose captives they once were; and they shall rule over their oppressors.

Babylon Is Destroyed

It will happen in the day that Yahweh will give you rest from your sorrow from your trouble and from the hard service in which you were made to serve,⁴ that you will take up this parable against the king of Babylon and

watch the situation in Iran and Iraq, the areas of historical Babylon and Assyria, with great interest.

14:12 It is assumed by some that Lucifer was once a powerful angel who sinned at Adam's time and was therefore cast down to earth. This isn't Biblical. The words "Devil", "Satan" and "angel" never occur in this chapter. This is the only place in Scripture where the word "Lucifer" occurs in some translations. There is no evidence that Isaiah 14 is describing anything that happened in the garden of Eden; if it is, then why are we left 3,000 years from the time of Genesis before being told what really happened there? Lucifer is described as being covered in maggots (:11) and mocked by men (:16) because he no longer has any power; so there is no justification for thinking that Lucifer is now on earth leading believers astray. Why is Lucifer punished for saying, "I will ascend into heaven" (:13), if he was already there? Lucifer is to rot in sheol [the grave] (:11). Seeing angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35,36), Lucifer therefore cannot be an angel; the language is more suited to a man. It wasn't until Milton's *Paradise Lost* that the term 'Lucifer' took on any connotation of 'Satan' or a force of evil in secular thinking. Isaiah 13–23 is a series of "burdens" on various nations, e.g. Baby-

say, How the oppressor has ceased! The golden city has ceased!⁵ Yahweh has broken the staff of the wicked, the sceptre of the rulers,⁶ who struck the peoples in wrath with a continual stroke, who ruled the nations in anger, with a persecution that none restrained.⁷ The whole earth is at rest, and is quiet. They break out in song.⁸ Yes, the fir trees rejoice with you, with the cedars of Lebanon, saying, Since you are humbled, no lumberjack has come up against us.⁹ Sheol from beneath has moved for you to meet you at your coming. It stirs up the dead for you, even all the rulers of the earth. It has raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.¹⁰ They all will answer and ask you, Have you also become as weak as we are? Have you become like us?¹¹ Your pomp is brought down to Sheol, with the sound of your stringed instruments. Maggots are spread out under you, and worms cover you.¹² How you have fallen from heaven, morning

star [Lucifer], son of the dawn! How you are cut down to the ground, who laid the nations low! ¹³ You said in your heart, I will ascend into heaven! I will exalt my throne above the stars of God! I will sit on the mountain of assembly, in the far north! ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds! I will make myself like the Most High! ¹⁵ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol, to the depths of the pit. ¹⁶ Those who see you will stare at you. They will ponder you, saying, Is this the man who made the earth to tremble, who shook kingdoms; ¹⁷ who made the world like a wilderness, and overthrew its cities; who didn't release his prisoners to their home? ¹⁸ All the kings of the nations sleep in glory, each one in his own house. ¹⁹ But you are cast away

from your tomb like a hated branch, clothed with the slain, who are thrust through with the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit; like a dead body trodden under foot. ²⁰ You will not join them in burial, because you have destroyed your land. You have killed your people. The seed of evildoers will not be mentioned by name forever. ²¹ Prepare for slaughter of his children because of the iniquity of their fathers, that they rise not up and possess the earth, and fill the surface of the world with cities. ²² I will rise up against them, says Yahweh of Armies, and cut off from Babylon name and remnant, and son and son's son, says Yahweh. ²³ I will also make it a possession for the porcupine, and pools of water. I will sweep it with the broom of destruc-

lon, Tyre, Egypt. 14:4 sets the context as being a parable against the king of Babylon. The prophecy is therefore about the human king of Babylon, who is described as the morning star. He is clearly defined as a man in :16, a king like any other king (:9,10). In the parable, this star proudly decides to “ascend (higher) into heaven... exalt my throne above the (other) stars of God” (:13). “The stars of God” can refer to the leaders of Israel (Gen. 37:9; Joel 3:15; Dan. 8:10). Because of this, the star is cast down to the earth. The star represents the king of Babylon. Daniel 4 explains how Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had a pride which reached unto heaven (Dan. 4:22). Because of this he was made as an animal (Dan. 4:33). This sudden humbling of one of the world’s most powerful men to a deranged lunatic was such a dramatic event as to call for the parable about the falling of the morning star from heaven to earth. Stars are symbolic of powerful people (Gen. 37:9; Is. 13:10; Ez. 32:7). Ascending to heaven and falling from heaven are Biblical idioms often used for increasing in pride and being humbled (Job 20:6; Jer. 51:53; Lam. 2:1; Mt. 11:23). 14:8 records the relief that now the “Lucifer” figure would no longer cut down cedars in Lebanon and hew mountains. This is exactly the language used by Nebuchadnezzar: “What no former king had done, I achieved: I cut through steep mountains, I split rocks, I opened passages and constructed a straight road for the transport of cedars... To Marduk, my king, mighty cedars... The abundant yield of the Lebanon”. Clearly the figure spoken of in Is. 14 was Nebuchadnezzar. 14:12 says that Lucifer was to be “cut down to the ground” – implying he was a tree. This provides a further link with Daniel 4:8–16, where Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are likened to a tree being cut down.

tion, says Yahweh of Armies. ²⁴ Yahweh of Armies has sworn, saying, Surely, as I have thought, so shall it happen; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand: ²⁵ that I will break the Assyrian in My land, and tread him under foot on My mountains. Then his yoke will leave them, and his burden leave their shoulders. ²⁶ This is the plan that is determined for the whole earth. This is the hand that is stretched out over all the nations. ²⁷ For Yahweh of Armies has planned, and who can stop it? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back? ²⁸ This burden was in the year that king Ahaz died.

Philistines Destroyed

Don't rejoice, O Philistia, all of you, because the rod that struck you is broken; for out of the serpent's root an adder will emerge, and his fruit will be a fiery flying serpent. ³⁰ The first-born of the poor will eat, and the needy will lie down in safety; and I will kill your root with famine, and your remnant will be killed. ³¹ Howl, gate! Cry, city! You are melted away, Philistia, all of you; for smoke comes out of the north, and there is no straggler in his ranks. ³² What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That Yahweh has founded Zion, and in her the afflicted of His people will take refuge.

CHAPTER 15 May 25

Moab Destroyed

The burden of Moab: for in a night, Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to nothing; for in a night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to nothing. ² They have gone up to Bayith, and to Dibon, to the high places, to weep. Moab wails over Nebo and over Medeba. Baldness is on all of their heads; every beard is cut off. ³ In their streets they clothe themselves in sackcloth. In their streets and on their housetops everyone wails, weeping abundantly. ⁴ Heshbon cries out with Elealeh. Their voice is heard even to Jahaz. Therefore the armed men of Moab cry aloud, their souls tremble within them. ⁵ My heart cries out for Moab! Her nobles flee to Zoar, to Eglath Shelishiyah; for they go up by the ascent of Luhith with weeping; for in the way of Horonaim, they raise up a cry of destruction. ⁶ For the waters of Nimrim will be desolate; for the grass has withered away, the tender grass fails, there is no green thing. ⁷ Therefore they will carry away the abundance they have gotten, and that which they have stored up, over the brook of the willows. ⁸ For the cry has gone around the borders of Moab; its wailing to Eglaim, and its wailing echoes back to Beer Elim. ⁹ For the waters of Dimon are full

15:5 My heart cries out for Moab! – Isaiah was emotionally caught up in his message. Having prophesied how Moab, the enemy of his people, would weep and cry out, Isaiah starts crying for them. Like God, he had no joy in the death or judgment of his enemies. He grieved at any person who turns against God, even if they were his personal enemy. The message of Christ's return is also a message of judgment on this earth, and we must ask ourselves whether we have ever cried tears for the lost? See on 16:7.

of blood; for I will bring yet more on Dimon, a lion on those of Moab who escape, and on the remnant of the land.

CHAPTER 16 May 26

Moab's Hopeless Situation

Send the lambs for the ruler of the land from Selah to the wilderness, to the mountain of the daughter of Zion.² For it will be that as wandering birds, as a scattered nest, so will the daughters of Moab be at the fords of the Arnon.³ Give counsel! Execute justice! Make your shade like the night in the midst of the noonday! Hide the outcasts! Don't betray the fugitive!⁴ Let My outcasts dwell with you! As for Moab, be a hiding place for him from the face of the destroyer. For the extortioner is brought to nothing. Destruction ceases, the oppressors are consumed out of the land.⁵ A throne will be established in grace, one will sit on it in truth, in the tent of David, judging, seeking justice, and swift to do righteousness.⁶ We have heard of the pride of Moab, that he is very proud; even of his arrogance, his pride, and his wrath. His boastings are noth-

ing.⁷ Therefore Moab will wail for Moab, all of them will wail. You will mourn for the raisin cakes of Kir Hareseth, utterly stricken.⁸ For the fields of Heshbon languish like the vine of Sibmah. The lords of the nations have broken down its choice branches which reached even to Jazer, which wandered into the wilderness. Its shoots were spread abroad, they passed over the sea.⁹ Therefore I will weep with the weeping of Jazer for the vine of Sibmah. I will water you with my tears, Heshbon, and Elealeh: for on your summer fruits and on your harvest the battle shout has fallen.¹⁰ Gladness is taken away, and joy out of the fruitful field; and in the vineyards there will be no singing, neither joyful noise. Nobody will tread out wine in the presses; I have made the shouting stop.¹¹ Therefore my heart sounds like a harp for Moab, and my inward parts for Kir Heres.¹² It will happen that when Moab presents himself, when he wearis himself on the high place and comes to his sanctuary to pray, that he will not prevail.¹³ This is the word that Yahweh spoke concerning Moab in time past.¹⁴ But now Yah-

16:7 Moab will wail for Moab – And yet Isaiah the Jew wailed for Moab too, such was his identity with and grief for the lost; see on 15:5.

16:9 Therefore I will weep with the weeping of Jazer – Jazer was part of Moab, so Isaiah is saying that he wept as the Moabites did, so much did he identify with the tragedy of his enemies' position. See on 15:5; 16:7; 21:3; 24:16.

16:10 I have made the shouting stop – Isaiah here recognizes the awesome power of the inspired words he was declaring, and felt identified with God to a very deep extent.

16:12 He will not prevail – Prayer is here likened to a struggle, as in Hos. 12:4. It's not a mindless uttering of familiar words and phrases, but real, focused engagement with the mind and heart of God.

weh has spoken, saying, Within three years, as a worker bound by contract would count them, the glory of Moab shall be brought into contempt, with all his great multitude; and the remnant will be very small and feeble.

CHAPTER 17 May 27

Syria Is Punished

The burden of Damascus: Behold, **T**Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it will be a ruinous heap. ² The cities of Aroer are forsaken. They will be for flocks, which shall lie down, and none shall make them afraid. ³ The fortress shall cease from Ephraim, and the kingdom from Damascus, and the remnant of Syria. They will be as the glory of the children of Israel, says Yahweh of Armies.

Concerning Israel

It will happen in that day that the glory of Jacob will be made thin, and the fatness of his flesh will become lean. ⁵ It will be like when the harvester gathers the wheat, and his arm reaps the grain. Yes, it will be like when one gleans grain in the valley of Rephaim. ⁶ Yet gleanings will be left there, like the shaking of an olive tree, two or three olives in the top of

the uppermost bough, four or five in the outermost branches of a fruitful tree, says Yahweh, the God of Israel. ⁷ In that day, a man will look to his Maker, and his eyes shall perceive the Holy One of Israel. ⁸ They will not look to the altars, the work of their hands; neither shall they respect that which their fingers have made, neither the Asherim nor the incense altars. ⁹ In that day their strong cities will be like the forsaken places in the woods and on the mountain top, which were forsaken from before the children of Israel; and it will be a desolation. ¹⁰ For you have forgotten the God of your salvation, and have not remembered the rock of your strength. Therefore you plant pleasant plants, and set out foreign seedlings. ¹¹ In the day of your planting, you hedge it in; in the morning, you make your seed blossom, but the harvest flees away in the day of grief and of desperate sorrow. ¹² Ah, the uproar of many peoples, who roar like the roaring of the seas; and the rushing of nations, that rush like the rushing of mighty waters! ¹³ The nations will rush like the rushing of many waters: but He will rebuke them, and they will flee far off, and will be chased like the chaff of the

17:4 *The glory of Jacob will be made thin* – The context of this section has been a series of prophetic burdens condemning various Gentile nations. And now Isaiah turns to God's people with a message of judgment, as if to make the point that they are no better than the sinful world around them.

17:13 *Chased like the chaff* – This is the language of Dan. 2:35,44 concerning what will happen to all Gentile nations at Christ's return and the establishment of His Kingdom on the ruins of the kingdoms of men. The fearsome awfulness of that day (:14) must never cease to be part of our thinking; with the result that we beseech people to become part of God's true Israel.

mountains before the wind, and like the whirling dust before the storm. ¹⁴ At evening, behold, terror! Before the morning, they are no more. This is the portion of those who plunder us, and the lot of those who rob us.

CHAPTER 18 May 27

Ethiopia Is Punished and Converted

Ah, the land of the rustling of wings, which is beyond the rivers of Ethiopia; ² that sends ambassadors by the sea, even in vessels of papyrus on the waters, saying, Go, you swift messengers, to a nation tall and smooth, to a people awesome from their beginning onward, a nation that measures out and treads down, whose land the rivers divide! ³ All you inhabitants of the world and you dwellers on the land, when a banner is lifted up on the mountains, look! When the trumpet is blown, listen! ⁴ For Yahweh said to me, I will be still, and I will be seen in My dwelling place, like clear heat in sunshine, like a cloud of dew in the heat of harvest. ⁵ For before the harvest, when the blossom is over, and the flower becomes a ripening grape, He will

cut off the sprigs with pruning hooks, and He will cut down and take away the spreading branches. ⁶ They will be left together for the ravenous birds of the mountains, and for the animals of the earth. The ravenous birds will summer on them, and all the animals of the earth will winter on them. ⁷ In that time, a present will be brought to Yahweh of Armies from a people tall and smooth, even from a people awesome from their beginning onward, a nation that measures out and treads down, whose land the rivers divide, to the place of the name of Yahweh of Armies, Mount Zion.

CHAPTER 19 May 28

Egypt Is Punished

The burden of Egypt: Behold, Yahweh rides on a swift cloud, and comes to Egypt. The idols of Egypt will tremble at His presence; and the heart of Egypt will melt in its midst. ² I will stir up the Egyptians against the Egyptians, and they will fight each one against his brother, and each one against his neighbour; city against city, and kingdom against kingdom. ³ The spirit of Egypt will fail in its midst; I will de-

18:7 The intention of all God's judgments is that some will repent, drop their pride and come to identify with Him and His people. His judgments aren't therefore the outpouring of the uncontrolled anger of an irritated deity, but they are spiritually constructive in their ultimate intent. We see this too in the smaller experience we have of Divine judgment for our sins in this life.

19:2 God can give a community the spirit of division as a sign of His judgment (also in :14), and so a divided community is one which is displeasing to God. If we seek, create and glorify division, we are effectively making ourselves worthy of God's condemnation.

19:3-13 This passage speaks of how Egyptian wisdom is in fact foolish, and will be declared as such in Egypt's final judgment; and how God will thereby destroy the

stroy its wisdom. They will seek the idols, the charmers, those who have familiar spirits, and the wizards.⁴ I will give over the Egyptians into the hand of a cruel lord; a fierce king will rule over them, says the Lord Yahweh of Armies.⁵ The waters will fail from the sea, and the river will be wasted and become dry.⁶ The rivers will become foul; the streams of Egypt will be diminished and dried up, the reeds and flags will wither away.⁷ The meadows by the Nile, by the brink of the Nile, and all the sown fields of the Nile, will become dry, be driven away, and be no more.⁸ The fishermen will lament, and all those who fish in the Nile will mourn, and those who spread nets on the waters will languish.⁹ Moreover those who work in combed flax and those who weave white cloth will be confounded.¹⁰ The pillars will be broken in pieces. All those who work for hire will be grieved in soul.¹¹ The princes of Zoan are utterly foolish, the counsel of the wisest counsellors of Pharaoh has become stupid. How do you say to Pharaoh, I am the son of the wise, the son of ancient kings?¹² Where then are your wise men? Let them tell you now; and let them know what Yahweh of Armies has purposed concerning

Egypt.¹³ The princes of Zoan have become fools, the princes of Memphis are deceived. They have caused Egypt to go astray, they who are the cornerstone of her tribes.¹⁴ Yahweh has mixed a spirit of division in the midst of her; and they have caused Egypt to go astray in all of its works, like a drunken man staggers in his vomit.¹⁵ Neither shall there be any work for Egypt, which head or tail, palm branch or rush, may do.

Egypt and Assyria Will Be Blessed

¹⁶ In that day the Egyptians will be like women, they will tremble and fear because of the shaking of the hand of Yahweh of Armies which He shakes over them.¹⁷ The land of Judah will become a terror to Egypt. Everyone to whom mention is made of it will be afraid, because of the plans of Yahweh of Armies which He determines against it.¹⁸ In that day, there will be five cities in the land of Egypt that speak the language of Canaan, and swear to Yahweh of Armies. One will be called The city of destruction.¹⁹ In that day there will be an altar to Yahweh in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to Yahweh at its border.²⁰ It will be for a sign and for a witness to Yahweh of Armies in the land of Egypt; for

wisdom of this world, for Egypt is a symbol of the world. Paul alludes here in 1 Cor. 1:19,20, where he speaks of just the same principles; that God will bring down the wisdom of this world, and that worldly wisdom is foolishness with Him (as in Rom. 1:22). What the world will learn only when it's too late, we are to learn now. This is not an appeal to any spirit of anti-intellectualism in itself, but rather the simple teaching that what is worldly wise and smart is foolishness with God; and acts and attitudes of faith which may appear foolish in the eyes of the world, are in fact the true wisdom.

they will cry to Yahweh because of oppressors, and He will send them a saviour and a defender, and He will deliver them.²¹ Yahweh will be known to Egypt, and the Egyptians will know Yahweh in that day. Yes, they will worship with sacrifice and offering, and will vow a vow to Yahweh, and will perform it.²² Yahweh will strike Egypt, striking and healing. They will return to Yahweh, and He will be entreated by them, and will heal them.²³ In that day there will be a highway out of Egypt to Assyria, and the Assyrian shall come into Egypt, and the Egyptian into Assyria; and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians.²⁴ In that day, Israel will be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth;²⁵ because Yahweh of Armies has blessed them, saying, Blessed be Egypt My people, Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.

CHAPTER 20 May 29

The Sign of the Naked Prophet

In the year that Tartan came to Ashdod, when Sargon the king of Assyria sent him, and he fought against Ashdod and took it;² at that time Yahweh spoke by Isaiah the son of

Amoz, saying, Go, and loosen the sackcloth from off your waist, and take your shoes from off your feet. He did so, walking naked and barefoot.³ Yahweh said, As My servant Isaiah has walked naked and barefoot three years for a sign and a wonder concerning Egypt and concerning Ethiopia,⁴ so the king of Assyria will lead away the captives of Egypt and the exiles of Ethiopia, young and old, naked and barefoot, and with buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt.⁵ They will be dismayed and confounded, because of Ethiopia their expectation, and of Egypt their glory.⁶ The inhabitants of this coast land will say in that day, ‘Behold, this is our expectation, where we fled for help to be delivered from the king of Assyria. And we, how will we escape?’.

CHAPTER 21 May 29

The Fall of Babylon

The burden of the wilderness of the sea. As whirlwinds in the South sweep through, it comes from the wilderness, from an awesome land.² A grievous vision is declared to me. The treacherous man deals treacherously, and the destroyer destroys. Go up, Elam; attack! I have stopped all

19:21 This prediction that the Egyptians will finally turn to Israel's God hasn't yet been fulfilled; it therefore awaits its fulfilment around the time of Christ's return.

20:6 *The inhabitants of this coast land* – The people of Judah. God speaks in a very positive way of how He believes that His people will cease trusting in Egypt after seeing Isaiah's graphic portrayal of how the Egyptians were to be led captive. Yet as later Isaiah makes clear, His people didn't 'get it'; they continued trusting in Egypt rather than in God for salvation from their enemies. Yet God speaks as if they will positively respond. This reflects His hopefulness (as in Mt. 21:37), and this should be our spirit in our witness to others, preaching with a sure hope in response, as the shepherd who goes looking for the lost sheep in the spirit of searching until it is found (Lk. 15:4).

of Media's sighing.³ Therefore my thighs are filled with anguish, pains have taken hold on me, like the pains of a woman in labour. I am in so much pain that I can't hear; I so am dismayed that I can't see.⁴ My heart flutters. Horror has frightened me. The evening of my pleasure has been turned into trembling for me.⁵ They prepare the table, they set the watch; then they eat and drink! But 'Rise up, you princes, oil the shield!'.⁶ For the Lord said to me, Go, set a watchman. Let him declare what he sees.⁷ When he sees a troop, horsemen in pairs, a troop of donkeys, a troop of camels, he shall listen diligently with great attentiveness.⁸ He cried like a lion: Lord, I stand continually on the watchtower in the daytime, and every night I stay at my post.⁹ Behold, here comes a troop of men, horsemen in pairs. He answered, Fallen, fallen is Babylon; and all the engraved images of her gods are

broken to the ground.¹⁰ You are My threshing, and the grain of My floor! That which I have heard from Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, I have declared to you.

A Message about Edom

¹¹ The burden of Dumah. One calls to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? Watchman, what of the night?¹² The watchman said, The morning comes, and also the night. What hour of the night will it come? Turn back again.

A Message about Arabia

¹³ The burden on Arabia. In the forest in Arabia you will lodge, you caravans of Dedanites.¹⁴ They brought water to him who was thirsty. The inhabitants of the land of Tema met the fugitives with their bread.¹⁵ For they fled away from the swords, from the drawn sword, from the bent bow, and from the heat of battle.¹⁶ For

21:3, 4 Isaiah's emotional grief for those outside of God's people as he spoke of their judgment is really impressive – see on 16:9.

21:4 What would have been pleasure for Isaiah – that the great enemy of His people was to be judged – became awful for him as he realized the tragic human destruction it involved. Strangely, he achieved identity with Belshazzar king of Babylon, who likewise had his evening of pleasure broken up by fear – see on :5. Unconsciously, we too can achieve identity with the objects of our witness if we have a true heart for people as Isaiah did.

21:5 This is exactly the situation of Daniel 5, where Belshazzar has a feast, sees the writing on the wall, and then suddenly there was a cry that the Medes had attacked and taken the city.

21:12 *What hour of the night will it come?... Turn back again* – The exact timing of the fulfilment of God's prophecies is dependent to some extent upon human response. The ending of the night of judgment for these people would be when they turned back, i.e. repented. The morning might come, or the night might continue – it depended upon their response. The same idea is found in Acts 1:7,8; Mk. 13:28-33, where the answer to the question 'When will Jesus return?' is basically: 'Preach to Israel; lead them to repentance. That's when the Lord Jesus will return'.

the Lord said to me, Within a year, as a worker bound by contract would count it, all the glory of Kedar will fail,¹⁷ and the residue of the number of the archers, the mighty men of the children of Kedar, will be few; for Yahweh, the God of Israel, has spoken it.

CHAPTER 22 May 30

A Message about Jerusalem

The burden of the valley of vision. What ails you now, that you have all gone up to the housetops? ² You that are full of shouting, a tumultuous city, a joyous town; your slain are not slain with the sword, neither are they dead in battle. ³ All your rulers fled away together. They were bound by the archers. All who were found by you were bound together. They fled far away. ⁴ Therefore I said, Look away from me. I will weep bitterly. Don't labour to comfort me for the destruction of the daughter of my people. ⁵ For it is a day of confusion and of treading down and of perplexity from the Lord Yahweh of Armies,

in the valley of vision; a breaking down of the walls, and a crying to the mountains. ⁶ Elam carried his quiver, with chariots of men and horsemen; and Kir uncovered the shield. ⁷ It happened that your choicest valleys were full of chariots, and the horsemen set themselves in array at the gate. ⁸ He took away the covering of Judah; and you looked in that day to the armour in the house of the forest. ⁹ You saw the breaches of the city of David, that they were many; and you gathered together the waters of the lower pool. ¹⁰ You numbered the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall. ¹¹ You also made a reservoir between the two walls for the water of the old pool. But you didn't look to Him who had done this, neither did you have respect for Him who purposed it long ago. ¹² In that day, the Lord Yahweh of Armies called to weeping and to mourning and to baldness and to dressing in sackcloth: ¹³ and behold, joy and gladness, killing cattle and killing sheep, eating flesh and

22:8 *He took away the covering of Judah* – God's judgment makes a person naked (Hos. 2:3; 7:1; Rev. 16:15). Now is the time to see ourselves as we really are before God, rather than have to be stripped of all appearances at the final day of truth.

22:10, 11 This appears to refer to the preparations made by Hezekiah against the Assyrian invasion (2 Kings 20:20). Yet God perceived that the hearts of the people who did the work did it thinking that this piece of human ingenuity would save them rather than their faith in God. Hezekiah, whose initiative it was, appears to have acted with faith in God. We see therefore how within a group of people apparently doing the Lord's work, God perceives some may do it in faith in God, seeing the work as merely a means to an end, of His deliverance; whereas others trust in the work itself with no faithful heart.

22:13 *Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die* – Quoted by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:32 as the attitude we may as well have if we have no hope of resurrection to eternal life. Exactly because we will *not* die eternally, we are to *not* live merely for today, like the Jews in Isaiah's time, shrugging at the prospect of future judgment. Paul is saying that

drinking wine: Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we will die.¹⁴ Yahweh of Armies revealed Himself in my ears, Surely this iniquity will not be forgiven you until you die, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies.

A Message to the Chief Treasurer

15 Thus says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, Go, get yourself to this treasurer, even to Shebna, who is over the house, and say,¹⁶ ‘What are you doing here? Whom do you have here, that you have dug out a tomb here?’ . Cutting himself out a tomb on high, chiselling a habitation for himself in the rock!¹⁷ Behold, Yahweh will overcome you and hurl you away violently. Yes, He will grasp you firmly.¹⁸ He will surely wind you around and around, and throw you like a ball into a large country. There you will die, and there the chariots of your glory will be, you shame of your lord’s house.¹⁹ I will thrust you from your office. You will be pulled down from your station.²⁰ It will happen in that day that I will call My servant Eliakim the son of Hilkiah,²¹ and I will clothe him with your robe, and strengthen him with your belt. I will commit your government into his hand; and he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to the house of Judah.²² I will lay

the key of the house of David on his shoulder. He will open, and no one will shut. He will shut, and no one will open.²³ I will fasten him like a nail in a sure place. He will be for a throne of glory to his father’s house.²⁴ They will hang on him all the glory of his father’s house, the offspring and the issue, every small vessel, from the cups even to all the pitchers.²⁵ In that day, says Yahweh of Armies, the nail that was fastened in a sure place will give way. It will be cut down, and fall. The burden that was on it will be cut off, for Yahweh has spoken it.

CHAPTER 23 May 31

A Message about Tyre and Sidon

The burden of Tyre. Howl, you ships of Tarshish! For it is laid waste, so that there is no house, no entering in. From the land of Kittim it is revealed to them.² Be still, you inhabitants of the coast, you whom the merchants of Sidon, that pass over the sea, have replenished.³ On great waters, the seed of the Shihor, the harvest of the Nile, was her revenue. She was the market of nations.⁴ Be ashamed, Sidon; for the sea has spoken, the stronghold of the sea, saying, I have not travailed, nor brought forth, neither have I nourished young men, nor brought

he for one *would* live like that if he had no hope of eternity. Our belief in future salvation has profound effect upon our lives today.

22:22 Applied by Jesus to Himself in Rev. 3:7. Eliakim could perhaps have been the Messiah figure of his time, but it seems he failed to live up to the potential, and so the prophecy was rescheduled and reapplied to Jesus. God sets up so many potentials for individuals and for His people as a whole; it's so tragic for Him and for us all that so much potential is unfulfilled.

up virgins.⁵ When the report comes to Egypt, they will be in anguish at the report of Tyre.⁶ Pass over to Tarshish! Wail, you inhabitants of the coast!⁷ Is this your joyous city, whose antiquity is of ancient days, whose feet carried her far away to travel?⁸ Who has planned this against Tyre, the giver of crowns, whose merchants are princes, whose traffickers are the honourable of the earth?⁹ Yahweh of Armies has planned it, to stain the pride of all glory, to bring into contempt all the honourable of the earth.¹⁰ Pass through your land like the Nile, daughter of Tarshish. There is no restraint any more.¹¹ He has stretched out His hand over the sea, He has shaken the kingdoms. Yahweh has ordered the destruction of Canaan's strongholds.¹² He said, You shall rejoice no more, you oppressed virgin daughter of Sidon. Arise, pass over to Kittim. Even there you will have no rest.¹³ Behold, the land of the Chaldeans. This people was

not until the Assyrians founded it for those who dwell in the wilderness. They set up their towers; they overthrew its palaces, they made it a ruin.¹⁴ Howl, you ships of Tarshish, for your stronghold is laid waste!¹⁵ It will come to pass in that day that Tyre will be forgotten seventy years, according to the days of one king. After the end of seventy years it will be to Tyre like in the song of the prostitute.¹⁶ Take a harp; go about the city, you prostitute that has been forgotten. Make sweet melody. Sing many songs, that you may be remembered.¹⁷ It will happen after the end of seventy years that Yahweh will visit Tyre, and she shall return to her wages, and will play the prostitute with all the kingdoms of the world on the surface of the earth.¹⁸ Her merchandise and her wages will be holiness to Yahweh. It will not be treasured nor laid up; for her merchandise will be for those who dwell before Yahweh, to eat sufficiently, and for durable clothing.

23:9 To stain the pride of all glory – All the various prophecies of judgment could have chosen many sinful aspects of the peoples' behaviour as being the reason for the judgments. But repeatedly, pride is the sin which God focuses upon. God is so sensitive to human pride that He even notices it amongst those not in relationship with Him, and takes the trouble to punish it and bring it down. It is so important to be humble. God gave Judah all this information about the impending fall of the surrounding nations so that His people would perceive the principles He works according to, and therefore humble themselves lest the same inevitable judgment for pride come upon them. We are intended to reflect upon the people who form the environment God has surrounded us with, and to learn from their rises and falls.

23:15 God's prophesied 70 year silencing of Tyre was perhaps to encourage Judah to believe that the prophecies of their 70 year captivity in Babylon and subsequent revival would likewise be fulfilled (Jer. 25:12; 29:10). God may make situations occur in the unbelieving world around us which parallel our own, in order that we may be encouraged that His word will come true in our lives and that His principles will be upheld in the end.

CHAPTER 24 Jun. 1***Punishment on the Whole Land***

Behold, Yahweh creates the earth empty, creates it waste, turns it upside down, and scatters its inhabitants. ² It will be as with the people, so with the priest; as with the servant, so with his master; as with the maid, so with her mistress; as with the buyer, so with the seller; as with the creditor, so with the debtor; as with the taker of interest, so with the giver of interest. ³ The earth will be utterly emptied and utterly laid waste; for Yahweh has spoken this word. ⁴ The earth mourns and fades away, the world languishes and fades away; the proud people of the earth languish. ⁵ The earth also is polluted under its inhabitants, because they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, and broken the everlasting covenant. ⁶ Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell therein are found guilty. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth

are burned, and few men left. ⁷ The new wine mourns, the vine languishes. All the merry-hearted sigh, ⁸ the mirth of tambourines ceases, the sound of those who rejoice ends, the joy of the harp ceases. ⁹ They will not drink wine with a song, strong drink will be bitter to those who drink it. ¹⁰ The confused city is broken down, every house is shut up so that no man may come in. ¹¹ There is a crying in the streets because of the wine- all joy is darkened, the mirth of the land is gone. ¹² The city is left in desolation, and the gate is struck with destruction. ¹³ For it will be so in the midst of the earth among the peoples, as the shaking of an olive tree, as the gleanings when the vintage is done. ¹⁴ These shall lift up their voice, they will shout for the majesty of Yahweh, they cry aloud from the sea. ¹⁵ Therefore glorify Yahweh in the east, even the name of Yahweh the God of Israel, in the islands of the sea! ¹⁶ From the uttermost part of

24:1 The earth, moon and sun (:23) are clearly spoken of figuratively, to describe the system of things in Judah – see on 1:2. However, often in this chapter we must remember that the Hebrew *eretz* translated “earth” can mean both the earth as in the whole planet, and also “the land”, as specifically the land of Israel or the land promised to Abraham.

Empty... waste is an allusion to how the earth was originally empty and waste in Gen. 1:2 (the same Hebrew words are used). The implication is that God was going to make a new creation with Judah out of the emptiness which His judgments would create. Again we see that God even has a creative purpose in the destruction of the wicked and judgment of our sins – hence to make something empty and waste is in fact to *create* something. Yet even this intended new creation of Judah after the 70 years captivity didn’t work out; the concept has been reapplied to how by baptism in Christ, we become a new creation once we have allowed God to make empty and waste our old personality (2 Cor. 5:17).

24:4 *The world languishes... the proud people of the earth languish* – We could probably understand “the world” here and often in the prophets as referring to people, i.e. society, rather than any reference to the physical planet.

the earth have we heard songs of glory to the righteous! But I said, I pine away! I pine away! Woe is me! The treacherous have dealt treacherously, yes, the treacherous have dealt very treacherously.¹⁷ Fear, the pit and the snare are on you who inhabitant the earth.¹⁸ It will happen that he who flees from the noise of the fear will fall into the pit; and he who comes up out of the midst of the pit will be taken in the snare; for the windows on high are opened, and the foundations of the earth tremble.¹⁹ The earth is utterly broken. The earth is torn apart, the earth is shaken violently,²⁰ the earth will stagger like a drunken man, and will sway back and forth like a hammock. Its disobedience will be heavy on it, and it will fall and not rise again.²¹ It shall happen in that day that Yahweh will punish the army of the high ones on high, and the kings of the earth on the earth.²² They shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison; and after many days shall they be visited.²³ Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed; for Yahweh of Armies will reign on Mount Zion, and in Jerusalem; and before His elders will be glory.

CHAPTER 25 Jun. 2

A Hymn of Praise

Yahweh, You are My God. I will exalt You! I will praise Your name, for You have done wonderful things, things planned long ago, in complete faithfulness and truth.² For You have made a city into a heap, a fortified city into a ruin, a palace of strangers to be no city; it will never be built.³ Therefore a strong people will glorify You, a city of awesome nations will fear You.⁴ For You have been a stronghold to the poor, a stronghold to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shade from the heat, when the blast of the dreaded ones is like a storm against the wall.⁵ As the heat in a dry place will You bring down the noise of strangers; as the heat by the shade of a cloud, the song of the dreaded ones will be brought low.

Death Removed for Ever

In this mountain Yahweh of Armies will make to all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of choice wines, of fat things full of marrow, of well refined choice wines.⁷ He will destroy in this mountain the surface of the covering that covers all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations.⁸ He

24:16 Isaiah's sorrow to the extent of wanting to pine away is purposefully juxtaposed alongside the reference to the fact that there would be a righteous remnant out of all the destruction. This is to show how pained he was at the fact that so many would be lost. We noted his extreme compassion for those who left or never knew God's ways in the note on 16:9.

25:6 A reference to the marriage supper of the Lord Jesus being held in Jerusalem, on the temple mount, at His return (Rev. 19:9).

25:8 *He has swallowed up death forever* – Quoted in 1 Cor. 15:54 about how death will be no more after Christ has returned, we have been resurrected and immortalized.

has swallowed up death forever! The Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces. He will take the reproach of His people away from off all the earth, for Yahweh has spoken it.⁹ It shall be said in that day, Behold, this is our God! We have waited for Him, and He will save us! This is Yahweh! We have waited for Him. We will be glad and rejoice in His salvation!¹⁰ For in this mountain the hand of Yahweh will rest.

But Punishment for Moab

Moab will be trodden down in his place, even like straw is trodden down in the water of the dunghill.¹¹ He will spread out his hands in its midst, like one who swims spreads out hands to swim, but his pride will be humbled together with the craft of his hands.¹² He has brought down the high fortress of your walls, laid them low and brought them to the ground, even to the dust.

CHAPTER 26 Jun. 3

God Gives Victory for His People

In that day this song will be sung in the land of Judah: We have a strong city. God appoints salvation for walls and defences.² Open the

gates, that the righteous nation may enter: the one which keeps faith.³ You will keep whoever's mind is steadfast in perfect peace, because he trusts in You.⁴ Trust in Yahweh forever; for in Yah, Yahweh, is an everlasting Rock.⁵ For He has brought down those who dwell on high, the lofty city. He lays it low, He lays it low even to the ground, He brings it even to the dust.⁶ The foot shall tread it down; even the feet of the poor, and the footsteps of the needy.⁷ The way of the just is uprightness; You who are upright make the path of the righteous level.⁸ Yes, in the way of Your judgements, Yahweh, have we waited for You. Your name and Your renown are the desire of our soul.⁹ With my soul have I desired You in the night. Yes, with my spirit within me will I seek You earnestly; for when Your judgements are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.¹⁰ Let grace be shown to the wicked, yet he will not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness he will deal wrongfully, and will not perceive Yahweh's majesty.¹¹ Yahweh, Your hand is lifted up, yet they don't see; but they will see Your zeal for the

The Lord Yahweh will wipe away tears from off all faces – Quoted in Rev. 7:17; 21:4 as being done by God at Christ's return when the righteous are given eternal life.

25:9 These will be our feelings after Christ has returned, and we stand immortalized before His judgment seat. Our faith in God's final, visible intervention on this earth and in our own lives will have finally come to realization.

26:1 *In that day* – See notes on 25:6,8,9. This day is the day of Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

26:10 This seems to be saying that it would be pointless to allow wicked people into God's Kingdom because even there they would not wish to be righteous. If we wish above all things to be eternally righteous, then the Kingdom of God will be for us.

people, and be disappointed; yes, fire will consume Your adversaries. ¹² Yahweh, You will ordain peace for us, for You have also worked all our works for us. ¹³ Yahweh our God, other lords besides You have had dominion over us, but by You only will we make mention of Your name. ¹⁴ Their dead shall not live, their deceased shall not rise. Therefore have You visited and destroyed them, and caused all memory of them to perish. ¹⁵ You have increased the nation, O Yahweh, You have increased the nation! You are glorified! You have enlarged all the borders of the land. ¹⁶ Yahweh, in trouble they have come to You; they poured out a prayer when Your chastening was on them. ¹⁷ Like as a woman with child who draws near the time of her delivery and is in pain and cries out in her pangs; so we have been before You, Yahweh. ¹⁸ We have been with child, we have been in pain, we gave birth, it seems, only to wind. We have not worked any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen. ¹⁹ Your dead shall

live; my dead body also shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth will cast forth her dead.

Judgement on the Earth

²⁰ Come, My people, enter into your rooms, and shut your doors behind you. Hide yourself for a little moment, until the indignation is past. ²¹ For behold, Yahweh comes forth out of His place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity. The earth also will disclose her blood, and will no longer cover her slain.

CHAPTER 27 Jun. 3

Israel Restored

In that day, Yahweh with His hard Land great and strong sword will punish leviathan, the fleeing serpent, and leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon that is in the sea. ² In that day, sing to her, A pleasant vineyard! ³ I, Yahweh, am its keeper. I will water it every moment. Lest anyone damage it, I will keep it

26:14 The Gentile nations not in saving covenant relationship with God will not be resurrected. Human beings have no inherent ‘immortal soul’; immortality is revealed only to God’s people (2 Tim. 1:10). Those who don’t know the Gospel will not be resurrected to judgment, nor will they be punished after death; they return to dust as the animals (Ps. 49:20). Knowledge is the basis of responsibility to God (Lk. 12:47,48).

26:20, 21 These verses are speaking of the situation around the time of the resurrection at Christ’s return (:19). It seems God’s people will be somehow hidden from the effects of the final judgments which will come upon the earth, in the same way as the Israelites in Egypt were untouched by the plagues which came on the rest of their surrounding world.

27:3 The vineyard owner in this simile is almost obsessive – he waters it continually, and day and night watches its borders. This unusual level of care by God for the vineyard of His people (5:7) is so that the vineyard has no excuse for not bringing forth fruit. God has done all that He can so that we should bring forth fruit (5:4). We cannot

night and day. ⁴ Wrath is not in Me, but if I should find briars and thorns, I would do battle! I would march on them and I would burn them together. ⁵ Or else let him take hold of My strength, that he may make peace with Me; and he will make peace with Me. ⁶ In days to come, Jacob will take root, Israel will blossom and bud; they will fill the face of the world with fruit. ⁷ Has He struck them as He struck those who struck them? Or are they killed like those who killed them were killed? ⁸ In measure, when You send them away, You contend with them. He has removed them with His rough blast in the day of the east wind. ⁹ Therefore by this the iniquity of Jacob will be forgiven, and this is all the fruit of taking away his sin: that he makes all the stones of the altar as chalk stones that are beaten in pieces, so that the Asherim and the incense altars shall rise no more. ¹⁰ For the fortified city is solitary, a habitation deserted and forsaken, like the wilderness. The calf will feed there and there he will lie down and consume its branches. ¹¹ When its boughs are withered, they will be broken off. The women will come and set them on fire, for they are a people of no

understanding. Therefore He who made them will not have compassion on them, and He who formed them will show them no grace. ¹² It will happen in that day, that Yahweh will thresh from the flowing stream of the Euphrates to the brook of Egypt; and you will be gathered one by one, you children of Israel. ¹³ It will happen in that day that a great trumpet will be blown; and those who were ready to perish in the land of Assyria, and those who were outcasts in the land of Egypt, shall come; and they will worship Yahweh in the holy mount at Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 28 Jun. 4

Judgement on Drunkards

Woe to the crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim, and to the fading flower of his glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fertile valley of those who are overcome with wine! ² Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one; like a storm of hail, a destroying storm, and like a storm of mighty waters overflowing, He will cast them down to the earth with His hand. ³ The crown of pride of the drunkards of Ephraim will be trodden under foot. ⁴ The fading flower of his glorious

therefore excuse our lack of fruitfulness by saying that if we had a better or different situation, we would then be fruitful. God has given us exactly the required environment in order to be fruitful, and the level of His care should never be doubted.

27:9 *This is all the fruit of taking away his sin* – God isn't saying that if Israel destroyed their altars, then He would forgive them. Instead His way of grace is to take away sin and then hope that we will make response to that, in this case, by destroying the altars.

28:1 Here we see again God's persistent hatred of pride; He condemned drunkenness because it made people proud (see too :3).

beauty, which is on the head of the fertile valley, shall be like the first-ripe fig before the summer, which someone picks and eats as soon as he sees it.⁵ In that day, Yahweh of Armies will become a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remains of His people;⁶ and a spirit of justice to him who sits in judgement, and strength to those who turn back the battle at the gate.⁷ They also reel with wine, and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink. They are swallowed up by wine, they stagger with strong drink. They err in vision, they stumble in judgement.⁸ For all tables are completely full of filthy vomit and filthiness.⁹ Whom will He teach knowledge? To whom will He explain the message? Those who are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts?¹⁰ For it is precept on precept, precept on precept; line on line, line on line; here a little,

there a little.¹¹ But He will speak to this nation with stammering lips and in another language;¹² to whom He said, This is the resting place. Give rest to the weary; and This is the refreshing; yet they would not hear.¹³ Therefore the word of Yahweh will be to them precept after precept, precept after precept; line on line, line on line; here a little, there a little; that they may go, fall backward, be broken, be snared, and be taken.

A Message for Jerusalem's Rulers

Therefore hear the word of Yahweh, you scoffers, that rule this people in Jerusalem:¹⁵ Because you have said, 'We have made a covenant with death, and with Sheol are we in agreement; when the overflowing scourge passes through, it won't come to us; for we have made lies our refuge, and we have hidden ourselves under falsehood'.¹⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold,

28:13 *Therefore the word of Yahweh will be to them precept after precept... line on line* – This is declared as a judgment upon Judah, with the result that it would make them fall. Israel throughout their Biblical history always claimed to be believers in Yahweh and to be obedient to His word; their sin was in that they additionally did other things and worshipped other gods which were quite contrary to God's word. The problem was in their attitude to the word of God, which they claimed to study and be aware of. They saw it as merely a series of disjointed, unrelated commands; they didn't perceive the overall spirit behind it. Our Bible reading can be the same, indeed it is often like this for unbelievers who start reading the Bible for the first time. This is why we must pray for God to guide and assist our Bible reading so that we make the connections and join the dots, until we hear the voice of God Himself speaking to us through those lines and precepts.

28:15 *Because you have said* – It's unlikely these people actually openly said these words. But this was how they thought in their hearts, and God reads our quiet thoughts as if we have spoken them out loud. To be spiritually minded is the essence of Christian living.

28:16 Quoted in 1 Pet. 2:6-8 about Jesus, who is either a stone to be stumbled over (8:14), or to be built upon as the foundation of our lives. Those who encounter Christ

I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation. He who believes shall not be ashamed.¹⁷ I will make justice the measuring line, and righteousness the plumb line. The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters will overflow the hiding place.¹⁸ Your covenant with death shall be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol shall not stand. When the overflowing scourge passes through, then you will be trampled down by it.¹⁹ As often as it passes through, it will seize you; for morning by morning it will pass through, by day and by night; and it will be nothing but terror to understand the message.²⁰ For the bed is too short to stretch out on, and the blanket is too narrow to wrap oneself in.²¹ For Yahweh will rise up as on Mount Perazim, He will be angry as in the valley of Gibeon; that He may do His work, His unusual work, and bring to pass His act, His extraordinary act.²² Now therefore don't be scoffers, lest your bonds be made strong; for I have heard a decree of destruction from the Lord Yahweh of Armies, upon the whole earth.²³ Give ear, and hear my voice! Listen, and hear my speech!²⁴ Does he

who ploughs to sow plough continually? Does he keep turning the soil and breaking the clods?²⁵ When he has levelled its surface, doesn't he plant the dill, and scatter the cumin seed, and put in the wheat in rows, the barley in the appointed place, and the spelt in its place?²⁶ For his God instructs him in right judgement, and teaches him.²⁷ For the dill are not threshed with a sharp instrument, neither is a cart wheel turned over the cumin; but the dill is beaten out with a stick, and the cumin with a rod.²⁸ Bread flour must be ground; so he will not always be threshing it. Although he drives the wheel of his threshing cart over it, his horses don't grind it.²⁹ This also comes forth from Yahweh of Armies, who is wonderful in counsel, and excellent in wisdom.

CHAPTER 29 Jun. 5

The Siege of Jerusalem

Woe to Ariel! Ariel, the city where David encamped! Add year to year; let the feasts come around;² then I will distress Ariel, and there will be mourning and lamentation. She shall be to Me as an altar hearth.³ I will encamp against you all around you, and will lay

cannot be passive to Him or unaffected by that encounter; knowledge brings responsibility.

28:24–28 Although the trials and judgments God brings into our lives may appear pointlessly repetitious, they aren't. They last for a limited time and to a specific end.

29:3 *I will encamp against you... and will lay siege against you* – It was understood that each city had its god, who was supposed to protect it from invaders. But here the God of Israel says that He Himself will camp with Jerusalem's enemies, and enable and support their campaign against His own people. This was more radical a concept of God at that time than we can likely realize. Yet it's all very hard for us to under-

siege against you with a mount; I will raise siege works against you. ⁴ You will be brought down, and will speak out of the ground. Your speech will mumble out of the dust. Your voice will be as of one who has a familiar spirit, out of the ground, and your speech will whisper out of the dust. ⁵ But the multitude of your foes will be like fine dust, and the multitude of the ruthless ones like chaff that blows away. Yes, it will be in an instant, suddenly. ⁶ She will be visited by Yahweh of Armies with thunder, with earthquake, with great noise, with whirlwind and storm, and with the flame of a devouring fire. ⁷ The multitude of all the nations that fight against Ariel, even all who fight against her and her stronghold and who distress her, will be like a dream, a vision of the night. ⁸ It will be like when a hungry man dreams, and behold, he eats; but he awakes, and his hunger isn't satisfied; or like when a thirsty man dreams, and behold, he drinks; but he awakes, and behold, he is faint, and he is still thirsty. The

multitude of all the nations that fight against Mount Zion will be like that. ⁹ Pause and wonder, take your pleasure and be blind. They are drunken, but not with wine; they stagger, but not with strong drink. ¹⁰ For Yahweh has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep, and has closed your eyes, O prophets; and He has covered your heads, O seers. ¹¹ All vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one who is educated, saying, Read this, please; and he says, I can't, for it is sealed: ¹² and the book is delivered to one who is not educated, saying, Read this, please; and he says, I can't read. ¹³ The Lord said, Because this people draws near with their mouth and with their lips to honour Me, but they have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear of Me is a commandment of men which has been taught; ¹⁴ therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder; and the wisdom of their wise men will per-

stand that the God of all grace can allow and bring about the most awful suffering in the lives of His children – with the aim of developing us even through our weaknesses so that we shall enter His Kingdom.

29:10 *Yahweh has poured out on you a spirit of deep sleep* – Quoted in Rom. 11:8 about what God has done to all Israel, in closing their eyes to perceiving Jesus as their Messiah – in response to the fact that they had already closed their eyes to Him. There were many similarities between the Jews of Isaiah's time and those of Christ's (see on :13).

29:13 These words are quoted in Mt. 15:7,8 and interpreted by Jesus as a specific prophecy of the hypocrites who confronted Him in the first century. But the context of Isaiah 29 clearly requires that they had relevance to the Jews of Isaiah's day. In this we see the uniquely living, constantly relevant nature of God's word. It can speak to different generations in different contexts with perfect and Divinely designed relevance. This is the result of the Bible being written by the inspiration process of God's Spirit; it isn't, therefore, like the black print and white paper of any human book.

ish, and the understanding of their prudent men will be hidden.¹⁵ Woe to those who deeply hide their counsel from Yahweh, and whose works are in the dark, and who say, Who sees us? and Who knows us?¹⁶ You turn things upside down! Should the potter be thought to be like clay; that the thing made should say about him who made it, He didn't make me; or the thing formed say of him who formed it, He has no understanding?¹⁷ Isn't it yet a very little while, and Lebanon will be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field will be regarded as a forest?¹⁸ In that day, the deaf will hear the words of the book, and the eyes of the blind will see out of obscurity and out of darkness.¹⁹ The humble also will increase their joy in Yahweh, and the poor among men will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel.²⁰ For the ruthless is brought to nothing, and the scoffer ceases, and all those who are alert to do evil are cut off—²¹ who cause a person to be indicted by a word, and lay a snare for the arbiter in the gate, and who deprive the innocent of justice with false testimony.²² Therefore thus says Yahweh who redeemed Abraham concerning the house of Jacob: Jacob shall no longer

be ashamed, neither shall his face grow pale.²³ But when he sees his children, the work of My hands, in the midst of him, they will sanctify My name. Yes, they will sanctify the Holy One of Jacob, and will stand in awe of the God of Israel.²⁴ They also who err in spirit will come to understanding, and those who grumble will receive instruction.

CHAPTER 30 Jun. 6

A Treaty with Egypt

Woe to the rebellious children, says Yahweh, who take counsel, but not from Me; and who make an alliance, but not with My Spirit, that they may add sin to sin,² who set out to go down into Egypt, and have not asked My advice; to strengthen themselves in the strength of Pharaoh, and to take refuge in the shadow of Egypt!³ Therefore the strength of Pharaoh will be your shame, and the refuge in the shadow of Egypt your confusion.⁴ For their princes are at Zoan, and their ambassadors have come to Hanes.⁵ They shall all be ashamed because of a people that can't profit them, that are not a help nor profit, but a shame, and also a reproach.⁶ The burden of the animals of the South. Through the land

30:1 This must have been very hard for Isaiah to tell Judah, because for three years he had walked barefoot amongst his people to try to persuade them how Egypt would go into captivity, and Judah should hope only in God (20:1-4). Our tendency too is to treat God as a kind of extra insurance policy; to turn firstly to human strength, and only to Him if all else fails. His desire is that we should trust totally in Him, and however we might use ‘Egypt’, it should never be our strength and trust.

30:6 *They carry their rich gifts* – This is a picture of the people of Judah braving wild animals in the desert (Dt. 8:15) as they carried their wealth down into Egypt, reversing their exodus, in order to buy Egyptian support against Assyria. People will go to huge

of trouble and anguish, of the lioness and the lion, the viper and fiery flying serpent, they carry their rich gifts on the shoulders of young donkeys, and their treasures on the humps of camels, to an unprofitable people. ⁷ For Egypt helps in vain, and to no purpose; therefore have I called her Rahab who sits still.

A Disobedient People

Now go, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, that it may be for the time to come forever and ever. ⁹ For it is a rebellious people, lying children, children who will not hear the law of Yahweh; ¹⁰ who tell the seers, Don't see! and to the prophets, Don't prophesy to us right things. Tell us pleasant things, prophesy deceits, ¹¹ get out of the way, turn aside from the path; cause the Holy One of Israel to cease from before us. ¹² Therefore thus says the Holy One of Israel, Because you despise this word, and trust in oppression and perverseness and rely on it; ¹³ therefore this iniquity shall be to you like a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose break-

efforts and expense to obtain human strength; when the answer is ultimately in God and not man.

30:9 Lying children – Yet when He brought them out of Egypt, God had been certain that “Surely they are My people, children that will *not* lie: so He was their saviour” (63:8). The God who can know the end from the beginning was so in love with His people, as He is with us, that He felt the very best about them. Hence the bitter disappointment when those positive hopes were dashed by their fickleness. God has great hopes for each of us.

30:18 Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you – There’s similar reasoning in 2 Pet. 3:14,15; the reason why the return of Christ is delayed is so that God may be gracious to even more people than He had otherwise planned. God’s delay is often because He is seeking a way to be yet more gracious. Hence “Blessed are all those who wait for Him”.

ing comes suddenly in an instant. ¹⁴ He will break it as a potter’s vessel is broken, breaking it in pieces without sparing, so that there won’t be found among the broken pieces one piece good enough to take fire from the hearth, or to dip up water out of the cistern. ¹⁵ For thus said the Lord Yahweh, the Holy One of Israel, You will be saved by returning and rest; your strength will be in quietness and in confidence. You refused, ¹⁶ but you said, No, for we will flee on horses; therefore you will flee; and, We will ride on the swift; therefore those who pursue you will be swift. ¹⁷ One thousand will flee at the threat of one; at the threat of five, you will flee until you are left like a beacon on the top of a mountain, and like a banner on a hill.

Yahweh Will be Gracious

Therefore Yahweh will wait, that He may be gracious to you; and therefore He will be exalted, that He may have mercy on you, for Yahweh is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who wait for Him. ¹⁹ For the people will dwell in Zion at Jerusalem; you

will weep no more. He will surely be gracious to you at the voice of your cry; when He hears you, He will answer you.²⁰ Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers won't be hidden any more, but your eyes will see your teachers;²¹ and when you turn to the right hand, and when you turn to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, This is the way, walk in it.²² You shall defile the overlaying of your engraved images of silver, and the plating of your molten images of gold. You shall cast them away as an unclean thing. You shall tell it, Go away!²³ He will give the rain for your seed, with which you will sow the ground; and the bread from the increase of the ground will be rich and plentiful. In that day, your livestock will feed in large pastures;²⁴ the oxen likewise and the young donkeys that till the ground will eat savoury provender, which has been winnowed with the shovel and with the fork.²⁵ There shall be brooks and streams of water on every lofty mountain and on every high hill in the day of the great slaughter, when the towers fall.²⁶ Moreover the light of the moon will be like the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be seven times brighter, like the light

of seven days, in the day that Yahweh binds up the fracture of His people, and heals the wound they were struck with.

Yahweh will Punish Assyria

Behold, the name of Yahweh comes from far away, burning with His anger, and in thick rising smoke. His lips are full of indignation, and His tongue is as a devouring fire.²⁸ His breath is as an overflowing stream that reaches even to the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of destruction; and a bridle that leads to ruin will be in the jaws of the peoples.²⁹ You will have a song, as in the night when a holy feast is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goes with a flute to come to Yahweh's mountain, to Israel's Rock.³⁰ Yahweh will cause His glorious voice to be heard, and will show the descent of His arm, with the indignation of His anger, and the flame of a devouring fire, with a blast, storm, and hailstones.³¹ For through the voice of Yahweh the Assyrian will be dismayed. He will strike him with His rod.³² Every stroke of the rod of punishment which Yahweh will lay on him will be with the sound of tambourines and harps. He will fight with them in battles, brandishing weapons.³³ For his burning

30:26 This could be a poetic way of saying that the meaning of time [as defined by sun and moon] will be changed around the time of Christ's return. This would enable the various predicted events to happen with no problem of chronology.

30:33 This language of fire and sulphur ["brimstone"] is clearly figurative and not literal – it speaks of the anger of God in destroying His enemies. This verse clearly describes the death of the Assyrian invaders, as fulfilled in 37:36. There was no literal place of sulphur with an angry God stirring it up with His breath. Likewise the Lord

place has long been ready. Yes, for the king it is prepared; He has made its pyre deep and large with fire and much wood. Yahweh's breath, like a stream of sulphur, kindles it.

CHAPTER 31 Jun. 7

No Safety in Egypt

Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help, and rely on horses and trust in chariots because they are many, and in horsemen because they are very strong, but they don't look to the Holy One of Israel, and they don't seek Yahweh! ² Yet He also is wise, and will bring disaster, and will not call back His words, but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the helpers of those who work iniquity. ³ Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When Yahweh stretches out His hand, both he who helps shall stumble, and he who is helped shall fall, and they all shall be consumed

together. ⁴ For thus says Yahweh to me, As the lion and the young lion growling over his prey who will not be dismayed if a multitude of shepherds is called together against him, nor will he abase himself for their noise, so Yahweh of Armies will come down to fight on Mount Zion and on its mount. ⁵ As birds hovering, so Yahweh of Armies will protect Jerusalem. He will protect and deliver it, He will pass over and preserve it. ⁶ Return to Him from whom you have deeply revolted, children of Israel! ⁷ For in that day everyone shall cast away his idols of silver and his idols of gold—the sin which your own hands have made for you. ⁸ The Assyrian will fall by the sword, not of man; and the sword, not of mankind, shall devour him. He will flee from the sword, and his young men will become subject to forced labour. ⁹ His rock will pass away by reason of terror, and his princes will be afraid of the banner, says Yahweh,

Jesus used the language of Gehenna in a figurative manner – constant fire, brimstone etc. are symbols of total destruction, and shouldn't be forced into a literal reading.

31:3 The implication is that God also has horses and chariots – His invisible Angelic cherubim. Although Judah preferred to believe in the visible horses of Egypt, yet in His amazing grace, God still used His Angelic cherubim to destroy the Assyrians (37:36). This is grace itself.

31:4 *Yahweh of Armies* – God uses this title of Himself in this context to remind Judah that He has armies of Angels at His disposal. Judah were running to Egypt to enlist the help of their human armies; and by doing so were disbelieving that Yahweh really is the Yahweh of Armies of Angels.

31:7 This means that at the time of the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem in Hezekiah's time (which is the context of the chapter), the people were still worshipping idols. Yet Hezekiah had supposedly purged Judah of idols. This shows that true faith is sometimes only found in a minority of God's people; they may go along with the guidance of faithful leadership externally, but even good leaders cannot reform the hearts of individuals. It also shows how the Angelic deliverance of Jerusalem was due to the prayers and faith of a very small remnant, centred around Isaiah and Hezekiah.

whose fire is in Zion and His furnace in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER 32 Jun. 8

A King will Reign Righteously

Behold, a king shall reign in Righteousness, and princes shall rule in justice. ² A man shall be as a hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the storm, as streams of water in a dry place, as the shade of a large rock in a weary land. ³ The eyes of those who see will not be dim, and the ears of those who hear will listen. ⁴ The heart of the rash will understand knowledge, and the tongue of the stammerers will be ready to speak plainly. ⁵ The fool will no longer be called noble, nor the scoundrel be highly respected. ⁶ For the fool will speak folly, and his heart will work iniquity, to practice profanity, and to utter error against Yahweh, to make empty the soul of the hungry and to cause the drink of the thirsty to fail. ⁷ The

ways of the scoundrel are evil. He devises wicked devices to destroy the humble with lying words, even when the needy speaks right. ⁸ But the noble devises noble things; and he will continue in noble things.

A Warning to Women

⁹ Rise up, you women who are at ease! Hear My voice, you careless daughters, give ear to My speech! ¹⁰ For days beyond a year you will be troubled, you careless women; for the vintage shall fail. The harvest won't come. ¹¹ Tremble, you women who are at ease! Be troubled, you careless ones! Strip yourselves, make yourselves naked and put sackcloth on your waist.¹² Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine. ¹³ Thorns and briars will come up on My people's land; yes, on all the houses of joy in the joyous city. ¹⁴ For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city will be deserted. The hill and the watchtower will be

32:6 Attitudes to the poor amongst Israel were interpreted by God as blasphemy against Him. In our age, all those baptized into the Name manifest God, and our attitude to them is our attitude to God, and will be the basis of our judgment at the last day (Mt. 25:40).

32:10 It seems Isaiah was making this prophecy a year before it would be fulfilled. His request for the women to wear sackcloth (12) was a call for them to repent – so that the promised judgments might be averted. We note God's granting of full significance and spiritual meaning to women, making an appeal specifically to them – at a time when religion in the surrounding world considered women largely irrelevant in religious decisions, and would never have considered that the repentance of a group of women could have changed the destiny of an entire nation, far beyond whatever their male leaders might decide.

32:14 The threatened judgments against “the city” (also in :19) presumably refers to Jerusalem. It seems that on one hand, it was God's intention to allow the Assyrians to destroy Jerusalem as well as Judah, and yet He saved it for the sake of the faithful minority who were there, based around Isaiah and Hezekiah. God is so sensitive to His people that He is willing to change His stated purpose if He hears powerful prayer and sees genuine spirituality amongst even a minority.

for dens forever, a delight for wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks;

Restored Again

15 Until the Spirit is poured on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is considered a forest. 16 Then justice will dwell in the wilderness; and righteousness will remain in the fruitful field. 17 The work of righteousness will be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever. 18 My people will live in a peaceful habitation, in safe dwellings and in quiet resting places— 19 though for now hail flattens the forest, and the city is levelled completely. 20 Blessed are you who sow beside all waters, who send out the feet of the ox and the donkey.

CHAPTER 33 Jun. 9

The Destruction of the Assyrians Prophesied

Woe to you who destroy, but you weren't destroyed; and who betray, but nobody betrayed you. When you have finished destroying, you will be destroyed; and when you have made an end of betrayal, you will be betrayed. 2 Yahweh, be gracious to us; we have waited for You. Be our strength every morning, our salvation also in the time of trouble. 3 At the noise of the thunder, the peoples have fled. When You lift

Yourself up, the nations are scattered. 4 Your spoil will be gathered as the caterpillar gathers. Men will leap on it as locusts leap. 5 Yahweh is exalted, for He dwells on high; He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness. 6 There will be stability in your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge. The fear of Yahweh is your treasure. 7 Behold, their valiant ones cry outside; the ambassadors of peace weep bitterly. 8 The highways are desolate, the travelling man ceases. The covenant is broken; He has despised the cities. He doesn't respect man. 9 The land mourns and languishes, Lebanon is confounded and withers away, Sharon is like a desert, and Bashan and Carmel are stripped bare. 10 Now I will arise, says Yahweh; Now I will lift Myself up. Now I will be exalted. 11 You will conceive chaff, you will bring forth stubble, your breath is a fire that will devour you. 12 The peoples will be like the burning of lime, like thorns that are cut down and burned in the fire. 13 Hear, you who are far off, what I have done; and, you who are near, acknowledge My might. 14 The sinners in Zion are afraid. Trembling has seized the godless ones. Who among us can live with the devouring fire? Who among us can live with everlasting burning? 15 He who walks righteously, and speaks blamelessly; he who despises

33:11 *Your breath is a fire that will devour you* – This is a common theme, that the rejected are those who condemn and destroy themselves, often by their own words (“breath”).

33:15 *Shuts his eyes from looking at evil* – Very relevant to us in the age when all manner of evil can be viewed without others knowing. This verse teaches that our hands,

the gain of oppressions, who gestures with his hands, refusing to take a bribe, who stops his ears from hearing of blood, and shuts his eyes from looking at evil—¹⁶ he will dwell on high. His place of defence will be the fortress of rocks. His bread will be supplied, his waters will be sure.¹⁷ Your eyes will see the king in His beauty, they will see the land that is distant.¹⁸ Your heart will meditate on the terror. Where is he who counted? Where is he who weighed? Where is he who counted the towers?¹⁹ You will no longer see the fierce people, a people of a deep speech that you can't comprehend, with a strange language that you can't understand.²⁰ Look toward Zion, the city of our appointed festivals! Your eyes will see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tent that won't be removed; her stakes will never be plucked up, nor will any of her cords be broken.²¹ But there Yahweh will be with us

in majesty, a place of broad rivers and streams, in which no galley with oars will go, neither will any gallant ship pass by there.²² For Yahweh is our judge, Yahweh is our lawgiver, Yahweh is our king; He will save us.²³ Your rigging is untied; they couldn't strengthen the foot of their mast, they failed to spread the sail. Then the prey of a great spoil was divided, the lame took the prey.²⁴ The inhabitant won't say, I am sick because the people who dwell therein will be forgiven their iniquity.

CHAPTER 34 Jun. 10

God's Punishment on the Nations

Come near, you nations, to hear!
Listen, you peoples. Let the earth and all it contains hear; the world, and everything that comes from it.² For Yahweh is enraged against all the nations and angry with all their armies. He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over for

eyes and ears really can come under our control. There is the impression given that human behaviour is somehow automatic; and yet we *can* take control of our senses and responses to them.

33:18 This refers to the Assyrian military personnel outside Jerusalem, wisely analyzing the situation as they besieged the city. But Paul alludes to the LXX of this verse in 1 Cor. 1:20, where he says that we too are surrounded by the wise and powerful of this world, but ‘Where are they...?’ compared to the power of the Gospel of Christ, which declares their wisdom and human strength as nothing. Paul therefore understands each of us as being as it were in essence in the same position as the Jews of Isaiah’s time, tempted to rely upon Egypt rather than God, and likely to be awed by the human strength of those things which are against us. And yet we are to see them in the perspective of faith as nothing, as foolish and weak.

33:24 There is a connection between sin and sickness, as made also by Jesus (Mt. 9:5). It doesn’t mean that sickness always comes as a result of sin, but rather that because of our fallen state as a result of sin we are generally prone to sickness and death. The ultimate answer to sickness, therefore, is the complete removal of our sin, being counted righteous by God, and therefore being related (by His grace) to eternal life. In our age this is possible through baptism into Christ.

slaughter.³ Their slain will also be cast out, and the stench of their dead bodies will come up; and the mountains will melt in their blood.⁴ All of the army of the sky will be dissolved, the sky will be rolled up like a scroll, and all its armies will fade away, as a leaf fades from off a vine or a fig tree.⁵ For My sword has drunk its fill in the sky. Behold, it will come down on Edom and on the people of My curse for judgement.⁶ Yahweh's sword is filled with blood, it is covered with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams; for Yahweh has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in the land of Edom.⁷ The wild oxen will come down with them and the young bulls with the mighty bulls; and their land will be drunken with blood and their dust made greasy with fat.⁸ For Yahweh has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion.⁹ Her streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into sulphur, and

her land will become burning pitch;¹⁰ it won't be quenched night nor day, the smoke will go up forever; from generation to generation, it will lie waste. Nobody will pass through it forever and ever;¹¹ but the pelican and the porcupine will possess it, the owl and the raven will dwell in it. He will stretch the line of confusion over it, and the plumb line of emptiness.¹² They shall call its nobles to the kingdom, but none shall be there; and all its princes shall be nothing.¹³ Thorns will come up in its palaces, nettles and thistles in its fortresses; and it will be a habitation of jackals, a court for ostriches.¹⁴ The wild animals of the desert will meet with the wolves, and the wild goat will cry to his fellow. Yes, the night creature shall settle there and shall find herself a place of rest.¹⁵ The arrow snake will make her nest there, and lay, hatch, and gather under her shade. Yes, the kites will be gathered there, every one with her mate.

34:8 In human terms, this seems rather unjust. God had called the nations to attack and destroy Judah because of her sins, and yet now He takes vengeance for Zion (as in 35:4) as if she has been unfairly treated, and those nations require punishment for what they did. The final algorithm of God's justice is far beyond our total comprehension, but perhaps we are to perceive in this the passionate love God has for His sinful people – in that He so loved them that even when they were justly punished, He punished those by whom they were punished with great fury. This was in a sense just because they were also sinners. But whoever touches God's people, even when they are in rebellion against Him, has touched Him at a highly sensitive spot. In these things we see the depth of God's love for us, and how He counts us as His very own, and feels to us that way, even when we are in rebellion against Him.

34:10 *Smoke will go up forever; from generation to generation, it will lie waste* – Eternal fire and smoke is again used figuratively, as a symbol of total, permanent destruction. It can't be literal, for the 'eternal' smoke is paralleled with laying calm and desolate for ever. We need to remember this in considering Christ's use of the image of 'eternal fire' as a symbol for complete destruction, rather than forcing his words into any literal interpretation.

16 Search in the book of Yahweh, and read: not one of these will be missing; none will lack her mate. For My mouth has commanded, and His Spirit has gathered them. 17 He has cast the lot for them, and His hand has divided it to them with a measuring line. They shall possess it forever, from generation to generation they will dwell in it.

CHAPTER 35 Jun. 11

God's Promise for Israel

The wilderness and the dry land will be glad. The desert will rejoice and blossom like a rose. 2 It will blossom abundantly, and rejoice even with joy and singing. Lebanon's glory will be given to it, the excellence of Carmel and Sharon; they will see Yahweh's glory, the excellence of our God. 3 Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. 4 Tell those who have a fearful heart, Be strong, don't be afraid. Behold, your God will come with vengeance, God's retribution. He will come and save you. 5 Then the eyes of the blind will be opened,

and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped. 6 Then the lame man will leap like a deer and the tongue of the mute will sing; for waters will break out in the wilderness, and streams in the desert. 7 The burning sand will become a pool, and the thirsty ground springs of water. Grass with reeds and rushes will be in the habitation of jackals, where they used to lay. 8 A highway will be there, a road, and it will be called The Holy Way. The unclean shall not pass over it, but it will be for those who walk in the Way. Wicked fools will not go there, 9 no lion will be there, nor will any ravenous animal go up on it. They will not be found there; but the redeemed will walk there. 10 Yahweh's ransomed ones will return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy will be on their heads. They will obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing will flee away.

CHAPTER 36 Jun. 12

Assyria Invades Judah

Now it happened in the fourteenth year of king Hezekiah,

35:4 Vengeance... retribution – see on 34:8.

35:10 Whatever possible application this may have had to Hezekiah's time (e.g. the return of those who had fled Zion in fear) and what might have been after the destruction of the Assyrian invaders, or at the return of the exiles from Babylon, it is clearly a prophecy of God's future Kingdom on earth when Christ returns. Our joy will be "everlasting", whereas all joy in this life is tinged by the sense that it shall come to an end, the emotion has to subside, with the prospect of death ever before us. The joy we will then have shall have no fading away from a crescendo back into normality, but will have this 'eternal' aspect to it.

36:1 The Assyrian invasion was in the 14th year of Hezekiah's reign. He reigned twenty nine years (2 Kings 14:2). His sickness unto death from which he was miraculously healed gave him another 15 years to live (38:5); his serious illness was therefore in the same year in which Judah was invaded. So often, several things go seriously wrong in our lives all at the same time. The chance of that happening is negligible; clearly such

that Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all of the fortified cities of Judah, and captured them.² The king of Assyria sent Rabshakeh from Lachish to Jerusalem to king Hezekiah with a large army; he came and stood by the aqueduct from the upper pool in the fuller's field highway.³ Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder came out to him.⁴ Rabshakeh said to them, Now tell Hezekiah, ‘Thus says the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this in which you trust?⁵ I say that your counsel and strength for the war are only vain words. Now in whom do you trust, that you have rebelled against me?⁶ Behold, you trust in the staff of this bruised reed, even in Egypt, which if a man leans on it, it will go into his hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him.⁷ But if you tell me, ‘We trust in Yahweh our God’, isn't that He whose high places and whose altars Hezekiah has taken away, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, ‘You shall worship before this altar?’⁸ Now therefore, please make a pledge to my master the king of As-

syria, and I will give you two thousand horses, if you are able on your part to set riders on them.⁹ How then can you turn away the face of one captain of the least of my master's servants, and put your trust on Egypt for chariots and for horsemen?¹⁰ Have I come up now without Yahweh against this land to destroy it? Yahweh said to me, Go up against this land, and destroy it.¹¹ Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah said to Rabshakeh, Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; and don't speak to us in the Jews' language in the hearing of the people who are on the wall.¹² But Rabshakeh said, Has my master sent me only to your master and to you, to speak these words, and not to the men who sit on the wall, who will eat their own dung and drink their own urine with you?¹³ Then Rabshakeh stood, and called out with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and said, Hear the words of the great king, the king of Assyria!¹⁴ Thus says the king, ‘Don't let Hezekiah deceive you; for he will not be able to deliver you.¹⁵ Don't let Hezekiah make you trust in Yahweh, saying, Yahweh will surely deliver us. This

negative coincidences are all under God's controlling hand [not that of any cosmic ‘Satan’ being]. The coincidences would be too great to write off as merely chance. Note also that Hezekiah had lived a good life and acted in faith despite being surrounded by many of weak or weaker faith – and then, double tragedy struck him. Good living is no guarantee of a charmed life now, indeed, given all the Biblical examples of good people like Hezekiah suffering bad things, we should be surprised if we don't receive them.

36:10 The way Rabshakeh uses the term “Yahweh”, speaks Hebrew (:11) and is aware of Isaiah's prophecies about Assyria being sent to punish Judah, and the fact that Judah had trusted on Egypt when Yahweh had told them not to (:6), would all suggest that Rabshakeh was an apostate Jew who had gone over to the Assyrian side.

city won't be given into the hand of the king of Assyria'. ¹⁶ Don't listen to Hezekiah, for thus says the king of Assyria, 'Make your peace with me, and come out to me; and each of you eat from his vine, and each one from his fig tree, and each one of you drink the waters of his own cistern; ¹⁷ until I come and take you away to a land like your own land, a land of grain and new wine, a land of bread and vineyards. ¹⁸ Beware lest Hezekiah persuade you, saying, Yahweh will deliver us. Have any of the gods of the nations delivered their lands from the hand of the king of Assyria? ¹⁹ Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand? ²⁰ Who are they among all the gods of these countries that have delivered their country out of my hand, that Yahweh should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand? ²¹ But they remained silent and said nothing in reply, for the king's commandment was Don't answer him. ²² Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and

Joah, the son of Asaph, the recorder, came to Hezekiah with their clothes torn, and told him the words of Rabshakeh.

CHAPTER 37 Jun. 13

The King Asks Isaiah for Advice

It happened, when king Hezekiah heard it, that he tore his clothes, covered himself with sackcloth, and went into Yahweh's house. ² He sent Eliakim who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests, covered with sackcloth, to Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz. ³ They said to him, Thus says Hezekiah, 'This day is a day of trouble, and of rebuke, and of rejection; for the children have come to the birth, and there is no strength to bring forth. ⁴ It may be Yahweh your God will hear the words of Rabshakeh, whom the king of Assyria his master has sent to defy the living God, and will rebuke the words which Yahweh your God has heard. Therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left'. ⁵ So the servants of king Hezekiah came to Isaiah. ⁶ Isaiah said to them, Tell your

36:16, 17 This is a parody of Micah's prophecy of what God's future Kingdom on earth would be like (Mic. 4:4). The allusion is so strong that it would seem Rabshakeh knew that prophecy, confirming the suggestion made under :10 that he was an apostate Jew. The kingdoms of this world offer us a fake kingdom of God in this life – if we submit to them and reject the vision of *God's* Kingdom. Going the way of the world may appear to give all that God's Kingdom offers – but the kingdoms of men shall come to an end, all is not what it seems, they will not last eternally as God's Kingdom will; and it is for us to have the wisdom to see that we face a choice between the Kingdom of God, and the kingdoms of men which are a poor imitation of it.

37:1 In times of crisis, our response should be the same – to turn to God, to His house (the ecclesia), to His word and to His faithful people, asking them to pray for us. Maybe there are times when we can literally place a letter or hospital report on a table and pray to God over it, bringing it as it were in a special sense before Him (:14).

master, ‘Thus says Yahweh, Don’t be afraid of the words that you have heard, with which the servants of the king of Assyria have blasphemed Me. ⁷ Behold, I will put a spirit in him and he will hear news, and will return to his own land. I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land’. ⁸ So Rabshakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria warring against Libnah, for he had heard that he was departed from Lachish. ⁹ He heard news concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, He has come out to fight against you. When he heard it he sent messengers to Hezekiah, saying, ¹⁰ Thus you shall speak to Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, ‘Don’t let your God in whom you trust deceive you, saying, Jerusalem won’t be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. ¹¹ Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, by destroying them utterly. Shall you be delivered? ¹² Have the gods of the nations delivered them, which my fathers have destroyed, Gozan, Haran, Rezeph, and the children of Eden who were in Telassar? ¹³ Where is the king of

Hamath, and the king of Arpad, and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena, and Ivvah?’.

Hezekiah’s Prayer

¹⁴ Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it. Then Hezekiah went up to Yahweh’s house, and spread it before Yahweh. ¹⁵ Hezekiah prayed to Yahweh, saying, ¹⁶ Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, who is enthroned among the cherubim, You are the God, even You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; You have made heaven and earth. ¹⁷ Turn Your ear Yahweh and hear; open Your eyes Yahweh and behold; hear all of the words of Sennacherib, who has sent to defy the living God. ¹⁸ Truly Yahweh, the kings of Assyria have destroyed all the countries and their land, ¹⁹ and have cast their gods into the fire; for they were no gods, but the work of men’s hands, wood and stone; therefore they have destroyed them. ²⁰ Now therefore, Yahweh our God, save us from his hand, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are Yahweh, even You only.

37:7 A spirit – Can refer to an attitude of mind. God is quite capable of giving people mindsets, over and above their own thinking. There are many situations in life where we realize that we simply cannot change another’s mind. But God can.

37:16 Yahweh of Armies – Hezekiah uses that title for God in recognition of the fact that God has armies of invisible Angels far mightier than the armies of the Assyrians which surrounded him.

You have made heaven and earth – The Psalms record many other prayers where believers in extremity have been inspired in their faith by the fact that God is creator. As He has created all things that are, it follows that to change one small thing within that creation on the face of one of the smallest planets of the cosmos... is in fact nothing at all difficult for Him. Such inspiration to faith is not present for those who believe the myth that all things evolved without God’s creative input.

37:20 That all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are Yahweh – A common

The Fall of Sennacherib

21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, ‘Because you have prayed to Me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, 22 this is the word which Yahweh has spoken concerning him. The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you and ridiculed you. The daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head at you. 23 Whom have you defied and blasphemed? Against whom have you exalted your voice and lifted up your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel. 24 By your servants have you defied the Lord and have said, With the multitude of my chariots I have come up to the height of the mountains, to the innermost parts of Lebanon. I will cut down its tall cedars and its choice fir trees. I will enter into its farthest height, the forest of its fruitful field. 25 I have dug and drunk water, and with the sole of my feet I will dry up all the rivers of Egypt. 26 Have you not heard

how I have done it long ago, and formed it in ancient times? Now I have brought it to pass, that it should be yours to destroy fortified cities, turning them into ruinous heaps. 27 Therefore their inhabitants had little power; they were dismayed and confounded, they were like the grass of the field and like the green herb, like the grass on the housetops, and like a field before its crop has grown. 28 But I know your sitting down, your going out, your coming in, and your raging against Me. 29 Because of your raging against Me, and because your arrogance has come up into My ears, therefore will I put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will turn you back by the way by which you came. 30 This shall be the sign to you. You will eat this year that which grows of itself, and in the second year that which springs from the same; and in the third year sow and reap and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. 31 The remnant that is escaped of the

reason given by faithful believers when begging God to hear their prayer. It should be most important to us to see His glory worked out through the answer to our requests, rather than merely personal benefit to us. This approach will also influence what we pray for, as well as how we pray for it.

37:22 The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you and ridiculed you – This “daughter” refers to the faithful remnant in Jerusalem. But God speaks of them as being far more confident and full of faith than they really were; they feared the Assyrians and didn’t exactly laugh at them. But we see here one of many examples of how God is so thrilled with the faith of His children that He counts what faith and spirituality they have as far more than it actually is, so thrilled by it is He.

37:23 Against whom have you exalted your voice? – Rabshakeh spoke with an exalted, loud voice to all the Jews guarding Jerusalem (36:13). But God says that effectively, he had been shouting against the most holy God. God in all His holiness was manifest in those spiritually weak members of His people who were then in Jerusalem. His identity with His people is amazing; and it doesn’t end when they become weak or are in double mind about Him, just as it doesn’t in a natural family.

house of Judah will again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. 32 For out of Jerusalem a remnant will go forth, and survivors will escape from Mount Zion. The zeal of Yahweh of Armies will perform this'.³³ Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the king of Assyria, 'He will not come to this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither will he come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against it'.³⁴ By the way that he came, by the same he shall return, and he shall not come to this city', says Yahweh. 35 'For I will defend this city to save it, for My own sake, and for My servant David's sake'. 36 The angel of Yahweh went out and struck one hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the camp of the Assyrians. When men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.³⁷ So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, went away, returned to Nineveh, and stayed there. 38 It happened that as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons struck him with the sword; and they escaped into the land of Ararat. Esar Haddon his son reigned in his place.

CHAPTER 38 Jun. 14

Hezekiah's Illness and Recovery

In those days was Hezekiah sick and near death. Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, came to him, and said to him, Thus says Yahweh, 'Set your house in order, for you will die, and not live'.² Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to Yahweh,³ and said, Remember now, Yahweh, I beg You, how I have walked before You in truth and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Your sight. Hezekiah wept bitterly.⁴ Then the word of Yahweh came to Isaiah, saying,⁵ Go, and tell Hezekiah, 'Thus says Yahweh the God of David your father, I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears. Behold, I will add fifteen years to your life.⁶ I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city.⁷ This shall be the sign to you from Yahweh, that Yahweh will do this thing that He has spoken.⁸ Behold, I will cause the shadow on the sundial, which has gone down on the sundial of Ahaz with the sun, to return backward ten steps.⁹ So the sun returned ten steps on the sundial on which it had gone down.⁹ The

38:1 *In those days* – His sickness was at the same time as the invasion. See on 36:1.

38:3 Hezekiah simply puts his situation before God, he doesn't actually specifically ask for healing. But God saw the essence of his heart, and read this as a prayer requesting healing and the extension of life. At times, typically during illness, we find it hard to verbalize prayer; and yet God sees to the core of our hearts, and understands what are really our heart's desires, and understands these as requests to Him.

38:5 *I have heard your prayer, I have seen* – Hezekiah had just been begging God to *hear and see* the behaviour of the Assyrians (37:17). God teaches us how to pray through some desperate experience, and then gives us another crisis in which we can as it were practice the style and intensity of prayer which we learnt in the previous experience.

writing of Hezekiah king of Judah, when he had been sick, and had recovered of his sickness.¹⁰ I said, In the middle of my life I go into the gates of Sheol. I am deprived of the residue of my years.¹¹ I said, I won't see Yah, Yah in the land of the living. I will see man no more with the inhabitants of the world.¹² My dwelling is removed, and is carried away from me like a shepherd's tent. I have rolled up, like a weaver, my life. He will cut me off from the loom. From day even to night You will make an end of me.¹³ I waited patiently until morning. He breaks all my bones like a lion. From now until tonight You will make an end of me.¹⁴ I am chattering like a swallow or a crane, moaning like a dove. My eyes weaken looking upward. Lord, I am oppressed. Be my salvation.¹⁵ What will I say? He has both spoken to me, and Himself has done it. I will walk carefully all my years because of that anguished experience of my soul.¹⁶ Lord, men live by these things; and my spirit finds life in all of them: You restore me, and cause me to live.¹⁷ Behold, for peace I had great anguish, but You have in love for my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption; for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.¹⁸ For Sheol can't praise You.

Death can't celebrate You. Those who go down into the pit can't hope for Your truth.¹⁹ The living, the living, he shall praise You, as I do this day. The father shall make known Your truth to the children.²⁰ Yahweh will save me. Therefore we will sing my songs with stringed instruments all the days of our life in the house of Yahweh.²¹ Now Isaiah had said, Let them take a cake of figs, and lay it for a poultice on the boil, and he shall recover.²² Hezekiah also had said, What is the sign that I will go up to the house of Yahweh?

CHAPTER 39 Jun. 15

Visitors from Babylon

At that time, Merodach Baladan the son of Baladan king of Babylon sent letters and a present to Hezekiah; for he heard that he had been sick, and had recovered.² Hezekiah was pleased with them, and showed them the house of his precious things, the silver, and the gold, the spices, and the precious oil, and all the house of his armour, and all that was found in his treasures. There was nothing in his house nor in all his dominion that Hezekiah didn't show them.³ Then Isaiah the prophet came to king Hezekiah and asked him, What did these men say? Where did they come from to you?

38:19 Hezekiah didn't want to die because he understood that after death he couldn't praise God. His understanding of death was as a state of total unconsciousness, where he would meet with neither God nor man (:11). There was no 'immortal soul' or conscious survival of death in his theology, these were pagan ideas of the time which he clearly rejected – as should we. The devotional point is that life is for praising God; and given the brevity of it, every minute must be harnessed into His praise, rather than frittered away.

Hezekiah said, They have come from a country far from me, even from Babylon. ⁴ Then he asked, What have they seen in your house? Hezekiah answered, They have seen all that is in my house. There is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them. ⁵ Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, Hear the word of Yahweh of Armies: ⁶ ‘Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers have stored up until this day, will be carried to Babylon. Nothing will be left’, says Yahweh. ⁷ ‘They will take away your sons who will issue from you, whom you shall father, and they

will be eunuchs in the king of Babylon’s palace’. ⁸ Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, Yahweh’s word which you have spoken is good. He said moreover, For there will be peace and truth in my days.

CHAPTER 40 Jun. 16

A Message of Comfort

Comfort you, comfort My people, says your God. ² Speak comfortably to Jerusalem; and call out to her that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned, that she has received of Yahweh’s hand double for all her sins. ³ The voice of one who calls out, Prepare you the way

39:8 The Hezekiah story has a spiritually sad ending, with Hezekiah appearing selfishly content that he himself won’t suffer too much for his prideful friendship with the world and indeed, with those who were God’s especial enemies. We inevitably wonder whether in spiritual terms it wouldn’t have been better for him to die when God first offered him the chance to, as it were. We need to consider relatively ‘premature’ deaths in this light; maybe they are a case of ‘die young stay pretty’ in spiritual terms. For it is far better to die in youth and rise again to live eternally, than live a ‘long’ human life only to in middle or older age turn away from faith and the hope of the Kingdom.

40:3 Quoted about John the Baptist preaching the Gospel of Christ (Mt. 3:3). Before the final coming of the Lord, there will be a proclamation of this by His people: “Prepare you [plural] the way”. As the King’s servants went ahead of him to make the path he had to travel smooth and plain [remember there were no motorways then!], so we go ahead of the returning Lord of all the earth, to prepare the way / road for Him. The fulfilment of this commission by John the Baptist in the first century is therefore a great pattern for our fulfilment of it before the Lord’s *second* coming in our age. And yet *God* prepares His *own* way (43:19; 49:11). The element of unreality here, the ‘new thing’, is that the King Himself prepares His own way or road. The connection with :3 is that in the work of preparing the Lord’s way, in the last great preaching appeal of all time in the lead up to the second coming, the Lord Himself will work with us to make that way plain and clear. We are to “cry” unto Zion that “her iniquity is pardoned” (:2), but we are also to ‘cry’ for her to repent, to be “made straight” (:2-4; 58:1). It’s exactly because we have in prospect been forgiven that we are called to repent. The forgiveness has already been granted; iniquity has been pardoned. We are to ‘cry’ out this fact; and also to ‘cry out’ for repentance. But we have to respond to that. The world’s redemption was achieved through the cross; but we have to appeal to the world to accept it. The same Hebrew word translated ‘cry’ occurs in the same context in 40:26;

of Yahweh in the wilderness! Make a level highway in the desert for our God. ⁴ Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low. The uneven shall be made level, and the rough places a plane. ⁵ The glory of Yahweh shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it. ⁶ The voice of one saying, Cry! Another one said, What shall I cry? All flesh is like grass, and all its glory is like the flower of the field. ⁷ The grass withers, the flower fades, because Yahweh's breath blows on it; surely the people are like grass. ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades; but the word of our God stands forever. ⁹ You who tell good news to Zion, go up on a high mountain. You who tell good news to Jerusalem, lift up your voice with strength- lift it up, don't be afraid. Say to the cities of Judah, Behold, your God! ¹⁰ Behold, the Lord Yahweh will come as a mighty

one and His arm will rule for him. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before him. ¹¹ He will feed His flock like a shepherd, He will gather the lambs in His arm, and carry them in His bosom; He will gently lead those who have their young.

God Is Incomparable

¹² Who has measured the waters in the hollow of His hand, and marked off the sky with His span, and calculated the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance? ¹³ Who has directed the Spirit of Yahweh, or has taught Him as His counsellor? ¹⁴ Who did He take counsel with, and who instructed Him and taught Him in the path of justice, and taught Him knowledge and showed Him the way of understanding? ¹⁵ Behold, the nations are like a drop in a bucket, and are re-

43:1; 45:3,4; 48:12; 54:6, where we read that it is God Himself who calls every one of Israel back to Him, just as He calls every star by its own personal name. And so in our personal calling of men and women, in our crying out to them in these last days to be prepared for the Lord's coming, we are workers together with God. He is crying out to them, through our feeble, shy, embarrassed, uncertain words of witness. Likewise it is God Himself who makes the crooked places straight in 42:16 and 45:2 – whereas here in 3, it is we the preachers who are to do this.

40:4 In the prospect of Christ's coming and our meeting with Him, those with a too low self esteem are lifted up, and the proud brought down to their level; so that between them, the prepared people of God are the road over which God's glory in Christ shall advance. "Made low" uses the same word as in 2:11, which predicts that in the day of judgment, the proud looks of man shall be *humbled* [s.w. 'made low']".

40:8 *The word of our God* – Interpreted in 1 Pet. 1:24,25 as the Gospel of Christ.

40:10 Applied by Christ to His second coming in Rev. 22:12. The reward is brought to us from Heaven to earth at His return; we don't go to Heaven after death to receive it. Statements about God are fulfilled in Christ, as His Son who has been given by God all authority to act in His Name; but this doesn't make Jesus God Himself in person.

40:15 *The nations are like a drop in a bucket* – This was said in the context of Judah

garded as a speck of dust on a balance. Behold, He lifts up the islands like a very little thing.¹⁶ Lebanon's forest is not sufficient to burn, nor its animals sufficient for a burnt offering.¹⁷ All the nations are like nothing before Him, they are regarded by Him as less than nothing, and vanity.¹⁸ To whom then will you liken God? Or what likeness will you compare to Him?¹⁹ A workman has cast an image, and the goldsmith overlays it with gold, and casts silver chains for it.²⁰ He who is too impoverished for such an offering chooses a tree that will not rot. He seeks a skilful workman to set up an engraved image for him that will not be moved.²¹ Haven't you known? Haven't you heard, yet? Haven't you been told from the beginning? Haven't you understood from the foundations of the earth?²² It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers; who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell

in;²³ who brings princes to nothing; who makes the judges of the earth meaningless.²⁴ They are planted scarcely, they are sown scarcely, their stock has scarcely taken root in the ground. He merely blows on them, and they wither, and the whirlwind takes them away as stubble.²⁵ To whom then will you liken Me? Who is My equal? says the Holy One.²⁶ Lift up your eyes on high, and see who has created these, who brings out their army by number. He calls them all by name, by the greatness of His might, and because He is strong in power, not one is lacking.²⁷ Why do you say, Jacob, and speak, Israel, My way is hidden from Yahweh, and the justice due me is disregarded by my God?²⁸ Haven't you known? Haven't you heard? The everlasting God, Yahweh, the Creator of the ends of the earth, doesn't faint. He isn't weary, His understanding is unsearchable.²⁹ He gives power to the weak, He increases the strength of him who has no might.³⁰ Even the

being tempted to trust in the nations around them rather than in God. Reflection on the extent of His power as seen in the natural creation (:12-14) is intended to inspire faith in practice.

40:17 Regarded by Him as less than nothing – This is not to say that God considers human beings as irrelevant; the significance of the human person is ever before us in the Bible. The context of these statements about the smallness of man is the appeal not to trust in human strength but in God, compared to whose strength humanity is nothing.

40:22 The circle of the earth – Although people at the time generally believed the earth was flat, God's word doesn't contradict true scientific fact, even though at times He speaks to people in the unscientific language which they can cope with.

40:27 The justice due me – The pain of injustice afflicts people in so many ways; but the answer given here is to look to the future day of God's Kingdom, whilst meanwhile remembering God's amazing knowledge and sensitivity to the nuances of every human situation, better than we ourselves know them. His present knowledge and future revelation of judgment is the answer presented to our search for justice today.

youths faint and get weary, and the young men utterly fall; ³¹ but those who wait for Yahweh will renew their strength. They will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run, and not be weary, they will walk, and not faint.

CHAPTER 41 Jun. 17

God Reassures Judah

Keep silent before Me, islands, and let the peoples renew their strength. Let them come near, then let them speak. Let's meet together for judgement. ² Who has raised up one from the east? Who called him to His foot in righteousness? He hands over nations to him, and makes him rule over kings. He gives them like the dust to his sword, like the driven stubble to his bow. ³ He pursues them, and passes by safely, even by a way that he had not gone with his feet. ⁴ Who has worked and done it, calling the generations from the beginning? I Yahweh, the first and with the last, I am He. ⁵ The islands have seen and fear. The ends of the earth tremble; they approach, and come. ⁶ Everyone helps his neighbour, they say to their brothers, Be strong! ⁷ So the carpenter encourages the goldsmith. He who smoothes with the hammer encourages him who strikes the anvil, saying of the soldering, It is good; and

he fastens it with nails, that it might not totter. ⁸ But you, Israel My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham My friend, ⁹ you whom I have taken hold of from the ends of the earth and called from its corners and said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and not cast you away’; ¹⁰ don't you be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. Yes, I will help you. Yes, I will uphold you with the right hand of My righteousness. ¹¹ Behold, all those who are incensed against you will be disappointed and confounded. Those who strive with you will be like nothing, and shall perish. ¹² You will seek them, and won't find them, even those who contend with you. Those who war against you will be as nothing, as a non-existent thing. ¹³ For I, Yahweh your God, will hold your right hand, saying to you, ‘Don't be afraid. I will help you’. ¹⁴ Don't be afraid, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel. I will help you, says Yahweh, and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁵ Behold, I have made you into a new sharp threshing instrument with teeth. You will thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and will make the hills like chaff. ¹⁶ You will winnow them, and the wind will carry them away, and the whirlwind

41:8 The servant of Isaiah's prophecies is “the seed of Abraham”, but Gal. 3:16 interprets this seed as a singular person, Jesus. The “servant” is therefore both Israel and Jesus. He is their (our) representative, the One to whom every one of God's people should aspire. Wherein Israel failed to fulfil these servant prophecies, Jesus did. We can now become God's “servant” people, Israel of the Spirit, by baptism into Christ – so that all that is true of Him becomes true of us.

will scatter them. You will rejoice in Yahweh, you will glory in the Holy One of Israel. ¹⁷ The poor and needy seek water, and there is none, their tongue fails for thirst. I Yahweh, will answer them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. ¹⁸ I will open rivers on the bare heights and springs in the midst of the valleys. I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. ¹⁹ I will put cedar, acacia, myrtle, and oil trees in the wilderness. I will set fir trees, pine, and box trees together in the desert; ²⁰ that they may see, know, consider, and understand together, that the hand of Yahweh has done this, and the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Why Trust in Idols?

²¹ Produce your cause, says Yahweh. Bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob. ²² Let them announce and declare to us what shall happen. Declare the former things, what they are, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or show us things to come. ²³ Declare the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods. Yes, do good, or do evil, that we may be dismayed, and

see it together. ²⁴ Behold, you are of nothing, and your work is of nothing. He who chooses you is an abomination. ²⁵ I have raised up one from the north, and he has come; from the rising of the sun, one who calls on My name; and he shall come on rulers as on mortar, and as the potter treads clay. ²⁶ Who has declared it from the beginning, that we may know? And before, that we may say, ‘He is right?’ Surely, there is no one who declares like this. Surely, there is no one who shows, surely, there is no one who hears your words. ²⁷ I am the first to say to Zion, ‘Behold, look at them;’ and I will give one who brings good news to Jerusalem. ²⁸ When I look, there is no man; even among them there is no counsellor who, when I ask of them, can answer a word. ²⁹ Behold, all of them, their works are vanity and nothing. Their molten images are wind and confusion.

CHAPTER 42 Jun. 18

The Lord's Chosen Servant

Behold, My servant, whom I uphold; My chosen, in whom My soul delights—I have put My Spirit on him. He will bring justice to the nations. ² He will not shout, nor

41:22 *Declare the former things* – Not only is God’s prediction of future events a sign of His supremacy as God, but we must consider too that He is the only ultimate historian; He alone can attach meaning to the events of history, interpreting in a way so unique that we are persuaded that surely, He alone is God. This is why so much of the Bible is in one sense history, and God’s interpretation of it. This of itself ought to persuade us of Him and His word, quite apart from His predictions of future things.

41:25 *He shall come on rulers as on mortar; and as the potter treads clay* – This connects with the prophecy of Dan. 2:44, that Christ’s second coming will be like a stone hitting the feet of clay of human kingdoms.

raise his voice, nor cause it to be heard in the street.³ He won't break a bruised reed. He won't quench a dimly burning wick. He will faithfully bring justice.⁴ He will not fail nor be discouraged until he has set justice in the earth, and the islands will wait for his law.⁵ Thus says God Yahweh, He who created the heavens and stretched them out, He who spread out the earth and that which comes out of it, He who gives breath to its people and spirit to those who walk in it.⁶ I, Yahweh, have called you in righteousness, and will hold your hand and will keep you, and make you a covenant for the people, as a light for the nations;⁷ to open the blind eyes, to bring the prisoners out of the dungeon, and those who sit in darkness out of the prison.⁸ I am Yahweh; that is My name. I will not give My glory to another, nor My praise to engraved images.⁹ Behold, the former things have happened, and I declare new things. I tell you about them before they come up.

A Song of Praise

¹⁰ Sing to Yahweh a new song, and His praise from the end of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is therein, the islands and their inhabitants.¹¹ Let the wilderness and its cities raise their voices, with the villages that Kedar inhabits. Let the inhabitants of Sela sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains!¹² Let them give glory to Yahweh, and declare His praise in the islands.¹³ Yahweh will go out like a mighty man, He will stir up zeal like a man of war, He will raise a war cry. Yes, He will shout aloud, He will triumph over His enemies.

God's Promise

¹⁴ I have been silent a long time, I have been quiet and restrained Myself; now I will cry out like a travailing woman, I will both gasp and pant.¹⁵ I will destroy mountains and hills and dry up all their herbs. I will make the rivers islands and will dry up the pools.¹⁶ I will bring the blind by a way that they don't know, I will

42:3 Quoted about the preaching of Jesus in Mt. 12:18-20. He didn't turn away from human weakness, but rather tried to fan what spiritual fire there was into a greater flame; we should have the same attitude to people. Isaiah prophesied in the context of the Assyrian invasion, at which time Judah were tempted to trust in the "broken reed" of Egypt (2 Kings 18:21). This is the only other time the phrase is used. God was even unwilling to break Egypt, but rather sought even their salvation (19:24).

42:4 *He will not fail nor be discouraged* – This is a prophecy of Jesus. He had so much to discourage Him, and yet it seems He never felt totally discouraged even once – because He looked at the short term ups and downs of His ministry from a Kingdom perspective, knowing that *ultimately* all would work out. We need to look at the down cycles of our own experience the same way.

42:14 God likens Himself here to a woman; characteristics of both male and female are found in Him, in whose image both male and female were created (Gen. 1:27; 5:1,2).

42:16 – see on 40:3.

lead them in paths that they don't know. I will make darkness light before them, and crooked places straight. I will do these things, and I will not forsake them.¹⁷ Those who trust in engraved images, who tell molten images, 'You are our gods' will be turned back. They will be utterly disappointed.

Israel's Failure to Learn

18 Hear, you deaf, and look, you blind, that you may see. **19** Who is blind, but My servant? Or who is as deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is as blind as he who is at peace, and as blind as Yahweh's servant? **20** You see many things, but don't observe. His ears are open, but he doesn't listen. **21** It pleases Yahweh, for His righteousness' sake, to magnify the law, and make it honourable. **22** But this is a robbed and plundered people. All of them are snared in holes, and they are hidden in prisons. They have become a prey, and no one delivers; and a spoil, and no one says, 'Restore them!'. **23** Who is there among you who will give ear to this? Who will listen and hear bearing in mind the time to come? **24** Who gave Jacob as plunder, and Israel to the robbers? Didn't Yahweh,

He against whom we have sinned? For they would not walk in His ways, and they disobeyed His law. **25** Therefore He poured the fierceness of His anger on him, and the strength of battle; and it set him on fire all around, but he didn't know; and it burned him, but he didn't take it to heart.

CHAPTER 43 Jun. 19

Judah's Saviour

But now thus says Yahweh who created you, Jacob, and He who formed you, Israel: Don't be afraid, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by your name. You are Mine. **2** When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned, and flame will not scorch you. **3** For I am Yahweh your God, the Holy One of Israel your Saviour. I have given Egypt as your ransom, Ethiopia and Sheba in your place. **4** Since you have been precious and honoured in My sight and I have loved you; therefore I will give people in your place, and nations instead of your life. **5** Don't be afraid; for I am with you. I will bring your seed from the

42:22 *No one says, 'Restore them!' – Nobody at that time was saying that, but God had prophesied so many times that His people would be restored at the end of 70 years, and Cyrus did indeed make the amazing call to restore Judah then (see Ezra 1). The challenge at Isaiah's time was to view the discouragement of the moment in the context of God's prophetic word – to suffer the apparent silence of God "bearing in mind the time to come" (:23) when one *would* say "Restore them!".*

43:4 That God should 'honour' His weak people is amazing. But this is what it means to be loved by God; for the object of love is thereby respected and honoured in the eyes of the lover. And this is how God also sees us today.

east, and gather you from the west.
 6 I will tell the north, ‘Give them up!’
 and tell the south, ‘Don’t hold them
 back! Bring My sons from far, and
 My daughters from the ends of the
 earth— 7 each one who is called by
 My name, and whom I have created
 for My glory, whom I have formed,
 yes, whom I have made’.

Israel, the Lord’s Witness

8 Bring out the blind people who have eyes, and the deaf who have ears.
 9 Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the peoples be assembled. Who among them can declare this, and show us former things? Let them bring their witnesses, that they may be justified; or let them hear, and say, That is true. 10 You are My witnesses, says Yahweh, With My servant whom I have chosen; that you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He. Before Me there was no God formed, neither will there be after Me. 11 I Myself am Yahweh; and besides Me there is no saviour. 12 I have declared, I have saved, and I have shown; and

there was no strange god among you. Therefore you are My witnesses, says Yahweh, That I am God. 13 Yes, since the day was I am He; and there is no one who can deliver out of My hand. I will work, and who can hinder it? 14 Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and I will bring all of them down as fugitives, even the Chaldeans, in the ships of their rejoicing. 15 I am Yahweh your Holy One, the Creator of Israel- your King. 16 Thus says Yahweh, who makes a way in the sea, and a path in the mighty waters; 17 who brings forth the chariot and horse, the army and the mighty man (they lie down together, they shall not rise; they are extinct, they are quenched like a wick): 18 Don’t remember the former things, and don’t consider the things of old. 19 Behold, I will do a new thing. It springs forth now; don’t you perceive it? I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert. 20 The animals of the field shall honour Me, the jackals and the ostriches; because I give water in the

43:7 *Each one* – Every single Jew in captivity was created potentially for God’s glory. At the end of the 70 years captivity He did indeed command the Persian empire to allow the Jews to return; but the majority chose to stay where they were rather than return to the ruined, hard land of Judah – to glorify God. The frequent emphasis on how “each one” would be gathered shows the colossal significance of the individual human person to God, and how He sees us as individuals rather than merely His people *en masse*.

43:15 *The Creator of Israel – your King* – Because Yahweh God was Israel’s creator, therefore He ought to have been their King. If we really believe His creative authority over us, then He will rule in every aspect of our lives; this is an implication of our belief that God created us and we didn’t create ourselves by fluke chance.

43:17 *They shall not rise* – Another proof that those who don’t know God will die and remain dead. Hence the urgent importance of spreading the knowledge of God to those who have not yet heard.

wilderness and rivers in the desert, to give drink to My people, My chosen, ²¹ the people which I formed for Myself, that they might show forth My praise. ²² Yet you have not called on Me, Jacob; but you have been weary of Me, Israel. ²³ You have not brought Me of your sheep for burnt offerings; neither have you honoured Me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings, nor wearied you with frankincense. ²⁴ You have bought Me no sweet cane with money, nor have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices; but you have burdened Me with your sins. You have wearied Me with your iniquities. ²⁵ I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins. ²⁶ Put Me in remembrance, let us plead together. Set forth your case, that you may be justified. ²⁷ Your first father sinned, and your teachers have transgressed against Me. ²⁸ Therefore I will profane the princes of the sanctuary; and I will make Jacob a curse, and Israel an insult.

CHAPTER 44 Jun. 20

Yet listen now, Jacob My servant, and Israel, whom I have chosen. ² This is what Yahweh who made you

and formed you from the womb, who will save you, says: Don't be afraid, Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. ³ For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and streams on the dry ground. I will pour My Spirit on your seed, and My blessing on your offspring: ⁴ and they will spring up among the grass, as willows by the watercourses. ⁵ One will say, 'I am Yahweh's' and another will be called by the name of Jacob; and another will write with his hand 'to Yahweh', and honour the name of Israel. ⁶ This is what Yahweh the King of Israel and His Redeemer, Yahweh of Armies, says: I am the first, and I am the last; and besides Me there is no God. ⁷ Who is like Me? Who will call, and will declare it, and set it in order for Me, since I established the ancient people? Let them declare the things that are coming, and that will happen. ⁸ Don't fear, neither be afraid. Haven't I declared it to you long ago, and shown it? You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me? Indeed there is not. I don't know any other Rock.

The Foolishness of Idolatry

⁹ Everyone who makes an engraved image is vain. The things that they delight in will not profit. Their own

43:24 *You have wearied Me with your iniquities* – God speaks here of being burdened by Israel's sins – and yet this is a prelude to the passages which speak of the Lord Jesus bearing our sins on the cross (53:4,11,12). He was wearied by Israel's sins even though God does not "grow weary" (40:28) by nature; in His full entering into His people's situation, in His extreme sensitivity to our behavior, He does allow Himself to grow weary with the sins of those with whom He is in covenant relationship. It was this kind of capacity which God has which was supremely revealed in His 'sharing in' the crucifixion of His Son.

witnesses don't see nor know, that they may be disappointed. ¹⁰ Who has fashioned a god or moulds an image that is profitable for nothing? ¹¹ Behold, all his fellows will be disappointed; and the workmen are mere men. Let them all be gathered together. Let them stand up. They will fear. They will be put to shame together. ¹² The blacksmith takes an axe, works in the coals, fashions it with hammers, and works it with his strong arm. He is hungry, and his strength fails; he drinks no water, and is faint. ¹³ The carpenter stretches out a line. He marks it out with a pencil. He shapes it with planes. He marks it out with compasses, and shapes it like the figure of a man, with the beauty of a man, to reside in a house. ¹⁴ He cuts down cedars for himself, and takes the cypress and the oak, and strengthens for himself one among the trees of the forest. He plants a fir tree, and the rain nourishes it. ¹⁵ Then it will be for a man to burn; and he takes some of it, and warms himself. Yes, he burns it, and bakes bread. Yes, he makes a god, and worships it; he makes it an engraved image, and falls down to it.

¹⁶ He burns part of it in the fire. With

part of it, he eats meat. He roasts a roast, and is satisfied. Yes, he warms himself and says, Ah! I am warm, I have seen the fire. ¹⁷ The rest of it he makes into a god, even his engraved image. He bows down to it and worships and prays to it and says, Deliver me; for you are my god! ¹⁸ They don't know neither do they consider: for He has shut their eyes that they can't see; and their hearts that they can't understand. ¹⁹ No one thinks neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire. Yes, I have also baked bread on its coals. I have roasted meat and eaten it. Shall I make the rest of it into an abomination? Shall I bow down to a tree trunk? ²⁰ He feeds on ashes. A deceived heart has turned him aside; and he can't deliver his soul, nor say, Isn't there a lie in my right hand?

The Lord, Creator and Saviour

²¹ Remember these things, Jacob and Israel; for you are My servant. I have formed you; you are My servant. Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me. ²² I have blotted out as a thick cloud your iniquities, and, as a cloud, your sins. Return to Me, for

44:14–18 The folly of sin is only fully evident to God. We may go along with the text here, poking fun at the idiocy of idolatry – and yet we all have a tendency to this kind of thing, because every sin is in essence a form of idolatry.

44:22 God appeals for Israel to respond by pointing out that in prospect, He has already forgiven them. This not only inspires our personal repentance, but can be the basis upon which we appeal to others to repent – that for the sake of Christ, God has forgiven them, but they need to claim that and identify with it. Isaiah urged the Jews to return to the land by saying that God had forgiven them, and on this basis He appealed for them to both ‘repent’ and ‘return’ to the land. The two terms are related. Thus He showed His grace; forgiveness preceded, not followed, repentance. As Paul put it, the goodness of God leads to repentance (Rom. 2:4). And we are asked to show that same

I have redeemed you.²³ Sing you heavens, for Yahweh has done it! Shout, you lower parts of the earth! Break out into singing, you mountains, O forest, all of your trees, for Yahweh has redeemed Jacob, and will glorify Himself in Israel.²⁴ Thus says Yahweh your Redeemer, and He who formed you from the womb: I am Yahweh who makes all things, who alone stretches out the heavens; who spreads out the earth by Myself;²⁵ who frustrates the signs of the liars, and makes diviners mad; who turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolish;²⁶ who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; who says of Jerusalem, ‘She will be inhabited;’ and of the cities of Judah, ‘They will be built’, and ‘I will raise up its waste places;’²⁷ who says to the deep, ‘Be dry’, and ‘I will dry up your rivers;’²⁸ who says of Cyrus, ‘He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure’, even say-

ing of Jerusalem, ‘She will be built;’ and of the temple, ‘Your foundation will be laid’.

CHAPTER 45 Jun. 21

The Lord Appoints Cyrus

Thus says Yahweh to His anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have held, to subdue nations before him, and strip kings of their armour; to open the doors before him, and the gates shall not be shut:² I will go before you, and make the rough places smooth. I will break the doors of brass in pieces, and cut apart the bars of iron.³ I will give you the treasures of darkness, and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that it is I, Yahweh, who call you by your name, even the God of Israel.⁴ For Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel My chosen, I have called you by your name. I have surnamed you, though you have not known Me.⁵ I am Yahweh, and there is none else. Besides Me, there is no God. I will

“goodness” of God to others, being “kind [s.w. ‘goodness’] one to another... forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32). We too are to show this grace of forgiveness-before-repentance; but perhaps in no other area has formalized, institutionalized Christianity failed worse. The Greek word translated “goodness” is rendered “gracious” in 1 Pet. 2:3 – newly converted babes in Christ taste of this gracious goodness, and it leads to repentance.

44:26 Who confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers – The singular servant is equated with His “messengers”, whose “counsel” to others is the word which is Jesus, the true servant. If we are “in Christ” then we are His witnesses, and He is especially with us in our witness for Him.

44:28 The command of Cyrus to allow the Jews to return to Judah and rebuild their temple at his expense as recorded in Ezra 1 was clearly a result of God working on the hearts of unbelievers to make them do things which otherwise have little sense or human wisdom. The tragedy is that most of the Jews preferred the soft life in Babylon and didn’t return.

45:5-7 Of especially significant influence upon Judaism were the Persian views of Zoroastrianism. This was a philosophy which began in Persia about 600 B.C., and

strengthen you, though you have not known Me; ⁶ that they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides Me. I am Yahweh, and there is no one else. ⁷ I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create calamity. I am Yahweh, who does all these things. ⁸ Distil, you heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness. Let the earth open, that it may bring forth salvation, and let it cause righteousness to spring up with it. I, Yahweh, have created it.

Yahweh's Supremacy

⁹ Woe to him who strives with his Maker— a clay pot among the clay pots of the earth! Shall the clay ask

Him who fashions it, ‘What are you making?’ or your work, ‘He has no hands?’. ¹⁰ Woe to him who says to a father, ‘What have you become the father of?’ or to a mother, ‘To what have you given birth?’ ¹¹ Thus says Yahweh the Maker and Holy One of Israel: You can ask Me about the things that are to come, concerning My sons, and you command Me concerning the work of My hands! ¹² I have made the earth, and created man on it. I, even My hands, have stretched out the heavens; and I have commanded all their army. ¹³ I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will make straight all his ways. He shall build My city, and he shall let My exiles go free, not for price nor reward, says Yahweh of Armies.

was growing in popularity when Judah went to Babylon / Persia in captivity. This philosophy taught that there was a good god of light (Mazda) and an evil god of darkness (Ahriman). :5–7 is a clear warning to the Jews in captivity not to buy into this— Israel’s God *alone* made the light and the darkness, the good and the calamity or “evil”. The Jews were influenced by the Zoroastrian idea that somehow God Himself would never cause evil in our lives— and therefore, God is to be seen as somehow distanced from all good or evil actions, as these are under the control of the good and evil gods. The fact is, God personally is passionately involved with this world and with our lives; and so it is He who brings about the dark and the light, good and evil. “In pre-exilic Hebrew religion, Yahweh made all that was in heaven and earth, both of good and of evil. The Devil did not exist”. During their captivity in Babylon, the Jews shifted towards understanding that there was actually a separate entity responsible for disaster. Hence :5–8 warns them not to adopt the views of Babylon in this area, but to remain firm in their faith that God, their God, the God of Israel, the one and only Yahweh, was the ultimate source of all things, both positive and negative, having no equal or competitor in Heaven. This becomes a frequent theme of Isaiah and other prophets who wrote in the context of Israel in captivity. The Jews of course were monotheists, and these ideas were developed in order to allow them to believe in both one God, and yet also the dualistic, god of evil / god of good idea of the Persians. It was in this period that the Jews adopted the idea of sinful Angels, even though the Old Testament knows nothing of them. They didn’t want to compromise their monotheism by saying there was more than one God; and so they set up the ‘evil god’ as in fact a very powerful, sinful Angel. And this wrong notion was picked up by early Christians equally eager to accommodate the surrounding pagan ideas about evil.

14 Thus says Yahweh: The labour of Egypt, and the merchandise of Ethiopia, and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you, and they shall be yours. They will go after you. They shall come over in chains and they will bow down to you. They will make supplication to you: ‘Surely God is in you; and there is none else. There is no other god.’¹⁵ Most certainly You are a God who has hidden Yourself, God of Israel, the Saviour’.¹⁶ They will be disappointed, yes, confounded, all of them. Those who are makers of idols will go into confusion together.¹⁷ Israel will be saved by Yahweh with an everlasting salvation. You will not be disappointed nor confounded to ages everlasting.¹⁸ For thus says Yahweh who created the heavens, the God who formed the earth and made it, who established it and didn’t create it in vain, who formed it to be inhabited: I am Yahweh; and there is no other.¹⁹ I have not spoken in secret, in a place of the land of darkness. I didn’t say to the seed of Jacob, ‘Seek Me in vain’. I, Yahweh, speak righteousness. I declare things that are right.²⁰ Assemble yourselves and come. Draw near

together, you who have escaped from the nations. Those have no knowledge who carry the wood of their engraved image, and pray to a god that can’t save.²¹ Declare and present it. Yes, let them take counsel together. Who has shown this from ancient time? Who has declared it of old? Haven’t I, Yahweh? There is no other God besides Me, a just God and a Saviour; There is no one besides Me.²² Look to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other.²³ I have sworn by Myself, the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness and will not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.²⁴ They will say of Me, ‘There is righteousness and strength only in Yahweh’. Even to Him shall men come; and all those who were incensed against Him shall be disappointed.²⁵ In Yahweh shall all the seed of Israel be justified, and shall glory.

CHAPTER 46 Jun. 22

The Foolishness of Idols

Bel bows down, Nebo stoops; their idols are on the animals, and on the livestock: the things that

45:18 This verse is proof enough that God won’t allow the world to be destroyed – He has a glorious purpose with it.

45:20-24 These words are quoted in Phil. 2:9-11 in description of the believer’s response to the suffering Saviour. And yet they are quoted again in Rom. 14:10-12 regarding our confession of sin before Christ at judgment day. The connections mean simply this: before the Lord’s cross, we bow our knee and confess our failures, knowing the imputation of His righteousness, in anticipation of how we will bow before Him and give our miserable account at the judgment. And both processes are wonderfully natural. We must allow the power of a true faith in His cross to work out its own way in us. At the judgment, no flesh will glory in himself, but only in the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 1:29). And even now, we glory in His cross (Gal. 6:14).

you carried about are made a load, a burden to the weary.² They stoop, they bow down together; they could not deliver the burden, but themselves have been carried away into captivity.³ Listen to Me, house of Jacob, and all the remnant of the house of Israel, that have been carried from their birth, that have been carried from the womb;⁴ and even to old age I am He, and even to grey hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; yes, I will carry, and will deliver.⁵ To whom will you liken Me and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike?⁶ Some pour out gold from the bag, and weigh silver in the balance. They hire a goldsmith, and he makes it a god. They fall down—yes, they worship.⁷ They bear it on the shoulder, they carry it, and set it in its place, and it stands, from its place it shall

not move: yes, one may cry to it, yet it can not answer, nor save him out of his trouble.⁸ Remember this, and show yourselves men; bring it again to mind, you transgressors.⁹ Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like Me;¹⁰ declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure;¹¹ calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man of My counsel from a far country; yes, I have spoken, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed, I will also do it.¹² Listen to Me, you stout-hearted, who are far from righteousness:¹³ I bring near My righteousness, it shall not be far off, and My salvation shall not wait; and I will place salvation in Zion for Israel My glory.

46:3, 4 God is likening Himself to a woman who carries a child in her womb, then bears it, and then carries it as a baby, but *still* carries it when the child is an old man. The God of all knowledge is aware of a fundamental psychological phenomena in all men; the fear, however passive and buried, of being without their mother; the fear of loneliness, the fear of eternal separation from the woman who bore and carried them. From the president to the happy village grandfather, this sense is there. Perhaps David appreciated this when he referred to a man weeping at his mother's funeral (not his *father's*) as the ultimate cameo of grieving and desolation of soul (Ps. 35:14). And yet God says that He is in some ways the eternal mother, the one who bore and carried us in babyhood, but the One who will yet carry us when we are gray headed and once again unable to walk. Yet He is also the everlasting Father to us, through His Son (9:6). It's a picture of exquisite beauty. Our relationship with God as the One who will *never* leave us is the *only* answer to what philosophers call 'the existential problem'; the awareness that has come to every thoughtful soul, the terror of being so alone as we get older, the dread of being without our human roots, of becoming the one to whom others (e.g. our children) look to as their background and root, whilst we ourselves have no tangible link with *our* past. This horror of existential loneliness can *only* be met by our sure knowledge that we have a very personal relationship in the Kingdom of God with our Heavenly Father, who will never leave us, and will preserve us unto His eternal Kingdom.

CHAPTER 47 Jun. 22***Judgement on Babylon***

Come down and sit in the dust, virgin daughter of Babylon; sit on the ground without a throne, daughter of the Chaldeans: for you shall no more be called tender and delicate.² Take the millstones, and grind meal; remove your veil, strip off the train, uncover the leg, pass through the rivers.³ Your nakedness shall be uncovered, yes, your shame shall be seen: I will take vengeance, and will spare no man.⁴ Our Redeemer, Yahweh of Armies is His name, is the Holy One of Israel.⁵ Sit in silence, and go into darkness, daughter of the Chaldeans; for you shall no more be called the mistress of kingdoms.⁶ I was angry with My people, I profaned My inheritance, and gave them into your hand: you showed them no mercy; on the aged you have very heavily laid your yoke.⁷ You said, ‘I shall be a mistress forever;’ so that you did not lay these things to your heart, nor did you remember the latter end of it.⁸ Now therefore hear this, you who are given to pleasures, who sit securely, who say in your

heart, ‘I am, and there is none else besides me; I shall not sit as a widow, neither shall I know the loss of children;’⁹ but these two things shall come to you in a moment in one day, the loss of children, and widowhood; in their full measure shall they come on you, in the multitude of your sorceries, and the great abundance of your enchantments.¹⁰ For you have trusted in your wickedness; you have said, ‘No one sees me’; your wisdom and your knowledge, it has perverted you, and you have said in your heart, ‘I am, and there is none else besides me’.¹¹ Therefore evil will come on you; you won’t know when it dawns: and mischief will fall on you; you will not be able to put it away: and desolation shall come on you suddenly, which you don’t know.¹² Stand now with your enchantments, and with the multitude of your sorceries in which you have laboured from your youth; if so be you shall be able to profit, if so be you may prevail!¹³ You are wearied in the multitude of your counsellors: let now the astrologers, the stargazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save

47:8 I am and there is none else – We bear the Name of Yahweh / Jehovah, by reason of our baptism into it. His Name is declared as His character – merciful, truthful, judging sin, patient etc (Ex. 34:5-7). He who will be who He will be, manifesting His characteristics as He does so, must have His way in us too. Babylon and Nineveh were condemned for having the attitude that “I am, and there is none beside me” (Zeph. 2:15). Their self-perception was a parody on the Name and being of Yahweh: He alone can say “I am, and there is none else” (43:11; 44:6; 45:6,21) and seek to be who He is. He alone can seek to articulate the characteristics that make up His Name onto the lives of others, and onto the things that comprise His Kingdom. We are not to be who we are in a fleshly sense; to ‘just be yourself’; to ‘just do it’, as foolish slogans and adverts encourage us. We are here to show forth His mercy, truth, judgment of sin, patient saving of the weak etc., not our own human agenda. We are to be Yahweh manifested to this world, through our participation in His Name in Christ.

you from the things that shall come on you. ¹⁴ Behold, they shall be as stubble; the fire shall burn them; they shall not deliver themselves from the power of the flame: it shall not be a coal to warm at, nor a fire to sit before. ¹⁵ Thus shall the things be to you in which you have laboured: those who have trafficked with you from your youth shall wander each one to his place; there shall be none to save you.

CHAPTER 48 Jun. 23

The Lord's Patience with Israel

Hear this, house of Jacob, you who are called by the name of Israel, and have come forth out of the waters of Judah; who swear by the name of Yahweh, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth nor in righteousness ² (for they call themselves of the holy city, and rest themselves on the God of Israel; Yahweh of Armies is His name): ³ I have declared the former things from of old; yes, they went forth out of My mouth, and I showed them: suddenly I did them, and they happened. ⁴ Because I knew that you are obstinate, and your neck is an iron sinew, and your brow brass, ⁵ therefore I have declared it in advance to you from of old; before it came to pass I showed it to you; lest you should say, ‘My idol has done them, and my

engraved image, and my molten image, has commanded them’. ⁶ You have heard it; see all this; and you, will you not declare it? I have shown you new things from this time, even hidden things, which you have not known. ⁷ They are created now, and not from of old; and before this day you didn’t hear them; lest you should say, ‘Behold, I knew them’. ⁸ Yes, you didn’t hear; yes, you didn’t know; yes, from of old your ear was not opened: for I knew that you dealt very treacherously, and were called a transgressor from the womb. ⁹ For My name’s sake will I defer My anger, and for the sake of My praise will I refrain for you, that I not cut you off. ¹⁰ Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction. ¹¹ For My own sake, for My own sake, will I do it; for how should My name be profaned? I will not give My glory to another. ¹² Listen to Me, O Jacob, and Israel My called: I am He; I am the first, I also am the last. ¹³ Yes, My hand has laid the foundation of the earth, and My right hand has spread out the heavens: when I call to them, they stand up together. ¹⁴ Assemble yourselves all of you, and hear; who among them has declared these things? He whom Yahweh loves shall perform His will on Babylon, and his arm shall be on the

48:3 Suddenly I did them, and they happened – Another of Isaiah’s allusions to creation. All that happens in our lives is a creation from God’s word of command; even the bad things in our experience have ultimately a creative, positive intent from God.

48:6 And you, will you not declare it? – God is the One who ‘declared’ things in advance (:5), and we in our turn are to declare to the world what He has declared. In our work of witness there is a mutuality between God and us.

Chaldeans. ¹⁵ I, even I, have spoken; yes, I have called him; I have brought him, and he shall make his way prosperous. ¹⁶ Come near to Me and hear this: ‘From the beginning I have not spoken in secret; from the time that it was, there am I’. Now the Lord Yahweh has sent me, with His Spirit.

The Lord's Plan

¹⁷ Thus says Yahweh, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am Yahweh your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way that you should go. ¹⁸ Oh that you had listened to My commandments! then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea: ¹⁹ your seed also had been as the sand, and the offspring of your body like its grains: his name would not be cut off nor destroyed from before Me. ²⁰ Go forth from Babylon, flee from the Chaldeans; with a voice of singing declare, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth: say, ‘Yahweh has redeemed His servant Jacob’.

48:18 The fact God knows all possible futures must make His experience with us His people so tragic. For sorrow is largely related to our awareness of what could have been; and God knows that so much could have been. The promises to Abraham and the coming of the Messianic seed of Abraham could have been fulfilled; but because Israel chose to be wicked, there was no such peace to them (:22). For all their wealth in Babylon, they had no peace with God.

48:20 *Flee from the Chaldeans* – Judah were comfortable and prosperous in Babylon, as the conclusion to the book of Esther shows. Jews were senior in commerce and politics (as witness the book of Daniel). Yet they were to “flee” from this situation because of its huge spiritual danger. Generally they didn’t perceive the spiritual danger of the world in which they lived, and most Jews remained in Babylon, to their spiritual destruction.

49:2 The Lord Jesus is described as having a sharp sword going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16; 2:16; 19:15); this is a prophecy of Him personally.

²¹ They didn’t thirst when He led them through the deserts; He caused the waters to flow out of the rock for them; He split the rock also, and the waters gushed out. ²² There is no peace, says Yahweh, for the wicked.

CHAPTER 49 Jun. 24

Israel, a Light to the Nations

Listen, islands, to me; and listen, you peoples, from far: Yahweh has called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother has He made mention of my name: ² and He has made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of His hand has He hidden me: and He has made me a polished shaft; in His quiver has He kept me close: ³ and He said to me, You are My servant; Israel, in whom I will be glorified. ⁴ But I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity; yet surely the justice due to me is with Yahweh, and my reward with my God. ⁵ Now says Yahweh who formed me from the womb to be His servant, to bring Jacob again to Him, and that Israel be gathered

to Him (for I am honourable in the eyes of Yahweh, and my God has become my strength); ⁶ yes, He says, It is too light a thing that you should be My servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved of Israel: I will also give you for a light to the nations, that you may be My salvation to the end of the earth. ⁷ Thus says Yahweh, the Redeemer of Israel, and His Holy One, to him whom man despises, to him whom the nation abhors, to a servant of rulers: Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall worship; because of Yahweh who is faithful, even the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you.

Judah's Final Return

8 Thus says Yahweh, In an acceptable time have I answered you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you; and I will preserve you, and give you for a covenant of the people, to raise up the land, to make them inherit the desolate heritage: ⁹ saying to those who are bound, 'Come out!', to those

who are in darkness, 'Show yourselves!' They shall feed in the ways, and on all bare heights shall be their pasture. ¹⁰ They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun strike them: for He who has mercy on them will lead them, even by springs of water He will guide them. ¹¹ I will make all My mountains a way, and My highways shall be exalted. ¹² Behold, these shall come from far; and behold, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim. ¹³ Sing, heavens; and be joyful, earth; and break forth into singing, mountains: for Yahweh has comforted His people, and will have compassion on His afflicted. ¹⁴ But Zion said, Yahweh has forsaken me, and the Lord has forgotten me. ¹⁵ Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yes, these may forget, yet I will not forget you! ¹⁶ Behold, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands; your walls are continually before Me. ¹⁷ Your children make

49:8 2 Cor. 6:2 interprets this time of salvation and acceptance as "now". The window of opportunity which there was for Judah to return from exile and inherit the restored Kingdom of God is "now" in that we should likewise be appealing to men and women to quit this world of "Babylon" and journey towards God's Kingdom. The spiritual opportunities which there are "now" are amazing; but there is an urgency to our appeal in that the time of acceptance is "now" and the amazing opportunity must be grasped "now".

49:10 Quoted about how we shall be led by Jesus in the future Kingdom of God on earth (Rev. 7:16,17).

49:16 Judah in captivity must've thought that God had forgotten them and His land as it lay there desolated. We too at times feel the apparent silence of God means that He is somehow there but too far away. But He assures them and us that His silence is only apparent. They were engraven upon His palms, perhaps alluding to the fact that it seems that to this day the Lord Jesus has on His hands the marks from the nails with which He was crucified (Zech. 13:6; Jn. 20:25-27; Rev. 1:7).

haste; your destroyers and those who made you waste shall go forth from you. ¹⁸ Lift up your eyes all around, and see: all these gather themselves together, and come to you. As I live, says Yahweh, you shall surely clothe yourself with them all as with an ornament, and dress yourself with them, like a bride. ¹⁹ For, as for your waste and your desolate places, and your land that has been destroyed, surely now you shall be too small for the inhabitants, and those who swallowed you up shall be far away. ²⁰ The children of your bereavement shall yet say in your ears, ‘The place is too small for me; give more space to me that I may dwell!’ ²¹ Then you will say in your heart, ‘Who has conceived these for me, since I have been bereaved of my children, and am solitary, an exile, and wandering back and forth? Who has brought up these? Behold, I was left alone; these, where were they?’ ²² Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I will lift up My hand to the nations, and set up My banner to the peoples; and they shall bring your sons in their bosom, and your daughters shall be carried on their shoulders.

49:24 Despite having enabled their exit from Babylon, they complained: “Vindication remains far removed from us and deliverance does not reach us” (59:9). This was an awful spurning of the great salvation enabled for them. They remonstrated against God’s message of deliverance from captivity: “Can prey be taken from a warrior? Or can prisoners of a tyrant be rescued?” (:24). They thought their salvation was too hard even for God. They made the same mistake as all who reason that their situation or personality is too far gone for God to redeem. For the ‘salvation’ of the exiles in Babylon is alluded to in the New Testament as a prototype of our salvation in Christ. The good news of *potential* deliverance from Babylon is quoted as the good news of salvation from sin (Is. 52:7-10 = Mk. 1:15; Mt. 10:7,8; Rom. 10:15; Eph. 6:15; Is. 61:1,2 = Lk. 4:16-21).

50:1 God was angry with their sins, but kept no record of them – hence He could

23 Kings shall be your nursing fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers: they shall bow down to you with their faces to the earth, and lick the dust of your feet; and you shall know that I am Yahweh; and those who wait for Me shall not be disappointed. **24** Can prey be taken from a warrior? Or can prisoners of a tyrant be rescued? **25** But thus says Yahweh, Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him who contends with you, and I will save your children. **26** I will feed those who oppress you with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine: and all flesh shall know that I, Yahweh, am your Saviour, and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.

CHAPTER 50 Jun. 25

Reasons and Rewards

Thus says Yahweh, Where is the bill of your mother’s divorce, for which I have put her away? Or which of My creditors is it to whom I have sold you? Behold, for your iniquities were you sold, and for

your transgressions was your mother put away. ² Why, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there none to answer? Is My hand shortened at all, that it can't redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, at My rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a wilderness: their fish stink, because there is no water, and die for thirst. ³ I clothe the heavens with blackness, and I make sackcloth their covering. ⁴ The Lord Yahweh has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with words him who is weary: He wakens me morning by morning, He wakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. ⁵ The Lord Yahweh has opened my ear, and I was not rebellious, neither turned away backward. ⁶ I gave my back to the strikers, and my cheeks to those who plucked off the hair; I didn't hide my face from shame and spitting. ⁷ For the Lord Yahweh will help me; therefore I have not been confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be disappointed. ⁸ He is near who justifies me; who will bring charges against me? Let us stand up together: who is my adversary? Let him come near to me. ⁹ Behold, the Lord Yahweh will help me; who is

he who shall condemn me? Behold, all they shall wax old as a garment, the moth shall eat them up. ¹⁰ Who is among you who fears Yahweh, who obeys the voice of His servant? He who walks in darkness, and has no light, let him trust in the name of Yahweh, and rely on his God. ¹¹ Behold, all you who kindle a fire, who adorn yourselves with torches around yourselves; walk in the flame of your fire, and among the brands that you have kindled. You shall have this of My hand; you shall lie down in sorrow.

CHAPTER 51 Jun. 26

The Lord Comforts Jerusalem

Listen to Me, you who follow after righteousness, you who seek Yahweh: look to the rock you were cut from, and to the hold of the pit you were dug from. ² Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you; for when he was but one I called him, and I blessed him, and made him many. ³ For Yahweh has comforted Zion; He has comforted all her waste places, and has made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of Yahweh; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody. ⁴ Listen to Me, My people; and

comfort Judah that there was actually no documentary evidence for their divorce and therefore she could return to Him.

50:6, 7 I gave... I didn't hide my face... set my face like a flint – The body language of Jesus as He endured His sufferings is worth trying to imagine. His spirit of self-sacrifice and willing suffering with and for us would've shone through it. Lk. 9:51,53 notes how He set His face to go to Jerusalem and die there, His determination and conscious self-dedication were visible in how His face was set. We are asked to carry His cross with the same devotion.

give ear to Me, My nation: for a law shall go forth from Me, and I will establish My justice for a light of the peoples.⁵ My righteousness is near, My salvation is gone forth, and My arms shall judge the peoples; the islands shall wait for Me, and on My arm shall they trust.⁶ Lift up your eyes to the skies, and look on the land beneath; for the skies shall vanish away like smoke, and the land shall wax old like a garment; and those who dwell therein shall die in the same way: but My salvation shall be eternal, and My righteousness shall not be abolished.⁷ Listen to Me, you who know righteousness, the people in whose heart is My law; don't fear the reproach of men, neither be dismayed at their insults.⁸ For the moth shall eat them up like a garment, and the worm shall eat them like wool; but My righteousness shall be forever, and My salvation to all generations.⁹ Awake, awake, put on strength, arm of Yahweh; awake, as in the days of old, the generations of ancient times. Isn't it You who cut Rahab in pieces, who pierced the monster?¹⁰ Isn't it You who dried up the sea, the waters of the great deep;

who made the depths of the sea a way for the redeemed to pass over?¹¹ The ransomed of Yahweh shall return, and come with singing to Zion; and everlasting joy shall be on their heads. They shall obtain gladness and joy; sorrow and weeping shall flee away.¹² I, even I, am He who comforts you: who are you, that you are afraid of man who shall die, and of the son of man who shall be made as grass;¹³ and have forgotten Yahweh your Maker, who stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and fear continually all the day because of the fury of the oppressor, when he makes ready to destroy; and where is the fury of the oppressor?¹⁴ The captive exile shall speedily be freed; and he shall not die and go down into the pit, neither shall his bread fail.¹⁵ For I am Yahweh your God, who stirs up the sea, so that its waves roar: Yahweh of Armies is His name.¹⁶ I have put My words in your mouth, and have covered you in the shadow of My hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and tell Zion, 'You are My people'.¹⁷ Awake, awake, stand up, Jerusalem, that has

51:8 God's salvation is paralleled with His righteousness; He saves people by counting them as if they are righteous on account of their relationship with Him. In our times our baptism into Christ means that His righteousness is counted to us, and on this basis we shall be saved.

51:14 This sounds as if they were all willing and eager to leave that spiritually dreadful place. But the reality was that Judah didn't hasten to be loosed, they preferred the Babylon life, and didn't perceive it for the spiritual pit that was killing them which it was. Most of them chose to remain there. So this passage is therefore a prophecy, a command, about how God wanted Judah to respond.

51:17 God 'stirred up' the spirit of Cyrus and also of the Jews who returned (Ezra 1:1,5). Isaiah uses the same Hebrew term to describe how Israel's saviour would

drunk at the hand of Yahweh the cup of His wrath; you have drunken the bowl of the cup of staggering, and drained it.¹⁸ There is none to guide her among all the sons whom she has brought forth; neither is there any who takes her by the hand among all the sons whom she has brought up.¹⁹ These two things have happened to you; who will bemoan you? Desolation and destruction, and the famine and the sword; how shall I comfort you?²⁰ Your sons have fainted, they lie at the head of all the streets, as an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of Yahweh, the rebuke of your God.²¹ Therefore hear now this, you afflicted and drunken, but not with wine:²² Thus says your Lord Yahweh, and your God who pleads the cause of His people, Behold, I have taken out of your hand the cup of staggering, even the bowl of the cup of My wrath; you shall no more drink it again:²³ and I will put it into the hand of those who afflict you, who have said to your soul, ‘Bow down, that we may walk over you,’ and you have laid your back as

the ground, and as the street, to those who walk over.

CHAPTER 52 Jun. 27

Jerusalem is Rescued

A wake, awake, put on your strength, Zion; put on your beautiful garments, Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into you the uncircumcised and the unclean.² Shake yourself from the dust! Arise, sit up, Jerusalem! Release yourself from the bonds of your neck, captive daughter of Zion!³ For thus says Yahweh, You were sold for nothing; and you shall be redeemed without money.⁴ For thus says the Lord Yahweh, My people went down at the first into Egypt to live there: and the Assyrian has oppressed them without cause.⁵ Now therefore, what do I do here, says Yahweh, seeing that My people are taken away for nothing? Those who rule over them mock, says Yahweh, and My name continually all the day is blasphemed.⁶ Therefore My people shall know My name. Therefore they shall know in that

be “raised up” – 41:2,25; 45:13. Isaiah pleads with Zion, i.e. the faithful, to indeed be stirred up – 51:17; 52:1 appeal to Zion to “Awake!” – the same word translated “stirred up”. But Isaiah tragically concluded that there were so few who would ‘stir up themselves’ (64:7). God had given them the potential to be ‘stirred up’ in their hearts and minds to leave Babylon and return – but they wouldn’t respond. And today, the same happens. God is willing to change hearts, to stir up materialistic and complacent spirits – but because we’re not robots, we have to respond.

51:22 To be given a cup of wine to drink from the Lord is a double symbol; of condemnation, as it is here; or of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16). When we take the cup of the Lord at the breaking of bread service, we are drinking either to our eternal blessing or condemnation – hence the need for self-examination, so that we drink to our blessing and not our condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29).

52:2 The Jews didn’t perceive the soft life of Babylon as chains around their necks, and so they didn’t loose themselves and leave.

day that I am He who speaks; behold, it is I.⁷ How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of good, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns!⁸ The voice of your watchmen! They lift up the voice, together do they sing; for they shall see eye to eye, when Yahweh brings Zion back.⁹ Break forth into joy, sing together, you waste places of Jerusalem; for Yahweh has comforted His people, He has redeemed Jerusalem.¹⁰ Yahweh has made bare His holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.¹¹ Depart, depart, go out from there, touch no unclean thing! Go out of the midst of her! Cleanse yourselves, you who bear the temple vessels of Yahweh.¹² For you shall

not go out in haste, neither shall you go by flight: for Yahweh will go before you; and the God of Israel will be your vanguard.

The Suffering Servant

¹³ Behold, My servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high.¹⁴ Just as many were astonished at you (his appearance was marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men),¹⁵ so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand.

CHAPTER 53 Jun. 28

Who has believed our message? To whom has the arm of Yahweh been revealed?² For he grew

52:7 *The feet of him* – A prophecy of Christ’s preaching of the Gospel. But it is quoted in Rom. 10:15 with a significant change of pronoun – “the feet of *them*”. We who are baptized into Christ are His witnesses; His preaching is ours and *vice versa*. We will experience His especial identity with us in our efforts to preach the Gospel.

52:7-10 See on 49:24.

52:13 From here to the end of chapter 53 we have the ‘Servant song’ which speaks most clearly of the death and work of Christ for us. Many phrases in it are applied to Jesus in the New Testament (Mt. 8:17; 20:28; Mk. 15:28; Jn. 1:29; 12:38; Rom. 4:25; 10:16; 1 Cor. 15:3; Phil. 2:4-8; Col. 1:20; 1 Pet. 2:22,24).

52:14 There was something especially awful about the physical appearance of Christ on the cross, a reflection of the huge mental struggle there was within His holy mind as He finally overcame sin in all its forms.

53:1 *Who has believed our message?* was fulfilled both in the final, friendless rejection of the crucifixion, and also in the failure of Israel to really believe as a result of the Lord’s miracles done during His life (Jn. 12:38). “He has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering” is how :4 described the cross; but these words are quoted in Mt. 8:16,17 about Christ’s healing of people. The miracles therefore were performed in the spirit of the cross – personally identifying with the sick and healing them through that identification. His whole life was a being acquainted with disease (Heb. “grief”) (:3); and yet we read in this same context that He was put to grief in His death (:10). The grief of His death was an extension of the grief of His life. “He bore the sin of

up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground. He has no good looks or majesty; when we see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.³ He was despised, and rejected by men; a man of suffering, and acquainted with disease. He was despised as one from whom men hide their face; and we didn't respect him.⁴ Surely he has borne our sickness, and carried our suffering; yet we considered him plagued, struck by God, and afflicted.⁵ But he was pierced for our transgressions. He was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment that brought our peace was on him; and by his wounds we are healed.⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray; each one has turned to his own way; and Yahweh has laid on him the iniquity of us all.⁷ He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he didn't open his mouth. As a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is mute, so he didn't open his mouth.⁸ He was taken away by oppression

and judgement; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living and stricken for the disobedience of My people?⁹ They made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.¹⁰ Yet it was Yahweh's will to bruise him; He has caused him to suffer. When You make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed. He shall prolong his days, and the will of Yahweh shall prosper in his hand.¹¹ After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light and be satisfied. My righteous servant will justify many by the knowledge of himself; and he will bear their iniquities.¹² Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

many" (:12) is applied by Jn. 1:29 to how during His ministry, Jesus bore the sin of the world. All this shows that the cross wasn't an unusual, one time act of supreme devotion; the spirit of it was lived out in Christ's daily life. We who are to carry His cross must see it the same way.

53:2 As a root out of dry ground – There was nothing around Jesus in His environment which encouraged spirituality. He grew as we do, as a tender green plant in a desert.

53:6 All we like sheep have gone astray – We tend to sin as a result of group mentality; and yet this influences us individually to each turn to our own personal, unique way of sinning.

53:7 As a sheep that before its shearers is mute – A sheep is dumb in this situation from total fear. Jesus was human and in His time of dying went through all the usual human emotions in the face of death.

53:9 A detailed prophecy of how Jesus died with the wicked but was buried in the tomb of the rich Joseph of Arimathea.

53:10 He shall see his seed – Did Jesus have a vision of us the ones He would redeem, which inspired Him at the end, at the very time He was making an offering for sin?

CHAPTER 54 Jun. 29***God's Promise of Everlasting Peace***

Sing, barren, you who didn't bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, you who did not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, says Yahweh. ² Enlarge the place of your tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of your habitations; don't spare: lengthen your cords, and strengthen your stakes. ³ For you shall spread out on the right hand and on the left; and your seed shall possess the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.⁴ Don't be afraid; for you shall not be ashamed: neither be confounded; for you shall not be disappointed: for you shall forget the shame of your youth; and the reproach of your widowhood you shall remember no more. ⁵ For your Maker is your husband; Yahweh of Armies is His name: and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; the God of the whole earth shall He be called. ⁶ For Yahweh has called you as a wife forsaken and grieved in

spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, says your God. ⁷ For a small moment have I forsaken you; but with great mercies will I gather you. ⁸ In overflowing wrath I hid My face from you for a moment; but with everlasting loving kindness will I have mercy on you, says Yahweh your Redeemer. ⁹ For this is like the waters of Noah to Me; for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be angry with you, nor rebuke you. ¹⁰ For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed; but My loving kindness shall not depart from you, neither shall My covenant of peace be removed, says Yahweh who has mercy on you. ¹¹ You afflicted, tossed with storms, and not comforted, behold, I will set your stones in beautiful colours, and lay your foundations with sapphires. ¹² I will make your pinnacles of rubies, and your gates of sparkling jewels, and all your walls of precious stones. ¹³ All your children shall be taught of Yahweh; and great shall be the peace of your chil-

54:4 Your widowhood – The implication is that God as their husband (:5) had died – and somehow returned to life to remarry them. This doesn't mean that Jesus is God, for God by nature cannot die; rather does it speak of the intensity to which God was manifest in Christ and went through the pain of death as it were because of what Israel's unfaithfulness and rejection felt like to Him.

54:6 In this language God as it were takes false guilt over His divorce with Israel; such is His gushing love for His unfaithful people who now return to Him.

54:7 God clearly has emotions of a kind which are not unrelated to the emotions we experience, as beings made in His image. But those emotions involve a time factor in order to be emotions. We read of the anger of God “for a moment” (:7,8; Ps. 30:5), and of His wrath coming and going, leaving Him “calm” and no longer angry (Ez. 16:42). When we sin, we provoke God to anger – i.e. at a point in time, God sees our sin, and becomes angry. This is attested many times in Scripture. But it's meaningless if God is totally outside of our time and emotions.

dren. ¹⁴ In righteousness you shall be established: you shall be far from oppression, for you shall not be afraid; and from terror, for it shall not come near you. ¹⁵ Behold, they may gather together, but not by Me: whoever shall gather together against you shall fall because of you. ¹⁶ Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. ¹⁷ No weapon that is formed against you will prevail; and you will condemn every tongue that rises against you in judgement. This is the heritage of the servants of Yahweh, and their righteousness which is of Me, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 55 Jun. 30

God's Offer of Mercy

Come, everyone who thirsts, to the waters! Come, he who has no money, buy, and eat! Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. ² Why do you spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which doesn't satisfy? Listen diligently to Me, and eat you that which is good,

and let your soul delight itself in fatness. ³ Turn your ear, and come to Me; hear, and your soul shall live: and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. ⁴ Behold, I have given him for a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander to the peoples. ⁵ Behold, you shall call a nation that you don't know; and a nation that didn't know you shall run to you, because of Yahweh your God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you. ⁶ Seek Yahweh while He may be found; call you on Him while He is near: ⁷ let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to Yahweh, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon. ⁸ For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, says Yahweh. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts. ¹⁰ For as the rain comes down and the snow from the sky and doesn't return there but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, and

54:17 Their righteousness which is of Me – Again we meet the New Testament idea of imputed righteousness, for Isaiah makes clear enough elsewhere that Israel had no righteousness of their own. We too have God's righteousness imputed to us by being in Christ.

55:1 Whilst we don't have to actually pay money for God's blessings, we are expected to go through the feelings of having paid, given something, in response to what He has already given us so as to take them to ourselves.

55:3 The sure mercies of David result in the wicked man forsaking his way (:3,7). The description of the promises to David as "sure mercies" (1 Chron. 17:13) may perhaps be with a reference to his sin with Bathsheba; his forgiveness in that incident is typical of that which we all receive (Rom. 4:6-8). The very existence of the "mercies of / to David" therefore inspire us in forsaking sinful thoughts and wicked ways (:7).

gives seed to the sower and bread to the eater;¹¹ so shall My word be that goes forth out of My mouth: it shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing I sent it to do.¹² For you shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing; and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands.¹³ Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir tree; and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle tree: and it shall be to Yahweh for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.

CHAPTER 56 Ju1. 1

Faithful Gentiles Will Be Accepted

Thus says Yahweh, Keep justice, and do righteousness; for My salvation is near to come, and My righteousness to be revealed.² Blessed is the man who does this, and the

son of man who holds it fast; who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.³ Neither let the foreigner who has joined himself to Yahweh speak, saying, Yahweh will surely separate me from His people; neither let the eunuch say, Behold, I am a dry tree.⁴ For thus says Yahweh, To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose the things that please Me, and hold fast My covenant:⁵ to them I will give in My house and within My walls a memorial and a name better than of sons and of daughters; I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off.⁶ Also the foreigners who join themselves to Yahweh, to minister to Him and to love the name of Yahweh, to be His servants, each one who keeps the Sabbath from profaning it, and holds fast covenant;⁷ even them will I bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of prayer: their burnt

55:11 The parallel between the seed and the convert is such as to suggest that the word of God will produce converts in some sense; it will not return void (:11). The apparent dearth of response to some preaching therefore poses a challenging question. Are we preaching the word of God alone, or our own ideas? Does God withhold blessing for some reason unknown to us? Or is this only part of a wider picture, in which somehow the word *does* return void due to man's rejection? Thus the word of God was 'made void' by the Pharisees (Mk. 7:13 RV – a conscious allusion to 55:11). One possible explanation is that "the word" which is sent forth and prospers, achieving all God's intention, is in fact Messiah. The same word is used about the 'prospering' of the Servant in His work: 48:15; 53:10 cp. Ps. 45:4. Another is to accept the LXX reading of this passage: "...until whatsoever I have willed shall have been accomplished". Here at least is the implication that *something* happens and is achieved when we preach God's word. The same idiom occurs in Ez. 9:11 Heb., where we read that "the man clothed with linen" – representing Ezekiel or his representative Angel – "returned the word, saying, I have done as You have commanded me". The word 'returned' in the sense that someone, somewhere, was obedient to it even if others weren't.

56:7 *My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples* – Quoted by Jesus in Mt 21:13 as a demand for God's house now to not be a forum for personal financial

offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted on My altar; for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.⁸ The Lord Yahweh who gathers the outcasts of Israel says, Yet will I gather others to him, besides his own who are gathered.⁹ All you animals of the field, come to devour, all you animals in the forest.¹⁰ His watchmen are blind, they are all without knowledge; they are all mute dogs, they can't bark; dreaming, lying down, loving to slumber.¹¹ Yes, the dogs are greedy, they can never have enough; and these are shepherds who can't understand: they have each turned to their own way, each one to his gain, from every quarter.¹² Come, say they, I will get wine, and we will fill ourselves with strong drink; and tomorrow shall be as this day, great beyond measure.

CHAPTER 57 Ju1. 1

Idol Worship Again Condemned

The righteous perishes, and no man lays it to heart; and merciful men are taken away, none considering that the righteous is taken away from the coming evil.² He enters into peace; they rest in their beds, each one who walks in his uprightness.³ But draw near here, you sons of the

sorceress, the seed of the adulterer and the prostitute.⁴ Against whom do you sport yourselves? Against whom do you make a wide mouth, and stick out your tongue? Aren't you children of disobedience, a seed of falsehood,⁵ you who inflame yourselves among the oaks, under every green tree; who kill the children in the valleys, under the clefts of the rocks?⁶ Among the smooth stones of the valley is your portion; they, they are your lot; you have even poured a drink offering to them. You have offered an offering; but shall I be appeased for these things?⁷ On a high and lofty mountain you have set your bed; there also you went up to offer sacrifice.⁸ Behind the doors and the posts you have set up your memorial: for you have uncovered to someone besides Me, and have gone up; you have enlarged your bed, and made you a covenant with them: you loved their bed wherever you saw it.⁹ You went to the king with oil and increased your perfumes, and sent your ambassadors far off, and debased yourself even to Sheol.¹⁰ You were wearied with the length of your way; yet you didn't say, 'It is in vain'. You found a reviving of your strength; therefore you weren't faint.¹¹ Of whom have you

gain. If we are living the Kingdom life now, then whatever is said of the future Kingdom must in essence be the rule of our lives today.

56:11 *Each turned to their own way* – This phrase connects with 53:6, which says that although we have *each* done this, Christ's death was for us, to save us from that situation. The group in view in 56:11 were obsessed with money and personal pleasure, whilst claiming faith in God. Those types may seem the hardest to convert; but we are each in essence the same, and the connection with 53:6 shows that the cross is powerful enough to shake even them, even us, from such complacency.

57:11 One thing that works against truthfulness is the neuroses that come from fear,

been afraid and in fear, that you lie, and have not remembered Me, nor laid it to your heart? Haven't I held peace even of long time, and you don't fear Me? ¹² I will declare your righteousness; and as for your works, they shall not profit you. ¹³ When you cry, let those who you have gathered deliver you; but the wind shall take them, a breath shall carry them all away: but he who takes refuge in Me shall possess the land, and shall inherit My holy mountain.

A Promise of Help and Healing

14 He will say, Cast up, cast up, prepare the way, take up the stumbling-block out of the way of My people. **15** For thus says the high and lofty

One who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a broken and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite. ¹⁶ For I will not contend forever, neither will I be always angry; for the spirit would faint before Me, and the souls who I have made. ¹⁷ For the iniquity of his covetousness was I angry, and struck him; I hid Myself and was angry; and he went on backsliding in the way of his heart. ¹⁸ I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts to him and to his mourners. ¹⁹ I create the fruit of the lips: Peace, peace, to him who is far off and to him who is near, says

the fearful tensions that arise between our real self and the false self. Fear and truth are opposed. This isn't merely psychobabble. Consider God's words about this here: "Of whom have you been afraid and in fear, that you lie, and have not remembered Me?". The life of brave faith, the life that is lived in the overcoming of fears, the fearless breaking out of our comfort zones... this is the true life, the life in which we have no need to lie nor believe in lies. But of course it's hard, because we think that the truth, the reality, is what we see around us; whereas faith is believing in what is not seen. Yet actually what is *not* seen is the reality, and what *is* seen is very often a lie. And the true life is a life of faith in those things which are not yet visibly seen.

57:14 Stumbling block – The ultimate rock of stumbling for the Jewish people is accepting Jesus of Nazareth as the Christ (Rom. 9:32,33; 1 Pet. 2:8). The preparation of the highway for Christ's return involves Israel accepting Jesus as Christ. This is why we should preach to Israel in the last days, for the sooner they accept Christ, the quicker He will return.

57:15 I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also who is of a broken and humble spirit – This purposeful juxtaposition brings out the great paradox – that the God who is so high above humanity dwells together with the very lowest and most broken of humanity. Humility and broken spiritedness are of the highest value to God. The "high and holy place" of God's dwelling contrasts with the "high and lofty mountain" where the humanly wise of Israel offered sacrifice to idols (:7). The ultimately humble man was the Lord Jesus. God doesn't live in physical houses built by people, but in the humble heart of a man; and supremely, within the person of Christ. If we are in Him, God dwells in us.

57:19 Peace, to him who is far off and to him who is near – Eph. 2:13,14 alludes here, interpreting the "peace" as peace with God, offered to both Jews ("him who is near")

Yahweh; and I will heal them.²⁰ But the wicked are like the troubled sea; for it can't rest, and its waters cast up mire and dirt.²¹ There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

CHAPTER 58 Ju1. 2

Genuine Behaviour

Cry aloud, don't spare, lift up your voice like a trumpet, and declare to My people their disobedience, and to the house of Jacob their sins.² Yet they seek Me daily, and delight to know My ways: as a nation that did righteousness, and didn't forsake the ordinance of their God, they ask of Me righteous judgments; they delight to draw near to God.³ 'Why have we fasted', they

say, 'and You don't see? Why have we afflicted our soul, and You take no knowledge?'. Behold, in the day of your fast you find pleasure, and oppress all your labourers.⁴ Behold, you fast for strife and contention, and to strike with the fist of wickedness: you don't fast this day so as to make your voice to be heard on high.⁵ Is such the fast that I have chosen? The day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a rush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Will you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to Yahweh?⁶ Isn't this the fast that I have chosen: to release the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, and to let the oppressed go free, and that you

and the Gentiles "far off". Acts 2:39 also has this passage in mind, when Peter offers the Spirit gift of salvation to those who are "far off".

58:2 Again we see that Judah weren't atheists, nor did they formally reject Yahweh – rather the opposite. But they ignored His commandments in practice, and those they kept they used as a means for spiritual pride. In all this we have a highly relevant message to ourselves.

58:3 *In the day of your fast you find pleasure* – Sacrifice to God must be sacrifice, contrite repentance means just that, rather than using these concepts as a channel for our own self-fulfilment.

58:5 *Bow down his head as a rush* – To quickly spring back again to pride. Our talk of humility mustn't be just a temporary, tokenistic acceptance of it as a nice idea.

58:6 Consider how Jesus brings together various passages from Isaiah in His opening declaration in Lk. 4:18: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he anointed me to preach the good tidings to the poor; he has sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To proclaim [proclaim] [Heb. 'call out to a man'] the acceptable year of the Lord*". This combines allusions to 61:1 (Lev. 25:10); 58:6 LXX and 61:2. Is. 58 has many Day of Atonement allusions – the year of Jubilee began on this feast. We are as the High Priest declaring the reality of forgiveness to the crowd. Hence Lk. 24:47 asks us to proclaim a Jubilee of atonement. The Greek for "preach" in Lk. 24:47 and for "preach / proclaim the acceptable year" in Lk. 4:19 are the same, and the word is used in the LXX for proclaiming the Jubilee. The LXX word used for 'jubilee' means remission, release, forgiveness, and it is the word used to describe our preaching / proclaiming forgiveness in Lk. 24:47. It could be that we are to see the cross as the day of atonement, and from then on the Jubilee should be proclaimed

break every yoke? ⁷ Isn't it to distribute your bread to the hungry, and that you bring the poor who are cast out to your house? When you see the naked, that you cover him; and that you not hide yourself from your own flesh? ⁸ Then your light shall break forth as the morning, and your healing shall spring forth speedily; and your righteousness shall go before you; the glory of Yahweh shall be your vanguard. ⁹ Then you shall call, and Yahweh will answer; you shall cry and He will say, 'Here I am'. If you take away from the midst of you the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking wickedly; ¹⁰ and if you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul: then your light shall rise in darkness, and your obscurity be as the noon-day; ¹¹ and Yahweh will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in dry places, and make strong your bones; and you shall be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters don't fail. ¹² Those who shall be of you shall build the old waste places; you shall raise up

the foundations of many generations; and you shall be called The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in. ¹³ If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your pleasure on My holy day; and call the Sabbath a delight, and the holy day of Yahweh honourable; and shall honour it, not doing your own ways, nor finding your own pleasure, nor speaking your own words: ¹⁴ then you shall delight yourself in Yahweh; and I will make you to ride on the high places of the earth; and I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father: for the mouth of Yahweh has spoken it.

CHAPTER 59 Ju1. 3

Evil Again Condemned

Behold, Yahweh's hand is not shortened that it can't save; neither His ear heavy, that it can't hear: ² but your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He will not hear. ³ For your hands are defiled with blood, and your fingers with iniquity; your

in the lives of those who accept it. It's as if we are running round telling people that their mortgages have been cancelled, hire purchase payments written off... and yet we are treated as telling them something unreal, when it is in fact so real and pertinent to them.

58:6-13 This seems to be a reference to an insincerely kept day of atonement in Ezra or Nehemiah's time. The Jewish nobles were oppressing the poor and thereby keeping the feast with no meaning. If they had properly kept the feast, *then* the promised Kingdom conditions would have burst forth to the world around them. But they were too caught up with their own self-benefit to be bothered to show true care for their brethren. If they had, *then* the glory of Yahweh would have entered the temple, just as Ezekiel 43 had prophesied would happen, if the Kingdom was rebuilt as commanded.

59:1, 2 If we feel that God is somehow limited, we must ask whether it is in fact our sins which are limiting His action; because He Himself is totally unlimited in His possibilities.

lips have spoken lies, your tongue mutters wickedness.⁴ None sues in righteousness, and none pleads in truth: they trust in vanity, and speak lies; they conceive mischief, and bring forth iniquity.⁵ They hatch adders' eggs, and weave the spider's web: he who eats of their eggs dies; and that which is crushed breaks out into a viper.⁶ Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands.⁷ Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; desolation and destruction are in their paths.⁸ The way of peace they don't know; there is no justice in their goings: they have made them crooked paths; whoever goes therein does not know peace.

The People Confess

Vindication remains far removed from us and deliverance does not reach us: we look for light, but behold, darkness; for brightness, but we walk in obscurity.¹⁰ We grope for the wall like the blind; yes, we grope as those who have no eyes: we stumble at noonday as in the twilight; among those who are lusty we

are as dead men.¹¹ We roar all like bears, and moan bitterly like doves: we look for justice, but there is none; for salvation, but it is far off from us.¹² For our transgressions are multiplied before You, and our sins testify against us; for our transgressions are with us, and as for our iniquities, we know them:¹³ transgressing and denying Yahweh, and turning away from following our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood.¹⁴ Justice is turned away backward, and righteousness stands afar off; for truth is fallen in the street, and uprightness can't enter.¹⁵ Yes, truth is lacking; and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey. Yahweh saw it, and it displeased Him that there was no justice.¹⁶ He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore His own arm brought salvation to Him; and His righteousness, it upheld Him.¹⁷ He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head; and He put on garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a mantle.¹⁸ According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, wrath to His adversaries, recompense to His enemies; to the islands He will repay

59:7, 8 These verses are quoted in Rom. 3:17 about all of us. We aren't to look at Judah at this time and shake our heads in disgust at them; the essence of their failures is to be found in each one of us.

59:9 See on 49:24.

59:13 *Conceiving and uttering from the heart* – Sin is conceived within the human heart, not placed there by some cosmic Satan being (Mk. 7:15-23; James 1:13-15). Our own heart is the arena of our spiritual battles; we are responsible for our sins, because they begin within our own minds.

recompense.¹⁹ So shall they fear the name of Yahweh from the west, and His glory from the rising of the sun; for He will come as a rushing stream, which the breath of Yahweh drives. ²⁰ A Redeemer will come to Zion, and to those who turn from disobedience in Jacob, says Yahweh. ²¹ As for Me, this is My covenant with them, says Yahweh. My Spirit which is on you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart out of your mouth, nor out of the mouth of your seed, nor out of the mouth of your seed's seed, says Yahweh, from henceforth and forever.

CHAPTER 60 Ju1. 4

The Future Glory of Israel

A rise, shine; for your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh is risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the land, and gross darkness the peoples; but Yahweh will arise on you, and His glory shall be seen on you. ³ Nations shall come to your light, and kings to the

brightness of your rising. ⁴ Lift up your eyes all around, and see: they all gather themselves together, they come to you; your sons shall come from far, and your daughters shall be carried in the arms. ⁵ Then you shall see and be radiant, and your heart shall thrill and be enlarged; because the abundance of the sea shall be turned to you, the wealth of the nations shall come to you. ⁶ The multitude of camels shall cover you, the dromedaries of Midian and Ephah; all they from Sheba shall come; they shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall proclaim the praises of Yahweh. ⁷ All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered together to you, the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on My altar; and I will glorify the house of My glory. ⁸ Who are these who fly as a cloud, and as the doves to their windows? ⁹ Surely the islands shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your sons from far, their silver and

59:20 The Redeemer is interpreted as Christ in Rom. 11:26. We could understand this verse as meaning that Christ shall come to Zion when there are in her those who have turned away from their transgression – which in the context of Israel is their rejection of Jesus as Christ. This would suggest a repentance of some Jews is required before Christ's return; and this should motivate our preaching to them.

59:21 *My Spirit... My words* – There is a parallel of God's words and His Spirit (notably in Jn. 6:63). The Bible is written by inspiration of God, and is therefore the work and vehicle of His Spirit. One way in which the Spirit works in our lives today is therefore through God's word the Bible.

60:5 The sea is used as a symbol for the nations – this is common in the Bible.

60:6 *They shall bring gold and frankincense* – What was potentially possible for Judah at the time of the restoration, or perhaps at the time of Hezekiah, didn't come true because of their disobedience. But this doesn't mean the prophecy was falsified – it was reapplied to Jesus, the true “servant of the Lord”, and this was fulfilled when the wise men brought Him these presents at His birth. God will not be defeated by human failure, but somehow His word comes true.

their gold with them, for the name of Yahweh your God, and for the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified you.¹⁰ Foreigners shall build up your walls, and their kings shall minister to you: for in My wrath I struck you, but in My grace have I had mercy on you.¹¹ Your gates also shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations, and their kings led captive.¹² For that nation and kingdom that will not serve you shall perish; yes, those nations shall be utterly wasted.¹³ The glory of Lebanon shall come to you, the fir tree, the pine, and the box tree together, to beautify the place of My sanctuary; and I will make the place of My feet glorious.¹⁴ The sons of those who afflicted you shall come bending to you; and all those who despised you shall bow themselves down at the soles of your feet; and they shall call you The city

of Yahweh, The Zion of the Holy One of Israel.¹⁵ Whereas you have been forsaken and hated, so that no man passed through you, I will make you an eternal excellency, a joy of many generations.¹⁶ You shall also drink the milk of the nations, and shall nurse from royal breasts; and you shall know that I, Yahweh, am your Saviour and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Jacob.¹⁷ For brass I will bring gold, and for iron I will bring silver, and for wood brass, and for stones iron. I will also make your officers peace, and righteousness your ruler.¹⁸ Violence shall no more be heard in your land, desolation nor destruction within your borders; but you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise.¹⁹ The sun shall be no more your light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light to you: but Yahweh will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory.²⁰ Your

60:11 The reality was that the walls were built from a motive not of glorifying Zion in fulfillment of prophecy, but for defence *against* the Gentiles. But the gates had to be shut to keep the Gentiles out (Neh. 13:19), lest they yet further corrupted the Jews who were eager to trade with them on the Sabbath rather than convert them to the God of Israel. Instead of bringing their goods through the gates to lay before Yahweh, they brought in their goods to sell to His people in trade. But returned Judah didn't act as a nation of priests, the food the Gentiles brought in to Zion was to be sold for profit to the Jews. They failed to be a missionary nation, and rather were mere trading / economic partners on an equal footing [cp. the church today?].

60:13 But Haggai lamented that instead, Judah dwelt in their own “beautifully ceilinged houses”, they used the exotic trees of the land for their own homes, whilst the house of Yahweh lay desolate. The prophecy of :14 started to come true after Haman's demise; but Judah didn't do their part in fulfilling the rest of that prophecy, which speaks of a rebuilt Zion. Note that the language of wood from Lebanon being used to build the temple is alluding to what happened when the first temple was planned and built under David and Solomon. The future Kingdom of God on earth will be a restoration of the Kingdom of God as it historically was on earth previously (Acts 1:6; see on Ez. 21:25-27).

sun shall no more go down, neither shall your moon withdraw itself; for Yahweh will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended.²¹ Your people also shall be all righteous; they shall inherit the land forever, the branch of My planting, the work of My hands, that I may be glorified.²² The little one shall become a thousand, and the small one a strong nation; I, Yahweh, will hasten it in its time.

CHAPTER 61 Ju1. 5

The Time of the Lord's Grace

The Spirit of the Lord Yahweh is on me; because Yahweh has anointed me to preach good news to the humble. He has sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to those who are bound;² to proclaim the time of Yahweh's grace, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn;³ to appoint to those who mourn in Zion, to give to them a garland for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of Yahweh,

that He may be glorified.⁴ They shall build the old wastes, they shall raise up the former desolations, and they shall repair the waste cities, the desolations of many generations.⁵ Gentiles shall stand and feed your flocks, and foreigners shall be your plough men and your vine dressers.⁶ But you shall be named the priests of Yahweh; men will call you the ministers of our God: you will eat the wealth of the nations, and you will boast in their glory.⁷ Instead of your shame you shall have double; and instead of dishonour they shall rejoice in their portion: therefore in their land they shall possess double; everlasting joy shall be to them.⁸ For I, Yahweh, love justice, I hate robbery with iniquity; and I will give them their recompense in truth, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.⁹ Their seed shall be known among the nations, and their offspring among the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which Yahweh has blessed.¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in Yahweh, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,

61:1, 2 See on 49:24; 58:6. This prophecy was fulfilled in the preaching of Jesus (Lk. 4:17-21). It could have come true at the return of the exiles from Babylon, when they could have rebuilt Jerusalem to Kingdom specifications (:4). But they became obsessed with building their own houses and trying to build up their own kingdom rather than God's, and so the prophecy was rescheduled and given a more spiritual fulfilment in the preaching of Jesus to people like us who are held captive by sin and human weakness.

61:6 Again we see God's intention that all Israel should have graduated to become priests (Ex. 19:5,6); this became true in the new Israel, the ecclesia, where we are all to have the spirit of priesthood (1 Pet. 2:9).

61:8 Entry into covenant relationship with God requires first of all that we recognize our sinfulness, as was the case with Israel.

He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.¹¹ For as the earth brings forth its bud, and as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth; so the Lord Yahweh will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

CHAPTER 62 Ju1. 6

Righteousness in Jerusalem

For Zion's sake will I not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness go forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns.² The nations shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name, which the mouth of Yahweh shall name.³ You shall also be a crown of beauty in the hand of Yahweh, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.⁴ You shall no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall your land any more be termed Desolate: but you shall be called Hephzibah, and your land Beulah; for Yahweh delights in you, and your land shall be mar-

ried.⁵ For as a young man marries a virgin, so your sons shall marry you; and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so your God will rejoice over you.⁶ I have set watchmen on your walls, Jerusalem; they shall never hold their peace day nor night: you who call on Yahweh, take no rest,⁷ and give Him no rest, until He establishes and until He makes Jerusalem a praise in the earth.⁸ Yahweh has sworn by His right hand and by the arm of His strength, Surely I will no more give your grain to be food for your enemies; and foreigners shall not drink your new wine, for which you have laboured:⁹ but those who have garnered it shall eat it, and praise Yahweh; and those who have gathered it shall drink it in the courts of My sanctuary.¹⁰ Go through, go through the gates! Prepare the way of the people! Cast up, cast up the highway! Gather out the stones! Lift up a banner for the peoples.¹¹ Behold, Yahweh has proclaimed to the end of the earth, Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your salvation comes. Behold, His reward is with Him, and His recompense before Him'.¹² They shall call them The holy peo-

62:1 Although God may appear inactive, there is a restlessness in Him, willing all things towards their appointed end – the establishment of His Kingdom on earth based around Jerusalem. This restlessness of God is inspired by His people continually begging Him to intervene on earth, to reveal Himself and establish His Kingdom (:6,7).

62:6 *I have set watchmen on your walls* – These watchmen refer to us who pray continually to God to establish His Kingdom (:7), but God has as it were set us up to pray like this. There are times when we feel we have been moved by God to pray about things; in this phenomenon we perceive God's grace, that it's not all simply up to us, but God to some extent works in our spirituality and inspires us to pray as we should, as if He wants as it were an excuse to act.

62:11 Applied by Jesus to His second coming in Rev. 22:12.

ple, The redeemed of Yahweh: and you shall be called Sought out, A city not forsaken.

CHAPTER 63 Jul. 7

Punishment upon the Nations

Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? This one who is glorious in his clothing, marching in the greatness of his strength? It is I who speak in righteousness, mighty to save. ² Why are you red in your clothing, and your garments like him who treads in the wine vat? ³ I have trodden the wine press alone; and of the peoples there was no man with Me: yes, I trod them in My anger, and trampled them in My wrath; and their lifeblood is sprinkled on My garments, and I have stained all My clothing. ⁴ For the day of vengeance was in My heart, and the year of My redeemed has come. ⁵ I looked, and there was none to help; and I wondered that there was none to uphold:

therefore My own arm brought salvation to Me; and My wrath, it upheld Me. ⁶ I trod down the peoples in My anger, and made them drunk in My wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth.

The Lord's Mercy on Israel

⁷ I will make mention of the loving kindnesses of Yahweh and the praises of Yahweh, according to all that Yahweh has bestowed on us, and the great goodness toward the house of Israel which He has bestowed on them according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His grace. ⁸ For He said, Surely, they are My people, children who will not deal falsely: so He was their Saviour. ⁹ In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them: in His love and in His pity he redeemed them; and He bore them, and carried them all the days of old. ¹⁰ But they rebelled and grieved His holy spirit: therefore He

63:3 Here and in :5 we have a window into the loneliness of Jesus on the cross, where His clothing was made red with His own blood.

63:8 Israel did deal falsely with God, but His hope – an almost blind hope which was born of the extent of His love for them – was that they would not deal falsely with Him. This positive hopefulness of God for His people should be seen in us too.

63:10 *His holy Spirit* – God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7), and the reference here and in :11 is to the Angel who went with Israel on their wilderness journey as the special manifestation of Yahweh, the “Angel of His presence” (:9). The New Testament promises of “the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit” are full of allusion to this part of Isaiah 63. The Comforter would teach (Jn. 14:26), guide, be a judge and prophesy (Jn. 16:8,13); the Angel guided Israel through the wilderness, taught them God’s ways, judged Egypt and the Canaanites, gave prophecies, and represented God to Israel as the Comforter represented Jesus to His people. As the church began a new Exodus and was constituted God’s Kingdom in prospect as Israel were at Sinai, it was fitting that it should also have an Angel leading them, representing God to them. As Israel were led by a special Angel through the wilderness, whom Isaiah 63 associates with God’s Holy Spirit, so the new Israel were led by a Holy Spirit

was turned to be their enemy, and He Himself fought against them.¹¹ Then He remembered the days of old, Moses and His people, saying, Where is He who brought them up out of the sea with the shepherds of His flock? Where is He who put His holy spirit in their midst?¹² Who caused His glorious arm to go at the right hand of Moses? Who divided the waters before them, to make Himself an everlasting name?¹³ Who led them through the depths, as a horse in the wilderness, so that they didn't stumble?¹⁴ As the cattle that go down into the valley, the spirit of Yahweh caused them to rest; so You led Your people, to make Yourself a glorious name.

A Prayer for Mercy

15 Look down from heaven, and see from the habitation of Your holiness and of Your glory: where are Your zeal and Your mighty acts? The yearning of Your heart and Your compassion is restrained toward me. 16 For You are our Father, though Abraham doesn't know us, and Israel does not acknowledge us: You, Yah-

weh, are our Father; our Redeemer from everlasting is Your name.¹⁷ O Yahweh, why do You make us to err from Your ways, and harden our heart from Your fear? Return for Your servants' sake, the tribes of Your inheritance.¹⁸ Your holy people possessed it but a little while: our adversaries have trodden down Your sanctuary.¹⁹ We have become as they over whom You never bear rule, as those who were not called by Your name.

CHAPTER 64 Ju1. 8

A Prayer for Revival

Oh that You would tear the heavens, that You would come down, that the mountains might quake at Your presence,² as when fire kindles the brushwood, and the fire causes the waters to boil; to make Your name known to Your adversaries, that the nations may tremble at Your presence!³ When You did awesome things which we didn't look for, You came down, the mountains quaked at Your presence.⁴ For from of old men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen a God

Angel, the Comforter, who was sent to the church by Jesus after His assuming of all power over the Angels on His ascension. The Jewish fathers resisted the Angel of the presence which went with them; and so the Jews of the first century did just the same (Acts 7:51). The Holy Spirit is the power of God, not a person, but it is sometimes personified; one reason for that may be that it worked in the first century through this Comforter Angel of the Lord's presence.

63:16 Israel does not acknowledge us – We have here the heart cry of the righteous remnant, rejected by the majority of God's people and feeling God too is somehow distant from them. This has been a common experience amongst the righteous over history.

64:4 This is quoted in 1 Cor. 2:9; the things prepared for those who wait for God are the things of redemption and forgiveness in Christ. But Paul interprets "him who waits for Him" as "them that love Him". To love God is in one sense to wait in patient faith

besides You, what God has prepared for him who waits for Him.⁵ You meet him who rejoices and works righteousness, those who remember You in Your ways. Behold, You were angry, and we sinned. We have been in sin for a long time; and shall we be saved?⁶ For we have all become as one who is unclean, and all our righteousness is as a polluted garment: and we all fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.⁷ There is none who calls on Your name, who stirs up himself to take hold of You; for You have hidden Your face from us, and have consumed us by means of our iniquities.⁸ But now, Yahweh, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and we all are the work of Your hand.⁹ Don't be furious, Yahweh, neither remember iniquity for-

ever: see, look, we beg You, we are all Your people.¹⁰ Your holy cities are become a wilderness, Zion has become a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation.¹¹ Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised You is burnt with fire; and all our pleasant places are laid waste.¹² Will You refrain Yourself for these things, Yahweh? Will You hold Your peace, and afflict us very severely?

CHAPTER 65 Ju1. 9

God Punishes the Nations

I was ready to be sought by those who did not ask for Me; I was ready to be found by those who did not seek Me. I said, 'Here am I, here am I' to a nation that was not called by My name.² I have spread out My hands all the day to a rebellious people, who walk in a way that is not

for Him to act and send His Son to establish His Kingdom. But the waiting game is harder than it seems, because we expect immediate response from God, whereas the intention of His apparent inaction is to focus us instead upon the return of Christ and the coming of His Kingdom as the ultimate resolution of all things. 64:4 says that only God alone knows these things He has prepared for us in Christ. But Paul says in 1 Cor. 2:10 that they are also known by us, through God's Spirit. So through our association with the one Spirit, the one Name of Yahweh, what is true of God Himself on a personal level becomes true of us. Such is the wonder of the way in which His fullness dwells in us.

64:7 See on 51:17. The destruction of the wicked is “by means of [their] iniquities”; sin is its own judgment.

65:1 God's experience with the Jews in exile was tragic. He set them up with the possibility to return to Judah, to establish there a Messianic-style Kingdom, giving them the commands in Ez. 40-48 for a glorious temple; but most of them preferred the soft life in Babylon, and those who did return proved small minded, selfish and disinterested in the vision of God's glory. In this context, Isaiah ends his restoration prophecies on a tragic note from God: “I was ready to be sought... I was ready to be found” by the unspiritual exiles in Babylon. But Israel would not. He pictures Himself standing there crying “Here am I, here am I!” – to be rejected by a people more interested in climbing the endless economic and social ladder in Babylon and Persia, and caught up in finding petty religious fault with their brethren (:5).

good, after their own thoughts; ³ a people who provoke Me to My face continually, sacrificing in gardens and burning incense on bricks; ⁴ who sit among the graves and lodge in the secret places; who eat pig's flesh, and broth of abominable things is in their vessels; ⁵ who say, 'Stand by yourself, don't come near to me, for I am holier than you'. These are a smoke in My nose, a fire that burns all the day. ⁶ Behold, it is written before Me: I will not keep silence, but will recompense, yes, I will recompense into their bosom, ⁷ your own iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, says Yahweh, who have burned incense on the mountains, and blasphemed Me on the hills; therefore will I first measure their work into their bosom. ⁸ Thus says Yahweh, As the new wine is found in the cluster and one says, 'Don't destroy it, for a blessing is in it.' so will I do for My servants' sake, that I may not destroy them all. ⁹ I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of My mountains; and My chosen shall inherit it, and My servants shall dwell there. ¹⁰ Sharon shall be a fold of flocks, and the valley of Achor a place for herds to lie down in, for My people who have sought Me. ¹¹ But you who forsake Yahweh, who forget My holy mountain, who prepare a table for Fortune, and who fill up mixed

wine to Destiny; ¹² I will destine you to the sword, and you shall all bow down to the slaughter; because when I called, you didn't answer; when I spoke, you didn't listen; but you did that which was evil in My eyes, and chose that in which I didn't delight. ¹³ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, My servants shall eat, but you shall be hungry; behold, My servants shall drink, but you shall be thirsty; behold, My servants shall rejoice, but you shall be disappointed; ¹⁴ behold, My servants shall sing for joy of heart, but you shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall wail for anguish of spirit. ¹⁵ You shall leave your name for a curse to My chosen; and the Lord Yahweh will kill you; and He will call His servants by another name: ¹⁶ so that he who blesses himself in the earth shall bless himself in the God of truth; and he who swears in the earth shall swear by the God of truth; because the former troubles are forgotten, and because they are hidden from My eyes.

A New Creation

¹⁷ For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former things shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. ¹⁸ But be you glad and rejoice forever in that which I create; for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in Jerusalem,

65:17 *New heavens and a new earth* – The close of Isaiah's prophecy is related to how it opens in 1:2; and there, the heavens and earth are figurative for the system of things which was in Judah (see note there). This verse is quoted in 2 Pet. 3:13 as having had a fulfilment in the destruction of the Jewish system in AD70; yet then the literal Heaven and earth weren't destroyed.

and joy in My people; and there shall be heard in her no more the voice of weeping and the voice of crying. 20 There shall be no more there an infant of days, nor an old man who has not filled his days; for the child shall die one hundred years old, and the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. 21 They shall build houses and inhabit them themselves; and they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. 22 They shall not build, and another inhabit; they shall not plant, and another eat: for as the days of a tree shall be the days of My people, and My chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands. 23 They shall not labour in vain, nor bring forth for calamity; for they are the seed of the blessed of Yahweh, and their offspring with them. 24 It shall happen that, before they call, I will answer; and while they are yet speaking, I will hear. 25 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the ox; and

dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 66 Jul. 10

The Lord Loves This Man

Thus says Yahweh, Heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool: what kind of house will you build to Me? And what place shall be My rest? 2 For all these things has My hand made, and so all these things came to be, says Yahweh: but to this man will I look, even to him who is poor and of a broken spirit, and who trembles at My word. 3 He who kills an ox is as he who kills a man; he who sacrifices a lamb, as he who breaks a dog's neck; he who offers an offering, as he who offers pig's blood; he who burns frankincense, as he who blesses an idol. Yes, they have chosen their own ways, and their soul delights in their abominations: 4 I also will choose their delusions, and will bring their fears

65:24 Before they call, I will answer – This is found in the context of a prophecy about the future Kingdom of God on earth. But Jesus applies this phrase to our experience in prayer now, when He says that God knows our needs before we ask Him in prayer (Mt. 6:8). Answered prayer is a foretaste of the Kingdom life. The essence of how we will eternally live in the Kingdom can be experienced in our spiritual life today. In this sense Jesus said that we “have eternal life”, in the sense that we can begin to live now the type of life we will eternally live.

66:2 The Jews did tremble at the word at the beginning of the rebuilding (Ezra 10:9). But it was a momentary thing; they came to see the building of the walls as more important than keeping a trembling spirit. Works eclipsed spirituality. Yet Isaiah had taught that the trembling at the word was more essentially important than building temples. But Judah paid no attention in the long term. Perhaps God was saying that His plan for the glorious rebuilding of the temple at the time of the return from exile in Babylon wasn't going to work out, and instead He was going to focus on dwelling with humble, broken individuals who loved His word.

66:3, 4 God does not just disregard those who turn away from Him. He deceives them, and leads them into a downward spiral of moral and doctrinal declension. The idea of

on them; because when I called, no one answered; when I spoke, they didn't listen; but they did that which was evil in My eyes, and chose that in which I didn't delight. ⁵ Hear the word of Yahweh, you who tremble at His word: Your brothers who hate you, who cast you out for My name's sake, have said, 'Let Yahweh be glorified, that we may see your joy,' but it is those who shall be disappointed. ⁶ A voice of tumult from the city, a voice from the temple, a voice of Yahweh that renders recompense to His enemies.

Rejoice with Jerusalem

⁷ Before she travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she delivered a son. ⁸ Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth at once? For as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children. ⁹ Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? says Yahweh: shall I who cause to bring forth shut the womb? says your God. ¹⁰ Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad for her, all you who love her: rejoice for joy with her, all you who mourn over her; ¹¹ that you may nurse and be satisfied at the comforting breasts; that you may drink deeply,

and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. ¹² For thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will extend peace to her like a river, and the glory of the nations like an overflowing stream: and you will be nursed. You will be carried on her side, and will be dangled on her knees. ¹³ As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ You will see it, and your heart shall rejoice, and your bones shall flourish like the tender grass: and the hand of Yahweh shall be known toward His servants; He will have indignation against His enemies. ¹⁵ For behold, Yahweh will come with fire, and His chariots shall be like the whirlwind; to render His anger with fierceness, and His rebuke with flames of fire. ¹⁶ For by fire and by His sword will Yahweh plead judgement on all flesh; and the slain of Yahweh shall be many. ¹⁷ Those who sanctify themselves and purify themselves to go to the gardens, behind one in the midst, eating pig's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, they shall come to an end together, says Yahweh. ¹⁸ For I know their works and their thoughts: the time comes, that I will gather all nations and languages; and they shall come, and shall see My glory. ¹⁹ I will set a sign among

"the God of Truth" deceiving people may seem strange at first. But consider how He chose Israel's delusions by making their idols answer them; see too 1 Kings 22:20-22; Ez. 3:20; 14:9; 2 Thess. 2:9-11.

66:16 Plead judgement – The Hebrew word translated "judgment" here is also translated "plead". God's judgments aren't the anger of an irritated deity, rather are they constructive, designed to plead with those who observe them to repent.

66:19 Paul's desire to go to Spain (Rom. 15:24) indicates a commitment to taking

them, and I will send such as escape of them to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the islands afar off, who have not heard My fame, neither have seen My glory; and they shall declare My glory among the nations. ²⁰ They shall bring all your brothers out of all the nations for an offering to Yahweh, on horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and on mules, and on dromedaries, to My holy mountain Jerusalem, says Yahweh, as the children of Israel bring their offering in a clean vessel into the house of Yahweh. ²¹ Of

them also will I take for priests and for Levites, says Yahweh. ²² For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before Me, says Yahweh, so your seed and your name shall remain. ²³ It shall happen, that from one new moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before Me, says Yahweh. ²⁴ They shall go forth, and look on the dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they will be loathsome to all mankind.

the Gospel to the very ends of the world he then knew. He may well have been motivated in this by wishing to fulfill in spirit this Kingdom prophecy of :18,19, which describes how Tarshish (which he would have understood as Spain) and other places which “have not heard My fame, neither have seen My glory” will be witnessed to by those who *have* seen His glory and have “escaped” from God’s just condemnation by grace. Paul sees this as referring to himself. For he speaks in Rom. 15:19 of his ambition to take the Gospel to Spain; and in that same context, of how he will bring the Gentile brethren’s offering up to Jerusalem. This is precisely the context of Is. 66 – the offerings of the Gentiles are to be brought up to Jerusalem, as a result of how the Lord’s glory will be spoken of to all nations. So Paul read Isaiah 66 and did something about his Old Testament Bible study; he dedicated his life to taking the Gospel to the Gentiles, and he encouraged them to send their offerings to Jerusalem. He was no mere theologian. His study and exposition of Old Testament Scripture led to a life lived out in practice, to hardship, risk of life, persecution, loneliness, even rejection by his brethren. It is also significant that :19 speaks of nations which occur in the list of nations we have in Genesis 10, in the context of the effect of Babel. It is as if Paul sees the spreading of the Gospel as an undoing of the curse of Babel and the establishment of the Kingdom conditions described in Is. 66. By his preaching of God’s Kingdom and the reign of Christ, he brought about a foretaste of the future Kingdom in the lives of his converts. And we can do likewise.

JEREMIAH

CHAPTER 1 Ju1. 11

God Calls Jeremiah

The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: ² to whom the word of Yahweh came in the days of Josiah son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³ It came also in the days of Jehoiakim son of Josiah king of Judah, to the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah son of Josiah king of Judah, to the carrying away of Jerusalem captive in the fifth month. ⁴ Now the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ⁵ Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you. Before you came forth out of the womb, I sanctified you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations. ⁶ Then I said, Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, I don't know how to speak; for I am a child. ⁷ But Yahweh said to me, Don't say, 'I am a child;' for to whoever I shall send you, you shall go, and whatever I shall command you, you shall speak. ⁸ Don't be afraid because of them; for I am with you to deliver you, says Yahweh. ⁹ Then Yahweh put forth His hand, and touched my mouth; and Yahweh said to me, Be-

hold, I have put My words in your mouth. ¹⁰ Behold, I have this day set you over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.

Two Visions

¹¹ Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying, Jeremiah, what do you see? I said, I see a branch of an almond tree. ¹² Then Yahweh said to me, You have seen well; for I watch over My word to perform it. ¹³ The word of Yahweh came to me the second time saying, What do you see? I said, I see a boiling cauldron; and it is tipping away from the north. ¹⁴ Then Yahweh said to me, Out of the north evil will break out on all the inhabitants of the land. ¹⁵ For, behold, I will call all the families of the kingdoms of the north, says Yahweh; and they shall come, and they shall each set his throne at the entrance of the gates of Jerusalem, and against all its walls all around, and against all the cities of Judah. ¹⁶ I will utter My judgements against them touching all their wickedness, in that they have forsaken Me and have burned

1:5 Jeremiah is spoken of as having existed before birth. This wasn't literally the case, but because God is outside time as we know it, He can speak of things which don't exist as if they do, so total is His knowledge of the future (Rom. 4:17). All the believers and also Jesus are spoken of with this language (Eph. 1:4; 1 Pet. 1:20), but it doesn't mean that He nor we personally pre-existed.

1:6 So many called to preach God's word feel unworthy or unqualified to do so; but God delights to work through those who feel this way.

1:10 This reflects the power which there is in God's word, which we also can speak forth to this world.

incense to other gods and worshipped the works of their own hands.¹⁷ You therefore put your belt on your waist, arise, and speak to them all that I command you. Don't be dismayed at them, lest I dismay you before them.¹⁸ For, behold, I have made you this day a fortified city, and an iron pillar, and bronze walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against its princes, against its priests, and against the people of the land.¹⁹ They will fight against you; but they will not prevail against you; for I am with you, says Yahweh, to deliver you.

CHAPTER 2 Ju1. 12

Israel's Unfaithfulness

The word of Yahweh came to me saying,² Go and cry in the ears of Jerusalem saying, ‘Thus says Yahweh, I remember the kindness

of your youth, the love at the time of your marriage; how you went after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown.³ Israel was holiness to Yahweh, the first fruits of His increase. All who devour him shall be held guilty. Evil shall come on them’, says Yahweh.⁴ Hear the word of Yahweh O house of Jacob, and all the families of the house of Israel!⁵ Thus says Yahweh, What unrighteousness have your fathers found in Me, that they have gone far from Me, and have walked after vanity, and are become vain?⁶ Neither did they say, ‘Where is Yahweh who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and of pits, through a land of drought and of the shadow of death, through a land that none passed through, and where no man lived?’⁷ I brought

1:17 *Don't be dismayed at them, lest I dismay you* – This appears to be the basis of Christ's warning to His preachers, that if we are ashamed of His words in this generation, He will be ashamed of us in the last day and we will walk before all men with the shame of the rejected (Lk. 9:26; Rev. 16:15). We are to therefore see Jeremiah as in some sense representative of us in our witness to the world.

1:18 The prophets required this psychological strengthening to do their work; because seeing the world from God's perspective, perceiving the tragedy of a humanity who refuse to accept His salvation, realizing the depth of His pain – is all too much. And God will strengthen us too, to be His witnesses in a similar world.

2:5 *Walked after vanity, and are become vain* – We become like what we worship (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). The prophets emphasize that the idols are empty and vain. Whilst we may not be tempted to worship pieces of stone or wood, we are surrounded by the vain things of the modern world which can become our gods; sport, endless surfing the internet, frivolous obsession with tickling our taste buds, these and so much else are mere vanity. And as we worship them, we become vain and empty too, with no real substance to our personality. Whilst the richness and depth of Yahweh is thereby ignored by us. See on 2:11.

2:6 The wilderness is described as an awful place, just as Moses likewise spoke of it when reflecting on the journeys of Israel in Deuteronomy. Israel crossing the Red Sea represents our baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2), and their wilderness journey afterwards equates with our lives now as we walk toward the promised land of God's

you into a plentiful land, to eat its fruit and its goodness; but when you entered, you defiled My land and made My heritage an abomination.

8 The priests didn't say, 'Where is Yahweh?' and those who handle the law didn't come to know Me. The rulers also transgressed against Me, the prophets prophesied by Baal and walked after things that do not profit.

9 Therefore I will yet contend with you, says Yahweh, and I will contend with your children's children.

10 For pass over to the islands of Kittim, and see; and send to Kedar, and consider diligently; and see if there has been such a thing.

11 Has a nation changed its gods, which really are no gods? But My people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.

12 Be astonished, you heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid. Be very desolate, says Yahweh.

13 For My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the spring of

living waters, and cut them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.

Results of Israel's Unfaithfulness

14 Is Israel a servant? Is he a native-born slave? Why has he become a prey?

15 The young lions have roared at him and yelled, they have desolated his land. His cities are burned up without inhabitant.

16 The children also of Memphis and Tahpanhes have broken the crown of your head.

17 Haven't you procured this to yourself, in that you have forsaken Yahweh your God, when He led you by the way?

18 Now what have you to do in the way to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Shihor? Or what

have you to do in the way to Assyria, to drink the waters of the River?

19 Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backsliding shall reprove you. Know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and a bitter,

Kingdom. The world is a terrifying place spiritually; in spiritual terms it isn't the nice safe place it can appear.

2:8 Those who handle the law didn't come to know Me – We can be faithful Bible readers, familiar with the text, and yet not know God in the sense of having a personal relationship with Him; rather like the rejected of the last day who will call Jesus "Lord" and have been associated with Him in their lives, but who never knew Him (Mt. 7:22,23; 25:12; Lk. 13:25).

2:11 Israel never officially changed their gods; they never rejected Yahweh nor were they atheists. But worshipping any other god *in addition* to the one true God as they did is effectively doing this. See on 2:5.

2:19 God has a wonderful way of not turning away in disgust from sinful people, but rather working through their sin to try to bring them to repentance. The traditional understanding of Satan is unable to explain this; for if a personal, sinful entity called 'satan' makes people sin, then how come that sin actually results in some becoming righteous? Sin comes from within (James 1:13-15), it is solely our fault that we sin; but God in His grace often works through human failure in order to bring sinners to Himself. Our real 'satan' or adversary is ourselves, and not any external, cosmic being.

that you have forsaken Yahweh your God, and that My fear is not in you, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies. 20 For of old time I have broken your yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, ‘I will not serve;’ for on every high hill and under every green tree you bowed yourself, playing the prostitute. 21 Yet I had planted you a noble vine, wholly a right seed. How then have you turned into the degenerate branches of a foreign vine to Me? 22 For though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, yet your iniquity is marked before Me, says the Lord Yahweh. 23 How can you say, ‘I am not defiled. I have not gone after the Baals?’ See your way in the valley. Know what you have done. You are a swift dromedary traversing her ways; 24 a wild donkey used to the wilderness, that snuffs up the wind in her desire. When she is in heat, who can turn her away? All those who seek her will not weary themselves. In her month, they will find her. 25 Withhold your foot from being unshod, and your throat from thirst. But you said, ‘It is in vain.

No, for I have loved strangers, and I will go after them’. 26 As the thief is ashamed when he is found, so is the house of Israel ashamed; they, their kings, their princes, and their priests, and their prophets; 27 who tell wood, ‘You are my father;’ and a stone, ‘You have brought me forth’; for they have turned their back to Me, and not their face; but in the time of their trouble they will say, ‘Arise, and save us’. 28 But where are your gods that you have made for yourselves? Let them arise, if they can save you in the time of your trouble: for according to the number of your cities are your gods, Judah.

Israel Rebels against God

29 Why will you contend with Me? You all have transgressed against Me, says Yahweh. 30 I have struck your children in vain. They received no correction. Your own sword has devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion. 31 Generation, consider the word of Yahweh. Have I been a wilderness to Israel? Or a land of thick darkness? Why do My people

2:26 Worshipping other gods is likened here to stealing. Not giving God our entire worship is in fact robbing Him; even though the analogy seems extreme at first sight, if we really accept that we are created by Him and are His, then to not give Him all of ourselves is to rob Him (Mal. 3:8). Significantly, the people are mentioned as punishing innocent people for the crime of stealing when they hadn’t committed it (:34). Those who robbed God knew subconsciously what they were doing; and so unconsciously, they transferred their guilt onto others, falsely accusing them of the very kind of sin *they* had committed, and then strictly condemning and punishing those innocent people for it, exercising the judgment against themselves which was their due upon others, onto whom they had transferred their guilt. This is why people gossip, malign, falsely accuse and judge harshly. If we face up to our sins in the first place and accept God’s forgiveness, then we will show grace to others rather than act in this way.

2:30 It’s tragic that people can suffer so much, as Israel have throughout their history, and yet not respond to it as God intended.

say, ‘We have broken loose. We will come to You no more?’. ³² Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire? Yet My people have forgotten Me for days without number. ³³ How well you prepare your way to seek love! Therefore you have taught even the wicked women your ways. ³⁴ Also the blood of the souls of the innocent poor is found in your skirts, even though you did not catch them in the act of burglary. ³⁵ Yet you said, ‘I am innocent. Surely His anger has turned away from me’. Behold, I will judge you, because you say, ‘I have not sinned’. ³⁶ Why do you go about so much, ever changing your way? You will be shamed by Egypt, just as you were shamed by Assyria. ³⁷ From there also you shall go forth, with your hands on your head; for Yahweh has rejected those in whom you trust, and you shall not prosper with them.

CHAPTER 3 Ju1. 13

Israel and Judah Likened to an Unfaithful Wife

They say, ‘If a man puts away his wife and she goes from him and become another man’s, should he

return to her again?’ . Wouldn’t that land be greatly polluted? But you have played the prostitute with many lovers; yet return again to Me, says Yahweh. ² Lift up your eyes to the bare heights, and see! Where have you not been lain with? You have sat for them by the ways, as an Arabian in the wilderness. You have polluted the land with your prostitution and with your wickedness. ³ Therefore the showers have been withheld, and there has been no latter rain; yet you have a prostitute’s forehead, you refused to be ashamed. ⁴ Will you not from this time cry to Me, ‘My Father, You are the guide of my youth?’ . ⁵ ‘Will He retain His anger forever? Will He keep it to the end?’ Behold, you have spoken and have done evil things, and have had your way. ⁶ Moreover, Yahweh said to me in the days of Josiah the king, Have you seen that which backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there has played the prostitute. ⁷ I said after she had done all these things, ‘She will return to Me;’ but she didn’t return; and her treacherous sister Judah saw

3:1 God’s own law had forbidden a man to do this, calling it an abomination (Dt. 24:4). And yet God was willing to do so. Thus He demonstrates that His grace and love for His people goes even beyond the limits of His own word, and may even in a way contradict it; such is the greatness of His grace. He isn’t indifferently waiting for us to return to Him; He is willing to debase Himself and commit what He considers abomination in order to be back together with us. In similar vein, God speaks as if His expectation that Israel would return to Him had been as it were proved wrong (:7). Again, He speaks as if His foreknowledge was as it were limited compared to the power of the hopefulness of His love and grace; for we are made after God’s image, and true love has the quality of desperate hopefulness against our better knowledge. Such is God’s passion for us His people.

it. ⁸ I saw, when, for the very reason of committing adultery that I had put away and given a bill of divorce to backsliding Israel, then treacherous Judah her sister didn't fear; but likewise went and played the prostitute. ⁹ It happened through the lightness of her prostitution, that the land was polluted, and she committed adultery with stones and with stocks. ¹⁰ Yet for all this her treacherous sister, Judah, has not returned to Me with her whole heart, but only in pretence, says Yahweh.

God Wants Israel to Return to Him

¹¹ Yahweh said to me, Backsliding Israel has shown herself more righteous than treacherous Judah. ¹² Go, and proclaim these words towards the north, and say, ‘Return, you backsliding Israel’, says Yahweh; ‘I will not look in anger on you; for I am merciful’, says Yahweh. ‘I will not keep anger forever. ¹³ Only acknowledge your iniquity, that you have transgressed against Yahweh your God, and have scattered your ways to the strangers under every green tree, and that you have not obeyed My voice’, says Yahweh.

¹⁴ Return, backsliding children, says Yahweh; for I am a husband to you. I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion. ¹⁵ I will give you shepherds according to My heart, who shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. ¹⁶ It shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, says Yahweh, they shall say no more, ‘The ark of the covenant of Yahweh!’ neither shall it come to mind; neither shall they remember it; neither shall they miss it; neither shall it be made any more. ¹⁷ At that time they shall call Jerusalem ‘The throne of Yahweh;’ and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of Yahweh, to Jerusalem. Neither shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart. ¹⁸ In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I gave for an inheritance to your fathers. ¹⁹ But I thought how I would set you among My children, and give you a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the armies of the nations; and I thought

3:14 *I am a husband to you* – Although divorced from Israel (:8), God still considered Himself her husband. These contradictory feelings within God are expressed in His word, in that some passages protest His eternal love and relationship with Israel whatever, whilst others declare them no longer His people.

3:19, 20 Although God presents Himself to us as having a memory which functions not unlike our memories, who are made in His image, there is with God the capacity for total recall of history; and hence His pain is far greater than ours, not least because He knows, with all the power of infinite analysis of possibilities, ‘what might have been’. And it is the ‘what might have been’ syndrome which is one of the greatest sources of our emotional pain. His pain and hurt is therefore and thereby so much greater than ours. Hence the pain, the pain which comes from understanding and the

you would call Me My Father, and would not turn away from following Me'. ²⁰ Surely as a wife faithlessly departs from her husband, so you have dealt treacherously with Me, house of Israel, says Yahweh. ²¹ A voice is heard on the bare heights, the weeping and the petitions of the children of Israel; because they have perverted their way, they have forgotten Yahweh their God. ²² Return, you backsliding children, I will heal your backsliding. Behold, we have come to You; for You are Yahweh our God. ²³ Truly in vain is help from the hills, the tumult on the mountains. Truly the salvation of Israel is in Yahweh our God. ²⁴ But the shameful thing has devoured the labour of our fathers from our youth, their flocks and their herds, their sons and their daughters. ²⁵ Let us lie down in our shame, and let our confusion cover us; for we have sinned against Yahweh our God, we

and our fathers, from our youth even to this day. We have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God.

CHAPTER 4 Jul. 14

Repentance Needed

If you will return, Israel, says Yahweh, if you will return to Me, and if you will put away your abominations out of My sight; then you shall not be removed; ² and you shall swear, 'As Yahweh lives', in truth, in justice, and in righteousness. The nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him shall they glory. ³ For thus says Yahweh to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and don't sow among thorns. ⁴ Circumcise yourselves to Yahweh, and take away the foreskins of your heart, you men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest My wrath go forth like fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.

potential of total recall, behind these words which reflect how Israel *could have been* sons which made Him proud. Because of His capacity to imagine, to see possible futures, God feels rejected both by His children and by His wife at the same time. It's as if He could see the potentially happy future which they could've had stretching out before Him. Yet now He has chosen *us* as His wife and children; and we are to do our uttermost to be His faithful woman, loyal children.

3:22–25 This was God's fantasy about Israel, how one day they would say such words of repentance and return to Him. True love includes fantasy, imagining the object of our love speaking or acting in the way we dream of. And God's passionate love for His people is no different. True repentance is such a thrill to God; it fulfils what He has dreamt of for us. Hence all the Angels rejoice when one sinner repents.

4:3 *Break up your fallow ground* – Like us, they were to realize their spiritual potential in order to bring forth fruit to God.

4:4 The wrath of God can be turned away or 'quenched' by the actions of those He is angry with (see too Num. 25:4; Dt. 13:15–17; Ezra 10:14; Jonah 3:7,10; 2 Chron. 12:7; Jer. 21:12). And yet that wrath can also be turned away by the prayers of a third party (see 18:20; Ps. 106:23; Job 42:7). This means that in some cases, our prayers for others can be counted as if they have repented. We can gain our brother for God's

Judah to be Invaded

⁵ Declare in Judah and publish in Jerusalem; say, ‘Blow the trumpet in the land! Cry aloud and say, ‘Assemble yourselves! Let us go into the fortified cities!’ ⁶ Set up a standard towards Zion. Flee for safety! Don’t wait; for I will bring evil from the north, and a great destruction. ⁷ A lion is gone up from his thicket, and a destroyer of nations; he is on his way, he is gone forth from his place, to make your land desolate, that your cities be laid waste, without inhabitant. ⁸ For this clothe yourself with sackcloth, lament and wail; for the fierce anger of Yahweh hasn’t turned back from us. ⁹ It shall happen at that day, says Yahweh, that the heart of the king shall perish, and the heart of the princes; and the priests shall be astonished, and the prophets shall wonder. ¹⁰ Then I said, Ah, Lord Yahweh! Surely You have greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem in saying, ‘You shall have peace;’ whereas the sword reaches to the heart. ¹¹ At that time shall it be said to this people and to Jerusalem, A hot wind from the bare heights in the wilderness towards the daughter

of My people, not to winnow, nor to cleanse; ¹² a full wind for these things shall come from Me. Now I will also utter judgements against them. ¹³ Behold, he shall come up as clouds, and his chariots shall be as the whirlwind: his horses are swifter than eagles. Woe to us! For we are ruined. ¹⁴ Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved. How long shall your evil thoughts lodge within you? ¹⁵ For a voice declares from Dan, and publishes evil from the hills of Ephraim: ¹⁶ Tell the nations; behold, publish against Jerusalem, ‘Watchers come from a far country and lift up their voice against the cities of Judah. ¹⁷ As keepers of a field, they are against her all around, because she has been rebellious against Me’, says Yahweh. ¹⁸ Your way and your doings have brought these things to you. This is your wickedness; for it is bitter, for it reaches to your heart.

Jeremiah’s Vision of Destruction

¹⁹ My anguish, my anguish! I am pained at my very heart; my heart is disquieted in me; I can’t hold my peace; because you have heard, O

Kingdom (Mt. 18:15), as Noah saved his own house by his faithful preparation (Heb. 11:7).

4:13 Clouds, chariots and whirlwind are associated with Yahweh’s appearances in theophanies and as the cherubim. Yet here this language is applied to the Babylonian invaders – for they were manifesting God. Their chariots were as it were the wheels on earth of the Angel cherubim above who were directing them. At times unbelievers can be used by God as His form of manifestation, as we will experience in our lives too.

4:19 Jeremiah interjects here. He didn’t just output the words God had given him like a printer or piece of computer hardware. He saw the reality of it all, that it would really all come to pass. We too must be moved by the reality of the message we teach about the future; it is all very well telling others of a time of trouble coming upon this earth, but we should feel deeply for the human tragedy of it, to the point of being al-

my soul, the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. ²⁰ Destruction on destruction is cried; for the whole land is laid waste: suddenly are my tents destroyed, and my curtains in a moment. ²¹ How long shall I see the standard, and hear the sound of the trumpet? ²² For my people are foolish, they don't know me. They are foolish children, and they have no understanding. They are skilful in doing evil, but to do good they have no knowledge. ²³ I saw the land and, behold, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. ²⁴ I saw the mountains, and behold, they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth. ²⁵ I saw, and behold, there was no man, and all the birds of the sky had fled. ²⁶ I saw, and behold, the fruitful field was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down at the presence of Yahweh, before His fierce anger. ²⁷ For thus says Yahweh, The whole land shall be a desolation; yet will I not make a full end. ²⁸ For this the land will mourn, and the heavens above be black; because I have spoken it,

most broken down because of it. The message we give cannot pass through our hands or lips without eliciting response from us.

4:20 Jeremiah felt that the future things he was prophesying had already come to pass; he shared God's perspective (Rom. 4:17), as we should, that the Biblically predicted future is effectively now – so certain is God's word of fulfilment.

4:31 *The anguish* – Jeremiah felt “anguish” right then (:19) because he identified with the future “anguish” of the people about whom he prophesied. We also should identify with the audience we preach to; the tragedy of their situation should touch us deeply and be the basis of our passionate, persuasive appeal to them.

5:1 All of Jerusalem would have been forgiven if there was even one that truly executed justice. This is the colossal significance to God of the individual. Abraham ceased at 10 people when interceding for Sodom, but if he had gone down to asking for the city to be spared for just one righteous person, likely he would've been heard. See on 26:13.

I have purposed it, and I have not relented, neither will I go back from it. ²⁹ Every city flees for the noise of the horsemen and archers; they go into the thickets and climb up on the rocks: every city is forsaken, not a man dwells therein. ³⁰ You, when you are made desolate, what will you do? Though you clothe yourself with scarlet, though you deck you with ornaments of gold, though you enlarge your eyes with paint, in vain do you make yourself beautiful; your lovers despise you, they seek your life. ³¹ For I have heard a voice as of a woman in travail, the anguish as of her who brings forth her first child, the voice of the daughter of Zion, who gasps for breath, who spreads her hands saying, Woe is me now! For my soul faints before the murderers.

CHAPTER 5 Ju1. 15

The Sins of Jerusalem

Run back and forth through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places of it, if you can find a man,

if there are any who does justice, who seeks truth; and I will pardon her. ² Though they say, ‘As Yahweh lives,’ surely they swear falsely. ³ O Yahweh, don’t Your eyes look on truth? You have stricken them, but they were not grieved. You have consumed them, but they have refused to receive correction. They have made their faces harder than a rock. They have refused to return. ⁴ Then I said, Surely these are poor. They are foolish; for they don’t know the way of Yahweh, nor the law of their God. ⁵ I will go to the great men, and

will speak to them; for they know the way of Yahweh, and the law of their God. But these with one accord have broken the yoke, and burst the bonds. ⁶ Therefore a lion out of the forest shall kill them, a wolf of the evenings shall destroy them, a leopard shall watch against their cities; everyone who goes out there shall be torn in pieces; because their transgressions are many, and their backsliding is increased. ⁷ How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken Me, and sworn by what are no gods. When I had fed them to the

Who does justice – The Hebrew Bible very often demands “justice” from individuals within Israel and almost considers this to be the epitome of righteousness. We may consider that because we’re not judges nor part of the judicial apparatus of society, therefore this doesn’t apply to us. But daily if not hourly, we’re confronted with situations which demand our correct response, our fairness, our application of Divine principle when dealing with others, often to our own cost; and in our own minds, we do have to judge, not in the sense of condemning but in forming opinions. Thus “justice” is required from each of us, daily.

5:5 We see here Jeremiah’s naivety, assuming that the leaders of God’s people must surely be spiritual people. The disciples were the same, initially. We too easily tend to confuse status or seniority amongst God’s people with spirituality, and so often this assumption is wrong.

5:7 *When I had fed them to the full* – So often God’s kind material blessings to His people led them into unfaithfulness to Him (Dt. 32:15). It’s not surprising, therefore, that the requests of the new Israel for material blessing are so often unanswered; for God seeks relationship with us above all, and earnestly desires our eternal good.

How can I pardon you? – This opens a window on the self-questioning which is associated with God – e.g. “What shall I do with you, O Ephraim?” (Hos. 6:4; 11:8; see too Jer. 9:7,9). These aren’t purely rhetorical questions – they reflect the actual and real self-questioning of Almighty God, reflective as it is of the turbulence of emotion which is part and parcel of being in a relationship which has gone painfully wrong. There even seems at times a difficulty on God’s part to understand why the people He had loved could hate Him so much (2:14,31;8:5,19; 30:6; Is. 5:4; 50:2). “What more could I have done for my vineyard... why did it yield wild grapes?” (Is. 5:1-7). This is so much the anguished cry of bewildered middle age parents as they reflect upon a wayward child. This Divine struggle to understand reflects the extraordinary depth of His love for them; and it warns us in chilling terms as to the pain we can cause God if we spurn His amazing love. 8:4-7 records God reflecting that even the stork ‘returns’ predictably; but His people have inexplicably not returned to Him. This reveals a

full, they committed adultery, and assembled themselves in troops at the prostitutes' houses. ⁸ They were as fed horses roaming at large: everyone neighed after his neighbour's wife. ⁹ Shouldn't I punish them for these things? says Yahweh; and shouldn't My soul be avenged on such a nation as this? ¹⁰ Go up on her walls, and destroy; but don't make a full end. Take away her branches; for they are not Yahweh's. ¹¹ For the house of Israel and the house of Judah have dealt very treacherously against Me, says Yahweh. ¹² They have denied Yahweh and said, It is not He; neither shall evil come on us; neither shall we see sword nor famine. ¹³ The prophets shall become wind, and the word is not in them. Thus shall it be done to them. ¹⁴ Therefore thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, Because you speak this word, behold, I will make My words in your mouth fire and this people wood, and it shall devour them.

Israel to be Invaded

15 Behold, I will bring a nation on you from far, house of Israel, says Yahweh. It is a mighty nation. It is an ancient nation, a nation whose language you don't know, nor under-

stand what they say. ¹⁶ Their quiver is an open tomb, they are all mighty men. ¹⁷ They shall eat up your harvest and your bread, which your sons and your daughters should eat. They shall eat up your flocks and your herds. They shall eat up your vines and your fig trees. They shall beat down your fortified cities in which you trust with the sword. ¹⁸ But even in those days, says Yahweh, I will not make a full end with you. ¹⁹ It will happen, when you say, 'Why has Yahweh our God done all these things to us?' Then you shall say to them, 'Just like you have forsaken Me and served foreign gods in your land, so you shall serve strangers in a land that is not yours'. ²⁰ Declare this in the house of Jacob, and publish it in Judah saying, ²¹ 'Hear now this, foolish people, and without understanding; who have eyes, and don't see; who have ears, and don't hear: ²² Don't you fear Me?' says Yahweh 'Won't you tremble at My presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea by a perpetual decree, that it can't pass it? and though its waves toss themselves, yet they can't prevail; though they roar, yet they can't pass over it'. ²³ But this people has a revolting and

powerful thing – that our rejection of God's love is inexplicable even to God Himself. And yet humanity persists in this utter madness. For all our education, business sense, scientific knowledge – we are revealed as inexplicably foolish in rejecting God's love and not 'returning' [repenting] to Him.

5:11 *It is not He* – A denial of the meaning of 'Yahweh' – I am that I am. Yet they weren't atheists. But by denying the reality of judgment to come and the constant, insistent presence of God in our lives and His continual claim upon every part of our lives, they were denying the essence of God – He is, who He is, and shall be who He shall be in our lives.

a rebellious heart; they have revolted and gone.²⁴ Neither do they say in their heart, ‘Let us now fear Yahweh our God who gives rain, both the former and the latter, in its season; who preserves to us the appointed weeks of the harvest’.²⁵ Your iniquities have turned away these things, and your sins have withheld good from you.²⁶ For among My people are found wicked men. They watch, as fowlers lie in wait. They set a trap. They catch men.²⁷ As a cage is full of birds, so are their houses full of deceit. Therefore they became great and grew rich.²⁸ They have grown fat. They shine; yes, they excel in deeds of wickedness. They don’t plead the cause, the cause of the fatherless, that they may prosper; and they don’t judge the right of the needy.²⁹ Shall I not punish for these things? says Yahweh. Shall not My soul be avenged on such a nation as this?³⁰ An astonishing and horrible thing has happened in the land.³¹ The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests rule by their own authority; and My people love to have it so. What will you do in the end of it?

CHAPTER 6 Ju1. 16

A Warning for the People

Flee for safety, you children of Benjamin, out of the midst of Jerusalem, blow the trumpet in Tekoa and raise up a signal on Beth Hacherem; for evil looks forth from the north, and a great destruction.² The comely and delicate one, the daughter of Zion, will I cut off.³ Shepherds with their flocks shall come to her; they shall pitch their tents against her all around; they shall feed each one in his place.⁴ Prepare war against her; arise, and let us go up at noon. Woe to us! For the day declines, for the shadows of the evening are stretched out.⁵ Arise, and let us go up by night, and let us destroy her palaces.⁶ For Yahweh of Armies said, Cut down trees, and cast up a mound against Jerusalem: this is the city to be visited; she is wholly oppression in the midst of her.⁷ As a well casts forth its waters, so she casts forth her wickedness: violence and destruction is heard in her; before Me continually is grief and woundedness.⁸ Be instructed, Jerusalem, lest My soul depart from

6:8 Here and in Ez. 23:18, God’s soul “departed” from His people – but the same word is translated to hang / crucify (Num. 25:4; 2 Sam. 21:6,9,13). It’s as if God was crucified in His pain for Israel. And in the death of His Son He went through that pain. And so never, ever, ever... can we nor Israel complain that our pain is greater than God’s. Never. The pain of God at Israel’s sin leads Him to exclaim (almost in the language of piercing and crucifixion): “Before Me continually is grief and woundedness” (Jer. 6:7). We can wound God by our sin, so sensitive is He to us. In the end, we read that God’s “soul” departed from them, because He “rejected” them (:30). This is the same language used about Saul – God rejected him, and so His spirit departed from him (1 Sam. 15:23; 16:14). The implication was that God’s very soul / spirit is “with” us, and therefore He can be so terribly wounded by us in His heart by the rebellions of those in covenant relationship with Him. For His heart / soul / spirit is *so* close to us His beloved people.

you; lest I make you a desolation, a land not inhabited. ⁹ Thus says Yahweh of Armies, They shall thoroughly glean the remnant of Israel like a vine. Turn again your hand as a grape gatherer into the baskets. ¹⁰ To whom shall I speak and testify, that they may hear? Behold, their ear is uncircumcised, and they can't listen. Behold, the word of Yahweh has become a reproach to them. They have no delight in it. ¹¹ Therefore I am full of the wrath of Yahweh. I am weary with holding in. Pour it out on the youths in the street, and on the assembly of young men together; for even the husband with the wife shall be taken, the aged with him who is full of days. ¹² Their houses shall be turned to others, their fields and their wives together; for I will stretch out My hand on the inhabitants of the land, says Yahweh. ¹³ For from their least even to their greatest, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. ¹⁴ They have healed also the hurt of My people superficially, saying, ‘Peace, peace!’

when there is no peace. ¹⁵ Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; at the time that I visit them, they shall be cast down, says Yahweh. ¹⁶ Thus says Yahweh, Stand in the ways and see, and ask for the old paths, ‘Where is the good way?’ and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But they said, ‘We will not walk in it’. ¹⁷ I set watchmen over you saying, ‘Listen to the sound of the trumpet!’. But they said, ‘We will not listen!’. ¹⁸ Therefore hear, you nations, and know, congregation, what is among them. ¹⁹ Hear, earth! Behold, I will bring evil on this people, even the fruit of their thoughts, because they have not listened to My words; and as for My law, they have rejected it. ²⁰ To what purpose comes there to Me frankincense from Sheba, and the sweet cane from a far country? your burnt offerings are not acceptable, nor your sacrifices pleasing to Me. ²¹ Therefore thus says Yahweh,

6:11 We may assume that it is the leaders of a corrupt society, the opinion formers, who should be punished. But God seems to emphasize here that it's the apparently innocent members of society also who shall be punished – the children and the wives of the men who were the decision makers. The modern liberal mindset struggles with this kind of thing. But the picture is all the same of God holding an entire society culpable to judgment, as He did in punishing Egypt. It's not that the individual doesn't matter to God, nor that the righteous must perish with the wicked; but rather than the apparently insignificant individuals have more significance than we may imagine. Passive support of a corrupt regime is sinful and culpable for judgment; for holocausts happen when good people do nothing. There is in this sense no such person as the innocent bystander.

6:20 Israel weren't atheists, and they still sacrificed to Yahweh; but Jeremiah makes it clear that external religion and mere intellectual assent isn't enough. Effectively they had rejected Him for other gods.

Behold, I will lay stumbling blocks before this people. The fathers and the sons together shall stumble against them. The neighbour and his friend shall perish.

Invasion from the North

22 Thus says Yahweh, Behold, a people comes from the north country. A great nation shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth. 23 They take hold of bow and spear. They are cruel, and have no mercy. Their voice roars like the sea, and they ride on horses, each one set in array, as a man to the battle, against you, daughter of Zion. 24 We have heard its report; our hands become feeble: anguish has taken hold of us, pains as of a woman in labour. 25 Don't go forth into the field, nor walk by the way; for the sword of the enemy and terror are on every side. 26 Daughter of My people, clothe yourself with sackcloth, and wallow in ashes! Mourn, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation; for the destroyer shall suddenly come upon us. 27 I have made you a tester of met-

als and a fortress among My people; that you may know and try their way. 28 They are all grievous rebels, going about with slanders; they are brass and iron: they all of them deal corruptly. 29 The bellows blow fiercely; the lead is consumed of the fire: in vain do they go on refining; for the wicked are not plucked away. 30 Men will call them rejected silver, because Yahweh has rejected them.

CHAPTER 7 Ju1. 17

Jeremiah Preaches at the Temple Gate

The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying, 2 Stand in the gate of Yahweh's house and proclaim there this word and say, 'Hear the word of Yahweh, all you of Judah, who enter in at these gates to worship Yahweh. 3 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will cause you to dwell in this place. 4 Don't trust in lying words by saying, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple, Yahweh's temple, are these. 5 For if you thoroughly amend your

6:21 I will lay stumbling blocks – There is a downward as well as an upward spiral in spiritual life; God at times deceives people so that they believe a lie, because they don't love truth (2 Thess. 2:11). Note that it is a serious sin for *us* to be stumbling blocks to others; but God can morally do what we can't. What *He* does at times, e.g. slaying the wicked, doesn't always mean that *we* can do the same.

6:23 Against you, daughter of Zion – Yahweh was Israel's God, and Zion, the temple built on Mount Zion, was His dwelling place. The pagan gods were intended to keep their temples and people safe from invaders; but the true God was quite different. He sent enemies against His own house to destroy it. The people of Judah would've had the same struggle to understand Him as those today who expect only good from their God.

6:26, 27 Jeremiah was so merged with God that it's hard to work out to whom the pronouns ["He", "My"] refer – to God or Jeremiah. "Come upon *us*" may reflect how even in punishing His people for their sin, God was united with them.

ways and your doings; if you thoroughly execute justice between a man and his neighbour; ⁶ if you don't oppress the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, and don't shed innocent blood in this place, neither walk after other gods to your own hurt: ⁷ then will I cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, from of old even for evermore. ⁸ Behold, you trust in lying words, that can't profit. ⁹ Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, burn incense to Baal and walk after other gods that you have not known, ¹⁰ and come and stand before Me in this house, which is called by My name, and say, We are saved; so that you may do all these abominations? ¹¹ Is this house, which is called by My name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says

Yahweh. ¹² But go now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I caused My name to dwell at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. ¹³ Now, because you have done all these works, says Yahweh, and I spoke to you, rising up early and speaking, but you didn't hear; and I called you, but you didn't answer: ¹⁴ therefore thus will I do to the house which is called by My name, in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I did to Shiloh. ¹⁵ I will cast you out of My sight, as I have cast out all your brothers, even the whole seed of Ephraim.

The People's Disobedience

¹⁶ Therefore don't pray for this people, neither lift up a cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to Me; for I will not hear you.

7:10 The false ‘once saved always saved’ mentality leads to this kind of moral slackness. Only by enduring to the end will we be saved (Mt. 10:22).

7:13 *Rising up early* – Before the days of alarm clocks, rising before dawn required a great conscious mental effort. The words of the prophets weren't effortlessly given by God and mindlessly relayed by them. They involved real conscious expenditure of effort by both God and the prophets.

7:16 *Don't pray for this people* – Only once Israel had passed a certain level of sinfulness was Jeremiah told to cease prayer for them. Until that point, God seems to have been willing to read Jeremiah's prayer for them as their prayer (his “cry” was seen as theirs). And Ez. 14:14,18 imply the same – Noah, Daniel and Job could have delivered Israel up to a certain point, but they were *so* hardened in sin at Ezekiel's time that even those men wouldn't have saved a nation which, for a lower level of sin as it were, they could otherwise have saved. Jeremiah did however pray for his people even after this command; He knew God well enough to know that He is open to reason. At times, God reveals His intentions regarding Israel, but then the prophets make a case against this and are heard. This seems to be almost a pattern with God – to devise His purpose, and then in the ‘gap’ until its fulfilment, be open to the persuasion of His people to change or amend those plans (Am. 3:7). It's as if He reveals His plans to the prophets *so that* they can then comment upon them in prayer. But in this case, God tells Jeremiah *not* to pray to Him to change His stated plans against Israel (cp. 11:14; 14:11; 15:1), as He

¹⁷ Don't you see what they do in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem? ¹⁸ The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead the dough, to make cakes to the queen of the sky, and to pour out drink offerings to other gods, that they may provoke Me to anger. ¹⁹ Do they provoke Me to anger? says Yahweh. Don't they provoke themselves, to the confusion of their own faces? ²⁰ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, My anger and My wrath shall be poured out on this place, on man, and on animal, and on the trees of the field, and on the fruit of the ground; and it shall burn, and shall not be quenched. ²¹ Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Add your burnt offerings to your sacrifices, and eat meat. ²² For I didn't speak to your fathers, nor command them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices: ²³ but this thing I commanded them, saying, Listen to My voice, and I will be Your God, and you shall be My people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you. ²⁴ But they didn't listen nor turn their ear, but

walked in their own counsels and in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward, and not forward. ²⁵ Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have sent to you all My servants the prophets, daily rising up early and sending them: ²⁶ yet they didn't listen to Me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff: they did worse than their fathers. ²⁷ You shall speak all these words to them; but they will not listen to you: you shall also call to them; but they will not answer you. ²⁸ You shall tell them, This is the nation that has not listened to the voice of Yahweh their God, nor received instruction: truth is perished, and is cut off from their mouth.

The Sinful Deeds of the People of Judah

²⁹ Cut off your hair and throw it away, and take up a lamentation on the bare heights; for Yahweh has rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath. ³⁰ For the children of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight, says Yahweh: they have set their abominations in the house which is called by My name, to defile

had asked Moses to ‘leave Me alone’ and not try to persuade Him to change His mind (Ex. 32:10). He didn’t want, in these cases, His stated plans to be interrupted by the appeals of His people to change them. Interestingly, in both these examples, Moses and Jeremiah know God well enough, the relationship was intimate enough, for them to *still* speak with Him – and change His mind. Those who’ve prayed to God in cases of terminal illness [and countless other situations] will have sensed this ‘battle’, this ‘struggle’ almost, between God and His friends, His covenant people, and the element of ‘persuasion’ which there is going on *both* ways in the dialogue between God and ourselves. The simple fact that God really can change – there are over 40 references to His ‘relenting’ in Scripture – is vital to understand; for this is the basis of the prayer that changes things, that as it were wrestles with God.

it.³¹ They have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I didn't command, nor did it come into My mind.³² Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that it shall no more be called Topheth, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of Slaughter: for they shall bury in Topheth, until there is no place to bury.³³ The dead bodies of this people shall be food for the birds of the sky and for the animals of the earth; and none shall frighten them away.³⁴ Then will I cause to cease from the cities of Judah and from the streets of Jerusalem, the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride; for the land shall become a waste.

CHAPTER 8 Ju1. 18

At that time, says Yahweh, they shall bring out the bones of the kings of Judah, and the bones of his princes, and the bones of the priests, and the bones of the prophets, and

the bones of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, out of their graves;² and they shall spread them before the sun, the moon and all the army of the sky which they have loved, and which they have served, and after which they have walked, and which they have sought, and which they have worshipped: they shall not be gathered, nor be buried, they shall be for dung on the surface of the earth.³ Death shall be chosen rather than life by all the residue that remain of this evil family, that remain in all the places where I have driven them, says Yahweh of Armies.

False Wisdom

4 Moreover you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh: Shall men fall, and not rise up again? Shall one turn the wrong way, and not return?⁵ Why then is this people of Jerusalem sliding back by a perpetual backsliding? They hold fast deceit, they refuse to return.⁶ I listened and heard, but they didn't speak aright: no man repents him of his wickedness, saying, What have I done? Each one turns

8:4 Shall one turn the wrong way, and not return? – We all know how when we miss the way in finding an unfamiliar address, there's a tendency to keep on going along the wrong road – because turning back is so psychologically difficult. Pride often stops us turning back; we were so convinced we were right, and what will people think as they see us retracing our steps... And this is the image that God uses here – to appeal to Israel, and ourselves, not to foolishly ‘backslide’, keep on turning away from Him – just because that's the course we're set upon and we lack humility. Pride is the greatest barrier to repentance; pride is indeed the essence of sin.

8:4-7 See on 5:7.

8:5 The Hebrew word for “sliding back” is that translated “return”. The image is of a man on a muddy slope; he slides back either into sin, or into the way of the Lord. We must ‘slide’ one way or the other; every micro decision which makes up the stream of daily life is confirmed by God one way or the other. We are never passive in our spiritual path; we are either sliding back, or returning nearer to the Lord.

to his course, as a horse that rushes headlong in the battle. ⁷ Yes, the stork in the sky knows her appointed times; and the turtle-dove and the swallow and the crane observe the time of their coming; but My people don't know Yahweh's law. ⁸ How do you say, We are wise, and the law of Yahweh is with us? But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has worked falsely. ⁹ The wise men are disappointed, they are dismayed and taken: behold, they have rejected the word of Yahweh; and what kind of wisdom is in them? ¹⁰ Therefore will I give their wives to others, and their fields to those who shall possess them: for each one from the least even to the greatest is given to covetousness; from the prophet even to the priest each one deals falsely. ¹¹ They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. ¹² Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore shall they fall among those who fall; in the time of their visitation they shall be cast down, says Yahweh. ¹³ I will utterly consume them, says Yahweh: no grapes shall be on the vine, nor figs on the fig tree, and the leaf

shall fade; and the things that I have given them shall pass away from them. ¹⁴ Why do we sit still? Assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the fortified cities, and let us be silent there; for Yahweh our God has put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against Yahweh. ¹⁵ We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of healing, and behold, dismay! ¹⁶ The snorting of his horses is heard from Dan: at the sound of the neighing of his strong ones the whole land trembles; for they have come, and have devoured the land and all that is in it; the city and those who dwell therein. ¹⁷ For, behold, I will send serpents, adders, among you, which will not be charmed; and they shall bite you, says Yahweh.

Jeremiah Mourns for His People

¹⁸ Oh that I could comfort myself against sorrow! My heart is faint within me. ¹⁹ Behold, the voice of the cry of the daughter of my people from a land that is very far off: Isn't Yahweh in Zion? Isn't her King in her? Why have they provoked Me to anger with their engraved images, and with foreign vanities? ²⁰ The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved. ²¹ For the hurt

8:7 *But My people don't know Yahweh's law* – In the context, God is amazed that Israel won't return – because usually there is a pattern of repentance in people, and even the birds return from where they migrated to. We expect to read ‘But My people don't return to Me’; instead we read that they don't know Yahweh's law. The impact of God's word, our sensitive Bible reading, should be that we return / repent.

8:11 Peace often refers to peace with God. One of the worst sins we can commit is to tell others that their sin is not sin and that they can have peace with God about it.

8:21, 22 These could be Jeremiah's words, or Yahweh's; Jeremiah's worldview

of the daughter of my people am I hurt: I mourn; dismay has taken hold on me. ²² Is there no balm in Gilead? is there no physician there? Why then isn't the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

CHAPTER 9 Ju1. 19

Oh that my head were waters, and my eyes a spring of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people! ² Oh that I had in the wilderness a lodging place of wayfaring men; that I might leave my people, and go from them! For they are all adulterers, an assembly of treacherous men.

God's Reply to Jeremiah

³ They bend their tongue, as their bow, for falsehood; and they are grown strong in the land, but not for truth: for they proceed from evil to

merged very intensely with God's, just as ours should. They felt for Judah even when Judah were suffering "hurt" for their sins, just as parents share the hurt of the punishment they may give their child.

9:1, 2 Jeremiah's feelings here are contradictory. On the one hand, he so loved the wayward children of God that he wished he could find more tears to weep for them; on the other, he wished to go right away from them and live in total isolation, like a lonely shepherd who has a booth in which he sleeps in the desert. All God's true servants will have had these contradictory feelings; Jeremiah sets the example of ultimately sticking with God's people, indeed at the end of the book we find him going down to Egypt with them, despite God warning them not to – when he could have had a respectable retirement in the wealth of Babylon. But we can too easily assume that these are the thoughts of Jeremiah. The references to "my people" in the passage point us toward God as the person expressing these feelings. And then in :3 we have the speaker defined as God. So these were also *God's* thoughts. He wished He had human tear ducts to weep with... this was how He felt for them.

9:7 Jeremiah was told to "know and try" Israel's way, just as God said that He did (Jer. 6:27 cp. 9:7; 17:10). Our 'judging' of others, as well as ourselves, must be according to God's judgments of them.

9:9 *Such a nation as this* – Our world's devaluing and misunderstanding of sin has likely affected all of us. We see the rich abusing the poor, manipulation of all sorts going on, petty injustices, hypocrisy in the ecclesia, falsehood, cheating in business,

evil, and they don't know Me, says Yahweh. ⁴ Beware everyone of his neighbour, and don't trust in any brother; for every brother will utterly supplant, and every neighbour will go about with slanders. ⁵ They will deceive each one his neighbour and will not speak the truth: they have taught their tongue to speak lies; they weary themselves to commit iniquity. ⁶ Your habitation is in the midst of deceit; through deceit they refuse to know Me, says Yahweh. ⁷ Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, I will melt them, and try them; for how should I deal with the daughter of My people? ⁸ Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks deceit: one speaks peaceably to his neighbour with his mouth, but in his heart he lays wait for him. ⁹ Shall I not visit them for these things, says Yahweh; shall not My soul be

avenged on such a nation as this? 10 For the mountains will I take up a weeping and wailing, and for the pastures of the wilderness a lamentation, because they are burned up, so that none passes through; neither can men hear the voice of the livestock; both the birds of the sky and the animals are fled, they are gone. 11 I will make Jerusalem heaps, a dwelling place of jackals; and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant. 12 Who is the wise man, that may understand this? Who is he to whom the mouth of Yahweh has spoken, that he may declare it? Why is the land perished and burned up like a wilderness, so that none passes through? 13 Yahweh says, Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, neither walked therein, 14 but have walked after the stub-

bornness of their own heart, and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them; 15 therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. 16 I will scatter them also among the nations, whom neither they nor their fathers have known; and I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them.

The Wailing Women Summoned

17 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Consider, and call for the mourning women, that they may come; and send for the skilful women, that they may come: 18 and let them make haste, and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run down with tears, and our eyelids gush out with waters. 19 For a voice of wailing is

white lies, unkindness to ones' brethren... and we shrug and think that it's just normal, part of life as it is. And yet for the prophets, these things were a catastrophe. Saying one thing to someone whilst feeling differently about them in the heart was the reason for God passionately wishing to take vengeance "on a nation such as this" – note that the whole nation are counted as guilty, in that society just shrugged at hypocritical words. What to us are the daily minor sins and injustices of life are to God issues of cosmic proportion. Nobody in our current society would consider what you *think* to be a criminal act; and nobody did in early Israel, either. But time and again, Jeremiah passionately calls down judgment for "evil thoughts" and "evil hearts" (3:17; 4:14; 7:24; 9:14; 11:8; 13:10; 14:14; 16:12; 18:12; 23:17).

9:18 *A wailing for us* – As God had lamented that the destroyer would come "upon us" (6:22,26). The "us" is God and Israel. The tragedy is awful, beyond words. All commentary is bathos. His love is wondrous. God delicately speaks as if He is married to Israel, and that even in their sufferings, He would suffer with them, as a husband suffers with his wife. "The destroyer will come upon us" even sounds as if God let Himself in a way be 'destroyed' in Israel's destruction; for each of us dies a little in the death of those we love. The idea of God being destroyed in the destruction of His people may be the basis of the descriptions of Zion as being left widowed (Lam. 1:1; Is. 54:1-8). We ask the question – if she was a widow, who died? Her husband, God, was as it were dead. The very idea of the death of God is awful and obnoxious. But this was and is the depth of God's feelings at His peoples' destruction. This is the almost

heard out of Zion, How are we ruined! We are greatly confounded, because we have forsaken the land, because they have cast down our dwellings. ²⁰ Yet hear the word of Yahweh, you women, and let your ear receive the word of His mouth; and teach your daughters wailing, and each one her neighbour lamentation. ²¹ For death has come up into our windows, it is entered into our palaces; to cut off the children from outside, and the young men from the streets. ²² Speak, Thus says Yahweh, The dead bodies of men shall fall as dung on the open field, and as the handful after the harvester; and none shall gather them. ²³ Thus says Yahweh, Don't let the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, don't let the rich man glory in his riches; ²⁴ but let him who glories glory in this, that he has understanding, and knows Me, that I am Yahweh who exercises loving kindness, justice, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, says Yahweh. ²⁵ Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will punish all those who are circumcised along with the uncircumcised: ²⁶ Egypt, Judah, Edom and the children of Ammon, Moab and all that have the corners of their hair cut off, who dwell in the wilderness; for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in heart.

CHAPTER 10 Jul. 20

Hear the word which Yahweh speaks to you, house of Israel! ² Thus says Yahweh, Don't learn the way of the nations, and don't be dismayed at the signs of the sky; for the nations are dismayed at them. ³ For the customs of the peoples are vanity; for one cuts a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman with the axe. ⁴ They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it not move. ⁵ They are like a palm tree, of turned work, and don't speak: they must be carried, because they can't walk. Don't be afraid of them; for they can't do evil, neither is it in them to do good.

Jeremiah's Praise of God

⁶ There is none like You, Yahweh; You are great, and Your name is great in might. ⁷ Who should not fear You, King of the nations? For it is appropriate for You; because among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their royal estate, there is none like You. ⁸ But they are together primitive and foolish: the instruction of idols! It is but a stock. ⁹ There is silver beaten into plates which is brought from Tarshish, and gold from Uphaz, the work of the artificer and of the hands of the goldsmith; blue and purple for their clothing; they are all the work of skilful men. ¹⁰ But Yahweh is the true God; He is the living

unbelievable extent of God's pain and hurt for His people. Truly did it hurt God more than His children knew to punish them.

10:2 *The signs of the sky* – A reference to astrology. Our lives are totally in God's hands.

God and an everlasting King: at His wrath the earth trembles, and the nations are not able to withstand His indignation. ¹¹ You shall say this to them: The gods that have not made the heavens and the earth, these shall perish from the earth, and from under the heavens. ¹² He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding has He stretched out the heavens: ¹³ when He utters his voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightnings for the rain, and brings forth the wind out of His treasuries. ¹⁴ Every man has become primitive and without knowledge; every goldsmith is disappointed by his engraved image; for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. ¹⁵ They are vanity, a work of delusion: in the time of their visitation they shall perish. ¹⁶ The portion of Jacob is not like these; for He is the former of all things; and Israel is the tribe of His inheritance: Yahweh of Armies is His name.

Coming Destruction

¹⁷ Gather up your wares out of the land, you who live under siege. ¹⁸ For thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will sling out the inhabitants of the

land at this time, and will distress them, that they may feel it. ¹⁹ Woe is me because of my hurt! my wound is grievous: but I said, Truly this is my grief, and I must bear it. ²⁰ My tent is destroyed, and all my cords are broken: my children are gone forth from me, and they are no more: there is none to spread my tent any more, and to set up my curtains. ²¹ For the shepherds are become primitive, and have not inquired of Yahweh: therefore they have not prospered, and all their flocks are scattered. ²² The voice of proclamation, behold, it comes, and a great commotion out of the north country, to make the cities of Judah a desolation, a dwelling place of jackals. ²³ Yahweh, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man who walks to direct his steps. ²⁴ Yahweh, correct me, but in measure: not in Your anger, lest you bring me to nothing. ²⁵ Pour out Your wrath on the nations that don't know You, and on the families that don't call on Your name: for they have devoured Jacob, yes, they have devoured him and consumed him, and have laid waste his habitation.

CHAPTER 11 Jul. 21

The Covenant of God

The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying, ² Hear the

10:19, 20 This interjection by Jeremiah could equally be from God; both of them identified with the hurt and pain of those who were to be punished. We can understand why God says He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked – He finds it simply so painful (Ez. 18:32; 33:11). This alone is reason to reject the unBiblical myth of God allowing eternal punishment of the wicked in ‘hell’.

10:23 Wisdom must come from outside a person, from God’s word. There is no natural spiritual wisdom within human beings.

words of this covenant, and speak to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem; ³ and say to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel: Cursed is the man who doesn't hear the words of this covenant, ⁴ which I commanded your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the iron furnace saying, Obey My voice, and do them, according to all which I command you: so you shall be My people, and I will be your God; ⁵ that I may establish the oath which I swore to your fathers, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, as at this day. Then answered I and said, Amen, Yahweh. ⁶ Yahweh said to me, Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem saying, Hear the words of this covenant, and do them. ⁷ For I earnestly protested to your fathers in the day that I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, even to this day, rising early and protesting saying, Obey My voice. ⁸ Yet they didn't obey, nor turn their ear, but walked each one in the stubbornness of their

evil heart: therefore I brought on them all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they didn't do them. ⁹ Yahweh said to me, A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ¹⁰ They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, who refused to hear My words; and they are gone after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken My covenant which I made with their fathers. ¹¹ Therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will bring evil on them, which they shall not be able to escape; and they shall cry to Me, but I will not listen to them. ¹² Then shall the cities of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem go and cry to the gods to which they offer incense: but they will not save them at all in the time of their trouble. ¹³ For according to the number of your cities are your gods, Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have you set up altars to the shameful thing, even altars to burn incense to Baal. ¹⁴ Therefore don't

11:2 At times of Israel's apostasy, God reconfirmed Israel's covenant relationship with Him. Note how God calls them "My beloved" even whilst listing their sins and His future rejection of them (:15). His grace is so counter-instinctive. The height of the demand, the extent of the implication of being in covenant with God ought to preclude the possibility of worshipping anything else. The covenant we have entered has constant and binding claims upon our loyalty (Dt. 29:14-18). By reminding them of the nature of their covenant relationship at a time of their moral weakness, they were being led to realize that the life of sin was not for them. And so there should be a like awareness in us when at least weekly we are reminded of our covenant bond in the communion service, celebrating the blood of the covenant made with us.

11:13 Each street of Jerusalem was named after an idol, just as was the case in Babylon – and thus Jerusalem shared Babylon's judgment. Zion lost her children and also her husband whilst still a young woman (Is. 49:21; 54:6), just as Babylon would (Is. 47:9). If we act like Babylon, we will share her judgments (Rev. 18:4).

pray for this people, neither lift up cry nor prayer for them; for I will not hear them in the time that they cry to Me because of their trouble.¹⁵ What has My beloved to do in My house, since she has worked lewdness with many, and the holy flesh is passed from you? When you do evil, then you rejoice.¹⁶ Yahweh called your name, A green olive tree, beautiful with goodly fruit: with the noise of a great tumult he has kindled fire on it, and its branches are broken.¹⁷ For Yahweh of Armies, who planted you, has pronounced evil against you, because of the evil of the house of Israel and of the house of Judah, which they have worked for themselves in

provoking Me to anger by offering incense to Baal.¹⁸ Yahweh gave me knowledge of it, and I knew it: then You showed me their evil deeds.

A Plot to Kill Jeremiah

¹⁹ But I was like a gentle lamb that is led to the slaughter; and I didn't know that they had devised devices against me saying, Let us destroy the tree with its fruit, and let us cut him off from the land of the living, that his name may be no more remembered.²⁰ But, Yahweh of Armies, who judges righteously, who tests the heart and the mind, I shall see Your vengeance on them; for to You have I opened up my cause.²¹ Therefore

11:17 In provoking Me to anger – This is Yahweh speaking, but earlier in the verse it's Jeremiah speaking. So often in the prophets, the pronouns change quickly. One moment we have God speaking, the next, the prophet is responding in agreement, appealing to his people, or echoing the message in his own words. So in Is. 1:2,3 we have the direct words of God, ending with “They have rebelled against me... my people does not understand”. And then in Is. 1:4 we have Isaiah echoing back those thoughts of God: “They have forsaken the Lord”. Prophecies begin with God speaking in the third person, and end with Him speaking in the first person; and *vice versa*. In all these examples, we see God merging with His prophet, and *vice versa* (Am. 3:1; Is. 1:2-4; 3:1,4; Is. 5:1,2 cp. 3-6; 7; 10:12; 11:3,9; 22:17,19,20; 53:10,12; Is. 61:6,8; Jer. 4:1,2,21,22; 8:13,14; 11:17; 9:1,2; 23:9,11; Nah. 1:12,13). However, there was more than an echo going on between God and the prophet. There was a kind of dialectic in the Divine-human encounter. God is influenced by man, as well as man by God. This same mutuality between God and man is possible for us too (Rev. 19:10).

11:18 You showed me their evil deeds – Ezekiel was likewise shown “what the house of Israel is doing in the dark” (Ez. 8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity to the amount of sin around them must've been so hard, as it is for us. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would've been awful. Hence the prophets had to be psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world – hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and “iron pillar” to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn't be “dismayed at [the] looks” of those who watched them with anger and consternation (1:18; 15:20; Ez. 2:4-6; 3:8,9,27). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too; for the spirit of the prophets is what our testimony to Jesus is all about (Rev. 19:10).

thus says Yahweh concerning the men of Anathoth, who seek your life saying, You shall not prophesy in the name of Yahweh, that you not die by our hand; ²² therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, I will punish them: the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine; ²³ and there shall be no remnant to them: for I will bring evil on the men of Anathoth, even the year of their visitation.

CHAPTER 12 Jul. 22

Jeremiah Reasons With God

You are righteous, Yahweh, when I contend with You; yet I would reason the cause with You: Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why are all they at ease who deal very treacherously? ² You have planted them, yes, they have taken root; they grow, yes, they bring forth fruit: You are near in their mouth, and far from their heart. ³ But You, Yahweh, know me; You see me, and try my heart towards You: pull them out like sheep for the slaughter, and prepare them for the day of slaughter. ⁴ How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of the whole country wither? for the wickedness of those who dwell therein, the animals are consumed,

and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our latter end. ⁵ If you have run with the footmen, and they have wearied you, then how can you contend with horses? and though in a land of peace you are secure, yet how will you do in the swelling of the Jordan? ⁶ For even your brothers, and the house of your father, even they have dealt treacherously with you; even they have cried aloud after you: don't believe them, though they speak beautiful words to you.

God Rejects His People

⁷ I have forsaken My house, I have cast off My heritage; I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies. ⁸ My heritage has become to Me as a lion in the forest: she has uttered her voice against Me; therefore I have hated her. ⁹ Is My heritage to Me as a speckled bird of prey? Are the birds of prey against her all around? Go, assemble all the animals of the field, bring them to devour. ¹⁰ Many shepherds have destroyed My vineyard, they have trodden My portion under foot, they have made My pleasant portion a desolate wilderness. ¹¹ They have made it a desolation; it mourns to Me, being desolate; the

12:1 Any doubts we have about the justice and ethics of God's ways must begin with the acceptance that God is right; therefore the difficulties we have with these things are a result of our limitations rather than any ultimate fault with Him.

12:7 *I have given the dearly beloved of My soul into the hand of her enemies* – This is how difficult it was for God to punish His beloved people. He doesn't do it from spite nor from the pleasure of retribution. The way God calls Judah His “beloved” (also 11:15; Is. 5:1) at the time of punishing her is reflected by the way in which Jesus calls Judas “friend” in the very moment of betrayal (Mt. 26:50). In wrath He remembers mercy (Hab. 3:2).

whole land is made desolate, because no man lays it to heart.¹² Destroyers have come on all the bare heights in the wilderness; for the sword of Yahweh devours from the one end of the land even to the other end of the land: no flesh has peace.¹³ They have sown wheat, and have reaped thorns; they have put themselves to pain, and profit nothing: and you shall be ashamed of your fruits, because of the fierce anger of Yahweh.

God's Promise to Other Nations

¹⁴ Thus says Yahweh against all My evil neighbours, who touch the inheritance which I have caused My people Israel to inherit: behold, I will pluck them up from off their land, and will pluck up the house of Judah from among them.¹⁵ It shall happen, after that I have plucked them up, I will return and have compassion on them; and I will bring them again, every man to his inheritance, and every man to his land.¹⁶ It shall happen, if they will diligently learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name, As Yahweh lives; even as they taught My people to swear by Baal; then shall they be built up in the midst of My people.¹⁷ But if

they will not hear, then will I pluck up that nation, plucking up and destroying it, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 13 Jul. 23

Jeremiah's Linen Belt

Thus said Yahweh to me, Go, and buy yourself a linen belt, and put it on your waist, and don't put it in water.² So I bought a belt according to the word of Yahweh, and put it on my waist.³ The word of Yahweh came to me the second time saying,⁴ Take the belt that you have bought, which is on your waist, and arise, go to the Euphrates, and hide it there in a cleft of the rock.⁵ So I went and hid it by the Euphrates, as Yahweh commanded me.⁶ It happened after many days that Yahweh said to me, Arise, go to the Euphrates and take the belt from there, which I commanded you to hide there.⁷ Then I went to the Euphrates and dug, and took the belt from the place where I had hidden it; and behold, the belt was ruined, it was unfit for use.⁸ Then the word of Yahweh came to me saying,⁹ Thus says Yahweh, In this way I will ruin the pride of Judah, and the great pride of Jerusalem.¹⁰ This evil people, who refuse

12:14-17 Here we have another potential prophecy – Judah could have completely returned from captivity in Babylon, and their captors could have accepted Israel's God and returned with them to a blessed life in a restored kingdom. But neither the Jews nor Babylonians / Persians really wanted it.

13:7 The whole point of Judah's exile in Babylon was to make them “ruined, unfit for use” like the cloth which Jeremiah buried by Euphrates (Jer. 13:7). And yet the second half of Isaiah is full of expressions of God's desire to use Israel after their experience in Babylon as His witness to the nations. Israel's preparation for their mission was through being made “unfit for use”. And so God prepares His missionaries and ambassadors today likewise.

to hear My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their heart, and are gone after other gods to serve them and to worship them, shall even be as this belt, which is profitable for nothing.¹¹ For as the belt clings to the waist of a man, so have I caused to cling to Me the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah, says Yahweh; that they may be to Me for a people, and for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory: but they would not hear.

Wine Jars

¹² Therefore you shall speak to them this word: Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine: and they shall tell you, Do we not certainly know that every bottle shall be filled with wine?¹³ Then you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will fill all the inhabitants of this land, even the kings who sit on David's throne, and the priests, and the prophets, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, with drunkenness.¹⁴ I will dash them one against another, even the fathers and the sons together, says Yahweh: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have compassion, that I should not destroy them.

The Pride and Shame of Jerusalem

¹⁵ Hear, and give ear; don't be proud; for Yahweh has spoken.¹⁶ Give glory to Yahweh your God, before He causes darkness, and before your feet stumble on the dark mountains, and, while you look for light, He turns it into the shadow of death, and makes it gross darkness.¹⁷ But if you will not hear it, my soul shall weep in secret for your pride; and my eye shall weep bitterly, and run down with tears, because Yahweh's flock is taken captive.¹⁸ Say to the king and to the queen mother, Humble yourselves, sit down; for your headdresses have come down, even the crown of your glory.¹⁹ The cities of the South are shut up, and there is none to open them: Judah is carried away captive, all of it; it is wholly carried away captive.²⁰ Lift up your eyes, and see those who come from the north: where is the flock that was given you, your beautiful flock?²¹ What will you say, when He shall punish you? You have provoked them to be captains and rulers over you. Shall not sorrows take hold of you, as of a woman in travail?²² If you say in your heart, Why are these things come on me? For the greatness of your iniquity

13:15-17 For all the issues over which the prophets could have condemned people, pride was high on their list. “I hate the pride of Jacob”, Amos cried out in dismay (Am. 6:8). Jeremiah wept in secret, his eyes running with tears, “for your pride”. Do we weep privately, just to ourselves, because people don’t respond to our message? Only those who have a heart that bleeds will do so. We can’t have an indifferent, take-it-or-leave-it attitude.

13:22, 26 The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel as His wife are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (Hosea 2), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (Ez. 16,23), and here, she is to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed. Did it all have to end in such

are your skirts lifted up, and your private parts suffer violence. ²³ Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may you also do good, who are accustomed to do evil. ²⁴ Therefore will I scatter them, as the stubble that passes away, by the wind of the wilderness. ²⁵ This is your lot, the portion measured to you from Me, says Yahweh; because you have forgotten Me, and trusted in falsehood. ²⁶ Therefore will I also lift your skirts up above your face, and your shame shall appear. ²⁷ I have seen your abominations, even your adulteries, and your neighing,

the lewdness of your prostitution, on the hills in the field. Woe to you, Jerusalem! You will not be made clean; how long shall it yet be?

CHAPTER 14 Ju1. 24

The Drought

The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah concerning the drought. ² Judah mourns, and its gates languish, they sit in black on the ground; and the cry of Jerusalem is gone up. ³ Their nobles send their little ones to the waters: they come to the cisterns, and find no water; they return with their vessels empty; they

brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism. God paints Himself as acting with the anger of a very angry husband, whose anger is rooted in the profoundness of His love for His wife. There is a dark side to intimacy. It's why families, lovers, both spiritual and natural, experience the heights of both love and frustration / anger with each other. With a love like God's, it's inevitable that there is a strong element of jealousy and potential hurt over us. It has to be so. And yet the story of the prophets never ends with the angry judgment – amazingly, given this level of anger and judgment / retribution, there is always the passionate appeal for Israel to return, to recover love, romance and intimacy in the relationship. But the shocking sexual language and imagery of the prophets was in order to help Israel see that this was how far they had outraged God. It was and is a rhetoric that cannot be forgotten, shrugged off, re-interpreted. The rhetoric pushes relentlessly for a response in our consciences. Just as for a woman to have her skirt ripped above her head and her nakedness displayed was ultimately humiliating for her, so Israel had humiliated God by their sin (13:25-27); their actions were just as shocking and obscene. And yet we so minimize sin. Just a bit of injustice, a little touch of selfishness, a moment of hypocrisy... but all this is obscene treatment of our God. We all know the downward spiral into sin... how once we start, we can't stop. But when Israel were like this, they are likened to a female camel in insatiable heat (2:23-25; 5:7-9). We'd just rather not read that, or retranslate the words to make it seem somehow different. But we're dealing with serious matters here. Sin is serious to God.

are disappointed and confounded, and cover their heads. ⁴ Because of the ground which is cracked, because no rain has been in the land, the ploughmen are disappointed, they cover their heads. ⁵ Yes, the hind also in the field calves and forsakes her young, because there is no grass. ⁶ The wild donkeys stand on the bare heights, they pant for air like jackals; their eyes fail, because there is no greenery to eat. ⁷ Though our iniquities testify against us, work for Your name's sake, Yahweh; for our backslidings are many; we have sinned against You. ⁸ You hope of Israel, its Saviour in the time of trouble, why should You be as a foreigner in the land, and as a wayfaring man who turns aside to stay for a night? ⁹ Why should You be like a scared man, as a mighty man who can't save? Yet You, Yahweh, are in the midst of us, and we are called by Your name; don't leave us. ¹⁰ Thus says Yahweh to this people, Even so have they loved to wander; they have not refrained their feet: therefore Yahweh does not accept them; now He will remember their iniquity, and visit their sins.

Lying Prophets

11 Yahweh said to me, Don't pray for this people for their good. ¹² When

they fast, I will not hear their cry; and when they offer burnt offering and meal offering, I will not accept them; but I will consume them by the sword, by the famine and by the plague. ¹³ Then I said, Ah, Lord Yahweh! Behold, the prophets tell them, You shall not see the sword, neither shall you have famine; but I will give you assured peace in this place. ¹⁴ Then Yahweh said to me, The prophets prophesy lies in My name; I didn't send them, neither have I commanded them, neither spoke I to them: they prophesy to you a lying vision and divination, a thing of nothing and the deceit of their own heart. ¹⁵ Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning the prophets who prophesy in My name and I didn't send them, yet they say, Sword and famine shall not be in this land: By sword and famine shall those prophets be consumed. ¹⁶ The people to whom they prophesy shall be cast out in the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and the sword; and they shall have none to bury them—them, their wives, nor their sons, nor their daughters: for I will pour their wickedness on them. ¹⁷ You shall say this word to them, Let my eyes run down with tears night and day, and let them not cease; for the virgin daughter of

14:8, 9 God is presented as a tragic figure here, desolated by the loss of His people, left as a mighty man that cannot save, as a wayfaring man wandering through His own deserted land; as Israel wandered amongst the nations (:10), so God as it were wanders too, so identified with them is He. This is how difficult it is for God to punish His people; for He so suffers in their suffering. It is in a sense therefore 'easier' for Him to forgive and save us.

14:17 *The virgin daughter of my people* – Yet Israel are elsewhere in Jeremiah described as a sexually addicted prostitute, and the rape hinted at here is understood in

my people is broken with a great breach, with a very grievous wound. 18 If I go forth into the field, then, behold, the slain with the sword! If I enter into the city, then, behold, those who are sick with famine! For both the prophet and the priest go about in the land, and have no knowledge. 19 Have You utterly rejected Judah? Has Your soul loathed Zion? Why have You struck us, and there is no healing for us? We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of healing, and behold, dismay! 20 We acknowledge, Yahweh, our wickedness, and the iniquity of our fathers; for we have sinned against You. 21 Do not abhor us, for Your name's sake; do not disgrace the throne of Your glory: remember, don't break Your covenant with us. 22 Are there any among the vanities of the nations that can cause rain? or can the sky give showers? Aren't You He, Yahweh our God? Therefore we will wait for You; for You have made all these things.

CHAPTER 15 Ju1. 25

The People Will be Punished

Then Yahweh said to me, Though Moses and Samuel stood before

Me, yet My mind would not be towards this people: cast them out of My sight, and let them go forth. 2 It shall happen, when they tell you, Where shall we go forth? Then you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh: Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for captivity, to captivity.³ I will appoint over them four kinds, says Yahweh: the sword to kill, the dogs to tear, the birds of the sky and the animals of the land, to devour and to destroy. 4 I will cause them to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the land because of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, king of Judah, for that which he did in Jerusalem.⁵ For who will have pity on you, Jerusalem? Or who will bemoan you? Or who will turn aside to ask of your welfare?⁶ You have rejected Me, says Yahweh, you have gone backward: therefore have I stretched out My hand against you and destroyed you; I am weary with relenting.⁷ I have winnowed them with a fan in the gates of the land; I have bereaved them of children, I have destroyed My people; they didn't return from

13:22,26 as the deserved punishment she received from the Babylonians. We have here a reflection of God's own divided mind about His sinful people; on one hand loving them and seeing them as innocent, on the other, recognizing their sin and who they really were.

14:20 *We have sinned* – Again we see Jeremiah's identity with His people, not considering himself somehow uninvolved with their failures.

15:1 The implication is that when an individual or group of God's people have a modicum of spirituality, then one individual like Moses is able to make Him feel positively toward them. The power of third party intercession for others means that we should constantly be in prayer for our brethren. But 'the power of one' works the other way, too; for :4 speaks as if all Judah suffered because of the *sins* of one man.

their ways. ⁸ Their widows are increased to Me above the sand of the seas; I have brought on them against the mother of the young men a destroyer at noonday: I have caused anguish and terrors to fall on her suddenly. ⁹ She who has borne seven languishes; she has given up the spirit; her sun is gone down while it was yet day; she has been disappointed and confounded: and their residue will I deliver to the sword before their enemies, says Yahweh.

Jeremiah Complains to God

10 Woe is me, my mother, that you have borne me a man of strife and a man of contention to the whole land! I have not lent, neither have men lent to me; yet everyone of them curses me. ¹¹ Yahweh said, Most certainly I will strengthen you for good; most

certainly I will cause the enemy to make supplication to you in the time of evil and in the time of affliction. ¹² Can one break iron, even iron from the north, and brass? ¹³ Your substance and your treasures will I give for a spoil without price, and that for all your sins, even in all your borders. ¹⁴ I will make them to pass with your enemies into a land which you don't know; for a fire is kindled in My anger, which shall burn on you. ¹⁵ Yahweh, you know; remember me, and visit me, and avenge me of my persecutors; don't take me away in Your long suffering: know that for Your sake I have suffered reproach. ¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate them; and Your words were to me the joy and the delight of my heart: for I am called by Your name, Yahweh, God of Armies. ¹⁷ I didn't sit in the

15:15 Jeremiah asks for vengeance on his persecutors, and in :18 accuses God of deceiving him. God's response is to ask him to repent of this, so that he can resume his prophetic work: "If you [Jeremiah] return, then I will restore you, and you shall stand before Me [prophetic language]. If you utter what is precious, and not what is base, you shall be as My mouth" (:19). Perhaps Jeremiah had this incident in mind when he commented: "The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against His word" (Lam. 1:18). This indicates that at least in Jeremiah's case, he was not irresistibly carried along by the Spirit in some kind of ecstasy, having no option but to speak God's word. His speaking of God's word required that he shared the essentially loving and gracious spirit / disposition of his God. This incident is also another example of how God's preachers so often don't want to do the work; God tends to use those who are weak and feel inadequate to share His word with others, not the fluent and self-assured.

15:16 Jeremiah had found God's word and eaten it, and as a result, "I am called by Your name" – the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). The word of God was his "joy [and] delight" – two words used four times elsewhere in Jeremiah, and always in the context of the joy of a wedding (7:34; 16:9; 25:10; 33:11). Jeremiah saw his prophetic task as actually a marriage to God, an in-breathing of His word and being, to the point that he could say that he personally was "full of the wrath / passion of God" (6:11). No wonder these prophets felt alone amongst men. They had a relationship with God which others couldn't enter into, which totally affected their lives and beings. The preacher / testifier of Jesus knows something of this spirit of prophecy (Rev. 19:10).

assembly of those who make merry, nor rejoiced; I sat alone because of Your hand; for You have filled me with indignation.¹⁸ Why is my pain perpetual, and my wound incurable, which refuses to be healed? Will You indeed be to me as a deceitful brook, as waters that fail?

God Replies

19 Therefore thus says Yahweh, If you return, then I will restore you, and you shall stand before Me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is base, you shall be as My mouth: they shall return to you, but you shall not return to them.²⁰ I will make you to this people a fortified bronze wall; and they shall fight against you, but they shall not prevail against you; for I am with you to save you and to deliver you, says Yahweh.²¹ I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and I will redeem you out of the hand of the terrible.

CHAPTER 16 Ju1. 26

How Jeremiah Is to Live His Life

The word of Yahweh came also to me saying,² You shall not take

a wife, neither shall you have sons or daughters in this place.³ For thus says Yahweh concerning the sons and concerning the daughters who are born in this place, and concerning their mothers who bore them, and concerning their fathers who became their father in this land:⁴ They shall die grievous deaths: they shall not be lamented, neither shall they be buried; they shall be as dung on the surface of the ground; and they shall be consumed by the sword and by famine; and their dead bodies shall be food for the birds of the sky, and for the animals of the earth.⁵ For thus says Yahweh, Don't enter into the house of mourning, neither go to lament, neither bemoan them; for I have taken away My peace from this people, says Yahweh, even loving kindness and tender mercies.⁶ Both great and small shall die in this land; they shall not be buried, neither shall men lament for them, nor cut themselves, nor make themselves bald for them;⁷ neither shall men break bread for them in mourning, to comfort them for the dead; neither shall men give them the cup of

15:17 Jeremiah “sat alone”. Not only was the prophets’ perspective on human sinfulness so very different to that of their audience. They preached a message which was counter-cultural and attacked the very bases of the assumptions which lay at the core of individual and social life in Israel. They appeared to back Israel’s enemies. They and their message were therefore rejected.

15:19 Jeremiah often makes a play upon the Hebrew word *shub* – it can mean to turn away (from God), and also to ‘turn back’ or repent (e.g. 3:1,7,10,12,14,19,22; 4:1). If Jeremiah and Judah turned in repentance, then God would return / restore them to their land; if they turned away from Him, He would turn them out into the Gentile world. Our lives are a twisting and turning, either to or away from God; and God is waiting to confirm us in those twists and turns.

16:7 The communion meal is in one sense designed to be for our comfort as we mourn the death of Jesus.

consolation to drink for their father or for their mother.⁸ You shall not go into the house of feasting to sit with them, to eat and to drink.⁹ For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will cause to cease out of this place, before your eyes and in your days, the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride.¹⁰ It shall happen, when you shall show this people all these words and they shall tell you, Why has Yahweh pronounced all this great evil against us? Or what is our iniquity? Or what is our sin that we have committed against Yahweh our God?

Exile and Return

¹¹ Then you shall tell them, Because your fathers have forsaken Me, says Yahweh, and have walked after other gods, and have served them, and have worshipped them, and have forsaken Me, and have not kept My law;¹² and you have done evil more than your fathers; for behold, you walk each one after the stubbornness of his evil heart, so that you don't listen to Me:¹³ therefore will

I cast you forth out of this land into the land that you have not known, neither you nor your fathers, where I will not show you favour; and there you shall serve other gods day and night.¹⁴ Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that it shall no more be said, As Yahweh lives, who brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt;¹⁵ but, As Yahweh lives, who brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the countries where He had driven them. I will bring them again into their land that I gave to their fathers.¹⁶ Behold, I will send for many fishermen, says Yahweh, and they shall fish them up; and afterwards I will send for many hunters, and they shall hunt them from every mountain and from every hill and out of the clefts of the rocks.¹⁷ For My eyes are on all their ways; they are not hidden from My face, neither is their iniquity concealed from My eyes.¹⁸ First I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double, because they have polluted My land with the carcasses of their detestable things, and have filled

16:13 The passion and love of God leads Him time and again to apparently contradict Himself. He says that He will cast Judah out of their land, they would go to Babylon and serve other gods there, “where I will not show you favour”. But actually Esther and her people were shown favour there (s.w. Esther 4:8; 8:5). God was gracious [s.w. ‘to show favour’] to those in exile (Is. 30:18,9; Am. 5:15; Mal. 1:9). But Jeremiah goes on to state that God would not ever hide His eyes / face from the iniquity they had committed, i.e. the reason why they were in captivity (:17). But actually He did do just that – He hid His eyes from the sin of Judah and the sin of the exiles (Is. 65:16); the hiding of His face from them was in fact not permanent but for a brief moment (Is. 54:8). God then outlines a plan – He will recompense their sin double, and this would lead them back to Him (:18). But this was to be an unrepeatable, once-for-all program that would “cause them to know My hand... and they shall now that My name is Yahweh” (:21).

My inheritance with their abominations. ¹⁹ Yahweh, my strength, my stronghold and my refuge in the day of affliction, to You shall the nations come from the ends of the land and shall say, Our fathers have inherited nothing but lies, vanity and things in which there is no profit. ²⁰ Shall a man make to himself gods, which yet are no gods? ²¹ Therefore behold, I will cause them to know, this once will I cause them to know My hand and My might; and they shall know that My name is Yahweh.

CHAPTER 17 Ju1. 27

Punishment for Judah

The sin of Judah is written with a pen of iron, and with the point of a diamond: it is engraved on the tablet of their heart, and on the horns of your altars; ² while their children remember their altars and their Asherim by the green trees on the high hills. ³ My mountain in the field, I will give your substance and all your treasures for a spoil, and your high places, because of sin, throughout all your borders. ⁴ You, even of yourself, shall discontinue from your inheritance that I gave you; and I will cause

you to serve your enemies in the land which you don't know: for you have kindled a fire in My anger which shall burn forever. ⁵ Thus says Yahweh: Cursed is the man who trusts in man, and makes flesh his arm, and whose heart departs from Yahweh. ⁶ For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good comes, but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, a salt land and not inhabited. ⁷ Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh, and whose trust Yahweh is. ⁸ For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, who spreads out its roots by the river, and shall not fear when heat comes, but its leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit. ⁹ The heart is deceitful above all things, and it is exceedingly corrupt: who can know it? ¹⁰ I, Yahweh, search the mind, I try the heart, even to give every man according to his works, according to the fruit of his doings. ¹¹ As the partridge that sits on eggs which she has not laid, so is he who gets riches, and not by right; in the midst of his days they shall leave him, and at his end he shall be a fool.

16:18 *I will recompense their iniquity and their sin double* – But God punished Israel less than their sins deserved (Ezra 9:13). He surely said this :18 in anger, and later relented. He is revealed as an emotional, passionate God.

17:1 The simple interpretation of this would be that sin has permanent consequences upon our heart or mind.

17:9 In the context, this is a description of the state of Judah's heart at Jeremiah's time (18:12). Our hearts are indeed deceitful, but God judges us according to what is in our heart (:10). It's not the case that we are born with a sinful heart and so we will inevitably be condemned for having one. The Lord Jesus was of our human nature and yet He never sinned; whatever we say about human nature we say about Him.

17:10 God searches our heart in order to judge our works; because how we think is how we act – in the end.

Jeremiah Prays to God

¹² A glorious throne, set on high from the beginning, is the place of our sanctuary. ¹³ Yahweh, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You shall be disappointed. Those who depart from Me shall be written in the earth, because they have forsaken Yahweh, the spring of living waters. ¹⁴ Heal me, O Yahweh, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for You are my praise. ¹⁵ Behold, they tell me, Where is the word of Yahweh? let it come now. ¹⁶ As for me, I have not hurried from being a shepherd after you; neither have I desired the woeful day; you know: that which came out of my lips was before Your face. ¹⁷ Don't be a terror to me: You are my refuge in the day of evil. ¹⁸ Let them be disappointed who persecute me, but let not me be disappointed; let them be dismayed, but don't let me be dismayed; bring on them the day of evil, and destroy them with double destruction.

Observance of the Sabbath

¹⁹ Thus said Yahweh to me: Go, and stand in the gate of the children of the people through which the kings of Judah come in and by which they go out, and in all the gates of Jerusalem; ²⁰ and tell them, Hear the word of Yahweh, you kings of Judah,

and all Judah, and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, that enter in by these gates: ²¹ Thus says Yahweh, Take heed to yourselves, and bear no burden on the Sabbath day, nor bring it in by the gates of Jerusalem; ²² neither carry forth a burden out of your houses on the Sabbath day, neither do any work: but make the Sabbath day holy, as I commanded your fathers. ²³ But they didn't listen neither turn their ear, but made their neck stiff that they might not hear and might not receive instruction. ²⁴ It shall happen, if you diligently listen to Me, says Yahweh, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the Sabbath day, but to make the Sabbath day holy, to do no work therein; ²⁵ then shall there enter in by the gates of this city kings and princes sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, they, and their princes, the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and this city shall remain forever. ²⁶ They shall come from the cities of Judah, and from the places around Jerusalem, and from the land of Benjamin, and from the lowland, and from the hill country, and from the South, bringing burnt offerings, sacrifices, meal offerings and frankincense, and bringing sacrifices of thanksgiving to the house of Yah-

17:13 The first half of the verse is Jeremiah praying to God; God responds in the second half of the verse; and the prayer resumes in :14. Prayer isn't simply requests, it involves meditation, reflections and thinking of God's response.

17:25 If Judah had been obedient, it's possible that God's Kingdom as it was in the form of Israel could have developed into His full Kingdom on earth. He has set up all kinds of potential situations throughout history, which tragically have been unfulfilled because of human weakness.

weh. ²⁷ But if you will not listen to Me to make the Sabbath day holy, and not to bear a burden and enter in at the gates of Jerusalem on the Sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in its gates, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem, and it shall not be quenched.

CHAPTER 18 Ju1. 28

Jeremiah Goes to the Potter's House

The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying, ² Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause you to hear My words. ³ Then I went down to the potter's house, and behold, he was making a work on the wheels. ⁴ When the vessel that he made of the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, he made of it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. ⁵ Then the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ⁶ House of Israel, can't I

do with you as this potter? Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are you in My hand, house of Israel. ⁷ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation or kingdom, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy it; ⁸ if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them. ⁹ At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation or kingdom, to build and to plant it; ¹⁰ if they do that which is evil in My sight, that they not obey My voice, then I will repent of the good, with which I said I would benefit them. ¹¹ Now therefore, speak to the men of Judah and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I frame evil against you, and devise a device against you: return you now each one from his evil way, and amend your ways and your doings. ¹² But they say, It is in vain; for we will walk after our own devices, and

17:27 This eternal fire is paralleled with God's eternal wrath (:4). The punishment for the wicked is eternal death (Rom. 6:23); not conscious existence in fire. Fire consumes back to dust. The eternity of God's anger will be in the sense that sinners will be punished by eternal death; but death is unconsciousness.

18:4-8 The clay clearly represents people, made as we are from dust. God's purpose is in some sense open-ended, in that He has intentions for us which can be ruined by how we poorly respond to the potter's hand. This doesn't mean that God's words of judgment or promise are unreliable; but rather that His sensitivity to human behaviour is such that He will change His intention in accordance with their response to His statement of those intentions. God's statement that He would destroy Nineveh in 40 days is maybe the clearest example; He added no conditions, just stated this would happen. And yet they repented; and He changed and didn't fulfil His specific word of judgment.

18:8 Due to Moses' prayer, "the Lord repented of the evil which He had said He would do unto His people" (Ex. 32:14 RV). Yet these are the very words of 18:8 – if a *nation* repents, then God will repent. But in this case, God accepted the singular prayer of Moses as if it were the prayer of the whole community. We can influence God positively for others' blessing.

we will do everyone after the stubbornness of his evil heart.¹³ Therefore thus says Yahweh: Ask now among the nations, who has heard such things; the virgin of Israel has done a very horrible thing.¹⁴ Shall the snow of Lebanon fail from the rock of the field? Shall the cold waters that flow down from afar be dried up?¹⁵ For My people have forgotten Me, they have burned incense to false gods; and they have been made to stumble in their ways, in the ancient paths, to walk in byways, in a way not built up;¹⁶ to make their land an astonishment and a perpetual hissing; everyone who passes thereby shall be astonished and shake his head.¹⁷ I will scatter them as with an east wind before the enemy; I will show them the back and not the face in the day of their calamity.¹⁸ Then they said, Come, and let us devise devices against Jeremiah; for the law shall not perish from the priest, nor counsel from the wise, nor the word from the prophet. Come, and let us strike him with the tongue, and let us not give heed to any of his words.

Jeremiah Prays about His Enemies

¹⁹ Give heed to me, Yahweh, and listen to the voice of those who contend with me.²⁰ Shall evil be compensated for good? For they have dug a pit for my soul. Remember how I stood before You to speak good for them, to turn away Your wrath from

them.²¹ Therefore deliver up their children to the famine, and give them over to the power of the sword; and let their wives become childless and widows; and let their men be slain of death, and their young men struck of the sword in battle.²² Let a cry be heard from their houses, when You shall bring a troop suddenly on them; for they have dug a pit to take me, and hid snares for my feet.²³ Yet, Yahweh, You know all their counsel against me to kill me; don't forgive their iniquity, neither blot out their sin from Your sight; but let them be overthrown before You; may You deal with them in the time of Your anger.

CHAPTER 19 Jul. 29

Jeremiah Breaks a Bottle

Thus said Yahweh, Go and buy a potter's earthen bottle, and take some of the elders of the people and of the elders of the priests;² and go forth to the valley of the son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the gate Harsith, and proclaim there the words that I shall tell you;³ and say, Hear the word of Yahweh, kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring evil on this place, which whoever hears, his ears shall tingle.⁴ Because they have forsaken Me, and have estranged this place, and have burned incense in it to other gods that they didn't know,

18:20 Jeremiah said that God's wrath was his wrath, "I am full of the wrath of God" (6:11), and yet he stood before God "to turn away Your wrath from them". Jeremiah like us was as it were a bridge between God and man; as a prophet he saw the world through the eyes of God, and yet he was himself a man.

they and their fathers and the kings of Judah; and have filled this place with the blood of innocents,⁵ and have built the high places of Baal, to burn their sons in the fire for burnt offerings to Baal; which I didn't command, nor spoke it, neither came it into My mind:⁶ therefore, behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that this place shall no more be called Topheth, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of Slaughter.⁷ I will nullify the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place; and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies, and by the hand of those who seek their life: and their dead bodies will I give to be food for the birds of the sky, and for the animals of the earth.⁸ I will make this city an astonishment, and a hissing; everyone who passes thereby shall be astonished and hiss because of all its plagues.⁹ I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters; and they shall eat each one the flesh of his friend, in the siege and in the distress, with which their enemies, and those who seek their life, shall distress them.¹⁰ Then you shall break the bottle in the sight

of the men who go with you,¹¹ and shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Even so will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, that can't be made whole again; and they shall bury in Topheth, until there is no place to bury.¹² Thus will I do to this place, says Yahweh, and to its inhabitants, even making this city as Topheth:¹³ and the houses of Jerusalem and the houses of the kings of Judah, which are defiled, shall be as the place of Topheth, even all the houses on whose roofs they have burned incense to all the army of the sky, and have poured out drink offerings to other gods.

Jeremiah Warns the People

¹⁴ Then came Jeremiah from Topheth, where Yahweh had sent him to prophesy; and he stood in the court of Yahweh's house and said to all the people:¹⁵ Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Behold, I will bring on this city and on all its towns all the evil that I have pronounced against it; because they have made their neck stiff, that they may not hear My words.

19:9 This verse in the LXX seems to be alluded to by Paul when he says that we today can bite and devour one another in gossip and slander (Gal. 5:15). By doing so, we will be living out our condemnation, acting as if we are Judah under Divine judgment at the hands of the Babylonians.

19:11 The world will be broken to shivers, “as the vessels of a potter” (Rev. 2:26). But this is in fact quoting Jeremiah's words concerning the breaking of the individual believer who is rejected at the last day (cp. 18:4-6). The point of the quotation is surely that those Christ rejects will share the world's condemnation.

19:15 *I will bring on this city and on all its towns all the evil that I have pronounced –* This may appear to be stating the obvious, until we appreciate that God pronounced the evil whilst being fully open to changing His mind about it – see on 18:4-8. God is therefore saying here that the time of His openness to persuasion against His intention

CHAPTER 20 Ju1. 30***Pashhur Puts Jeremiah in Stocks***

Now Pashhur the son of Immer the priest, who was chief officer in the house of Yahweh, heard Jeremiah prophesying these things. ² Then Pashhur struck Jeremiah the prophet, and put him in the stocks that were in the upper gate of Benjamin, which was in the house of Yahweh. ³ It happened on the next day, that Pashhur brought forth Jeremiah out of the stocks. Then Jeremiah said to him, Yahweh has not called your name Pashhur, but Magormissabib. ⁴ For thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will make you a terror to yourself, and to all your friends; and they shall fall by the sword of their enemies, and your eyes shall see it; and I will give all Judah into the hand of the

king of Babylon, and he shall carry them captive to Babylon, and shall kill them with the sword. ⁵ Moreover I will give all the riches of this city, and all its gains, and all the precious things of it, yes, all the treasures of the kings of Judah will I give into the hand of their enemies; and they shall make them a prey, and take them, and carry them to Babylon. ⁶ You, Pashhur, and all who dwell in your house shall go into captivity; and you shall come to Babylon, and there you shall die, and there you shall be buried, you, and all your friends, to whom you have prophesied falsely.

Jeremiah Complains to God

7 Yahweh, you have seduced me, and I was seduced; You are stronger than me, and I am overcome: I am

to destroy them is now closing. Every moment we live, we live within the frames of amazing possibilities in terms of dialogue with our gracious, open-ended God.

20:6 Publically, Jeremiah appears bold and undeflected by opposition and persecution. But :7-10 show how internally, he was so sensitive to it all. When we feel the same, we can remember Jeremiah.

20:7 Despite the unity of spirit between God and Jeremiah, the prophets weren't always forced to say the words. Jeremiah didn't want to say them at times, the weariness of it all got on top of him; and yet he felt unable to walk away, just as God felt with Israel. But there were times when he outright rebelled. Here Jeremiah complains: "Yahweh, You have seduced me [s.w. Ex. 22:16 of a man seducing a woman], and I was seduced; You are stronger than me [s.w. Dt. 22:15] and I am overcome" (Abraham Heschel's translation understands "stronger than" to imply rape; most translations are too embarrassed to render the words as they really are). The extreme language isn't surprising given that Jeremiah was suicidal (:14-18) and likely bi-polar – consider how he oscillates between praise in :13 and a death wish in :14. So here in :7 Jeremiah is saying that he was attracted by God, he was seduced by Him, but then the whole thing became too much – he felt his soul had been inappropriately taken over. And yet in 15:16 he says that he had found God's word and eaten it of his own freewill, and as a result, "I am called by Your name" – the language of a woman marrying and taking her husband's name (Is. 4:1). But here, Jeremiah felt he had been forcibly used and not married. He resented the complete takeover of his heart. But he reasons himself through it, until in :13 he can come to again praise Yahweh in ecstasy, and recognize

become a laughing-stock all the day, every one mocks me. ⁸ For whenever I speak, I cry out Your word; I cry, Violence and destruction! But the word of Yahweh is made a reproach to me and a derision all the day. ⁹ If I say, I will not make mention of Him, nor speak any more in His name; then there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with forbearing, and I can't. ¹⁰ For I have heard the defaming of many, terror on every side. Denounce, and we will denounce him, say all my familiar friends, those who watch for my fall; Perhaps he will be persuaded, and we shall prevail against him, and we shall take our revenge on him. ¹¹ But Yahweh is with me as an awesome mighty one: therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail; they shall be utterly disappointed, because they have not dealt wisely, even with an everlasting dishonour which shall never be forgotten. ¹² But, Yahweh of Armies, who tests the righteous, who sees the heart and the mind, let me see Your vengeance on them; for to You have I revealed my cause. ¹³ Sing to Yahweh, praise Yahweh; for He has delivered the soul of the needy from the hand of evildoers. ¹⁴ Cursed is the day in which I was born: don't let the day in which my mother bore me be blessed. ¹⁵ Cursed is the man who brought news to my father saying, A boy is born to you; making him very

glad. ¹⁶ Let that man be as the cities which Yahweh overthrew, and didn't relent: and let him hear a cry in the morning, and shouting at noontime; ¹⁷ because God didn't kill me from the womb; and so my mother would have been my grave, and her womb always great. ¹⁸ Why came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

CHAPTER 21 Ju1. 31

Jeremiah's Message for Zedekiah

The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, when king Zedekiah sent to him Pashhur the son of Malchijah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest saying, ² Please inquire of Yahweh for us; for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon makes war against us: perhaps Yahweh will deal with us according to all His wondrous works, that He may go up from us. ³ Then Jeremiah said to them, You shall tell Zedekiah: ⁴ Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, Behold, I will turn back the weapons of war that are in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and against the Chaldeans who besiege you without the walls; and I will gather them into the midst of this city. ⁵ I Myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger, wrath and great indignation. ⁶ I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man

that he had simply revealed to God how he felt in that moment, which God knew anyway because He sees and knows all things (:12).

20:14 Here Jeremiah quotes Job's words; even in his depression, he perceived the similarities between himself and other depressed Biblical heroes.

and animal: they shall die of a great plague.⁷ Afterward, says Yahweh, I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah and his servants and the people, even such as are left in this city from the plague, from the sword and from the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life: and he shall strike them with the edge of the sword; he shall not spare them, neither have pity, nor have mercy.⁸ To this people you shall say, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I set before you the way of life and the way of death.⁹ He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence; but he who goes out, and passes over to the Chaldeans who besiege you, he shall live, and his life shall be to him for a prey.¹⁰ For I have set My face against this city for evil and not for good, says Yahweh: it shall be given into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire.

21:6 *They shall die of a great plague* – There seems no record of this happening, indeed the Babylonian capture of Jerusalem wasn't as awful as it could have been; because God in His love and grace for a faithless people reduced the judgment threatened? Likewise the threat that none would be spared (:7) must be compared against the fact that many Jews were saved alive and taken into captivity in Babylon.

21:9 By surrendering to the Babylonians they would be expressing their recognition that they had indeed sinned, and should rightfully be placed in the hands of their enemies.

21:12 Even at this very late stage, with Jerusalem surrounded (:2,4), God was prepared to relent and not fulfil all the prophetic words of destruction; His wrath was still capable of being quenched. Unquenchable or eternal fire therefore refers to the wrath of God which has reached such a point that it can no longer be extinguished; but once the objects of that wrath are ‘burnt’, as the metaphor requires, they will not exist eternally in that burning process. Notice that the one thing He so wished to see was “justice” – because this is the epitome of so much spirituality and right behaviour. This is how very sensitive He is to how we treat each other.

A Warning for the Royal Family of Judah

11 Touching the house of the king of Judah, hear the word of Yahweh:
12 House of David, thus says Yahweh, Execute justice in the morning, and deliver him who is robbed out of the hand of the oppressor, lest My wrath go forth like fire, and burn so that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings.¹³ Behold, I am against you, O inhabitant of the valley and of the rock of the plain, says Yahweh; you that say, who shall come down against us? Or who shall enter into our habitations?¹⁴ I will punish you according to the fruit of your doings, says Yahweh; and I will kindle a fire in her forest, and it shall devour all that is around her.

CHAPTER 22 Aug. 1

How the People of Judah Could Have Pleased God

Thus said Yahweh: Go down to the house of the king of Judah and speak there this word saying,² Hear

the word of Yahweh, king of Judah, who sits on the throne of David, you, and your servants, and your people who enter in by these gates.³ Thus says Yahweh: Execute justice and righteousness, and deliver him who is robbed out of the hand of the oppressor: and do no wrong, do no violence, to the foreigner, the fatherless, nor the widow; neither shed innocent blood in this place.⁴ For if you do this thing indeed, then shall there enter in by the gates of this house kings sitting on the throne of David, riding in chariots and on horses, he, and his servants, and his people.⁵ But if you will not hear these words, I swear by Myself, says Yahweh, that this house shall become a desolation.⁶ For thus says Yahweh concerning the house of the king of Judah: You are Gilead to Me, the head of Lebanon. Yet surely I will make you a wilderness, cities which are not inhabited.⁷ I will prepare destroyers against you, each

one with his weapons; they shall cut down your choice cedars and cast them into the fire.⁸ Many nations shall pass by this city and shall say every man to his neighbour, Why has Yahweh done thus to this great city?⁹ Then they shall answer, Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh their God, and worshipped other gods, and served them.

Punishment for the Kings of Judah

¹⁰ Don't weep for the dead, neither bemoan him; but weep bitterly for him who goes away into exile; for he shall return no more, nor see his native country.¹¹ For thus says Yahweh touching Shallum the son of Josiah, king of Judah, who reigned instead of Josiah his father, and who went forth out of this place: He shall not return there any more.¹² But in the place where they have led him captive, there shall he die, and he shall see this land no more.¹³ Woe to him

22:2 Jeremiah must've been so nervous when he learnt to whom he must preach. He'd have had to take a deep breath to say these things, just as we have to when trying to swing a conversation around to witnessing to Christ to those we feel awed by or would far rather not witness to.

22:3 In giving Israel the reasons for their destruction, God parallels their breaking covenant with Him, with their injustice (21:12; 22:3,9,13). Mal. 2:8,10,14 speaks of how a broken covenant with God is related to a broken covenant with our brethren and our partner. The nature of our covenant relationship with God is reflected in our relationships with each other. If we sense the grace of God shown to us in covenant relationship, we will respond by having justice and integrity toward others in all our ways, awed as we will be by the certainty and reliability of His grace to us through His covenant with us.

22:6 Note the dramatic contrast within this verse. God so loved Judah, He saw them as beautiful, and yet with those feelings in mind He was going to destroy them. They were so wicked and rebellious against them, but truly He loved them with a father's love. His punishment of them wasn't the offended wrath of a capricious deity. If God has such love for the condemned and rebellious just because they are His children; how much more confident can we be of His grace toward us who are in Christ.

who builds his house by unrighteousness, and his rooms by injustice; who uses his neighbour's service without wages, and doesn't give him his hire; 14 who says, I will build me a wide house and spacious rooms, and cuts him out windows; and makes a ceiling with cedar, painted with vermillion. 15 Shall you reign, because you strive to excel in cedar? Didn't your father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was well with him. 16 He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Wasn't this to know Me? says Yahweh. 17 But your eyes and your heart are not but for your covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression, and for violence, to do it. 18 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: they shall not lament for him saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister!

22:13-19 This is a passionate condemnation of Jehoiakim for building an extension to his house, using his neighbours as workmen and not giving them the agreed wages. We see this sort of thing all the time. And shrug and think it good fortune it didn't happen to us. But that's not the spirit of prophecy; God and the prophets were so sensitive to that kind of abuse of power. No matter how poor we may be, we each have power in some form over others in the context of our relationships with them, and we are not to misuse it.

22:16 To know God means to have an active relationship with Him, which will involve showing care and justice towards the poor.

22:22 *Surely then you will be ashamed* – God was so [apparently] sure that the exile would bring about Judah's repentance and return to Him. But actually the very opposite happened. It's rather like "They will reverence My son" (Mt. 21:37) – when actually they crucified Him. It's an indication of His passion and how deeply He wishes His plans of redemption for us to work out. He's not ashamed to as it were humiliate Himself, lay Himself open to petty critics, in His passion for us.

22:24 God's knowledge of possible futures is brought out several times in Jeremiah. He considered how even if Coniah were the signet upon His right hand, yet He would still have to uproot Israel. He fantasized about how if the prophets had been faithful and if Israel had heard them, then Israel would have repented (23:22). This reveals the extent of His passion for us; and it's this knowledge which must make His experience of us so tragic and sad, more than we can ever know. He knows all the infinite num-

They shall not lament for him saying Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! 19 He shall be buried with the burial of a donkey, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem. Go up to Lebanon, and cry; and lift up your voice in Bashan, and cry from Abarim; for all your lovers are destroyed. 21 I spoke to you in your prosperity; but you said, I will not hear. This has been your way from your youth, that you didn't obey My voice. 22 The wind shall feed all your shepherds, and your lovers shall go into captivity: surely then you will be ashamed and confounded for all your wickedness. 23 Inhabitant of Lebanon, who makes your nest in the cedars, how greatly to be pitied you will be when pangs come on you, the pain as of a woman in travail! 24 As I live, says Yahweh, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet on My right hand, yet

would I pluck you from there;²⁵ and I will give you into the hand of those who seek your life, and into the hand of them of whom you are afraid, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans.²⁶ I will cast you out, and your mother who bore you, into another country where you were not born; and there you will die.²⁷ But to the land to which their soul longs to return, to it they shall not return.²⁸ Is this man Coniah a despised broken vessel? Is he a vessel in which none delights? Why are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into the land which they don't know?²⁹ O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of Yahweh.³⁰ Thus says Yahweh, Write you this man childless, a man who shall not prosper in his days; for no more shall a man of his seed prosper, sitting on the throne of David, and ruling in Judah.

CHAPTER 23 Aug. 2

Hope for the Future

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of

My pasture! says Yahweh.² Therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will visit on you the evil of your doings, says Yahweh.³ I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them, and will bring them again to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and multiply.⁴ I will set up shepherds over them who shall feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, neither shall any be lacking, says Yahweh.⁵ Behold, the days come says Yahweh, that I will raise to David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and deal wisely, and shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.⁶ In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely; and this is his name by which he shall be called: Yahweh our righteousness.⁷ Therefore behold, the days come says Yahweh, that they shall no more say, As Yahweh lives, who brought up the children of Israel

bers of possible futures there could have been if we were more faithful. This thought alone should inspire us to try to live up more to our potentials, to trade our talents, and thus to experience His working with us.

23:2 Both God and the pastors of Israel are described as having ‘driven out’ Israel from their land (:2,3,8); the pastors’ sin resulted in all the people sinning and deserving judgment, and God worked with this system, confirming His people in the evil way they had taken. There is no doubt that we can be counted responsible for making another brother sin, even though he too bears responsibility for that sin.

23:5 Jesus was the final fulfilment of this “branch”; He was a branch of David in the sense that He had David as His ancestor (Lk. 1:31-35). He therefore didn’t pre-exist as a person before the time of David.

23:6 *Yahweh our righteousness* – Jesus never sinned, He was as righteous as God in His character. By baptism into Him, that righteousness is counted to us; and thereby He is for us the means to God’s righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30).

out of the land of Egypt; ⁸ but, As Yahweh lives, who brought up and who led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country, and from all the countries where I had driven them. They shall dwell in their own land.

Unfaithful Prophets and their Punishment

⁹ Concerning the prophets. My heart within me is broken, all my bones shake; I am like a drunken man, and like a man whom wine has overcome, because of Yahweh, and because of His holy words. ¹⁰ For the land is full of adulterers; for because of swearing the land mourns; the pastures of the wilderness are dried up. Their way is evil, and their might is not right; ¹¹ for both prophet and priest are profane; yes, in My house have I found their wickedness, says Yahweh. ¹² Therefore their way shall be to them as slippery places in the darkness: they shall be driven on, and fall therein; for I will bring evil on them, even the year of their visitation, says Yahweh. ¹³ I have seen folly in the prophets of Samaria; they

prophesied by Baal, and caused My people Israel to err. ¹⁴ In the prophets of Jerusalem also I have seen a horrible thing: they commit adultery, and walk in lies; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that none does return from his wickedness: they are all of them become to Me as Sodom, and its inhabitants as Gomorrah. ¹⁵ Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies concerning the prophets: Behold, I will feed them with wormwood, and make them drink the water of gall; for from the prophets of Jerusalem is ungodliness gone forth into all the land.

A Warning from God

¹⁶ Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Don't listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you: they teach you vanity; they speak a vision of their own heart, and not out of the mouth of Yahweh. ¹⁷ They say continually to those who despise Me, Yahweh has said, You shall have peace; and to each one who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart they say, No evil shall come on you. ¹⁸ For who has stood in the council

23:10 Human “might is not right”; human power is fiercely criticized by the prophets. One of the most striking features of the prophets is their denunciation of human power. Judah were doing what was humanly sensible and smart. To trust in politics, in what seems the usual human response to an issue rather than trust in God, is in fact something which breaks God’s heart. The life of faith in God is simply the very opposite of what seems humanly sensible. To give money we’d surely be better saving; risk our lives and health for another; neglect our business or career for the sake of the Lord’s work. These ought to be the *normal* decisions we make, if we are walking in step with the spirit; and yet it would appear that they are the exceptions to the rule of far too many of our lives. And the point is, God’s heart broke because His people were and are like this (9).

23:12 *They shall be driven on, and fall* – God confirms people in the downward spiral they choose.

of Yahweh, that he should perceive and hear His word? Who has noted My word, and heard it? ¹⁹ Behold, the storm of Yahweh, His wrath, has gone forth. Yes, a whirling storm. It shall burst on the head of the wicked. ²⁰ The anger of Yahweh shall not return, until He has executed, and until He has performed the intents of His heart: in the latter days you shall understand it perfectly. ²¹ I sent not these prophets, yet they ran: I didn't speak to them, yet they prophesied. ²² But if they had stood in My council, then had they caused My people to hear My words, and had turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. ²³ Am I a God at hand, says Yahweh, and not a God afar off? ²⁴ Can any hide himself in secret places so that I shall not see him? says Yahweh. Don't I fill heaven and earth? says Yahweh. ²⁵ I have heard what the prophets have said, who prophesy lies in My name saying, I have dreamed, I have dreamed. ²⁶ How long shall this be in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, even the prophets of the deceit of their own heart? ²⁷ Who think to cause My people to forget My name by their dreams which they tell every man to his neighbour, as their fathers forgot My name for Baal. ²⁸ The prophet who has a dream, let

him tell a dream; and he who has My word, let him speak My word faithfully. What is the straw to the wheat? says Yahweh. ²⁹ Isn't My word like fire? says Yahweh; and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces? ³⁰ Therefore behold, I am against the prophets, says Yahweh, who steal My words each one from his neighbour. ³¹ Behold, I am against the prophets, says Yahweh, who use their tongues and say, He says. ³² Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says Yahweh, and do tell them, and cause My people to err by their lies, and by their vain boasting: yet I didn't send them, nor commanded them; neither do they profit this people at all, says Yahweh.

The Burden of God

³³ When this people, or the prophet, or a priest, shall ask you saying, What is the burden of Yahweh? Then you shall tell them, What burden! I will cast you off, says Yahweh. ³⁴ As for the prophet, the priest and the people who shall say, The burden of Yahweh, I will even punish that man and his house. ³⁵ You shall say each one to his neighbour and each one to his brother, What has Yahweh answered? and, What has Yahweh spoken? ³⁶ You shall mention the burden of Yahweh no more: for

23:18 It is indeed hard to see the world from God's perspective; but this is what the spirit of prophecy was and is all about. The prophets stood in the presence of God, and partook in His "council" (:22), i.e. His inner circle of trusted friends (see too 15:19). The way God speaks of the prophets as being His "council" suggests He is open to dialogue and even 'advice' from men; such is His humility and desire to work with us rather than merely demand our submission.

23:36 The false prophets were judged according to their words; each man's word was

every man's own word shall be his burden; for you have perverted the words of the living God, of Yahweh of Armies our God.³⁷ You shall say to the prophet, What has Yahweh answered you? and, What has Yahweh spoken?³⁸ But if you say, The burden of Yahweh; therefore thus says Yahweh: Because you say this word, The burden of Yahweh, and I have sent to you saying, You shall not say, The burden of Yahweh;³⁹ therefore, behold, I will utterly forget you, and I will cast you off, and the city that I gave to you and to your fathers, away from My presence:⁴⁰ and I will bring an everlasting reproach on you, and a perpetual shame, which shall not be forgotten.

CHAPTER 24 Aug. 3

Good and Bad Figs

Yahweh showed me and behold, two baskets of figs set before Yahweh's temple, after that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah and

the princes of Judah, with the craftsmen and smiths, from Jerusalem, and had brought them to Babylon.² One basket had very good figs, like the figs that are first-ripe; and the other basket had very bad figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad.³ Then Yahweh said to me, What do you see, Jeremiah? I said, Figs; the good figs, very good; and the bad, very bad, that can't be eaten, they are so bad.⁴ The word of Yahweh came to me saying,⁵ Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel: Like these good figs, so will I regard the captives of Judah, whom I have sent out of this place into the land of the Chaldeans, for good.⁶ For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them again to this land: and I will build them, and not pull them down; and I will plant them, and not pluck them up.⁷ I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am Yahweh: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God; for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.⁸ As the bad figs, which can't be eaten, they are

to be his burden at the day of Babylonian judgment. Gal. 6:5 alludes here in saying that at the judgment, every man shall bear his own burden – i.e., that of his own words. Wrong speech will be condemned at the day of judgment (Tit. 2:8), out of our own mouths we will be judged (Lk. 19:22). The implication seems to be that our words will be quoted back to us during the judgment process. By our words we really will be justified or condemned (Mt. 12:37). How we speak, especially if we claim to bear God's Name as baptized believers, will be the basis of our judgment.

24:3 It was obvious what Jeremiah had seen; but God asked him to verbalize it. By putting things into words out loud, we become the more conscious of them. It's no bad idea to pray our private prayers out loud, to recount out loud to God our situations so that we perceive them more accurately rather than just assuming that we have internally assessed the situation correctly.

24:8 The spiritually weakest were those who remained in the land and went down into Egypt. Yet when given the choice of going to Babylon or remaining with these people, Jeremiah chose to remain with them, knowing they were the weakest. If we truly seek

so bad, surely thus says Yahweh, So will I give up Zedekiah the king of Judah, and his princes, and the residue of Jerusalem, who remain in this land, and those who dwell in the land of Egypt,⁹ I will even give them up to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth for evil; to be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt and a curse, in all places where I shall drive them.¹⁰ I will send the sword, the famine, and the plague, among them, until they be consumed from off the land that I gave to them and to their fathers.

CHAPTER 25 Aug. 4

Seventy Years of Exile

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (the same was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon),² which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah, and to all

the inhabitants of Jerusalem saying:
 3 From the thirteenth year of Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, even to this day, these twenty-three years, the word of Yahweh has come to me, and I have spoken to you, rising up early and speaking; but you have not listened. ⁴ Yahweh has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them (but you have not listened, nor inclined your ear to hear)⁵ saying, Return now each one from his evil way and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that Yahweh has given to you and to your fathers, from of old and even for evermore;⁶ and don't go after other gods to serve them or worship them, and don't provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands; and I will do you no harm.⁷ Yet you have not listened to Me, says Yahweh; so that you provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own hurt.⁸ Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies: Because you have not heard

God's glory in people, it may be that we in some ways make the choice to be with the weak so that by all means we may save some; when the nicer thing to do is to associate only with the spiritually stronger.

25:3 *Rising up early and speaking* – Just as God also did (:4). In our witness to the world, we are especially united with God. He is speaking through us; our feelings of disappointment, discouragement and rejection are in a sense His feelings; our joy at converting another is His joy. In this sense Jesus says He will be personally with us as we obey the commission to take His message to all the world (Mt. 28:20).

25:8 *Because you have not heard My words* – Time and again, ignoring God's word is presented as the main reason for Judah's condemnation. The people would've heard Jeremiah teaching and preaching, and simply shrugged. They may have accepted him as a prophet, but they were not prepared to have their lives disrupted by his message; they were fine as they were, too busy (as they thought). The fact they didn't take seriously the emotional man from Anathoth was the basis of their condemnation. Yet they loyally went to the temple (26:2) and offered sacrifice. They weren't atheists. They simply didn't take God's word seriously. People are just the same today. We likewise should be aware that our easy access to God's word today makes us very much ac-

My words, ⁹ behold, I will send and take all the families of the north, says Yahweh, and I will send to Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, and against its inhabitants, and against all these nations around; and I will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and a hissing, and perpetual desolations. ¹⁰ Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. ¹¹ This whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. ¹² It shall happen that when seventy years are accomplished, then I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, says Yahweh, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it desolate forever. ¹³ I

will bring on that land all My words which I have pronounced against it, even all that is written in this book, which Jeremiah has prophesied against all the nations. ¹⁴ For many nations and great kings shall make bond servants of them, even of them; and I will recompense them according to their deeds, and according to the work of their hands.

The Vision of the Cup of Wine

¹⁵ For thus says Yahweh the God of Israel to me: Take this cup of the wine of wrath at My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. ¹⁶ They shall drink, and reel back and forth, and be mad, because of the sword that I will send among them. ¹⁷ Then took I the cup at Yahweh's hand, and made all the nations to drink, to whom Yahweh had sent me: ¹⁸ Jerusalem, and the cities of Judah, and its kings, and its princes, to make them a desola-

countable. We ought to be reading it at least daily and seriously trying to conform our lives and thinking to it.

25:9 And against all these nations around – Judah's sin lead to other nations suffering. People suffer the effects of others' sin, as we see in the consequence of Adam's sin. This isn't because God punishes the righteous with the wicked, but because He allows people the freewill to sin; and the sinfulness of sin is in the harmful effect it has upon others.

25:15 Being given a cup of wine to drink from God is a double symbol – of condemnation, as here, or of blessing and salvation (1 Cor. 10:16). This is why our drinking of the cup of wine at the communion service is a step either to our eternal blessing or condemnation, and this is why we are powerfully helped by the symbol to examine ourselves at that meeting especially, knowing that we have only one of two possible destinies – eternal death or the blessing of eternal life (1 Cor. 11:29). And there is no way out by simply refusing to drink it – for if we refuse, we shall be made to drink it to our condemnation (.28).

25:18-26 We seem to have here a chronological prediction of the nations which Babylon attacked and destroyed, beginning with Jerusalem (:29); and finally Sheshach, a code name for Babylon, drinks the cup of destruction herself.

tion, an astonishment, a hissing, and a curse, as it is this day; ¹⁹ Pharaoh king of Egypt, and his servants, and his princes, and all his people; ²⁰ and all the mixed people, and all the kings of the land of the Uz, and all the kings of the Philistines, and Ashkelon, and Gaza, and Ekron, and the remnant of Ashdod; ²¹ Edom, and Moab, and the children of Ammon; ²² and all the kings of Tyre, and all the kings of Sidon, and the kings of the isle which is beyond the sea; ²³ Dedan, and Tema, and Buz, and all who have the corners of their beard cut off; ²⁴ and all the kings of Arabia, and all the kings of the mixed people who dwell in the wilderness; ²⁵ and all the kings of Zimri, and all the kings of Elam, and all the kings of the Medes; ²⁶ and all the kings of the north, far and near, one with another; and all the kingdoms of the world, which are on the surface of the earth: and the king of Sheshach shall drink after them. ²⁷ You shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel: Drink, and be drunk, vomit, fall, and rise no more, because of the sword which I will send among you. ²⁸ It shall be, if they refuse to take the cup at your hand to drink, then you shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies: You shall surely drink. ²⁹ For, behold, I begin to work evil at the city which is called by My name; and should you be utterly unpunished? You shall not be unpunished; for I will call for a sword on all the inhabitants of the earth, says Yahweh of Armies.

Jeremiah Must Warn the People

³⁰ Therefore you must prophesy against them all these words and tell them, Yahweh will roar from on high, and utter His voice from His holy habitation; He will mightily roar against His fold; He will give a shout, as those who tread grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. ³¹ A noise shall come even to the end of the land; for Yahweh has a controversy with the nations; He will enter into judgement with all flesh: as for the wicked, He will give them to the sword, says Yahweh. ³² Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, evil shall go forth from nation to nation, and a great storm shall be raised up from the uttermost parts of the earth. ³³ The slain of Yahweh shall be at that day from one end of the earth even to the other end of the earth: they shall not be lamented, neither gathered, nor buried; they shall be dung on the surface of the ground. ³⁴ Wail, you shepherds, and cry; and wallow in dust, you principal of the flock; for the days of your slaughter and of your dispersions are fully come, and you shall fall like a goodly vessel. ³⁵ The shepherds shall have no way to flee, nor the principal of the flock to escape. ³⁶ A voice of the cry of the shepherds, and the wailing of the principal of the flock! For Yahweh lays waste their pasture. ³⁷ The peaceable folds are brought to silence because of the fierce anger of Yahweh. ³⁸ He has left His den, as the lion; for their land has become an astonishment because of the fierceness of the oppression, and because of His fierce anger.

CHAPTER 26 Aug. 5***Jeremiah Speaks God's Words at the Temple***

In the beginning of the reign of Je-hoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah came this word from Yahweh saying, ² Thus says Yahweh: Stand in the court of Yahweh's house and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in Yahweh's house, all the words that I command you to speak to them; don't diminish a word. ³ Perhaps they will listen, and turn every man from his evil way; so that I may repent Me of the evil which I purpose to do to them because of the evil of their doings. ⁴ You shall tell them, Thus says Yahweh: If you will not listen to Me, to walk in My law which I have set before you, ⁵ to listen to the words of My servants the prophets whom I send to you, even

rising up early and sending them, to which you have not listened; ⁶ then will I make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth.

Jeremiah on Trial

⁷ The priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of Yahweh. ⁸ It happened that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that Yahweh had commanded him to speak to all the people, the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him saying, You shall surely die. ⁹ Why have you prophesied in the name of Yahweh saying, This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant? All the people were gathered to Jeremiah in the house of Yahweh.

26:2 *Perhaps they will listen* – This leads in to the implications that God doesn't actually know for sure how His people will respond to His word. So great is the freewill we have been given as we in our generation read and hear the words of the Bible. God of course *could* know our response, but at times He limits His knowledge in the same way as He limits His power – in that He *could* do all things but He doesn't do all He'd like to do because of our limitation of Him. The limitation of God is shown by how He speaks about prayer: “The Lord’s... ear [is not] dull, that it *cannot* hear... your sins have hid His face from you so that He *will not* hear” (Is. 59:1,2). In this sense God limits His possibilities. He *can* see all things, and yet in the time of Israel’s apostasy He hides His face from them (Mic. 3:4 cp. Dt. 32:19,20). The Hebrew word *ulay*, ‘perhaps’, is significant in this connection. “Perhaps they will listen”, God says, in reflection upon Ezekiel’s preaching ministry to God’s people (Ez. 12:1-3). Of Jeremiah’s prophetic work, God likewise comments: “Perhaps [Heb. *ulay*] they will listen” (:2,3; 36:3,7; 51:8; also Is. 47:12). This uncertainty of God as to how His people will respond to His word reflects the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to our kind of time. It has huge implications for us, too. With what eagerness must God Almighty look upon us as we sit down to read His word daily! ‘Are they going to listen? How are they going to respond?’.

26:8 *You shall surely die* – People get very angry when we say things which criticize their relationship with God and their behaviour before Him, and suggest that their established way of worship is wrong.

10 When the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house to the house of Yahweh; and they sat in the entry of the new gate of Yahweh's house. 11 Then spoke the priests and the prophets to the princes and to all the people saying, This man is worthy of death; for he has prophesied against this city, as you have heard with your ears. 12 Then spoke Jeremiah to all the princes and to all the people saying, Yahweh sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that you have heard. 13 Now therefore amend your ways and your doings, and obey the voice of Yahweh your God; and Yahweh will repent Him of the evil that He has pronounced against you. 14 But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes. 15 Only know for certain that if you put me to death, you will bring innocent blood on yourselves, and on this city, and on its inhabitants; for of a truth Yahweh has sent me to you to speak all these words in your ears.

Jeremiah's Life Is Spared

16 Then the princes and all the people said to the priests and to the prophets: This man is not worthy of death; for he has spoken to us in the name

of Yahweh our God. 17 Then rose up certain of the elders of the land and spoke to all the assembled people saying, 18 Micah the Morashite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he spoke to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Zion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. 19 Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? Didn't he fear Yahweh, and entreat the favour of Yahweh, and Yahweh relented of the disaster which He had pronounced against them? Thus should we commit great evil against our own souls. 20 There was also a man who prophesied in the name of Yahweh, Uriah the son of Shemaiah of Kiriath Jearim; and he prophesied against this city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah: 21 and when Jehoiakim the king, with all his mighty men and all the princes heard his words, the king sought to put him to death; but when Uriah heard it, he was afraid, and fled, and went into Egypt: 22 and Jehoiakim the king sent men into Egypt, Elnathan the son of Achbor, and certain men with him, into Egypt; 23 and they fetched forth Uriah out of Egypt, and

26:19 In Hezekiah's time, all Judah had to repent to avert total destruction – but even though they didn't, the prayer of Hezekiah saved the nation. This is the power of just one righteous person, God is so sensitive to righteousness. In the Old Testament there are several examples of just one righteous man saving the sinful or spiritually weak people of God from destruction; and those cases were to prepare Israel for the concept of the supreme righteousness and intercession of Christ being able to save we who are likewise sinners.

brought him to Jehoiakim the king, who killed him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people.²⁴ But the hand of Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hand of the people to put him to death.

CHAPTER 27 Aug. 6

Slaves of Nebuchadnezzar

In the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah, came this word to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying,² Thus says Yahweh to me: Make bonds and bars and put them on your neck;³ and send them to the king of Edom, to the king of Moab, to the king of the children of Ammon, to the king of Tyre and to the king of Sidon, by the hand of the messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah king of Judah;⁴ and give them a command to their masters saying, Thus says Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel, You shall tell your masters:⁵ I have made the earth, the men and the animals that are on the

surface of the earth, by My great power and by My outstretched arm; and I give it to whom it seems right to Me.⁶ Now have I given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant; and the animals of the field also have I given him to serve him.⁷ All the nations shall serve him, and his son, and his son's son, until the time of his own land come: and then many nations and great kings shall make him their bond servant.⁸ It shall happen, that the nation and the kingdom which will not serve the same Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and that will not put their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon, that nation will I punish, says Yahweh, with the sword, and with the famine, and with the plague, until I have consumed them by his hand.⁹ But as for you, don't you listen to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreams, nor to your soothsayers, nor to your sorcerers, who speak to you saying, You shall not serve the king of Babylon:¹⁰ for they prophesy a lie

27:3 *The messengers who come to Jerusalem to Zedekiah* – Instead of trusting solely in God, Zedekiah was trying to make alliances with other nations to stave off the Babylonian invasion. But the message was again that all such human might would fail, and total repentance was the only way for Judah to be saved.

27:5 If God takes away from us what we have been accustomed to having – in Judah's case, their independence as a nation – then we should recognize that God as creator of all has the right to do this, and that nothing we have, be it material or immaterial, is personally ours. This is one outcome of believing in God as creator rather than in atheistic evolution.

27:6 *And the animals of the field also* – This is emphasized several times. We see thereby God's huge sensitivity to the natural creation. It also opens up the possibility that there is a latent spirituality within all of creation; God is in some sense in contact with them. Rom. 8:19-23 seems to hint that the natural creation will in some sense be delivered into a new spiritual dimension at Christ's return and the establishment of God's Kingdom on earth.

to you, to remove you far from your land, and that I should drive you out, and you should perish.¹¹ But the nation that shall bring their neck under the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him, that nation will I let remain in their own land, says Yahweh; and they shall till it, and dwell therein.

Message for Zedekiah

¹² I spoke to Zedekiah king of Judah according to all these words saying, Bring your necks under the yoke of the king of Babylon, and serve him and his people, and live.¹³ Why will you die, you and your people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as Yahweh has spoken concerning the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon?¹⁴ Don't listen to the words of the prophets who speak to you saying, You shall not serve the king of Babylon; for they prophesy a lie to you.¹⁵ For I have not sent them, says Yahweh, but they prophesy falsely in My name; that I may drive you out, and that you may perish, you, and the prophets who prophesy to you.

Serve the King of Babylon and Live

¹⁶ Also I spoke to the priests and to all this people saying, Thus says

Yahweh: Don't listen to the words of your prophets who prophesy to you saying, Behold, the vessels of Yahweh's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon; for they prophesy a lie to you.¹⁷ Don't listen to them; serve the king of Babylon, and live: why should this city become a desolation?¹⁸ But if they be prophets, and if the word of Yahweh be with them, let them now make intercession to Yahweh of Armies, that the vessels which are left in the house of Yahweh, and in the house of the king of Judah, and at Jerusalem, don't go to Babylon.¹⁹ For thus says Yahweh of Armies concerning the pillars, and concerning the sea, and concerning the bases, and concerning the residue of the vessels that are left in this city,²⁰ which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon didn't take, when he carried away captive Jecoeniah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, from Jerusalem to Babylon, and all the nobles of Judah and Jerusalem;²¹ yes, thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, concerning the vessels that are left in the house of Yahweh, and in the house of the king of Judah and at Jerusalem:²² They shall be carried to Babylon, and there shall they be, until the day that I visit them, says Yahweh; then

27:14 Speaking God's truth made Jeremiah everybody's enemy. His own people, from the masses to the leadership, the religious leaders and their false prophets, the surrounding Gentile nations – all were insulted by what he had to say. There are times in our own ministries when we will be left alone because of our loyalty to God's word – or so it will seem.

27:21 It would appear that the expensive vessels of God's house had been taken into the house of the king. We must learn the lesson, not to use the things of God's spiritual house for our own personal benefit.

will I bring them up, and restore them to this place.

CHAPTER 28 Aug. 7

The False Prophet Hananiah

It happened the same year, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the fourth year, in the fifth month, that Hananiah the son of Azzur, the prophet, who was of Gibeon, spoke to me in the house of Yahweh, in the presence of the priests and of all the people saying, ² Thus speaks Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, saying, I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon. ³ Within two full years will I bring again into this place all the vessels of Yahweh's house, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon took away from this place, and carried to Babylon: ⁴ and I will bring again to this place Jeconiah the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, with all the captives of Judah, who went to Babylon, says Yahweh; for I will break the yoke of the king of Babylon.

Jeremiah Denounces Hananiah

⁵ Then the prophet Jeremiah said to

the prophet Hananiah in the presence of the priests, and in the presence of all the people who stood in the house of Yahweh, ⁶ even the prophet Jeremiah said, Amen: Yahweh do so; Yahweh perform your words which you have prophesied, to bring again the vessels of Yahweh's house, and all them of the captivity, from Babylon to this place. ⁷ Nevertheless hear you now this word that I speak in your ears, and in the ears of all the people: ⁸ The prophets who have been before me and before you of old prophesied against many countries, and against great kingdoms, of war, and of evil, and of plague. ⁹ The prophet who prophesies of peace, when the word of the prophet shall happen, then shall the prophet be known, that Yahweh has truly sent him. ¹⁰ Then Hananiah the prophet took the bar from off the prophet Jeremiah's neck, and broke it. ¹¹ Hananiah spoke in the presence of all the people saying, Thus says Yahweh: Even so will I break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon within two full years from off the neck of all the nations. The prophet Jeremiah

28:3, 4 Hananiah had taken Jeremiah's prophecies of restoration but said it would happen within two years rather than the 70 years which Jeremiah had spoken of in chapter 25. And he inserted a false prediction that Jeconiah would return from Babylon. False teaching follows this pattern; slightly changing God's true word and slipping in a few other things. This is what makes false religion attractive, and why it will be accepted by those who aren't familiar with God's word. We live in a world where there are many voices, many claims, clamouring for our belief; only a familiarity with the Bible text and an acceptance of it as the final authority will enable us to discern truth from error.

28:11 *The prophet Jeremiah went his way* – There are times in such conflict situations when we too just have to walk away. God's says one thing, and the popular religious leaders say another. We can make our point and then walk away from endless argument and controversy.

went his way.¹² Then the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, after that Hananiah the prophet had broken the bar from off the neck of the prophet Jeremiah saying,¹³ Go, and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus says Yahweh: You have broken the bars of wood; but you have made in their place bars of iron.¹⁴ For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: I have put a yoke of iron on the neck of all these nations, that they may serve Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and they shall serve him: and I have given him the animals of the field also.¹⁵ Then the prophet Jeremiah said to Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah: Yahweh has not sent you; but you make this people to trust in a lie.¹⁶ Therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will send you away from off the surface of the land: this year you shall die, because you have spoken rebellion against Yahweh.¹⁷ So Hananiah the prophet died the same year in the seventh month.

CHAPTER 29 Aug. 8

Jeremiah's Letter to the People in Babylon

Now these are the words of the letter that Jeremiah the prophet

sent from Jerusalem to the residue of the elders of the captivity, and to the priests, to the prophets, and to all the people, whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon,² (after that Jeconiah the king, the queen mother, the eunuchs, the princes of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem),³ by the hand of Elasar the son of Shaphan, and Gemariah the son of Hilkiah, (whom Zedekiah king of Judah sent to Babylon to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), saying,⁴ Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, to all the captivity, whom I have caused to be carried away captive from Jerusalem to Babylon:⁵ Build houses and dwell in them; and plant gardens and eat their fruit.⁶ Take wives, and father sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons, and give your daughters to husbands, that they may bear sons and daughters; and multiply there, and don't be diminished.⁷ Seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to Yahweh for it; for in its peace you shall have peace.⁸ For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Don't let your

28:13 *Go, and tell Hananiah* – Jeremiah may well have thought ‘Oh no, I never want to see that man again’. But the motive and purpose of correcting false teaching is for the sake of helping those who are deceived.

29:5, 6 By doing so, the exiles would be expressing their faith that God’s word about a 70 year captivity was going to be true. The Jewish false prophets in Babylon were telling them that the captivity would soon be over and they would be back in the land of Judah (:8). False teaching tries to tell us that we can have the restored Kingdom now, with no need to wait long, no need to accept our sinfulness nor truly repent.

29:7 *Pray to Yahweh for it; for in its peace you shall have peace* – Alluded to in 1 Tim. 2:1,2 about how we should pray for the nations in which we live, that we might be able to live in peace.

prophets who are in the midst of you, and your diviners, deceive you; neither listen to your dreams which you cause to be dreamed. ⁹ For they prophesy falsely to you in My name: I have not sent them, says Yahweh.

The People's Return Promised

¹⁰ For thus says Yahweh, After seventy years are accomplished for Babylon, I will visit you and perform My word of grace towards you, in causing you to return to this place. ¹¹ For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, says Yahweh, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you hope and a future. ¹² You shall call on Me, and you shall go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. ¹³ You shall seek Me and find Me, when you shall search for Me with all your heart. ¹⁴ I will be found by you, says Yahweh, and I will turn again your captivity, and I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places where I have driven you, says Yahweh; and I will bring you again to the place from where I caused you to be carried away captive. ¹⁵ Because you have said, Yahweh has raised us up prophets in Babylon; ¹⁶ thus says Yahweh concerning the king who sits on the throne of David, and concerning all the people who dwell in this city, your brothers who haven't gone forth with you into captivity; ¹⁷ thus says Yahweh of

Armies; Behold, I will send on them the sword, the famine, and the pestilence, and will make them like vile figs, that can't be eaten, they are so bad. ¹⁸ I will pursue after them with the sword, with the famine, and with the pestilence, and will deliver them to be tossed back and forth among all the kingdoms of the earth, to be an object of horror, and an astonishment, and a hissing, and a reproach, among all the nations where I have driven them; ¹⁹ because they have not listened to My words, says Yahweh, with which I sent to them My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them; but you would not hear, says Yahweh. ²⁰ Hear therefore the word of Yahweh, all you of the captivity, whom I have sent away from Jerusalem to Babylon.

Punishment for False Prophets

²¹ Thus says Yahweh of Armies the God of Israel, concerning Ahab the son of Kolaiah, and concerning Zedekiah the son of Maaseiah, who prophesy a lie to you in My name: Behold, I will deliver them into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall kill them before your eyes; ²² and of them shall be taken up a curse by all the captives of Judah who are in Babylon saying, Yahweh make you like Zedekiah and like Ahab, whom the king of Babylon roasted in the fire; ²³ because

29:15 The sin of the Jewish captives in exile would bring about suffering on the Jews who then remained in the land (:16,17). Again we see that sin is about the damage we do to others.

29:23 *And have committed adultery* – Repeatedly, the false prophets of both Old and New Testaments are associated with immoral behaviour. Wrong beliefs about God of-

they have worked folly in Israel, and have committed adultery with their neighbours' wives, and have spoken words in My name falsely, which I didn't command them; and I am He who knows, and am witness, says Yahweh.²⁴ Concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite you shall speak saying,²⁵ Thus speaks Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, saying, Because you have sent letters in your own name to all the people who are at Jerusalem, and to Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah the priest, and to all the priests saying,²⁶ Yahweh has made you priest in the place of Jehoiada the priest, that there may be officers in the house of Yahweh, for every man who is mad, and makes himself a prophet, that you should put him in the stocks and in shackles.²⁷ Now therefore, why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth, who makes himself a prophet to you,²⁸ because he has sent to us in Babylon, saying, The captivity is long: build houses, and dwell in them; and plant gardens, and eat their fruit?²⁹ Zeph-

niah the priest read this letter in the ears of Jeremiah the prophet.³⁰ Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah, saying,³¹ Send to all them of the captivity saying, Thus says Yahweh concerning Shemaiah the Nehelamite: Because Shemaiah has prophesied to you, and I didn't send him, and he has caused you to trust in a lie;³² therefore thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will punish Shemaiah the Nehelamite and his seed; he shall not have a man to dwell among this people, neither shall he see the good that I will do to My people, says Yahweh, because he has spoken rebellion against Yahweh.

CHAPTER 30 Aug. 9

God Will Rescue Israel and Judah

The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying,² Thus speaks Yahweh, the God of Israel saying, Write all the words that I have spoken to you in a book.³ For, behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will turn again the captivity of My people Israel and Judah, says

ten lead to wrong behaviour; false teaching is often wrong teaching about way of life, rather than being simply honestly mistaken in theological interpretation of the Bible. *I am He who knows, and am witness* – It's not painless to simply say that we believe God's Name is Yahweh and that this means "I am". He therefore sees and knows all things because He "is" in all ways, and our lives must be appropriate to Him being as He is. Note that God is presented as both witness and judge. Our lives are as it were played out before the Divine courtroom.

29:26 The whole tremendous experience of having God's mind in them, sharing His perspective, seeing the world through His eyes, made the prophets appear crazy to others. There's a marked emphasis upon the fact that they were perceived as madmen (:24,26; Hos. 9:7; 2 Kings 9:11). For us to walk down a street for even ten minutes, feeling and perceiving and knowing the sin of every person in those rooms and houses and yards, feeling the weeping of God over each of them... would send us crazy. And yet God strengthened the prophets, and there's no reason to think that He will not as it were strengthen us in our sensitivity too.

Yahweh; and I will cause them to return to the land that I gave to their fathers, and they shall possess it.
⁴ These are the words that Yahweh spoke concerning Israel and concerning Judah. ⁵ For thus says Yahweh: We have heard a voice of trembling, of fear, and not of peace. ⁶ Ask now, and see whether a man does travail with child: why do I see every man with his hands on his waist, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? ⁷ Alas! for that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble; but he shall be saved out of it. ⁸ It shall come to pass in that day, says Yahweh of Armies, that I will break his yoke from off your neck, and will burst your bonds; and strangers shall no more make him their bond servant; ⁹ but they shall serve Yahweh their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up to them. ¹⁰ Therefore don't you be afraid, O Jacob my servant, says Yahweh; neither be dismayed, Israel: for, behold, I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall

make him afraid. ¹¹ For I am with you, says Yahweh, to save you: for I will make a full end of all the nations where I have scattered you, but I will not make a full end of you; but I will correct you in measure, and will in no way leave you unpunished.

God Will Heal His People

¹² For thus says Yahweh, Your hurt is incurable, and your wound grievous. ¹³ There is none to plead your cause, that you may be bound up: you have no healing medicines. ¹⁴ All your lovers have forgotten you; they don't seek you: for I have wounded you with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the greatness of your iniquity, because your sins were increased. ¹⁵ Why do you cry for your hurt? Your pain is incurable: for the greatness of your iniquity, because your sins were increased, I have done these things to you. ¹⁶ Therefore all those who devour you shall be devoured; and all your adversaries, each one of them, shall go into captivity; and those who despoil you shall be a spoil, and all who prey on you will I give for a prey. ¹⁷ For I will restore health

30:7 That day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob's trouble – Dan. 12:1 says the same thing in the same language, but says that the ultimate salvation of Israel will be in the appearance of Christ and the resurrection from the dead (Dan. 12:2,3). The Babylonian invasion was known as the time of Israel's trouble (2:28; 8:15; 11:12; Neh. 9:32). There was the possibility that the Babylonian invasion and capture of Jerusalem was the time of trouble which would lead to Israel's final salvation in the coming of their Messiah; but instead they chose to believe their false prophets and refused to repent. So the whole possible scenario didn't come true then, and was reapplied to a latter day invasion of Israel, the taking of Jerusalem, Israel's repentance, hearing the words of the true prophets, the return of Christ, the resurrection and the establishment of God's Kingdom. That scenario could now come true at any moment.

to you, and I will heal you of your wounds, says Yahweh; because they have called you an outcast, saying, It is Zion, whom no man seeks after.

Restored to Be God's People

18 Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will turn again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have compassion on his dwelling places; and the city shall be built again on its own hill, and the palace shall be inhabited in its own former way. 19 Out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of those who make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small. 20 Their children also shall be as before, and their congregation shall be established before Me; and I will punish all who oppress them. 21 Their prince shall be of themselves, and their ruler shall proceed from their midst; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach to Me: for who is he who has had boldness to approach to Me? says Yahweh. 22 You shall be My people, and I will be your God. 23 Behold, the storm of Yahweh, His wrath, has gone forth, a sweep-

ing storm: it shall burst on the head of the wicked. 24 The fierce anger of Yahweh will not return, until He has executed, and until He has performed the intentions of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it.

CHAPTER 31 Aug. 10

God Will Rebuild Israel

At that time, says Yahweh, will I be the God of all the families of Israel, and they shall be My people. 2 Thus says Yahweh, The people who were left of the sword found grace in the wilderness; even Israel, when I went to cause him to rest. 3 Yahweh appeared of old to me saying, Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness have I drawn you. 4 Again will I build you, and you shall be built, O virgin of Israel: again you shall be adorned with your tambourines, and shall go forth in the dances of those who make merry. 5 Again you shall plant vineyards on the mountains of Samaria; the planters shall plant, and shall enjoy its fruit. 6 For there shall be a day when the watchmen on the hills of Ephraim shall cry, Arise, and let us go up to Zion to Yahweh our

30:17 *I will restore health to you* – Although their wound was humanly incurable (:12,15). God really can do the impossible, and the impossible thing we struggle with is that sinners condemned to suffering and death can really be saved from that and given eternal life.

Zion, whom no man seeks after – The attitude of others to us God's people is so painful for Him. He desperately seeks His people, and for others to consider we are down and out, not wanted by anyone, provokes Him to action. Even though His people were so sinful, the fact others mocked them was significant to God. This colossal sensitivity of God is an encouragement to us who can feel at times that we are insignificant and ultimately, existentially alone.

30:18 We see here the theme of God's Kingdom actually being a re-establishment of the entity which once was on earth (Ez. 21:25-57; Acts 1:6). See too :20 "as before".

God. ⁷ For thus says Yahweh, Sing with gladness for Jacob, and shout for the chief of the nations: publish, praise, and say, Yahweh, save Your people, the remnant of Israel. ⁸ Behold, I will bring them from the north country, and gather them from the uttermost parts of the earth, along with the blind and the lame, the woman with child and her who travails with child together: a great company shall they return here. ⁹ They shall come with weeping; and with petitions will I lead them: I will cause them to walk by rivers of waters, in a straight way in which they shall not stumble; for I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first born. ¹⁰ Hear the word of Yahweh, you nations, and declare it

in the islands afar off; and say, He who scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock. ¹¹ For Yahweh has ransomed Jacob, and redeemed him from the hand of him who was stronger than he. ¹² They shall come and sing in the height of Zion, and shall flow to the goodness of Yahweh, to the grain, and to the new wine, and to the oil, and to the young of the flock and of the herd: and their soul shall be as a watered garden; and they shall not sorrow any more at all. ¹³ Then shall the virgin rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old together; for I will turn their mourning into joy, and will comfort them, and make them rejoice from their sorrow.

31:13 This is what shall happen after Rachel weeps for her slain children (:15) and she enters the new covenant (:31). She will be as a virgin who takes her tambourine in hand and dances, entering a new covenant with her *ba'al*, her Lord, her husband, who has obliterated the memory of all her sins in a way that only a Divine being could do (:13). Women in love are stereotypically associated with emotions of giddiness, hysteria, excitement, joy... and this is the language applied to the once weeping Rachel, who wept over the children God had taken from her. And *yet...* according to the New Testament quotations and expositions of :31, this is the very same ‘new covenant’ into which we enter in baptism (Heb. 8:8,13; 12:24). This is God’s joy over us, and it should be ours over Him. The damage of sin can at times seem so permanent that we can feel that nothing whatever can change things for us now, as Rachel weeping for her children. But the dramatic transformation really can happen when we enter into the new covenant. It’s hard to put together how God will slay Rachel’s children with thirst, forget them and show them no pity (Hos. 2:3,4; 4:6; 9:12), leave her weeping for them, and then dry her eyes and speak of a new covenant and new relationship with her. But the point of it all is that this is indeed how radical the cycle of sin, judgment and repentance really is in the lives of each of us. If a movie were to be made of all this, none of us would be able to resist it. The story of how through love gone sour, estrangement, anger and battery, a couple triumph in love and true, eternal intimacy. But this is the wonder and power of true repentance. And it is also a powerful window into the consequence and nature of human sin. The whole story, the images and ideas... surely leave us knowing once and for all that our religion and relationship with God simply can never be merely abstract contemplation of Biblical ideas, devoid of commitment and passion in response to God’s love. All these wonderful ideas come down to us through reading and reflection upon Scripture. But Bible reading, under-

14 I will satiate the soul of the priests with fatness, and My people shall be satisfied with My goodness, says Yahweh.

God Offers Hope

15 Thus says Yahweh: A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping, Rachel weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are no more. 16 Thus says Yahweh: Refrain your voice from weeping, and your eyes from tears; for your work shall be rewarded, says Yahweh; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy. 17 There is hope for your latter end, says Yahweh; and your children shall come again to their own border. 18 I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus, You have chastised me, and I was chastised, as an untrained calf: turn me, and I shall be turned; for You are Yahweh my God. 19 Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I struck on my thigh: I was ashamed, yes, even confounded, because I bore the reproach of my youth. 20 Is Ephraim

My dear son? Is he a darling child? For as often as I speak against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my heart yearns for him; I will surely have mercy on him, says Yahweh. 21 Set up road signs, make guideposts; set your heart towards the highway, even the way by which you went: turn again, virgin of Israel, turn again to these your cities. 22 How long will you go here and there, you backsliding daughter? For Yahweh has created a new thing in the earth: a woman shall follow after a man. 23 Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, Yet again shall they use this speech in the land of Judah and in its cities, when I shall bring again their captivity: Yahweh bless you, habitation of righteousness, mountain of holiness. 24 Judah and all its cities shall dwell therein together, the farmers, and those who go about with flocks. 25 For I have satiated the weary soul, and every sorrowful soul have I replenished. 26 On this I awakened, and saw; and my sleep was sweet to me. 27 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will sow the house of Israel

stood and felt as it should be, can never be a passive, neutral, private experience. If we truly are in covenant relationship with this wondrous God, it demands our all. Our failures, forgiven as they are, will haunt us for their awfulness; and the wonder of His love will never cease to move us to real tears in the midst of this passionless, too busy, postmodern world.

31:22 *A woman shall follow after a man* – It was unheard of for a woman to take the initiative in starting a romance leading towards marriage; the man always chose his woman. Hence Ruth and Naomi's outstanding initiative regarding Boaz. Our repentance is presented here as a woman taking the initiative to as it were woo God Almighty; who as it happens has a heart that yearns for her anyway (:20). This is the strange romance of repentance, a mutual attraction that lasts for eternity. And the grace of it all is that this initiative of Judah for God, this new thing in the earth, was created by Him.

and the house of Judah with the seed of man, and with the seed of animal. 28 It shall happen that like as I have watched over them to pluck up and to break down and to overthrow and to destroy and to afflict, so will I watch over them to build and to plant, says Yahweh. 29 In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. 30 But each one shall die for his own iniquity: every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.

God Makes a New Covenant with the People

31 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: 32 not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which My covenant they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Yahweh. 33 But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says Yahweh: I will put My law in their inward parts, and in their heart will I write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people: 34 and they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother saying, Know Yahweh; for they shall all know Me, from their least to their greatest, says Yahweh: for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin will I remember no more. 35 Thus says Yahweh, who gives the sun for a light by day, and the ordinances of

the moon and of the stars for a light by night, who stirs up the sea, so that its waves roar; Yahweh of Armies is His name: 36 If these ordinances depart from before Me, says Yahweh, then the seed of Israel also shall cease from being a nation before Me forever. 37 Thus says Yahweh: If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, then will I also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, says Yahweh. 38 Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that the city shall be built to Yahweh from the tower of Hananel to the gate of the corner. 39 The measuring line shall go out further straight onward to the hill Gareb, and shall turn about to Goah. 40 The whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields to the brook Kidron, to the corner of the horse gate towards the east, shall be holy to Yahweh; it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more forever.

CHAPTER 32 Aug. 11

Jeremiah Buys a Field

The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh in the tenth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, which was the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar. 2 Now at that time the king of Babylon's army was besieging Jerusalem; and Jeremiah the prophet was shut up in the court of the guard, which was in the king of Judah's house. 3 For Zedekiah king of Judah had shut him up saying, Why do you prophesy and say, Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will give this city

into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall take it; ⁴ and Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall see his eyes; ⁵ and he shall bring Zedekiah to Babylon, and he shall be there until I visit him, says Yahweh: though you fight with the Chaldeans, you shall not prosper? ⁶ Jeremiah said, The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ⁷ Behold, Hanamel the son of Shallum your uncle shall come to you, saying, Buy my field that is in Anathoth; for the right of redemption is yours to buy it. ⁸ So Hanamel my uncle's son came to me in the court of the guard according to the word of Yahweh, and said to me, Please buy my field that is in Anathoth, which is in the land of Benjamin; for the right of inheritance is yours, and the redemption is yours; buy it for yourself. Then I knew that this was the word of Yah-

weh. ⁹ I bought the field that was in Anathoth of Hanamel my uncle's son, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver. ¹⁰ I subscribed the deed, and sealed it, and called witnesses, and weighed him the money in the balances. ¹¹ So I took the deed of the purchase, both that which was sealed, containing the terms and conditions, and that which was open; ¹² and I delivered the deed of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, in the presence of Hanamel my uncle's son, and in the presence of the witnesses who subscribed the deed of the purchase, before all the Jews who sat in the court of the guard. ¹³ I commanded Baruch before them, saying, ¹⁴ Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Take these deeds, this deed of the purchase which is sealed, and this deed which is open, and put them in an earthen vessel; that they may continue many days. ¹⁵ For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and

32:8 *Then I knew that this was the word of Yahweh* – To buy property in a land terrorized by the Babylonians and about to be taken over by them (note the date given in :1), as God Himself had predicted, seemed pointless and foolish. There was only any point in doing this if it would result in Jeremiah's family gaining the land at a future date, but it seems from 16:2 that Jeremiah had no children. But sometimes God asks us to do such counter-instinctive things that we know that this just has to be His hand. Likewise Peter tested whether it was really Jesus walking on the water by saying that if it was Jesus, then only He would ask him to come walking on the water; only the Lord would ask us to do such counter-instinctive things (Mt. 14:28).

32:15 The repeated emphasis upon witnessing the purchase and making it legal was because at the end of the 70 years captivity, land would again be valuable and be bought and sold; and this land which Jeremiah was buying would therefore be a valued part of his family's inheritance. So God was asking Jeremiah to put his money where his mouth was for the sake of the hope of the restored Kingdom which he was preaching. Sometimes God asks us to do the same; to make a sacrifice, even a financial one, for the sake of the hope of the Kingdom which we profess to others.

vineyards shall yet again be bought in this land.¹⁶ Now after I had delivered the deed of the purchase to Baruch the son of Neriah, I prayed to Yahweh, saying,

Jeremiah Prays and Questions God

17 Ah Lord Yahweh! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm; there is nothing too hard for You,¹⁸ Who show loving kindness to thousands, and recompense the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them; the great, the mighty God, Yahweh of Armies is His name;¹⁹ great in counsel, and mighty in working; whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give each one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings:²⁰ who performed signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, even to this day, both in Israel and among other men; and made Yourself a name, as it is at this day;²¹ and brought forth Your people Israel out of the land of Egypt with signs, wonders, a strong hand,

an outstretched arm and with great terror;²² and gave them this land, which You swore to their fathers to give them, a land flowing with milk and honey;²³ and they came in, and possessed it, but they didn't obey Your voice, neither walked in Your law; they have done nothing of all that You commanded them to do: therefore You have caused all this evil to come on them.²⁴ Behold, the siege mounds, they have come to the city to take it; and the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans who fight against it, because of the sword, and of the famine, and of the pestilence; and what You have spoken has happened; and behold, You see it.²⁵ You have said to me, Lord Yahweh, Buy the field for money, and call witnesses; whereas the city is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.

God Answers Jeremiah

26 Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah saying,²⁷ Behold, I am Yahweh, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for Me?²⁸ There-

32:23 Done nothing of all that You commanded – Yet they were partially obedient; even within Jeremiah we see evidence of them offering sacrifices. But giving only part of our hearts to God is effectively giving nothing; the lesson is the demand for wholeheartedness in devotion. Hence :30 says that Israel “have done *only* that which was evil in My sight from their youth”. Another window onto this is to understand that when someone believes, righteousness is imputed to them; but to the unbeliever, sin is imputed (Rom. 4:8). Hence all the blood of the prophets was counted upon those who slew Jesus (Mt. 23:35). We cannot therefore simply choose not to believe and claim some kind of neutrality before God; sin will be added to our existing sins (Ps. 69:27).
32:25 Although Jeremiah did what God commanded and openly justified it to others on the basis that one day, God's promised restoration would happen – yet he evidently struggled within himself and with God about this issue. We may appear confident in faith and hope in the future Kingdom, and so may others, but who knows the internal struggles going on within us all.

fore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it: ²⁹ and the Chaldeans who now fight against this city shall come and set this city on fire and burn it, with the houses on whose roofs they have offered incense to Baal, and poured out drink offerings to other gods, so as to provoke Me to anger. ³⁰ For the children of Israel and the children of Judah have done only that which was evil in My sight from their youth; for the children of Israel have only provoked Me to anger with the work of their hands, says Yahweh. ³¹ For this city has been to Me a provocation of My anger and of My wrath from the day that they built it even to this day; that I should remove it from before My face, ³² because of all the evil of the children of Israel and of the children of Judah, which they have done to provoke Me to anger, they, their kings, their princes, their priests, and their prophets, and the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ³³ They have turned to Me the back and not the face: and though I taught them, rising up early and teaching them, yet they have not listened to receive instruction. ³⁴ Instead they set their

abominations in the house which is called by My name, to defile it. ³⁵ They built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire to Molech; which I didn't command them, neither did it come into My mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin. ³⁶ Now therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, concerning this city, about which you say, It is given into the hand of the king of Babylon by the sword, and by the famine, and by the pestilence:

God Explains about the Field

³⁷ Behold, I will gather them out of all the countries where I have driven them in My anger, and in My wrath, and in great indignation; and I will bring them again to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely: ³⁸ and they shall be My people, and I will be their God: ³⁹ and I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me forever, for their good, and of their children after them: ⁴⁰ and I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from following them, to do them good; and I will put My fear in their hearts, that they may not

32:37 Out of all the countries – The Babylonians scattered the Jews amongst all their empire. Hence the book of Esther describes how the Jews were to be found in all 127 provinces of the empire; the command to kill them and then to save them had to be written in all those different languages (Esther 8:9; 9:30).

32:40 I will put My fear in their hearts – Part of the new covenant involved God giving those included in it a new heart (:39), putting His word within their minds (31:33). Whilst we of our own freewill have to be prepared to enter that covenant with God, our salvation isn't by our works nor by our steel willed mastery of our own minds; God works within the human heart, to some extent even giving us spirituality.

depart from Me.⁴¹ Yes, I will rejoice over them to do them good, and I will plant them in this land assuredly with My whole heart and with My whole soul.⁴² For thus says Yahweh: Like as I have brought all this great evil on this people, so will I bring on them all the good that I have promised them.⁴³ Fields shall be bought in this land, about which you say, It is desolate, without man or animal; it is given into the hand of the Chaldeans.⁴⁴ Men shall buy fields for money, and subscribe the deeds, and seal them, and call witnesses, in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, and in the cities of the hill country, and in the cities of the lowland, and in the cities of the South: for I will cause their captivity to return, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 33 Aug. 12

God Promises Restoration to Israel and Judah

Moreover the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah the second time, while he was still shut up in the court of the guard, saying,² Thus says Yahweh who does it, Yahweh

who forms it to establish it; Yahweh is His name:³ Call to Me, and I will answer you, and will show you great things, and difficult, which you don't know.⁴ For thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, concerning the houses of this city, and concerning the houses of the kings of Judah, which are broken down to make a defence against the mounds and against the sword;⁵ while men come to fight with the Chaldeans, and to fill them with the dead bodies of men, whom I have killed in My anger and in My wrath, and for all whose wickedness I have hidden My face from this city:⁶ Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them; and I will reveal to them abundance of peace and truth.⁷ I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them, as at the first.⁸ I will cleanse them from all their iniquity, by which they have sinned against Me; and I will pardon all their iniquities, by which they have sinned against Me, and by which they have transgressed against Me.⁹ This city shall be to Me for a name of joy, for a praise and for a glory, before all the nations of the

32:44 These were exactly the things which Jeremiah had been asked to do right then, *before* this promised time of restoration of the Kingdom. The command wasn't simply so that his relatives' descendants might be blessed by his obedience with some land to the family name (note the implication in 16:2 that he didn't have his own children); rather was it an invitation to him to live out the Kingdom life in this life, even though the environment was very much not the time of God's restored Kingdom, in fact the very opposite. We too are invited to experience the Kingdom life in some ways even now.

33:7 *As at the first* – One proof that the future Kingdom of God will be on earth rather than in Heaven is because that Kingdom is to be a restoration of the Kingdom of God as it had been in the form of Israel (Ez. 21:25-27; Acts 1:6). The language of restoration “as at the first” is a major theme in Jeremiah – note “yet again” (:10).

earth, which shall hear all the good that I do to them, and shall fear and tremble for all the good and for all the peace that I procure to it.¹⁰ Thus says Yahweh: Yet again there shall be heard in this place, about which you say, It is waste, without man and without animal, even in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem that are desolate, without man and without inhabitant and without animal,¹¹ the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the voice of those who say, Give thanks to Yahweh of Armies, for Yahweh is good, for His loving kindness endures forever; who bring thanksgiving into the house of Yahweh. For I will cause the captivity of the land to return as at the first, says Yahweh.¹² Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Yet again shall there be in this place which is waste, without man and without animal, and in all its cities, a habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down.¹³ In the cities of the hill country, in the cities of

the lowland, and in the cities of the South, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks again pass under the hands of him who numbers them, says Yahweh.

God Promises a King

¹⁴ Behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will perform that word of grace which I have spoken concerning the house of Israel and concerning the house of Judah.¹⁵ In those days, and at that time, will I cause a Branch of righteousness to grow up to David; and he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.¹⁶ In those days shall Judah be saved, and Jerusalem shall dwell safely; and this is the name by which it shall be called: Yahweh our righteousness.¹⁷ For thus says Yahweh: David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel;¹⁸ neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before Me to offer burnt offerings, and to burn meal offerings, and to

33:10 That are desolate – They were not at that moment desolate (:1), but God’s prophetic word is so certain, that what He *predicts* will happen is spoken of as if it already exists. Likewise :12 “which is waste”.

33:15 Israel’s return from the nations where they had been scattered would be associated with the coming of Messiah to lead them once they had returned. It seems from Haggai 2 and Zech. 4 that Zerubbabel [meaning ‘branch brought from Babylon’] could have fulfilled these prophecies. But due to the prosperity in captivity which the Jews attained (see Esther 10), most chose not to return to the land, and those who did weren’t willing to obey God’s law. Indeed, extra-Biblical history records that Zerubbabel returned to Babylon. So the “branch” prophecies were reapplied to Christ; by baptism into Him, God’s righteousness is counted to us. We live at a time when the Jews are literally scattered worldwide; around the time when they return to the land, Christ will come as “the branch” to restore God’s Kingdom on earth. We may yet have to see a far greater return to the land than happened since the 1948 establishment of the state of Israel.

do sacrifice continually.¹⁹ The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah saying,²⁰ Thus says Yahweh: If you can break My covenant of the day, and My covenant of the night, so that there shall not be day and night in their season;²¹ then may also My covenant be broken with David My servant, that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne; and with the Levites the priests, My ministers.²² As the army of the sky can't be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured; so will I multiply the seed of David My servant, and the Levites who minister to Me.²³ The word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah saying,²⁴ Don't consider what this people has spoken saying, The two families which Yahweh chose, has He not cast them off? Thus do they despise My people, that they should be no more a nation before them.²⁵ Thus says Yahweh: If My covenant of day and night fails, if I have not appointed the ordinances of heaven and earth;²⁶ then will I also cast away the seed of Jacob, and of David My servant, so that I will not take of his seed to be rulers over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: for I will cause their captivity to return, and will have mercy on them.

CHAPTER 34 Aug. 13

A Warning for Zedekiah

The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and all his army and all the kingdoms of the land that were under his dominion, and all the peoples, were fighting against Je-

rusalem and against all the cities of it, saying:² Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, Go speak to Zedekiah king of Judah and tell him, Thus says Yahweh, Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall burn it with fire:³ and you shall not escape out of his hand, but shall surely be taken, and delivered into his hand; and your eyes shall see the eyes of the king of Babylon, and he shall speak with you mouth to mouth, and you shall go to Babylon.⁴ Yet hear the word of Yahweh, O Zedekiah king of Judah: thus says Yahweh concerning you, You shall not die by the sword;⁵ you shall die in peace; and with the burnings of your fathers, the former kings who were before you, so shall they make a burning for you; and they shall lament you saying, Ah Lord! Because I have spoken the word, says Yahweh.⁶ Then Jeremiah the prophet spoke all these words to Zedekiah king of Judah in Jerusalem,⁷ when the king of Babylon's army was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, against Lachish and against Azekah; for these alone remained of the cities of Judah as fortified cities.

Shameful Treatment of Slaves

The word that came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, after that the king Zedekiah had made a covenant with all the people who were at Jerusalem, to proclaim liberty to them;⁹ that every man should let his male servant, and every man his female servant, who is a Hebrew or a Hebrew-

ess, go free; that none should make bond servants of them, of a Jew his brother.¹⁰ All the princes and all the people obeyed, who had entered into the covenant, that everyone should let his male servant and everyone his female servant, go free, that none should make bond servants of them any more; they obeyed, and let them go:¹¹ but afterwards they turned, and caused the servants and the handmaids, whom they had let go free, to return, and brought them into subjection for servants and for handmaids.¹² Therefore the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying,¹³ Thus says Yahweh, God of Israel: I made a covenant with your fathers in the day that I brought them forth out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, saying,¹⁴ At the end of seven years you shall let go every man his brother who is a Hebrew, who has been sold to you,

and has served you six years, you shall let him go free from you: but your fathers didn't listen to Me, neither inclined their ear.¹⁵ You had now turned, and had done that which is right in My eyes, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour; and you had made a covenant before Me in the house which is called by My name:¹⁶ but you turned and profaned My name, and caused every man his servant, and every man his handmaid, whom you had let go free at their pleasure, to return; and you brought them into subjection, to be to you for servants and for handmaids.¹⁷ Therefore thus says Yahweh: you have not listened to Me, to proclaim liberty each man to his brother and each man to his neighbour: behold, I proclaim to you a liberty, says Yahweh, to the sword, to the plague and to the famine; and I will make you to be tossed back and forth among

34:11 The prophets not only reflected God's dismay and passionate feelings, they expressed their own dismay too. Lack of justice was a major concern of the prophets. But to us, injustice may be so commonplace we don't really worry about it too much. Given all the idolatry going on at the time of Jeremiah, we'd have expected the condition for being spared judgment at the hands of their invaders to be: 'Throw your idols away!'. But :11,22 offers them a reprieve if they stopped abusing their brethren. When, temporarily, the Jews ceased doing that and proclaimed liberty to their brethren – the pending judgment was put on hold. When they again abused their brethren, not giving them the "liberty" which must be afforded to all those made in God's image, then the Babylonians returned. And we need to ask whether we proclaim liberty to our brethren – or abuse them by not allowing them the basic freedom which is the dignity God allows to each of His children.

34:17 *Among all the kingdoms of the earth* – The Hebrew *eretz* means both "earth" in the sense of the whole planet, and also "the land" promised to Abraham. This ambiguity helps us understand how the restoration prophecies could have had their fulfilment in the regathering of the Jews scattered throughout the 127 provinces of the Babylonian and then Persian empires, which straddled the land promised to Abraham; and yet they will now have their major fulfilment in our last days, in the restoration of Israel from their dwelling places in literally the entire planet.

all the kingdoms of the earth. ¹⁸ I will give the men who have transgressed My covenant, who have not performed the words of the covenant which they made before Me, when they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts; ¹⁹ the princes of Judah, and the princes of Jerusalem, the eunuchs, and the priests, and all the people of the land, who passed between the parts of the calf; ²⁰ I will even give them into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life; and their dead bodies shall be for food to the birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth. ²¹ Zedekiah king of Judah and his princes will I give into the hand of their enemies, and into the hand of those who seek their life, and into the hand of the king of Babylon's army who have for now gone away from you. ²² Behold, I will command, says Yahweh, and cause them to return to this city; and they shall fight against

it, and take it, and burn it with fire: and I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant.

CHAPTER 35 Aug. 14

Jeremiah Meets with the Rechabites

The word which came to Jeremiah ¹ from Yahweh in the days of Je-hoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, ² Go to the house of the Rechabites, and speak to them, and bring them into the house of Yahweh, into one of the rooms, and give them wine to drink. ³ Then I took Jaazaniah the son of Jeremiah, the son of Habazziniah, and his brothers, all his sons and the whole family of the Rechabites; ⁴ and I brought them into the house of Yahweh, into the room of the sons of Hanan the son of Igdaiah, the man of God, which was by the room of the princes, which was above the room of Maaseiah the son of Shallum, the keeper of the

34:18 This speaks of how the Jews must die, because they passed between the pieces of the dead animal sacrifices in making a covenant. The idea of the dead animals in the ceremony was to teach that ‘So may I be dismembered and die if I fail to keep my promise’. God too has cut such a covenant commitment to us. In Genesis 15, He made a one-sided commitment to Abraham and to us Abraham’s seed by baptism into Christ (Gal. 3:27-29); and He passed between the pieces of the sacrificed animals to confirm it. But it was none less than the God who cannot die who is offering to do this, subjecting Himself to this potential curse! And He showed Himself for real in the death of His Son. That was His way of confirming the utter certainty of the promises to Abraham which are the basis of the new covenant which He has cut with us (Rom. 15:8; Gal. 3:17). Usually both parties passed between the dead animals – but in Gen. 15, only Yahweh did. It was a one-sided covenant from God to man, exemplifying His one-way grace. The Lord died, in the way that He did, to get through to us how true this all is – that God Almighty cut a sober, unilateral covenant with us personally, to give us the Kingdom. We simply can’t be passive to such grace, we have no option but to reach out with grace to others in care and concern – and we have a unique motivation in doing this, which this unbelieving world can never equal. From one viewpoint, the only way we can not be saved is to wilfully refuse to participate in this covenant.

threshold.⁵ I set before the sons of the house of the Rechabites bowls full of wine and cups; and I said to them, Drink wine!⁶ But they said, We will drink no wine; for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us saying, You shall drink no wine, neither you, nor your sons, forever:⁷ neither shall you build house, nor sow seed, nor plant a vineyard nor own one; but all your days you shall dwell in tents; that you may live many days in the land in which you live.⁸ We have obeyed the voice of Jonadab the son of Rechab our father in all that he commanded us, to drink no wine all our days, we, our wives, our sons, or our daughters;⁹ nor to build houses for us to dwell in; neither do we have vineyard, nor field, nor seed:¹⁰ but we have lived in tents and have obeyed and done according to all that Jonadab our father commanded us.¹¹ But it happened, when Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up into the land,

that we said, Come, and let us go to Jerusalem for fear of the army of the Chaldeans, and for fear of the army of the Syrians; so we dwell at Jerusalem.

A Lesson Learned from the Rechabites

¹² Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah saying,¹³ Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Go, and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, Will you not receive instruction to listen to My words? says Yahweh.¹⁴ The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab that he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; and to this day they drink none, for they obey their father's commandment: but I have spoken to you, rising up early and speaking; and you have not listened to Me.¹⁵ I have sent also to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return now every man

35:14 Jonadab's requirements of his descendants were unreasonable. There was nothing wrong in drinking wine nor in owning vineyards or living in a house. Indeed, all these three things are listed amongst the blessings which God would give Israel in Canaan (Dt. 6:11; 8:12; Ps. 104:15). But the point is that if other people can show such careful obedience to human commands, even if they are unnecessary and increasingly irrelevant – how much more should we be obedient to God's word. All around us are great examples of single minded dedication of life – to wrong principles. Self-sacrificial humanitarian atheists are ever before us with their good deeds. Men give their lives to and for what they believe and for political leaders – even though those beliefs are faulty and the leaders have feet of clay. How much more committed should we be... faced as we are with the ultimate truths of God and His Son. *If they can do it* – why can't we, and why can't we do even more than them? We can also reflect that Jonadab asked his descendants to not indulge in the legitimate blessings which God had given (houses, wine and vineyards). There are different levels in spiritual life; we can grab what blessings God gives us and run with them; or we can forego them, give them to others, use them for Him, refuse them simply to exercise the spiritual muscles of our self-control.

from his evil way, and amend your doings, and don't go after other gods to serve them, and you shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers: but you have not inclined your ear, nor listened to Me. 16 Because the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father which he commanded them, but this people has not listened to Me; 17 therefore thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the evil that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them, but they have not heard; and I have called to them, but they have not answered. 18 Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts, and done according to all that he commanded you; 19 therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before me forever.

CHAPTER 36 Aug. 15

Jeremiah Dictates a Scroll

It happened in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, that this word came to Jeremiah from Yahweh saying, 2 Take a scroll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken to you against Israel and against Judah and against all the nations, from the day I spoke to you, from the days of Josiah, even to this day. 3 It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do to them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. 4 Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of Neriah; and Baruch wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of Yahweh, which He had spoken to him, on a scroll of a book. 5 Jeremiah commanded Baruch saying, I am shut up; I can't go into the house of Yahweh: 6 therefore you go, and read in the scroll, which you have written from my mouth, the words of Yahweh in the ears of the people in Yahweh's house on the fast day; and also you shall read them in the ears of all Ju-

36:2 Jeremiah was asked to write down his words *so that perhaps* Judah would repent (:3). God recognized that by regularly reading those words there was a far higher chance the message might sink in and they would be motivated to action. Hearing God's word read to us is one thing, but reading it ourselves is another process. We who are literate and have Bibles are greatly blessed with the potential for really getting to grips with God's word in a manner which others haven't been blessed with. To waste and fritter away that responsibility in favour of trashy novels is something we shall have to give account for.

36:3 God says that perhaps Judah would *hear His word* and repent; in :7 Jeremiah repeats this by saying that perhaps Judah would *pray* and repent. True prayer is therefore a reflection of our hearing of God's word. His word influences ours. If the Lord's word abides in us, then prayer becomes powerful, as our will merges with that of God in our requests (Jn. 15:7).

dah who come out of their cities. ⁷ It may be they will present their supplication before Yahweh, and will return each one from his evil way; for great is the anger and the wrath that Yahweh has pronounced against this people.

Baruch Reads the Scroll

⁸ Baruch the son of Neriah did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of Yahweh in Yahweh's house. ⁹ Now it happened in the fifth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, in the ninth month, that all the people in Jerusalem, and all the people who came from the cities of Judah to Jerusalem, proclaimed a fast before Yahweh. ¹⁰ Then read Baruch in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of Yahweh, in the room of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, at the entry of the new gate of Yahweh's house, in the ears of all the people. ¹¹ When Micaiah the son of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan, had heard out of the book all the words of Yahweh, ¹² he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's room: and behold, all the princes were sitting there, Elishama the scribe, and Delaiah the son of Shemaiah, and El-

nathan the son of Achbor, and Gemariah the son of Shaphan, and Zedekiah the son of Hananiah, and all the princes. ¹³ Then Micaiah declared to them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch read the book in the ears of the people. ¹⁴ Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi the son of Nethaniah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Cushi, to Baruch, saying, Take in your hand the scroll in which you have read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch the son of Neriah took the scroll in his hand, and came to them. ¹⁵ They said to him, Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Baruch read it in their ears. ¹⁶ Now it happened, when they had heard all the words, they turned in fear one towards another, and said to Baruch, We will surely tell the king of all these words. ¹⁷ They asked Baruch, saying, Tell us now, How did you write all these words at his mouth? ¹⁸ Then Baruch answered them, he pronounced all these words to me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book. ¹⁹ Then the princes said to Baruch, Go, hide, you and Jeremiah; and let no man know where you are. ²⁰ They went in to the king into the court; but they had laid up the scroll in the room of Elishama the scribe; and they told

36:9 The paradox is that the leadership fasted, but didn't ultimately want to hear God's word. Even such self-deprivation is of no meaning unless we are going to be guided by God's word.

36:19 It's a common feature of human response that we tend to 'shoot the messenger', and this is supremely true when it comes to response to someone preaching repentance and God's demands upon human life. This is the main psychological reason behind religious persecution. The source of discomfort must be removed from our presence or even destroyed.

all the words in the ears of the king. 21 So the king sent Jehudi to get the scroll; and he took it out of the room of Elishama the scribe. Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes who stood beside the king.

The King Burns the Scroll

22 Now the king was sitting in the winter house in the ninth month: and there was a fire in the brazier burning before him. 23 It happened, when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, that the king cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the scroll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. 24 They were not afraid, nor tore their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants who heard all these words. 25 Moreover Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the scroll; but he would not hear them. 26 The king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son, and Seraiyah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet; but Yahweh hid them. 27 Then the

word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the scroll and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, 28 Take again another scroll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first scroll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah has burned. 29 Concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah you shall say, Thus says Yahweh: You have burned this scroll saying, Why have you written therein saying, The king of Babylon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from there man and beast? 30 Therefore thus says Yahweh concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: He shall have none to sit on the throne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. 31 I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring on them, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and on the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them, because they didn't listen. 32 Then took Jeremiah another scroll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from

36:23 As noted on :19, the natural human response to God's word prodding at their conscience is to remove it, to shoot the messenger. In our day one way of getting rid of the inconvenient demands of God's word is to declare parts of it uninspired by Him; not really His word, just the local views of the time; or to embark upon complex academic attempts to obscure the obvious message beneath a cloud of uncertainty, radical re-translation and polemics.

36:24 *They were not afraid* – But when they first heard those words, they were afraid (:16). Our response to and even interpretation of God's word is so often influenced by those around us. In the presence of unbelievers we can be tempted to see it the way they do... Bible reading and response has to be a totally personal enterprise, and at times it calls us to be prepared to stand alone, with our backs to the world if necessary.

the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and there were added besides to them many like words.

CHAPTER 37 Aug. 16

A Message for Zedekiah

Zedekiah the son of Josiah reigned as king, instead of Coniah the son of Jehoiakim, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made king in the land of Judah.² But neither he, nor his servants, nor the people of the land, listened to the words of Yahweh, which He spoke by the prophet Jeremiah.³ Zedekiah the king sent Jehucal the son of Shelemiah, and Zephaniah the son of Maaseiah, the priest, to the prophet Jeremiah saying, Pray now to Yahweh our God for us.⁴ Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people; for they had not put him into prison.⁵ Pharaoh's army had come forth out of Egypt; and when the Chaldeans who were besieging Jerusalem heard news of them, they broke up from Jerusalem.⁶ Then came the word of Yahweh to the prophet Jeremiah saying,⁷ Thus says Yahweh, the God of Is-

rael, You shall tell the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come forth to help you shall return to Egypt into their own land.⁸ The Chaldeans shall return and fight against this city; and they shall take it, and burn it with fire.⁹ Thus says Yahweh, Don't deceive yourselves by saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us; for they shall not depart.¹⁰ For though you had struck the whole army of the Chaldeans who fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet would they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.¹¹ It happened that when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army,¹² then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to receive his portion there, in the midst of the people.¹³ When he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the guard was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he laid hold on Jeremiah the prophet saying, You are falling away to the Chaldeans.¹⁴ Then Jeremiah said,

37:12 Later in Jeremiah, we read of how Jeremiah was given the choice of honourable retirement in Babylon, or to remain with God's spiritually weak people in the land. He chose to stay with them, and even went down into Egypt with the weakest of them. Perhaps he learnt to do that from his experience at this time. We too are taught by failures in one situation to be stronger the next time we are faced with the choice. It seems he had had enough and just wanted to get away from the aggressive, rejective audience he had in Jerusalem. It is hinted in 32:25 that Jeremiah may have somewhat resented having to buy the field, so that perhaps his family relatives would inherit it at the time of the restored Kingdom in 70 years time, after his death. So he wanted to enjoy it now. And for these things he suffered. We can't have the hope of eternity and enjoy it now, even if we may have some foretastes of it.

It is false; I am not falling away to the Chaldeans. But he didn't listen to him; so Irijah laid hold on Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes.

Jeremiah Imprisoned

15 The princes were angry with Jeremiah and struck him and imprisoned him in the house of Jonathan the scribe; for they had made that the prison. 16 When Jeremiah had come into the dungeon house and into the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days; 17 then Zedekiah the king sent and fetched him: and the king asked him secretly in his house saying, Is there any word from Yahweh? Jeremiah said, There is. He said also, You shall be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. 18 Moreover Jeremiah said to king Zedekiah, Wherein have I sinned against you, or against your servants, or against this people, that you have put me in prison? 19 Where now are your prophets who prophesied to you saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? 20 Now please

hear, my lord the king: please let my supplication be presented before you, that you not cause me to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, unless I die there. 21 Then Zedekiah the king commanded and they committed Jeremiah into the court of the guard; and they gave him daily a loaf of bread out of the bakers' street, until all the bread in the city was spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

CHAPTER 38 Aug. 17

Jeremiah Put into the Dungeon

Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah and Pashhur the son of Malchijah heard the words that Jeremiah spoke to all the people saying, 2 Thus says Yahweh, He who remains in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine and by the plague; but he who goes forth to the Chaldeans shall live, and his life shall be to him for a prey, and he shall live. 3 Thus says Yahweh, This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon, and he

37:17 Those who know God's word will find encouragement there in their experiences of life – but that encouragement is dependent upon their appreciation of the word, and their ability to see the similarities between their situation and that of others who have gone before. Thus when Zedekiah called Jeremiah out of the prison house to meet him and show him the word of God, he ought to have perceived that he was going through the very experience of Pharaoh with Joseph (see too :20). Jeremiah's desperate plea not to be sent back to prison to die there surely echoes that of Joseph to his brethren; for Jeremiah was let down like Joseph had been into a pit with no water in, so reminiscent of Joseph (Gen. 37:24). But Zedekiah didn't want to see all this; he should've listened to Jeremiah, as Pharaoh had listened to Joseph and saved himself. It was all potentially set up for him; but he refused to take note. One of the many reasons for daily Bible reading is that we become familiar with the text of Scripture, and can more easily perceive the similarities between our life situations and those of Bible characters who have gone before us.

shall take it.⁴ Then the princes said to the king, Please let this man be put to death; because he weakens the hands of the men of war who remain in this city, and the hands of all the people, in speaking such words to them: for this man doesn't seek the welfare of this people, but their hurt.⁵ Zedekiah the king said, Behold, he is in your hand; for the king is not he who can do anything against you.⁶ Then they took Jeremiah and cast him into the dungeon of Malchijah the king's son, that was in the court of the guard: and they let down Jeremiah with cords. In the dungeon there was no water, but mud; and Jeremiah sank in the mud.⁷ Now when Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, a eunuch who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah in the dungeon (the king then sitting in the gate of Benjamin),⁸ Ebedmelech went forth out of the king's house and spoke to the king saying,⁹ My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the dungeon; and he is likely to die in the place where he is, because of the famine; for there is no more bread in the city.¹⁰ Then the king commanded Ebedmelech the Ethiopian saying, Take from here

thirty men with you, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon before he dies.

Jeremiah Rescued

¹¹ So Ebedmelech took the men with him, and went into the house of the king under the treasury, and took from there rags and worn-out clothes and let them down by cords into the dungeon to Jeremiah.¹² Ebedmelech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, Put now these rags and worn-out clothes under your armpits under the cords. Jeremiah did so.¹³ So they drew up Jeremiah with the cords, and took him up out of the dungeon: and Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

Jeremiah's Last Conversation with Zedekiah

¹⁴ Then Zedekiah the king sent and took Jeremiah the prophet to him into the third entry that is in the house of Yahweh: and the king said to Jeremiah, I will ask you something. Hide nothing from me.¹⁵ Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, If I declare it to you, will you not surely put me to death? And if I give you advice, you will not listen to me.¹⁶ So Zedekiah the king swore secretly to Jeremiah saying, As Yahweh lives, who

38:7 Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, a eunuch – As a dark skinned foreigner who was well known to be a eunuch, he would likely have been despised within Jerusalem society. But it was exactly the despised who God loves to use as tools to save His people. And it's exactly these types who have the empathy to be able to reach out to save those like Jeremiah. We too can be such people, if we meditate enough upon who we really are and the significance of our sins.

38:16 Who made us this soul – The fact we had our lives created by God means we should never take another's life apart from at His specific command.

made us this soul, I will not put you to death, neither will I give you into the hand of these men who seek your life.

¹⁷ Then Jeremiah said to Zedekiah, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: If you will go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then your soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and you shall live, and your family.

¹⁸ But if you will not go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, then shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire and you shall not escape out of their hand.

¹⁹ Zedekiah the king said to Jeremiah, I am afraid of the Jews who are fallen away to the Chaldeans, lest they deliver me into their hand and they mock me.

²⁰ But Jeremiah said, They shall not deliver you. Obey, I beg you, the voice of Yahweh, in that which I speak to you: so it shall be well

with you, and your soul shall live.

²¹ But if you refuse to go forth, this is the word that Yahweh has shown me:

²² behold, all the women who are left in the king of Judah's house shall be brought forth to the king of Babylon's princes, and those women shall say, Your familiar friends have deceived you and have prevailed over you. Your feet are now sunk in the mud, and they now turn away from you.

²³ They shall bring out all your wives and your children to the Chaldeans; and you shall not escape out of their hand, but shall be taken by the hand of the king of Babylon: and you shall cause this city to be burned with fire.

²⁴ Then Zedekiah said to Jeremiah, Let no man know of these words, and you shall not die.

²⁵ But if the princes hear that I have talked with you, and they come to you and tell you, Declare to us now what you have said to the king; don't

38:22 *Your feet are now sunk in the mire* – The emphasis would've been on “*your feet*”. Jeremiah witnessed to Zedekiah on the basis of bridge building. Jeremiah warned him that politically and spiritually, *his* feet were sunk in the mud – just after Jeremiah himself had sunk in the mud and been miraculously delivered from it (:6). We must build bridges into the real world in which the people who are our audience live and love, work and play, laugh and weep, struggle and suffer, grow old and die. We do this by revealing to them that we too are human, we're not knights in shining armour; and we seek to relate our experiences to theirs, so that there is that point of ‘flash’ where we as it were catch each others’ eye, and are united by experience. It is from that point that we have won their trust and can proceed to credibly share the doctrinal content of the Gospel with them. The more real, the more credible.

38:23 *You shall cause this city to be burned with fire* – God somehow arranged things within His purpose so that Zedekiah’s repentance would have enabled the salvation of all Israel. But his failure to repent, his fear of his image amongst men who were themselves condemned and on borrowed time, meant that judgment came on all His people. What this shows is that there are times and places where God is willing to save people for the sake of the spirituality of a third party, but if he or she fails in this, deliverance doesn’t necessarily arise from another place, as it would have done in Esther’s time.

hide it from us, and we will not put you to death; also what the king said to you: ²⁶ then you shall tell them, I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to Jonathan's house to die there. ²⁷ Then came all the princes to Jeremiah, and asked him; and he told them according to all these words that the king had commanded. So they left off speaking with him; for the matter was not perceived. ²⁸ So Jeremiah stayed in the court of the guard until the day that Jerusalem was taken.

CHAPTER 39 Aug. 18

Jerusalem Is Taken

It happened when Jerusalem was taken, (in the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and besieged it; ² in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city), ³ that all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, Nergal Sharezer, Samgarnebo, Sarschim, Rabsaris, Nergal Sharezer, Rabmag, with all the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon. ⁴ It

happened that when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, then they fled and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, through the gate between the two walls; and he went out towards the Arabah. ⁵ But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after them, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; and he gave judgement on him. ⁶ Then the king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes: also the king of Babylon killed all the nobles of Judah. ⁷ Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him in fetters to carry him to Babylon. ⁸ The Chaldeans burned the king's house and the houses of the people with fire, and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. ⁹ Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the remnant of the people who remained in the city, the deserters also who fell away to him, and the residue of the people who remained. ¹⁰ But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, who had nothing, in the land of Judah, and

39:5 The parable of the good Samaritan features a man going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and being attacked, to be saved by grace when no human help could assist him (Lk. 10:30). The wounded man represents us all, and yet he is modelled upon Zedekiah. This weak king who loved hearing God's word and wanted to do the right thing, but was simply weak and gave in to the pressure of circumstance and thereby seriously sinned – is representative of each of us.

39:10 These very poor people didn't show themselves spiritually strong, whereas at least some of the more prosperous who were taken to Babylon did repent and some returned to the land after 70 years. Poverty doesn't always mean spirituality; for the problem with poverty is that it can become obsessive and distracts people from God.

gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

Jeremiah Not to Be Harmed

11 Now Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon commanded Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard concerning Jeremiah saying, **12** Take him, and look well to him, and do him no harm; but do to him even as he shall tell you. **13** So Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard sent, and Nebushazban, Rab-saris, Nergal Sharezer, Rabmag, and all the chief officers of the king of Babylon; **14** they sent, and took Jeremiah out of the court of the guard, and committed him to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, that he should carry him home: so he lived among the people. **15** Now the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah, while he was shut up in the court of the guard, saying, **16** Go and speak to Ebedmelech the Ethiopian saying, Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will bring My words on this city for evil, and not for good; and they shall be accomplished before you in that day. **17** But I will deliver you in that day, says Yahweh; and you shall not be

given into the hand of the men of whom you are afraid. **18** For I will surely save you, and you shall not fall by the sword, but your life shall be for a prey to you; because you have put your trust in me, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 40 Aug. 19

Jeremiah is Set Free

The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh after Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had let him go from Ramah, when he had taken him being bound in chains among all the captives of Jerusalem and Judah, who were carried away captive to Babylon. **2** The captain of the guard took Jeremiah and said to him, Yahweh your God pronounced this evil on this place; **3** and Yahweh has brought it, and done according as He spoke: because you have sinned against Yahweh, and have not obeyed His voice, therefore this thing has come on you. **4** Now, behold, I release you this day from the chains which are on your hand. If it seems good to you to come with me into Babylon, come, and I will take care of you; but if it seems bad to

39:18 *Because you have put your trust in me* – Ebedmelech is commended for his faith, and yet at the same time God points out his fear (:17). Ideally, faith should preclude fear. Ebedmelech feared, and yet he still believed. Perhaps faith is rarely total in human beings, but God accepts that all the same, in His grace. Note that Ebedmelech is promised deliverance because of his faith – when we would have expected him to be given deliverance because he had delivered God’s prophet Jeremiah. Thus we see that good works are not on their own of significance to God; it is faith in Him which is of the essence.

40:4 *All the land is before you* – Jeremiah would have recalled how Lot was in a similar position, given the opportunity of living where he wanted; and he wrongly chose the Sodom area, and spiritually suffered for it. Jeremiah would’ve immediately been on his guard, in case this offer of living where he liked could lead him to wrong

you to come with me into Babylon, don't: behold, all the land is before you; where it seems good and right to you to go, there go.⁵ If you remain, then return to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, son of Shaphan, whom the king of Babylon appointed governor of the cities of Judah, and dwell with him among the people. Or go wherever you think it right to go. So the captain of the guard gave him an allowance of food and a present, and let him go.⁶ Then went Jeremiah to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah, and lived with him among the people who were left in the land.
 7 Now when all the captains of the forces who were in the fields, even they and their men, heard that the king of Babylon had made Gedaliah the son of Ahikam governor in the land, and had committed to him

men, and women, and children, and of the poorest of the land, of those who were not carried away captive to Babylon; ⁸ then they came to Gedaliah to Mizpah, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, Johanan and Jonathan the sons of Kareah, Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth, the sons of Ephai the Netophathite and Jezaniah the son of the Maacathite, they and their men.
 9 Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan swore to them and to their men saying, Don't be afraid to serve the Chaldeans: dwell in the land, and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you.

The Harvest

¹⁰ As for me, behold, I will dwell at Mizpah, to stand before the Chaldeans who shall come to us: but you, gather grapes and summer fruits and

choices. The more familiar we are with Scripture and the more we reflect upon and personalize it, the easier it will be for us to see our situations as being in essence what others were in, and the clearer the decisions will become.

40:6 Jeremiah was popular with the Babylonians because he had repeatedly urged Judah to surrender to them and predicted the Babylonian victory. So he was offered a nice retirement package in the opulence of Babylon, amongst his fellow Jews, whom God had predicted would be the ones who would repent, rather than those very poor few who remained in the land. Jeremiah's chose to remain in unstable Judah, which would've suffered all the practical and economic problems associated with anarchy, marauding gangs and a land destroyed by a lengthy military campaign; and he also chose to remain among the materially poor and spiritually weakest. They wouldn't have been very nice company. The first wave of Jews taken captive to Babylon included faithful Daniel and his friends, Ezekiel and other prophets. But Jeremiah chose the hardest way, to stay with the weakest and poorest; he must've been so spiritually lonely. In various contexts we also have these choices, and if we are truly motivated by the love of Christ, we will seek the higher level choices as Jeremiah did.

40:9 *Don't be afraid to serve the Chaldeans* – Gedaliah is alluding to Jeremiah's words of 27:8,11,12, where he had urged Judah to recognize their sins and the need for punishment of them, and therefore serve the Chaldeans. Because they didn't do this, destruction came. But even afterwards, it seems Gedaliah was still urging the people to accept this principle.

oil, and put them in your vessels, and dwell in your cities that you have taken.¹¹ Likewise when all the Jews who were in Moab, and among the children of Ammon, and in Edom, and who were in all the countries, heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant of Judah, and that he had set over them Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan;¹² then all the Jews returned out of all places where they were driven, and came to the land of Judah to Gedaliah, to Mizpah, and gathered grapes and summer fruits very much.¹³ Moreover Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were in the fields, came to Gedaliah to Mizpah,¹⁴ and said to him, Do you know that Baalis the king of the children of Ammon has sent Ishmael the son of Nethaniah to take your life? But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam didn't believe them.¹⁵ Then Johanan the son of Kareah spoke to Gedaliah in Mizpah secretly saying, Please let me go, and I will kill Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and no man shall know

it: why should he take your life, that all the Jews who are gathered to you should be scattered, and the remnant of Judah perish?¹⁶ But Gedaliah the son of Ahikam said to Johanan the son of Kareah, You shall not do this thing; for you speak falsely of Ishmael.

CHAPTER 41 Aug. 20

Gedaliah is Killed

Now it happened in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, the son of Elishama, of the seed royal and one of the chief officers of the king, and ten men with him, came to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam to Mizpah; and there they ate bread together in Mizpah.² Then arose Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and the ten men who were with him, and struck Gedaliah the son of Ahikam the son of Shaphan with the sword, and killed him whom the king of Babylon had made governor over the land.³ Ishmael also killed all the Jews who were with him, with Gedaliah, at Mizpah, and the

40:10-15 The positive situation described here, both materially and spiritually, was perhaps an outcome of the people being willing to obey Jeremiah's earlier appeal to serve the Babylonians (see on :9). It would seem from 41:5 that the destroyed temple was at least partially operating; and as many as 80 men had cut themselves in repentance and a fervent desire for God to hear their prayers, and were bringing sacrifice to Him. The king's daughters were allowed to remain in Mizpah, and some of the "greatest" amongst the Jews also remained in the land (42:1). This situation is never predicted by Jeremiah; all the prophecies suggest a total destruction of the people and the severing of God's relationship with the land. But in wrath God remembered mercy; what we see here is grace indeed. And yet, once again, the situation didn't last because of human failure – in this case, Ishmael's evil explained in chapter 41, and Gedaliah's unwisdom in :16.

41:1 To eat bread together was a sign of fellowship and mutual acceptance. The breaking of bread service is therefore designed as a comfort to us of the Lord's acceptance of us. He is willing to do this any time with us.

Chaldeans who were found there, the men of war.⁴ It happened the second day after he had killed Gedaliah, and no man knew it,⁵ that there came men from Shechem, from Shiloh, and from Samaria, even eighty men, having their beards shaved and their clothes torn, and having cut themselves, with meal offerings and frankincense in their hand, to bring them to the house of Yahweh.⁶ Ishmael the son of Nethaniah went forth from Mizpah to meet them, weeping all along as he went: and it happened, as he met them, he said to them, Come to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam.

The Evil Done by Ishmael

⁷ It was so that when they came into the midst of the city, Ishmael the son of Nethaniah killed them, and cast them into the midst of the pit, he, and the men who were with him.⁸ But ten men were found among those who said to Ishmael, Don't kill us; for we have stores hidden in the field, of wheat, barley, oil and honey. So he stopped, and didn't kill them among their brothers.⁹ Now the cistern in which Ishmael cast all the dead bodies of the men whom he had killed along with Gedaliah was the same which Asa the king had made for fear of Baasha king of Israel. Ishmael the son of Nethaniah filled it with those who were killed.¹⁰ Then Ishmael carried away captive all the remainder of the people who were in Mizpah, even the king's daughters, and all the people who remained in

Mizpah, whom Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard had committed to Gedaliah the son of Ahikam; Ishmael the son of Nethaniah carried them away captive, and departed to go over to the children of Ammon.¹¹ But when Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, heard of all the evil that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had done,¹² then they took all the men and went to fight with Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, and found him by the great waters that are in Gibeon.¹³ Now it happened that when all the people who were with Ishmael saw Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces who were with him, then they were glad.¹⁴ So all the people whom Ishmael had carried away captive from Mizpah turned about and returned and went to Johanan the son of Kareah.¹⁵ But Ishmael the son of Nethaniah escaped from Johanan with eight men, and went to the children of Ammon.¹⁶ Then took Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, all the remnant of the people whom he had recovered from Ishmael the son of Nethaniah, from Mizpah, after that he had killed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the men of war, and the women, and the children, and the eunuchs, whom he had brought back from Gibeon:¹⁷ and they departed, and lived in Geruth Chimham, which is by Bethlehem, to go to enter into Egypt,¹⁸ because of the Chaldeans; for they were afraid of them, because

41:5 See on 40:10-15.

Ishmael the son of Nethaniah had killed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, whom the king of Babylon made governor over the land.

CHAPTER 42 Aug. 21

The People Ask Jeremiah to Pray for Them

Then all the captains of the forces, Johanan the son of Kareah, Jezaniah the son of Hoshiaiah and all the people from the least even to the greatest came near,² and said to Jeremiah the prophet, Please let our supplication be presented before you, and pray for us to Yahweh your God, even for all this remnant; for we are left but a few of many, as your eyes do see us:³ that Yahweh your God may show us the way in which we should walk, and the thing that we should do.⁴ Then

Jeremiah the prophet said to them, I have heard you; behold, I will pray to Yahweh your God according to your words; and it shall happen that whatever thing Yahweh shall answer you, I will declare it to you; I will keep nothing back from you.⁵ Then they said to Jeremiah, Yahweh be a true and faithful witness among us, if we don't do according to all the word with which Yahweh your God shall send you to us.⁶ Whether it be good, or whether it be evil, we will obey the voice of Yahweh our God to whom we send you; that it may be well with us, when we obey the voice of Yahweh our God.

God Answers

7 It happened that after ten days the word of Yahweh came to Jeremiah.
8 Then called he Johanan the son of

42:4 *I will keep nothing back from you* – Paul uses the very same phrase from the LXX in Act 20:20 in the same context; of declaring to God's people what He has revealed to him. Many of the allusions made by Bible characters to the words of other Bible characters may not have been conscious; but they were so filled with God's word that they came out with those phrases which they had in their hearts as a result of their continual reflection upon God's word. This is how the Bible can become a living word for us; in that we find ourselves talking even to ourselves, in our deepest self-talk, in the terms and phrases we encounter in the Bible (Eph. 5:19). This is the essence of spiritual mindedness, which is what Christianity is all about.

42:6 *We will obey* – Whilst their attitude is great on paper, chapter 43 explains that they simply rejected the answer they received. At this point, they were approaching God and seeking guidance from His word with their minds already made up as to what they wanted the answer to be. This is the attitude which robs so much prayer and Bible reading of its value – people can do these things in the hope they will be confirmed in their own views and wishes, and if they aren't confirmed in them, they just continue in them anyway. Prayer and Bible study must be done with a true openness of mind and willingness to be directed by them, even into paths and choices we strongly don't wish to make.

God to whom we send you – Prayer was envisaged by them as a going to God, a journey into His presence. Although we are in His presence all the time, this doesn't take away the special entry into God's personal presence which is what prayer is all about.

Kareah, and all the captains of the forces who were with him, and all the people from the least even to the greatest,⁹ and said to them, Thus says Yahweh, the God of Israel to whom you sent me to present your supplication before Him:¹⁰ If you will still live in this land, then will I build you, and not pull you down, and I will plant you, and not pluck you up; for I grieve over the distress that I have brought on you.¹¹ Don't be afraid of the king of Babylon, of whom you are afraid; don't be afraid of him, says Yahweh: for I am with you to save you, and to deliver you from his hand.¹² I will grant you mercy, that he may have mercy on you, and cause you to return to your own land.¹³ But if you say, We will not dwell in this land; so that you don't obey the voice of Yahweh your God,¹⁴ saying, No; but we will go into the land of Egypt, where we shall see no war, nor hear the sound of the trumpet, nor have hunger of bread; and there will we dwell:¹⁵ now therefore hear the word of Yahweh, O remnant of Judah: Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, If you indeed set your faces to enter into Egypt, and go to live there;¹⁶ then it shall happen, that the sword which you fear shall overtake you there in the land of Egypt; and the famine, about which you are afraid, shall follow close behind you there in Egypt; and there you shall die.¹⁷ So shall it be with all the men who set their faces to go into Egypt to live there: they shall die by the sword, by the famine and by the plague; and none of them

shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring on them.¹⁸ For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: As My anger and My wrath has been poured forth on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so shall My wrath be poured forth on you, when you shall enter into Egypt; and you shall be an object of horror and an astonishment, a curse and a reproach; and you shall see this place no more.

Jeremiah Warns the People

¹⁹ Yahweh has spoken concerning you, remnant of Judah, Don't you go into Egypt: know certainly that I have testified to you this day.²⁰ For you have dealt deceitfully against your own souls; for you sent me to Yahweh your God saying, Pray for us to Yahweh our God; and according to all that Yahweh our God shall say, so declare to us, and we will do it:²¹ and I have this day declared it to you; but you have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh your God in anything for which He has sent me to you.²² Now therefore know certainly that you shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, in the place where you desire to go to live there.

CHAPTER 43 Aug. 22

The People Flee to Egypt

It happened that when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking to all the people all the words of Yahweh their God, with which Yahweh their God had sent him to them, even all these words,² then spoke Azariah the son of Hoshaiah, and Johanan the son of

Kareah, and all the proud men, saying to Jeremiah, You speak falsely: Yahweh our God has not sent you to say, You shall not go into Egypt to live there;³ but Baruch the son of Neriah sets you on against us, to deliver us into the hand of the Chaldeans, that they may put us to death, and carry us away captive to Babylon.⁴ So Johanan the son of Kareah, and all the captains of the forces, and all the people, didn't obey the voice of Yahweh, to dwell in the land of Judah.⁵ But Johanan the son of Kareah and all the captains of the forces took all the remnant of Judah, who were returned from all the nations where they had been driven, to live in the land of Judah;⁶ the men, and the women, and the children, and the king's daughters, and every person who Nebuzaradan the captain of the

guard had left with Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan; and Jeremiah the prophet, and Baruch the son of Neriah;⁷ and they came into the land of Egypt; for they didn't obey the voice of Yahweh: and they came to Tahpanhes.

The Invasion of Egypt Foretold

⁸ Then came the word of Yahweh to Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, saying,
⁹ Take great stones in your hand, and hide them in mortar in the brick work, which is at the entry of Pharaoh's house in Tahpanhes, in the sight of the men of Judah;¹⁰ and tell them, Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will send and take Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will set his throne on these stones that I have hidden; and he shall spread

43:2 See on 42:6. The way out of finding that God's word is telling us something we don't want to hear is to claim that actually, that part isn't inspired. The problem with rejecting parts of God's word – the inconvenient bits – is that we then have no mechanism with which to decide which parts to accept and which not to; the process becomes subjective to the point that God's word is no longer His but effectively our own. And it's pride which is at the root of refusing to accept God's word as inspired – for "all the proud men" refused to accept Jeremiah's word as inspired.

43:5 *The remnant of Judah, who were returned from all the nations where they had been driven* – It seems that during the short period of peace immediately after the destruction of Jerusalem (see on 40:10-15), some of the Jews who had fled over Judah's border into neighbouring countries started to return. This was becoming a foretaste of the prophesied restoration and return which was to happen after 70 years; but their trust in Egypt and lack of faith in Jeremiah's prophetic word meant that this possible scenario didn't come true. We too by grace have many possible scenarios open to us, but our unbelief and desire to follow our gut feelings lead us not to fulfil them.

43:8 Jeremiah in Tahpanhes – It's incredible that Jeremiah went there with them, despite having had his prophetic words specifically ignored, and being slandered as actually not a true prophet of Yahweh. But this was his level of identity with God's people, weak as they were. After reading this verse, the spiritual weakness of others in the family of God should never again make us think that we want nothing to do with them. We need to stick with them as Jeremiah did.

his royal pavilion over them.¹¹ He shall come, and shall strike the land of Egypt; such as are for death shall be put to death, and such as are for captivity to captivity, and such as are for the sword to the sword.¹² I will kindle a fire in the houses of the gods of Egypt; and he shall burn them, and carry them away captive: and he shall array himself with the land of Egypt, as a shepherd puts on his garment; and he shall go forth from there in peace.¹³ He shall also break the pillars of Beth Shemesh that is in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the gods of Egypt shall he burn with fire.

CHAPTER 44 Aug. 23 *God's Message for the Jews in Egypt*

The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the Jews who lived in the land of Egypt, who lived at Migdol, Tahpanhes, Memphis and in the country of Pathros, saying,² Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: You have seen all the evil that I have brought on Jerusalem and on all the cities of Judah; and behold, this day they are a desolation, and no man dwells therein,³ because of their wickedness which they have committed to provoke Me to anger, in that they went to burn incense, to serve other gods that they didn't know, neither they, nor you, nor your

fathers.⁴ However I sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them saying, Oh, don't do this abominable thing that I hate!⁵ But they didn't listen nor inclined their ear to turn from their wickedness, to burn no incense to other gods.⁶ Therefore My wrath and My anger was poured forth, and was kindled in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem; and they are wasted and desolate, as it is this day.⁷ Therefore now thus says Yahweh, the God of Armies, the God of Israel: Why do you commit great evil against your own souls, to cut off from yourselves man and woman, infant and nursing child out of the midst of Judah, to leave yourselves none remaining;⁸ in that you provoke Me to anger with the works of your hands, burning incense to other gods in the land of Egypt where you have gone to live; that you may be cut off, and that you may be a curse and a reproach among all the nations of the earth?⁹ Have you forgotten the wickedness of your fathers, the wickedness of the kings of Judah, the wickedness of their wives, and your own wickedness, and the wickedness of your wives which they committed in the land of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem?¹⁰ They are not humbled even to this day, neither have they feared, nor walked in My law, nor in My statutes, that

44:3 Time and again Jeremiah accuses the people of purposefully inciting God to anger through their worshipping of Him along with other gods (7:18,19; 11:17,18; 25:6; 44:3-8) – whereas the onlooker would've likely commented that at least they were doing *something*, and Jeremiah should just calm himself down about it all. The demand is for total dedication.

I set before you and before your fathers.¹¹ Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will set My face against you for evil, even to cut off all Judah. ¹² I will take the remnant of Judah, that have set their faces to go into the land of Egypt to live there, and they shall all be consumed; in the land of Egypt shall they fall; they shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine; they shall die, from the least even to the greatest, by the sword and by the famine; and they shall be an object of horror, an astonishment, a curse and a reproach. ¹³ For I will punish those who dwell in the land of Egypt as I have punished Jerusalem, by the sword, by the famine, and by the plague;¹⁴ so that none of the remnant of Judah, who have gone into the land of Egypt to live there, shall escape or be left to return into the land of Judah, to which they will have a desire to return to dwell there: for none shall return save such as shall escape.

The People Refuse to Heed God's Message

¹⁵ Then all the men who knew that their wives burned incense to other gods, and all the women who stood by, a great assembly, even all the people who lived in the land of Egypt, in Pathros, answered Jeremiah saying,¹⁶ As for the word that you have spoken to us in the name of Yahweh, we will not listen to you. ¹⁷ But we will certainly perform every word that is gone forth out of our mouth, to burn incense to the queen of the sky, and to pour out drink offerings to her, as we have done, we and our fathers, our kings and our princes, in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem; for then had we plenty of food, and were well, and saw no evil. ¹⁸ But since we left off burning incense to the queen of the sky, and pouring out drink offerings to her, we have wanted all things, and have been consumed by the sword and by the famine. ¹⁹ When we burned incense to the queen of the sky, and

44:14 *For none shall return save such as shall escape* – God's grace is amazing here. He had promised total destruction of Judah; but some survived. He had told Jeremiah that He wouldn't respond to Jeremiah's prayers for the people (7:16; 11:14). Yet Jeremiah had prayed for this remnant of the people, and God had responded (42:6). The people had solemnly promised to do whatever God said in response. He told them not to go to Egypt. They went anyway. God said they would be destroyed there "so that none... shall be left to return". And now He hints at the possibility that some would still return to Judah from Egypt. He so seeks relationship with His people. See on :28.

44:18 *Were well, and saw no evil* – Their motivation was simply to have a situation where they would experience good and not "evil", in the sense of disaster. Yet they had claimed that they would accept God's word whether it meant good or evil for them (42:6). However, their agenda was clearly that they wanted good in this life, right now; rather than accepting evil now as a preparation for God's future Kingdom. The prosperity Gospel has likewise totally misunderstood this; through much tribulation in this life we shall come to enter God's Kingdom (Acts 14:22).

44:19 There is fair emphasis on the role the women played in the decision to worship

poured out drink offerings to her, did we make her cakes to worship her, and pour out drink offerings to her, without our husbands? ²⁰ Then Jeremiah said to all the people, to the men, and to the women, even to all the people who had given him an answer, saying, ²¹ The incense that you burned in the cities of Judah, and in the streets of Jerusalem, you and your fathers, your kings and your princes, and the people of the land, didn't Yahweh remember it, and didn't it come into His mind? ²² So that Yahweh could no longer endure you, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which you have committed; therefore your land has become a desolation, an astonishment and a curse, without inhabitant, as it is this day. ²³ Because you have burned incense, and because you have sinned against Yahweh, and have not obeyed the voice of Yahweh, nor walked in His law, nor in His statutes, nor in His testimonies; therefore this evil has happened to you, as it is this day. ²⁴ Moreover Jeremiah said to all the people, and to all the women, Hear the word of Yahweh, all Judah who are in the land of Egypt: ²⁵ Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, saying, You and your wives

have both spoken with your mouths, and with your hands have fulfilled it saying, We will surely perform our vows that we have vowed, to burn incense to the queen of the sky, and to pour out drink offerings to her: establish then your vows, and perform your vows.

God Will Punish Them

²⁶ Therefore hear the word of Yahweh, all Judah who dwell in the land of Egypt: Behold, I have sworn by My great name, says Yahweh, that My name shall no more be named in the mouth of any man of Judah in all the land of Egypt saying, As the Lord Yahweh lives. ²⁷ Behold, I watch over them for evil, and not for good; and all the men of Judah who are in the land of Egypt shall be consumed by the sword and by the famine, until they are all gone. ²⁸ Those who escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah, few in number; and all the remnant of Judah, who have gone into the land of Egypt to live there, shall know whose word shall stand, Mine, or theirs. ²⁹ This shall be the sign to you, says Yahweh, that I will punish you in this place, that you may know that My words shall surely stand against you for evil: ³⁰ Thus

“the queen of the sky”. Perhaps the women were attracted by the idea of a female deity and cast off their faith in Yahweh because of that attraction. People can be abused and discriminated against, just as women were at that time, and yet allow this to lead them into rejecting the true God because they think some other religious system gives value to the abused and glorifies them; when in fact it is Yahweh alone who can glorify anything and ultimately right any wrong.

44:28 Having said that all the Jews in Egypt would be destroyed (:27), there is still going to be a tiny remnant, by God's grace. See on :14.

says Yahweh, Behold, I will give Pharaoh Hophra king of Egypt into the hand of his enemies, and into the hand of those who seek his life; as I gave Zedekiah king of Judah into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, who was his enemy, and sought his life.

CHAPTER 45 Aug. 24

God Will Spare Baruch's Life

The message that Jeremiah the prophet spoke to Baruch the son of Neriah, when he wrote these words in a book at the mouth of Jeremiah, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, saying, ² Thus says Yahweh the God of Israel, to you, Baruch: ³ You said, Woe is me now! For Yahweh has added sorrow to my pain; I am weary with my groaning and I find no rest. ⁴ You shall tell him, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, that which I have built will I break down, and that which I have planted I will pluck up; and this

will be so in the whole land. ⁵ Do you seek great things for yourself? Don't seek them; for, behold, I will bring evil on all flesh, says Yahweh; but your life will I give to you for a prey in all places where you go.

CHAPTER 46 Aug. 24

God's Message for Egypt

The word of Yahweh which came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations. ² Of Egypt: concerning the army of Pharaoh Necoh king of Egypt, which was by the river Euphrates in Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah. ³ Prepare the buckler and shield, and draw near to battle! ⁴ Harness the horses, rise up, you horsemen, and stand forth with your helmets; furbish the spears, put on the coats of mail. ⁵ Why have I seen it? They are dismayed and are turned backward; and their mighty ones are

45:5 The command not to see great material things for himself was given to Baruch in the context of the fact that the entire nation of Judah was about to be taken over and destroyed by Babylon. Likewise James 5:3 comments upon the absurdity of heaping up treasures in the last days. If Jesus is about to return and establish His Kingdom here, then amassing wealth in this present order of things which is so soon to be destroyed is bizarre. To live *as if* the day of Christ's return is upon us appears to have been an expectation of the early Christians. It is not to say that we actually *know* that day shall be hear imminently; rather are we to live *as if* it will be.

46:2 The disobedient Jews had fled to Egypt because they thought there would be support and stability there from the Babylonians. Here God prophesies that the Egyptian army would be destroyed and wouldn't be a strength to the Jews. Egypt so often becomes a symbol of human strength which God's people are tempted to trust in rather than in Him. His requirements are often counter-instinctive to obey; to remain in the ruins of Judah under Babylonian occupation was in fact the way to peace; but Egypt always looks the logical, more attractive choice.

46:5 *Why have I seen it?* – Jeremiah like us at times was weary at having to teach bad news to sinners, and the loss of life because of human pride.

beaten down and have fled apace, and don't look back: terror is on every side, says Yahweh. ⁶ Don't let the swift flee away, nor the mighty man escape; in the north by the river Euphrates have they stumbled and fallen. ⁷ Who is this who rises up like the Nile, whose waters toss themselves like the rivers? ⁸ Egypt rises up like the Nile, and his waters toss themselves like the rivers: and he says, I will rise up, I will cover the land; I will destroy cities and its inhabitants. ⁹ Go up, you horses; and rage, you chariots; and let the mighty ones go forth: Cush and Put, who handle the shield; and the Ludim, who handle and bend the bow. ¹⁰ For that day is of the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself of His adversaries: and the sword shall devour and be satiate, and shall drink its fill of their blood; for the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, has a sacrifice in the north country by the river Euphrates. ¹¹ Go up into Gilead and take balm, virgin daughter of Egypt: in vain do you use many medicines; there is no healing for you. ¹² The nations have heard of your shame, and the earth is full of your cry; for the mighty man has stumbled against the mighty, they are fallen both of them together.

Egypt Is Warned

¹³ The word that Yahweh spoke to Jeremiah the prophet, how that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon should come and strike the land of Egypt. ¹⁴ Declare in Egypt, and publish in Migdol, and publish in Memphis and in Tahpanhes: say, Stand forth, and prepare; for the sword has devoured around you. ¹⁵ Why are your strong ones swept away? They didn't stand, because Yahweh pushed them over. ¹⁶ He made many to stumble, yes, they fell one on another: and they said, Arise, and let us go again to our own people, and to the land of our birth, from the oppressing sword. ¹⁷ They cried there, Pharaoh king of Egypt is but a noise; he has let the appointed time pass by. ¹⁸ As I live, says the King whose name is Yahweh of Armies, surely like Tabor among the mountains, and like Carmel by the sea, so shall he come. ¹⁹ You daughter who dwells in Egypt, furnish yourself to go into captivity; for Memphis shall become a desolation and shall be burnt up without inhabitant. ²⁰ Egypt is a very beautiful heifer; but destruction out of the north has come, it has come. ²¹ Also her hired men in the midst of her are like calves of the stall; for they also are turned back, they are fled away

46:9 The reference to “mighty ones” here and in :5 is an allusion to the Hebrew word *elohim*, which also means “mighty ones” or ‘the one great mighty one’, and is often applied to God and His armies of Angels. The mighty ones of Egypt and her allies were what Judah preferred to trust in, rather than in the mighty ones of Israel’s God. Hence God calls Himself by His title “Yahweh of Armies” in :18. His was the true army, not human armies. Day by day and at times hour by hour, we have this same choice – between trust in God’s might or human might. Biblical history is recorded so that we might make the right choice.

together, they didn't stand: for the day of their calamity has come on them, the time of their visitation. ²² The sound of it shall go like the serpent; for they shall march with an army, and come against her with axes, as wood cutters. ²³ They shall cut down her forest, says Yahweh, though it can't be searched; because they are more than the locusts, and are innumerable. ²⁴ The daughter of Egypt shall be disappointed; she shall be delivered into the hand of the people of the north. ²⁵ Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, says: Behold, I will punish Amon of No, and Pharaoh, and Egypt, with her gods, and her kings; even Pharaoh, and those who trust in him: ²⁶ and I will deliver them into the hand of those who seek their lives, and into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of his servants; and afterwards it shall be inhabited like in the days of old, says Yahweh.

God Will Save His People

²⁷ But don't you be afraid, Jacob My servant, neither be dismayed, Israel: for, behold, I will save you from afar,

and your seed from the land of their captivity; and Jacob shall return, and shall be quiet and at ease, and none shall make him afraid. ²⁸ Don't you be afraid, O Jacob My servant, says Yahweh; for I am with you: for although I will make a full end of all the nations where I have driven you, I will not make a full end of you, but I will correct you in measure, and will in no way leave you unpunished.

CHAPTER 47 Aug. 25 God's Message about the Philistines

The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before that Pharaoh struck Gaza. ² Thus says Yahweh: Behold, waters rise up out of the north, and shall become an overflowing stream, and shall overflow the land and all that is therein, the city and those who dwell therein; and the men shall cry, and all the inhabitants of the land shall wail. ³ At the noise of the stamping of the hoofs of his strong ones, at the rushing of his chariots, at the rumbling of his wheels, the fathers don't look back to their children for feebleness

46:27 *None shall make him afraid* – This was how it would be at the time of the restored Kingdom of God; and yet Judah are then told that therefore right now in this life “Don't you be afraid” (:28). They were to live now the kind of life they would eternally live in the Kingdom; and we too are asked to live the Kingdom life now. In this sense as Jesus often promised, we who believe in Him “have eternal life” right now (1 Jn. 5:13); not in that we will never die in this life, but in the sense that we can begin to live now the kind of life we will eternally live in the future Kingdom.

47:1 The Philistines were another group of people with whom Judah were tempted to trust upon against the Babylonians; but here their destruction is foretold. They should of course have realized from Biblical history that the Philistines were God's enemies, and they ought to have driven them out of the land rather than think about making such alliances with them.

of hands; ⁴ because of the day that comes to destroy all the Philistines, to cut off from Tyre and Sidon every helper who remains: for Yahweh will destroy the Philistines, the remnant of the isle of Caphtor. ⁵ Baldness has come on Gaza; Ashkelon is brought to nothing, the remnant of their valley: how long will you cut yourself? ⁶ You sword of Yahweh, how long will it be before you be quiet? Put up yourself into your scabbard; rest, and be still. ⁷ How can you be quiet, since Yahweh has given you a command? Against Ashkelon, and against the seashore, there has He appointed it.

CHAPTER 48 Aug. 26

God's Message for Moab

Of Moab. Thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Woe to Nebo! for it is laid waste; Kiriathaim is disappointed, it is taken; Misgab is put to shame and broken down. ² The praise of Moab is no

more; in Heshbon they have devised evil against her: Come, and let us cut her off from being a nation. You also, Madmen, shall be brought to silence: the sword shall pursue you. ³ The sound of a cry from Horonaim, desolation and great destruction! ⁴ Moab is destroyed; her little ones have caused a cry to be heard. ⁵ For by the ascent of Luhith with continual weeping shall they go up; for at the descent of Horonaim they have heard the distress of the cry of destruction. ⁶ Flee, save your lives, and be like the heath in the wilderness. ⁷ For because you have trusted in your works and in your treasures, you also shall be taken: and Chemosh shall go forth into captivity, his priests and his princes together. ⁸ The destroyer shall come on every city, and no city shall escape; the valley also shall perish, and the plain shall be destroyed; as Yahweh has spoken. ⁹ May wings be given to Moab, that she may fly

47:6 Again as in 46:5 we sense Jeremiah's weariness at all the bloodshed and his desire for an end to come. We likely feel the same as we survey our world and the prophecies of its immediate future. The fact is, if Judah had been faithful, there would've been no Babylonian invasion, no destruction of the nations Judah wanted to make alliances with to stave it off rather than repenting.

48:6 It appears that God was even concerned about saving some of Gentile Moab, who had been so aggressive to His beloved people. He gave them the same choice as He did to Judah – if they believed that Babylon really would take their land, then they should act appropriately. But just as leaders madly cling on to power, so people more than anything else want to retain their existing lifestyle and environment; we are all so conservative by nature, as Jesus recognized in His parable of Lk. 5:39. The old must continue at all costs, we think; whereas God's word demands of us a counter-instinctive and radical change. This theme continues in :11, where we read of Moab as wine which has settled for too long.

48:9 It really was God's will that even Moab be obedient; or perhaps this was Jeremiah's interjection, as he too wished that Moab would flee their land and thereby escape death at the hand of the Babylonians. There was no gloating over the fact that Israel's historical enemy was also to suffer, just as believers shouldn't get caught up

and get her away: and her cities shall become a desolation, without any to dwell therein. ¹⁰ Cursed is he who does the work of Yahweh negligently; and cursed is he who keeps back his sword from blood. ¹¹ Moab has been at ease from his youth, and he has settled on his lees, and has not been emptied from vessel to vessel, neither has he gone into captivity: therefore his taste remains in him, and his scent is not changed. ¹² Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will send to him those who pour off, and they shall pour him off; and they shall empty his vessels, and break their bottles in pieces. ¹³ Moab shall be ashamed of Chemosh, as the house of Israel was ashamed of Bethel their confidence. ¹⁴ How do you say, We are mighty men, and valiant men for the war? ¹⁵ Moab is laid waste, and they are gone up into his cities, and his chosen young men are gone down to the slaughter, says the King, whose name is Yahweh of Armies. ¹⁶ The calamity of Moab is near to come, and his affliction hurries fast. ¹⁷ All you who are around him, bemoan him; all you who know his name, say, How is the strong staff broken, the beautiful rod! ¹⁸ You daughter who dwells in Dibon, come down from your glory,

and sit in thirst; for the destroyer of Moab has come up against you, he has destroyed your strongholds. ¹⁹ Inhabitant of Aroer, stand by the way, and watch: ask him who flees, and her who escapes; say, What has been done? ²⁰ Moab is disappointed; for it is broken down: wail and cry; tell it by the Arnon, that Moab is laid waste. ²¹ Judgement has come on the plain country, on Holon, Jahzah, Mephaath, ²² Dibon, Nebo, Beth Diblathaim, ²³ Kiriathaim, Beth Gamul, Beth Meon, ²⁴ Kerioth, Bozrah, and on all the cities of the land of Moab, far or near.

The Humbling of Moab

²⁵ The horn of Moab is cut off, and his arm is broken, says Yahweh. ²⁶ Make him drunken; for he magnified himself against Yahweh: and Moab shall wallow in his vomit, and he also shall be in derision. ²⁷ For wasn't Israel a derision to you? Was he found among thieves? For as often as you speak of him, you shake your head. ²⁸ You inhabitants of Moab, leave the cities, and dwell in the rock; and be like the dove that makes her nest over the mouth of the abyss. ²⁹ We have heard of the pride of Moab. He is very proud; his loftiness, and his pride, and his arro-

in feelings of national aggression against another race; rather did God and Jeremiah reveal a true perception of the value of the human person, and therefore a desire that they should repent.

48:13 The intended purpose of the judgment upon Moab was so that they would quit their allegiance to Chemosh their god. In those days, a people couldn't exist without a national god, and in any case, there is within all humans a basic desire to worship at least something. The implication seems to be that if they quit Chemosh, then they would adopt Yahweh as their national God.

gance, and the highness of his heart.
 30 I know his wrath, says Yahweh, that it is nothing; his boastings have worked nothing. 31 Therefore will I wail for Moab; yes, I will cry out for all Moab: for the men of Kir Heres shall they mourn. 32 With more than the weeping of Jazer will I weep for you, vine of Sibmah: your branches passed over the sea, they reached even to the sea of Jazer: on your summer fruits and on your vintage the destroyer is fallen. 33 Gladness and joy is taken away from the fruitful field and from the land of Moab; and I have caused wine to cease from the wine presses: none shall tread with shouting; the shouting shall be no shouting. 34 From the cry of Heshbon even to Elealeh, even to Jahaz have they uttered their voice, from Zoar even to Horonaim, to Eglath Shelishiyah: for the waters of Nimrim also shall become desolate. 35 Moreover I will cause to cease in Moab, says Yahweh, him who offers in the high place, and him who burns incense to his gods. 36 Therefore my

heart sounds for Moab like pipes, and my heart sounds like pipes for the men of Kir Heres: therefore the abundance that he has gotten is perished. 37 For every head is bald, and every beard clipped: on all the hands are cuttings, and on the waist sackcloth. 38 On all the housetops of Moab and in its streets there is lamentation every where; for I have broken Moab like a vessel in which none delights, says Yahweh. 39 How it is broken down! How they wail! How Moab has turned the back with shame! So shall Moab become a derision and a terror to all who are around him. 40 For thus says Yahweh: Behold, he shall fly as an eagle, and shall spread out his wings against Moab. 41 Kerioth is taken, and the strongholds are seized, and the heart of the mighty men of Moab at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs. 42 Moab shall be destroyed from being a people, because he has magnified himself against Yahweh. 43 Fear, the pit and the snare are upon you, inhabitant of Moab, says Yahweh.

48:31 *Therefore will I wail for Moab* – Moab was to weep for her own destruction (:20), but Jeremiah was so identified with them that he felt their future pain and desolation, and wept with them ahead of time. This was how sure Jeremiah was that these prophetic words he preached would come true. He didn't just relay them to the world as a duty, as merely a messenger. He identified with his audience and felt for them. This is our pattern in preaching. We must ask whether we have a heart that bleeds for this world, whether we have ever wept tears for the people we preach to and for the world around us which is fast heading to destruction.

48:36 *Therefore my heart sounds for Moab* – The preceding verses are clearly God Himself speaking. Both His and Jeremiah's heart [see on :31] groaned for Moab, the continual enemy of God's people. God weeps for the arrogant, for the condemned, for His enemies (:42). We who at times fear His judgment of us should remember this; ultimately His love and desire to save is very great, and we unlike Moab have openly shown in baptism, daily prayer and the life of faith that we do indeed want to be saved.

44 He who flees from the fear shall fall into the pit; and he who gets up out of the pit shall be taken in the snare: for I will bring on him, even on Moab, the year of their visitation, says Yahweh. ⁴⁵ Those who fled stand without strength under the shadow of Heshbon; for a fire is gone forth out of Heshbon, and a flame from the midst of Sihon, and has devoured the corner of Moab, and the crown of the head of the tumultuous ones. ⁴⁶ Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh is undone; for your sons are taken away captive, and your daughters into captivity. ⁴⁷ Yet will I revive the fortunes of Moab in the latter days, says Yahweh. Thus far is the judgement of Moab.

CHAPTER 49 Aug. 27

God's Message for Ammon

Of the children of Ammon. Thus says Yahweh: Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir? why then does Malcam possess Gad, and his people dwell in its cities? ² Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will cause an alarm of war to

be heard against Rabbah of the children of Ammon; and it shall become a desolate heap, and her daughters shall be burned with fire: then shall Israel possess those who possessed him, says Yahweh. ³ Wail, Heshbon, for Ai is laid waste; cry, you daughters of Rabbah, clothe yourself in sackcloth: lament, and run back and forth among the fences; for Malcam shall go into captivity, his priests and his princes together. ⁴ Why do you glory in the valleys, your flowing valley, backsliding daughter? Who trusted in her treasures, saying, who shall come to me? ⁵ Behold, I will bring a fear on you, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, from all who are around you; and you shall be driven out every man right forth, and there shall be none to gather together the fugitives. ⁶ But afterwards I will revive the fortunes of the children of Ammon, says Yahweh.

God's Message for Edom

⁷ Of Edom. Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Is wisdom no more in Teman? Is counsel perished from the pru-

48:47 The latter day blessing of Moab will be when Christ returns and all Israel's angry neighbours finally humble themselves and accept the God of Israel. So many prophecies of their judgment end with this prospect in view. The destruction of the wicked is but part of God's greater plan to bring people from all nations to Him and the eternal blessing of His Kingdom on earth.

49:1 *Why then does Malcam possess Gad* – It was Ammon who had gone over their border to possess the land intended for the Israelite tribe of Gad; hence the reference to Israel repossessing their own land from Ammon in :2. But Malcam, the god of Ammon, is spoken of here as if it was Ammon (as in :3). A people are identified with the name of their god, in that those who worship idols become like them (Ps. 115:8). Israel were unusual in that they had a national God, Yahweh, but they didn't totally identify with Him because they also worshipped gods like Malcam whom the surrounding nations worshipped. By baptism into the Lord's Name and becoming the spiritual people of Abraham (Gal. 3:27-29) we are to be totally identified with our God.

dent? Has their wisdom vanished?
 8 Flee, turn back, dwell in the depths, inhabitants of Dedan; for I will bring the calamity of Esau on him, the time that I shall visit him. 9 If grape gatherers came to you, would they not leave some gleaning grapes? If thieves by night, wouldn't they steal until they had enough? 10 But I have made Esau bare, I have uncovered his secret places, and he shall not be able to hide himself: his seed is destroyed, and his brothers, and his neighbours; and he is no more. 11 Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let your widows trust in Me. 12 For thus says Yahweh: Behold, they to whom it didn't pertain to drink of the cup shall certainly drink; and are you he who shall altogether go unpunished? You shall not go unpunished, but you shall surely drink. 13 For I have sworn by Myself, says Yahweh, that Bozrah

shall become an astonishment, a reproach, a waste, and a curse; and all its cities shall be perpetual wastes. 14 I have heard news from Yahweh, and an ambassador is sent among the nations saying, Gather yourselves together, and come against her, and rise up to the battle. 15 For, behold, I have made you small among the nations, and despised among men. 16 As for your terror, the pride of your heart has deceived you, O you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, who hold the height of the hill: though you should make your nest as high as the eagle, I will bring you down from there, says Yahweh. 17 Edom shall become an astonishment: each one who passes by it shall be astonished, and shall hiss at all its plagues. 18 As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbouring cities, says Yahweh, no man shall dwell there, neither shall any son of man live

49:9 *If thieves by night, wouldn't they steal until they had enough?* – This recalls how Prov. 6:30 says that we don't despise a thief who steals because he is hungry. Although all sin is sin, it seems that there are degrees of sin, hence the varying degrees of sacrifice required under the Law of Moses for different sins. God is particularly angry with those who revel in sin as Edom had done, for they as it were sinned for the pleasure of it rather than because human weakness pushed them into the sinful situation (not that sin in any form can be justified). We should bear this in mind when responding to others' failures.

49:11 *Let your widows trust in Me* – As in all these prophecies there is an appeal for the enemies of God's people to repent. The widows of the soldiers whom God had slain are asked to turn to God and trust Him; again we see that the ultimate intention of judgment is to bring people to God and finally bring about the establishment of His Kingdom.

49:16 God wanted to bring down the pride of Edom. They were not His people, they were one of many Gentile nations. Yet God observed their pride and how they trusted in their mountain strongholds. His colossal perception of the attitudes of every human being on earth is perhaps beyond our full appreciation. If He looks with such detail upon the hearts of those who don't know Him, how much more does He look upon us, and also knows the hearts of all those who intersect with us His children.

therein. ¹⁹ Behold, he shall come up like a lion from the pride of the Jordan against the strong habitation: for I will suddenly make them run away from it; and whoever is chosen, him will I appoint over it: for who is like Me? And who will appoint Me a time? And who is the shepherd who will stand before Me? ²⁰ Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh that He has taken against Edom; and His purposes, that He has purposed against the inhabitants of Teman: Surely they shall drag them away, the little ones of the flock; surely he shall make their habitation desolate over them. ²¹ The earth trembles at the noise of their fall; there is a cry, the noise which is heard in the Red Sea. ²² Behold, he shall come up and fly as the eagle, and spread out his wings against Bozrah: and the heart of the mighty men of Edom at that day shall be as the heart of a woman in her pangs.

God's Message for Damascus

23 Of Damascus. Hamath is con-

founded, and Arpad; for they have heard evil news, they are melted away: there is sorrow on the sea; it can't be quiet. ²⁴ Damascus has grown feeble, she turns herself to flee, and trembling has seized on her: anguish and sorrows have taken hold of her, as of a woman in travail. ²⁵ How is the city of praise not forsaken, the city of My joy! ²⁶ Therefore her young men shall fall in her streets, and all the men of war shall be brought to silence in that day, says Yahweh of Armies. ²⁷ I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus, and it shall devour the palaces of Ben Hadad.

God's Message for Kedar, Hazor and Elam

28 Of Kedar, and of the kingdoms of Hazor, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck. Thus says Yahweh: Arise, go up to Kedar, and destroy the children of the east. ²⁹ Their tents and their flocks shall they take; they shall carry away for themselves their curtains, and all their vessels,

49:25 *How is the city of praise not forsaken, the city of My joy!* – This could be the stubborn denial of the king of Damascus. Yet Jerusalem is the city of praise that shall not be forsaken eternally, and which shall be the eternal joy of God's people when it is declared the capital of the future Kingdom of God on earth (Ps. 9:14; 102:21; Is. 62:12; 65:18). So it seems that God and Jeremiah interject in the midst of these woeful prophecies of the destruction of Gentile cities like Damascus, to reflect that ultimately Jerusalem will not be destroyed like they shall be. This encourages us to see the predictions of Jerusalem or Zion's eternal presence and joy as having a literal dimension to their fulfilment; the Jerusalem which we can locate on a map, view photographs of or visit shall indeed be the eternal capital city of God's Kingdom on earth, in the same way as Christ shall reign eternally on David's throne / place of kingship, which was in Jerusalem (Lk. 1:31-35).

49:28 *Which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck* – The destruction of all these nations is prophesied as a warning to Judah not to make allegiance with them in the hope they would stave off the Babylonian invasion. The lesson is so repeated – that

and their camels; and they shall cry to them, Terror on every side! ³⁰Flee, wander far off, dwell in the depths, you inhabitants of Hazor, says Yahweh; for Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has taken counsel against you, and has conceived a purpose against you. ³¹Arise, go up to a nation that is at ease, that dwells without care, says Yahweh; that have neither gates nor bars, that dwell alone. ³²Their camels shall be a booty, and the multitude of their livestock a spoil: and I will scatter to all winds those who have the corners of their beards cut off; and I will bring their calamity on them from every side, says Yahweh. ³³Hazor shall be a dwelling place of jackals, a desolation forever: no man shall dwell there, neither shall any son of man live therein. ³⁴The word of Yahweh that came to Jeremiah the prophet concerning Elam, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah king of Judah, saying, ³⁵Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Behold, I will break the bow of Elam, the chief of their might. ³⁶On Elam will I bring the four winds from the four quarters of the sky, and will scatter them towards

all those winds; and there shall be no nation where the outcasts of Elam shall not come. ³⁷I will cause Elam to be dismayed before their enemies, and before those who seek their life; and I will bring evil on them, even My fierce anger, says Yahweh; and I will send the sword after them, until I have consumed them; ³⁸and I will set My throne in Elam, and will destroy from there king and princes, says Yahweh. ³⁹But it shall happen in the latter days, that I will restore the fortunes of Elam, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 50 Aug. 28

The Fall of Babylon and Israel's Return

The word that Yahweh spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by Jeremiah the prophet. ²Declare among the nations and publish, and set up a standard; publish, and don't conceal: say, Babylon is taken, Bel is disappointed, Merodach is dismayed; her images are disappointed, her idols are dismayed. ³For out of the north there comes up a nation against her, which shall make her land desolate,

all human strength is not going to work out, the only way of escape from the consequences of sin is by listening to God's prophetic word.

49:30 *Has conceived a purpose against you* – But :31 explains that God had commanded Nebuchadnezzar to attack these nations. God is therefore shown to be capable of putting thoughts and ideas in the minds of wicked Gentiles, even though they of their own freewill conceive the plans themselves. We're unable to exactly understand this process nor the ethics of it all, but the fact is that it happens. The encouragement is that if God does this kind of thing to wicked people, He is likewise able to work upon the weak hearts of those of us who do love Him in weakness and who eagerly invite Him to put good rather than evil in our hearts because we feel so weak in our own mental strength.

50:2 *Babylon is taken, Bel is disappointed, Merodach is dismayed* – Note how Babylon is so identified with her gods; see on 48:13; 49:1.

and none shall dwell therein: they are fled, they are gone, both man and animal.⁴ In those days, and in that time, says Yahweh, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together; they shall go on their way weeping, and shall seek Yahweh their God.⁵ They shall inquire concerning Zion with their faces turned towards it saying, Come, and join yourselves to Yahweh in an everlasting covenant that shall not be forgotten.⁶ My people have been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray; they have turned them away on the mountains; they have gone from mountain to hill; they have forgotten their resting place.⁷ All who found them have devoured them; and their adversaries said, We are not guilty, because they have sinned against Yahweh, the habitation of righteous-

ness, even Yahweh, the hope of their fathers.⁸ Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and go forth out of the land of the Chaldeans, and be as the male goats before the flocks.⁹ For behold, I will stir up and cause to come up against Babylon a company of great nations from the north country; and they shall set themselves in array against her; from there she shall be taken: their arrows shall be as of an expert mighty man; none shall return in vain.¹⁰ Chaldea shall be a prey: all who prey on her shall be satisfied, says Yahweh.¹¹ Because you are glad, because you rejoice, O you who plunder My inheritance, because you are wanton as a heifer that treads out the grain, and neigh as strong horses;¹² your mother shall be utterly disappointed; she who bore you shall be confounded: behold, she shall be the least of the nations, a wilderness, a

50:3 Time and again the prophets describe the judgments to fall upon Israel in the same terms as they speak of the condemnations of the surrounding nations (compare :3 and :13). The message was clear: rejected Israel would be treated as Gentiles. Even if we are separated from this world externally, we can still act in a worldly way, and share the world's condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29,32).

50:4 God's intention was that when Babylon fell, the exiles would repent and return to rebuild Zion and enter the new covenant (:5). Babylon fell, the new king, Cyrus of Persia, commanded them to return and rebuild the temple; but the Jews didn't repent and therefore many of them remained in Babylon, where they had a good life. The fall of Babylon is spoken of in Revelation as happening at Christ's return; the prophecy will be reapplied and fulfilled at that time. The return of the Jews to Israel over the last few generations is surely a preparation for this.

50:8 There was an urgency to flee from Babylon, even though at the time the Jews were prosperous there; there were Jews in leadership positions, as the Biblical record makes clear in Daniel; and archaeological research shows that the Jews were in senior business and administrative positions. But there was an urgency to flee from there and return to Judah and rebuild the Kingdom. The call to leave Babylon is interpreted in the New Testament as representing the call of the Gospel, to leave this present system of things at least mentally (Rev. 18:4). But will the new Israel respond better than historical Israel?

dry land, and a desert.¹³ Because of the wrath of Yahweh she shall not be inhabited, but she shall be wholly desolate: everyone who goes by Babylon shall be astonished, and hiss at all her plagues.¹⁴ Set yourselves in array against Babylon all around, all you who bend the bow; shoot at her, spare no arrows: for she has sinned against Yahweh.¹⁵ Shout against her all around: she has submitted herself; her bulwarks are fallen, her walls are thrown down; for it is the vengeance of Yahweh: take vengeance on her; as she has done, do to her.¹⁶ Cut off the sower from Babylon, and him who handles the sickle in the time of harvest: for fear of the oppressing sword they shall turn each one to his people, and they shall flee each one to his own land.¹⁷ Israel is a hunted sheep; the lions have driven him away: first, the king of Assyria devoured him; and now at the last Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has broken his bones.¹⁸ Therefore thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of Assyria.¹⁹ I will bring Israel again to his pasture, and he shall feed on Carmel and Bashan, and his soul shall be satisfied on the hills of Ephraim and in

Gilead.²⁰ In those days and in that time, says Yahweh, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I leave as a remnant.

The Destruction of Babylon

²¹ Go up against the land of Merathaim, even against it, and against the inhabitants of Pekod: kill and utterly destroy after them, says Yahweh, and do according to all that I have commanded you.²² A sound of battle is in the land, and of great destruction.²³ How is the hammer of the whole earth cut apart and broken! How is Babylon become a desolation among the nations!²⁴ I have laid a snare for you, and you are also caught, Babylon, and you weren't aware: you are found, and also caught, because you have struggled against Yahweh.²⁵ Yahweh has opened His armoury and has brought forth the weapons of His indignation; for the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, has a work to do in the land of the Chaldeans.²⁶ Come against her from the utmost border; open her storehouses; cast her up as heaps, and destroy her utterly; let nothing of her be left.²⁷ Kill all her bulls; let

50:14 *She has sinned against Yahweh* – Gentile unbelievers are still counted as sinning against God. His sensitivity to sin must make it so hard to be God... perceiving and feeling the sin of every person amongst the billions of this world. We should be therefore the more sensitive to His sensitivity. This also means that He must be thrilled with the genuine efforts of His people to be righteous, as He observes so much rebellion against Him.

50:20 *The iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none* – An encouragement to us as to the totality and depth of God's ability to forgive.

them go down to the slaughter: woe to them! For their day has come, the time of their visitation. ²⁸ The voice of those who flee and escape out of the land of Babylon, to declare in Zion the vengeance of Yahweh our God, the vengeance of His temple. ²⁹ Call together the archers against Babylon, all those who bend the bow; encamp against her all around; let none of it escape: recompense her according to her work; according to all that she has done, do to her; for she has been proud against Yahweh, against the Holy One of Israel. ³⁰ Therefore her young men will fall in her streets, and all her men of war will be brought to silence in that day, says Yahweh. ³¹ Behold, I am against you, you proud one, says the Lord, Yahweh of Armies; for your day has come, the time that I will visit you. ³² The proud one shall stumble and fall, and none shall raise him up; and I will kindle a fire in his cities, and it shall devour all who are around him. ³³ Thus says Yahweh of Armies: The children of Israel and the children

of Judah are oppressed together; and all who took them captive hold them fast; they refuse to let them go. ³⁴ Their Redeemer is strong; Yahweh of Armies is His name: He will thoroughly plead their cause, that He may give rest to the earth, and disquiet the inhabitants of Babylon. ³⁵ A sword is on the Chaldeans, says Yahweh, and on the inhabitants of Babylon, on her princes and on her wise men. ³⁶ A sword is on the boastfuls, and they shall become fools; a sword is on her mighty men, and they shall be dismayed. ³⁷ A sword is on their horses, and on their chariots, and on all the mixed people who are in the midst of her; and they shall become as women: a sword is on her treasures, and they shall be robbed. ³⁸ A drought is on her waters, and they shall be dried up; for it is a land of engraved images, and they are mad over idols. ³⁹ Therefore the wild animals of the desert with the wolves shall dwell there, and the ostriches shall dwell therein: and it shall be no more inhabited forever; neither shall

50:29 *For she has been proud* – For all the millions of sins of Babylon, not least her idolatry, it is her pride which is seen as her main sin; for pride is the essence of all sin (see too :31,32,36).

50:33 *They refuse to let them go* – The Babylonians initially ‘refused’ to let Judah return in the same way as Egypt did under Pharaoh. However, there’s no hint that the Jews actually asked to return. Babylon ‘refused’ to respond to the Angels’ attempts to encourage Babylon to send the Jews back; this may be referred to in Dan. 10:13. From the viewpoint of a Jewish person in Babylon, all this Angelic activity was quite invisible. We too can think God is inactive when in fact He is working powerfully for us behind the scenes.

50:39 *It shall be no more inhabited forever; neither shall it be lived in from generation to generation* – The fact Babylon has been rebuilt at times and didn’t cease to be inhabited after the Medes captured it and overthrew the Babylonian empire means that this prophecy must have a future fulfilment. It’s not impossible that literal Babylon may be rebuilt, and the latter-day equivalent of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires

it be lived in from generation to generation.⁴⁰ As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and the neighbouring cities, says Yahweh, so shall no man dwell there, neither shall any son of man live therein.⁴¹ Behold, a people comes from the north; and a great nation and many kings shall be stirred up from the uttermost parts of the earth.⁴² They lay hold on bow and spear; they are cruel, and have no mercy; their voice roars like the sea; and they ride on horses, each one set in array as a man to the battle, against you, daughter of Babylon.⁴³ The king of Babylon has heard the news of them, and his hands wax feeble: anguish has taken hold of him, pains as of a woman in labour.⁴⁴ Behold, the enemy shall come up like a lion from the pride of the Jordan against the strong habitation: for I will suddenly make them run away from it; and whoever is chosen, him will I appoint over it: for who is like Me? And who will appoint Me a time? And who is the shepherd who can stand before Me?⁴⁵ Therefore hear the counsel of Yahweh that He has

be re-established in the form of some superpower which will likewise persecute Israel, and meet its final end at Christ's return.

51:1 A destroying wind – The Hebrew *ruach* translated “wind” is also translated “spirit”; God makes His Angels spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7). The reference seems to be to a specific Angel who was given the task of destroying Babylon; rather like the Angel who slew the firstborn of Egypt and the faithless Israelites in the wilderness is called “the destroyer” (1 Cor. 10:10). God gives His Angels specific tasks to perform, in the same way as He works with us and will work with us when we take over the Angels’ role in the future Kingdom on earth (Lk. 20:35,36; Heb. 2:5). We have even now been given specific work to do, and we should pray to perceive what that is (Eph. 2:10). Also note that the apparently ‘negative’ phenomena in human life, “evil” in the sense of destruction, come from God through His Angels designated to perform that work – there is no personal Satan figure who is out of God’s control and working against Him.

taken against Babylon; and His purposes, that He has purposed against the land of the Chaldeans: Surely they shall drag them away, even the little ones of the flock; surely he shall make their habitation desolate over them.⁴⁶ At the noise of the taking of Babylon the earth trembles, and the cry is heard among the nations.

CHAPTER 51 Aug. 29

More Judgement against Babylon

Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will raise up a destroying wind against Babylon and against those who dwell in Lebkamai.² I will send to Babylon strangers who shall winnow her; and they shall empty her land: for in the day of trouble they shall be against her around.³ Against him who bends let the archer bend his bow, and against him who lifts himself up in his coat of mail: don’t spare her young men; utterly destroy all her army.⁴ They shall fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans, and thrust through in her streets.⁵ For neither Israel nor Judah is forsaken, of his God, of Yahweh of Ar-

mies; though their land is full of guilt against the Holy One of Israel. ⁶Flee out of the midst of Babylon, and save every man his life; don't be cut off in her iniquity: for it is the time of Yahweh's vengeance; He will render to her a recompense. ⁷Babylon has been a golden cup in Yahweh's hand, who made all the earth drunken: the nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are mad. ⁸Babylon is suddenly fallen and destroyed: wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed. ⁹We would have healed Babylon, but she is not healed: forsake her, and let us go each one into his own country; for

51:6 Quoted about us in Rev. 18:4; see on 50:8.

51:8 *Wail for her; take her balm for her pain, if so be she may be healed* – If God wanted to save even Babylon, how much more is He eager to save us who do believe in and love Him. After all the prophecies of destruction against Babylon, they could all have been averted if she had been taken the message of repentance by the Jews and had accepted it. But part of the problem was that the Jews were comfortable in Babylon [see on 50:8] and therefore they didn't see she needed to repent too much, and they didn't preach this to her. One of the reasons we don't preach to this world is because we are too comfortable within it, as Judah were in Babylon.

51:9 *Her judgement... is lifted up even to Heaven* – But sins are described as ‘rising up to Heaven’ (2 Chron. 28:9); here the judgement for them is spoken of as also ‘rising up to Heaven’ (same Hebrew words). Sin and judgment are therefore paralleled. Sin is its own judgment. Whenever we commit sin, we do so knowing (at least in one part of our brain) the judgment / condemnation which it is. In this sense, we know God’s judgments, and the coming day of judgment shouldn’t therefore be some totally unknown situation for us. For we have His judgments revealed ahead of time in His word.

51:12 *Yahweh has both purposed and done that which He spoke* – The idea of God ‘preparing’ implies that there is a gap between the plan being made, and it being executed – hence the statement here that He has planned *and done* as planned (see too 4:28; Lam. 2:17; Is. 22:11; 37:26; Zech. 1:6; 8:14). This ‘gap’ is significant when we come to consider the idea of God’s ‘relenting’ or change of mind – stating something is going to happen, but then changing His mind because of human behaviour during the ‘time gap’ between the statement and its’ execution. How then are we to understand God’s capacity to know the future? All we can say is that God Almighty throws Himself into our experience, by limiting Himself to our kind of time – with all the suspense, hope, excitement, joy, disappointment which this involves. Often we read

her judgement reaches to the sky, and is lifted up even to heaven. ¹⁰ Yahweh has brought forth our righteousness: come, and let us declare in Zion the work of Yahweh our God. ¹¹ Make sharp the arrows; hold firm the shields: Yahweh has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes; because His purpose is against Babylon to destroy it: for it is the revenge of Yahweh, the revenge for His temple. ¹² Set up a standard against the walls of Babylon, make the watch strong, set the watchmen, prepare the ambushes; for Yahweh has both purposed and done that which He spoke concerning the inhabitants of

Babylon.¹³ You who dwell on many waters, abundant in treasures, your end has come, the measure of your covetousness.¹⁴ Yahweh of Armies has sworn by Himself saying, Surely I will fill you with men, as a swarm of locusts; and they shall lift up a shout against you.

A Hymn of Praise to God

15 He has made the earth by His power, He has established the world by His wisdom, and by His understanding has He stretched out the heavens: 16 when He utters His voice, there is a tumult of waters in the heavens, and He causes the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain, and brings forth the wind out of His treasures. 17 Every man has become a brute, without knowledge. Every goldsmith is disappointed by his image; for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them.¹⁸ They are vanity, a work of delusion: in the time of their visitation they shall perish.

of how God says He is planning evil and devising a plan against His enemies (18:11; 26:3; 49:20,30; 50:45; Mic. 2:3; 4:12). But having shared with us His plans through the prophets, He is open to being persuaded not to perform them – as we see in the case of Nineveh, and the intercessions of Moses. See on :29.

51:15, 16 The implication is that the same Divine word which brought about creation (God spoke His word and it was done), and which still sustains it, is the same word of God which we meet in the prophets proclaiming destruction. The awesome power of God's word as it is in our times in the Bible is the same creative power we see in the natural creation, and carries the same destructive power as has been witnessed throughout history in His destruction of wicked entities.

51:24 The destruction of Babylon was because of their destruction of the temple; but it took at least 70 years for this judgment to come, in the same way as it took nearly 40 years for Jerusalem to be destroyed for crucifying Christ. The generation who killed Him and that which destroyed the temple all died in their beds. The gap between the sin and the judgment coming was surely in order to give a chance for repentance, and for the subsequent generation to perceive the evil their fathers had done and repent of

19 The portion of Jacob is not like these; for He is the former of all things; and Jacob is the tribe of His inheritance: Yahweh of Armies is His name.²⁰ You are my battle axe and weapons of war: and with you will I break in pieces the nations; and with you will I destroy kingdoms;²¹ and with you will I break in pieces the horse and his rider;²² and with you will I break in pieces the chariot and him who rides therein; and with you will I break in pieces man and woman; and with you will I break in pieces the old man and the youth; and with you will I break in pieces the young man and the virgin;²³ and with you will I break in pieces the shepherd and his flock; and with you will I break in pieces the farmer and his yoke; and with you will I break in pieces governors and deputies.

Babylon to Be Desolate Forever

24 I will render to Babylon and to all the inhabitants of Chaldea all their evil that they have done in Zion in

your sight, says Yahweh. ²⁵ Behold, I am against you, destroying mountain, says Yahweh, which destroys all the land; and I will stretch out My hand on you and roll you down from the rocks, and will make you a burnt mountain. ²⁶ They shall not take of you a stone for a corner, nor a stone for foundations; but you shall be desolate for ever, says Yahweh. ²⁷ Set up a standard in the land, blow the trumpet among the nations, prepare the nations against her, call together against her the kingdoms of Ararat, Minni, and Ashkenaz: appoint a marshal against her; cause the horses to come up as the rough canker worm. ²⁸ Prepare against her the nations, the kings of the Medes, its governors, and all its deputies, and all the land of their dominion. ²⁹ The land trembles and is in pain; for the plans of Yahweh against Babylon do stand, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without inhabitant. ³⁰ The mighty men of Babylon have declined to fight, they remain in their strongholds; their might has

failed; they are become as women: her dwelling places are set on fire; her bars are broken. ³¹ One runner will run to meet another, and one messenger to meet another, to show the king of Babylon that his city is taken on every quarter: ³² and the passages are seized, and the reeds they have burned with fire, and the men of war are frightened. ³³ For thus says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel: The daughter of Babylon is like a threshing floor at the time when it is trodden; yet a little while, and the time of harvest shall come for her. ³⁴ Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon has devoured me, he has crushed me, he has made me an empty vessel, he has, like a monster, swallowed me up, he has filled his maw with my delicacies; he has cast me out. ³⁵ The violence done to me and to my flesh be on Babylon, shall the inhabitant of Zion say; and, my blood be on the inhabitants of Chaldea, shall Jerusalem say. ³⁶ Therefore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I will plead your cause, and

it. But this lack of repentance and disassociation was what caused such fearful judgment to finally come upon them. In the length of the ‘gap’ we see the passion of God for human repentance and for people to perceive the sin not only of themselves but of the societies in which they live.

51:29 *The plans of Yahweh against Babylon do stand* – God states His plans but is open to change; in Babylon’s case, they remained or ‘stood’ because there was no repentance nor intercession for her; see on :12.

51:36 *I will plead your cause* – Judah is as it were the one who takes Babylon to the Divine court, with the complaint of :34,35. God is the one who will both plead our cause as an advocate, and take vengeance, i.e. order the sentence, as our judge. Mic. 7:9 speaks of how Micah has sinned against Yahweh, and yet He will plead his cause and also execute judgment. Likewise with Israel, the Lord stood up to plead as an advocate, and also He stood as the Judge to pronounce the verdict in favour of His people (Is. 3:13); even though He is also the witness against them (Mal. 3:5). In this mixture of metaphor we see how the judicial process is biased in our favour by the

take vengeance for you; and I will dry up her sea, and make her fountain dry. ³⁷ Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling place for jackals, an astonishment and a hissing, without inhabitant. ³⁸ They shall roar together like young lions; they shall growl as lions' cubs. ³⁹ When they are heated, I will make their feast, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep and not wake, says Yahweh. ⁴⁰ I will bring them down like lambs to the slaughter, like rams with male goats. ⁴¹ How is Sheshach taken and the praise of the whole earth seized! How is Babylon become a desolation among the nations! ⁴² The sea has come up on Babylon; she is covered with the multitude of its waves. ⁴³ Her cities are become a desolation, a dry land and a desert, a land in which no man dwells, neither does any son of man pass thereby. ⁴⁴ I will execute judgement on Bel in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he has swallowed up; and the nations shall not flow any more to him: yes, the wall of Babylon shall fall.

Hope for God's People

⁴⁵ My people, go away from the midst of her, and save yourselves every man from the fierce anger of Yahweh. ⁴⁶ Don't let your heart faint, neither fear for the news that shall be heard in the land; for news shall come one year, and after that in another year shall come news, and violence in the land, ruler against ruler. ⁴⁷ Therefore behold the days come, that I will execute judgement on the engraved images of Babylon; and her whole land shall be confounded; and all her slain shall fall in the midst of her. ⁴⁸ Then the heavens and the earth, and all that is therein, shall sing for joy over Babylon; for the destroyers shall come to her from the north, says Yahweh. ⁴⁹ As Babylon has caused the slain of Israel to fall, so at Babylon shall fall the slain of all the land. ⁵⁰ You who have escaped the sword, go, don't stand still; remember Yahweh from afar, and let Jerusalem come into your mind. ⁵¹ We are confounded, because we have heard reproach; confusion has covered our faces: for strangers have come into the sanctuaries of

simple fact that God loves His people; hence Paul, having made the same observations with his use of legal terms, concludes that there is nobody who can condemn God's people (Rom. 8:33,34). The events of our lives, all the abuses we suffer, are being considered by God right now in His court. He is both our advocate, the ultimate accurate witness to our sufferings, both of the facts and also our internal feelings, and is also the judge. His apparent silence isn't that at all. The ongoing process of the court of Heaven should be our continual comfort.

51:39 *A perpetual sleep and not wake* – The ultimate punishment for sin is death (Rom. 6:23), which is unconsciousness, without any hope of a future resurrection. Eternal conscious torment of the wicked isn't taught in the Bible.

51:48 *The heavens and the earth* – Another example of where 'heavens and earth' refer to the people of Israel and aren't to always be taken literally, especially when we read of their 'destruction'.

Yahweh's house. ⁵² Therefore behold, the days come, says Yahweh, that I will execute judgement on her engraved images; and through all her land the wounded shall groan. ⁵³ Though Babylon should mount up to the sky, and though she should fortify the height of her strength, yet from Me shall destroyers come to her, says Yahweh. ⁵⁴ The sound of a cry from Babylon, and of great destruction from the land of the Chaldeans! ⁵⁵ For Yahweh lays Babylon waste, and destroys out of her the great voice; and their waves roar like many waters; the noise of their voice is uttered: ⁵⁶ for the destroyer has come on her, even on Babylon, and her mighty men are taken, their bows are broken in pieces; for Yahweh is a God of recompenses, He will surely requite. ⁵⁷ I will make drunk her princes and her wise men, her governors and her deputies, and her mighty men; and they shall sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake up, says the King whose name is Yahweh of Armies. ⁵⁸ Thus says Yahweh of Armies: The broad walls of Babylon shall be utterly overthrown, and her high gates shall be burned with

fire; and the peoples shall labour for vanity, and the nations for the fire; and they shall be weary.

Jeremiah Gives a Scroll to Seraiah

⁵⁹ The word which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the son of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. Now Seraiah was chief quartermaster. ⁶⁰ Jeremiah wrote in a book all the evil that should come on Babylon, even all these words that are written concerning Babylon. ⁶¹ Jeremiah said to Seraiah, When you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words, ⁶² and say, Yahweh, You have spoken concerning this place to cut it off, that none shall dwell therein, neither man nor animal, but that it shall be desolate forever. ⁶³ It shall be, when you have made an end of reading this book, that you shall bind a stone to it, and cast it into the midst of the Euphrates: ⁶⁴ and you shall say, Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise again because of the evil that I will bring on her; and they shall be weary. Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.

51:61 The Babylonians had been kindly disposed to Jeremiah because he had prophesied their victory against Jerusalem and had urged Judah to surrender rather than fight Babylon; and they had offered him a comfortable retirement in Babylon after Jerusalem fell (40:4). Such a prophecy would've seemed the height of ingratitude towards them. The captive Jews had just arrived in Babylon; to pronounce the destruction of Babylon was the last thing they wanted to do, because they sought the favour of their captors. To speak out God's word is so often counter-instinctive, awkward, embarrassing and difficult.

51:63, 64 Babylon's destruction is as a stone being cast into the sea (Jesus repeats this in Rev. 18:21). But Jesus also uses this very image to describe the judgment of those who offend one of His little ones (Mt. 18:6). To upset fragile believers by our rejection of them is to be as bad as proud, idolatrous Babylon who destroyed Yahweh's temple

CHAPTER 52 Aug. 30***Nebuchadnezzar Takes Jerusalem***

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign; he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and his mother's name was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. ² He did that which was evil in the sight of Yahweh, according to all that Jehoiakim had done. ³ For through the anger of Yahweh it happened in Jerusalem and Judah, until He had cast them out from His presence, that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. ⁴ It happened in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem, and encamped against it; and they built forts against it round about. ⁵ So the city was besieged to the eleventh year of king Zedekiah. ⁶ In the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the famine was severe in the city, so that there was no bread for the people of the land. ⁷ Then a breach was made in the city, and all the men of war fled, and went forth out of the city by night by the way of the gate between the two walls, which was by the king's garden;

(now the Chaldeans were against the city all around;) and they went towards the Arabah. ⁸ But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after the king, and overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho; and all his army was scattered from him. ⁹ Then they took the king and carried him up to the king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; and he gave judgement on him. ¹⁰ The king of Babylon killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he killed also all the princes of Judah in Riblah. ¹¹ He put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in fetters, and carried him to Babylon, and imprisoned him until the day of his death. ¹² Now in the fifth month, in the tenth day of the month, which was the nineteenth year of king Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, came Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard, who stood before the king of Babylon, into Jerusalem: ¹³ and he burned the house of Yahweh, and the king's house; and all the houses of Jerusalem, even every great house, burned he with fire. ¹⁴ All the army of the Chaldeans, who were with the captain of the guard, broke down all the walls of Jerusalem all around. ¹⁵ Then Nebuzaradan the captain of

and slew His people. And it will meet the same judgment. We should therefore be extra careful not to reject our fellow believers, especially the “little ones” whose faith is new or fragile. Three of the Gospel records feature this saying of Jesus (also Mk. 9:42; Lk. 17:2); it is so very important.

52:3 Zedekiah's rebellion was of his own freewill, and God through Jeremiah had pleaded with him not to rebel but to surrender; yet in another sense, God confirmed Zedekiah in this stubbornness, because He wanted to express His anger against Judah. If we reject God's word as Zedekiah did, then we will be confirmed in the way to destruction we wish to go.

52:8 See on 39:5.

the guard carried away captive of the poorest of the people, and the residue of the people who were left in the city, and those who fell away, who fell to the king of Babylon, and the residue of the multitude.¹⁶ But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poorest of the land to be vineyard keepers and farmers.

Desecration of God's Temple

¹⁷ The Chaldeans broke the pillars of brass that were in the house of Yahweh, and the bases and the bronze sea that were in the house of Yahweh they broke in pieces and carried all of their brass to Babylon. ¹⁸ They also took away the pots, the shovels, the snuffers, the basins, the spoons and all the vessels of brass with which they ministered. ¹⁹ The captain of the guard took away the cups, the fire pans, the basins, the pots, the lampstands, the spoons and the bowls; that which was of gold, in gold, and that which was of silver, in silver. ²⁰ They took the two pillars, the one sea, and the twelve bronze bulls that were under the bases, which king Solomon had made for the house of Yahweh. The brass of all these vessels was without weight. ²¹ As for the pillars, the height of the one pillar was eighteen cubits; and a line of twelve cubits encircled it; and its thickness was four fingers. It was hollow. ²² A capital of brass was on it; and the height of the one

capital was five cubits, with network and pomegranates on the capital all around, all of brass: and the second pillar also had like these, and pomegranates. ²³ There were ninety-six pomegranates on the sides; all the pomegranates were one hundred on the network all around.

The People of Judah Taken to Babylon

²⁴ The captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest, and Zephaniah the second priest, and the three keepers of the threshold: ²⁵ and out of the city he took an officer who was set over the men of war; and seven men of those who saw the king's face, who were found in the city; and the scribe of the captain of the army, who mustered the people of the land; and sixty men of the people of the land, who were found in the midst of the city. ²⁶ Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them and brought them to the king of Babylon to Riblah. ²⁷ The king of Babylon struck them, and put them to death at Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah was carried away captive out of his land. ²⁸ This is the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away captive: in the seventh year three thousand and twenty-three Jews; ²⁹ in the eighteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar he carried away captive from Jerusalem eight hundred and thirty-two persons; ³⁰ in the twenty third year

52:27 If this includes Seraiah (:24), and this Seraiah is the same one as in 51:61, it may be that he died because he had in his heart decided that he would not relay God's word nor obey the difficult preaching commission which he had been given (see on 51:61).

of Nebuchadnezzar Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive of the Jews seven hundred and forty-five persons: all the persons were four thousand six hundred. 31 It happened in the thirty seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, in the twenty fifth day of the month, that Evilmerodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah,

and brought him forth out of prison; 32 and he spoke kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings who were with him in Babylon,³³ and changed his prison garments. Jehoiachin ate bread before him continually all the days of his life: ³⁴ and for his allowance, there was a continual allowance given him by the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life.

LAMENTATIONS

CHAPTER 1 Aug. 31

The Suffering of Jerusalem

How the city sits solitary, that was full of people! She has become a widow, she who was once great among the nations! She who was a princess among the provinces has become a tributary! ² She weeps bitterly in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks; among all her lovers she has none to comfort her: all her friends have dealt treacherously with her; they are become her enemies. ³ Judah is gone into captivity because of affliction, and because of great servitude she dwells among the nations, she finds no rest: all her persecutors overtook her within the narrows. ⁴ The ways of Zion do mourn, because none come to the solemn assembly; all her gates are desolate, her priests do sigh: her virgins are afflicted, and she herself is in bitterness. ⁵ Her adversaries are become

the head, her enemies prosper; for Yahweh has afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions: her young children are gone into captivity before the adversary. ⁶ From the daughter of Zion all her majesty is departed: her princes are become like harts that find no pasture, they are gone without strength before the pursuer. ⁷ Jerusalem remembers in the days of her affliction and of her miseries all her pleasant things that were from the days of old. When her people fell into the hand of the adversary, no one helped her; the adversaries saw her, they mocked at her desolations. ⁸ Jerusalem has grievously sinned; therefore she has become as an unclean thing; all who honoured her despise her, because they have seen her nakedness: yes, she sighs, and turns backward. ⁹ Her filthiness was in her skirts; she didn't remember her latter end; therefore is

1:1 God speaks as if He is married to Israel, and that even in their sufferings, He would suffer with them, as a husband suffers with his wife: “The destroyer will come upon us” (Jer. 6:22,26) even sounds as if God let Himself in a way be ‘destroyed’ in Israel’s destruction; for each of us dies a little in the death of those we love. The idea of God being destroyed in the destruction of His people may be the basis of the descriptions of Zion as being left widowed (here and Is. 54:1-8). We ask the question – if she was a widow, who died? Her husband, God, was as it were dead. The very idea of the death of the immortal God is awful and obnoxious. But this was and is the depth of God’s feelings at His peoples’ destruction, but it paves the way for the idea of God somehow being “in Christ” at His death.

1:9 No comforter – Seeing God knows all things, we should have total openness with God; this is why some of the great heroes of faith apparently openly question God, because they realized that if they felt something internally, then God knew this anyway. Thus Jeremiah complains that Zion has no comforter – in clear reference to the prophecies of Is. 40:1 that when Judah went into captivity, they would have a comforter. When Jeremiah complains that “The comforter who should refresh my soul is far from me” (:16) he is surely saying ‘The prophesied comforter of Isaiah just simply hasn’t

she come down wonderfully; she has no comforter: see, Yahweh, my affliction; for the enemy has magnified himself. ¹⁰ The adversary has spread out his hand on all her pleasant things: for she has seen that the nations are entered into her sanctuary, concerning whom You commanded that they should not enter into Your assembly. ¹¹ All her people sigh, they seek bread; they have given their pleasant things for food to refresh the soul: look, Yahweh, and see; for I am become abject.

Jerusalem Confesses Her Transgressions

¹² Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by? Look, and see if there is any sorrow like my sorrow, which is brought on me, with which Yahweh has afflicted me in the day of His fierce anger. ¹³ From on high has He sent fire into my bones, and it prevails against them; He has spread a net for my feet, He has turned me back: He has made me desolate and faint all the day. ¹⁴ The yoke of my transgressions is bound by His hand; they are knit together, they have come up on my neck; He has

come!'. He had his doubts – and he expresses them openly to God. We can find this same openness in prayer before God if we have a living relationship with Him.

1:18 In Jer. 15:15–19, Jeremiah asks for vengeance on his persecutors, and accuses God of deceiving him. God's response is to ask him to repent of this, so that he can resume his prophetic work. Perhaps Jeremiah had this incident in mind when he commented: "Yahweh is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandment". This indicates that at least in Jeremiah's case, he was not irresistibly carried along by the Spirit in some kind of ecstasy, having no option but to speak God's word. His speaking of God's word required that he shared the essentially loving and gracious spirit / disposition of his God; and he struggled to have this. Note too how repentance requires a specific, sober recognition that God is right and we were wrong – repentance isn't a mere shrugging of the shoulders and half-second acceptance that we messed up.

made my strength to fail: the Lord has delivered me into their hands, against whom I am not able to stand. ¹⁵ The Lord has set at nothing all my mighty men in the midst of me; He has called a solemn assembly against me to crush my young men: the Lord has trodden as in a wine press the virgin daughter of Judah. ¹⁶ For these things I weep; my eye, my eye runs down with water; because the comforter who should refresh my soul is far from me: my children are desolate, because the enemy has prevailed. ¹⁷ Zion spreads forth her hands; there is none to comfort her; Yahweh has commanded concerning Jacob, that those who are around him should be his adversaries: Jerusalem is among them as an unclean thing. ¹⁸ Yahweh is righteous; for I have rebelled against His commandment: please hear, all you peoples, and see my sorrow: my virgins and my young men are gone into captivity. ¹⁹ I called for my lovers, but they deceived me: my priests and my elders gave up the spirit in the city, while they sought themselves food to refresh their souls. ²⁰ See, Yahweh; for I am in distress; my heart is troubled;

my heart is turned within me; for I have grievously rebelled: abroad the sword bereaves, at home there is as death.²¹ They have heard that I sigh; there is none to comfort me; all my enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that You have done it: You will bring the day that You have proclaimed, and they shall be like me.²² Let all their wickedness come before You; do to them, as You have done to me for all my transgressions: for my sighs are many, and my heart is faint.

CHAPTER 2 Sep. 1

God's Punishment of Jerusalem

How has the Lord covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He has cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and hasn't remembered His footstool in the day of His anger.² The Lord has swallowed up all the habitations of Jacob, and has not pitied: He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought them down to the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes.³ He has cut off in fierce anger all the horn of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand from before the enemy: He has burned up Jacob like a flaming fire, which devours all around.⁴ He has bent His bow like an enemy, He has stood with His right hand as an adversary, has killed all that were

pleasant to the eye: in the tent of the daughter of Zion He has poured out His wrath like fire.⁵ The Lord has become as an enemy, He has swallowed up Israel; He has swallowed up all her palaces, He has destroyed his strongholds; He has multiplied in the daughter of Judah mourning and lamentation.⁶ He has violently taken away His tent, as if it were just in a garden; He has destroyed His place of assembly: Yahweh has caused solemn assembly and Sabbath to be forgotten in Zion, and has despised in the indignation of His anger the king and the priest.⁷ The Lord has cast off His altar, He has abhorred His sanctuary; He has given up into the hand of the enemy the walls of her palaces: they have made a noise in the house of Yahweh, as in the day of a solemn assembly.⁸ Yahweh has purposed to destroy the wall of the daughter of Zion; He has stretched out the line, He has not withdrawn His hand from destroying; He has made the rampart and wall to lament; they languish together.⁹ Her gates are sunk into the ground; He has destroyed and broken her bars: her king and her princes are among the nations where the law is not; yes, her prophets find no vision from Yahweh.

The Suffering of the People

¹⁰ The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground, they keep silence; they have cast up dust on

2:1 Ascending to heaven and falling from heaven are Biblical idioms often used for increasing in pride and being humbled respectively – see too Job 20:6; Jer. 51:53 (about Babylon); Mt. 11:23 (about Capernaum). The language of falling from Heaven which we meet in the Bible isn't therefore to be taken literally.

their heads; they have clothed themselves with sackcloth: the virgins of Jerusalem hang down their heads to the ground.¹¹ My eyes do fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my liver is poured on the earth, because of the destruction of the daughter of my people, because the young children and the infants swoon in the streets of the city.¹² They ask their mothers for grain and wine, whilst they swoon as the wounded in the streets of the city, with their soul poured out into their mothers' bosom.¹³ What shall I testify to you? What shall I liken to you, daughter of Jerusalem? What shall I compare to you, that I may comfort you, virgin daughter of Zion? For your breach is great like the sea: who can heal you?¹⁴ Your prophets have seen for you false and foolish visions; they did not expose

your sin to ward off your captivity, but have seen for you false oracles and causes of banishment.¹⁵ All that pass by clap their hands at you. They hiss and wag their head at the daughter of Jerusalem saying, Is this the city that men called The perfection of beauty, The joy of the whole land?¹⁶ All your enemies have opened their mouth wide against you; they hiss and gnash the teeth; they say, We have swallowed her up; certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it!¹⁷ Yahweh has done that which He purposed; He has fulfilled His word that He commanded in the days of old; He has thrown down, and has not pitied: He has caused the enemy to rejoice over you; He has exalted the horn of your adversaries.¹⁸ Their heart cried to the Lord: wall of the

2:14 before the Babylonian invasion, Judah had been offered the prospect of eternally remaining in their land, if they repented (Jer. 7:7). And after it happened, Jeremiah commented: “Your prophets... did not expose your sin to ward off your captivity”. It could have been ‘warded off’ by the peoples’ repentance and the more powerful entreaty of the prophets. Note how Jeremiah, himself a prophet at the time, so wishes to take the blame upon himself for not pleading more powerfully with the people. Perhaps we will have similar feelings when the time of tribulation breaks forth in the very last days. Others’ repentance to some degree depends upon the depth of our entreaty.

2:15 Christ on the cross was bearing the judgment of Israel’s sins when He was offered gall to quench His thirst (3:15) and when those from Jerusalem mocked and wagged their heads at Him. By baptism into His death we accept that the just judgment for our sins has been laid upon Him, and we will rise again with Him in resurrection (Rom. 6:3-5). We will therefore avoid the tendency to transfer our sin and the judgment for it onto others, and judge them harshly.

2:16 *Gnash the teeth* – There will be “gnashing of teeth” for the rejected at the last day (Mt. 8:12; 13:42,50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Lk. 13:28). In the Old Testament, gnashing of teeth always means to hate somebody, often the righteous (here and Job 16:9; Ps. 35:16; 37:12; 112:10). Could it not be that the rejected hate their Lord and His people, who will be watching the judgment in some form, and therefore go and join the ranks of the embittered armies that come against Him? Or is their extreme hatred against themselves?

2:18 Jeremiah wanted his grief to be reflective of the grieving prayer of the remnant

daughter of Zion, let tears run down like a river day and night; give yourself no respite; don't let the apple of your eye cease. ¹⁹ Arise, cry out in the night, at the beginning of the watches; pour out your heart like water before the face of the Lord: lift up your hands toward Him for the life of your young children, that faint for hunger at the head of every street.

Jerusalem Speaks

20 Look, Yahweh, and see to whom You have done thus! Shall the women eat their fruit, the children that are dandled in the hands? Shall the priest and the prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord? ²¹ The youth and the old man lie on the ground in the streets; my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword: You have killed them in the day of Your anger; You have slaughtered, and not

pitied. ²² You have called, as in the day of a solemn assembly, my terrors on every side; there was none that escaped or remained in the day of Yahweh's anger: those that I have dandled and brought up has my enemy consumed.

CHAPTER 3 Sep. 2

Affliction

I am the man that has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. ² He has led me and caused me to walk in darkness, and not in light. ³ Surely against me He turns his hand again and again all the day. ⁴ My flesh and my skin He has made old; He has broken my bones. ⁵ He has built against me, and surrounded me with gall and travail. ⁶ He has made me to dwell in dark places, as those that have been long dead. ⁷ He has walled me about, that I can't go forth; He has made my

to their God. His grief really was and is to be the pattern for others. Attitudes to prayer influence others. Doubtless it influenced the Lord Himself, who wept over Zion (Lk. 19:41), inevitably holding Jeremiah in His mind. Note that Isaiah had prophesied that God would not rest until Zion be restored. Watchmen would be set upon Zion's walls who would give Him no rest until the walls be rebuilt (Is. 62:1,6,7). At this time, Zion was felt by God to be the “apple of his eye” (Zech. 2:8). This prophesy started to be fulfilled straight after the Babylonian invasion when Jeremiah urged the desolated people to pray: “Let tears run down like a river day and night; give yourself no respite; don't let the apple of your eye cease”. The prayerful remnant gave *themselves* no rest; and thus was fulfilled the prophecy that *God* would have no rest. Sincere prayer according to God's will meant that there was a strong mutuality between the Father and those who prayed to Him. The apple of *His* eye was also theirs; and thus the prayers were ultimately answered and Zion was restored. Our spirit and His are united. All this speaks of an incredible personal bonding in prayer between the Creator and each, specific one of His creatures.

3:7 Jeremiah felt himself totally identified with sinful Judah. Instead of turning away in disgust from God's sinful people who had so abused him, he instead strongly identified with them and on that basis pleaded with God for them; and in this he sets us an amazing challenge and pattern. He was “afflicted” (1:9; 3:1; as Judah, 1:3,7; “built against”, :5, as Judah was, Jer. 52:4; “made old”, i.e. prematurely aged, :4, as Judah,

chain heavy. ⁸ Yes, when I cry, and call for help, He shuts out my prayer. ⁹ He has walled up my ways with cut stone; He has made my paths crooked. ¹⁰ He is to me like a bear lying in wait, as a lion in secret places. ¹¹ He has turned aside my ways, and pulled me in pieces; He has made me desolate. ¹² He has bent His bow, and set me as a target for the arrow. ¹³ He has caused the shafts of His quiver to enter into my kidneys. ¹⁴ I am become a derision to all my people, and their song all the day. ¹⁵ He has filled me with bitterness, He has sated my thirst with wormwood. ¹⁶ He has also broken my teeth with gravel stones; He has covered me with ashes. ¹⁷ You have removed my soul far off from peace; I forgot prosperity. ¹⁸ I said, My strength is

perished, and my expectation from Yahweh. ¹⁹ Remember my affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall. ²⁰ My soul still remembers them, and is bowed down within me. ²¹ This I recall to my mind; therefore have I hope.

God's Compassion

²² It is because of Yahweh's graces that we are not consumed, because His compassion doesn't fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ Yahweh is my portion, says my soul; therefore will I hope in Him. ²⁵ Yahweh is good to those who wait for Him, to the soul that seeks Him. ²⁶ It is good that a man should hope and quietly wait for the salvation of Yahweh. ²⁷ It is good for a man that he bear the yoke

Ps. 102:26; 50:9; 51:6; felt his prayers not heard, :8, as Judah's weren't; walled about and inclosed,:7,9, as Judah (Hos. 2:6); had God act to him "as a bear", :10, as He was to Judah (Hos. 13:8; Am. 5:19); and "as a lion", :10, as He was to Judah (Jer. 5:6; 49:19; 50:44); God bent His bow against him (:12), as He did against Judah (2:4 s.w.); suffered affliction and misery, :19, as Judah did (1:7 s.w.); drank gall (:5,19) as Judah had to (Jer. 8:14; 9:15; 23:15); had none to comfort him (1:21), as Judah didn't (1:9); bore a yoke (:27), as did Judah (Jer. 27:8,12).

3:13 Notice how Jeremiah's innermost being was turned for his people, because he felt that *he* had shared in their sin. The arrows of God entered into his kidneys, and this is why he so cried out. But God's arrows were against a sinful Judah (2:4). Yet Jeremiah so identified with them that he felt they had entered *him*; and this is why he could cry out in the way he did. Even though he hadn't sinned as they had, he felt that because they had, so had he, as he was so identified with them. He reached such a level of grief through identifying himself so closely with those for whom he grieved. Time and again, the descriptions of his personal suffering and grief are expressed in the terms of the very sufferings which he had prophesied as coming upon a sinful Israel. And so with us, if we feel and show a solidarity with the people of this world, with our brethren, then we will grieve for them. If we maintain a selfish, postmodern detachedness from them, then we will never have a heart that bleeds for them. Jeremiah could so easily have shrugged his shoulders and reasoned that Judah had had their chance; and it wasn't on his head. But he didn't. His attitude was that he had to seek the sheep until he found it.

3:15 See on 2:15.

in his youth. ²⁸ Let him sit alone and keep silence, because He has laid it on him. ²⁹ Let him put his mouth in the dust, if so be that in this case there may be hope. ³⁰ Let him give his cheek to Him who strikes him; let him be filled full with reproach. ³¹ For the Lord will not cast off forever. ³² For though He cause grief, yet He will have compassion according to the multitude of His graces. ³³ For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men. ³⁴ To crush under foot all the prisoners of the earth, ³⁵ to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High, ³⁶ to subvert a man in his cause, the Lord doesn't approve. ³⁷ Who is he who says, and it comes to pass, when the Lord doesn't command it? ³⁸ Doesn't evil and good come out of the mouth of the Most High? ³⁹ Why does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?

A Call to Repentance

⁴⁰ Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to Yahweh. ⁴¹ Let us lift up our heart with our hands to God in the heavens. ⁴² We have transgressed and have rebelled; You have not pardoned. ⁴³ You have covered with anger and pursued us; You have killed, You have not pitied. ⁴⁴ You have covered Yourself with a cloud, so that no prayer can pass through. ⁴⁵ You have made us an off-scouring and refuse in the midst of the nations. ⁴⁶ All our enemies have opened their mouth wide against us. ⁴⁷ Fear and the pit have come on us, devastation and destruction. ⁴⁸ My eye runs down with streams of water, for the destruction of the daughter of my people. ⁴⁹ My eye pours down, and doesn't cease, without any intermission, ⁵⁰ until Yahweh look down, and see from heaven. ⁵¹ My eye affects my soul, because of all the daughters of my city. ⁵² They have chased me

3:38 Evil and good come out of the mouth of the Most High – As in Is. 45:5-7 we see that both positive and negative experiences come from God; He is truly almighty and doesn't just provide the good whilst the evil, or disaster, comes from some sinful ‘Satan’ being. This isn't taught in the Bible; in fact, the very opposite.

3:40 God now tries our hearts (Job 7:18; Ps. 11:4; 17:3; 26:2; 139:23). In likely allusion to the descriptions of God searching and trying our hearts in the Psalms, Jeremiah says that we should search and try our hearts – we should seek to know ourselves as God does, seeing ourselves as He sees us.

3:45 Paul described himself as the offscouring of all things – using the very language of condemned Israel (1 Cor. 4:13). Paul so wanted to see their salvation that he identified with them to this extent. By doing so he was reflecting in essence the way the Lord Jesus so identified Himself with us sinners, as our representative, “made sin” [whatever precisely this means] for the sake of saving us from that sin (2 Cor. 5:21).

3:48-51 What he saw with his eye affected his mind / heart. Let us not see the doom of others, the pain and suffering of another life, and walk on by not permanently moved. What we see should affect our heart – if we have a heart that bleeds. And a bleeding heart doesn't merely bleed – it *does* something concrete, in prayer and action. Consider other examples of the bleeding heart of Jeremiah in 1:16,20; 2:11.

relentlessly like a bird, those who are my enemies without cause.⁵³ They have cut off my life in the dungeon, and have cast a stone on me.⁵⁴ Waters flowed over my head; I said, I am cut off.

Jeremiah's Reflects on His Redemption from the Dungeon

⁵⁵ I called on Your name, Yahweh, out of the lowest dungeon.⁵⁶ You heard my voice; don't hide Your ear at my breathing, at my cry.⁵⁷ You drew near in the day that I called on You; You said, Don't be afraid.⁵⁸ Lord, You have pleaded the causes of my soul; You have redeemed my life.⁵⁹ Yahweh, You have seen my wrong. Judge my cause.⁶⁰ You have seen all their vengeance and all their devices against me.⁶¹ You have heard their reproach, Yahweh, and all their devices against me,⁶² the lips of those that rose up against me, and their device against me all the day.⁶³ You see their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their song.⁶⁴ You will render to them a recompense, Yahweh, according to the work of their hands.⁶⁵ You will give them hardness of heart, Your curse to them.⁶⁶ You will pursue them in anger, and destroy them from under the heavens of Yahweh.

CHAPTER 4 Sep. 3

Terrible Suffering in Jerusalem

How the gold has become dim! The most pure gold has changed! The stones of the sanctuary are poured out at the head of every street.² The precious sons of Zion, comparable to fine gold, how are they now esteemed as earthen pitchers, the work of the hands of the potter!³ Even the jackals draw out the breast, they nurse their young ones: the daughter of my people has become cruel, like the ostriches in the wilderness.⁴ The tongue of the nursing child clings to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread, and no man breaks it to them.⁵ Those who fed delicately are desolate in the streets: those who were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills.⁶ For the punishment of the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the sin of Sodom, that was overthrown as in a moment, and no hands were laid on her.⁷ Her nobles were purer than snow, they were whiter than milk; they were more ruddy in body than rubies, their polishing was as of sapphire.⁸ Their appearance is blacker than a coal; they are not known in the streets: their skin clings to their bones; it is withered, it has become

4:6 By an interesting metonymy in the Hebrew language, the idol, the thing that facilitated sin, is put for their punishment / ruin. Sin and the punishment for it are inextricably linked. The Hebrew language reflects this identity here too, in that the Hebrew word for “punishment” is the same as for “iniquity”. And so it is with all the things of this present evil world; movies, music, novels, the needle, the bottle.... there is nothing unclean in itself, but these things can all be put by metonymy for the condemnation that can arise from the sin they facilitate. It’s a powerful thought, as we face hourly temptation.

like a stick. ⁹ Those who are killed with the sword are better than those who are killed with hunger; for these pine away, stricken through, for want of the fruits of the field. ¹⁰ The hands of the pitiful women have boiled their own children; they were their food in the destruction of the daughter of my people.

God's Anger Poured Out

¹¹ Yahweh has accomplished His wrath, He has poured out His fierce anger; He has kindled a fire in Zion, which has devoured its foundations. ¹² The kings of the land didn't believe, neither all the inhabitants of the world, that the adversary and the enemy would enter into the gates of Jerusalem. ¹³ It is because of the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her. ¹⁴ They wander as blind men in the streets, they are polluted with blood, so that men can't touch their garments. ¹⁵ Depart! they cried to them, Unclean! Depart, depart, don't touch! When they fled away and wandered, men said among the nations, They shall not live here any more. ¹⁶ The anger of Yahweh has scattered them; He will no more regard them: they didn't respect the persons of the priests, they didn't favour the elders. ¹⁷ Our eyes still

fail, looking in vain for our help: in our watching we have watched for a nation that could not save. ¹⁸ They hunt our steps, so that we can't go in our streets: our end is near, our days are fulfilled; for our end has come. ¹⁹ Our pursuers were swifter than the eagles of the sky: they chased us on the mountains, they laid wait for us in the wilderness. ²⁰ The breath of our nostrils, the anointed of Yahweh, was taken in their pits; of whom we said, Under His shadow we shall live among the nations. ²¹ Rejoice and be glad, daughter of Edom that dwells in the land of Uz: the cup shall pass through to you also; you shall be drunken, and shall make yourself naked. ²² The punishment of your iniquity is accomplished, daughter of Zion; He will no more carry you away into captivity: He will visit your iniquity, daughter of Edom; He will uncover your sins.

CHAPTER 5 Sep. 4

A Prayer for Mercy

Remember, Yahweh, what has come on us: look, and see our reproach. ² Our inheritance is turned to strangers, our houses to aliens. ³ We are orphans and fatherless; our mothers are as widows. ⁴ We have drunken our water for money; our wood is sold to us. ⁵ Our pursuers are on our necks: we are weary, and have

4:11 Both Yahweh and Israel are described as kindling the fire of judgment; He responded to what they had done (Jer. 11:16; 15:14; Lam. 4:11 cp. Jer. 17:4). Those who will be condemned will be only those who really wanted it.

4:15 Israel were made to depart into captivity because of their self-righteous rejection of their brethren, telling them to ‘depart’ from them because they considered them unclean – when they themselves were unclean.

no rest. ⁶ We have given the hand to the Egyptians, to the Assyrians, to be satisfied with bread. ⁷ Our fathers sinned, and are no more; we have borne their iniquities. ⁸ Servants rule over us: there is none to deliver us out of their hand. ⁹ We get our bread at the peril of our lives, because of the sword of the wilderness. ¹⁰ Our skin is black like an oven, because of the burning heat of famine. ¹¹ They ravished the women in Zion, the virgins in the cities of Judah. ¹² Princes were hanged up by their hand: the faces of elders were not honoured. ¹³ The young men were made to grind at the mill; the children stumbled under the wood. ¹⁴ The elders

have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music. ¹⁵ The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. ¹⁶ The crown is fallen from our head: woe to us! For we have sinned. ¹⁷ For this our heart is faint; for these things our eyes are dim; ¹⁸ for the mountain of Zion, which is desolate: the foxes walk on it. ¹⁹ You, Yahweh, remain forever; Your throne is from generation to generation. ²⁰ Why do You forget us forever, and forsake us so long time? ²¹ Turn us to Yourself, Yahweh, and we shall be turned. Renew our days as of old. ²² But You have utterly rejected us; You are very angry against us.

5:7 In this very context, Ez. 18 later emphasized that the people at that time were suffering for their own sins, not just for those of their fathers. Yet Jeremiah seems in his grief to have overlooked that; and yet by grace he remained amongst the faithful, despite circumstances leading him to overlook parts of God's truth and not facing up to the seriousness of Israel's sin as he ought to have done.

5:20, 21 Jeremiah's prophecies of gracious restoration were known by the exiles; but many passages in Isaiah, the Psalms (e.g. Ps. 137:7-9) and Lamentations (:20,21) indicate that the exiles had little conviction they would be fulfilled, considering Judah as "utterly rejected" by God, and just getting on with their lives in Babylon without any real hope in God's salvation. Considering the prosperity of their lives there, this was an all too convenient conclusion for them to draw. Once again we see that false interpretation of Scripture invariably has a moral subtext to it. Is. 40:1,2 speaks a message of comfort to the exiles: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God". But [in full allusion to this prophecy], the exiles were like Rachael who refused to be comforted over her loss (Jer. 31:15); they claimed they found "none to comfort" (1:2,16,17,21). But they were wilfully refusing the comfort of God's repeated word of hope and restoration. They didn't grasp the plain teaching of the prophetic word because they didn't want to – it demanded too much of them, and a giving up of the comfortable Babylon life. Hence Is. 43:19 laments: "I am doing a new thing: now it springs forth [in the decree to return to Zion?], do you not perceive it?". And do we "not perceive it?" time and again in our own lives, as to the potentials God is opening up?

EZEKIEL

CHAPTER 1 Sep. 5

The Glory of God in the Living Creatures

Now it happened in the thirtieth year in the fourth month in the fifth of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God.² In the fifth of the month, which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin's captivity,³ the word of Yahweh came specifically to Ezekiel the priest the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and the hand of Yahweh was there on him.⁴ I looked, and behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, a great cloud, with flashing lightning and a brightness around it; and out of its midst as it were glowing metal out of the midst

of the fire.⁵ Out of its midst came the likeness of four living creatures. This was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man.⁶ Each one had four faces, and each one of them had four wings.⁷ Their feet were straight feet; and the soles of their feet were like the soles of a calf's feet; and they gleamed like burnished brass.⁸ They had the hands of a man under their wings on their four sides; and the four of them had their faces and their wings like this:⁹ their wings were joined one to another; they didn't turn when they went; each one went straight forward.¹⁰ As for the likeness of their faces, they each had the face of a man; and the face of a lion on the right side; and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; the four of them also

1:5 Ezekiel's opening vision of the cherubim was surely to encourage the captives in Babylon that above them was an awesome Angelic system, that was able to carry them with it back to the land – if they were workers together with God. Although it seemed that they were sitting still, nothing was happening, they were just passing time by the rivers of Babylon, above them there was an intensely active system of Angels working for their good.

Asaph, writing Psalms in the captivity, perceived this when [surely referring to Ezekiel's recent vision] he speaks of how the God who dwells between the cherubim is in fact actively leading Judah somewhere (Ps. 80:1). Despite God's apparent silence, there is likewise a huge Angelic system whirring away over our lives too.

1:7 Straight feet – The return of the exiles led by Ezra made the journey by a “right way” from Babylon to Zion (Ezra 8:21). Yet this is the very word used about the “straight” feet of the Cherubim Angels here in :7,23. The return from Babylon involved following in the path of the Angels, walking in step with them. The restoration prophecy of Jer. 31:9 spoke of how the returnees would walk “in a straight way” (s.w.) “by the rivers of waters” – and surely Ezra consciously alluded to this when by the river Ahava he fasted for the exiles to return in a “right / straight way”. He knew that these prophecies of restoration would not just automatically come true – they had to be fulfilled by much prayer, fasting and stepping out in faith. But so very few perceived that. And the challenge remains for us today – to walk in the way which God's Angels have potentially prepared for us, with prayer and boldness.

had the face of an eagle.¹¹ Such were their faces. Their wings were spread out above; two wings of each one touched another, and two covered their bodies.¹² Each one went straight forward. Where the spirit was to go, they went; they didn't turn when they went.¹³ As for the likeness of the living creatures, their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches. The fire went up and down among the living creatures; and the fire was bright, and out of the fire went forth lightning.¹⁴ The living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning.¹⁵ Now as I saw the living creatures, there was one wheel on the earth beside the living creatures, for each of the four faces of it.¹⁶ The appearance of the wheels and their work was like a beryl: and the four of them had one likeness; and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within a wheel.¹⁷ When they went, they went in their four directions. They didn't turn when they went.¹⁸ As for their rims, they were high and dreadful; and the four of them had their rims full of eyes all around.¹⁹ When the living creatures went, the wheels went beside them; and when the living creatures were lifted

up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up.²⁰ Wherever the spirit was to go, they went under the spirit's control: and the wheels were lifted up beside them, for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.²¹ When those went, these went; and when those stood, these stood; and when those were lifted up from the earth, the wheels were lifted up beside them: for the spirit of the living creature was in the wheels.²² Over the head of the living creature there was the likeness of an expanse, like an awesome crystal to look on, stretched forth over their heads above.²³ Under the expanse were their wings straight, the one toward the other: each one had two which covered their bodies on this side, and each one had two which covered their bodies on that side.²⁴ When they went, I heard the noise of their wings like the noise of great waters, like the voice of the Almighty, a noise of tumult like the noise of an army. When they stood, they let down their wings.²⁵ There was a voice above the expanse that was over their heads when they stood and let down their wings.²⁶ Above the expanse that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of a sapphire stone; and

1:20 The wheels represented God's people Israel on earth. If they had kept in step with the Spirit-Angel, following Him both to Babylon and back to Judah at His bidding, they would have been in step with God's plan for them, and all would have prospered. This passage appears to be behind Paul's appeal to us to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).

1:25 *There was a voice* – The supreme exaltation of the voice / word of God.

1:26 *As the appearance of a man on it above* – Ezekiel saw only likenesses and appearances, rather than God Himself. But the implication is surely that we are made in God's image and likeness, and therefore we are invited to understand that God exists

on the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man on it above.²⁷ I saw as it were glowing metal, as the appearance of fire within it all around, from the appearance of his waist and upward. From the appearance of his waist and downward I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him.²⁸ As the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud in the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Yahweh. When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard a voice of one that spoke.

CHAPTER 2 Sep. 6

The Call of Ezekiel

He said to me, son of man, stand on your feet, and I will speak with you.² The spirit entered into me when He spoke to me, and set me on my feet; and I heard Him who spoke to me.³ He said to me, Son of man, I send you to the children of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against Me. They and their fathers have transgressed against

Me even to this very day.⁴ The children are impudent and stiff-hearted. I am sending you to them; and you shall tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord Yahweh’.⁵ They, whether they will hear or whether they will forbear (for they are a rebellious house), will at least know that there has been a prophet among them.⁶ You, son of man, don’t be afraid of them, neither be afraid of their words, though briars and thorns are with you, and you do dwell among scorpions. Don’t be afraid of their words, nor be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house.⁷ You shall speak My words to them, whether they will hear, or whether they will refuse to hear; for they are most rebellious.⁸ But you, son of man, hear what I tell you; don’t be rebellious like that rebellious house: open your mouth, and eat that which I give you.⁹ When I looked, behold, a hand was put forth to me; and behold, a scroll of a book was therein.¹⁰ He spread it before me. It was written within and without; and there were written therein lamentations and mourning and woe.

in a corporeal form, in which image our bodies appear. Understanding God as a personal being rather than intangible ‘spirit’ greatly enhances our relationship and prayer life with God.

2:4-6 Ezekiel was shown “what the house of Israel are doing in the dark” (8:12). To pass through human life with this level of sensitivity must’ve been so hard. Psychologically and nervously, the stress would’ve been awful. It seems to me that the prophets had to be somehow psychologically strengthened by God to endure living that sensitively in this crass and unfeeling world – hence God made Ezekiel and Jeremiah as a wall and “iron pillar” to Israel, hardened their faces, so that they wouldn’t be “dismayed at [the] looks” of those who watched them with anger and consternation (2:4-6; 3:8,9,27; Jer. 1:18; 15:20). This psychological strengthening was not aimed at making them insensitive, but rather in strengthening them to live sensitively to sin in a sinful world without cracking up. And He will do the same for us, too.

CHAPTER 3 Sep. 7***Ezekiel Eats the Scroll***

He said to me, Son of man, eat that which you find. Eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel. ² So I opened my mouth, and He caused me to eat the scroll. ³ He said to me, Son of man, cause your belly to eat, and fill your stomach with this scroll that I give you. Then I ate it; and it was as sweet as honey in my mouth. ⁴ He said to me, Son of man, go to the house of Israel, and speak My words to them. ⁵ For you are not sent to a people of a foreign speech and of a hard language, but to the house of Israel; ⁶ not to many peoples of a foreign speech and of a hard language, whose words you cannot understand. Surely, if I sent you to them, they would listen to you. ⁷ But the house of Israel will not

listen to you; for they will not listen to Me; for all the house of Israel are obstinate and hard-hearted. ⁸ Behold, I have made your face hard against their faces, and your forehead hard against their foreheads. ⁹ As an adamant harder than flint have I made your forehead. Don't be afraid of them, neither be dismayed at their looks, though they are a rebellious house. ¹⁰ Moreover He said to me, Son of man, all My words that I shall speak to you receive in your heart, and hear with your ears. ¹¹ Go to them of the captivity, to the children of your people, and speak to them, and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord Yahweh;’ whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear. ¹² Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great rushing, saying, Blessed be the glory of

3:3 This eating of God's word was to represent how Ezekiel wasn't merely to relay God's word as a disinterested messenger, but to assimilate it personally, receiving it into his heart before he spoke it to others (:10), just as we should in our witness.

3:7 Having specifically told Ezekiel that Israel would *not* hearken to His word, God later tells Ezekiel to act out his parables in front of them – for “it may be they will consider, though they be a rebellious house” (12:3). Here we see the supreme *hopefulness* of God, which we too should have when it appears we are preaching to hopeless cases.

3:12 *Rushing* – The Angels are involved with the Cherubim. Yet in Ezekiel's context, the language of chariots inevitably suggests the approach of enemy armies. Thus the cherubim chariots represented not only the Angels, but also the chariots of God's enemies; for the Lord of the Angelic hosts was manifested on earth in the Babylonian hosts. The word for the “rushing” noise of the cherubim wheels is used elsewhere about the noise of the chariots of Israel's enemies and the Babylonian invasion (Jer. 10:22; 47:3; Nah. 3:2). The Angelic armies of Heaven were therefore revealed on earth in the chariots of Babylon; it was both Babylon and the Angelic cherubim behind them who took Judah captive, and who could also return them to their land. Hence the stress in Ezekiel's vision that the wheels of the cherubim were on the earth / land. Clearly enough, the things that go on in our lives, even those things which appear as brutal and tragic as the Babylonian chariots were to Judah, are not random machinations of men; they are, in some unfathomable way, under the direct control of a God of love, who only means to do us good at our latter end.

Yahweh from His place. ¹³ I heard the noise of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, even the noise of a great rushing. ¹⁴ So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away; and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; and the hand of Yahweh was strong on me. ¹⁵ Then I came to them of the captivity at Tel Abib, by the river Chebar, and to where they lived; and I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.

God Warns Israel

¹⁶ It happened at the end of seven days, that the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ¹⁷ Son of man, I have made you a watchman to the house of Israel: therefore hear the word from My mouth, and give them warning from Me. ¹⁸ When I tell the wicked, You shall surely die; and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at your hand. ¹⁹ Yet if you warn the wicked, and he doesn't turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have saved your own life. ²⁰ Again, when a righteous man turns from his right-

eousness and commits iniquity, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at your hand. ²¹ Nevertheless if you warn the righteous man, that the righteous not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and you have saved your own life. ²² The hand of Yahweh was there on me; and He said to me, Arise, go forth into the plain, and I will there talk with you. ²³ Then I arose, and went forth into the plain: and behold, the glory of Yahweh stood there, as the glory which I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face. ²⁴ Then the Spirit entered into me and set me on my feet; and He spoke with me, and said to me, Go, shut yourself inside your house. ²⁵ But you, son of man, behold, they shall lay shackles on you and shall bind you with them, and you shall not go out among them. ²⁶ I will make your tongue stick to the roof of your mouth, that you shall be mute, and unable to reprove them; for they are a rebellious house. ²⁷ But when I speak with you, I will open your mouth, and you shall tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord Yahweh: He who hears, let him hear; and he

3:17-21 Our duty is to witness to the Truth even if there's no response; realizing that we may have to answer at the last day if we do not do so.

3:18 Perhaps this was said to Ezekiel because for 7 days he hadn't told them the word of God as he had been asked to (:11,15,16).

3:20 God does not just disregard those who turn away from Him. He deceives them, and leads them into a downward spiral of moral and doctrinal declension. He laid a stumbling block before the righteous man who turned to sin.

who forbears, let him forbear; for they are a rebellious house.

CHAPTER 4 Sep. 8

The Siege of Jerusalem

You also, son of man, take a tile, and lay it before yourself, and portray on it the city - Jerusalem. 2 Lay siege against it, and build forts against it, and cast up a mound against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around. 3 Take for yourself an iron pan and set it for a wall of iron between yourself and the city: and set your face toward it, and it shall be besieged, and you shall lay siege against it. This shall be a sign to the house of Israel. 4 Moreover lie on your left side, and lay the iniquity of the house of Israel on it; according to the number of the days that you shall lie on it, you shall bear their iniquity. 5 For I have appointed the years of their iniquity to be to you a number of days, even three hundred and ninety days. So you shall bear the iniquity of the house of Israel. 6 Again, when you have accomplished these, you shall lie on your right side, and shall bear the iniquity of the house of Judah: forty days, each day for

a year, have I appointed it to you. 7 You shall set your face toward the siege of Jerusalem with your arm uncovered; and you shall prophesy against it. 8 Behold, I lay shackles on you, and you shall not turn yourself from one side to the other, until you have accomplished the days of your siege. 9 Take for yourself also wheat, barley, beans, lentils, millet and spelt, and put them in one vessel and make bread of it; according to the number of the days that you shall lie on your side, even three hundred and ninety days, you shall eat of it. 10 Your food which you shall eat shall be by weight, twenty shekels a day: from time to time you shall eat it. 11 You shall drink water by measure, the sixth part of a hin: from time to time you shall drink. 12 You shall eat it as barley cakes, and you shall bake it in their sight with dung that comes out of man. 13 Yahweh said, Even thus shall the children of Israel eat their bread unclean among the nations where I will drive them. 14 Then I said, Ah Lord Yahweh! Behold, my soul has not been polluted; for from my youth up even until now have I not eaten of that which dies of itself, or is torn of animals;

4:1-5 Preaching through these acted parables would've led to people thinking Ezekiel was mad or at least, very 'odd'; just as they may consider us when we share God's word with them as He asks.

4:14 This is very similar to the situation when Christ asked Peter to kill and eat unclean animals (Acts 10:14). Peter saw the similarity, taking (as we should) guidance and encouragement from a Biblical example of a person who was in his situation. Peter therefore replied by quoting from Ez. 4:14, where Ezekiel refuses to eat similar food when asked to by the Angel. Perhaps Peter saw himself as Ezekiel's antitype in his witnessing against Israel's rejection of the word of God in Christ (note how 4:16 is a prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction in AD70). 'In the same way as God made a concession to Ezekiel about this command to eat unclean food', Peter reasoned, 'so

neither came there abominable flesh into my mouth. ¹⁵ Then He said to me, Behold, I have given you cow's dung for man's dung, and you shall prepare your bread thereon. ¹⁶ Moreover He said to me, Son of man, behold, I will break the staff of bread in Jerusalem. They shall eat bread by weight, and with fearfulness; and they shall drink water by measure, and in dismay: ¹⁷ that they may want bread and water, and be dismayed one with another, and pine away in their iniquity.

CHAPTER 5 Sep. 9

Ezekiel Shaves His Hair

You, son of man, take a sharp sword. You shall use it like a barber's razor on yourself, and shall cause it to pass on your head and on your beard. Then take balances to weigh, and divide the hair. ² A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are fulfilled; and you shall take a third part, and strike with the sword around it; and a third part you shall scatter to the wind - and I will draw out a sword after them. ³ You shall take of it a few in number, and bind them in your skirts. ⁴ Of these again you shall take, and throw them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire; from it shall a fire

come forth into all the house of Israel. ⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: This is Jerusalem; I have set her in the midst of the peoples and countries which are around her. ⁶ She has rebelled against My ordinances in doing wickedness more than the nations, and against My statutes more than the countries that are around her; for they have rejected My ordinances, and as for My statutes, they have not walked in them. ⁷ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you are rebellious more than the nations that are around you and have not walked in My statutes, neither have kept My ordinances, neither have done after the ordinances of the nations that are around you; ⁸ therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I, even I, am against you; and I will execute judgments in the midst of you in the sight of the nations. ⁹ I will do in you that which I have not done, and whereunto I will not do any more the like, because of all your abominations. ¹⁰ Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of you, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments on you; and the whole remnant of you will I scatter to all the winds. ¹¹ Therefore as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely, because you have defiled My sanctuary with all your

perhaps my Lord will do for me'. But the Lord was to teach him even greater things than Ezekiel.

4:15 God is open to dialogue with His children, and is willing to make concessions to human weakness and foibles; just as we should be to others.

5:11 *Will I also diminish you* – The implication was that they had diminished God. It may be purposefully putting it in arresting terms, but all the same it's ultimately true that if we don't give God the glory we are intended to, then we are diminishing Him of

detestable things and with all your abominations, therefore will I also diminish you; neither shall My eye spare, and I also will have no pity. ¹² A third part of you shall die with the plague and with famine shall they be consumed in the midst of you; and a third part shall fall by the sword around you; and a third part I will scatter to all the winds, and will draw out a sword after them. ¹³ Thus shall My anger be accomplished, and I will cause My wrath toward them to rest, and I shall be comforted. They shall know that I, Yahweh, have spoken in My zeal, when I have accomplished My wrath on them. ¹⁴ Moreover I will make you a desolation and a reproach among the peoples that are around you, in the sight of all that pass by. ¹⁵ So it shall be a reproach and a taunt, an instruction and an astonishment, to the peoples that are around you, when I shall execute judgments on you in anger and in wrath and in furious rebukes. I, Yahweh, have spoken it. ¹⁶ They shall see, when I shall send on them the evil arrows of famine that are for

what is potentially and rightfully His. This is the degree to which He has come down to our level in His interaction with men.

5:13 The very existence of “the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction” is in order to “make known the riches of his glory upon the vessels of mercy” (Rom. 9:22,23 Gk.). After the experience of Divine judgment, “you shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought upon Jerusalem” (14:22); and yet these are exactly the words used here in 5:13 to describe how God will be ‘comforted’ after the judgments. We will come to share God’s perspective through our experience of the judgment process. It will teach us to be like Him, to see things from His viewpoint. As a result of it, the struggles we have over “why...?” so many things happened will be resolved. The purpose of the judgment is not only to convict us of our sinfulness, but also to make us appreciate our own righteousness for what it was and is. The faithful almost argue back with the Lord when He points out to them their righteous acts; they were done within a spirit of service that simply didn’t see them as He does (Mt. 25:38).

destruction, which I will send to destroy you: when I will increase the famine on you, and will break your staff of bread. ¹⁷ I will send on you famine and wild animals, and they shall bereave you; and pestilence and blood shall pass through you; and I will bring the sword on you: I, Yahweh, have spoken it.

CHAPTER 6 Sep. 10

Prophecy about the Mountains of Israel

The word of Yahweh came to me, ¹ saying, ² Son of man, set your face toward the mountains of Israel, and prophesy to them, ³ and say, You mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord Yahweh: Thus says the Lord Yahweh to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys: Behold, I, even I, will bring a sword on you, and I will destroy your high places. ⁴ Your altars shall become desolate, and your incense altars shall be broken; and I will cast down your slain men before your idols. ⁵ I will lay the dead bodies of the children of Israel before their

idols; and I will scatter your bones around your altars. ⁶ In all your dwelling places the cities shall be laid waste, and the high places shall be desolate; that your altars may be laid waste and made desolate, and your idols may be broken and cease, and your incense altars may be cut down, and your works may be abolished. ⁷ The slain shall fall in the midst of you, and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ⁸ Yet will I leave a remnant: you shall have some that escape the sword among the peoples, when you shall be scattered through the nations. ⁹ Those of you that escape shall remember Me among the nations where they shall be carried captive because I have been broken with their lewd heart which has departed from Me, and with their eyes, which play the prostitute after their idols. They shall loathe themselves in their own sight for the evils which they have committed in all their

abominations. ¹⁰ They shall know that I am Yahweh: I have not said in vain that I would do this evil to them. ¹¹ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Strike with your hand and stamp with your foot and say, Alas! Because of all the evil abominations of the house of Israel, they shall fall by the sword, by the famine and by the plague. ¹² He who is far off shall die of the plague; and he who is near shall fall by the sword; and he who remains and is besieged shall die by the famine. Thus will I accomplish My wrath on them. ¹³ You shall know that I am Yahweh, when their slain men shall be among their idols around their altars on every high hill, on all the tops of the mountains and under every green tree and under every thick oak, the places where they offered pleasant aroma to all their idols. ¹⁴ I will stretch out My hand on them, and make the land desolate and waste, from the wilderness toward Diblah,

6:7 You shall know that I am Yahweh – This is as a refrain throughout Ezekiel. Ultimately, the wicked will come to know Yahweh through their experience of His judgment, but then it will be too late. We are to “know” Him now, rather than too late in the process of condemnation.

6:9 I have been broken – The God who is Almighty and so more powerful than us has become so involved with humanity that His heart was broken by Israel; and if it was broken in Ezekiel’s time, we cannot imagine what His feelings were at the crucifixion of His Son. To truly love makes us weak and vulnerable, and the awesome extent of God’s love has in a sense done the same to Him. Not that we are righteous of ourselves, but it’s worth reflecting how our feeble efforts to love Him are therefore so thrilling to Him.

Their lewd heart... their eyes, which play the prostitute – This is the language of sexual addiction, and it applies to God’s woman, Israel. No wonder they so broke His loving heart.

6:13 The bodies of Israel lay strewn around their idols because in fact the idols they worshipped were the idols of their enemies, who would’ve sacrificed the corpses of the Israelites to *their* gods. It’s so bizarre that Israel should’ve worshipped the idols of their victorious enemies, but this is how bizarre sin is.

throughout all their habitations. They shall know that I am Yahweh.

CHAPTER 7 Sep. 11 *God's Anger Means the End Has Come*

Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying,² You, son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh to the land of Israel, An end: the end has come on the four corners of the land.³ Now is the end on you, and I will send My anger on you, and will judge you according to your ways; and I will bring on you all your abominations.⁴ My eye shall not spare you, neither will I have pity; but I will bring your ways on you, and your abominations shall be in the midst of you. You shall know that I am Yahweh.⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: An evil, a one-time evil; behold, it comes.⁶ An end has come, the end has come; it awakes against

you; behold, it comes.⁷ Your doom has come to you, inhabitant of the land. The time has come, the day is near, a day of tumult, and not of mere echoing on the mountains.⁸ Now will I shortly pour out My wrath on you and accomplish My anger against you, and will judge you according to your ways; and I will bring on you all your abominations.⁹ My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity. I will bring on you according to your ways; and your abominations shall be in the midst of you; and you shall know that I, Yahweh, do strike.¹⁰ Behold, the day, behold, it comes: your doom is gone forth; the rod has blossomed, pride has budded.¹¹ Violence has risen up into a rod of wickedness. None of them shall remain, neither of their multitude, nor of their wealth. There shall be nothing of value among them.¹² The time has come, the day draws near:

7:9 According to your ways – Here God says that He will punish Israel at the hand of the Babylonians according to their sins, proportionate to them. But when Israel *were* punished by the Babylonians, Ezra (9:13) realized that they had *not* been punished proportionate to their sins. Yet in Is. 40:2, again in the context of Judah's punishment by the Babylonians, God says that their judgment had been double what it ought to have been; and yet Ezra says it was *less* than the promised proportionate recompense for their sins. Here we have the utter, humanly inconsistent grace of God; almost taking guilt for punishing them too much, then for not punishing them enough, and yet saying He will punish them in exact proportion to their sin (see too 5:11; 8:18,19; 9:10). All we can say is that God is passionate and emotional. He hates punishing His children for their sins, just as any loving parent does, even if He speaks at times in the fire of His wrath. And when He did punish Judah, it seems He almost rushes to take it back and say it was far too much. This isn't to say that God is in any sense fickle; the paradox can perhaps only dimly be understood by the analogy to human parenting dilemmas. All we can say is that His love and passion for His wayward children is real and felt, and He will not hold Himself to His word of judgment in a legalistic, literalistic sense – quite simply because love, not least *His* love, is beyond such limitation.

7:12 The time has come – And yet God says elsewhere that it is still to come (:10). God is outside of time as we know it. The future is as if it's happened. Because of this,

don't let the buyer rejoice, nor the seller mourn; for wrath is upon all its multitude.¹³ For the seller shall not return to that which is sold, even if they be still alive. The vision is touching the whole multitude of it, none shall return; neither shall any strengthen himself in the iniquity of his life.¹⁴ They have blown the trumpet, and have made all ready, but none goes to the battle; for My wrath is on all its multitude.¹⁵ The sword is outside, and the pestilence and the famine within. He who is in the field shall die with the sword; and he who is in the city, famine and pestilence shall devour him.¹⁶ But those of the ones who escape shall escape, and shall be on the mountains like doves of the valleys, all of them moaning, every one in his iniquity.¹⁷ All hands shall be feeble, and all knees shall be weak as water.¹⁸ They shall also clothe themselves with sack-cloth, and horror shall cover them; and shame shall be on all faces, and baldness on all their heads.¹⁹ They shall throw their silver in the streets, and their gold shall be as an unclean thing; their silver and their gold shall not be able to deliver them in the day of the wrath of Yahweh. They shall

not satisfy their souls, neither fill their stomachs; because it has been the stumbling block of their iniquity.²⁰ As for the beauty of His ornament, He set it in majesty; but they made the images of their abominations and their detestable things therein; therefore have I made it to them as an unclean thing.²¹ I will give it into the hands of the gentiles for a prey, and to the wicked of the earth for a spoil; and they shall profane it.²² My face will I turn also from them, and they shall profane My secret place; and robbers shall enter into it, and profane it.²³ Make the chain; for the land is full of bloodshed, and the city is full of violence.²⁴ Therefore I will bring the worst of the nations, and they shall possess their houses. I will also make the pride of the strong to cease; and their holy places shall be profaned.²⁵ Destruction comes; and they shall seek peace, and there shall be none.²⁶ Mischief shall come on mischief, and rumour shall be on rumour; and they shall seek a vision of the prophet; but the law shall perish from the priest, and counsel from the elders.²⁷ The king shall mourn, and the prince shall be clothed with desolation, and the hands of the people of

God can speak of the dead as if they are alive, although they are not; and can speak of people as if they were alive before birth. He can speak of a day coming as if it has come (Is. 3:8). We need to bear this in mind in interpreting His word.

7:20 Therein – Amazingly, there were idols made in Yahweh's temple...

7:23 The Hebrew word *mishpat* means [and is translated] both “crime” (7:23) and “judgment” (5:7,16,20). Every sin is its own judgment, and brings us immediately as it were before the judgment throne of God. And yet *mishpat* is also translated “ordinance”, in speaking about the commands of God (11:20). Acts of obedience are also acts of judgment; they too bring us positively before the judgment of God. The Greek and Hebrew words translated ‘judge’ mean both the process of discerning / summing up, and also the execution of judgment.

the land shall be troubled. I will do to them after their way, and according to their own judgments will I judge them; and they shall know that I am Yahweh.

CHAPTER 8 Sep. 12

Temple Idolatry

In the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house and the elders of Judah sat before me, the hand of the Lord Yahweh fell there on me.² Then I saw, and behold, a likeness as the appearance of fire; from the appearance of His waist and downward, fire; and from His waist and upward, as the appearance of brightness, as it were glowing metal.³ He put forth the form of a hand and took me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between the earth and the sky and brought me in the visions of God to Jerusalem, to the door of the gate of the inner court that looks toward the north; where there was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy.⁴ The glory of the God of Israel was there, according to the appearance that I saw in the plain.⁵ Then He said to me, Son of man, lift up your eyes now to the road that

leads toward the north. So I lifted up my eyes toward the northern road, and behold, northward of the gate of the altar this image of jealousy was in the entry.⁶ He said to me, Son of man, do you see what they do, even the great abominations that the house of Israel do commit here, so that I should go far away from My sanctuary? But you shall again see other, greater abominations.⁷ He brought me to the door of the court; and when I looked, there was a hole in the wall.⁸ Then He said to me, Son of man, dig now through the wall; and when I had dug through the wall, behold, a door.⁹ He said to me, Go in, and see the wicked abominations that they do here.¹⁰ So I went in and saw; and behold, every form of creeping thing and abominable animals and all the idols of the house of Israel, portrayed around on the wall.¹¹ There stood before them seventy men of the elders of the house of Israel; and in their midst stood Jaazaniah the son of Shaphan, every man with his censer in his hand; and the odour of the cloud of incense went up.¹² Then He said to me, Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the dark, every

8:3 Which provokes to jealousy – Any form of idolatry provokes God to jealousy. The vast extent of His love for us means that any unfaithfulness provokes His feelings of jealousy; love and jealousy are in this sense part of the same thing.

8:12 See on 2:4-6. It seems that righteousness goes unrewarded and sin goes unpunished. Those who thought in their hearts that “Yahweh doesn’t see” likely never said that in so many words. But their persistence in sin, like ours today, arose from a disbelief in practice that God does in fact see and know all things. They thought that “the Lord will not do good, nor will He do ill” (Zeph. 1:12); “my way is hidden from the Lord” (Is. 29:15; 40:27). This of course is the attitude with which we daily live. The question is, will we perceive it as the prophets did, and live with the belief that God is in fact intently watching us, 24/7?

man in his rooms of images? They say, ‘Yahweh doesn’t see us; Yahweh has forsaken the land’. ¹³ He said also to me, You shall again see more, greater abominations which they do. ¹⁴ Then He brought me to the door of the gate of Yahweh’s house which was toward the north; and see, there sat the women weeping for Tam-muz. ¹⁵ Then He said to me, Have you seen this, son of man? You shall again see greater abominations than these. ¹⁶ He brought me into the inner court of Yahweh’s house; and there, at the door of Yahweh’s temple, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs toward Yahweh’s temple, and their faces toward the east; and they were worshipping the sun toward the east. ¹⁷ Then He said to me, Have you seen this, son of man? Is it a trivial thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? For they have filled the land with violence, and have turned again to provoke Me to anger; and behold, they put the branch to their nose. ¹⁸ Therefore

will I also deal with them in anger; My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them.

CHAPTER 9 Sep. 13

Death to the Idolaters

Then He cried in my ears with a loud voice saying, Cause those who are in charge of the city to draw near, every man with his destroying weapon in his hand. ² Behold, six men came from the way of the upper gate which looks toward the north, every man with his slaughter weapon in his hand; and one man in their midst clothed in linen, with a writer’s inkhorn by his side. They went in, and stood beside the bronze altar. ³ The glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub upon which it rested, to the threshold of the house: and He called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writer’s inkhorn by his side. ⁴ Yahweh said to him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark on the foreheads of

8:13 Amongst God’s people, some sins are “greater abomination” than others . Even amongst the Gentiles, God sees some as sinning more than others (7:24). This doesn’t mean that the ‘smaller’ ones don’t count. But it reflects God’s great sensitivity to human behaviour. The varying scale of sacrifices for various sins reflects this too. The Lord Jesus spoke of the man with “greater sin” (Jn. 19:11), and of other men who owed varying amounts to the Father. God’s eye did not spare or pity Israel, *because* they thought that sin was a light thing to Him (:17,18). They thus insulted His essential nature.

9:2 *One man... with a writer’s inkhorn by his side* – Ezekiel was seeing himself in the vision.

9:4 *Foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry over all the abominations* – In some ways we can do nothing about the state of things in the world or amongst the people of God, because we cannot change other people. But what marks us out as God’s people is that in our deepest minds [symbolized by the forehead], we weep for it all. This was the characteristic which saved Lot when Sodom was destroyed (2 Pet. 2:8).

the men that sigh and that cry over all the abominations that are done in its midst.⁵ To the others He said in my hearing, Go through the city after him, and strike. Don't let your eye spare, neither have pity;⁶ kill utterly the old man, the young man and the virgin, and little children and women; but don't come near any man on whom is the mark. Begin at My sanctuary. Then they began at the old men that were before the house.⁷ He said to them, Defile the house, and fill the courts with the dead. Go forth! They went forth, and struck in the city.⁸ It happened, while they were smiting, and I was left, that I fell on my face and cried, and said, Ah Lord Yahweh! Will You destroy all who remain of Israel in Your pouring out of Your wrath on Jerusalem?⁹ Then He said to me, The iniquity of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great, and the land is full of blood, and the city full of perversion; for they say, Yahweh has forsaken the land, and Yahweh doesn't see.¹⁰ As for Me also, My eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity, but I will bring their behaviour on their heads.¹¹ Behold, the man clothed in linen, who had the inkhorn by his side, reported the matter, saying, I have done as You have commanded me.

CHAPTER 10 Sep. 14

The Glory of God in the Living Creatures Departs

Then I looked, and behold, in the expanse that was over the head of the cherubim there appeared above them as it were a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne.² He spoke to the man clothed in linen and said, Go in between the whirling wheels, even under the cherub, and fill both your hands with coals of fire from between the cherubim, and scatter them over the city. He went in as I watched.³ Now the cherubim stood on the right side of the house when the man went in; and the cloud filled the inner court.⁴ Then the glory of Yahweh was lifted up from the cherub, and stood over the threshold of the house; and the house was filled with the cloud, and the court was full of the brightness of Yahweh's glory.⁵ The sound of the wings of the cherubim was heard even to the outer court, as the voice of God Almighty when He speaks.⁶ It came to pass, when He commanded the man clothed in linen saying, Take fire from between the whirling wheels, from between the cherubim, that he went in and stood beside a wheel.⁷ The cherub stretched forth his hand from between the cherubim to the fire that

9:5 This is reminiscent of the Passover Angel sealing the faithful Israelites against the destruction of the “Destroyer” Angel (1 Cor. 10:10). But now, unfaithful Israel were no better than the Egyptians.

9:8 Ezekiel's intercession was after the pattern of Abraham pleading for Sodom, and Moses for Israel. Their examples inspired Ezekiel in prayer, as they should us. But it wasn't heard at this time; for in the end, wilful sin just has to be punished, and no mediator or intercession can change things.

was between the cherubim and took of it, and put it into the hands of him who was clothed in linen, who took it and went out.⁸ There appeared in the cherubim the form of a man's hand under their wings.⁹ I looked and behold, four wheels were beside the cherubim, one wheel beside one cherub, and another wheel beside another cherub; and the appearance of the wheels was like a beryl stone.¹⁰ As for their appearance, the four of them had one likeness, like a wheel within a wheel.¹¹ When they went, they went in their four directions. They didn't turn as they went, but to the place where the head looked they followed it; they didn't turn as they went.¹² Their whole body and their backs and their hands and their wings and the wheels were full of

eyes all around, even the wheels that the four of them had.¹³ As for the wheels, they were called in my hearing, 'the whirling wheels'.¹⁴ Each one had four faces: the first face was the face of the cherub, and the second face was the face of a man, and the third face the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle.¹⁵ The cherubim mounted up: this is the living creature that I saw by the river Chebar.¹⁶ When the cherubim went, the wheels went beside them; and when the cherubim lifted up their wings to mount up from the earth, the wheels also didn't turn from beside them.¹⁷ When they stood, these stood; and when they mounted up, these mounted up with them; for the spirit of the living creature was in them.¹⁸ The glory of Yahweh went

10:8 Ezekiel had to put his hand under the wings of the cherubim; and then there appeared permanently in the Cherubim visions “the form of a man's hand [i.e. Ezekiel's] under their wings” (:2,8). I take this to be indicative of how humanity can be so deeply a part of God's work; we are identified with Him and His Angels. The visions involved the whole system held up as it were upon a human hand; and God in the image of a man crowning it all in the Heavens. Truly God isn't far from any of us; and in a sense, “God is in need of man”.

10:14 The four faces are likely to be connected with the four standards of the tribes of Israel (Lion = Judah, Man = Reuben, Ox = Ephraim, Eagle = Dan). Each of those tribes had two other tribes assigned to them in the encampment procedures of Num. 2. There is extra-Biblical tradition that the cherubim in Solomon's temple had the same four faces which Ezekiel saw on the cherubim – lion, ox, man and eagle. Those to whom Ezekiel related his vision would have immediately understood the point – that the earthly sanctuary was a reflection of the Heavenly, and that above that was a huge Angelic system operating, which also represented God's people – them. But that huge system was to remove to Babylon, and then the final visions of Ezekiel show that glory returning. Ezekiel, as the representative “son of man”, was caught up within that system and transported at ease between Babylon and Jerusalem – and those who wanted to opt in with God and His Angels could likewise be taken to Babylon and returned. Those who chose to remain in Babylon were therefore resisting being part of an awesome system of God manifestation and Angelic operation. We have that same choice in things great and small today.

forth from over the threshold of the house, and stood over the cherubim. 19 The cherubim lifted up their wings, and mounted up from the earth in my sight when they went forth, and the wheels beside them. They stood at the door of the east gate of Yahweh's house; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. 20 This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim. 21 Every one had four faces, and every one four wings; and the likeness of the hands of a man was under their wings. 22 As for the likeness of their faces, they were the faces which I saw by the river Chebar, their appearances and themselves; they went each one straight forward.

CHAPTER 11 Sep. 15

Judah's Leaders Condemned

Moreover the Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the east gate of Yahweh's house which looks eastward. At the door of the gate were twenty-five men; and I saw in their midst Jaazaniah the son of Az-zur, and Pelatiah the son of Benaiah, princes of the people. 2 He said to me, Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked advice in this city; 3 who say,

The time is not near to build houses: this is the cauldron, and we are the meat. 4 Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, son of man. 5 The Spirit of Yahweh fell on me, and He said to me, Speak, Thus says Yahweh: 'Thus you have said, house of Israel; for I know the things that come into your mind. 6 You have multiplied your slain in this city, and you have filled its streets with the slain. 7 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Your slain whom you have laid in its midst, they are indeed the meat, and this is the cauldron; but you shall be brought out of its midst. 8 You have feared the sword; and I will bring the sword on you, says the Lord Yahweh. 9 I will bring you out of its midst and deliver you into the hands of foreigners, and will execute judgments among you. 10 You shall fall by the sword; I will judge you in the border of Israel; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. 11 This shall not be your cauldron, neither shall you be the meat in its midst; I will judge you in the border of Israel; 12 and you shall know that I am Yahweh: for you have not walked in My statutes, neither have you executed My ordinances, but have behaved like the nations that are around you'. 13 It happened, when I prophesied,

11:1 The wheels of the cherubim represented God's people Israel on earth. If they had kept in step with the Spirit-Angel, following Him both to Babylon and back to Judah at His bidding, they would have been in step with God's plan for them, and all would have prospered. This passage appears to be behind Paul's appeal to us to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). Ezekiel himself was the great example of this, for he was "lifted up" by the Spirit just as the wheels were lifted up, and went wherever he was taken, backwards and forwards between Babylon and Judah (8:3; 11:1). He became part of the Cherubic system.

that Pelatiah the son of Benaiah died. Then fell I down on my face and cried with a loud voice, and said, Ah Lord Yahweh! will you make a full end of those remaining of Israel? ¹⁴ The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ¹⁵ Son of man, the people who live in Jerusalem are talking about you and those of your nation who are with you in exile. They say, The exiles are too far away to worship Yahweh. He has given us possession of the land.

Judah's Return Promised

¹⁶ Therefore say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Whereas I have removed them far off among the nations, and whereas I have scattered them among the countries, yet will I be to them a sanctuary for a little while in the countries where they have come. ¹⁷ Therefore say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will gather you from the peoples and assemble you out of the countries where you have been scat-

tered, and I will give you the land of Israel. ¹⁸ They shall return, and they shall take away all the detestable things of it and all its abominations. ¹⁹ I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh; ²⁰ that they may walk in My statutes, and keep My ordinances, and do them: and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. ²¹ But as for those whose heart walks after their detestable things and their abominations, I will bring their way on their own heads, says the Lord Yahweh. ²² Then the cherubim lifted up their wings, and the wheels were beside them; and the glory of the God of Israel was over them above. ²³ The glory of Yahweh went up from the midst of the city, and stood on the mountain which is on the east side of the city. ²⁴ The Spirit lifted me up, and brought me in the vision by the Spirit of God into Chaldea, to

11:15 I will judge you in the border of Israel – Babylon and Assyria were located at the borders of the land promised to Abraham.

11:19 Sitting there in captivity, God offered His people a new covenant (:19,20,25 cp. Heb. 10:16); they could have one mind between each other, and a heart of flesh. But Israel would not, and the whole offer was rescheduled and reapplied, so that it is now accepted by those who turn to Jesus Christ. Their being of “one heart” after baptism (Acts 4:32) was a direct result of their acceptance of this same new covenant which Judah had rejected. In our hearing of the offer of the new covenant, we are essentially in the position of those of the captivity, hearing Ezekiel’s words, and deciding whether or not to believe it – or just continue to be obsessed with just trying to make the best of a rather dumb life.

11:22-24 When the cherubim lifted up, so was Ezekiel lifted up. Judah should have left Jerusalem when the Spirit told them to; and they should have upped and left Babylon when the Spirit told them to. But they were out of step with the Spirit, despite Ezekiel’s acted parable of literally being lifted up and going where the Cherubim went. The equivalent of this for us is surely our sense of doing all for God’s glory, of having this as the final deciding factor in all our decisions.

them of the captivity. So the vision that I had seen went up from me.

²⁵ Then I repeated to those of the captivity all the things that Yahweh had shown me.

CHAPTER 12 Sep. 16

Judah's Exile

The word of Yahweh also came to me saying,² Son of man, you dwell in the midst of the rebellious people, who have eyes to see, and don't see, who have ears to hear, and don't hear; for they are rebellious people.³ Therefore, you son of man, prepare what you need for a journey into exile and move by day in their sight. You shall move from your place to another place in their sight: perhaps they will consider, though they are rebellious people.⁴ You shall bring forth your belongings by day in their sight, as belongings for exile; and you shall go forth at evening in their sight, as when men go forth into exile.⁵ Dig through the wall in their sight, and carry your belongings out that way.⁶ In their sight you shall carry it on your shoulder, and carry it forth in the twilight; you shall cover your face, so that you don't see the land; for I have set you for a sign to the house of Israel.⁷ I did as I was commanded: I brought

forth my belongings by day, as if for exile, and in the evening I dug through the wall with my hand; I brought it forth in the dark, and carried it on my shoulder in their sight.⁸ In the morning came the word of Yahweh to me, saying,⁹ Son of man, has not the house of Israel, the rebellious house, said to you, 'What are you doing?'¹⁰ Say to them, 'Thus says the Lord Yahweh: This burden concerns the prince in Jerusalem, and all the people of Israel who are in it'.¹¹ Say, I am your sign: like as I have done, so shall it be done to them; they shall go into exile, into captivity.¹² The prince who is among them shall carry his belongings on his shoulder in the dark, and shall go forth: they shall dig through the wall to carry out thereby. He shall cover his face, because he shall not see the land with his eyes.¹³ My net also will I spread on him, and he shall be taken in My snare; and I will bring him to Babylon to the land of the Chaldeans; yet shall he not see it, though he shall die there.¹⁴ I will scatter toward every wind all who are around him to help him, and all his armies; and I will draw out the sword after them.¹⁵ They shall know that I am Yahweh, when I disperse them among the nations, and scatter them

12:3 See on 3:7.

Perhaps they will consider – The Hebrew word *ulay*, ‘perhaps’, is significant in revealing how much God has given us freewill; for we are invited to understand that maybe God limits His foreknowledge so that He didn't ‘know’ whether they would “consider” or not. He speaks the same way in Is. 47:12; Jer. 26:2,3; 36:3,7. This ‘uncertainty’ of God as to how His people will respond to His word reflects the degree to which He has accommodated Himself to our kind of time. It has huge implications for us. With what eagerness must God Almighty look upon us as we sit down to read His word daily! ‘Are they going to listen? How are they going to respond...?’.

through the countries. ¹⁶ But I will preserve a few men of them from the sword, from the famine, and from the pestilence; that they may declare all their abominations among the nations where they come; and they shall know that I am Yahweh. ¹⁷ Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ¹⁸ Son of man, eat your bread with quaking, and drink your water with trembling and with fearfulness; ¹⁹ and tell the people of the land, Thus says the Lord Yahweh concerning the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the land of Israel: They shall eat their bread with fearfulness, and drink their water in dismay, that her land may be desolate, and all that is therein, because of the violence of all those who dwell therein. ²⁰ The cities that are inhabited shall be laid waste, and the land shall be a desolation; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ²¹ The word of Yahweh came

to me, saying, ²² Son of man, what is this proverb that you have in the land of Israel, saying, The days are prolonged, and every prophetic vision fails? ²³ Tell them therefore, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will make this proverb to cease, and they shall no more use it as a proverb in Israel; but tell them, The days are at hand, and the fulfilment of every prophetic vision. ²⁴ For there shall be no more any false vision nor flattering divination within the house of Israel. ²⁵ For I am Yahweh. I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall be performed. It shall be no more deferred; for in your days, rebellious house, will I speak the word, and will perform it, says the Lord Yahweh. ²⁶ Again the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ²⁷ Son of man, behold, they of the house of Israel say, The vision that he sees is for many days to come, and he prophesies of times

12:22-25 The desolation of Israel by the invaders was repeatedly foretold by the prophets. The message was continually mocked by the false prophets, who claimed inspiration from God to claim that the day of judgment had been endlessly delayed. They also belittled the predictions made by true prophets like Ezekiel, spreading their ideas until it became a common joke that Yahweh's prophets kept speaking of a coming day of the Lord that never came. But God's reply here was clear. The similarities with the last days leading up to AD70 are clear – the prophetic word was likewise mocked with the taunt “Where is the promise of His coming?” (2 Pet. 3:4). The true word of God regarding the coming day of the Lord was mocked; a belief that “the days are prolonged” led to the conclusion that “every prophetic vision fails”, as the thought that “my Lord delays his coming” (Mt. 24:48) resulted in a lack of faith in the word of promise. Christ’s statement that “all shall be fulfilled” at His coming (Lk.21:32) matches the assurance given here that “every vision” *would* be fulfilled when the day came. Those within the people of God at Ezekiel’s time who were expressing such doubt were matched by some within the body of Christ in the first century. Clearly they must have their latter day counterparts.

12:25 ‘Yahweh’ can mean ‘I who will be’. Because He is, and He *will be*, therefore the words of the ‘I will be’, really will be. His very Name is the utter guarantee that His word for us will be fulfilled.

that are far off. ²⁸ Therefore tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: None of My words shall be deferred any more, but the word which I shall speak shall be performed, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 13 Sep. 17

Judgment on the False Prophets

The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who prophesy, and say to those who prophesy out of their own heart, Hear the word of Yahweh: ³ Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own spirit, though they have seen nothing! ⁴ Israel, your prophets have been like foxes in the desert places. ⁵ You have not gone up into the gaps, neither built up the wall for the house of Israel, to stand in the battle in the day of Yahweh. ⁶ They have seen falsehood and lying divination, they who say, Yahweh says; but Yahweh has not sent them; and they have

made men to hope that the word would be confirmed. ⁷ Haven't you seen a false vision, and haven't you spoken a lying divination in that you say, Yahweh says; but I have not spoken? ⁸ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have spoken falsehood and seen lies, therefore, behold, I am against you, says the Lord Yahweh. ⁹ My hand shall be against the prophets who see false visions, and who preach lies. They shall not be in the council of My people, neither shall they be written in the writing of the house of Israel, neither shall they enter into the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁰ Because, even because they have seduced My people, saying, Peace; and there is no peace; and when one builds up a wall, behold, they plaster it with whitewash. ¹¹ Tell those who plaster it with whitewash, that it shall fall: there shall be an overflowing storm; and on you great hailstones, shall fall; and a stormy wind shall tear it.

13:5 God is so sensitive to prayerfulness. He condemns the leaders of Israel for not stopping the gaps or building the wall, i.e. interceding, for Israel. If only there had been a prayerful minority, God would have changed the whole course of His dealings with Israel. But petty materialism and small-mindedness was what stopped those leaders from doing their job.

13:9 *Neither shall they enter into the land of Israel* – Ezekiel seems to be writing this in the context of the first wave of captives taken to Babylon. The false prophets amongst them were saying that all would be well with Jerusalem (.16); whereas Ezekiel spoke on God's behalf in revealing the sins going on there, and saying that because of them, the rest of Judah would be taken captive. Although it was God's purpose to restore the captives to Judah, these false prophets would die in Babylon and not return there. This kind of thing has gone on from the time of the serpent in Eden – questioning God's word, and saying what others would like to hear as if it is from God.

13:11 *You, great hailstones, shall fall* – Note the sudden change of pronoun. This is an example of how God personally addresses the natural creation. He may be speaking to the Angels who control it, and yet there is also the sense within the Bible that God

12 Behold, when the wall has fallen, shall it not be said to you, Where is the plaster with which you have plastered it? 13 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will even tear it with a stormy wind in My wrath; and there shall be an overflowing storm in My anger, and great hailstones in wrath to consume it. 14 So will I break down the wall that you have plastered with whitewash, and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation shall be uncovered; and it shall fall, and you shall be consumed in its midst: and you shall know that I am Yahweh. 15 Thus will I accomplish My anger on the wall, and on those who have plastered it with whitewash; and I will tell you, The wall is no more, neither those who plastered it; 16 namely, the prophets of Israel who prophesy concerning Jerusalem, and who see visions of peace for her when there is no peace, says the Lord Yahweh. 17 You, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own heart; and prophesy against them, 18 and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the women who sew magic wristbands for people and make magic scarves for everyone to wear on their heads, so that they can have power over other people's lives. You want to possess the power of life and death over My people and to use it for your own gain.

is somehow in conscious, active dialogue with the natural creation, and hasn't merely left it ticking on mindless clockwork.

13:18 Any attempt to manipulate or get power over other people within God's family, be it done consciously or unconsciously, should be outlawed for us by the simple consideration that they are in fact *God's* people and not ours.

19 You have profaned Me among My people in order to get handfuls of barley and for pieces of bread, to kill the people who should not die, and to save the people alive who should not live, by your lying to My people who listen to lies. 20 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: I hate the wristbands that you use in your attempt to control life and death. I will rip them off your arms and set free the people that you were controlling. 21 I will rip off your scarves and let My people escape from your power once and for all; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. 22 Because with lies you have grieved the heart of the righteous, whom I have not made sad; and strengthened the hands of the wicked, that he should not return from his wicked way, and be saved alive: 23 therefore you shall no more see false visions, nor practise fortune telling. I will deliver My people out of your hand; and you shall know that I am Yahweh.

CHAPTER 14 Sep. 18

Judgment on Idolaters

Then came certain of the elders of Israel to me, and sat before me. 2 The word of Yahweh came to me saying, 3 Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their heart, and put the stumbling block of their wickedness before their face: should I be inquired of at all by them?

⁴ Therefore speak to them, and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Every man of the house of Israel who takes his idols into his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his wickedness before his face, and comes to the prophet; I Yahweh will answer him according to the multitude of his idols; ⁵ that I may take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from Me through their idols. ⁶ Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Return and turn yourselves from your idols; and turn away your faces from all your abominations. ⁷ For each one of the house of Israel or of the foreigners who live in Israel who separates himself from Me, and takes his idols into his heart, and puts the stumbling block of his iniquity before his face, and comes to the prophet to inquire for himself of Me; I Yahweh will answer him by myself. ⁸ I will set My face against that man, and will make him an astonishment, for a sign and a proverb,

and I will cut him off from the midst of My people; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ⁹ If the prophet is deceived when he speaks a word, I, Yahweh, have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out My hand on him, and will destroy him from the midst of My people Israel. ¹⁰ They shall bear their wickedness: the wickedness of the prophet shall be even as the wickedness of him who seeks him; ¹¹ that the house of Israel may go no more astray from Me, neither defile themselves any more with all their transgressions; but that they may be My people, and I may be their God, says the Lord Yahweh.

Intercession Now Powerless

¹² The word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ¹³ Son of man, when a land sins against Me by committing a trespass and I stretch out My hand on it, and break the staff of its bread and send famine on it and cut off from it man and animal; ¹⁴ though these three men, Noah, Daniel, and

14:7 People who were worshipping idols in their hearts still wanted to come and hear God's word from the prophet. Like those people, we are tempted to worship the true God as well as idols, rather than making a clean break. People come to God's word as it now is in the Bible, but they are confused by God in the message they hear from it because they come to His word with idols in their hearts. Mere Bible reading won't make us righteous; the attitude of mind we bring to it is all important. If we come with idols in our hearts, then reading God's word will lead us yet further from God.

14:9 Clearly God is capable of deceiving people, and at times He even uses His word as the medium through which He does so. We can never be passive in our relationship with God, nor stand still in our journey with Him. He is constantly active through His word to lead us either closer to Him or further away from Him.

14:14 *Noah, Daniel, and Job* – Each of these men delivered others by their intercession and personal righteousness. Noah delivered his family, Daniel his people, and Job his friends. God is willing to save people for the sake of a third party, but there clearly has to be some base level of spirituality in the person. By Ezekiel's time, there wasn't even that.

Job, were in it, they would save only their own lives by their righteousness, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁵ If I cause evil animals to pass through the land and they ravage it and it be made desolate, so that no man may pass through because of the animals; ¹⁶ though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters; they only should be delivered, but the land should be desolate. ¹⁷ Or if I bring a sword on that land and say, Sword, go through the land; so that I cut off from it man and animal; ¹⁸ though these three men were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they should deliver neither sons nor daughters, but they only should be delivered themselves. ¹⁹ Or if I send a pestilence into that land, and pour out My anger on it in blood, to cut off from it man and animal; ²⁰ though Noah, Daniel, and Job, were in it, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, they would save neither son nor daughter; they would save only their own lives by their righteousness. ²¹ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: How much more when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem, the sword, and the famine, and savage

animals, and the plague, to cut off from it man and animal! ²² Yet, behold, therein shall be left a few who shall be carried forth, both sons and daughters. They shall come forth to you, and you shall see their way and their doings; and you shall be comforted concerning the evil that I have brought on Jerusalem, even concerning all that I have brought on it. ²³ They shall comfort you, when you see their way and their doings; and you shall know that I have not done without cause all that I have done in it, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 15 Sep. 19

A Useless Vine

The word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ² Son of man, what is the vine plant more than any tree, the vine-branch which is among the trees of the forest? ³ Shall wood be taken of it to make any work? or will men take a pin of it to hang any vessel thereon? ⁴ See, it is cast into the fire for fuel; the fire has devoured both its ends, and its midst is burned. Is it profitable for any work? ⁵ Behold, when it was whole, it was meet for no work. How much less, when the fire has devoured it, and it is burned,

14:22 See on 5:13.

The evil that I have brought – God and not some cosmic ‘Satan’ being is the One who brings “evil” in the sense of calamity against people. See on Is. 45:5-7.

15:5 There in Babylon they were as the vine tree, burned up and fit for no work; and yet, still used to perform God’s work, by grace alone. And these men were truly types of us. Even before they were burnt up, the vine tree of God’s people wasn’t good for any work (:3), and had no superiority over the other trees (:2). God’s people aren’t better, of themselves, than the peoples around them; we’re not good at works, even if we think we are; the way God uses us is a reflection of pure grace, and how He delights in using the humanly worthless and useless to do His work.

shall it yet be of any use! ⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: As the vine plant among the trees of the forest, which I have given to the fire for fuel, so will I give the inhabitants of Jerusalem. ⁷ I will set My face against them; they shall go forth from the fire, but the fire shall devour them; and you shall know that I am Yahweh, when I set My face against them. ⁸ I will make the land desolate, because they have committed a trespass, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 16 Sep. 20

Judah's Unfaithfulness

Again the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, cause Jerusalem to know her abominations ³ and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh to Jerusalem: Your birthplace is in the land of the Canaanite; the Amorite was your father, and your mother was a Hittite. ⁴ As for your birth, in the day you were born your navel was not tied neither were you washed in water to cleanse you; you weren't salted at all, nor swaddled at all. ⁵ No eye pitied you to do

any of these things to you, to have compassion on you; but you were cast out in the open desert, because your existence was despised in the day that you were born. ⁶ When I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you, Though you are in your blood, live; yes, I said to you, Though you are in your blood, live. ⁷ I caused you to multiply as that which grows in the field, and you increased and grew great, and you attained to excellent beauty; your breasts were fashioned, and your hair was grown; yet you were naked and bare. ⁸ Now when I passed by you and looked at you, behold, your time was the time of love; and I spread My skirt over you, and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore to you, and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord Yahweh, and you became Mine. ⁹ Then washed I you with water; yes, I thoroughly washed away your blood from you, and I anointed you with oil. ¹⁰ I clothed you also with embroidered work, gave you shoes of sealskin, dressed you with fine linen, and cov-

16:3 Israel are reminded that ethnically they're not so different from the surrounding nations, seeing that Abraham their ancestor was originally from Ur. The basis of being 'Jewish' and part of God's people was therefore God's grace rather than anything ethnic.

16:5 This is very much the language of Isaac's half brother Ishmael, ancestor of many of Israel's enemies (Gen. 21:10-16). Israel were no better than the Gentile world, just as they are today not inherently better than their Arab cousins, and as we in essence are no better than the world around us. It's God's calling, which is by grace alone, which makes all the difference.

16:8 God found Israel in the wilderness, covered them with a cloud (cp. His 'skirt') at Sinai, and there entered a covenant with them.

16:10 This alludes to the materials used for the tabernacle and priestly clothing. The intention of all that legislation, as with all God's Law, is to make us beautiful in His eyes.

ered you with silk.¹¹ I beautified you with ornaments, put bracelets on your hands and a chain on your neck.¹² I put a jewel on your forehead, earrings in your ears and a beautiful crown on your head.¹³ Thus you were decked with gold and silver; and your clothing was of fine linen, and silk, and embroidered work; you ate fine flour, honey and oil; and you were exceedingly beautiful, and you prospered to become a kingdom.¹⁴ Your renown went forth among the nations for your beauty; for it was perfect on account of My majesty which I had put on you, says the Lord Yahweh.¹⁵ But you trusted in your beauty and played the prostitute because of your renown, and poured out your prostitution on everyone who passed by; his it was.¹⁶ You took of your garments and made for yourselves high places decorated with various colours, and played the prostitute on them: such things shall not come, neither shall it be so.¹⁷ You also took your beautiful jewels of My gold and of My silver which I had given you, and made for yourself images of men and played the prostitute with them;¹⁸ and you took your embroidered garments and put them on the images, and set My oil and My incense before them.¹⁹ My bread also which I gave you,

fine flour, and oil, and honey, with which I fed you, you even set it before them for a pleasant aroma; and thus it was, says the Lord Yahweh.²⁰ Moreover you have taken your sons and your daughters whom you have borne to Me, and you have sacrificed these to them to be devoured. Was your prostitution a small matter,²¹ that you have slain My children and delivered them up, in causing them to pass through the fire to them?²² In all your abominations and your prostitution you have not remembered the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare, and were wallowing in your blood.²³ It has happened after all your wickedness (woe, woe to you! says the Lord Yahweh),²⁴ that you have built for yourselves a vaulted place, and have made yourselves a high place in every street.²⁵ You have built your lofty place at the head of every street, and have made your beauty an abomination, and have opened your feet to everyone who passed by and multiplied your prostitution.²⁶ You have also committed sexual immorality with the Egyptians your lustful neighbours, and have multiplied your prostitution, to provoke Me to anger.²⁷ See therefore, I have stretched out My hand over you and have diminished your allotted portion of food,

16:13 *You ate fine flour, honey and oil* – A reference to the priests eating these offerings. The whole people of Israel are spoken of here as if they were priests; it was God's intention that the whole nation should become priests (Ex. 19:6). We as the modern people of God are likewise all intended to be priests (1 Pet. 2:9), taking spiritual responsibility for others rather than leaving it to a dedicated minority of the community.

16:20 Our children are born to God; we're not therefore free to raise them as we wish, but as He wishes, because they are His children.

and delivered you to the will of those who hate you, the daughters of the Philistines, who are ashamed of your lewd way. ²⁸ You have played the prostitute also with the Assyrians because you were insatiable; yes, you have played the prostitute with them, and yet you weren't satisfied. ²⁹ You have moreover multiplied your prostitution to the land of merchants, to Chaldea; and yet you weren't satisfied with this. ³⁰ How weak is your heart, says the Lord Yahweh, since you do all these things, the work of an impudent prostitute; ³¹ in that you build your vaulted place at the head of every street, and make your high place in every street, and have not been as a prostitute, in that you scorn pay. ³² A wife who commits adul-

tery! Who takes strangers instead of her husband! ³³ They give gifts to all prostitutes; but you give your gifts to all your lovers and bribe them that they may come to you on every side for your prostitution. ³⁴ You are different from other women in your prostitution, in that no one follows you to play the prostitute; and whereas you give hire, and no hire is given to you, therefore you are different. ³⁵ Therefore, prostitute, hear the word of Yahweh: ³⁶ Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Because your filthiness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your prostitution with your lovers; and because of all the idols of your abominations, and for the blood of your children that you gave to them; ³⁷ therefore

16:37 The metaphors used to describe the anger of God with Israel are pretty awful. Her children to be slain with thirst, she was to be stripped naked by her husband (*Hosea 2*), gang raped by her lovers, having her nose cut off and left a battered, bleeding mess in the scrubland (*Ez. 16:23*), to have her skirt pulled up over her head and her nakedness revealed (*Jer. 13:20-27*), wishing to pluck off her own breasts for shame (*23:34*). Jerusalem is to be raped, violated and humiliated, according to Ezekiel. Indeed, Ezekiel's images verge at times on what some would consider pornographic. He speaks of the woman Israel's pubic hair, breasts, menstrual cycle (*:7,9,10*); the gang rape by her enemies which God would bring about, leaving her mutilated and humiliated (*:37; 23:22-49*); about the size of her lovers' sexual organs and coital emissions, and how she let them fondle her breasts (*23:8,20*). This is shocking language, which perhaps we skip over in our Bible reading from sheer embarrassment – and we are modern readers brutalized by exposure to this kind of stuff in the media. For early Israel, it would all have been even more shocking. It all seemed out of proportion to having 'merely' made a few political alliances with Egypt and Assyria. Was that really like a wife letting other men fondle her breasts and have sex with her, admiring their bodies as she did so? Did it all have to end in such brutality and vulgarity? Today, sex and violence are what attract attention. From lyrics of songs to advertising and movies, that's clear enough. And the prophets are using the same tactics to arrest Israel's attention, all the more so because nudity and sex were things simply not up for public discussion. There's an anxiety which any talk about sex seems to arouse in us, and it was the prophets' intention to make us likewise get on the edge of our seats, anxious, rapt, sensitive for the next word... realizing that really and truly, this is what human sin does to God. The outrageous sex talk was to bring out how outrageous and

see, I will gather all your lovers, with whom you have taken pleasure, and all those who you have loved, with all those who you have hated; I will even gather them against you on every side, and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness. ³⁸ I will judge you, as women who break wedlock and shed blood are judged; and I will bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy. ³⁹ I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your vaulted place, and break down your lofty places; and they shall strip you of your clothes, and take your beautiful jewels; and they shall leave you naked and bare. ⁴⁰ They shall also bring up a company against you, and they shall stone you with stones and thrust you through with their swords. ⁴¹ They shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will cause you to cease from playing the prostitute, and you shall also give no hire any more. ⁴² So will I cause My wrath toward you to rest, and My jealousy shall depart from you, and I will be quiet and will be no more angry. ⁴³ Because you have not remembered the days of your youth, but

have raged against Me in all these things; therefore, behold, I also will bring your way on your head, says the Lord Yahweh: and you shall not commit this lewdness with all your abominations. ⁴⁴ Behold, everyone who uses proverbs shall use this proverb against you, saying, As is the mother, so is her daughter. ⁴⁵ You are the daughter of your mother, who loathes her husband and her children; and you are the sister of your sisters, who loathed their husbands and their children: your mother was a Hittite, and your father an Amorite. ⁴⁶ Your elder sister is Samaria, who dwells at your left hand, she and her daughters; and your younger sister, who dwells at your right hand, is Sodom and her daughters. ⁴⁷ Yet have you not walked in their ways, nor done after their abominations; but, as if that were a very little thing, you were more corrupt than they in all your ways. ⁴⁸ As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, Sodom your sister has not done, she nor her daughters, as you have done, you and your daughters. ⁴⁹ Behold, this was the iniquity of your sister Sodom: pride, fullness of bread, and prosperous ease was in her and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor

obscene are our sins and unfaithfulness to the covenant we cut with God in baptism. The shocking sexual language and imagery of the prophets was in order to help Israel see that this was how far they had outraged God. It was and is a rhetoric that cannot be forgotten, shrugged off, re-interpreted. The rhetoric pushes relentlessly for a response in our consciences.

16:49 Note how pride, ignoring the poor and self-indulgence are highlighted as Sodom's essential sins; the sin of homosexuality is no worse nor better than these sins. *This was the iniquity... fullness of bread* – The “fullness of bread” was itself a sin. Hoarding wealth when others are poor and needy is “iniquity”.

and needy.⁵⁰ They were proud and committed sexual abomination before Me: therefore I took them away as I saw good.⁵¹ Neither has Samaria committed half of your sins; but you have multiplied your abominations more than they, and have justified your sisters by all your abominations which you have done.⁵² You also bear you your own shame, in that you have given judgment for your sisters; through your sins that you have committed more abominable than they, they are more righteous than you: yes, be also confounded, and bear your shame, in that you have justified your sisters.⁵³ I will turn again their captivity, the captivity of Sodom and her daughters and the captivity of Samaria and her daughters, and the captivity of your captives in their midst;⁵⁴ that you may bear your own shame, and may be ashamed because of all that you have done, in that you are a comfort to them.⁵⁵ Your sisters, Sodom and her daughters, shall return to their former estate; and Samaria and her daughters shall return to their former estate; and you and your

daughters shall return to your former estate.⁵⁶ For your sister Sodom was a byword to you in the day of your pride,⁵⁷ before your wickedness was uncovered, as at the time of the reproach of the daughters of Syria, and of all who are around her, the daughters of the Philistines, who do despite to you all around.⁵⁸ You have borne your lewdness and your abominations, says Yahweh.⁵⁹ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also deal with you as you have done, you who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant.⁶⁰ Nevertheless I will remember My covenant made with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish to you an everlasting covenant.⁶¹ Then you shall remember your ways, and be ashamed, when you shall receive your sisters, your elder sisters and your younger; and I will give them to you for daughters, but not by your covenant.⁶² I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall know that I am Yahweh;⁶³ that you may remember, and be confounded, and never open your mouth any more because of your shame, when I have forgiven

16:50 The abomination of their sexual perversion is placed last in the list of their sins, as if to emphasize that all the other sins were just as much sin. Likewise Paul writes to the Corinthians about their failures, but he doesn't start where I would have started – with their drunkenness at the memorial meeting. Instead he starts off with their disunity. Those things which we may consider as lesser sins, the Bible continually lists together with those things we have been conditioned into thinking are the greater sins. Clearest of all is the way Paul lists schism and hatred in his lists of sins that will exclude from the Kingdom. The worldviews of many societies have taught that sexual sin is so infinitely far worse than a bit of argument within a church, or ignoring others' poverty. But is this really right...?

16:51 This statement that Judah (the two tribe Kingdom) sinned more than Israel (the ten tribes) needs some meditation upon; God really did lavish grace upon the weakest of the weak.

you all that you have done, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 17 Sep. 21

A Vine and Two Great Eagles

The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, put forth a riddle, and speak a parable to the house of Israel; ³ and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: A great eagle with great wings and long feathers, full of feathers of various colours, came to Lebanon, and took off the top of the cedar. ⁴ He cropped off the highest of its young twigs and carried it to a land of commerce where he set it in a city of merchants. ⁵ He also took the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful soil. He placed it beside many waters and set it as a willow tree. ⁶ It grew, and became a spreading vine of low stature, whose branches turned toward him, and its roots were under him: so it became a vine, and brought forth branches, and young shoots. ⁷ There was also another great eagle with great wings

and many feathers. This vine bent its roots toward him, and shot forth its branches toward him, from the beds of its plantation, that he might water it. ⁸ It was planted in a good soil by many waters that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine. ⁹ Say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Shall it prosper? shall he not pull up its roots, and cut off its fruit, that it may wither; that all its fresh springing leaves may wither? and not by a strong arm or many people can it be raised from its roots. ¹⁰ Yes, behold, being planted, shall it prosper? Shall it not utterly wither, when the east wind touches it? It shall wither in the beds where it grew. ¹¹ Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying,

Babylon and Egypt

¹² Say now to the rebellious people, Don't you know what these things mean? Tell them, Behold, the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem, and took its king, and its princes, and

17:3 Great eagle – Nebuchadnezzar; Full of feathers – Many subject peoples; **Various colours –** Various nations within the Babylonian army and confederacy.

17:4 The topmost of the young twigs – The princes of Judah taken to Babylon.

17:5 The seed of the land – Zedekiah. **Planted it in a fruitful soil –** Set up as King of Judah, supported by Babylon.

17:6 A vine of low stature – Judah under Babylonian control could never become a high nation; her roots tended towards Nebuchadnezzar for all support.

17:7 Another great eagle – Pharaoh-hophra, king of Egypt. **This vine bent its roots toward him –** Judah broke their agreement with Nebuchadnezzar and sent to Egypt for help to rebel against Babylon.

17:8 That it might be a goodly vine – If Judah had accepted their domination by Babylon as a just punishment for their rebellion against Yahweh, God potentially had set up a situation whereby this could have been fruitful for His people. Wriggling out of our sins never brings the blessing God has prepared for those who accept their sins and the consequences of them.

17:9 Cut off its fruit – Zedekiah's children killed. **The leaves –** Judah's leadership.

brought them to him to Babylon. 13 He took of the seed royal, and made a covenant with him. He also brought him under an oath, and took away the mighty of the land; 14 that the kingdom might be base, that it might not lift itself up, but that by keeping his covenant it might stand. 15 But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors to Egypt that they might give him horses and many people. Shall he prosper? Shall he who does such things escape? Shall he break the covenant, and yet escape? 16 As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely in the place where the king dwells who made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. 17 Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company help him in the war, when they cast up mounds and build forts, to cut off many people. 18 For he has despised the oath by breaking the covenant; and behold, he had given his hand, and yet has done all these things; he shall not escape. 19 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely My oath that he has despised,

and My covenant that he has broken, I will even bring it on his own head. 20 I will spread My net on him, and he shall be taken in My snare, and I will bring him to Babylon and will enter into judgment with him there for his sins that he has committed against Me. 21 All his fugitives in all his bands shall fall by the sword, and those who remain shall be scattered toward every wind: and you shall know that I, Yahweh, have spoken it. 22 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also take of the lofty top of the cedar, and will set it. I will crop off from the topmost of its young twigs a tender one, and I will plant it on a high and lofty mountain. 23 In the mountain of the height of Israel will I plant it; and it shall bring forth boughs, and bear fruit, and be a goodly cedar. Under it shall dwell all birds of every wing; in the shade of its branches shall they dwell. 24 All the trees of the field shall know that I, Yahweh, have brought down the high tree, have exalted the low tree, have dried up the green tree, and have made the dry tree to flourish. I, Yahweh, have spoken and have done it.

17:15 *Shall he break the covenant, and yet escape?*—God's people are held to be honest to the agreements they make with unbelievers, as well as their covenant with God.

17:22 *A tender one*—Messiah, the Lord Jesus (Is. 53:2), one of the twigs of the Jewish nation as Zedekiah had been, a Jew of our human nature.

17:23 The great tree speaks of Christ's Kingdom, under which people from all nations would find refuge (Mk. 4:32).

17:24 The low tree which is exalted speaks of Christ; the dry tree which will flourish was understood by Jesus as a reference to Himself on the cross (Lk. 23:31). There, as also explained in Is. 53, He appeared to be a "dry tree", a man dying without any children; but through that death, He flourished into many children, in us who have believed in Him and been born anew as God's children.

CHAPTER 18 Sep. 22*The Justice of God's Ways*

The word of Yahweh came to me again, saying, ² What do you mean, that you use this proverb concerning the land of Israel saying, The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge? ³ As I live says the Lord Yahweh, you shall not have occasion any more to use this proverb in Israel. ⁴ Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine. The soul who sins, he shall die. ⁵ But if a man is just, and does that which is lawful and right, ⁶ and has not eaten on the mountains, neither has lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, neither has defiled his neighbour's wife, neither has come near to a woman in her impurity, ⁷ and has not wronged any but has restored to the debtor his pledge, has taken nothing by robbery, has given his bread to the hungry and has covered the naked with a garment; ⁸ he who has not given forth on interest neither has taken any increase, who has withdrawn his hand from iniquity, has executed true justice between man and man, ⁹ has walked in My statutes, and has kept My commandments, to deal truly: he is just,

he shall surely live, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁰ If he fathers a son who is a robber, a shedder of blood, and who does any one of these things, ¹¹ and who does not any of those obligations, but even has eaten on the mountains and defiled his neighbour's wife, ¹² has wronged the poor and needy, has taken by robbery, has not restored the pledge and has lifted up his eyes to the idols, has committed abomination, ¹³ has given forth on interest, and has taken increase: shall he then live? He shall not live. He has done all these abominations. He shall surely die; his blood shall be on him. ¹⁴ Now, behold, if he fathers a son, who sees all his father's sins which he has done, and sees, and does not such like; ¹⁵ who has not eaten on the mountains, neither has lifted up his eyes to the idols of the house of Israel, has not defiled his neighbour's wife, ¹⁶ neither has wronged any, has not taken anything to pledge, neither has taken by robbery, but has given his bread to the hungry and has clothed the naked; ¹⁷ who has not oppressed the poor, who has not received interest nor increase, has kept My commandments, has walked in My statutes; he shall not die for the iniquity of

18:4 The Jews of Ezekiel's time felt they weren't bad people, but were unjustly suffering the effects of their fathers' sins. The Hebrew word translated "soul" here has a wide range of meaning, but generally it refers to the human person. The person who sins will die. The soul therefore isn't something inherently immortal. This is a pagan idea which has sadly been accepted by some Christian traditions.

18:14 Note the double usage of the word "sees". He sees the sins, and then he really sees them, and doesn't do them. This is how we must be in our registering of the fact that sin really brings death. We can know that sin brings death as theory; and we can *really* know it.

his father, he shall surely live.¹⁸ As for his father, because he cruelly oppressed, robbed his brother, and did that which is not good among his people, see, he shall die in his iniquity.¹⁹ Yet you say, Why doesn't the son bear the iniquity of the father? When the son has done that which is lawful and right, and has kept all My statutes, and has done them, he shall surely live.²⁰ The soul who sins, he shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be on him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be on him.²¹ But if the wicked turn from all his sins that he has committed, and keep all My statutes and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die.²² None of his transgressions that he has committed shall be remembered against him: in his righteousness that he has done he shall live.²³ Have I any pleasure in the death of the wicked? says the Lord Yahweh; and not rather that he

should return from his way, and live?²⁴ But when the righteous turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? None of his righteous deeds that he has done shall be remembered: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die.²⁵ Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. Hear now, house of Israel: Is My way not fair? Aren't your ways unfair?²⁶ When the righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity and dies therein; in his iniquity that he has done shall he die.²⁷ Again, when the wicked man turns away from his wickedness that he has committed and does that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive.²⁸ Because he considers and turns away from all his transgressions that he has committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.²⁹ Yet the house of Israel says, The way of the Lord is not fair. House of Israel, aren't My

18:20 This simple truth demonstrates that the idea of suffering because of the sins of another person in another life is simply not true; we are judged for our own sins and not those of others. This can also psychologically free a person from the tendency to apply to ourselves 'guilt by association' for others' sins. However, it's also true that we can suffer the *effects* of others' sins, and the Bible contains examples of this, not least our suffering the effect of Adam's sin. But we are personally judged only for our own sins. We need to draw this line very clearly in our self-examination; between the suffering we experience as a result of others' dysfunctions and sins, and that which is in response to our personal sins.

18:22 *Remembered against him* – An implication that in some sense, at the day of judgment, there will be a 'going through' with the wicked of all their sins; whereas for the righteous, these will not be remembered and instead their good works will be recounted to them (:24). The parable of Mt. 25:36–44 says as much.

18:29 Working through the logic here, the answer to the 'God's not fair!' syndrome is to reflect deeper upon our own sinfulness, and the simple fact that sin nets death.

ways fair? Aren't your ways unfair? 30 Therefore I will judge you, house of Israel, each one according to his ways, says the Lord Yahweh. Return, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. 31 Cast away from you all your transgressions in which you have transgressed; and make yourself a new heart and a new spirit: for why will you die, house of Israel? 32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him who dies, says the Lord Yahweh: therefore turn yourselves, and live.

CHAPTER 19 Sep. 23

Lamentation for Judah's Princes

Moreover, take up a lamentation for the princes of Israel² and say, What was your mother? A lioness: she couched among lions, in the midst of the young lions she nourished her cubs.³ She brought up one of her cubs: he became a young lion, and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men.⁴ The nations also heard of him; he was caught in their pit; and they brought him with hooks

to the land of Egypt.⁵ Now when she saw that she had waited and her hope was lost, then she took another of her cubs and made him a young lion.⁶ He went up and down among the lions; he became a young lion and he learned to catch the prey; he devoured men.⁷ He knew their palaces and laid waste their cities; and the land was desolate, and its fullness, because of the noise of his roaring.⁸ Then the nations set against him on every side from the provinces; and they spread their net over him; he was caught in their pit.⁹ They put him in a cage with hooks and brought him to the king of Babylon; they brought him into strongholds, that his voice should no more be heard on the mountains of Israel.¹⁰ Your mother was like a vine in a vineyard planted by the waters. It was fruitful and full of branches because of the many waters.¹¹ It had strong rods for the sceptres of those who bore rule, and their height was exalted among the thick boughs, and they were seen in their height with the multitude of

18:32 God has no pleasure in punishing the wicked; rather do they punish themselves. He's not some capricious deity who takes pleasure in using His omnipotence to make His opponents suffer. His dislike of punishing the wicked is proof enough that 'hell' doesn't refer to any concept of eternal, conscious torment of the wicked; Biblically, *sheol* (the word translated "hell" in some Bibles) is the same word translated "the grave". Death is the punishment for sin, not eternal torment.

19:2 The lioness represents Judah or Jerusalem.

19:3 *She brought up one of her cubs* – Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, whose father was conquered and killed by Pharaoh-necho, king of Egypt.

19:5 *Took another of her cubs* – Jehoiakim, after Jehoahaz had been taken to Egypt (:4).

19:6 *He went up and down among the lions* – Jehoiakim acted like the leaders ["lions"] around him in the Gentile world.

19:11 A reference to Zedekiah and his sons; but Zedekiah became proud, was broken down by the Babylonians and Jerusalem was burnt (:12). Zedekiah comes over in

their branches.¹² But it was plucked up in fury, it was cast down to the ground, and the east wind dried up its fruit. Its strong rods were broken off and withered; the fire consumed them.¹³ Now it is planted in the wilderness, in a dry and thirsty land.¹⁴ Fire is gone out of the rods of its branches, it has devoured its fruit, so that there is in it no strong rod to be a sceptre to rule. This is a lamentation, and shall be for a lamentation.

CHAPTER 20 Sep. 24

Judah and Their Rebellion

It happened in the seventh year, in the fifth month, the tenth day of the month, that some of the elders of Israel came to inquire of Yahweh and they sat before me.² The word of Yahweh came to me saying,³ Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Is it to inquire of Me that you have come? As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I will not be inquired of by you.⁴ Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge them? Cause

them to know the abominations of their fathers;⁵ and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the day when I chose Israel, and swore to the seed of the house of Jacob, and made Myself known to them in the land of Egypt, when I swore to them saying, I am Yahweh your God;⁶ in that day I swore to them, to bring them forth out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had searched out for them flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands.⁷ I said to them, Throw away every man the abominations of his eyes, and don't defile yourselves with the idols of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.⁸ But they rebelled against Me, and would not listen to Me; they didn't throw away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt. Then I said I would pour out My wrath on them, to accomplish My anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt.⁹ But I worked for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations among which they were, in whose

Jeremiah as a weak man when it came to doing the right thing; it seems he wanted to obey God's word through Jeremiah, but feared the opinion of the princes and that the Babylonians might abuse him (Jer. 38:19-24). However, this verse fills out the picture – his fear of the opinion of others was due to his pride. We may appear humble, but if we are only so because we are image conscious – then in fact we are proud.

20:3 *Is it to inquire of Me?* – We can come to God's word in the Bible or bow in prayer before Him, but have our minds already made up, and not actually be seeking Him and His perspective at all. To truly "seek" God as we are often exhorted is not at all easy.

20:8 The degree to which righteousness is imputed to us is hard to feel. Dt. 32:12 states that there was no strange God with Israel – but here we read that they took the idols of Egypt with them, as confirmed in Acts 7:43. God counted wayward Israel as righteous after their Red Sea baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2); at that time, as Balaam said, God did not see iniquity in Israel, nor behold the perversity that was in Jacob (Num. 23:21).

sight I made Myself known to them in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt.¹⁰ So I caused them to go forth out of the land of Egypt and brought them into the wilderness.¹¹ I gave them My statutes and showed them My ordinances, which if a man does, he shall live in them.¹² Moreover also I gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between Me and them, that they might know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies them.¹³ But the house of Israel rebelled against Me in the wilderness. They didn't walk in My statutes and they rejected My ordinances, which if a man keep, he shall live in them; and My Sabbaths they greatly profaned. Then I said I would pour out My wrath on them in the wilderness, to consume them.¹⁴ But I worked for My name's sake that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them out.¹⁵ Moreover also I swore to them in the wilderness, that I would not bring them into the land which I had given them, flowing with milk and honey, which is the glory of all lands;¹⁶ because they rejected My ordinances, and didn't walk in My statutes, and profaned My Sabbaths: for their heart went after their

idols.¹⁷ Nevertheless My eye spared them and I didn't destroy them, neither did I make a full end of them in the wilderness.¹⁸ I said to their children in the wilderness, Don't walk in the statutes of your fathers, neither observe their ordinances, nor defile yourselves with their idols.¹⁹ I am Yahweh your God. Walk in My statutes and keep My ordinances and do them;²⁰ and make My Sabbaths holy; and they shall be a sign between Me and you, that you may know that I am Yahweh your God.²¹ But the children rebelled against Me; they didn't walk in My statutes, neither kept My ordinances to do them, which if a man do, he shall live in them: they profaned My Sabbaths. Then I said that I would pour out My wrath upon them, to accomplish My anger against them in the wilderness.²² Nevertheless I withdrew My hand, and worked for My name's sake, that it should not be profaned in the sight of the nations, in whose sight I brought them forth.²³ Moreover I swore to them in the wilderness that I would scatter them among the nations, and disperse them through the countries;²⁴ because they had not executed My ordinances but had re-

20:9 *I made Myself known to them in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt – Our exodus from the world at baptism, which is our Red Sea (1 Cor. 10:1,2), is a witness to the world around us. Our conversion to Christ therefore cannot be unnoticed by the world, there must be a visible element to it.*

20:12 *A sign between Me and them – The Sabbath was a sign between God and Israel, not between God and Gentile believers today.*

20:22 God swore that He would destroy Israel in the wilderness (:21); but God ‘withdrew His hand’, He took back this promise. Likewise God said He would destroy Israel in Egypt (:8). But He didn't (:9). Clearly enough God is willing to change His intended judgments of His people, so sensitive is He to their repentance and spirituality.

jected My statutes and had profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their fathers' idols.²⁵ Moreover also I gave them statutes that were not good, and ordinances in which they should not live;²⁶ and I polluted them in their own gifts, because they caused their children to pass through the fire, that I might make them desolate; to the end that they might know that I am Yahweh.²⁷ Therefore son of man speak to the house of Israel and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In this, moreover, have your fathers blasphemed Me, in that they have committed a trespass against Me.²⁸ For when I had brought them into the land which I swore to give to them, then they saw every high hill and every thick tree, and they offered there their sacrifices and there they presented the provocation of their offering; there also they made their pleasant aroma, and they poured out there their drink offerings.²⁹ Then I said to them, What does the high place where you go mean? So its name is called Bamah to this day.

Restoration

30 Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Do

you pollute yourselves in the way of your fathers? and do you play the prostitute after their abominations?³¹ When you offer your gifts, when you make your sons to pass through the fire, do you pollute yourselves with all your idols to this day? Shall I be inquired of by you, house of Israel? As I live says the Lord Yahweh, I will not be inquired of by you;³² and that which comes into your mind shall not be at all, in that you say, We will be as the nations, as the families of the countries, to serve wood and stone.³³ As I live says the Lord Yahweh, surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out will I be king over you.³⁴ I will bring you out from the peoples, and will gather you out of the countries in which you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm, and with wrath poured out;³⁵ and I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there will I enter into judgment with you face to face.³⁶ Like as I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so will I enter into judgment with you, says the Lord Yahweh.³⁷ I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you

20:25 An example of how God confirms people in the downward spiral they choose. Likewise :26 implies that God led His people into idolatry in order to make them desolate.

20:34 The mighty hand and stretched out arm of God was available to bring Judah out of Babylon – but most of them preferred to stay there. The wonderful possibility of a new covenant (:37) went unrealized – to be deferred until the true Israel of God are gathered home in our last days.

20:37 *The bond of the covenant* – The Hebrew translated “bond” is literally a fetter, a tie that binds, that restricts. To be in covenant relationship therefore means that we are

into the bond of the covenant; ³⁸ and I will purge out from among you the rebels and those who disobey against Me; I will bring them forth out of the land where they live, but they shall not enter into the land of Israel; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ³⁹ As for you, house of Israel, thus says the Lord Yahweh: Go, serve each one his idols, and hereafter also, if you will not listen to Me; but My holy name you shall no more profane with your gifts and with your idols. ⁴⁰ For in My holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh, there shall all the house of Israel, all of them, serve Me in the land. There will I accept them, and there will I require your offerings, and the first fruits of your offerings, with all your holy things. ⁴¹ As a pleasant aroma will I accept you when I bring you out from the peoples, and gather you out of the

countries in which you have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you in the sight of the nations. ⁴² You shall know that I am Yahweh when I shall bring you into the land of Israel, into the country which I swore to give to your fathers. ⁴³ There you shall remember your ways and all your doings, in which you have polluted yourselves; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that you have committed. ⁴⁴ You shall know that I am Yahweh when I have dealt with you for My name's sake, not according to your evil ways, nor according to your corrupt doings, you house of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh.

Against the South

⁴⁵ The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ⁴⁶ Son of man, set your face toward the south and direct your word toward the south, and proph-

not free to do as we like; there is an element of regulation in our lives, but of course it has a purpose – to bring us to God's Kingdom and keep us within the sphere of relationship with Him. But a covenant is a two way thing. This tie that binds applies to God too; hence the wonderful, oft-repeated idea of His *chesed*, His covenant faithfulness to us His people. He likewise carries a kind of responsibility to us.

20:38 *They shall not enter into the land of Israel* – Ezekiel told the captives during the early stages of their captivity that the false prophets and “rebels” amongst them would receive the condemnation and judgment of not returning to the land (also in 13:9). And yet when the command came to return to the land, most of the people chose to remain in Babylon – and therefore they chose their own condemnation. They were a “rebellious house” (2:3). For they were aware from Ezekiel’s words that not returning to the land was God’s condemnation. Those who will not be in the Kingdom will be those who chose not to be there – all who truly love the Lord’s appearing will be accepted (2 Tim. 4:8).

20:40 *There will I accept them* – As in :41. This ‘acceptance’ was to be when Judah returned from captivity, and the same word is found in 43:27 where a temple was to be built and sacrifices offered, “and I will accept you”. The intention clearly was that the temple was to be built upon Judah’s return from captivity; but they failed to live up to the wonderful potential enabled.

esy against the forest of the field in the south; ⁴⁷ and tell the forest of the south, Hear the word of Yahweh: Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I will kindle a fire in you, and it shall devour every green tree in you and every dry tree. The flaming flame shall not be quenched, and all faces from the south to the north shall be burnt thereby. ⁴⁸ All flesh shall see that I, Yahweh, have kindled it; it shall not be quenched. ⁴⁹ Then I said, Ah Lord Yahweh! they say of me, Isn't he a speaker of parables?

CHAPTER 21 Sep. 25

The Sword of Babylon

The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, set your face toward Jerusalem, and drop your word toward the sanctuaries and prophesy against the land of Israel; ³ and tell the land of Israel, Thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, and will draw forth My sword out of its sheath, and will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked. ⁴ Seeing then that I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked, therefore shall My sword go forth out of its sheath against all flesh from the south to the north: ⁵ and all flesh shall know that I, Yahweh, have drawn forth My sword out of its sheath; it shall not return any more. ⁶ Sigh therefore, you son of man; with the breaking of your thighs and with bitterness you will sigh before their eyes. ⁷ It shall be, when they

tell you, 'Why do you sigh?' that you shall say, Because of the news, for it is coming. Every heart shall melt, and all hands shall be feeble, every spirit shall faint and all knees shall be weak as water. It is coming, and it shall be done, says the Lord Yahweh. ⁸ The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ⁹ Son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says Yahweh: Say, A sword, a sword, it is sharpened, and also polished. ¹⁰ It is sharpened that it may make a slaughter; it is polished that it may be as lightning. Shall we then laugh? The rod of My son condemns every tree. ¹¹ It is given to be polished, that it may be ready for use: the sword, it is sharpened, yes, it is polished, to give it into the hand of the killer. ¹² Cry and wail, son of man; for it is on My people, it is on all the princes of Israel: they are delivered over to the sword with My people; strike therefore on your thigh. ¹³ For I am putting My people to the test, and if they refuse to repent, all these things will happen to them, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁴ You therefore, son of man, prophesy and strike your hands together; and let the sword be doubled the third time, the sword of the deadly wounded: it is the sword of the great slaughter which surrounds them. ¹⁵ I have set the threatening sword against all their gates, that their hearts may tremble, and their ruins be multiplied: ah! it is made as lightning, it is pointed for slaughter. ¹⁶ Gather

20:49 The fact that his audience disregarded and mocked his message was so hard for Ezekiel to endure. No true preacher of the Gospel hasn't had the same feeling at times.

yourselves together, go to the right, set yourselves in array, go to the left, wherever your face is set.¹⁷ I will also strike My hands together, and I will cause My wrath to rest: I, Yahweh, have spoken it.¹⁸ The word of Yahweh came to me again saying,¹⁹ Also, you son of man, appoint two ways, that the sword of the king of Babylon may come; they both shall come forth out of one land. Mark out a place, mark it out at the head of the way to the city.²⁰ You shall appoint a way for the sword to come to Rabbah of the Ammonites, and to Judah in Jerusalem the fortified.²¹ For the king of Babylon stood at the parting of the way, at the head of the two ways, to use fortune telling. He shook the arrows back and forth, he consulted the images, he looked in the liver.²² In his right hand was the forecast for Jerusalem, to set battering rams, to open the mouth in the slaughter, to lift up the battle cry, to

set battering rams against the gates, to cast up mounds, to build forts.²³ It shall seem to them as a false forecast in their opinion. They have sworn solemn oaths, but he brings their guilt to remembrance, that they may be caught.²⁴ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have made your wickedness to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered so that in all your doings your sins appear; because you have come to memory, you shall be taken with the hand.²⁵ You, deadly wounded wicked one, the prince of Israel, whose day has come, in the time of the iniquity of the end,²⁶ thus says the Lord Yahweh: Remove the mitre and take off the crown; this shall be no more the same; exalt that which is low, and abase that which is high.²⁷ I will overturn, overturn, overturn it. This also shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him.

21:26 *The mitre... the crown* – The implication is that the King to be deposed was a King-Priest, as if the priestly and kingly lines had crossed in his genealogy. This points forward to the Lord Jesus.

Mary understood that through her conception, God had put down the mighty from their thrones and exalted *them* of low station in this life (Lk. 1:52). This clearly alludes to Ez. 21:26, where the princes are to be put down and *him* that is low is to be exalted, i.e. Messiah. But Mary felt that she had been exalted; thus she shared Messiah's exaltation because He was in her and she in Him. We too are in Him, and we should feel something of the pride and joy, along with the suffering, that comes from that identification. She parallels *her* lowly estate with *them* of low station in this life (Lk. 1:48,52) – perhaps referring to her and Jesus? Yet despite all her undoubted spiritual perception in her song of praise, she didn't have totally pure understanding. It seems from her allusion in Lk. 1:52 to Ez. 21:26 [the mighty being put down from their thrones and the humble one exalted] that she thought that Ezekiel's prophesy about Messiah's restoration of the Kingdom had already been fulfilled in her conception of Jesus. It could be that she was so sure that her child would one day do this that she saw the time of the coming of "Him whose right it is" as being right there and then; and yet we know that it is in fact still future.

Against Ammon

²⁸ You, son of man, prophesy, and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh concerning the children of Ammon, and concerning their reproach; and say, A sword, a sword is drawn, for the slaughter it is polished, to cause it to devour, that it may be as lightning; ²⁹ while they see for you false visions, while they forecast lies to you, to lay you on the necks of the wicked who are deadly wounded, whose day has come in the time of the iniquity of the end. ³⁰ Cause it to return into its sheath. In the place where you were created, in the land of your birth, will I judge you. ³¹ I will pour out My indignation on you; I will blow on you with the fire of My wrath; and I will deliver you into the hand of cruel men, skilful to destroy. ³² You shall be for fuel to the fire; your blood shall be in the midst of the land; you shall be remembered no more: for I, Yahweh, have spoken it.

21:27 The throne of the kings of Judah was to be no more until Christ, the rightful King of Israel, returns. He is the One who was low who has been exalted on high (:26). The triple ‘overturning’ could refer to the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, the Roman destruction in AD70, and a final overturning of the city in our times, just prior to Christ’s return as King of Israel. Alternatively, the triple ‘overturning’ refers to the three invasions of Judah made by Babylon. The future Kingdom of Christ is to be a re-establishment of the Kingdom of God as it once was, based around Jerusalem. The return of Christ is spoken of as the restoration of that Kingdom in Acts 1:6, where the disciples are basically asking when this prophecy of Ez. 21:27 will be fulfilled.

22:2 *Judge the city of blood... cause her to know all her abominations* – The purpose of judgment is to reveal sin to those being judged. We must face up to our sins, know them for what they are – either now, or in the process of rejection at the final day of judgment.

22:3 *So that her time of judgment may come, and makes idols against herself to defile herself* – Notice how the judgment and defiling were brought about by her own behaviour. Those who are condemned have condemned themselves (see :31).

CHAPTER 22 Sep. 26***The Sins of Israel and Jerusalem***

The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² You, son of man, will you judge, will you judge the city of blood? So now cause her to know all her abominations. ³ You shall say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: The city sheds blood in the midst of her so that her time of judgment may come, and makes idols against herself to defile herself! ⁴ You have become guilty in the blood that you have shed, and are defiled in your idols which you have made; and you have caused your days to draw near, and have come even to your year of judgment. Therefore have I made you a reproach to the nations, and a mockery to all the countries. ⁵ Those who are near and those who are far from you shall mock you, you infamous one and full of tumult. ⁶ Behold, the princes of Israel, each according to his power, have been in you to shed blood. ⁷ In you have they set light by father and mother;

in the midst of you have they dealt by oppression with the foreigner; in you have they wronged the fatherless and the widow. ⁸ You have despised My holy things, and have profaned My Sabbaths. ⁹ Slanderous men have been in you to shed blood; and in you they have eaten on the mountains: in the midst of you they have committed lewdness. ¹⁰ In you have they uncovered their fathers' nakedness; in you have they humbled her who was unclean in her impurity. ¹¹ One has committed abomination with his neighbour's wife, another has lewdly defiled his daughter-in-law; and another in you has humbled his sister, his father's daughter. ¹² In you have they taken bribes to shed blood. You have taken interest and increase, you have greedily gained from your neighbours by oppression and have forgotten Me, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹³ Behold, therefore, I have struck My hand at your dishonest gain which you have made, and at the blood which has been shed in the midst of you. ¹⁴ Can your heart endure, or can your hands be strong,

in the days that I shall deal with you? I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and will do it. ¹⁵ I will scatter you among the nations and disperse you through the countries; and I will consume your filthiness out of you. ¹⁶ You shall be profaned in yourself, in the sight of the nations; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ¹⁷ The word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ¹⁸ Son of man, the house of Israel has become dross to Me: all of them are brass, tin, iron and lead in the midst of the furnace; they are the dross of silver. ¹⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have all become dross, therefore, behold, I will gather you into the midst of Jerusalem. ²⁰ As they gather silver, brass, iron, lead and tin into the midst of the furnace to blow the fire onto it to melt it; so will I gather you in My anger and in My wrath, and I will lay you there, and melt you. ²¹ Yes, I will gather you, and blow on you with the fire of My wrath, and you shall be melted in its midst. ²² As silver is melted in the midst of the furnace, so you will be melted in its midst; and you will

22:9 Because gossip is such an epitome of the flesh, it is ranked here along with sins like fornication, idolatry and murder. Other scripture teaches that to hate your brother in your heart was and is as bad as murdering him (Mt. 5:22; 1 Jn. 3:15). Here, the connection is made between gossip and murder. To gossip against our brother is to hate him.

22:15 *I will consume your filthiness out of you* – This suggests that as the day of the second coming approaches, Israel will be progressively purged and moved closer and closer towards repentance. It is our duty to show them the Gospel so that they can make sense of their sufferings and see what those sufferings are intended by God to lead them towards.

22:22 This wrath of God was still ultimately constructive – because through the heat of the fire of His wrath, God intended to purge out the dross from His people, so that they might be saved. A very common tragedy in human experience is when people suffer terribly, and yet still don't make the changes God intends. So much suffering, especially of Israel, has in this sense been in vain.

know that I, Yahweh, have poured out My wrath on you.²³ The word of Yahweh came to me saying,²⁴ Son of man, tell her, You are a land that is not cleansed nor rained on in the day of indignation.²⁵ There is a conspiracy of her prophets in its midst, like a roaring lion tearing the prey: they have devoured souls; they take treasure and precious things; they have made her widows many in its midst.²⁶ Her priests have done violence to My law and have profaned My holy things: they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they caused men to discern between the unclean and the clean and have hidden their eyes from My Sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.²⁷ Her princes in its midst are like wolves tearing the prey, to shed blood and to destroy people so that they may get dishonest gain.²⁸ Her prophets have plastered for them with whitewash, seeing false visions and foretelling lies to them, saying, Thus says the Lord Yahweh, when Yahweh has not spoken.²⁹ The people of the land have used oppression and committed robbery; yes, they have troubled the poor and needy and have oppressed the foreigner wrongfully.³⁰ I sought for a man among them, who should build up the wall and stand in the gap before Me for the land, that

I should not destroy it; but I found none.³¹ Therefore have I poured out My indignation on them; I have consumed them with the fire of My wrath. Their own way have I brought on their heads, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 23 Sep. 27

Samaria and Jerusalem — Sisters in Prostitution

The word of Yahweh came again to me saying,² Son of man, there were two women, the daughters of one mother:³ and they played the prostitute in Egypt; they played the prostitute in their youth; there were their breasts pressed, and there were fondled the breasts of their virginity.⁴ Their names were Oholah the elder, and Oholibah her sister: and they became Mine, and they bore sons and daughters. As for their names, Samaria is Oholah, and Jerusalem Oholibah.⁵ Oholah played the prostitute when she was Mine; and she doted on her lovers, on the Assyrians her neighbours,⁶ who were clothed with blue, governors and rulers, all of them desirable young men, horsemen riding on horses.⁷ She bestowed her prostitution on them, the choicest men of Assyria all of them; and on whoever she doted, with all their idols she defiled herself.⁸ Neither has she left her prostitution since

22:26 See on 42:20.

22:30 Even at this dire time of Judah's weakness, God would have changed His entire program of judgment for the sake of just one man. But there was none, it seems Ezekiel himself wasn't passionate enough even. Thus God says He has consumed them in His wrath (:31), whereas Moses 'turned' God from executing His wrath as He planned (Ps. 78:38; 106:23).

the days of Egypt; for in her youth they lay with her, and they fondled the breasts of her virginity; and they poured out their prostitution on her.

⁹ Therefore I delivered her into the hand of her lovers, into the hand of the Assyrians on whom she doted.

¹⁰ These uncovered her nakedness; they took her sons and her daughters and her they killed with the sword, and she became a byword among women; for they executed judgments on her.

¹¹ Her sister Oholibah saw this, yet was she more corrupt in her doting than she, and in her prostitution which was more than the prostitution of her sister.

¹² She doted on the Assyrians, governors and rulers, her neighbours, clothed most gorgeously, horsemen riding on horses, all of them desirable young men.

¹³ I saw that she was defiled; they both took one way.

¹⁴ She increased her

prostitution; for she saw men portrayed on the wall, the images of the Chaldeans portrayed with vermillion,¹⁵ dressed with girdles on their waists, with flowing turbans on their heads, all of them princes to look on, after the likeness of the Babylonians in Chaldea, the land of their birth.

¹⁶ As soon as she saw them she dotted on them, and sent messengers to them into Chaldea.

¹⁷ The Babylonians came to her into the bed of love, and they defiled her with their prostitution, and she was polluted with them, and her soul was alienated from them.

¹⁸ So she displayed her prostitution, and uncovered her nakedness: then My soul was alienated from her, like as My soul was alienated from her sister.

¹⁹ Yet she multiplied her prostitution, remembering the days of her youth, in which she had played the prostitute in the land

23:8 Neither has she left her prostitution since the days of Egypt – A reference to how Israel took the idols of Egypt with them through the Red Sea (16:8,9), just as we can take this world's idols with us through the waters of baptism (1 Cor. 10:1,2).

23:11 Judah (the two tribe Kingdom) are portrayed here as more sinful than Israel (the ten tribe Kingdom), although the historical records in Kings and Chronicles suggest that Judah had more spiritual Kings than did Israel. We must conclude that occasional good leadership doesn't therefore affect the entire community. Seeing relationship with God is so intensely personal, good leadership can only be of limited value, and it therefore shouldn't be over-emphasized as the reason why a community are righteous or not.

23:14 Men portrayed on the wall – The context suggests this was some kind of visual pornography. There's a lot of language in these verses which speak of her attraction to them visually. The impression is given of a totally superficial woman who became sexually obsessed – when married to God Himself. This is how we can become, unless we understand our covenant relationship with God to utterly preclude any other relationship.

23:19 Remembering the days of her youth – Israel's memories and perception of their time in Egypt were very warped. It was a furnace of suffering for them, and yet they remembered fondly the food which the Egyptians ate (Num. 11:5), and the gods they worshipped. We need to understand our life before baptism for what it was, and not keep hankering after it.

of Egypt.²⁰ She doted on their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of donkeys, and whose issue is like the issue of horses.²¹ Thus you called to memory the lewdness of your youth, in the fondling of your bosom by the Egyptians for the breasts of your youth.²² Therefore, Ohlibah, thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will raise up your lovers against you, from whom your soul is alienated, and I will bring them against you on every side:²³ the Babylonians and all the Chaldeans, Pekod and Shoa and Koa, and all the Assyrians with them; desirable young men, governors and rulers all of them, princes and men of renown, all of them riding on horses.²⁴ They shall come against you with weapons, chariots and wagons, and with a company of peoples; they shall set themselves against you with buckler and shield and helmet all around; and I will commit the judgment to them, and they shall judge you according to their judgments.²⁵ I will set My jealousy against you, and they shall deal with you in fury; they shall take away your nose and your ears; and your residue shall fall by the sword. They shall take your sons and your daughters; and your residue shall be devoured by the fire.²⁶ They

shall also strip you of your clothes, and take away your beautiful jewels.²⁷ Thus will I make your lewdness to cease from you, and your prostitution brought from the land of Egypt; so that you shall not lift up your eyes to them, nor remember Egypt any more.²⁸ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will deliver you into the hand of those whom you hate, into the hand of those from whom your soul is alienated;²⁹ and they shall deal with you in hatred, and shall take away all your labour, and shall leave you naked and bare; and the nakedness of your prostitution shall be uncovered, both your lewdness and your prostitution.³⁰ These things shall be done to you because you have played the prostitute after the nations, and because you are polluted with their idols.³¹ You have walked in the way of your sister; therefore will I give her cup into your hand.³² Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You will drink of your sister's cup, which is deep and large; you will be ridiculed and held in derision; it contains much.³³ You shall be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of astonishment and desolation, with the cup of your sister Samaria.³⁴ You shall even drink it and

23:22 *Your lovers... from whom your soul is alienated* – No illicit relationship can ever last, and the supposed love always turns to hate or alienation. Israel are the classic case – it was the nations whose gods she worshipped who came and destroyed her without mercy.

23:27 *Your prostitution brought from the land of Egypt* – It is repeatedly emphasized that Israel took Egypt's idols with them (16:8,9 and elsewhere in this chapter). Yet Ezekiel is writing centuries afterwards. The faithless attitude Israel had when they left Egypt influenced their spiritual walk afterwards. How we start our walk with God is so important; and we should be very aware of this in raising children and in our attitude to new converts within the church.

drain it out, and you shall gnaw the broken pieces of it, and shall tear off your breasts; for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh. ³⁵ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have forgotten Me, and cast Me behind your back, therefore you also shall bear your lewdness and your prostitution. ³⁶ Yahweh said moreover to me: Son of man, will you judge Oholah and Oholibah? Then declare to them their abominations. ³⁷ For they have committed adultery, and blood is in their hands; and with their idols have they committed adultery; and they have also caused their sons, whom they bore to Me, to pass through the fire to their idols to be devoured. ³⁸ Moreover this they have done to Me: they have defiled My sanctuary in the same day, and have profaned My Sabbaths. ³⁹ For when they had slain their children to their idols, then they came the same day into My sanctuary to profane it; and behold, thus have they done in the midst of My house. ⁴⁰ Furthermore you have sent for men who come from far, to whom a messenger

was sent, and behold, they came; for whom you did wash yourself, paint your eyes, and decorate yourself with ornaments, ⁴¹ and sat on a stately bed, with a table prepared before it, whereupon you set My incense and My oil. ⁴² The voice of a multitude being at ease was with her: and with men of the common sort were brought drunkards from the wilderness; and they put bracelets on both their hands, and beautiful crowns on their heads. ⁴³ Then I said of her who was an adulteress of old, Now will they play the prostitute with her, and she with them. ⁴⁴ They went in to her, as they go in to a prostitute: so went they in to Oholah and to Oholibah, the lewd women. ⁴⁵ Righteous men, they shall judge them with the judgment of adulteresses, and with the judgment of women who shed blood; because they are adulteresses, and blood is in their hands. ⁴⁶ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will bring up a company against them, and will give them to be tossed back and forth and robbed. ⁴⁷ The company shall stone them with stones,

23:34 Ezekiel speaks of how every act of idolatry was seen by God as the fickle wife of a faithful husband deceitfully liaising with another, worthless, man. And there is a similar shocking terror associated with our infidelities to the Lord who bought us for His own. The self-hatred of repentant Israel before they accept the new covenant is described with a purposefully terrible idiom: *a woman plucking off her own breasts*. These words must be seen in the context of Israel offering these parts of her body to the hands of the Gentiles (:3,8). And now, with her own hands, Israel would fain pluck off her breasts in realization of her degradation. This self-loathing must be part of every true repentance; for we too, in advance of Israel, ought to have repented a like repentance, and entered the very same covenant. Just reflect upon the self-loathing in repentance of 6:9; 20:43; Job 40:4; 42:6. This is how sin is serious. Alternatively, we can read this self-hatred as an Old Testament form of what Jesus repeatedly warned about – the “weeping and gnashing of teeth” which will be experienced by those rejected at the judgment seat (Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30).

and dispatch them with their swords; they shall kill their sons and their daughters, and burn up their houses with fire. ⁴⁸ Thus will I cause lewdness to cease out of the land, that all women may be taught not to do after your lewdness. ⁴⁹ They shall recompense your lewdness on you, and you shall bear the sins of your idols; and you shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 24 Sep. 28

The Cauldron

Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, in the tenth day of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, write the name of the day, this self-same day: the king of Babylon came close to Jerusalem this day. ³ Utter a parable to the rebellious house and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Set on the cauldron, set it on, and also pour water into it. ⁴ Gather its pieces into it, even every good piece, the thigh, and the shoulder; fill it with the choice bones. ⁵ Take the choice of the flock, and also a pile of wood for the bones under the cauldron; make it boil well; yes, let its bones be boiled in its midst. ⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the city of blood, to

the cauldron whose rust is therein, and whose rust is not gone out of it! Take out of it piece after piece; no lot is fallen on it. ⁷ For her blood is in the midst of her; she set it on the bare rock; she didn't pour it on the ground, to cover it with dust. ⁸ So that it may cause wrath to come up to take vengeance, I have set her blood on the bare rock, that it should not be covered. ⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the city of blood! I also will make the pile great. ¹⁰ Heap on the wood, make the fire hot, boil well the flesh, make thick the broth, and let the bones be burned. ¹¹ Then set it empty on its coals, that it may be hot and its brass may be hot, so that its filthiness may be molten in it, that its rust may be consumed. ¹² She has wearied herself with lies; yet her great rust doesn't go forth out of her; her rust doesn't go forth by fire. ¹³ In your filthiness is lewdness: because I have cleansed you and you weren't cleansed, you shall not be cleansed from your filthiness any more, until I have caused My wrath toward you to rest. ¹⁴ I, Yahweh, have spoken it: it shall happen, and I will do it: I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I relent; according to your ways and according to your doings

24:7 *She set it on the bare rock* – But :8 says that God made her do this with her blood, so that she would incite His wrath. Here we have an example of how God confirms people in the sin they choose to commit. There's both a downward spiral and an upward one, we can never take a break from our spiritual journey, constantly we are being confirmed in the direction we choose.

24:12 *Wearied herself with lies* – The wearying with lies suggests that it was due to their listening to false prophets rather than the true word of God that the fire did not cleanse them.

shall they judge you, says the Lord Yahweh.

the Death of Ezekiel's Wife

15 Also the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, **16** Son of man, behold, I will take away from you the desire of your eyes with a stroke: yet you shall neither mourn nor weep, neither shall your tears run down. **17** Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead; bind your headdress on you, and put your shoes on your feet, don't cover your lips nor eat men's bread. **18** So I spoke to the people in the morning; and at evening my wife died; and I did in the morning as I was commanded. **19** The people said to me, Won't you tell us what these things are to us, that you do so? **20** Then I said to them, The word of Yahweh came to me, saying, **21** Speak to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will profane My sanctuary, the pride of your power, the desire of your eyes, and that which your soul pities; and

your sons and your daughters whom you have left behind shall fall by the sword. **22** You shall do as I have done: you shall not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men. **23** Your ornaments shall be on your heads, and your shoes on your feet: you shall not mourn nor weep; but you shall pine away in your iniquities, and groan one toward another. **24** Thus Ezekiel shall be a sign to you; according to all that he has done, you will do. When this comes, then you will know that I am the Lord Yahweh. **25** You, son of man, shall it not be in the day when I take from them their strength, the joy of their glory, the desire of their eyes, and that whereupon they set their heart, their sons and their daughters, **26** that in that day he who escapes shall come to you, to cause you to hear it with your ears? **27** In that day your mouth will be opened to him who has escaped, and you shall speak, and be no more mute. So you will be a sign to them; and they shall know that I am Yahweh.

24:16 *The desire of your eyes* – The implication is that Ezekiel dearly loved his wife and found her very attractive. Yet just as he so loved her, so Judah loved Yahweh's temple (:21). We must realize that Judah weren't atheists, they hadn't rejected Yahweh. On one hand they loved Him, but they loved their other gods too.

24:23 The emphasis is very much on the psychological suffering of the condemned Israel. Ezekiel wasn't allowed to weep, which is the natural expression of grief. It therefore bottled up within him, causing deep psychological pain; in order to present Israel with an illustration of how they would feel under God's judgment. The punishment of the rejected at the final judgment will be "gnashing of teeth" (Mt. 24:51), which is again a picture of anger with oneself and internal torment at what might have been, the eternal future which they chose to miss. The wicked will not be punished with literal fire or torture; the internal psychological pain will be far worse. These pictures of condemnation are frequent in the Bible; not to scare us into submission, but to bring before us the eternal consequence of the decisions we take in this life, for the flesh or for the Spirit.

24:27 See on 29:21.

CHAPTER 25 Sep. 29***Against Ammon***

The word of Yahweh came to me, ¹ saying, ² Son of man, set your face toward the people of Ammon, and prophesy against them: ³ and tell the people of Ammon, Hear the word of the Lord Yahweh: Thus says the Lord Yahweh, Because you said, Aha, against My sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate; and against the house of Judah when they went into captivity: ⁴ therefore behold, I will deliver you to the people of the east for a possession, and they shall set their encampments in you, and make their dwellings in you; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. ⁵ I will make Rabbah a stable for camels, and the people of Ammon a resting place for flocks: and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ⁶ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have clapped your hands, stamped with the feet and rejoiced with all the despite of your soul against the land of Israel; ⁷ therefore behold, I have stretched out My hand upon you and will deliver you for a spoil to the nations; and I will cut you off from the

peoples, and I will cause you to perish out of the countries. I will destroy you; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ⁸ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because Moab and Seir say, Behold, the house of Judah is like all the nations; ⁹ therefore, behold, I will open the side of Moab from the cities, from his cities which are on his frontiers, the glory of the country, Beth Jeshimoth, Baal Meon, and Kiriathaim, ¹⁰ to the people of the east, to go against the children of Ammon; and I will give them for a possession, that the people of Ammon may not be remembered among the nations. ¹¹ I will execute judgments on Moab; and they shall know that I am Yahweh.

Against Edom

¹² Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because Edom has dealt against the house of Judah by taking vengeance and has greatly offended and revenged himself on them; ¹³ therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, I will stretch out My hand on Edom, and will cut off man and animal from it; and I will make it desolate: from Teman even to Dedan shall they fall by the sword. ¹⁴ I will lay My venge-

25:11 *They shall know that I am Yahweh* – God judged nations in order that men might know Him as Yahweh (see too 28:22; 30:19). But did they? Often God states His intentions and wishes for people's faith as if they have been realized. In this we can see the hopefulness of God, like the shepherd who searches for the lost sheep with the attitude that he will search until he finds it (Lk. 15:4). We should have this hopefulness in all our witnessing to others.

25:14 *By the hand of My people Israel* – The Law of Moses had commanded Israel not to hate Edomites (Dt. 23:7); so they were intended to carry out this judgment with no personal hatred, just as at times we have to. Despite Josephus claiming that the Maccabees fulfilled this prophecy, Obadiah 21 speaks of how this judgment will be fulfilled in the last days around the second coming of Christ (cp. Is. 63:1).

ance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel; and they shall do in Edom according to My anger and according to My wrath; and they shall know My vengeance, says the Lord Yahweh.

Against the Philistines

15 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because the Philistines have dealt by revenge, and have taken vengeance with despite of soul to destroy for the old enmity; ¹⁶ therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I will stretch out My hand on the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites, and destroy the rest of the sea coast. ¹⁷ I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes; and they shall know that I am Yahweh, when I shall lay My vengeance on them.

CHAPTER 26 Sep. 30

Against Tyre

It happened in the eleventh year in the first day of the month that

the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, Aha, she is broken! The gate of the peoples is now turned to me; I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste: ³ therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh, Behold, I am against you, Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up. ⁴ They shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers. I will also scrape her dust from her and make her a bare rock. ⁵ She shall be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea; for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh; and she shall become a spoil to the nations. ⁶ Her daughters who are in the field shall be slain with the sword; and they shall know that I am Yahweh. ⁷ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will bring on Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, from the north, with horses, with chariots,

25:15 *For the old enmity* – A reference to the Jacob:Esau hatred, which will finally be resolved in Jacob's favour – by God's grace alone.

25:16 *The rest of the sea coast* – The Hebrew word for 'Philistine' is the same as that now used for 'Palestinian'; the Palestinians of the Gaza Strip are in exactly the geographical location spoken of here.

26:7 This speaks of how Babylon will surround and destroy Tyre. But this never happened in recorded history – it was done by Alexander and the Greeks much later. 29:17-20 explains that because the King of Babylon laboured so hard to take Tyre (even though he never actually succeeded) God would give him the land of Egypt as a reward. This doesn't mean that the word of prophecy failed. Rather does it mean that God is open to a rethinking of plans and futures in accord with human response. Although all the conditions for Tyre's fall and Babylon's victory against her aren't given, evidently there must have been such unrecorded conditions; and they weren't fulfilled, hence Tyre was spared destruction by the Babylonians, and yet they were 'rewarded' for their part in the situation. Nebuchadnezzar was God's servant, but God changed the terms and conditions of his labour. He would not conquer Tyre, but he was given Egypt instead. Is it that God changes His mind? Did someone (of whom

with horsemen and a company, and many people. ⁸ He shall kill your daughters in the field with the sword; and he shall make forts against you, and cast up a mound against you, and raise up the buckler against you. ⁹ He shall set his battering engines against your walls, and with his axes he shall break down your towers. ¹⁰ By reason of the abundance of his horses their dust shall cover you. Your walls shall shake at the noise of the horsemen, and of the wagons, and of the chariots, when he shall enter into your gates, as men enter into a city in which is made a breach. ¹¹ With the hoofs of his horses shall he tread down all your streets; he shall kill your people with the sword; and the pillars of your strength shall go down to the ground. ¹² They shall make a

spoil of your riches, and make a prey of your merchandise; and they shall break down your walls, and destroy your pleasant houses; and they shall lay your stones and your timber and your dust in the midst of the waters. ¹³ I will cause the noise of your songs to cease; the sound of your harps shall be no more heard. ¹⁴ I will make you a bare rock; you shall be a place for the spreading of nets. You shall be built no more: for I Yahweh have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh to Tyre: shall not the islands shake at the sound of your fall, when the wounded groan, when the slaughter is made in the midst of you? ¹⁶ Then all the princes of the sea shall come down from their thrones and lay aside their robes and strip off their

there is no record) plead successfully for Tyre, like Lot did unsuccessfully for Sodom? Or did Tyre like Nineveh get to hear of this prophecy, and repent, so it didn't happen? Or is Tyre yet to fall in some last days scenario? Or is it that God tells us something, only a piece of the future at a time, and then we get a fuller picture later on? We do not need to question God's prophesies. We can believe Him each time, and believe the changes He makes as well. Ezekiel has a lot of conditional prophecies – not least the last nine chapters with their description of the temple situation which could have come about if Judah had returned from exile and rebuilt the temple as God intended.

Another approach would be to reconsider our philosophy of history. In this age where science is assumed to have all the answers, the assumption is likewise made that the science of history is somehow complete. But primary sources for ancient history are limited; there are large gaps in ancient history, and primary sources may exist for some incidents which aren't very significant on the larger canvass; and likewise major incidents are at times unnoticed in the sources currently available. So it's possible that Nebuchadnezzar did do to Tyre as required by this prophecy, it's just not recorded; and Alexander also destroyed the city later (this would require special attention to our note on 26:21 about the meaning of the phrase "no more be rebuilt").

26:8, 9 The references to making mounts against Tyre's walls show that the "Tyre" referred to here isn't any island fortification as claimed by some.

26:12 *Lay your stones and your timber and your dust in the midst of the waters* – Alexander the Great broke down Tyre and carefully laid the rubble in the water in order to build a causeway with which to reach the island castle of Tyre which still held out against him.

embroidered garments: they shall clothe themselves with trembling; they shall sit on the ground and shall tremble every moment, being astonished at you.¹⁷ They shall take up a lamentation over you and tell you, How you are destroyed, who was inhabited by mariners, the renowned city, who was strong in the sea, she and her inhabitants, who caused their terror to be on all who lived there!¹⁸ Now shall the islands tremble in the day of your fall; yes, the islands that are in the sea shall be dismayed at your departure.¹⁹ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: When I shall make you a desolate city like the cities that are not inhabited; when I shall bring up the deep on you and the great waters shall cover you;²⁰ then will I bring you down with those who descend into the pit, to the people of old time, and will make you to

dwell in the lower parts of the earth, in the places that are desolate of old, with those who go down to the pit, that you be not inhabited; and I will set glory in the land of the living.²¹ I will make you a terror, and you shall no more be rebuilt; though you are sought for, yet you will never be found again, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 27 Oct. 1

Lamentation over Tyre

The word of Yahweh came again to me saying,² You, son of man, take up a lamentation over Tyre,³ and tell Tyre: You who dwell at the entry of the sea, who are the merchant of the peoples to many islands, thus says the Lord Yahweh: You, Tyre, have said, I am perfect in beauty.⁴ Your borders are in the heart of the seas; your builders have perfected your beauty.⁵ They have made all

26:21 No more be rebuilt – This also may have been part of a conditional prophecy – see on :7. It could be that the Biblical Tyre wasn't on the same spot as the city now known as “Tyre”. The Hebrew can bear the translation ‘Not be built any more’, meaning that the building which was then ongoing would end. The same grammatical construction is found in passages like Ex. 9:29, where Moses says that ‘As soon as I go out of the city, I will spread out my hands to the Lord ... there will be hail no longer...’. This doesn't mean that there would never be any hail ever again; it means that the current hailstorm would stop. Another example is in Neh. 2:17.

27:3 Perfect in beauty – Arrogant self-confidence, opulence, human beauty, human wisdom, praise and respect from others, power... all the things which people so strive after in our society were all obtained to their fullness by Tyre, and yet these are the very things which they were condemned for. Note how the prophets pointed out to Gentile nations their sins and failures before the God of Israel; sin is still felt by God as sin, even if it is committed by those not responsible to His final judgment. It must be so hard for God, feeling all this offence against Him. However, it was Jerusalem which was the city seen by God as “perfect in beauty” (Ps. 50:2); Tyre wasn't simply boastful, but consciously wanted to take over from Jerusalem as God's chosen city. They thought that their wealth and human advantage could buy for them status with God – as people do today. It was Tyre's aspiration to replace Israel as God's people which He found so upsetting – see notes on chapter 28.

your planks of fir trees from Senir; they have taken a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you.⁶ Of the oaks of Bashan have they made your oars; they have made your benches of ivory inlaid in boxwood from the islands of Kittim.⁷ Of fine linen with embroidered work from Egypt was your sail, that it might be to you for a banner; blue and purple from the islands of Elishah was your awning.⁸ The inhabitants of Sidon and Arvad were your rowers. Your wise men, Tyre, were in you; they were your pilots.⁹ The old men of Gebal and the wise men of it were in you, your repairers of ship seams. All the ships of the sea with their mariners were in you to deal in your merchandise.¹⁰ Persia, Lud and Put were in your army, your men of war. They hung the shield and helmet in you; they set forth your beauty.¹¹ The men of Arvad with your army were on your walls all around, and heroic men were in your towers; they hung their shields on your walls all around; they have perfected your beauty.¹² Tarshish was your merchant by reason of the multitude of all kinds of riches; with silver, iron, tin and lead they traded for your wares.¹³ Javan, Tubal, and Meshech, they were your traffickers; they traded the persons of men and vessels of brass for your merchandise.¹⁴ They of the house

of Togarmah traded for your wares with horses and war horses and mules.¹⁵ The men of Dedan were your traffickers; many islands were the market under your control. They brought you in exchange horns of ivory and ebony.¹⁶ Syria was your merchant by reason of the multitude of your handiworks. They traded for your wares with emeralds, purple, embroidered work, fine linen, coral and rubies.¹⁷ Judah and the land of Israel, they were your traffickers. They traded for your merchandise wheat of Minnith, and confections, honey, oil and balm.¹⁸ Damascus was your merchant for the multitude of your handiworks, by reason of the multitude of all kinds of riches, with the wine of Helbon and white wool.¹⁹ Vedan and Javan traded with yarn for your wares: bright iron, cassia and calamus were among your merchandise.²⁰ Dedan was your trafficker in precious cloths for riding.²¹ Arabia and all the princes of Kedar, they were the merchants of your hand. In lambs, rams, goats, in these were they your merchants.²² The traffickers of Sheba and Raamah, they were your traffickers. They traded for your wares with the chief of all spices and with all precious stones and gold.²³ Haran and Canneh and Eden, the traffickers of Sheba, Asshur and Chilmad,

27:17 Judah and the land of Israel – Ezekiel would've reflected that this list of good things from his own land was produced at a time of blessing on the land (Dt. 8:8; 32:14); for at his time, the land was desolate and not trading with Tyre. As a young Jew in Babylon, Ezekiel likely knew nothing of Tyre personally, and so the detailed list in this chapter is an example of Divine inspiration giving the Bible writers information which was beyond them personally to amass.

were your traffickers.²⁴ These were your traffickers in choice wares, in wrappings of blue and embroidered work and in chests of rich clothing, bound with cords and made of cedar, among your merchandise.²⁵ The ships of Tarshish were your caravans for your merchandise, and you were replenished, and made very glorious in the heart of the seas.²⁶ Your rowers have brought you into great waters. The east wind has broken you in the heart of the seas.²⁷ Your riches, your wares, your merchandise, your mariners, your pilots, your repairers of ship hulls and the dealers in your merchandise, and all your men of war who are in you, with all your company which is in the midst of you, shall fall into the heart of the seas in the day of your ruin.²⁸ At the sound of the cry of your pilots the suburbs shall shake.²⁹ All who handled the oar, the mariners and all the pilots of the sea shall come down from their ships. They shall stand on the land,³⁰ and shall cause their voice to be heard over you, and shall cry bitterly and shall cast up dust on their heads, they shall wallow themselves in the ashes;³¹ and they shall make themselves bald for you, and clothe them with sackcloth, and they shall weep for you in bitterness of soul with bitter mourning.³² In their wailing they shall take up a lamentation for you and lament over you, saying, Who is there like Tyre, like her who is brought to silence in the midst of the sea?³³ When your wares went forth out of the seas, you filled many

peoples; you enriched the kings of the earth with the multitude of your riches and of your merchandise.³⁴ In the time that you were broken by the seas in the depths of the waters, your merchandise and all your company fell in your midst.³⁵ All the inhabitants of the islands are astonished at you, and their kings are horribly afraid; they are troubled in their face.³⁶ The merchants among the peoples hiss at you; you are become a terror, and you shall never again have any being.

CHAPTER 28 Oct. 2

Tyre: The Anointed Cherub

The word of Yahweh came again to me saying,² Son of man, tell the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because your heart is lifted up, and you have said, I am a god, I sit in the seat of God, in the midst of the seas; yet you are man, and not God, though you set your heart as the heart of God.³ Behold, you are wiser than Daniel; there is no secret that is hidden from you.⁴ By your wisdom and by your understanding you have become rich, and have gathered gold and silver into your treasures.⁵ By your great wisdom and by your traffic you have increased your riches, and your heart is lifted up because of your riches.⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because you have set your heart as the heart of God,⁷ therefore, behold, I will bring strangers on you, the terrible of the nations; and they shall draw their swords against the

beauty of your wisdom, and they shall defile your brightness. ⁸ They shall bring you down to the pit; and you shall die the death of those who are slain, in the heart of the seas. ⁹ Will you yet say before him who kills you, I am God? But you are man and not God in the hand of him who stabs you. ¹⁰ You shall die the death of the uncircumcised by the hand of strangers: for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹¹ Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ¹² Son of man, take up a lamentation

over the king of Tyre and tell him, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You seal up the imitation, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. ¹³ You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz, emerald, chrysolite, onyx, jasper, sapphire, turquoise, and beryl. Gold workmanship of tambourines and of pipes was yours. In the day that you were created they were prepared. ¹⁴ I put a terrifying messenger there to guard you. You lived on My holy mountain and walked among

28:13-15 It is wrongly assumed that this refers to Satan once having been in Eden. But the words “devil” and “satan” do not occur in this chapter, nor in the rest of Ezekiel. The context shows this is a prophecy about the King of Tyre; the preceding chapter 27 is an oracle against Tyre, and now chapter 28 speaks specifically about the King of Tyre. Ezekiel chapters 27 and 28 clearly hold together as a literary unit. The city of Tyre and the King of Tyre are described in similar terms, e.g. “perfect in beauty” (compare 27:3 and 28:12; 27:16,17 with 28:13; 27:33 with 28:16). The passage plainly speaks of the King of Tyre, not anything that happened at the beginning of the world. It is commonly believed that Satan was thrown out of heaven into Eden, but this passage says that this person was in Eden before he sinned and was cast out when he sinned. The garden of Eden was on the earth, not in heaven (its boundaries are given in Gen. 2:8-14), therefore the casting out was not out of heaven. The person was to “die the death of the uncircumcised” (:10), but angels cannot die (Lk. 20:35-36). That a man is referred to is confirmed by :9 “you are man”. Verse 2 defines him as the “prince of Tyre”. The Hebrew word for “perfect” is applied to Noah, Abraham, Job and David (Gen. 6: 9; 17:1; Job 1:1; Ps. 18:23 & 25); it doesn’t imply a supernatural being. “You were in Eden” refers to where the king of Tyre was in place, not in time. Pharaoh and Assyria are similarly described as being like trees in Eden, and having these trees in awe of them (31:2,3,8,9,16,18). The trees in Eden are not to be taken literally, they represent the nations whom Pharaoh and Assyria conquered, possibly referring to the fact that they were all within the old geographical boundaries of the garden of Eden. Eden was a geographical area on earth known to Ezekiel’s readers – this is how it is used elsewhere in Ezekiel (27:23; 31:8,9; Is. 51:3; Gen. 13:10). ‘Eden’ was not understood as a historical reference to the garden of Eden in early Genesis, but rather to a known nation / region of Ezekiel’s time. The sin of the King of Tyre is defined in :16-18 as dishonest accumulation of wealth. The sin in view wasn’t some Angelic rebellion against God. The language of precious stones in :13,14 is an allusion to the stones set in the breastplate of the high priest of Israel (Ex. 39:10-14). Tyre was “on the holy mountain of God” (:14) – but this holy mountain is Mount Zion, Jerusalem here on earth (20:40). The prophecy of the fall of Tyre is being consciously

sparkling gems.¹⁵ You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, until unrighteousness was found in you.¹⁶ By the abundance of your trading they filled the

midst of you with violence, and you have sinned; therefore I have cast you as profane out of the mountain of God; and the angel who guarded you drove you away from the midst

framed to mirror the fall of man, e.g. in :2 “you are man”; “man” is *Adam* in Hebrew, as if God is saying to the prince of Tyre, “You are like Adam in this parable”. Verse 17 tells how he will be brought to the ground – as Adam had to return to the dust. The passage is often skim read, leading to the assumption that the King of Tyre is being likened to the serpent in the Garden of Eden, or to some Satan figure who fell from Heaven at that time. But careful reading shows that the King of Tyre is being likened to Adam in Eden, not to the serpent. Verses 14,16 sound like a reference to the King of Tyre as Adam: “I put a terrifying angel there to guard you... the angel who guarded you drove you away” (:14,16 – this is also the reading of the G.N.B. and T.E.V.)

Another approach is suggested by archaeological discoveries in Tyre. A large cherub-sphinx with a king’s head and animal’s body set on a base of sculptured mountains was discovered, evidently a deification of a king of Tyre. With Hiram’s knowledge of the true God, it seems that subsequent Kings of Tyre came to put themselves in the position of God, seated between the cherubim on Mount Zion, in the same way as the king of Assyria effectively aspired to the same thing – Phoenician inscriptions have been uncovered calling the king of Tyre “Lord of the Heavens”. Even more amazingly, the jewels described in :13 were all found embedded in this sphinx-cherubim. The three jewels of the breastplate missing from the list in :13 were also missing from the sphinx. Inscriptions also describe Tyre as the “garden of God”, and reliefs of cherubim guarding Tyre as they did Eden have been found. Thus the king of Tyre had set up a blasphemous system of worship copying that of the temple and of Eden, with himself as God in the midst of it. “The king of Tyre” (:12) may be a reference to the Tyrian god Melkart (“King of the city”). Perhaps Tyre had installed a system of Yahweh worship similar to that which was in Jerusalem (perhaps a result of Hiram’s relationship with Solomon and assistance in building Yahweh’s temple) – but this had become mixed with the worship of Melkart. “You seal up the imitation” (:12) show how God was aware that this replica of His system of worship had been pushed by the king of Tyre as far as it could go. According to the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary: “This feeling of superhuman elevation in the king of Tyre was fostered by the fact that the island on which Tyre stood was called “the holy island” [Sanconiathon], being sacred to Hercules and Melkart, so much so that the colonies looked up to Tyre as the mother city of their religion”. The city was thought of as rising from the waters like the rock-throne of God. This would explain why the King of Tyre is criticized for saying “I am a god, I sit in the seat of God” (:2). It would also explain all the allusions to Israelite worship – he was setting himself up as a rival to Zion, dressing himself in clothing featuring all the jewels in the High Priestly breastplate (Ex. 28:15-20); the word used for his “workmanship” with those jewels in :13 is used in Ex. 31:3,5; 35:31 of the workmanship of the tabernacle and associated garments. The King of Tyre claimed to be “perfect in beauty” (:12) – just as Zion was described earlier in Ezekiel in the same terms (16:14).

of the stones of fire. ¹⁷ Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness. I have cast you to the ground; I have laid you before kings, that they may see you. ¹⁸ By the multitude of your iniquities, in the unrighteousness of your trading, you have profaned your sanctuaries; therefore have I brought forth a fire from the midst of you; it has devoured you, and I have turned you to ashes on the earth in the sight of all those who see you. ¹⁹ All those who know you among the peoples shall be astonished at you. You have become a terror, and your life shall end evermore.

Against Sidon

²⁰ The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ²¹ Son of man, set your face toward Sidon, and prophesy against it ²² and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you Sidon. I will be glorified in the midst of you; and they shall know that I am Yahweh when I shall have executed judgments in her, and shall be sanctified in her. ²³ For I will send plague into her and blood into her streets. The wounded shall fall in the midst of her, with the sword on her on every side; and they shall know that I am Yahweh. ²⁴ There shall be no more a pricking brier to the house of Israel, nor a hurting thorn of any that are around them, that scorned them; and they shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh. ²⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: When I shall have gathered the house of Israel from the

peoples among whom they are scattered, and shall be sanctified in them in the sight of the nations, then shall they dwell in their own land which I gave to My servant Jacob. ²⁶ They shall dwell securely therein; yes, they shall build houses, and plant vineyards, and shall dwell securely, when I have executed judgments on all those who do them despite all around them; and they shall know that I am Yahweh their God.

CHAPTER 29 Oct. 3

Against Pharaoh and All Egypt

In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt. ³ Speak and say, ‘Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt, the great monster that lies in the midst of his rivers, that has said, ‘My river is My own, and I have made it for Myself’. ⁴ I will put hooks in your jaws, and I will make the fish of your rivers stick to your scales; and I will bring you up out of the midst of your rivers, with all the fish of your rivers which stick to your scales. ⁵ I’ll cast you forth into the wilderness, you and all the fish of your rivers. You’ll fall on the open field. You won’t be bound together, nor gathered. I have given you for food to the animals of the earth and to the birds of the sky. ⁶ All the inhabitants of Egypt will know that I am Yahweh, because they have been a staff of reed to the house of

Israel. ⁷ When they took hold of you by your hand, you broke, and tore all their shoulders; and when they leaned on you, you broke, and paralyzed all of their thighs. ⁸ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will bring a sword on you, and will cut off man and animal from you. ⁹ The land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste; and they shall know that I am Yahweh. Because you have said, ‘The river is mine, and I have made it;’ ¹⁰ therefore, behold, I am against you and against your rivers, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from the tower of Sevneh even to the border of Ethiopia. ¹¹ No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of animal shall pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years. ¹² I will make the land of Egypt a desolation in the midst of the countries that are desolate; and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be a desolation forty years; and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries. ¹³ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: At the end of forty years will I gather the Egyptians from the peoples where they were scattered; ¹⁴ and I will bring back the captivity of Egypt, and will cause them to return into the land of Pathros, into

the land of their birth; and they shall be there a base kingdom. ¹⁵ It shall be the most base of the kingdoms; neither shall it any more lift itself up above the nations; and I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations. ¹⁶ It shall be no more the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing iniquity to remembrance, when they turn to look after them; and they shall know that I am the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁷ It came to pass in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, in the first day of the month, the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ¹⁸ Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to serve a great service against Tyre: every head was made bald, and every shoulder was worn; yet had he no wages, nor his army, for Tyre, for the service that he had served against it. ¹⁹ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; and he shall carry off her multitude and take her a spoil and take her a prey; and it shall be the wages for his army. ²⁰ I have given him the land of Egypt as his recompense for which he served, because they worked for Me, says the Lord Yahweh. ²¹ In that day will I cause a horn to bud forth to the house of Israel, and I will give you the opening

29:12 This prophecy of forty years could have been a provisional prophecy – see on 26:7,21. See too the note on 26:7 about the fact that ancient history has blank areas – perhaps this prophecy was fulfilled but there is no record of it.

29:17-20 See on 26:7.

29:21 *I will give you the opening of the mouth in their midst* – In the midst of the surrounding nations. But at the time of Christ’s return, when Israel repent and enter the new covenant with Him, they will remember all their past sins and never open their

of the mouth in their midst; and they shall know that I am Yahweh.

CHAPTER 30 Oct. 4

Lamentation over Egypt

The word of Yahweh came again to me saying, ² Son of man, prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Wail, Alas for the day! ³ For the day is near, even the day of Yahweh is near; it shall be a day of clouds, a time of the nations. ⁴ A sword shall come on Egypt and anguish shall be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in Egypt; and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundations shall be broken down. ⁵ Ethiopia, Put and Lud, and all the mixed people, and Cub, and the children of the land that is allied with them, shall fall with them by the sword. ⁶ Thus says Yahweh: They also who uphold Egypt shall fall; and the pride of her power shall come down: from the tower of Sevneh shall they fall in it by the sword, says the Lord Yahweh. ⁷ They shall be desolate in the

midst of the countries that are desolate; and her cities shall be in the midst of the cities that are wasted. ⁸ They shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and all her helpers are destroyed. ⁹ In that day shall messengers go forth from before Me in ships to make the careless Ethiopians afraid; and there shall be anguish on them, as in the day of Egypt; for, behold, it comes. ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease, by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. ¹¹ He and his people with him, the terrible of the nations, shall be brought in to destroy the land; and they shall draw their swords against Egypt, and fill the land with the slain. ¹² I will make the rivers dry, and will sell the land into the hand of evil men; and I will make the land desolate, and all that is therein, by the hand of strangers: I, Yahweh, have spoken it. ¹³ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will also destroy the idols and I will cause the images

mouth any more because of their shame (16:63). They will be so ashamed that they *will feel as if* they can never open their mouth. But Yahweh will open their mouth, and they will witness. In some anticipation of this, Ezekiel as the “son of man” prophet, a representative of his people just as the Lord Jesus was to be, had his mouth shut in dumbness, and he only had his mouth opened when Israel came to know [to some degree] that “I am Yahweh” (24:27). In all these evident connections something marvellous presents itself. Those who feel as if they just cannot open their mouths in witness are the very ones whom the Father will use; He will open their mouths and use them exactly because they are ashamed of their sins! And so it should be with us.

30:2 The wailing and lamentation for the fate of Gentile nations, even those who had been enemies of God’s people, really shows how neither God nor Ezekiel had the slightest pleasure in the punishment of the wicked. God’s desire is to positively manifest and develop His Name; this is His focus, rather than hitting back against those who rebel against Him.

30:13 *I will put a fear in the land of Egypt* – God often punishes people by sending attitudes of mind upon them.

to cease from Memphis; there shall be no more a prince from the land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt. ¹⁴ I will make Pathros desolate, will set a fire in Zoan and will execute judgments on No. ¹⁵ I will pour My wrath on Sin, the stronghold of Egypt; and I will cut off the multitude of No. ¹⁶ I will set a fire in Egypt; Sin shall be in great anguish, No shall be broken up and Memphis shall have adversaries in the daytime. ¹⁷ The young men of Aven and of Pibeseth shall fall by the sword; and these cities shall go into captivity. ¹⁸ At Tehaphnehes also the day shall withdraw itself, when I shall break there the yokes of Egypt, and the pride of her power shall cease in her: as for her, a cloud shall cover her, and her daughters shall go into captivity. ¹⁹ Thus will I execute judgments on Egypt; and they shall know that I am Yahweh. ²⁰ It happened in the eleventh year, in the first month, in the seventh day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me,

saying, ²¹ Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and behold, it has not been bound up, to apply healing medicines, to put a bandage to bind it that it be strong to hold the sword. ²² Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms, the strong arm, and that which was broken; and I will cause the sword to fall out of his hand. ²³ I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries. ²⁴ I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon and put My sword in his hand: but I will break the arms of Pharaoh, and he shall groan before him with the groanings of a deadly wounded man. ²⁵ I will hold up the arms of the king of Babylon; and the arms of Pharaoh shall fall down; and they shall know that I am Yahweh, when I shall put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out on the land of Egypt. ²⁶ I will scatter the Egyptians

30:18 *The day shall withdraw itself* – A reference to the collapse of the meaning of time as we know it around the period of Christ’s return? This verse speaks of the time when Egypt comes to know the Lord through His judgments (:19) – and this must have some reference to the last days.

30:21 *I have broken the arm of Pharaoh* – One arm of Pharaoh had already been broken when Babylon defeated Pharaoh-Necho at Carchemish (Jer. 46:2) and took away from Egypt all her territory from the Nile to the Euphrates (2 Kings 24:7). This breaking of Pharaoh’s arms one by one is likely because God wished them to repent after the first arm was broken. God doesn’t afflict just to be cruel, but because He has a purpose, to His glory.

30:23, 24 The language of scattering amongst the nations after being attacked by a Babylon empowered by God is exactly the sort of thing the prophets said would happen to Israel. There is a Biblical theme that God’s people suffer the same judgments as the world, Egypt, if they act like the world. Hence we are warned to beware lest we be condemned with the world (1 Cor. 11:32). In our hearts and actions, there must be a chasmic difference between us and this world.

among the nations, and disperse them through the countries; and they shall know that I am Yahweh.

CHAPTER 31 Oct. 5

The Assyrian a Cedar in Lebanon

It happened in the eleventh year, in the third month, in the first day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, tell Pharaoh king of Egypt and his multitude: Whom are you like in your greatness? ³ Behold, the Assyrian was a cedar in Lebanon with beautiful branches, and with a forest-like shade and of high stature; and its top was among the thick boughs. ⁴ The waters nourished it, the deep made it to grow. Its rivers ran all around its plantation; and it sent out its channels to all the trees of the field. ⁵ Therefore its stature was exalted above all the trees of the field; and its boughs

were multiplied, and its branches became long by reason of many waters, when it shot them forth. ⁶ All the birds of the sky made their nests in its boughs; and under its branches all the animals of the field brought forth their young; and all great nations lived under its shadow. ⁷ Thus was it beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches; for its root was by many waters. ⁸ The cedars in the garden of God could not hide it; the fir trees were not like its boughs, and the plane trees were not as its branches; nor was any tree in the garden of God like it in its beauty. ⁹ I made it beautiful by the multitude of its branches, so that all the trees of Eden that were in the garden of God envied it. ¹⁰ Therefore thus said the Lord Yahweh: Because you are exalted in stature and he has set your top among the thick boughs and his heart

31:1 This was a month before Jerusalem was taken by the Babylonians. Judah were desperately hoping that Egypt would come to their rescue, and in this prophecy there is the clear message that Egypt like Assyria before them, like all human strength, is doomed to not ultimately save us. Judah were intended to learn from history – the apparently invincible Assyrian had fallen, so would Egypt. But our human tendency to live in an eternal present means that we tend not to learn the lessons of history; yet God's word is full of history for us to learn from. Note how Is. 52:4 likewise parallels Egypt and Assyria.

31:3 God's people Israel are likened to such a cedar (17:3), spreading out roots to the waters (Ps. 80:11). The implication is that Assyria wished to usurp Israel as God's people and appropriated such language and imagery to themselves. It is God's Kingdom which gives "a forest-like shade" (Mk. 4:32); but the kingdoms of men appear as fake imitations of God's Kingdom; and it is our wisdom to perceive the difference.

31:6 Under its shadow – The smaller nations lived under the shadow of the superpowers like Egypt and Assyria, but they had eventually fled from under the shadow of Assyria (:12). Judah like us today are asked not to dwell under the shadow of such superpowers – in our day, perhaps insurance policies, savings, home ownership – but to dwell under the shadow of God's invisible Angel-cherubim wings (Ps. 17:8; 91:4). For a small nation like Judah wedged at the time between the superpowers of Babylon and Egypt, this was a radical demand – to dwell at peace under the shadow of God's care.

is lifted up in his height,¹¹ I will even deliver him into the hand of the mighty one of the nations. He shall surely deal with him. I have driven him out for his wickedness.¹² Gentiles, the terrible of the nations, have cut him off and have left him: on the mountains and in all the valleys his branches are fallen, and his boughs are broken by all the watercourses of the land; and all the peoples of the earth are gone away from his shadow, and have left him.¹³ On his ruin all the birds of the sky shall dwell, and all the animals of the field shall be on his branches;¹⁴ so that none of all the trees by the waters exalt themselves in their stature, neither set their top among the thick boughs. Their mighty ones shall not stand up on their height, even all who drink water; for they are all delivered to death, to the lower parts of the earth, in the midst of the children of men, with those who go down to the pit.¹⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the day when he went down to Sheol I caused a mourning. I covered the deep for him, and I restrained its rivers; and the great waters were stayed; and I caused Lebanon to mourn for him, and all the trees of the field fainted for him.¹⁶ I made the nations to shake at the sound of his fall, when I cast him down to Sheol with those who descend into the pit. And all the trees of Eden, the choice and best of Lebanon, all that drink water,

were comforted in the lower parts of the earth.¹⁷ They also went down into Sheol with him to those who are slain by the sword; yes, those who were his arm, that lived under his shadow in the midst of the nations.¹⁸ To whom are you thus like in glory and in greatness among the trees of Eden? Yet you will be brought down with the trees of Eden to the lower parts of the earth: you shall lie in the midst of the uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword. This is Pharaoh and all his multitude, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 32 Oct. 6

More Lamentation over Egypt

It happened in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, in the first day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me saying,² Son of man, take up a lamentation over Pharaoh king of Egypt and tell him, You were likened to a young lion of the nations: yet you are as a monster in the seas; and you broke out with your rivers, and troubled the waters with your feet and fouled their rivers.³ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I will spread out My net on you with a company of many peoples; and they shall bring you up in My net.⁴ I will leave you on the land, I will cast you forth on the open field and will cause all the birds of the sky to settle on you, and I will satisfy the animals of the whole earth with you.⁵ I will lay

32:2 *Take up a lamentation* – Ezekiel and the faithful are being invited to as it were attend Egypt's funeral and participate in the laments – rather than trust in her. We too, living as we do at the end of human history, can do the same – laying to eternal rest, in our own minds and faith, the pomp and the power and the pride of this world.

your flesh on the mountains and fill the valleys with your height. ⁶ I will also water with your blood the land in which you swim, even to the mountains; and the watercourses shall be full of you. ⁷ When I shall extinguish you, I will cover the sky and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud and the moon shall not give its light. ⁸ All the bright lights of the sky will I make dark over you and set darkness on your land, says the Lord Yahweh. ⁹ I will also trouble the hearts of many peoples, when I shall bring your destruction among the nations, into the countries which you have not known. ¹⁰ Yes, I will make many peoples amazed at you, and their kings shall be horribly afraid for you, when I shall brandish My sword before them; and they shall tremble every moment, every man for his own life, in the day of your fall. ¹¹ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: The sword of the king of Babylon shall come on you. ¹² By the swords of the mighty will I cause your multitude to fall; they are all the terrible of the nations; and they shall bring to nothing the pride of Egypt, and all its multitude shall be destroyed. ¹³ I will destroy also all its animals from beside many waters; neither shall the foot of man

trouble them any more, nor the hoofs of animals trouble them. ¹⁴ Then will I make their waters clear, and cause their rivers to run like oil, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁵ When I shall make the land of Egypt desolate and waste, a land destitute of that of which it was once full, when I shall strike all those who dwell therein, then shall they know that I am Yahweh. ¹⁶ This is the lamentation with which they shall lament, with which the daughters of the nations shall lament therewith; over Egypt and over all her multitude shall they lament therewith, says the Lord Yahweh.

Lamentation over Egypt's Supporters

¹⁷ It happened also in the twelfth year, in the fifteenth day of the month, that the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ¹⁸ Son of man, wail for the multitude of Egypt, and cast them down, even her, and the daughters of the famous nations, to the lower parts of the earth, with those who go down into the pit. ¹⁹ Whom do you pass in beauty? Go down, and be laid with the uncircumcised. ²⁰ They shall fall in the midst of those who are slain by the sword, she is delivered to the sword; draw her away and all her multitudes. ²¹ The strong among the

32:10 The prophesied judgment upon Egypt [a symbol of the world] included that the sun was to be made dark, and people would be “amazed” at her. This is just what happened when Christ was crucified (Is. 52:14). The judgment of Egypt / the world had some elements of fulfilment in the ‘judgment of this world’ which occurred through the cross (Jn. 12:31). The crucifixion of Christ declared all worldly strength to now be nothing compared to the power of God’s love toward us.

32:18 *Cast them down* – This was the power of the word of prophecy. What Ezekiel said on God’s behalf was as good as done.

mighty shall speak to him out of the midst of Sheol with those who help him. They are gone down, they lie still, even the uncircumcised, slain by the sword. ²² Assyria is there and all her company; her graves are all around her; all of them slain, fallen by the sword. ²³ Their graves are set in the uttermost parts of the pit, and her company is around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who caused terror in the land of the living. ²⁴ There is Elam and all her multitude around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who are gone down uncircumcised into the lower parts of the earth. They who caused their terror in the land of the living have now borne their shame with those who go down to the pit. ²⁵ They have set her a bed in the midst of the slain with all her multitude; her graves are around her; all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for their terror was caused in

the land of the living, and they have borne their shame with those who go down to the pit. He is put in the midst of those who are slain. ²⁶ There is Meshech, Tubal, and all their multitude; their graves are around them; all of them uncircumcised, slain by the sword; for they caused their terror in the land of the living. ²⁷ They shall not lie with the mighty who are fallen of the uncircumcised who are gone down to Sheol with their weapons of war, and have laid their swords under their heads, and their iniquities are on their bones; for they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living. ²⁸ But you shall be broken in the midst of the uncircumcised, and shall lie with those who are slain by the sword. ²⁹ There is Edom, her kings and all her princes, who in their might are laid with those who are slain by the sword. They shall lie with the uncircumcised, and with those who go down

32:26 Meshech, Tubal – At the time of this prophecy, these nations had already passed off the scene. They were Scythian tribes who were much feared in the area. Yet we read of them in 38:2 as coming to invade Israel and being destroyed by dramatic Divine intervention. This seems to be a prophecy of the last days, suggesting that the political and military situation around Israel at the time of the Babylonian invasion will be seen again in the last days. The current trends in the Middle East show this coming about. Another possibility is that the sequence of events intended in chapters 37-40 simply didn't happen because of Israel's failure [restoration of Israel, invasion by the Scythian tribes, the destruction of that invasion by Divine intervention and the establishment of God's Kingdom based around a renewed temple in Jerusalem]. The Scythian tribes like Meshech and Tubal passed off the scene, but not in the dramatic way envisaged in chapter 38; instead the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days.

32:26-30 gives a picture of the mighty warriors of the nations around, lying in their graves. This refers to the custom of burying warriors with their weapons, and resting the head of the corpse upon its sword. Yet this is a description of Sheol, the word translated in some Bibles “hell” – the grave. These mighty men lying still in hell (i.e. their graves) hardly supports the idea that hell is a place of fire. Physical things (e.g. swords) go to the same “hell” as people, showing that hell is not an arena of spiritual

to the pit.³⁰ There are the princes of the north, all of them, and all the Sidonians, who are gone down with the slain; in the terror which they caused by their might they are put to shame. They lie uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, and bear their shame with those who go down to the pit.³¹ When Pharaoh sees them, he will take comfort in his hordes. Pharaoh and all his army will die violently, says the Lord Yahweh.³² For I have put his terror in the land of the living; and he shall be laid in the midst of the uncircumcised with those who are slain by the sword, even Pharaoh and all his hordes, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 33 Oct. 7

The Responsibilities of Ezekiel the Watchman

The word of Yahweh came to me saying,² Son of man, speak to the children of your people and tell them, When I bring the sword on a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them and set him for their watchman;³ if, when he sees the sword come on the land, he blows the trumpet and warns the

torment. Note how Sheol is often paralleled in this chapter with “the pit”, clearly referring here to the mass graves of the once mighty soldiers.

33:4 *If the sword come* – Yet the context speaks as if the sword will surely come. But if the watchman warns the people, there arises an element of possibility – “*if the sword come*”. The implication is that God is willing to change the intended judgment if people repent (:11), as happened with Nineveh.

33:8 If we do not warn the wicked of their way, “his blood will I require at your hand”. Some will have to give an account on judgment day of their specific lack of witness. Yet we can live day after day, saying nothing to our fellows, as if it doesn’t really matter, because nobody notices... Not only our salvation but that of others can be limited by our exercise of freewill. If others’ salvation is not to some extent dependent upon our preaching, then there is no meaning to the very concept of preaching.

people;⁴ then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and doesn’t take warning, if the sword come and take him away, his blood shall be on his own head.⁵ He heard the sound of the trumpet and didn’t take warning; his blood shall be on him; whereas if he had taken warning, he would have delivered his soul.⁶ But if the watchman sees the sword come and doesn’t blow the trumpet and the people aren’t warned, and the sword comes and takes away any person from among them; he is taken away in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at the watchman’s hand.⁷ So you, son of man, I have set you a watchman to the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at My mouth, and give them warning from Me.⁸ When I tell the wicked, O wicked man, you shall surely die, if you don’t speak to warn the wicked from his way; that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at your hand.⁹ Nevertheless, if you warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, and he doesn’t turn from his way, he shall die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your soul.¹⁰ You, son of man, tell the house of Israel: Thus

you speak, saying, Our transgressions and our sins are on us, and we pine away in them; how then can we live? ¹¹ Tell them, As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways; for why will you die, house of Israel? ¹² You, son of man, tell the children of your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not save him in the day of his disobedience; and as for the wickedness of the wicked, he shall not fall thereby in the day that he turns from his wickedness; neither shall he who is righteous be able to live thereby in the day that he sins. ¹³ When I tell the righteous that he shall surely live; if he trust to his righteousness and commit iniquity, none of his righteous deeds shall be remembered; but in his iniquity that he has committed, therein shall he die. ¹⁴ Again, when I say to the wicked, You shall surely die; if he turn from his sin and do that which is lawful and right; ¹⁵ if the wicked restore the pledge, give again that which he had taken by robbery, walk in the statutes of life, committing no

iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. ¹⁶ None of his sins that he has committed shall be remembered against him. He has done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live. ¹⁷ Yet the children of your people say, The way of the Lord is not fair; but as for them, their way is not fair. ¹⁸ When the righteous turns from his righteousness and commits iniquity, he shall even die therein. ¹⁹ When the wicked turns from his wickedness and does that which is lawful and right, he shall live thereby. ²⁰ Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. House of Israel, I will judge every one of you after his ways.

Explanation of Judah's Demise

²¹ It happened in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, in the fifth day of the month, that one who had escaped out of Jerusalem came to me saying, The city has been struck. ²² Now the hand of the Yahweh had been upon me the evening before the fugitive came; and He had opened my mouth by the time the man came to me in the morning. So my mouth was opened, and I was no

33:10, 11 Like so many an addict, so many a Christian, like Judas and Achan, like you and me, they had the sense of desire to come back to God, the detailed realization of wherein they had failed; but not enough real strength of purpose to seriously repent.

33:13 *If he trust to his righteousness and commit iniquity* – This is a warning to the righteous, that they will fall into sin if they trust their own righteousness. Good living believers fall into sin once they start trusting their righteousness. As Paul explains throughout Romans 1-8, we are saved by our faith in righteousness being imputed to us. God has arranged our salvation this way so that our belief in the fact that we aren't righteous (for all our good living appearances compared to the surrounding world) will keep us humbly trusting in *His* righteousness being counted to us – and this is the mentality which leads us to not sin in practice.

longer dumb.²³ The word of Yahweh came to me saying,²⁴ Son of man, they who inhabit those waste places in the land of Israel speak, saying, ‘Abraham was one, and he inherited the land; but we are many; the land is given us for inheritance’.²⁵ Therefore tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: You eat with the blood, and lift up your eyes to your idols, and shed blood. Shall you possess the land?²⁶ You rely on your sword, you work abomination, and every one of you defiles his neighbour’s wife. Shall you possess the land?²⁷ You shall tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: As I live, surely those who are in the waste places shall fall by the sword; and him who is in the open field will I give to the animals to be devoured; and those who are in the strongholds and in the caves shall die of the pestilence.²⁸ I will make the land a desolation and an astonishment; the pride of her power shall cease and the mountains of Israel shall be desolate, so that none shall pass through.²⁹ Then shall they know that I am Yahweh, when I

have made the land a desolation and an astonishment, because of all their abominations which they have committed.³⁰ As for you, son of man, the children of your people talk of you by the walls and in the doors of the houses, speaking one to another, each one to his brother saying, Please come and hear what is the word that comes forth from Yahweh.³¹ They come to you as the people come, and they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but don’t do them; for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goes after their gain.³² Behold, you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they don’t do them.³³ When this comes to pass (behold, it comes!), then shall they know that a prophet has been among them.

CHAPTER 34 Oct. 8

Woe to the Shepherds of Israel

The word of Yahweh came to me saying,² Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel,

33:31 Ezekiel’s audiences loved to come and hear God’s words at his mouth – and in response to them, “with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goes after their gain”. Materialism stopped them from really accepting those words, even though they theoretically assented to their inspiration. Only in their condemnation would they know “that a prophet *has* been among them” (33). And so there is a chilling choice: to *really* accept the power of inspiration now; or have to learn it through the process of condemnation when judgment comes.

33:32 *They hear your words* – God prophesied that those to whom Ezekiel witnessed would not hear His words (3:11). And yet they came and sat before him, desiring to hear God’s word. They wanted to hear, they heard, and yet they didn’t really hear. The prophets were like buskers singing songs in the subway, which we may listen to with half an ear, even admire them for a few moments, and then walk on in our busy lives. But the prophets were speaking forth the words of passionate love of God Almighty for His people...

prophesy and tell them, even to the shepherds, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves! Shouldn't the shepherds feed the sheep? ³ You eat the fat and you clothe yourself with the wool, you kill the fatlings; but you don't feed the sheep. ⁴ You haven't strengthened the diseased, neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken, neither have you caused to return that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost; but with force and with rigour you have ruled over them. ⁵ They were scattered because there was no shepherd; and they became food to all the animals of the field and were scattered. ⁶ My sheep

wandered through all the mountains and on every high hill. Yes, My sheep were scattered on all the surface of the earth; and there was none who searched or sought them. ⁷ Therefore you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh: ⁸ As I live, says the Lord Yahweh, surely because My sheep became a prey, and My sheep became food to all the animals of the field, because there was no shepherd, neither did My shepherds search for My sheep, but the shepherds fed themselves, and didn't feed My sheep; ⁹ therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of Yahweh. ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against the shepherds; and I will require My sheep at their hand, and cause them to cease from feeding the

34:4 Cause to return – The great restoration prophecies of Jer. 23:1-8 and Ez. 34:1-31 speak of the flock of Israel going astray due to bad shepherds, being saved by the good shepherd, being delivered / gathered, and then returning to the land. The Hebrew word *shub* means both ‘to return’ in the sense of returning to the land, and ‘turning’ in the sense of repentance (see :4,16 and frequently in Ezekiel). But these restoration prophecies are packed with allusion to the great shepherd Psalm 23. Here, David says that the good shepherd ‘causes me to repent’ (Ps. 23:3 Heb.). This is matched in Ez. 36 by the idea of God giving Israel a new heart. And the parable of the good shepherd (Lk. 15:1-7) brings together Ps. 23 and also these restoration passages, in speaking of how He goes out and finds the lost sheep and brings it back home. The sheep is found, and accepts being found – there is no actual mention of repentance. Thus the ‘return’ of Judah to their land was intended as a work of God – He would make them return, He would give them repentance [note how Acts 11:18 speaks of God granting men repentance]. This is all such wonderful grace. The even more incredible thing, though, is that Judah refused to accept this grace; they didn’t ‘return’ to the land because they saw no need to ‘return’ to God. They willingly forgot that they were only in Babylon because of their sins; to ‘return’ to the land was a ‘return’ to God, which He had enabled. But they were like the lost sheep refusing to sit on the shepherd’s shoulders, preferring to sit in a hole and die... and this is the warning to us. For truly, absolutely all things have been prepared for us to enter the Kingdom. It’s only those who don’t want to be there who won’t be.

34:5 Scattered because there was no shepherd – Good leadership produces unity; disunity amongst the sheep is therefore a reflection of poor shepherding. They scatter because they aren’t fed by the shepherds and go elsewhere for food (9).

sheep; neither shall the shepherds feed themselves any more; and I will deliver My sheep from their mouth, that they may not be food for them.

¹¹ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I Myself, even I, will search for My sheep, and will seek them out.

¹² As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered abroad, so will I seek out My sheep; and I will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

¹³ I will bring them out from the peoples, and gather them from the countries, and will bring them into their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

¹⁴ I will feed them with good pasture; on the mountains of the height of Israel shall their fold be. There shall they lie down in a good fold; on fat pasture shall they feed on the mountains of Israel.

¹⁵ I Myself will be the shepherd of My sheep, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord Yahweh.

¹⁶ I will seek that which was lost, and will cause to return that which was driven away. I will bind

up that which was broken and will strengthen that which was sick: but the fat and the strong I will destroy; I will feed them in justice.

¹⁷ As for you, O My flock, thus says the Lord Yahweh: See, I judge between sheep and sheep, the rams and the male goats.

¹⁸ Does it seem a small thing to you to have fed on the good pasture, but you must tread down with your feet the remainder of your pasture; to have drunk of the clear waters, but you must foul what remains with your feet?

¹⁹ As for My sheep, they eat that which you have trodden with your feet, and they drink that which you have fouled with your feet.

²⁰ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh to them: Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat sheep and the lean sheep.

²¹ Because you thrust with side and with shoulder and push all the diseased with your horns, until you have scattered them abroad;

²² therefore will I save My flock, and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep.

²³ I will set up one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them, even My servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.

34:11 I Myself, even I, will search for My sheep – The passage in John 10 where Jesus speaks of Himself as the good shepherd who seeks out God's sheep is full of allusion to this chapter. When He says “I and My Father are one” (Jn. 10:30), He is speaking in this context of His being the shepherd on God's behalf. This principle of agency, of operating on behalf of God in His Name, doesn't mean that Jesus was God Himself in person, but rather that He manifested the Father, so that God's shepherding was achieved through the person and work of Jesus.

34:20 Between the fat sheep and the lean sheep – The shepherds are here likened to fat sheep. Shepherds or pastors are themselves sheep and in that sense no different from those they are shepherding. This should result in an appropriate humility in all pastoral work.

24 I, Yahweh, will be their God, and My servant David prince among them; I, Yahweh, have spoken it. 25 I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause dangerous animals to cease out of the land; they shall dwell securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. 26 I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing; I will cause the shower to come down in its season, there shall be showers of blessing. 27 The tree of the field shall yield its fruit and the earth shall yield its increase and they shall be secure in their land; and they shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them out of the hand of those who made slaves of them. 28 They shall no more be a prey to the nations, neither shall the animals of the earth devour them; but they shall dwell securely, and none shall make them afraid. 29 I will raise up to them a plantation for renown, and they shall be no more consumed with famine in the land, neither bear the shame of the nations any more. 30 They shall know that I, Yahweh their God, am with them; and that they, the house of Israel, are My people, says the Lord Yahweh. 31 You My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, are men, and I am your God, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 35 Oct. 9

More against Edom

Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, set your face against Mount Seir and prophesy against it ³ and tell it, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Mount Seir, and I will stretch out My hand against you, I will make you a desolation and an astonishment. ⁴ I will lay your cities waste and you shall be desolate; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ⁵ Because you have had a perpetual hatred, and have given over the children of Israel to the power of the sword in the time of their calamity, at the time when the punishment of their iniquity had an end; ⁶ therefore, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I will prepare you for blood, and blood shall pursue you. Since you have not hated blood, therefore blood shall pursue you. ⁷ Thus will I make Mount Seir an astonishment and a desolation; and I will cut off from it the one who passes through and the one who returns. ⁸ I will fill its mountains with its slain. In your hills and in your valleys and in all your watercourses shall they fall who are slain with the sword. ⁹ I will make you a perpetual desolation, and your cities shall not be inhabited; and you shall know that

35:5 “Esau is Edom” (Gen. 25:30; 36:1). The reference here is to the hatred between Jacob and Esau which played itself out between their descendants. Bitter argument between family members of one generation can continue over many generations; one aspect of the sin of division and enmity is that it tends to continue after our time, or after the protagonists have resolved with each other, as Jacob and Esau did. And each generation, according to this prophecy, is held responsible for their part in any hatred against their brother.

I am Yahweh.¹⁰ Because you have said, These two nations and these two countries shall be mine, and we will possess it; whereas Yahweh was there.¹¹ Therefore, as I live, says the Lord Yahweh, I will do according to your anger, and according to your envy which you have shown out of your hatred against them; and I will make Myself known among them, when I shall judge you.¹² You shall know that I, Yahweh, have heard all your insults which you have spoken against the mountains of Israel, saying, They are laid desolate, they have been given us to devour.¹³ You have magnified yourselves against Me with your mouth, and have multiplied your words against Me, which I have heard.¹⁴ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: When the whole earth rejoices, I will make you desolate.¹⁵ As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel, because it was desolate, so will I do to you. You shall be desolate, Mount Seir, and all Edom, even all of it; and they shall know that I am Yahweh.

CHAPTER 36 Oct. 10

A Prophecy about the Mountains of Israel

You, son of man, prophesy to the mountains of Israel and say, You

mountains of Israel, hear the word of Yahweh.² Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because the enemy has said against you, Aha! and, The ancient high places are ours in possession;³ therefore prophesy and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh. Because, even because they have made you desolate and swallowed you up on every side, so that you became the possession of the rest of the nations, and you became the talk and evil gossip of the nations;⁴ therefore, you mountains of Israel, hear the word of the Lord Yahweh. Thus says the Lord Yahweh to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys, to the desolate wastes and to the cities that are forsaken, which are become a prey and a mockery to the other nations that are all around;⁵ therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Surely in the fire of My jealousy have I spoken against the residue of the nations, and against all Edom, that have appointed My land to themselves for a possession with the joy of all their heart, with despite of soul, to cast it out for a prey.⁶ Therefore prophesy concerning the land of Israel, and tell to the mountains and to the hills, to the rivers and to the valleys, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I have spoken in My zeal and in My wrath, because

35:10 The two nations refer to Israel [the ten tribes] and Judah [the two tribe kingdom]. As God “was there” in the land of Israel in their past, so when the Kingdom is re-established it will again be known that “Yahweh is there” (48:35). The future Kingdom on God on earth will be a re-establishment of God’s Kingdom as it earlier was in the form of Israel and Judah.

35:12 *I, Yahweh, have heard* – The extent of God’s knowledge is amazing. He consciously is aware of every thought, intention, implication and actual spoken word of every single person in the world, including Gentiles like Edom.

you have borne the shame of the nations: ⁷ therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: I have sworn saying, Surely the nations that are around you, they shall bear their shame. ⁸ But you, mountains of Israel, you shall shoot forth your branches and yield your fruit to My people Israel; for they are at hand to return. ⁹ For, behold, I am for you, and I will turn unto you, and you shall be cultivated and sown; ¹⁰ and I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, even all of it; and the cities shall be inhabited, and the waste places shall be built. ¹¹ I will multiply on you man and animal; and they shall increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited after your former manner, and I will do better to you than at your beginnings; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ¹² Yes, I will cause men to

walk on you, even My people Israel; and they shall possess you, and you shall be their inheritance, and you shall no more henceforth bereave them of children. ¹³ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Because they say to you, You are a destroyer of men, and have caused bereavement in your nation; ¹⁴ therefore you shall destroy men no more, neither cause bereavement in your nation any more, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁵ Neither will I let you hear any more the shame of the nations, neither shall you bear the reproach of the peoples any more, neither shall you cause your nation to stumble any more, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁶ Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me saying, ¹⁷ Son of man, when the people of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their way and by their doings.

36:13 *You are a devourer of men* – This prophecy is given to the physical land of Israel. It seems the captives in Babylon didn't want to return after the 70 years because they felt the land itself was somehow evil and would devour them. This is a similar mistake made by Israel in the wilderness, who slandered God's land rather than accepting it was a land of blessing. Being influenced by worldly superstitions and fears can lead God's people to reject the hope of His Kingdom, and prefer to remain in the world rather than taking possession of the good Kingdom prepared for them. But God worked with Judah in their misunderstanding – He promises that from now on, the land will not be like that (:14). This is rather like how in New Testament times, Jesus worked with the wrong ideas people had about demons, and demonstrated that even if this was what they feared, they were actually of no power compared to the inbreaking of God's Kingdom power which was possible for those who believed.

36:15 *Neither shall you cause your nation to stumble any more* – The Jews blamed the high places of the land of Israel for having bereaved them of their children (:13) and having made them stumble; but it was in fact they who had chosen to go up to the high places, build altars there for false gods, and sacrifice their children to them. God doesn't specifically correct them, although He privately explains the real situation to Ezekiel (:17,18); rather He works through that wrong idea, supposing for a moment it were true, but assuring the people that this will no longer be the case – just as Jesus did by using the language of demons when He did healing miracles, without specifically stating the basic truth that demons in fact don't exist.

Their way before Me was as the uncleanness of a woman in her impurity.¹⁸ Therefore I poured out My wrath on them for the blood which they had poured out on the land, and because they had defiled it with their idols;¹⁹ and I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. According to their way and according to their doings I judged them.²⁰ When they came to the nations where they went, they profaned My holy name; in that men said of them, These are the people of Yahweh, and are gone forth out of His land.²¹ But I had respect for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations where they went.²² Therefore tell the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: I don't do this for your sake, house of Israel, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.²³ I will sanctify My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am Yahweh, says the Lord Yahweh, when I shall be sanctified in you before their eyes.²⁴ For I will take you from among the nations, and gather you out of all the

countries, and will bring you into your own land.²⁵ I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you.²⁶ I will also give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh.²⁷ I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you shall keep My laws and do them.²⁸ You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be My people, and I will be your God.²⁹ I will save you from all your uncleanness, and I will call for the grain and will multiply it, and lay no famine on you.³⁰ I will multiply the fruit of the tree and the increase of the field, that you may receive no more the reproach of famine among the nations.³¹ Then you shall remember your evil ways and your doings that were not good; and you shall loathe yourselves in your own sight for your iniquities and for your abominations.³² Not for your sake do I this, says the Lord Yahweh, be it known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, house of Israel.³³ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the day that I cleanse you

36:27 *Cause you to walk in My statutes* – Entering the new covenant which God here proposed to His people involved Him promising to make them be obedient to His ways. We who have entered this same new covenant (Heb. 8:8-13) are likewise party to this same operation of God on human hearts – if we want it.

36:27-29 A new spirit was potentially given to the exiles who returned from Babylon, God put in the heart of men like Nehemiah to revive the work (Neh. 2:12 same Hebrew word). But this didn't force them to be obedient. They chose not to be, and so the promised kingdom blessings of corn etc. were replaced by famines in the times of Nehemiah, Haggai and Malachi.

36:33 This says that although Judah had profaned God's Name in Babylon, yet He

from all your wickedness, I will cause the cities to be inhabited and the waste places shall be built.³⁴ The land that was desolate shall be cultivated whereas it was a desolation in the sight of all who passed by.³⁵ They shall say, This land that was desolate has become like the garden of Eden; and the waste and desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited.³⁶ Then the nations that are left around you shall know that I, Yahweh, have built the ruined places and planted that which was desolate. I, Yahweh, have spoken it, and I will do it.³⁷ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: For this also will I be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them. I will increase them with men like a flock.³⁸ As the flock for sacrifice, as the flock of Jerusalem in her appointed feasts, so shall the wasted cities

be filled with flocks of men; and they shall know that I am Yahweh.

CHAPTER 37 Oct. 11

The Valley of Dry Bones Comes to Life

The hand of Yahweh was on me and He brought me out in the Spirit of Yahweh, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones.² He caused me to pass by them all around: and, there were very many in the open valley; and, they were very dry.³ He said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? I answered, Lord Yahweh, You know.⁴ Again He said to me, Prophesy over these bones, and tell them, you dry bones, hear the word of Yahweh.⁵ Thus says the Lord Yahweh to these bones: I will cause spirit to enter into you, and you shall live.⁶ I will lay

would sprinkle their hearts by grace and make the new covenant with them; and then, “In the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited”. But in recorded history, there was no apparent connection between Judah’s forgiveness and the rebuilding of the land. God enabled the exiles to return and rebuild the cities even though they didn’t repent; such was His grace and urgent desire to give His spiritually weak people the Kingdom He had potentially prepared for them. We can take strong encouragement from this.

37:5 *I will cause spirit to enter into you* – This is an amplification of 36:27, where God explained His plan to make a new covenant with the returning exiles from Babylon. His Spirit would enter them and He would “cause” them to be obedient to His covenant, and they would return to the land and rebuild it. The dry bones represent Israel and Judah in their captivity, spiritually dead and thinking they were too far gone for God to revive them. God’s plan was to revive them and return them to His land and for them to rebuild God’s Kingdom there. But only a few returned from exile, and they were more interested in building up their own kingdom and houses than God’s Kingdom and house. The return from exile therefore featured some small fulfilment of the potential which is outlined as possible in chapters 36 and 37. The return of Israel to their land, arising as it were out of the death camps of Europe to rebuild and make fertile the neglected land of Israel, was likewise a small fulfilment of these prophecies – perhaps in the 1940s and 50s, as at the return from exile, there could also have been the fuller fulfilment of this chapter. But again, there wasn’t the all important turning to God in spirit and truth. It seems we must await yet further persecution to lead

sinews on you, and will bring up flesh on you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am Yahweh. ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded. As I prophesied, there was a noise, and an earthquake; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. ⁸ I saw, and, there were sinews on them, and flesh came up, and skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them. ⁹ Then He said to me, Prophesy to the wind, prophesy, son of man, and tell the wind, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Come from the four winds, breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live. ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up on their feet, an exceedingly great army. ¹¹ Then He said to me, Son of man, these bones are the

whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are totally cut off. ¹² Therefore prophesy and tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. ¹³ You shall know that I am Yahweh, when I have opened your graves, My people, and caused you to come up out of your graves. ¹⁴ I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; and you shall know that I, Yahweh, have spoken it and performed it, says Yahweh.

Unity and United Rule

¹⁵ The word of Yahweh came again to me, saying, ¹⁶ You, son of man, take one stick and write on it, For Judah, and for the children of Israel his

Israel to return to their land in repentance and faith in Christ, and then the promised Kingdom conditions will come about.

37:7 The sound of the cherubim Angels which Ezekiel heard was like the noise of an earthquake (3:12). Those two Hebrew words, for “noise” and “earthquake”, occur here in 37:7, when he hears the “noise” of “shaking” or earthquake as the bones of Israel in exile come together by the spirit / Angelic operation of Yahweh. The Spirit came from four places (:9) – just as there were four cherubim. As the sound of the cherubim was as of a great army (1:24), so revived Israel stood up as a great army (:10). The Angel cherubim would work with God’s disillusioned and broken people to revive them, so that they would become like the guardian Angels of Israel above them. The point was that the Angel cherubim system which Ezekiel had seen at work amongst the captives was able to gather them together, and give life to the nation. And yet that didn’t happen to those exiles – because they didn’t walk in step with the spirit.

The Hebrew word for “noise” here is the same word used in Ezra 1:1 about the “proclamation” of Cyrus for Judah to return to the land. Most of God’s people didn’t return; the majority preferred to stay in Babylon. Therefore the prophecy was deferred in fulfilment until our times; the tragedy is that so much was potentially enabled at the time of Cyrus’ decree, and Judah made such little use of it.

37:11 These were the very sentiments of Jeremiah in Lamentations, and those who wept by the waters of Babylon when they remembered Zion.

companions. Then take another stick and write on it, For Joseph, the stick of Ephraim, and for all the house of Israel his companions. ¹⁷ Join them yourself one to another into one stick, that they may become one in your hand. ¹⁸ When the children of your people shall speak to you saying, Will you not show us what you mean by these? ¹⁹ tell them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his companions; and I will put them with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in My hand. ²⁰ The sticks whereon you write shall be in your hand before their eyes. ²¹ Say to them, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I will take the children of Israel from among the nations where they are gone, and will gather them on every side and bring them into their own land. ²² I will make them one nation in the land on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all; and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all. ²³ Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will save them out of all their dwelling places in which they have sinned and will cleanse them. So shall they be My people, and I will be their God. ²⁴ My servant David shall be king

over them; and they all shall have one shepherd. They shall also walk in My ordinances and observe My statutes and do them. ²⁵ They shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, in which your fathers lived; and they shall dwell therein, they and their children and their children's children, forever: and David My servant shall be their prince for ever. ²⁶ Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them. It shall be an everlasting covenant with them; and I will place them and multiply them and will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. ²⁷ My tent also shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. ²⁸ The nations shall know that I am Yahweh who sanctifies Israel, when My sanctuary shall be in their midst forevermore.

CHAPTER 38 Oct. 12

Against Gog, of the Land of Magog

The word of Yahweh came to me saying, ² Son of man, set your face toward Gog, of the land of Magog, the chief prince of Meshech and Tubal, and prophesy against him ³ and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. ⁴ I will turn you around, put hooks into your jaws, and will bring you out with all your army, horses and horsemen, all of them clothed in full armour, a great company with buckler and shield, all of them han-

38:2 Gog is an individual, not a nation; he is portrayed as the singular leader of a confederacy of Scythian tribes, several of whom have been mentioned previously in Ezekiel and were known at the time.

dling swords; ⁵ Persia, Ethiopia and Libya with them, all of them with shield and helmet; ⁶ Gomer, and all his hordes; the house of Togarmah in the uttermost parts of the north and all his hordes; even many peoples with you. ⁷ Be prepared, yes, prepare yourself, you, and all your companies who are assembled to you, and be a guard to them. ⁸ After many days you shall be visited. In the latter years you shall come into the land that is brought back from the sword, that is gathered out of many peoples, on the mountains of Israel, which have been a continual waste; but it is brought forth out of the peoples, and they shall dwell securely all of them. ⁹ You shall ascend, you shall come like a storm, you shall be like a cloud to cover the land, you, and

all your hordes, and many peoples with you. ¹⁰ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: It shall happen in that day, that thoughts shall come into your mind, and you shall devise an evil plan. ¹¹ You shall say, I will go up to the land of unwalled villages; I will go to those who are at rest, who dwell securely, all of them dwelling without walls and having neither bars nor gates; ¹² to take the spoil and to take the wealth; to turn your hand against the waste places that are now inhabited, and against the people who are gathered out of the nations, who have gotten livestock and goods, who dwell in the middle of the land. ¹³ Sheba, Dedan and the merchants of Tarshish with all her young lions, shall say to you: Have you come to take the spoil? Have you assembled

38:5 Persia, Ethiopia and Libya – These areas don't exactly correspond to the areas bearing those names today. But clearly they refer to a group of people from what is now Iran and north Africa.

38:8 The invasion is to come against Israel after the Jews have returned to the land from many nations and are dwelling there confidently and in material prosperity (:11,12). In the prophetic schema which God had made potentially possible, the exiles were intended to return in faith and repentance, rebuild the land and temple and receive great material blessing from God. If that had happened, there would then have been this invasion outlined in chapter 38, dramatic Divine intervention (chapter 39) and then the re-establishment of God's Kingdom based around a rebuilt temple and the returned glory of God in Zion as detailed in chapters 40-48. But Israel failed in all this, and so the prophecies will have a re-scheduled and re-applied fulfilment in the last days before Christ returns. The nations and tribes mentioned are from the areas today occupied by the Islamic enemies of Israel. The fact there is a nation of Jews in Israel is also an encouragement that the Middle East situation is moving towards the time of fulfilment of this prophecy.

38:11 This dwelling securely sounds like the time of Messiah's Kingdom described in 37:24-27. Psalm 2 predicts a scenario where Christ is King in Jerusalem, surrounded by His enemies, whom He then goes out and destroys. There is no suggestion in Ezekiel 38 that the invasion is successful.

38:13 “Young lions” is a term elsewhere used in Ezekiel to refer to leaders or princes (19:2,6; 32:2). The Hebrew of this verse could imply that these three nations notice that the seven others are going to take spoil from Israel, and decide to join in with

your company to take the wealth? To carry away silver and gold, to take away livestock and goods, to take great spoil? ¹⁴ Therefore, son of man, prophesy and tell Gog, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In that day when My people Israel dwells securely, shall you not know it? ¹⁵ You shall come from your place out of the uttermost parts of the north, you, and many peoples with you, all of them riding on horses, a great company and a mighty army; ¹⁶ and you shall come up against My people Israel, as a cloud to cover the land. It shall happen in the latter days that I will bring you against My land, that the nations may know Me, when I shall be sanctified in you, Gog, before their eyes. ¹⁷ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Are you he of whom I spoke in old time by My servants the prophets of Israel, who prophesied in those days for many years that I would bring you against them? ¹⁸ It shall happen in that day, when Gog shall come against the land of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh, that My wrath shall come up into My nostrils. ¹⁹ For in My anger and in the fire of My wrath have I spoken, Surely in that day there shall be a great shaking in the land of Israel; ²⁰ so that the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the

them. This would bring the number of Israel's invaders in this prophecy to ten – which is the number of horns of the beast which desecrates the land of Israel in the last days, and the number of surrounding nations who attack Israel according to Psalm 83.

39:1 The emphasis of the prophecies is upon the individual leader of the confederacy. It seems there will be one specific, charismatic anti-Christ figure who leads the world's opposition to Christ in the last days.

39:3 This speaks of the failure of military technology – a scenario we can well imagine in our times.

animals of the field and all creeping things which creep on the earth, and all the men who are on the surface of the earth, shall shake at My presence. The mountains shall be thrown down, the steep places shall fall and every wall shall fall to the ground. ²¹ I will call to all My mountains for a sword against him, says the Lord Yahweh. Every man's sword shall be against his brother. ²² With pestilence and with blood will I enter into judgment with him; and I will rain on him and on his hordes and on the many peoples who are with him, an overflowing shower, and great hailstones, fire, and sulphur. ²³ I will magnify Myself, and sanctify Myself, and I will make Myself known in the eyes of many nations; and they shall know that I am Yahweh.

CHAPTER 39 Oct. 13

The Destruction of Gog

You, son of man, prophesy against Gog and say, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Behold, I am against you, Gog, chief prince of Meshech, and Tubal: ² and I will turn you around, and will lead you on, and will cause you to come up from the uttermost parts of the north; and I will bring you on the mountains of Israel; ³ and I will strike your bow out of your

left hand, and will cause your arrows to fall out of your right hand. ⁴ You shall fall on the mountains of Israel, you, and all your hordes, and the peoples who are with you. I will give you to the birds of prey of every sort, and to the animals of the field to be devoured. ⁵ You shall fall on the open field; for I have spoken it, says the Lord Yahweh. ⁶ I will send a fire on Magog, and on those who dwell confidently along the sea coasts; and they shall know that I am Yahweh. ⁷ My holy name will I make known in the midst of My people Israel; neither will I allow My holy name to be profaned any more: and the nations shall know that I am Yahweh, the Holy One in Israel. ⁸ Behold, it has come, and it is done, says the Lord Yahweh; this is the day about which I have spoken. ⁹ Those who dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall make fires of the weapons and burn them, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the war clubs, and the spears, and they shall make fires of them seven years. ¹⁰ They shall take

no wood out of the field, neither cut down any out of the forests; for they shall make fires of the weapons; and they shall plunder those who plundered them, and rob those who robbed them, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹¹ It shall happen in that day, that I will give to Gog a place for burial in Israel, the valley of those who pass through on the east of the sea; and it shall stop those who pass through. There shall they bury Gog and all his multitude; and they shall call it The valley of Hamon Gog. ¹² Seven months shall the house of Israel be burying them, that they may cleanse the land. ¹³ Yes, all the people of the land shall bury them; and it shall be to them for a renown in the day that I shall be glorified, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁴ After the seven months are over, men will be chosen to travel through the land in order to find and bury those bodies remaining on the ground, so that they can cleanse the land. ¹⁵ They shall go up and down the land; and when anyone sees a man's bone, then shall he set up a sign by it, until the undertakers have

39:4 On the mountains of Israel – Here we see God's grace; because the mountains of Israel were the high places where Israel had built altars to other gods and sacrificed their children to them. But in these very places, God would show Himself strong for His people.

39:6 Those who dwell confidently along the seacoasts – Maybe referring to the Palestinian enemies of Israel dwelling in the Gaza strip, confident because of some international body guaranteeing their safety?

39:9 The burning of wooden weapons and the cleansing of the land from dead bodies (:12 – :16) was likely part of the scenario which was intended by God at the time of the return from exile, but Judah's lack of commitment made this possible scenario not come true; the essence but maybe not the details of the prophecy will be fulfilled in the last days, when God finally intervenes to save His repentant people from their invaders and establish His Kingdom on earth.

buried it in the valley of Hamon Gog.
 16 Hamonah shall also be the name of a city. Thus shall they cleanse the land.
 17 You, son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh: Speak thus to the birds of prey, and to every animal of the field: Assemble yourselves, and come; gather yourselves on every side to My sacrifice that I do sacrifice for you, even a great sacrifice on the mountains of Israel, that you may eat flesh and drink blood.
 18 You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of goats, of bulls, all of them fatlings of Bashan.
 19 You shall eat fat until you be full, and drink blood until you are drunk, of My sacrifice which I have sacrificed for you.
 20 You shall be filled at My table with horses and chariots, with mighty men, and with all men of war, says the Lord Yahweh.
 21 I will set My glory among the nations; and all the nations shall see My judgment that I have executed, and My hand that I have laid on them.
 22 So the house of Israel shall know that I am Yahweh their God, from that day and forward.
 23 The nations shall know that the house of Israel went into captivity for their iniquity; be-

cause they trespassed against Me, and I hid My face from them: so I gave them into the hand of their adversaries, and they fell all of them by the sword.
 24 According to their uncleanness and according to their transgressions did I to them; and I hid My face from them.
 25 Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: Now will I bring back the captivity of Jacob, and have mercy on the whole house of Israel; and I will be jealous for My holy name.
 26 They shall bear their shame, and all their trespasses by which they have trespassed against Me, when they shall dwell securely in their land, and none shall make them afraid;
 27 when I have brought them back from the peoples, and gathered them out of their enemies' lands, and am sanctified in them in the sight of many nations.
 28 They shall know that I am Yahweh their God, in that I caused them to go into captivity among the nations, and have gathered them to their own land; and I will leave none of them any more there;
 29 neither will I hide My face any more from them; for I have poured out My Spirit on the house of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh.

39:17-20 This gathering of the birds of prey at Gog's destruction is alluded to in Rev. 19:17, which draws a parallel between Gog and the confederacy he controls and the latter day false prophet and "the beast" (Rev. 19:19). The confederacy of tribes which bordered Israel spoken of in Ez. 39 therefore become "the beast" of the latter day prophecies. We can therefore expect this "beast" to refer to Israel's neighbouring Islamic enemies in the last days.

39:29 *For I have poured out My Spirit* – Clearly the meaning is "I will pour out My Spirit". Here we have one of many examples of where God speaks of future events as if they've already occurred, so certain is His word toward us (Rom. 4:17). Verse 8 outlined the same principle: "Behold, it has come, and it is done".

CHAPTER 40 Oct. 14***The New Temple Area Described***

In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, in the beginning of the year, in the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after that the city was struck, on that very day, the hand of Yahweh was on me and He brought me there.² In the visions of God brought He me into the land of Israel and set me down on a very high mountain, whereon was as it were the frame of a city on the south.³ He brought me there; and, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of brass, with a line of flax in his hand, and a measuring reed; and he stood in the gate.⁴ The man said to me, Son of man, see with your eyes and hear with your ears, and set your heart on all that I shall show you; for you are brought here with the intent that I may show these things to you: declare all that you see to the people of Israel.⁵ See, a wall on the outside of the house all around, and in the man's hand a measuring reed six cubits long, of a cubit and a hand-

breadth each: so he measured the thickness of the building, one reed; and the height, one reed.⁶ Then he came to the gate which looks toward the east, and went up its steps: and he measured the threshold of the gate, one reed broad; and the other threshold, one reed broad.⁷ Every lodge was one reed long, and one reed broad; and the space between the lodges was five cubits; and the threshold of the gate by the porch of the gate toward the house was one reed.⁸ He measured also the porch of the gate toward the house, one reed.⁹ Then measured he the porch of the gate, eight cubits; and its posts, two cubits; and the porch of the gate was toward the house.¹⁰ The lodges of the gate eastward were three on this side and three on that side; these three were of the same measure: and the posts had the same measure on this side and on that side.¹¹ He measured the breadth of the opening of the gate, ten cubits; and the length of the gate, thirteen cubits;¹² and a border before the lodges of one cubit on this side, and a border of one

40:1 The return of the exiles from Babylon could have led to the re-establishment of God's Kingdom on earth, replete with a Messiah figure and a temple according to the pattern showed to Ezekiel in Ez. 40 – 48. Parts of many of the prophets looked forward to this time, as did the restoration prophecies of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Isaiah 40-66. All of these could have had their fulfilment in the return under Ezra, but this was disabled by the poor response to the call to return. Under Nehemiah and then even in Malachi's time, these Kingdom prophecies could have had their fulfilment, but time and again Judah failed to live up to the necessary preconditions. In all this lies abundant exhortation for us; so much *could* happen but doesn't, because of our failure to live out and fulfil prophecy... instead, like Judah, we tend to assume that the time for fulfilment will inexorably arrive some day, regardless of our effort. The details of the temple are to the micro detail. They were commands rather than predictions, for Judah to fulfil. Ezekiel 40-48 was intended as an architectural record of the 'old' temple upon which a new one was to be reconstructed.

cubit on that side; and the lodges, six cubits on this side, and six cubits on that side. ¹³ He measured the gate from the roof of the one lodge to the roof of the other, a breadth of twenty-five cubits; door against door. ¹⁴ He made also posts, sixty cubits; and the court reached to the posts, around the gate. ¹⁵ From the forefront of the gate at the entrance to the forefront of the inner porch of the gate were fifty cubits. ¹⁶ There were closed windows to the lodges, and to their posts within the gate all around, and likewise to the arches; and windows were around inward; and on each post were palm trees.

The Outer Court of the Temple

¹⁷ Then brought he me into the outer court; and behold, there were rooms and a pavement, made for the court all around: thirty rooms were on the pavement. ¹⁸ The pavement was by the side of the gates, answerable to the length of the gates, even the lower pavement. ¹⁹ Then he measured the breadth from the forefront of the lower gate to the forefront of the inner court outside, one hundred cubits, both on the east and on the north.

The Gate Which Is toward the North

²⁰ The gate of the outer court whose prospect is toward the north, he measured its length and its breadth. ²¹ The lodges of it were three on this side and three on that side; and its posts

and its arches were after the measure of the first gate: its length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits. ²² The windows of it, and its arches, and the palm trees of it, were after the measure of the gate whose prospect is toward the east; and they went up to it by seven steps; and its arches were before them. ²³ There was a gate to the inner court over against the other gate, both on the north and on the east; and he measured from gate to gate one hundred cubits.

The Gate Which Is toward the South

²⁴ He led me toward the south; and behold, a gate toward the south: and he measured its posts and its arches according to these measures. ²⁵ There were windows in it and in its arches all around, like those windows: the length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits. ²⁶ There were seven steps to go up to it, and its arches were before them; and it had palm trees, one on this side, and another on that side, on its posts. ²⁷ There was a gate to the inner court toward the south: and he measured from gate to gate toward the south a hundred cubits.

The Inner Court Gates

²⁸ Then he brought me to the inner court by the south gate: and he measured the south gate according to these measures; ²⁹ and its lodges, and its posts, and its arches, according to

40:29 Nehemiah did his very best to bring the potential Kingdom of God about by urging the people to repentance and conformity to God's will, such was his perception

these measures: and there were windows in it and in its arches all around; it was fifty cubits long, and twenty-five cubits broad.³⁰ There were arches all around, twenty-five cubits long, and five cubits broad.³¹ The arches of it were toward the outer court; and palm trees were on its posts: and the ascent to it had eight steps.³² He brought me into the inner court toward the east: and he measured the gate according to these measures;³³ and its lodges, and its posts, and its arches, according to these measures: and there were windows therein and in its arches all around; it was fifty cubits long, and twenty-five cubits broad.³⁴ The arches of it were toward the outer court; and palm trees were on its posts, on this side, and on that side: and the ascent to it had eight steps.³⁵ He brought me to the north gate: and he measured it according to these measures;³⁶ its lodges, its posts, and its arches: and there were windows therein all around; the length was fifty cubits, and the breadth twenty-five cubits.³⁷ The posts of it were toward the outer court; and palm trees were on its posts, on this side, and on that side: and the ascent to it had eight steps.

The Sacrifice Preparation Rooms

38 A room with its door was by the posts at the gates; there they washed

of what was going on; that the re-establishment of God's Kingdom was being limited by the apathy of his own people. No fewer than 24 times in Ez. 40-48 are we told that the temple was to be built by 'measure' (e.g. 40:3,5,10,21,22,24,28,29); and the same word occurs frequently in describing how Nehemiah gave various groups of Jews their own 'measure' in the work of rebuilding Jerusalem (Neh. 3:11,19,20,22,24,27). See on 48:31.

the burnt offering.³⁹ In the porch of the gate were two tables on this side, and two tables on that side, to kill thereon the burnt offering and the sin offering and the trespass offering.⁴⁰ On the one side outside, as one goes up to the entry of the gate toward the north, were two tables; and on the other side, which belonged to the porch of the gate, were two tables.⁴¹ Four tables were on this side, and four tables on that side, by the side of the gate; eight tables, whereupon they killed the sacrifices.⁴² There were four tables for the burnt offering, of cut stone, a cubit and a half long, and a cubit and a half broad, and one cubit high; whereupon they laid the instruments with which they killed the burnt offering and the sacrifice.⁴³ The hooks, a handbreadth long, were fastened within all around: and on the tables was the flesh of the offering.

The Priests' Rooms

44 Outside of the inner gate were rooms for the singers in the inner court, which was at the side of the north gate; and their prospect was toward the south; one at the side of the east gate having the prospect toward the north.⁴⁵ He said to me, This room, whose prospect is toward the south, is for the priests, the keepers of the duty of the house;⁴⁶ and the

room whose prospect is toward the north is for the priests, the keepers of the charge of the altar: these are the sons of Zadok, who from among the sons of Levi come near to Yahweh to minister to Him.⁴⁷ He measured the court, one hundred cubits long, and a hundred cubits broad, foursquare; and the altar was before the house.

The Temple Porch and Details

48 Then he brought me to the porch of the house, and measured each post of the porch, five cubits on this side, and five cubits on that side: and the breadth of the gate was three cubits on this side, and three cubits on that side.⁴⁹ The length of the porch was twenty cubits, and the breadth eleven cubits; even by the steps by which

they went up to it: and there were pillars by the posts, one on this side, and another on that side.

CHAPTER 41 Oct. 15

Measurements of the Temple Building

He brought me to the temple and measured the doorposts, six cubits broad on the one side, and six cubits broad on the other side, which was the breadth of the structure.² The breadth of the entrance was ten cubits; and the sides of the entrance were five cubits on the one side, and five cubits on the other side: and he measured its length, forty cubits, and the breadth, twenty cubits.³ Then he went inside and measured each post of the entrance, two cubits; and the

40:46 It could have been possible for the Messianic Kingdom to have been established at the time of the restoration, and these temple prophecies would fit perfectly into this context. Thus Ezekiel emphasised that the sons of Zadok were to organize priestly work in the temple (see too 43:19; 44:15; 48:11); Ezra, the leader of the initial restoration, was one of the sons of Zadok (Ezra 7:2). He was in a position to fulfil those prophecies, although the bulk of his brethren seem to have precluded this. Ezra was enabled to beautify the temple (Ezra 7:27), the very same Hebrew word used in Is. 60:7,9,13 about how God would “glorify” His temple with merchandise from throughout the Babylonian empire – all of which was willingly offered by Cyrus and Darius. Ez. 40-48 stress the “gates” dozens of times; and Nehemiah’s account likewise stresses many times the attention he paid to setting up the “gates”, as if he saw his work as fulfilling Ezekiel’s words. 42 speaks of the vessels to be used in the temple with the same Hebrew word used for the temple vessels which were brought out of Babylon back to Judah, in fulfilment of several of Isaiah’s ‘Kingdom’ passages (Ezra 1:6-11; 8:25-33 cp. Is. 52:11; 66:20).

The keepers of the charge – Judah were to keep the charges of God relating to His house. Nehemiah, seeking for Israel’s obedience to Ezekiel’s vision, tried to get them to “keep the charges” (s.w. Neh. 7:3; 12:9,45; 13:20). But soon, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges (Mal. 3:14 s.w.). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God’s Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose even the true faith – because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God’s law, rather than willingly devoting their way of life to the realisation of His vision.

entrance, six cubits; and the breadth of the entrance, seven cubits. ⁴ He measured its length, twenty cubits, and the breadth, twenty cubits, before the temple. He said to me, This is the most holy place. ⁵ Then he measured the wall of the house, six cubits; and the breadth of every side room, four cubits, all around the house on every side. ⁶ The side rooms were in three floors, one over another, and thirty on each floor. The outer wall on each floor was thinner than on the floor below, so that the rooms could rest on the wall without being anchored into it. ⁷ The walls of the house, when seen from the outside, seemed to have the same thickness all the way to the top. Against the house's outer wall, on the outside of the rooms, two wide stairways were built, so that it was possible to go from the lower story to the middle and the upper stories. ⁸ I saw also that the house had a raised base all around: the foundations of the side rooms were a full reed of six great cubits. ⁹ The thickness of the wall, which was for the side rooms, on the outside, was five cubits: and that which was left was the place of the side rooms that belonged to the house. ¹⁰ Between the rooms was a breadth of twenty cubits around the house on every side. ¹¹ The doors of the side rooms were toward the

place that was left, one door toward the north, and another door toward the south: and the breadth of the free space that was left was five cubits all around. ¹² The building that was before the separate place at the side toward the west was seventy cubits broad; and the wall of the building was five cubits thick all around, and its length ninety cubits. ¹³ So he measured the house, one hundred cubits long; and the separate place, and the building, with its walls, one hundred cubits long; ¹⁴ also the breadth of the face of the house, and of the separate place toward the east, one hundred cubits. ¹⁵ He measured the length of the building before the separate place which was at its back, and its galleries on the one side and on the other side, one hundred cubits; and the inner temple, and the porches of the court; ¹⁶ the thresholds, and the closed windows, and the galleries around on their three stories, over against the threshold, with wood ceilings all around, and from the ground up to the windows, (now the windows were covered), ¹⁷ to the space above the door, even to the inner house, and outside, and by all the wall all around inside and outside, by measure. ¹⁸ It was made with cherubim and palm trees; and a palm tree was between cherub and cherub, and each cherub had two fac-

41:5 These rooms around the temple were in Christ's mind when He spoke of how in God's house or temple, there are many rooms; and He has prepared one for each of us by His death on the cross (Jn. 14:2). It could be that He understood the temple as a spiritual house, and that the vision of 40-48 was going to be fulfilled in a more abstract, spiritual manner.

41:8 *A full reed of six great cubits* – See on 45:1.

es; ¹⁹ so that there was the face of a man toward the palm tree on the one side, and the face of a young lion toward the palm tree on the other side. Thus was it made through all the house all around: ²⁰ from the ground to above the door were cherubim and palm trees made: thus was the wall of the temple. ²¹ As for the temple, the door posts were squared; and as for the face of the sanctuary, the appearance of it was as the appearance of the temple. ²² The altar was of wood, three cubits high, and its length two cubits; and its corners, and its length, and its walls, were of wood: and he said to me, This is the table that is before Yahweh. ²³ The temple and the sanctuary had two doors. ²⁴ The doors had two leaves apiece, two turning leaves: two leaves for the one door, and two leaves for the other. ²⁵ There were made on them, on the doors of the temple, cherubim and palm trees, like as were made on the walls; and there was a threshold of wood on the face of the porch outside. ²⁶ There were closed windows and palm trees on the one side and on the other side, on the sides of the

porch: thus were the side rooms of the house, and the thresholds.

CHAPTER 42 Oct. 16

More on the Priests' Rooms

Then he brought me forth into the outer court, the way toward the north: and he brought me into the room that was opposite the separate place, and which was opposite the building toward the north. ² The length of the building whose door faced north was a hundred cubits, and the breadth was fifty cubits. ³ Over against the twenty cubits which belonged to the inner court, and over against the pavement which belonged to the outer court, was gallery against gallery in the third story. ⁴ Before the rooms was a walk of ten cubits' breadth inward, a way of one cubit; and their doors were toward the north. ⁵ Now the upper rooms were shorter; for the galleries took away from these, more than from the lower and the middle, in the building. ⁶ For they were in three stories, and they had no pillars like the pillars of the courts. Thus the upper chambers were set back from the

41:26 There are many links between Solomon's temple and that described by Ezekiel. The repeated stress on the cherubim / palm tree decor in both the records of Solomon's temple and also Ezekiel's encourages the idea that the prophesied temple was to be seen as a re-establishment of Solomon's (1 Kings 6:29,32,35; 7:36 cp. Ez. 40:16,22,26,31,34,37; 41:18-20, 25,26). There were "thick planks" upon the porch of Solomon's temple; and the same word is only used elsewhere in describing how this would feature in Ezekiel's temple too (1 Kings 7:6 cp. Ez. 41:25,26). Even the "windows of narrow lights" (1 Kings 6:4) were to be replicated (Ez. 40:16; 41:16,26). Solomon's system of "chambers" was likewise copied (1 Kings 6:5,8,16 cp. Ez. 41:5-11 same Hebrew word). The glory of Yahweh was to fill Ezekiel's temple as it had done Solomon's (Ez. 43:5 cp. 1 Kings 8:10). Both temples were to be ready for operation on "the eighth day" after their consecration (Ez. 43:27 cp. 1 Kings 8:66). Ezekiel's temple was to be of a similar size to that of Solomon's; see on 45:1.

ground more than the lower and the middle ones.⁷ The wall that was outside by the side of the rooms, toward the outer court before the rooms, its length was fifty cubits.⁸ For the length of the rooms that were in the outer court was fifty cubits: and see, before the temple were one hundred cubits.⁹ From under these rooms was the entry on the east side, as one goes into them from the outer court.¹⁰ In the thickness of the wall of the court toward the east, before the separate place, and before the building, there were rooms.¹¹ The way before them was like the appearance of the way of the rooms which were toward the north; according to their length so was their breadth: and all their exits were both according to their fashions, and according to their doors.¹² According to the doors of the rooms that were toward the south was a door at the head of the way, even the way directly before the wall toward the east, as one enters into them.¹³ Then he said to me, The north rooms and the south rooms, which are before the separate place, they are the holy rooms, where the priests who are near to Yahweh shall eat the most holy things: there shall they lay the most holy things, and the meal offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; for the place

is holy.¹⁴ When the priests enter in, then shall they not go out of the holy place into the outer court, but there they shall lay their garments in which they minister; for they are holy: and they shall put on other garments, and shall approach to those things which are for the people.¹⁵ Now when he had made an end of measuring the inner house, he brought me forth by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east, and measured it all around.¹⁶ He measured on the east side with the measuring reed five hundred reeds, with the measuring reed all around.¹⁷ He measured on the north side five hundred reeds with the measuring reed all around.¹⁸ He measured on the south side five hundred reeds with the measuring reed.¹⁹ He turned about to the west side, and measured five hundred reeds with the measuring reed.²⁰ He measured it on the four sides: it had a wall around it, the length five hundred, and the breadth five hundred, to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common.

CHAPTER 43 Oct. 17

The Return of the Glory of God

Afterward he brought me to the gate that looks toward the east.

² Behold, the glory of the God of

42:16 Reeds – The problem is that the length of the reed isn't specified. See on 45:1.
42:20 The new temple was “to make a separation between that which was holy and that which was common” – alluding back to Ezekiel's earlier lament that Judah had not made that very separation (22:26). Time and again, the new system is described in terms which allude to the bad practices in the old system – e.g. the stress of 42:4 etc. that the doors of the new chambers were “toward the north” connects with how Ezekiel had earlier seen women weeping for Tammuz “towards the north” in the temple (8:14; 9:2).

Israel came from the east: and His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shined with His glory.³ It was according to the appearance of the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city; and the visions were like the vision that I saw by the river Chebar; and I fell on my face.⁴ The glory of Yahweh came into the house by the way of the gate whose prospect is toward the east.⁵ The Spirit took me up, and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the house.⁶ I heard one speaking to me out of the house; and a man stood by me.⁷ He said to me, Son of man, this is the place of My throne, and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of

Israel forever. The house of Israel shall no more defile My holy name, neither they, nor their kings, by their prostitution, and by the dead bodies of their kings in their high places;⁸ in their setting of their threshold by My threshold, and their doorpost beside My doorpost, and there was but the wall between Me and them; and they have defiled My holy name by their abominations which they have committed: therefore I have consumed them in My anger.⁹ Now let them put away their prostitution, and the dead bodies of their kings, far from Me; and I will dwell in their midst forever.¹⁰ You, son of man, show the house to the people of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure

43:5 The glory would have entered the house of God's glory as it did at the inauguration of the first temple (2 Chron. 7:1-3). Ezekiel prophesied that ultimately the glory would fill the temple as it had done then (:4,5). But God's prophesy of this in Is. 60:7, that He would glorify His house, meant that He was prepared to work through men to glorify it. The fulfilment of Ezekiel's vision of the cloud of glory entering the temple again could have been fulfilled if the exiles had done what Cyrus empowered them to do – to glorify the house of glory. And so the fulfilment was delayed. The glory of the temple the exiles built was tragically less than the glory of the first temple; and so it would only be in the last day of Messiah's second coming that the house shall truly be filled with glory (Hag. 2:3,7,9). And the lesson ought to be clear for us, in the various projects and callings of our lives: it becomes crucial for us to discern God's specific purposes for us, and insofar as we follow His leading, we will feel a blessing and power which is clearly Divine.

43:8 How close God was ought to have made them quit their idolatry. But their cognizance of the closeness of God was merely theoretical. They didn't feel nor respond to the wonder of it. And truly, He is not far from every one of us.

43:10 Ezekiel showed Judah the general picture of the temple; if they were obedient, then God promised to give them more details so they could build it in reality. There is a congruence between the style of address found in Ez. 40-48 and the earlier part of the prophecy. This is because Ezekiel is addressing the same audience – those who had heard his criticisms and appeals for repentance were the same group who were now being commanded to build a temple according to the dimensions given. Thus "You shall tell the rebellious house of Israel..." (44:6) is the same rubric used earlier (2:5; 3:26; 12:2,25; 17:12; 24:3). The new temple was "to make a separation

the pattern.¹¹ If they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the form of the house, and its fashion, and its exits, and its entrances, and all its forms, and all its ordinances, and all its forms, and all its laws; and write it in their sight; that they may keep the whole form of it, and all its ordinances, and do them.¹² This is the law of the house: on the top of the mountain the whole limit around it shall be most holy. Behold, this is the law of the house.

Details of the Altar

¹³ These are the measures of the altar by cubits (the cubit is a cubit and a handbreadth): the bottom shall be a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and its border around its edge a span; and this shall be the base of the altar.
¹⁴ From the bottom on the ground to

the lower ledge shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser ledge to the greater ledge shall be four cubits, and the breadth a cubit.¹⁵ The upper altar shall be four cubits; and from the altar hearth and upward there shall be four horns.¹⁶ The altar hearth shall be twelve cubits long by twelve broad, square in the four sides of it.¹⁷ The ledge shall be fourteen cubits long by fourteen broad in the four sides of it; and the border about it shall be half a cubit; and its bottom shall be a cubit around; and its steps shall look toward the east.¹⁸ He said to me, Son of man, thus says the Lord Yahweh: These are the ordinances of the altar in the day when they shall make it, to offer burnt offerings thereon, and to sprinkle blood thereon.¹⁹ You shall give to the priests the Levites

between that which was holy and that which was common” (42:20) – alluding back to Ezekiel’s earlier lament that Judah had not made that very separation (22:26). Time and again, the new system is described in terms which allude to the bad practices in the old system – e.g. the stress of 42:4 etc. that the doors of the new chambers were “toward the north” connects with how Ezekiel had earlier seen women weeping for Tammuz “towards the north” in the temple (8:14; 9:2). Ezekiel himself was to provide the sons of Zadok with a bullock for a sin offering (43:19), as if he himself could have been present in the work of the building and dedication of this temple. Ezekiel himself, as a priest, was to inaugurate the altar by sprinkling blood upon it and making an offering (43:20-25). Ezekiel’s temple prophecies are described as “the law of the house” (43:12). They were a law, a commandment to be fulfilled. This explains the commandment style of the instructions, e.g. 44:2: “This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened”. The description of Ezekiel’s Temple was to be given to the captives in Babylon by Ezekiel, to lead them to repentance and to assure them of what could be if they repented. Then when the invitation to leave Babylon and return came in the time of Ezra, they ought to have been motivated to return to the land and build the temple which Ezekiel had explained to them. But sadly most of them weren’t very deeply motivated at all; they wanted to build a temple, but not to the extent Ezekiel had outlined. The intention was that *then*, when the temple was built (:11), they were to be obedient in all the ways in which they hadn’t been obedient in the past, with the result that they were now sitting in captivity (44:24).

43:19 This suggests the temple could have been built within Ezekiel’s lifetime, for he

who are of the seed of Zadok, who are near to Me, to minister to Me, says the Lord Yahweh, a young bull for a sin offering. ²⁰ You shall take of its blood, and put it on the four horns of it, and on the four corners of the ledge, and on the border all around: thus you shall cleanse it and make atonement for it. ²¹ You shall also take the bull of the sin offering, and it shall be burnt in the appointed place of the house, outside of the sanctuary. ²² On the second day you shall offer a male goat without blemish for a sin offering; and they shall cleanse the altar, as they cleansed it with the bull. ²³ When you have finished cleansing it, you shall offer a young bull without blemish, and a ram out of the flock without blemish. ²⁴ You shall bring them near to Yahweh, and the priests shall cast salt

on them, and they shall offer them up for a burnt offering to Yahweh. ²⁵ Seven days you shall prepare every day a goat for a sin offering: they shall also prepare a young bull, and a ram out of the flock, without blemish. ²⁶ Seven days shall they make atonement for the altar and purify it; so shall they consecrate it. ²⁷ When they have accomplished the days, it shall be that on the eighth day, and onwards, the priests shall make your burnt offerings on the altar and your peace offerings; and I will accept you, says the Lord Yahweh.

CHAPTER 44 Oct. 18

The Prince and the Officials of the Temple

Then he brought me back by the way of the outer gate of the sanctuary, which looks toward the

was to give the animals to the sons of Zadok to offer in the temple; Ezekiel was to prepare the daily sacrifice (46:13). But due to the Jews' selfishness and lack of spirituality, it didn't happen. This accounts for the many links between the Ezekiel prophesies and prophets like Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi. What was theoretically possible, what potentially could have been, simply wasn't – because of their self-centredness and lack of effort. The prophecy of Ezekiel 40-48 was therefore primarily command rather than prediction. This was how it should have been, but the Jews failed to obey it all. They were minimalists, satisficers, rather than rising up to their full potential.

43:21 Nehemiah built 'Miphkad', "the Muster Gate" (Neh. 3:31 RSV), the "appointed place" [same Hebrew word]; he really tried to fulfil this command of 43:21. See on 40:29; 48:31. But one man's obedience couldn't in this case count for the whole people.

43:27 See on 20:40. If Judah resumed building the temple according to Ezekiel's plan, "I will take pleasure" in it, God offered (Hag. 1:8). They should be more committed to building the temple "that I may appear in my glory" (RSV). The glory of Yahweh as described at the end of Ezekiel could have appeared in Haggai's time – but this wonderful possibility was held back by Israel's petty minded, self-satisficing laziness. The same word is used here in 43:27 – *then*, when the temple of Ezekiel was built, Yahweh would "accept / take pleasure in" His people and temple. But because they built and served Him with such a mean spirit, He did not "accept" them at that time (Mal. 1:10,13 s.w.).

I will accept you – This is to be connected with the prophecy of 20:41, that God would accept His people when they had been regathered from Babylon.

east; and it was shut. ² Yahweh said to me, This gate shall be shut; it shall not be opened, neither shall any man enter in by it; for Yahweh, the God of Israel, has entered in by it; therefore it shall be shut. ³ As for the prince, he shall sit therein as prince to eat bread before Yahweh; he shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate, and shall go out by the way of the same. ⁴ Then he brought me by the way of the north gate before the house; and I looked, and behold, the glory of Yahweh filled the house of Yahweh: and I fell on my face. ⁵ Yahweh said to me, Son of man, mark well, and see with your eyes, and hear with your ears all that I tell you concerning all the ordinances of the house of Yahweh, and all its laws; and mark well

the entrance of the house, with every exit of the sanctuary. ⁶ You shall tell the rebellious house of Israel, Thus says the Lord Yahweh: you house of Israel, let it suffice you of all your abominations, ⁷ in that you have brought in foreigners, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, to be in My sanctuary, to profane it, even My house, when you offer My bread, the fat and the blood; and they have broken My covenant, to add to all your abominations. ⁸ You have not performed the duty of My holy things; but you have set performers of My duty in My sanctuary for yourselves. ⁹ Thus says the Lord Yahweh, No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and uncircumcised in flesh, shall enter into My sanctuary,

44:2 The priests were to shut the gates (44:2; 46:2,12); but the returned exiles in practice refused to do this unless they were paid for it (Mal. 1:10). The potential set up simply wasn't realized because of petty selfishness.

44:6 *Let it suffice you* – These words are picked up from the LXX by Peter, and applied to all of us in 1 Pet. 4:3: “For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles” (Gk.). The temple vision should have made them ashamed of their sins (43:10,11). It should have motivated them to live the Kingdom life in their lives. Ezekiel’s prophecies should have been an inspiration to Israel to be obedient and live out these things as a reality before them, and thereby see other prophecies come true in their own experience. They could have entered upon an upward spiral of spirituality. The form of the house, the very description of it by Ezekiel, should have inspired them to feel that they had had enough of sin.

44:7 The house was not to be profaned, the covenant wasn’t to be broken. Judah returned from exile, built a temple, but profaned the Sabbath (Neh. 13:17,18), and profaned the temple by their marriage with Gentiles and their “weariness” with the temple ordinances (Mal. 1:12; 2:10,11). They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, and so they had no part in it. Judah broke covenant [s.w.] with Yahweh at the time of the restoration by marrying Gentiles and worshipping their gods (Ezra 9:1,14). We can externally appear obedient, as Judah did by building a temple, but our hearts can be far from the things of God’s covenant. By doing this, Judah precluded the possibility of all that is spoken in Ez. 40-48 from being fulfilled at that time.

44:9 The temple was primarily for the worship of Israel, “the people of the land” (45:22; 46:3,9), not for the whole world – no uncircumcised were allowed to worship in it.

of any foreigners who are among the people of Israel.¹⁰ But the Levites who went far from Me, when Israel went astray, who went astray from Me after their idols, they shall bear their iniquity.¹¹ Yet now they are to be ministers in My sanctuary, having oversight at the gates of the house, and ministering in the house: they shall kill the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister to them.¹² Because they ministered to them before their idols, and became a stumbling block of iniquity to the house of Israel; therefore have I lifted up My hand against them, says the Lord Yahweh, and they shall bear their iniquity.¹³ They shall not come near to Me, to execute the office of priest to Me, nor to come near to any of My holy things, to the things that are most holy; but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed.¹⁴ Yet will I make them performers of the duty of the house, for all its service, and for all that shall be done therein.¹⁵ But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, who performed the duty of My sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from Me, they shall come near to Me to minister to Me; and they shall stand before Me to offer to Me the fat and the blood, says the Lord Yahweh:¹⁶ they shall enter into My sanctuary, and they shall come near to My table, to minister to Me, and they shall keep My instructions.¹⁷ It shall be that when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with lin-

en garments; and no wool shall come on them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within.¹⁸ They shall have linen headware on their heads, and shall have linen breeches on their waists; they shall not clothe themselves with anything that causes sweat.¹⁹ When they go forth into the outer court, even into the outer court to the people, they shall put off their garments in which they minister, and lay them in the holy rooms; and they shall put on other garments, that they not sanctify the people with unclean garments.²⁰ Neither shall they shave their heads, nor allow their locks to grow long; they shall only cut off the hair of their heads.²¹ Neither shall any of the priests drink wine when they enter into the inner court.²² Neither shall they take for their wives a widow, nor her who is divorced; but they shall take virgins of the seed of the house of Israel, or a widow who is the widow of a priest.²³ They shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the common, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.²⁴ In a controversy they shall stand to judge; according to My ordinances shall they judge it: and they shall keep My laws and My statutes in all My appointed feasts; and they shall make My Sabbaths holy.²⁵ They shall not go near a dead person to defile themselves; but for father, or for mother, or for son, or for daughter, for brother, or for sister who has had no husband, they may defile themselves.²⁶ After he is cleansed, they shall reckon to

him seven days. ²⁷ In the day that he goes into the sanctuary, into the inner court, to minister in the sanctuary, he shall offer his sin offering, says the Lord Yahweh. ²⁸ They shall have an inheritance: I am their inheritance; and you shall give them no possession in Israel; I am their possession. ²⁹ They shall eat the meal offering, and the sin offering, and the trespass offering; and every devoted thing in Israel shall be theirs. ³⁰ The first of all the first fruits of every thing, and every offering of everything, of all

your offerings, shall be for the priest: you shall also give to the priests the first of your dough, to cause a blessing to rest on your house. ³¹ The priests shall not eat of anything that dies of itself, or is torn, whether it be bird or animal.

CHAPTER 45 Oct. 19

How the Land Was to Be Divided

Moreover, when you shall divide by lot the land for inheritance, you shall offer an offering to Yahweh, a holy portion of the land; the

44:31 There are many details in Ez. 40–48 which seem very hard to apply to a future Kingdom under the rulership of Jesus. The offering of animal sacrifices in order to gain forgiveness seems to flatly contradict the teaching of Hebrews concerning the one time nature of Christ's offering. The existence of animals who will have been "torn" by other animals seems hard to square with the Kingdom prophecies of Isaiah 9 and 11 about the animals living at peace with each other. The language used about "the prince" also seems impossible to understand about an immortal being. The whole prophecy was a command for the returning exiles from Babylon rather than prediction of the future. If we insist that every part of Ez. 40–48 is going to have a literal fulfilment in the Millennium, then we have to accept that Jesus will accept divorce and remarriage in His Kingdom – it's just that the priests won't be able to marry divorcees, but others will (44:22).

45:1 The problem is that the Hebrew text strangely omits the measurement unit. The "oblation" would be about 60 miles square if we measure it in "reeds" as some Bibles assume, although this term isn't in the Hebrew text here; if the "reed" is "six great cubits" as defined in 41:8, then this area would encroach either upon the Mediterranean or the Dead Sea, and it seems contextually more likely that a smaller area measured in cubits is intended, which would make the temple similar in dimension to Solomon's temple (see on 41:26). If measured in reeds, this large area somewhat disrupts the distribution of land amongst the tribes as detailed later in Ezekiel. If the missing measurement unit here is cubits and not reeds, it is likely that it is in the dimensions of the temple itself. The area described here in 45:1 is to be "the length of twenty five thousand". The following verse speaks of *cubits* as the measurement unit. Only the context can decide whether cubits or reeds is meant in many of the Ezekiel passages. If it is going to be thousands of reeds, then it would be over one mile square. However, Jer. 30:18 RSV prophesies that "the city shall be builded *upon her own heap*, and the palace shall be *where it used to be*". And passages as varied as Zech. 1, Ps. 68 and Micah 4 all insist that the temple of the restored Kingdom was to be built *within* the city of Jerusalem. If the temple is 500 reeds square, there will be no room for a city, assuming the city will be of the same size as the previous old city of Jerusalem.

length shall be the length of twenty-five thousand reeds, and the breadth shall be ten thousand: it shall be holy in all its border all around.² Of this there shall be for the holy place five hundred in length by five hundred in breadth, square all around; and fifty cubits for its suburbs all around.³ Of this measure you shall measure a length of twenty-five thousand, and a breadth of ten thousand: and in it shall be the sanctuary, which is most holy.⁴ It is a holy portion of the land; it shall be for the priests, the ministers of the sanctuary, who come near to minister to Yahweh; and it shall be a place for their houses, and a holy place for the sanctuary.⁵ Twenty-five thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth, shall be to the Levites, the ministers of the house, for a possession to themselves, as places to live in.⁶ You shall appoint the possession of the city five thousand broad, and twenty-five thousand long, side by side with the offering of the holy portion: it shall be for the whole house of Israel.⁷ Whatever is for the prince shall be on the one side and on the other side of the holy offering and of the possession of the city, in front of the holy offering and in front of the possession of the city, on the west side westward, and on the east side eastward; and in length answer-

able to one of the portions, from the west border to the east border.⁸ In the land it shall be to him for a possession in Israel: and My princes shall no more oppress My people; but they shall give the land to the house of Israel according to their tribes.⁹ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: Let it suffice you, princes of Israel: remove violence and spoil, and execute justice and righteousness instead of dispossessing My people, says the Lord Yahweh.¹⁰ You shall have just balances, a just ephah and a just bath.¹¹ The ephah and the bath shall be of one measure, that the bath may contain the tenth part of a homer, and the ephah the tenth part of a homer: its measure shall be after the homer.¹² The shekel shall be twenty gerahs. Twenty shekels plus twenty-five shekels plus fifteen shekels shall be your mina.

Offerings and Feast Days

¹³ This is the offering that you shall offer: the sixth part of an ephah from a homer of wheat; and you shall give the sixth part of an ephah from a homer of barley;¹⁴ and the set portion of oil, of the bath of oil, the tenth part of a bath out of the cor, which is ten baths, even a homer (for ten baths are a homer);¹⁵ and one lamb of the flock, out of two hundred, from the

45:8 The princes were not to oppress the people as they did in the recent past (45:8 cp. Jer. 22:3; Ez. 18:7,12,16; 22:7,29; Zeph. 3:1, where the same Hebrew word for “oppress” is found). Thus there was to be repentance for the ‘oppression’ which Ezekiel had earlier had to criticize Israel for. They were to have “just” balances (45:10), as opposed to the “unjust” balances which they had in the lead up to the captivity (Jer. 22:13 Heb.). In the past, they had brought strangers into the temple; but in the new system, they were not to do so (44:7 cp. 9).

well-watered pastures of Israel—for a meal offering, and for a burnt offering, and for peace offerings, to make atonement for them, says the Lord Yahweh. ¹⁶ All the people of the land shall give to this offering for the prince in Israel. ¹⁷ It shall be the prince's part to give the burnt offerings, and the meal offerings, and the drink offerings, in the feasts, and on the new moons, and on the Sabbaths, in all the appointed feasts of the house of Israel: he shall prepare the sin offering and the meal offering and the burnt offering and the peace offerings, to make atonement for the house of Israel. ¹⁸ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: In the first month, in the first day of the month, you shall take a young bull without blemish; and you shall cleanse the sanctuary. ¹⁹ The priest shall take of the blood of the sin offering, and put it on the door posts of the house and on the four corners of the ledge of the altar, and on the posts of the gate of the inner court. ²⁰ So you shall do on the seventh day of the month for everyone who errs, and for him who is ignorant: so you shall make atonement for the house. ²¹ In the first month, in the fourteenth day of the month, you

shall have the Passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten. ²² On that day shall the prince prepare for himself and for all the people of the land a bull for a sin offering. ²³ The seven days of the feast he shall prepare a burnt offering to Yahweh, seven bulls and seven rams without blemish daily the seven days; and a male goat daily for a sin offering. ²⁴ He shall prepare a meal offering, an ephah for a bull, and an ephah for a ram, and a hin of oil to an ephah. ²⁵ In the seventh month, in the fifteenth day of the month, in the feast, shall he do the like the seven days; according to the sin offering, according to the burnt offering, and according to the meal offering, and according to the oil.

CHAPTER 46 Oct. 20

The Prince and His Offerings

Thus says the Lord Yahweh: The gate of the inner court that looks toward the east shall be shut the six working days; but on the Sabbath day it shall be opened, and on the day of the new moon it shall be opened. ² The prince shall enter by the way of the porch of the gate outside, and shall stand by the post of

45:16 “The people of the land” were to have a part in the new system of things (45:16,22; 46:3,9), and yet this very phrase is repeatedly used concerning the Samaritan people who lived in the land at the time of the restoration with whom Judah intermarried and whose gods and language they accepted (Ezra 4:4; 10:2,11; Neh. 9:24; 10:30,31). God's intention was that they should eventually be converted unto Him; it was His intention that Ezekiel's temple be built at the time of the restoration under Ezra. And yet Zech. 7:10; Mal. 3:5 criticize the Jews who returned and built the temple for continuing to oppress these strangers / Gentiles. So much was made possible potentially that never happened, because of Judah's short sightedness and failure to grasp it. The same is true in the lives of God's people today.

the gate; and the priests shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, and he shall worship at the threshold of the gate: then he shall go forth; but the gate shall not be shut until the evening.³ The people of the land shall worship at the door of that gate before Yahweh on the Sabbaths and on the new moons.⁴ The burnt offering that the prince shall offer to Yahweh shall be on the Sabbath day six lambs without blemish and a ram without blemish;⁵ and the meal offering shall be an ephah for the ram, and the meal offering for the lambs as he is able to give, and a hin of oil to an ephah.⁶ On the day of the new moon it shall be a young bull without blemish, and six lambs, and a ram; they shall be without blemish:⁷ and he shall prepare a meal offering, an ephah for the bull, and an ephah for the ram, and for the lambs according

as he is able, and a hin of oil to an ephah.⁸ When the prince shall enter, he shall go in by the way of the porch of the gate, and he shall go out by its way.⁹ But when the people of the land shall come before Yahweh in the appointed feasts, he who enters by the way of the north gate to worship shall go out by the way of the south gate; and he who enters by the way of the south gate shall go out by the way of the north gate: he shall not return by the way of the gate by which he came in, but shall go out straight before him.¹⁰ The prince, when they go in, shall go in with them; and when they go out, he shall go out.¹¹ In the feasts and in the solemnities the meal offering shall be an ephah for a bull and an ephah for a ram, and for the lambs as he is able to give, and a hin of oil to an ephah.¹² When the prince shall prepare a

46:11 “The prince” of 21:27 was Judah’s last ruler – so “the prince” later in Ezekiel would appear to be a promise of a restored monarchy. Yet tragically, the royal family chose to remain in Babylon. “The prince” offers as He is able (:11) – hard to apply to the Almighty Lord Jesus. He offers sacrifice for his own sin, and has children, to whom He will pass an inheritance. And he has to be warned not to oppress the people (:18). It is a more comfortable interpretation to see him as primarily referring to Zerubbabel or Joshua the High Priest (44:3). It is evident from 46:3 and 44:3 that the promised Messiah figure was to be both a king and a priest – which would fit Joshua. Those men could have been so much; but their dysfunctions meant that what had been potentially prepared for them didn’t come true. The very same happens in the lives of so many of God’s people. We must pray for wisdom to understand what God intends for us, and have the faith to realize that we really can realize it in our lives. Zechariah concluded his prophecy about this Messiah figure with the comment that it would come to pass, if he would diligently obey the voice of the Lord (Zech. 6:10-15). Joshua-Jesus didn’t live up to it. And Zerubbabel never ruled in Jerusalem – he returned to the soft life in Babylon after the temple was rebuilt. But the prophecies suffered a deferral. They will in a broad sense be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, *the branch*, although the specific details were the commands which God intended the Messiah figure of Ezekiel’s time to fulfil and as such may not have to be literally fulfilled in any future reapplication of this prophecy.

freewill offering, a burnt offering or peace offerings as a freewill offering to Yahweh, one shall open for him the gate that looks toward the east; and he shall prepare his burnt offering and his peace offerings, as he does on the Sabbath day: then he shall go out; and after his going forth one shall shut the gate.¹³ You shall prepare a lamb a year old without blemish for a burnt offering to Yahweh daily: morning by morning you shall prepare it.¹⁴ You shall prepare a meal offering with it morning by morning, the sixth part of an ephah, and the third part of a hin of oil, to moisten the fine flour; a meal offering to Yahweh continually by a perpetual ordinance.¹⁵ Thus shall they prepare the lamb, and the meal offering, and the oil, morning by morning, for a continual burnt offering.¹⁶ Thus says the Lord Yahweh: If the prince give a gift to any of his sons, it is his inheritance, it shall belong to his sons; it is their possession by inheritance.¹⁷ But if he gives of his inheritance as a gift to one of his servants, it shall be his to the year

of liberty; then it shall return to the prince; but as for his inheritance, it shall be for his sons.¹⁸ Moreover the prince shall not take of the people's inheritance by thrusting them out of their possession; he shall give an inheritance to his sons out of his own possession, that My people not be scattered every man from his possession.¹⁹ Then he brought me through the entry, which was at the side of the gate, into the holy rooms for the priests, which looked toward the north: and behold, there was a place on the hinder part westward.²⁰ He said to me, This is the place where the priests shall boil the trespass offering and the sin offering, and where they shall bake the meal offering; so that they do not bring them into the outer court, to sanctify the people.²¹ Then he brought me into the outer court, and caused me to pass by the four corners of the court; and behold, in every corner of the court there was another court.²² In the four corners of the court there were enclosed courts, forty cubits long and thirty broad: these four in the corners were

46:12 *One shall open for him the gate* – David in his humility aspired to be such an anonymous gatekeeper in God's temple (Ps. 84:10). And yet “the prince” is defined as being “David” (34:24; 37:25). He was the prince exactly because he wished merely to the anonymous gatekeeper who would open the doors for the prince. In this we see the classic illustration of Christ’s teaching that true greatness is in humility; He will be the highest in the Kingdom because in this life He debased Himself lowest (Mt. 23:12; Mk. 9:35; 10:44).

46:13 See on 43:19.

46:18 They had gone into captivity for these kinds of abuses, and they were to return and rebuild the temple after the pattern of Solomon’s, repent of their sins and live righteously, and then they would have the possibility of bringing in the Messianic Kingdom. But they chose to be satisfied with a semi-revival, a quasi repentance – just as we can be so easily. And Nehemiah records how the princes *did* oppress the people, taking their land / possessions away from them.

of one measure.²³ There was a wall around in them, around the four, and boiling places were made under the walls all around.²⁴ Then he said to me, These are the boiling houses, where the ministers of the house shall boil the sacrifices of the people.

CHAPTER 47 Oct. 21

The River

He brought me back to the door of the house; and see, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward (for the front of the house was toward the east); and the waters came down from under the right side of the house, on the south of the altar.² Then he brought me out by the way of the north gate, and led me round by the way outside to the outer gate, to the gate that looks toward the east; and, there ran out waters on the right side.³ When the man went forth eastward with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the ankles.⁴ Again he measured one thousand, and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the knees. Again he measured one thousand, and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the waist.⁵ Afterward he measured one thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass through; for the waters were risen, waters to

swim in, a river that could not be passed through.⁶ He said to me, Son of man, have you seen this? Then he brought me and caused me to return to the bank of the river.⁷ Now when I had returned, see, on the bank of the river were very many trees on the one side and on the other.⁸ Then he said to me, These waters issue forth toward the eastern region, and shall go down into the Salt Sea Arabah; and the waters of the sea shall be healed.⁹ It shall happen, that every living creature which swarms, in every place where the rivers come, shall live; and there shall be a very great multitude of fish; for these waters have come there, and the waters of the sea shall be healed, and everything shall live wherever the river comes.¹⁰ It shall happen, that fishermen shall stand by it: from En Gedi even to En Eglaim shall be a place for the spreading of nets; their fish shall be after their species, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many.¹¹ But its muddy places and its marshes shall not be healed; they shall be given over to salt.¹² By the river on its banks, on this side and on that side, shall grow every tree for food whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall its fruit fail: it shall bear new fruit every month, because its waters issue out of the sanctuary; and its fruit shall be for food, and its leaf for healing.

47:12 This is alluded to in Rev. 22:2,14, where the future Kingdom of God on earth is spoken of as having a tree or forest of trees of life, giving healing to the nations each month. Again we see that the essence of Ezekiel's vision will come true, but maybe not the exact details, which were tailored to Judah's possible experience on return from captivity.

The Borders of the Land of the Inheritance

13 Thus says the Lord Yahweh: This shall be the border, by which you shall divide the land for inheritance according to the twelve tribes of Israel: Joseph shall have two portions. 14 You shall inherit it, one as well as another; for I swore to give it to your fathers: and this land shall fall to you for inheritance. 15 This shall be the border of the land: On the north side, from the great sea, by the road to Hethlon, to the entrance of Zedad; 16 Hamath, Berothah, Sibraim, which is between the border of Damascus and the border of Hamath; Hazer Hatticon, which is by the border of Hauran. 17 The border from the sea, shall be from the sea to Hazar Enon at the border of Damascus; and on the north northward is the border of Hamath. This is the north side. 18 The east side, between Hauran and Damascus and Gilead, and the land of

Israel, shall be the Jordan; from the north border to the east sea you shall measure. This is the east side. 19 The south side southward shall be from Tamar as far as the waters of Meriboth Kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, to the great sea. This is the south side southward. 20 The west side shall be the great sea, from the south border as far as over against the entrance of Hamath. This is the west side. 21 So you shall divide this land to you according to the tribes of Israel. 22 It shall happen, that you shall divide it by lot for an inheritance to you and to the aliens who live among you, who shall father children among you; and they shall be to you as the native-born among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. 23 It shall happen, that in what tribe the foreigner lives, there you shall give him his inheritance, says the Lord Yahweh.

47:13 The restored Kingdom of God could have come when Judah returned from Babylon. It was therefore potentially possible for the returning exiles to inherit all the land outlined in 47:13-21 and share it out between the twelve tribes. But according to the record in Ezra and Nehemiah, they grabbed every man for himself, his own farmstead, his own mini-Kingdom. They had no interest in the wider vision, nor in subduing extra land; and the majority of the Jews didn't even want to inherit it; they preferred the soft life of Babylon, the Kingdom of men rather than the Kingdom of God. And thus the Kingdom made possible was never actually fulfilled at that time.

47:16 The whole style of Ez. 40-48 is relevant to what could have been in Ezekiel's own time, rather than a specific prediction of the future – the borders of the land are described as “Sibraim, which *is* between the border of Damascus... on the north northward *is* the border of Hamath”.

47:23 The commandments about giving the Gentiles inheritance amongst the tribal cantons are understandable in the light of the fact that the Samaritans were living in the land at the time of the restoration. See on 43:10. Within Ezekiel, Israel are criticized for oppressing the stranger / Gentile who lived with them (22:7,29); and now they are told that in the new temple system, the stranger must be generously given an inheritance in the land, he must be counted as actually belonging to one of the tribes.

CHAPTER 48 Oct. 22***The Final Division of the Land***

Now these are the names of the tribes: From the north end, beside the way of Hethlon to the entrance of Hamath, Hazar Enan at the border of Damascus, northward beside Hamath, (and they shall have their sides east and west), Dan, one portion. ² By the border of Dan, from the east side to the west side, Asher, one portion. ³ By the border of Asher, from the east side even to the west side, Naphtali, one portion. ⁴ By the border of Naphtali, from the east side to the west side, Manasseh, one portion. ⁵ By the border of Manasseh, from the east side to the west side, Ephraim, one portion. ⁶ By the border of Ephraim, from the east side even to the west side, Reuben, one portion. ⁷ By the border of Reuben, from the east side to the west side, Judah, one portion. ⁸ By the border of Judah, from the east side to the west side, shall be the district which you shall set apart, twenty-five thousand cubits in breadth, and in length as one of the portions, from the east side to the west side: and the sanctuary shall be in its midst. ⁹ The district that you shall offer to Yahweh shall be twenty-five thousand in length, and ten thousand in breadth. ¹⁰ This holy district shall be for the priests: toward the north twenty-five thousand in length, and toward the west ten thousand in breadth, and toward the east ten thousand in breadth, and toward the south twenty-five thousand in length: and the sanctuary of Yahweh shall be in its midst.

¹¹ It shall be for the priests who are sanctified of the sons of Zadok, who have kept My instruction, who didn't go astray when the children of Israel went astray, as the Levites went astray. ¹² It shall be to them an offering from the offering of the land, a thing most holy, by the border of the Levites. ¹³ Opposite the border of the priests, the Levites shall have an area twenty-five thousand cubits in length, and ten thousand in breadth: the entire length shall be twenty-five thousand, and the breadth ten thousand. ¹⁴ They shall sell none of it, nor exchange it, nor shall the first fruits of the land be separated; for it is holy to Yahweh. ¹⁵ The five thousand that are left in the breadth, in front of the twenty-five thousand, shall be for common use, for the city, for dwellings and for suburbs; and the city shall be in its midst. ¹⁶ These shall be its measures: the north side four thousand five hundred, and the south side four thousand five hundred, and on the east side four thousand five hundred, and the west side four thousand five hundred. ¹⁷ The city shall have suburbs: toward the north two hundred and fifty, and toward the south two hundred and fifty, and toward the east two hundred and fifty, and toward the west two hundred and fifty. ¹⁸ The remainder in the length, alongside the holy district, shall be ten thousand eastward, and ten thousand westward; and it shall be adjacent to the holy district; and its increase shall be for food to those who labour in the city. ¹⁹ Those who labour in the city, out

of all the tribes of Israel, shall cultivate it.²⁰ The entire district shall be twenty-five thousand by twenty-five thousand: you shall offer the holy district foursquare, with the possession of the city.²¹ The residue shall be for the prince, on the one side and on the other of the holy offering and of the possession of the city; in front of the twenty-five thousand of the offering toward the east border, and westward in front of the twenty-five thousand toward the west border, answerable to the portions, it shall be for the prince: and the holy offering and the sanctuary of the house shall be in its midst.²² Moreover from the possession of the Levites, and from the possession of the city, being in the midst of that which is the prince's, between the border of Judah and the border of Benjamin, it shall be for the prince.²³ As for the rest of the tribes: from the east side to the west side, Benjamin, one portion.²⁴ By the border of Benjamin, from the east side to the west side,

Simeon, one portion.²⁵ By the border of Simeon, from the east side to the west side, Issachar, one portion.²⁶ By the border of Issachar, from the east side to the west side, Zebulun, one portion.²⁷ By the border of Zebulun, from the east side to the west side, Gad, one portion.²⁸ By the border of Gad, at the south side southward, the border shall be even from Tamar to the waters of Meribath Kadesh, to the brook of Egypt, to the great sea.²⁹ This is the land which you shall divide by lot to the tribes of Israel for inheritance, and these are their individual portions, says the Lord Yahweh.

The City Gates

³⁰ These are the exits of the city: On the north side four thousand five hundred reeds by measure;³¹ and the gates of the city shall be after the names of the tribes of Israel, three gates northward: the gate of Reuben, one; the gate of Judah, one; the gate of Levi, one.³² At the east side four

48:29 It was Ezekiel, as he sat with the exiles in Babylon, who was to divide the land by lot unto the various tribes. The tragedy of all the details recorded in Ezekiel 40–48, and the very reason for their being preserved to this day, is to show us to what great extent God has prepared potential things for His people, and yet they can be totally wasted if we don't respond. In fact according to Mic. 4:10, it was God's purpose to exile His people to Babylon, and *there* to deliver them from their enemies. And yet they preferred to side with their enemies and to prefer non-deliverance from Babylon. The tragedy of it all is almost unthinkable, and yet this is what we do if day by day we choose the things of this world against the deliverance from this world which there is in Christ.

48:31 Nehemiah arranged for 12 gates to be built in the wall, as Ez. 48:31–34 had commanded there to be. See on 40:29; 43:21. This verse is alluded to in Rev. 21:12, where it appears to be given a more symbolic application to the people of God, the new Jerusalem. Judah failed to build the new Jerusalem as intended, and so the essence of the vision was reapplied in a more abstract sense, and in this form will have its fulfilment in essence.

thousand five hundred reeds, and three gates: even the gate of Joseph, one; the gate of Benjamin, one; the gate of Dan, one.³³ At the south side four thousand five hundred reeds by measure, and three gates: the gate of Simeon, one; the gate of Issachar, one; the gate of Zebulun, one.

³⁴ At the west side four thousand five hundred reeds, with their three gates: the gate of Gad, one; the gate of Asher, one; the gate of Naphtali, one.³⁵ It shall be eighteen thousand reeds around: and the name of the city from that day shall be, Yahweh is there.

48:35 See on 35:10.

DANIEL

CHAPTER 1 Oct. 23

Daniel's Babylonian Education

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon to Jerusalem, and besieged it.² The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God; and he carried them into the land of Shinar to the house of his god: and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god.³ The king spoke to Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring in some of the Israelites, those of the seed royal and of the nobles;⁴ youths in whom was no blemish, but handsome, well educated, knowledgeable, understanding science, and such as had the ability to stand in the king's palace; that he should teach them the learning and the language of the Chaldeans.⁵ The king appointed for them a daily portion of the king's dainties, and of the wine which he drank, and that they should be trained for three years; that at its end they should stand before the king.⁶ Now among these were, of the Judeans, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.⁷ The prince of the eunuchs gave names to them: to Daniel he gave the name of Belteshazzar; and to Hananiah, of Shadrach; and to Mishael, of Meshach; and to Azariah, of Abednego.

⁸ But Daniel determined not to defile himself with the king's dainties, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself.⁹ Now God made Daniel to find kindness and compassion with the prince of the eunuchs.¹⁰ The prince of the eunuchs said to Daniel, I fear my lord the king who has appointed your food and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse looking than the youths who are of your own age? Do you really want to endanger my head with the king?¹¹ Then Daniel said to the steward whom the prince of the eunuchs had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah:¹² Test your servants, I beg you, for ten days; let them give us vegetables to eat, and water to drink.¹³ Then let our faces be looked on before you, and the faces of the youths who eat of the king's dainties; and as you see, deal with your servants.¹⁴ So he listened to them in this matter, and proved them ten days.¹⁵ At the end of ten days their faces appeared fairer, and they were fatter in flesh, than all the youths who ate of the king's dainties.¹⁶ So the steward took away their dainties, and the wine that they should drink, and gave them vegetables.¹⁷ Now as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and skill

1:8 There was nothing in the Law of Moses which specifically forbade eating or drinking these things. But Daniel would've been defiled in his conscience. We too should go to great lengths to always have a good conscience, even if in the eyes of the world and of other members of God's people we appear strange.

in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams.¹⁸ At the end of the days which the king had appointed for bringing them in, the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar.¹⁹ The king talked with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore they served the king.²⁰ In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters who were in all his kingdom.²¹ Daniel continued up to the first year of king Cyrus.

CHAPTER 2 Oct. 24

King Nebuchadnezzar's Dream

In the second year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar dreamed dreams; and his spirit was troubled, and his sleep went from him.² Then the king commanded to call the magicians, and the enchanters, and the sorcerers, and the Chaldeans, to tell the king his dreams. So they came in and stood before the king.³ The king said to them, I have dreamed a dream, and my spirit is troubled to know the dream.⁴ Then the Chaldeans spoke to the king in the Syrian language, O king, live forever: tell your servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.⁵ The king answered the Chaldeans, The thing is gone from me: if you don't make known to me the dream and its interpretation, you shall be cut in pieces, and your houses shall

be made a compost heap.⁶ But if you show the dream and its interpretation, you shall receive from me gifts and rewards and great honour: therefore show me the dream and its interpretation.⁷ They answered the second time and said, Let the king tell his servants the dream, and we will show the interpretation.⁸ The king answered, I know of a certainty that you would gain time, because you see the thing is gone from me.⁹ But if you don't tell me the dream, there is but one law for you; for you have prepared lying and corrupt words to speak before me, until the time be changed: therefore tell me the dream, and I shall know that you can show me its interpretation.¹⁰ The Chaldeans answered before the king and said, There is not a man on the earth who can show the king's matter, because no king, lord or ruler has asked such a thing of any magician, enchanter or Chaldean.¹¹ It is an unusual thing that the king requires, and there is no other who can show it before the king, except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh.¹² Therefore the king was angry and very furious, and he commanded that all the wise men of Babylon be destroyed.¹³ So the decree went forth that all the wise men were to be slain; and they sought Daniel and his companions to be slain.

Daniel Offers to Interpret the Dream

¹⁴ Then Daniel returned answer with counsel and prudence to Arioch the captain of the king's guard, who was

gone forth to kill the wise men of Babylon; ¹⁵ he answered Arioch the king's captain, Why is the decree so urgent from the king? Then Arioch made the thing known to Daniel. ¹⁶ Daniel went in, and desired of the king that he would appoint him a time, and he would show the king the interpretation. ¹⁷ Then Daniel went to his house, and told Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, his companions:⁸ that they would desire mercies of the God of heaven concerning this secret; so that Daniel and his companions should not die with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. ¹⁹ Then was the secret revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night. Then Daniel blessed the God of heaven. ²⁰ Daniel responded, Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever; for wisdom and might are His. ²¹ He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings, and sets up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have understanding; ²² He reveals the deep and secret things; He knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with Him. ²³ I thank You, and praise You, You God of

my fathers, who has given me wisdom and might, and has now made known to me what we desired of You; for You have made known to us the king's matter. ²⁴ Therefore Daniel went in to Arioch, whom the king had appointed to destroy the wise men of Babylon and said this: Don't destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show to the king the interpretation. ²⁵ Then Arioch brought in Daniel before the king in haste, and said: I have found a man among the captives of Judah who will make known to the king the interpretation. ²⁶ The king answered Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, Are you able to make known to me the dream which I have seen, and its interpretation? ²⁷ Daniel answered before the king, and said, The secret which the king has demanded can neither wise men, enchanters, magicians, nor soothsayers, show to the king; ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Your dream, and the visions of your head on your bed, are these:

2:19 Given the urgency of the situation, Daniel would've been tempted to rush in to the King with the interpretation, knowing that every second counted to save the lives of his friends and himself. But firstly he takes time to thank God; we should do the same in life's crises.

2:21 *Wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to those who have understanding* – God confirms people in their wisdom and understanding. God gives more to the one who already has obtained some more (Lk. 19:25). There is an upward spiral in spiritual growth, which has God's word as the dynamic within it.

2:23 *Made known to us* – Notice how selfless Daniel was, in feeling that the interpretation had been made known to "us", not just to him personally, because he recognized that there had been prayers of others involved, not just his – hence he later says that *we* will make known the interpretation (:36).

The Dream Revealed

29 As for you, O king, your thoughts came into your mind on your bed, what should happen in the future; and He who reveals secrets has made known to you what shall happen. **30** But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living, but to the intent that the interpretation may be made known to the king, and that you may know the thoughts of your heart. **31** You, O king, saw, and behold, a great image. This image, which was mighty, and whose brightness was excellent, stood before you; and its aspect was awesome. **32** As for this image, its head was of fine gold, its breast and its arms of silver, its belly and its thighs of brass, **33** its legs of iron, its feet part of iron and part of clay. **34** You saw until a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet that were of iron

and clay, and broke them in pieces. **35** Then was the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold, broken in pieces together, and became like the chaff of the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away, so that no place was found for them: and the stone that struck the image became a great mountain, and filled the whole earth. **36** This is the dream; and we will tell its interpretation before the king.

The Interpretation Presented

37 You, O king, are a king of kings, to whom the God of heaven has given the kingdom, the power, and the strength, and the glory. **38** Wher- ever the children of men dwell, the animals of the field and the birds of the sky has He given into your hand, and has made you to rule over them all: you are the head of gold. **39** After you shall arise another kingdom infe-

2:35 *No place was found for them* – Quoted in Rev. 20:11 about the present world system being destroyed at Christ's second coming.

2:39 *All the land* – The Chaldee word translated “land” here is equivalent to the Hebrew *eretz*, which is used in the Bible to refer to either ‘the land’ promised to Abraham, or the whole planet. Bible prophecy is centred around the land and people of Israel. The Gentile nations mentioned are prophetically significant only in terms of their relations with Israel. Babylon at that time ruled over the land of Israel, but not over the whole earth. The prophecy predicts how after Babylon there would come other empires who would rule over Israel. The chest of silver refers to the Medo-Persian empire, the thighs of brass to the Greeks, and the two legs of iron to the Roman empire, the two legs possibly referring to the Eastern and Western parts of the empire. After that, Israel ceased to be a nation, until in the 20th century the Jews returned and established the state of Israel. The mixture of nations represented by the feet of iron and clay will dominate Israel for a short time – in decorum with the fact that the feet of the statue were not a very large part of its total height. This may refer to a union of nations dominating Israel in the time just prior to Christ’s return. He is the stone cut out without hands (:45) – He was born of a virgin with no human hand involved. At His return He will destroy all human kingdoms and establish God’s eternal Kingdom on this earth, which shall last eternally.

rior to you; and then a third kingdom of brass, which shall rule over all the land.⁴⁰ The fourth kingdom shall be strong as iron, because iron breaks in pieces and subdues all things; and as iron that crushes all these, shall it break in pieces and crush.⁴¹ Then you saw the feet and toes, part of potters' clay, and part of iron, that shall be a divided kingdom; but there shall be in it of the strength of the iron, because you saw the iron mixed with miry clay.⁴² As the toes of the feet were part of iron, and part of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong, and partly broken.⁴³ Whereas you saw the iron mixed with miry clay, they shall mingle themselves with the seed of men; but they shall not cling to one another, even as iron does not mingle with clay.⁴⁴ In the days of those kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom which shall

never be destroyed, nor shall its sovereignty be left to another people; it shall crush to powder and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever.⁴⁵ As you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall happen hereafter: and the dream is certain, and its interpretation sure.⁴⁶ Then the king Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face, and worshipped Daniel, and commanded that they should offer an offering and sweet incense to him.⁴⁷ The king responded to Daniel and said, Of a truth your God is the God of gods, and the Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets, since you have been able to reveal this secret.⁴⁸ Then the king made Daniel great, and gave him many great gifts, and

2:44 Clear indication that the Kingdom of God is to be established on earth – not in Heaven.

Crush to powder – Alluded to by Jesus when He taught that He is the stone upon whom we either fall and are broken, or He will fall upon us and grind us to powder (Mt. 21:44). The choice we have is to fall upon Christ and become broken people, limping like Jacob by grace into His Kingdom; or to be ground to powder by Christ at His return, in that we will share the judgments of this present world system. Hence Paul speaks of how the rejected amongst the people of God will be “condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:32). The crucial separation between us and the world must be made now.

2:45 The whole image stands complete in the last days; there will be a latter day Nebuchadnezzar who has beneath him a system comprising all the elements of Israel's previous dominators.

2:48 Daniel went through a yo-yo pattern of being promoted into the limelight, and then (in an unrecorded manner) slipping out of the limelight into relative obscurity, from which he was promoted again. Thus in 2:48 Daniel is made Prime Minister, in the events of Chapter 3 he seems to be strangely absent, in 4:8 Daniel is brought in to interpret Nebuchadnezzar's second dream almost as an afterthought, implying he was out of the limelight; by 5:11 King Belshazzar was unaware of Daniel, but promoted him to be third ruler in the Kingdom (5:29). Daniel was made master of the magi-

made him to rule over the whole province of Babylon, and to be chief governor over all the wise men of Babylon.⁴⁹ Daniel requested of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, over the affairs of the province of Babylon: but Daniel was in the gate of the king.

CHAPTER 3 Oct. 25

The Burning Fiery Furnace

Nebuchadnezzar the king made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits, and its breadth six cubits: he set it up in the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon.² Then Nebuchadnezzar the king sent to gather together the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of

the provinces, to come to the dedication of the image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up.³ Then the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, the judges, the treasurers, the counsellors, the sheriffs, and all the rulers of the provinces, were gathered together to the dedication of the image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up; and they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.⁴ Then the herald called aloud, To you it is commanded, peoples, nations, and languages,⁵ that whenever you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, you fall down and worship the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king has set up;⁶ and whoever doesn't fall down and worship shall immediately be cast

cians by Nebuchadnezzar; but by the time his son was reigning, this had largely been forgotten (5:12) – because Daniel evidently was nowhere near that job to which he'd been promoted. Why did Daniel slip out of the limelight? Was it not for the sake of his conscience? As a member of the Jewish community, it would have been so easy for Daniel to stay where he was, reasoning that holding down a job like that would enable him to do so much for the Truth. But he realized that his personal conscience and devotion to the spiritual life must be given number one priority if he was to help his people. There is an exact correspondence between the mind of Daniel here and the fervent believer who refuses promotion, jumps out of a career that is rubbing too strongly against the conscience...

3:1 The image of the Daniel 2 vision had described Nebuchadnezzar as the head of gold, who would soon be replaced by other world empires. Nebuchadnezzar didn't like the sound of this – and so he blasphemously made an entire image of gold, as if to imply that he would in fact never come to an end. Believing in the coming of God's eternal Kingdom means we recognize our own frailty and mortality, and however small *our* 'kingdom' is in this world, it will quickly come to an end. Our focus will be on that Kingdom which is to come, rather than upon our 'kingdom' in this life, that very limited circle of things over which we have some power and control. Nebuchadnezzar didn't want to accept this; he like many unbelievers tried to live within the assumption, and create the impression, that his life and 'kingdom' would continue for ever. See on 4:3.

3:6 Rev. 13:14,15 speaks of the beast creating an image in the last days before Christ returns, and persecuting all those who refuse to bow down to it. This is clearly allud-

into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ⁷ Therefore at that time, when all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, all the peoples, the nations, and the languages, fell down and worshipped the golden image that Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up. ⁸ Therefore at that time certain Chaldeans came near, and brought accusation against the Jews. ⁹ They answered Nebuchadnezzar the king, O king, live for ever. ¹⁰ You, O king, have made a decree, that every man that shall hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music, shall fall down and worship the golden image; ¹¹ and whoever doesn't fall down and worship shall be cast into the midst of a burning fiery furnace. ¹² There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon: Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego; these men, O king, have not respected you. They don't serve your gods, nor worship

the golden image which you have set up. ¹³ Then Nebuchadnezzar in his rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Then they brought these men before the king. ¹⁴ Nebuchadnezzar said to them, Is it on purpose, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, that you don't serve my gods, nor worship the golden image which I have set up? ¹⁵ Now if you are ready whenever you hear the sound of the horn, flute, zither, lyre, harp, pipe, and all kinds of music to fall down and worship the image which I have made, well: but if you don't worship, you shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that god that shall deliver you out of my hands? ¹⁶ Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered the king, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. ¹⁷ If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O king. ¹⁸ But if not, be it

ing to what happened in Daniel's time in historical Babylon. The essence of what we read here will therefore be seen in the last days before Christ's return. A "herald" cried aloud to peoples of all nations and languages, and bid them worship the Babylonian image, on pain of being cast into a fiery furnace (:4). And yet in Rev. 14:9,10, an Angel herald cries to all nations and languages, warning them that if they *do* worship the image, they will be cast into the lake of fire. The Angels had observed Nebuchadnezzar's arrogance and defiance, and many centuries later they will work out their way of parodying it in their future proclamation to the world.

3:8 Chaldeans – The very astrologers (4:7) whose lives Daniel had saved (2:12). When we do good to others, very often they aren't merely ungrateful but positively resent us and seek to hurt us. This is a sad tendency of human nature, exemplified throughout history. If it happens to us, we must remember that it is in fact normal, and Biblical history is full of such examples, coming to their ultimate term in the Jewish hatred of their Saviour, Jesus.

3:18 Even if God didn't preserve them, they would still serve Him alone. Perhaps they had Job's words going round in their minds: "Though He slay me, yet will I trust in

known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up.

19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and his face changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was usually heated.

20 He commanded mighty men who were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to throw them into the burning fiery furnace.

21 Then these men were bound in their trousers, their tunics, and their mantles, and their other garments, and were thrown into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire killed those men who took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

23 These three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste: he spoke and said to his counsellors, Didn't we throw three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered the king, True, O king.

25 He answered, Look, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are unharmed; and the appearance of the fourth is

like a son of the gods.

26 Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace: he spoke and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, you servants of the Most High God, come out, and come here. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out of the midst of the fire.

27 The satraps, the deputies, and the governors, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, that the fire had no power on their bodies, nor was the hair of their head singed, neither were their clothes changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them.

28 Nebuchadnezzar spoke and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent His angel, and delivered His servants who trusted in Him, these who have set aside the king's command, and have yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

29 Therefore I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak anything evil against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a compost heap; because there is no other god who is able to deliver after this sort.

30 Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the province of Babylon.

Him" (Job 13:15). We cannot expect nor demand Divine deliverance from our crises; our love and trust of Him lead us to accept that He truly knows best and wishes us only our eternal good in our latter end.

3:28 Yielded their bodies – Alluded to in Rom. 6:13,19, where we are told that at baptism we yield our bodies in service to God as our true King and Master.

3:30 Where was Daniel at this time? Sick? Weak in faith? Away on business?

CHAPTER 4 Oct. 26***Another Dream for Nebuchadnezzar***

Nebuchadnezzar the king, to all the peoples, nations, and languages, who dwell in all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you.² It has seemed good to me to show the signs and wonders that the Most High God has worked toward me.³ How great are His signs! How mighty are His wonders! His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and His dominion is from generation to generation.⁴ I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace.⁵ I saw a dream which made me afraid; and the thoughts on my bed and the visions of my head troubled me.⁶ Therefore made I a decree to bring in all the wise men of Babylon before me, that they might explain to me the interpretation of the dream.⁷ Then came in the magicians, the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers; and I told the dream before them; but they did not explain to me its interpretation.⁸ But at the last Daniel came in before me, whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god, and in whom is the spirit of the holy gods: and I told the dream before him, saying,⁹ Belteshazzar, master of the magicians, because I know that the spirit of the holy gods is in you, and no

secret troubles you, tell me the visions of my dream that I have seen, and its interpretation.¹⁰ Thus were the visions of my head on my bed: I saw, and behold, a tree in the midst of the earth; and its height was great.¹¹ The tree grew, and was strong, and its height reached to the sky, and its sight to the end of all the earth.¹² The leaves of it were beautiful, and its fruit much, and in it was food for all: the animals of the field had their shadow under it, and the birds of the sky lived in its branches, and all flesh was fed from it.¹³ I saw in the visions of my head on my bed, and behold, a watcher and a holy one came down from Heaven.¹⁴ He cried aloud, and said thus: Cut down the tree, and cut off its branches, shake off its leaves, and scatter its fruit: let the animals get away from under it, and the birds from its branches.¹⁵ Nevertheless leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of the sky: and let his portion be with the animals in the grass of the earth:¹⁶ let his heart be changed from man's, and let an animal's heart be given to him; and let seven times pass over him.¹⁷ The sentence is by the decree of the watchers, and the judgment decision by the word of the holy ones; to the intent that

4:3 From generation to generation – Nebuchadnezzar learnt from his mistake of wanting his kingdom to last for ever – see on 3:1. He now recognizes the truth of the vision of chapter 2; that *his* kingdom and life were so very brief, and only *God's* Kingdom will be eternal.

4:17 The Chaldee words translated “sentence”, “decree” and “judgment decision” are all legal terms. This is an insight into the court of Heaven – presumably the matter in

the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will, and sets up over it the most abased of men.¹⁸ This dream I, king Nebuchadnezzar, have seen; and you, Belteshazzar, declare the interpretation, because all the wise men of my kingdom are not able to make known to me the interpretation; but you are able; for the spirit of the holy gods is in you.

The Dream's Interpretation

19 Then Daniel, whose name was Belteshazzar, was stricken mute for

a while, and his thoughts troubled him. The king answered, Belteshazzar, don't let the dream, or the interpretation, trouble you. Belteshazzar answered, My lord, the dream is to the side of those who hate you, and its interpretation to your adversaries.²⁰ The tree that you saw, which grew, and was strong, whose height reached to the sky, and its view to all the earth;²¹ whose leaves were beautiful, and its fruit much, and in it was food for all; under which the animals of the field lived, and under whose branches the birds of the sky had their habitation:²² it is you, O king, that

question was Nebuchadnezzar's pride and his position on the Jews (Daniel's advice in 4:27 to shew mercy to the poor may be a reference to what the King should've been doing to the Jews – perhaps by enabling their return to their land?). And a 'judicial decision' was made and "a watcher and a Holy One came down from Heaven" to operationalize it (:13). If this is the extent of Angelic attention to the heart of a Gentile king – how much more earnestly are they debating the states of our hearts and our actions, and issuing decrees for action accordingly? God doesn't respond to the issues in our lives on autopilot, He doesn't use standard form responses; there is real, live, active discussion about little you and me in the court of Heaven itself, with Angels sent hither and thither in response.

The kingdom of men – Whilst God is ultimately the King of His entire creation even now, He has given man freewill to rule the world and his own life as he wishes. Thus at present the world is comprised of "the kingdom of men". At Christ's return, "the kingdoms of the world (will) become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15). Then God's will and desires will be completely and openly performed in this earth. Hence Jesus' command for us to pray: "Your kingdom come (that) Your will be done on earth, as it is (now) in heaven" (Mt. 6:10).

The most abased – That most abased man was a reference to the Lord Jesus. He humbled Himself on the cross, that He might be exalted – to be King of God's Kingdom. The equivalent Hebrew word is used in Is. 53:3 about Christ's ultimate abasement on the cross.

4:19 Daniel in those moments must have been sorely tempted not to speak forth God's word, suspecting it might cost him his life if he did. We too have those moments when we struggle whether or not to open our mouth and testify as we should.

4:21 A spreading tree giving much fruit to all who took refuge under it is the very idea used by the contemporary prophet Ezekiel (Ez. 17:23) in describing the true Kingdom of God. This was to point up the choice available to Israel: a part in the Kingdom of

has grown and become strong; for your greatness is grown, and reaches to the sky, and your dominion to the end of the earth.²³ Whereas the king saw a watcher and a holy one coming down from Heaven and saying, Cut down the tree, and destroy it; nevertheless leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field, and let it be wet with the dew of the sky: and let his portion be with the animals of the field, until seven times pass over him;²⁴ this is the interpretation, O king, and it is the decree of the Most High, which has come on my lord the king:²⁵ that you shall be driven from men, and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field, and you shall be made to eat grass as oxen, and shall be wet with the dew of the sky, and seven times shall pass over you; until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it

to whomsoever He will.²⁶ Whereas they commanded to leave the stump of the roots of the tree; your kingdom shall be sure to you, after that you shall have known that the Heavens do rule.²⁷ Therefore, O king, let my advice be acceptable to you, and break off your sins by righteousness, and your iniquities by showing mercy to the poor; if there may be a lengthening of your prosperity.

The Interpretation Is Fulfilled

²⁸ All this came on the king Nebuchadnezzar.²⁹ At the end of twelve months he was walking in the royal palace of Babylon.³⁰ The king spoke and said, Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling place, by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?³¹ While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from Heaven, saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: The kingdom has

God, or that pseudo-Kingdom of this world. We have the same choice today, living as we do in spiritual Babylon.

4:25 Until you know – The King was still struggling to accept the truth of the chapter 2 vision, that *his* kingdom and life were very limited, and he must refocus himself upon God's eternal Kingdom rather than upon his *own* life and kingdom. He theoretically had accepted the truth of this in 2:47 and 3:29; but he didn't accept it in his heart until after his humiliation (:34). We may likewise struggle to really accept the Gospel of God's coming Kingdom as we should; for believing in it requires a radical refocus of our lives today, right away from ourselves and our own lives and 'kingdoms'.

Gives it to whoever He will – The fact God gives the kingdoms of this world to whoever He chooses should overshadow our decision making when it comes to voting in elections and being involved in politics.

4:27 Daniel prophesied in clear enough language that Nebuchadnezzar would surely be driven away from among men and live as an animal. But he goes on to plead: "Let my advice be acceptable to you, and break off your sins by righteousness" – as if to say that no matter how definite and categoric the prophecy of punishment, it was after all conditional, even though the conditions weren't even hinted at within the actual prophecy. God is *so* sensitive to human repentance.

departed from you: ³² and you shall be driven from men; and your dwelling shall be with the animals of the field; you shall be made to eat grass as oxen; and seven times shall pass over you; until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever He will. ³³ The same hour was the thing fulfilled on Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and ate grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of the sky, until his hair was grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws. ³⁴ At the end of the days I, Nebuchadnezzar, lifted up my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honoured Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom from generation to generation. ³⁵ All the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and He does according to His will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay His hand, or ask Him, What are You doing? ³⁶ At the same time my understanding returned to me; and the glory of my kingdom, my majesty and brightness returned to me; and my officials and my lords sought to me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent greatness was added to me. ³⁷ Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and extol and honour the King of heaven; for all His works are truth, and His ways justice; and those who walk in pride He is able to abase.

4:32 The world is under God's control, not that of demons or supposed evil beings in Heaven.

CHAPTER 5 Oct. 27

Writing on the Wall

Belshazzar the king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords, and drank wine before the thousand. ² Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out of the temple which was in Jerusalem; that the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, might drink from them. ³ Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of God's house which was at Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines, drank from them. ⁴ They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone. ⁵ In the same hour came forth the fingers of a man's hand, and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace: and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. ⁶ Then the king's appearance changed, and his thoughts alarmed him; the joints of his thighs were loosened, and his knees struck one against another. ⁷ The king cried aloud to bring in the enchanters, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon, Whoever shall read this writing, and show me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about his neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom. ⁸ Then came in all the

king's wise men; but they could not read the writing, nor reveal to the king the interpretation.⁹ Then was king Belshazzar greatly troubled, and his appearance was changed, and his lords were perplexed.¹⁰ Now the queen because of the words of the king and his lords came into the banquet house: the queen spoke and said, O king, live forever; don't let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your appearance be changed.¹¹ There is a man in your kingdom, in whom is the spirit of the holy gods; and in the days of your father light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him. The king Nebuchadnezzar your father, the king, I say, your father, made him master of the magicians, enchanters, Chaldeans, and soothsayers;¹² because an excellent spirit, and knowledge, and understanding, the interpreting of dreams, and revealing of strange messages, solving of problems and dissolving of doubts, were found in the same Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar. Now let Daniel be called, and he will show the interpretation.

Daniel Interprets the Words

¹³ Then was Daniel brought in before the king. The king spoke and said to Daniel, Are you that Daniel, who are of the children of the captivity of Judah, whom the king my father brought out of Judah?¹⁴ I have heard of you, that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that light and understanding and excellent wisdom are found in you.¹⁵ Now the wise men, the enchanters, have been brought in before me, that they should read this writing, and tell me its interpretation; but they could not show the interpretation of the thing.¹⁶ But I have heard of you, that you can give interpretations, and dissolve problems; now if you can read the writing, and tell me its interpretation, you shall be clothed with purple, and have a chain of gold about your neck, and shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.¹⁷ Then Daniel answered before the king, Let your gifts be to yourself, and give your rewards to another; nevertheless I will read the writing to the king, and tell him the interpretation.¹⁸ As for you, O king, the Most High

5:13 This incident is so similar to Joseph being suddenly summoned to come in to the mighty king and explain a dream which was worrying him, on the recommendation of another who remembered his previous ability in interpreting dreams; and they were both rewarded by the king in similar ways (Gen. 41:14,40-42). The fact circumstances repeat within the lives of God's children and also between people, one believer experiencing strangely similar situations to what another one has experienced, is all a sign that our lives are under God's control, and they develop according to patterns which He uses and has used with others. This means that we can feel great fellowship with Bible characters, and also with other believers of our own age. Daniel must have immediately thought of Joseph as he received the command to come before the king, and would've been strengthened by it. Likewise the scene here in Daniel 5 of Gentiles praising their gods, mocking Yahweh, and then suddenly being destroyed was a repeat of that in Jud. 16:24.

God gave Nebuchadnezzar your father the kingdom, and greatness, and glory, and majesty:¹⁹ and because of the greatness that He gave him, all the peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared before him: whom he would he killed, and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he raised up, and whom he would he put down.²⁰ But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened so that he became proud, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him:²¹ and he was driven from men, and his heart was made like an animal's, and his dwelling was with the wild donkeys; he was fed with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of the sky; until he knew that the Most High God rules in the kingdom of men, and that He sets up over it whomsoever He will.²² You, his son, Belshazzar, have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this,²³ but have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of His house before you, and

you and your lords, your wives and your concubines, have drunk wine from them; and you have praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which don't see, nor hear, nor know; and the God in whose hand your breath is, and whose are all your ways, you have not glorified.²⁴ Then was the part of the hand sent from before him, and this writing was inscribed:²⁵ MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UP-HARSIN.²⁶ This is the interpretation of it: MENE; God has numbered your kingdom, and brought it to an end;²⁷ TEKEL; you are weighed in the balances, and are found wanting.²⁸ PERES; your kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.²⁹ Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with purple, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.³⁰ In that night Belshazzar the king of the Chaldees was slain.³¹ Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old.

5:20 His spirit was hardened – The hardening was done by God. He confirmed Nebuchadnezzar in the mental position he chose to adopt. The language is similar to how God hardened Pharaoh's heart, after Pharaoh had hardened his own heart.

5:22 Though you knew all this – A classic example of how knowledge brings responsibility to God's judgment (Lk. 12:48; Jn. 15:22).

You, his son, Belshazzar – Triple emphasis is given to the fact that God was watching and speaking so directly and personally to this man, whose name He knew.

5:26 Numbered – God allows things to happen and permits nations to prosper for specific periods of time. The number of our days is likewise numbered (Job 7:1; 14:5; 38:21). God isn't absent from our world; everything is under amazingly tight observation and control.

5:27 Judgment is in a sense ongoing in this life; it's not that God is indifferent now, and will weigh our case only at the last day. Right now, human lives are weighed before God.

CHAPTER 6 Oct. 28***Daniel in the Lions' Den***

It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom one hundred and twenty satraps, who should be throughout the whole kingdom; ² and over them three presidents, of whom Daniel was one; so that these satraps might give account to them, and that the king should have no loss. ³ Then Daniel was promoted above the presidents and the satraps, because an excellently wise spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole kingdom. ⁴ Then the presidents and the satraps sought to find occasion against Daniel regarding the things of the kingdom; but they could find no case nor fault, because he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. ⁵ Then these men said, We shall not find any occasion against Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. ⁶ Then these presidents and satraps assembled together to the king, and said to him, King Darius, live forever. ⁷ All the presidents of the kingdom, the deputies and the satraps, the counsellors and the governors, have consulted together in order to establish a royal statute, and to make an enforced decree, that whoever shall ask a petition of any

god or man for thirty days, except of you, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. ⁸ Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which doesn't alter. ⁹ Therefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. ¹⁰ When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he still went into his house (now his windows in his room were open toward Jerusalem) and he kneeled on his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did previously. ¹¹ Then these men assembled together, and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. ¹² Then they came near, and spoke before the king concerning the king's decree: Haven't you signed a decree, that every man who shall make petition to any god or man within thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered, That is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which doesn't alter. ¹³ Then they responded and said to the king, That Daniel, who is of the captives of Judah, doesn't respect you, O king, nor the decree that you have signed, but makes his petition three times a day. ¹⁴ Then

6:10 Daniel could have just prayed privately, in his heart. Many other Jews probably did this. But he chose to continue to openly pray. He was prepared to give his life for what was only a conscience issue. We too must establish and be prepared to live by our conscience, no matter what others think. Note that Daniel and other faithful believers like David (Ps. 55:17; 119:164) prayed regularly, just as the incense (cp. prayer) was offered regularly. Regular prayer is a good discipline in the life of the believer, rather than praying only when we have the mood or in emergencies. Daniel was willing to die in justification of his habit of open, unashamed, regular prayer.

the king, when he heard these words, was very displeased, and set his heart on Daniel to save him; and he struggled until the going down of the sun to save him. ¹⁵ Then these men assembled together to the king, and said to the king, Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians, that no decree nor statute which the king establishes may be changed. ¹⁶ Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spoke and said to Daniel, Your God whom you serve continually, He will deliver you. ¹⁷ A stone was brought, and laid on the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet ring, and with the signet ring of his lords; so that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. ¹⁸ Then the king went to his palace, and spent the night fasting; no musical instruments were brought before him: and his sleep fled from him. ¹⁹ Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in urgency to the den of lions. ²⁰ When he came near to the den

to Daniel, he cried with a lamentable voice; the king spoke and said to Daniel: Daniel, servant of the living God, is your God, whom you serve continually, able to deliver you from the lions? ²¹ Then Daniel said to the king, O king, live forever. ²² My God has sent His angel, and has shut the lions' mouths, and they have not destroyed me; because before Him innocence was found in me; and also before you, O king, have I done nothing wrong. ²³ Then was the king exceeding glad, and commanded that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no kind of harm was found on him, because he had trusted in his God. ²⁴ The king commanded, and they brought those men who had accused Daniel, and they cast them into the den of lions, them, their children, and their wives; and the lions mauled them, and broke all their bones in pieces, before they came to the bottom of the den. ²⁵ Then king Darius wrote to all the peoples, nations, and languages, who dwell in

6:20 You serve continually – Darius was referring to Daniel's continual prayer. Prayer is a service to God; something we can do even if we incapable of doing any more physical, external service to Him.

6:22 The mouths of the lions were closed so that they did not “destroy” Daniel; and because of this, Darius praises God, saying that His Kingdom would never be ‘destroyed’ (:26, same original word). Daniel was not destroyed; and thus Darius came to believe that God’s Kingdom would not be destroyed. Daniel was set up as a living part and foretaste of that Kingdom, just as we too are to exemplify the life of the future Kingdom in our lives today; in this sense we ‘have eternal life’ in that we live the kind of lives which we will eternally live in God’s future Kingdom. To a far greater extent, “the Kingdom of God” is a title given to the Lord Jesus – because He in His mortal life was the essence of that Kingdom, the embodiment of the life which shall then be lived.

6:25 Note how Daniel is presented as a type of Christ in this chapter. :14 The ruler labouring not to kill a righteous man, manipulated by his own underlings = Pilate; :17

all the earth: Peace be multiplied to you. ²⁶ I make a decree, that in all the dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel; for He is the living God, and steadfast forever, His kingdom that which shall not be destroyed; and His dominion shall remain to the end. ²⁷ He delivers and rescues, and He works signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, He who has delivered Daniel from the power of the lions. ²⁸ So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.

CHAPTER 7 Oct. 29

Daniel's Dream – Four Beasts

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon Daniel had a dream on his bed: then he wrote the dream and told the conclusion of the matters. ² Daniel spoke and said, I saw in my dream and, behold, the four winds of

Heaven broke forth upon the great sea. ³ Four great beasts came up from the sea, diverse one from another. ⁴ The first was like a lion, and had eagle's wings: I saw until its wings were plucked, and it was lifted up from the earth, and made to stand on two feet as a man; and a man's heart was given to it. ⁵ Behold, another beast, a second, like a bear; and it was raised up on one side, and three ribs were in its mouth between its teeth: and they said thus to it, Arise, devour much flesh. ⁶ After this I saw, and behold, another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird; the beast had also four heads; and dominion was given to it. ⁷ After this I saw in the night visions, and, behold, a fourth beast, awesome and powerful, and strong exceedingly; and it had great iron teeth; it devoured and broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet: and

Den of lions – den s.w. pit Is. 14:15, where it is paralleled with the grave. :17 Stone sealed and put on the mouth of the cave [den]= Mt. 27:66; :17 the purpose could not be changed regarding Daniel's death= Jesus died by the determinate counsel of God, Acts 2:23; :22 An Angel sent; :22 'resurrection' early in the morning; :22 Daniel not hurt because innocence found in him = Acts 2:24; :23 Daniel taken up out of the den = resurrection and ascension, s.w. Ps. 139:8 who shall *ascend* to Heaven; :23 no damage was found on Daniel implies they examined his body= Lk. 24:39; :25,26 decree = great commission to spread the knowledge of God's Kingdom which we must fulfil after the Lord's resurrection.

7:7 Note the emphasis in Dan.7 that the fourth beast is totally different from all other beasts. The Roman empire was not so completely different from the preceding empires to warrant this description. 7:7,19 imply that the vision of the fourth beast and little horn was separate from his vision of the four beasts (:2). The first vision was of four beasts and therefore included some reference to the fourth beast, in its manifestation as the Roman empire. But "after this" (:7) there was the more detailed vision of the fourth beast and little horn. This alone implies that they were to have a special manifestation in the last days. The awesome power and strength of this system amazed Daniel, despite what he had already seen. In Daniel's first vision of the four beasts he says that they were "different one from another" (:3). But in the second vision he realized that the fourth beast "was different from all beasts that were before it" (:7), as if

it was diverse from all the beasts that preceded it; and it had ten horns. ⁸ I considered the horns, and behold, there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots: and behold, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things.

⁹ I saw until thrones were placed, and One who was the ancient of days sat: his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of His head like pure wool; His throne was fiery flames, and its wheels burning fire. ¹⁰ A fiery stream came forth from before Him: thousands of thousands ministered to Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him: the judgment was set, and the books were opened. ¹¹ I saw at that time because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke; I saw even until the beast was slain, and its body destroyed, and it was given to be burned with fire. ¹² As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away: yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. ¹³ I saw in the night visions, and behold, there came with the clouds of the sky One like a son of man, and he came up to

the ancient of days, and they brought him near before Him. ¹⁴ There was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations, and languages should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

The Interpretation

¹⁵ As for me Daniel, my spirit was grieved in the midst of my body, and the visions of my head troubled me.

¹⁶ I came near to one of those who stood by, and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made me know the interpretation of the things. ¹⁷ These great animals, which are four, are four kings, who shall arise out of the land. ¹⁸ But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever.

¹⁹ Then I desired to know the truth concerning the fourth beast, which was so different from all of them, exceedingly terrible, whose teeth were of iron, and its nails of brass; which devoured, broke in pieces, and stamped the residue with its feet; ²⁰ and concerning the ten horns that

they were all relatively similar. The persecuting power we are about to see revealed will thus not be a political or religious power of the type previously seen in history. It is therefore almost beyond our conception of exactly how large and strong this power will be: a world superpower directing its venom against Jews and true Christians.

7:19 This describes the fourth beast as having the iron and brass metals of the image of Dan.2 in it. The fourth beast had feet and teeth, we are specifically told. The lion, representing the head of gold, had feet (:4); the bear, representing the breast of silver, had powerful teeth. Thus the fourth beast had all the characteristics of the other beasts. By it being destroyed through its ten horns being smitten by Christ's return, it is as if the image of Dan.2 is standing erect and complete in the last days, being hit on the ten toes (cp. the ten horns of the beast) by Christ's return.

were on its head, and the other horn which came up, and before whom three fell, even that horn that had eyes, and a mouth that spoke great things, whose appearance was more aggressive than its fellows. ²¹ I saw, and the same horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them; ²² until the ancient of days came, and judgment was given to the saints of the Most High, and the time came that the saints possessed the kingdom. ²³ Thus he said, The fourth beast shall be a fourth kingdom on the land, which shall be different from all the kingdoms, and shall devour the whole land, and shall tread it down, and break it in pieces. ²⁴ As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom shall ten kings arise: and another shall arise after them; and he shall be different from the former, and he shall put down three kings. ²⁵ He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear down

the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time. ²⁶ But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it to the end. ²⁷ The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole Heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High: His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him. ²⁸ Here is the end of the matter. As for me Daniel, my thoughts much troubled me, and my appearance was changed: but I kept the matter in my heart.

CHAPTER 8 Oct. 30

A Further Vision of a Ram and a Goat

In the third year of the reign of king Belshazzar a vision appeared to

7:22 The metals of the image in Daniel 2 have their counterpart in the vision of the beasts in Daniel 7. The little stone (Christ) hits the image on the feet and then destroys all the metals together. This means that in some sense the image must stand complete in the last days. The various beasts and metals must all be in existence at the time of Christ's return in order for Him to destroy them by his coming. The little stone hits the image on its ten toes – corresponding to the ten horns of the fourth beast of Dan.7. The ten horns must in a sense be in existence at the time of Christ's coming. Amongst the horns there develops a "little horn" (:8) which persecutes the saints, but is destroyed by Christ's return (:8-11). This horn "made war with the saints... *until* the ancient of days came" (:21,22). Thus the saints will in some way be under persecution when Christ comes. This may be yet future; or it could be that the colossal moral pressure upon true Christians from every angle which we now experience is in fact effectively persecution.

7:25 "A time (a year), times (two years) and an half", i.e. 3.5 years (7:25; 12:7; Rev.12:14). The New Testament speaks of a similar period of 1,260 days -also 3.5 years (Rev.12:6; 11:3); 42 months (3.5 years) (Rev.11:2; 13:5). It seems fair to assume that they are all speaking of an identical or associated period of time. See 9:26.

8:1 There are few Bible characters who use their own name so much – but Daniel is

me, even to me, I Daniel, after that which appeared to me at the first. ² I saw in the vision; now it was so, that when I saw, I was in the citadel of Susa, which is in the province of Elam; and I saw in the vision, and I was by the river Ulai. ³ Then I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, there stood before the river a ram which had two horns: and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher came up last. ⁴ I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward; and no beasts could stand before him, neither was there any who could deliver out of his hand; but he did according to his will, and magnified himself. ⁵ As I was considering, behold, a male goat came from the west over the surface of the whole land, and didn't touch the ground: and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. ⁶ He came to the ram that had the two horns, which I saw standing before the river, and ran on him in the fury of his power. ⁷ I saw him come close to the ram, and he was moved with anger against him, and struck the ram, and broke his

two horns; and there was no power in the ram to stand before him; but he cast him down to the ground, and trampled on him; and there was none who could deliver the ram out of his hand. ⁸ The male goat magnified himself exceedingly: and when he was strong, the great horn was broken; and in the place of it there came up four notable horns toward the four winds of the sky. ⁹ Out of one of them came forth a little horn, which grew exceedingly great, toward the south, and toward the east, and toward the glorious land. ¹⁰ It grew great, even to the army of Heaven; and some of the army and of the stars it cast down to the ground, and trampled on them. ¹¹ Yes, it magnified itself, even to the prince of the army; and it took away from him the continual burnt offering, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. ¹² The army was given over to it along with the continual burnt offering on account of disobedience; and it cast down the truth to the ground, and it did according to its will and prospered. ¹³ Then I heard a holy one speaking; and another holy one said to that certain

always calling himself “I, Daniel” (7:28; 8:1,15,27; 9:2; 10:2,7; 12:5), despite having been given a Babylonian name. His self-perception was very clearly that he was a Hebrew, and a witness to God’s justice / judgment. Daniel has much to teach the man or woman caught up in the corporate life, the engrossing pull of business, education or social contact. His self-perception was that he was not of his surrounding world, even though those around him wanted to see him as one of them. And further, God Himself frequently addresses Daniel by his name – “Daniel”. Daniel realized that this was how God perceived him; and he wished to perceive himself as God perceived him. And he didn’t show one face to the world, and one to God. He openly showed himself to the world as he perceived himself, and he perceived himself as God perceived him. We too should show no shadow self to this world, no appearance; but the person whom we essentially are, and whom God perceives us as being. His children, His witnesses, His people.

one who spoke, How long shall be the vision concerning the continual burnt offering, and the abomination that makes desolate, to give both the sanctuary and the army to be trodden under foot? ¹⁴ He said to me, To two thousand and three hundred evenings and mornings; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed. ¹⁵ It happened when I, even I Daniel, had seen the vision, that I sought to understand it; and behold, there stood before me as the appearance of a man. ¹⁶ I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai which called, and said, Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision. ¹⁷ So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I was frightened, and fell on my face: but he said to me, Understand, son of man; for the vision concerns the time of the end. ¹⁸ Now as he was speaking with me, I fell into a deep sleep with my face toward the ground; but he touched me, and set me upright. ¹⁹ He said, See, I will make you know what shall be in the latter time of the indignation; for it concerns the appointed time of the end. ²⁰ The ram which you saw, that had the two

horns, they are the kings of Media and Persia. ²¹ The rough male goat is the king of Greece: and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. ²² As for that which was broken, in the place where four stood up, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not with his power. ²³ In the latter time of their kingdom, when the wicked have come to the full, a king of fierce appearance and understanding mysteries shall stand up. ²⁴ His power shall be mighty, but not by his own power; he shall be very destructive, and shall prosper and do his own will; and he shall destroy the mighty ones and the holy people. ²⁵ Through his policy he shall cause deceit to prosper; and he shall magnify himself in his heart, and in their security shall he destroy many: he shall also stand up against the prince of princes; but he shall be broken without human hand. ²⁶ The vision of the evenings and mornings which has been told is true: but seal up the vision; for it belongs to many days to come. ²⁷ I Daniel, fainted, and was sick for some days; then I rose up, and did the king's business:

8:15 Daniel sought to understand the meaning of a vision; but two verses earlier, an Angel had asked another Angel for understanding of the same vision. Here we have the practical meaning, in Angelic terms, of God knowing our prayers and arranging the answers before we even ask them. Perhaps it was Daniel's guardian Angel who asked a more senior Angel for the interpretation of the vision, knowing Daniel was going to be asking for it. Yet it was the second Angel who actually gave the answer to Daniel (:14). Verse 16 describes the one Angel standing at the Ulai river calling out: "Gabriel, make this man to understand the vision". Yet at this time, Daniel himself was in vision at the Ulai river (:2). His guardian Angel was there, right in front of him. And He had foreknown Daniel's feelings and arranged for another Angel to respond to them... and so the second Angel (Gabriel) also comes near where Daniel was standing (:17). His guardian Angel had literally called Gabriel to come over to Daniel... And all this kind of thing is going on for us *hourly* in the court of Heaven!

and I wondered at the vision, but none understood it.

CHAPTER 9 Oct. 31

Daniel's Prayer

In the first year of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the seed of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans,² in the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by the books the number of the years about which the word of Yahweh had come to Jeremiah the prophet for the accomplishing of the desolations of Jerusalem, even seventy years.³ I set my face to the Lord God, to seek by prayer and petitions, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.⁴ I prayed to Yahweh my God, and made confession, and said, Oh Lord, the great and dreadful God, who keeps covenant and loving kindness with those who love Him and keep His commandments,⁵ we have sinned and have dealt perversely, and have done wickedly, and have rebelled, even turning aside from Your precepts and from Your ordinances;⁶ neither have we listened to Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, and to all the people of the land.⁷ Lord, righteousness belongs to You, but to us shame of face, as at this day; to the men of Judah, and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and to all Israel, who are near and who are far off, through all the countries

where You have driven them, because of their trespass that they have trespassed against You.⁸ Lord, to us belongs shame of face, to our kings, to our princes, and to our fathers, because we have sinned against You.⁹ To the Lord our God belong mercies and forgiveness; for we have rebelled against Him;¹⁰ neither have we obeyed the voice of Yahweh our God to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets.¹¹ Yes, all Israel have transgressed Your law, turning aside, that they should not obey Your voice: therefore the curse and the oath written in the law of Moses the servant of God has been poured out on us; for we have sinned against Him.¹² He has confirmed His words which He spoke against us, and against our judges who judged us, by bringing on us a great evil; for under the whole Heaven such has not been done as has been done to Jerusalem.¹³ As it is written in the law of Moses, all this evil has come on us: yet have we not entreated the favour of Yahweh our God, that we should turn from our iniquities, and accept Your truth.¹⁴ Therefore has Yahweh watched over the evil, and brought it on us; for Yahweh our God is righteous in all His works which He does, and we have not obeyed His voice.¹⁵ Now, Lord our God, You who brought Your people forth out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and has

9:12 God brought the “evil” or disaster (:14); there is no personal Satan who does this, God creates both good and evil in a judicial sense (Is. 45:5-7).

9:15 *We have sinned* – So often in this prayer, Daniel associates himself with his sinful people. No matter how weak we perceive our fellow believers to be, we are part of

gotten Yourself renown, as at this day; we have sinned, we have done wickedly. ¹⁶ Lord, according to all Your righteousness, please let Your anger and Your wrath be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people have become a reproach to all who are around us. ¹⁷ Now therefore, our God, listen to the prayer of Your servant, and to his petitions, and cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary that is desolate, for the Lord's sake. ¹⁸ My God, turn Your ear, and hear; open Your eyes, and see our desolations, and the city which is called by Your name: for we do not present our petitions before You for our righteousness, but for Your great mercies' sake. ¹⁹ Lord, hear; Lord, forgive; Lord, listen and do; don't defer, for Your own sake, my God, because Your city and Your people are called by Your name.

The Seventy Weeks

20 While I was speaking, and praying, and confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before Yahweh

my God for the holy mountain of my God; ²¹ yes, while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, touched me about the time of the evening offering. ²² He instructed me, and talked with me, and said, Daniel, I am now come forth to give you wisdom and understanding. ²³ At the beginning of your petitions the commandment went forth, and I have come to tell you; for you are greatly beloved: therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision. ²⁴ Seventy weeks are decreed on your people and on your holy city, to finish disobedience, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy. ²⁵ Know therefore and discern, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem to the Anointed One, the prince, shall be seven weeks, and sixty-two weeks: it shall be built again, with street and moat, even in troubled times. ²⁶ After the sixty-two weeks the Anointed One shall be cut off, and shall have

the body of Christ as they are, and we cannot in this sense disassociate ourselves from them. When we see their sins, we should feel shame for the fact that the body of God's people behave like this, and ask God to forgive *us*.

9:23 See on 10:2.

9:26 69 weeks is 483 days. On the basis of a day for a year, this would make 483 years. However, Jewish time is often reckoned in Lunar cycles rather than Solar, as Europeans are accustomed to. The decree of Artaxerxes to rebuild Jerusalem was given BC457. On the basis of Lunar time, 69 weeks of years comes out at 486.5 Lunar years. Allowing for a BC/AD calendar inaccuracy of 4 years, this brings us to AD33.5 for the time of Messiah being cut off, which is exactly when Jesus was crucified, 33.5 years after his birth. The 69 weeks being split into 7 weeks and 62 weeks is under-

nothing: and the people of the prince who shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and its end shall be with a flood, and even to the end shall be war; desolations are determined. ²⁷ He shall make a firm covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week He shall cause the sacrifice and the offering to cease; and on the wing of abominations shall come desolation even to the full end, and the wrath that is de-

termined shall be poured out on the one who makes desolate.

CHAPTER 10 Nov. 1

A Vision of a Man

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia something was revealed to Daniel, whose name was called Belteshazzar; and it was true, even a great warfare: and he understood the thing, and had understanding of the vision. ² In those days I Daniel was

standable once it is appreciated that most Bible prophecy has some immediate reference to the period around which it was given. 7 weeks of years would come to around 50 years. According to the records of the rebuilding of Jerusalem in Ezra, Nehemiah and Haggai it would appear that the bulk of the work was done in the 50 years after the issuing of the decree for rebuilding. This mini time period would doubtless have been of great encouragement to the Jews of the time as they laboured in the rebuilding work amidst so much opposition. The final week of tribulation is hard to interpret, perhaps because if Israel had accepted Christ as Messiah as intended, it could have been fulfilled without the delay which was necessitated. One possibility is that the 3.5 year tribulation of Jerusalem at the hands of the Romans between AD67 and AD70 was the half week in which the sacrifices ceased to be offered in the Jerusalem temple (:27). The remaining half week would be fulfilled in the final 3.5 year tribulation before Christ's return (see 7:25). The jump in fulfilment from AD33 to AD70 and then to the last days is the same kind of hiatus found in the gap between the legs and the feet of the image in Dan. 2, and between the succession of beasts and then the terrible beast and the little horn in Dan. 7. These are but suggestions for the interpretation of some of the hardest words in the Bible.

10:2 Verses 2 and 3 show Daniel praying for three weeks – presumably for the fortunes of Israel to be restored. As the days went by, it would have seemed natural to assume that the prayer was going unanswered. However, the Angel told him that “from the first day... your words were heard” (:12), but the delay was because “the prince of the Kingdom of Persia withheld me (the Angel) twenty-one days” – i.e. three weeks. So his first prayer was heard, but it took the Angel three weeks to work out the answer in practice. How many of our prayers are like that! The Angel then describes how he confirmed and strengthened Darius (11:1) to the same end to enable the prayer to be answered – as if when our Angel sees someone set in a course of action which will lead to the answer of our prayer, they are confirmed and strengthened in it. The same idea is found in 9:23; a command being given from God to answer a prayer as soon as it's prayed, but there being a delay to the answer due to the Angels effecting the answer. The wonder of all this needs some reflection. Our words, the thoughts within human braincells, call forth the Angels from the court of Heaven. Our prayers may be answered immediately, but it takes time for the answers to be worked out.

mourning three whole weeks.³ I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine into my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, until three whole weeks were fulfilled.⁴ In the twenty fourth day of the first month, as I was by the side of the great river which is Hiddekel,⁵ I lifted up my eyes, and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, whose thighs were adorned with pure gold of Uphaz:⁶ his body also was like the beryl, and his face as the appearance of lightning, and his eyes as flaming torches, and his arms and his feet like burnished brass, and his voice like the voice of a multitude.⁷ I Daniel alone saw the vision; for the men who were with me didn't see the vision; but a great trembling fell on them, and they fled to hide themselves.⁸ So I was left alone, and saw this great vision, and there remained no strength in me; for my moisture was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength.⁹ Yet heard I the voice of his words; and at the time I heard the voice of his words, I had fallen into a deep sleep on my face, with my face toward the ground.¹⁰ Behold, a hand touched me, which set me on my knees and on the palms of my hands.¹¹ He said to me, Daniel, you man greatly beloved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright; for

I am now sent to you. When he had spoken this word to me, I stood trembling.¹² Then he said to me, Don't be afraid, Daniel; for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard: and I have come for your words' sake.¹³ But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withheld me twenty-one days; but, behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me: and I remained there with the kings of Persia.¹⁴ Now I have come to make you understand what shall happen to your people in the latter days; for the vision is yet for many days.¹⁵ And when he had spoken to me according to these words, I set my face toward the ground, and was mute.¹⁶ Then behold, one in the likeness of the sons of men touched my lips: then I opened my mouth, and spoke and said to him who stood before me: My lord, by reason of the vision my sorrows are turned on me, and I retain no strength.¹⁷ For how can my Lord's servant talk with my lord? For as for me, immediately there remained no strength in me, neither was there breath left in me.¹⁸ Then there touched me again one like the appearance of a man, and he strengthened me.¹⁹ He said, Greatly beloved man, don't be afraid: peace be to you, be strong, yes, be

10:12 An Angel is sent from Heaven to earth for the sake of human words... The prayers of a man standing at a bus stop on earth can call forth cosmic action. This is the power of prayer, and the extent of God's sensitivity to us.

10:19 Whenever Angels appear to people on earth, the people are afraid, but the Angel comforts them not to fear. It will be the same when the Angel appears to gather us to meet Christ at His return.

strong. When he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, Let my lord speak; for you have strengthened me. ²⁰ Then he said, Do you know why I have come to you? Now I will return to fight with the prince of Persia. When I go forth, behold, the prince of Greece shall come. ²¹ But I will tell you that which is inscribed in the writing of truth: and there is none who holds with me against these, but Michael your prince.

CHAPTER 11 Nov. 2

The King of the South and the King of the North

As for me, in the first year of Darius the Mede, I stood up to confirm and strengthen him. ² Now will I show you the truth. Behold, there shall stand up yet three kings in Persia; and the fourth shall be far richer than they all: and when he has grown strong through his riches, he shall stir up all against the realm of Greece. ³ A mighty king shall stand up, who shall rule with great power, and do according to his will. ⁴ When he has arisen, his kingdom shall be broken, and shall be divided toward the four winds of the sky, but not to his posterity, nor according to his power with which he ruled; for his kingdom shall be plucked up, even for others besides these. ⁵ The king

of the south shall be strong, and also one of his princes; and he shall be strong above him, and have dominion; his dominion shall be a great dominion. ⁶ At the end of years they shall join themselves together; and the daughter of the king of the south shall come to the king of the north to make an agreement: but she shall not retain the strength of her arm; neither shall he stand, nor his arm; but she shall be given up, and those who brought her, and he who became the father of her, and he who strengthened her in those times. ⁷ But out of a shoot from her roots shall one stand up in his place, who shall come to the army, and shall enter into the fortress of the king of the north, and shall deal against them, and shall prevail. ⁸ Also their gods, with their molten images, and with their attractive vessels of silver and of gold, shall he carry captive into Egypt; and he shall refrain some years from the king of the north. ⁹ He shall come into the realm of the king of the south, but he shall return into his own land. ¹⁰ His sons shall war, and shall assemble a multitude of great forces, which shall come on, and overflow, and pass through; and they shall return and war, even to his fortress. ¹¹ The king of the south shall be moved with anger, and shall come forth and

11:3 The “mighty king” is Alexander the Great; as soon as he arose to great power, he died and his empire was split amongst his generals (:4). This is confirmation of the prophecy in Daniel 2 that the Greek empire would also pass off the scene. The rest of the chapter describes how the situation after his death developed in relation to those nations who had domination over Israel; how the mighty powers fought with each other, their fortunes ebbed and faded according to the amount of time God had assigned them.

fight with him, even with the king of the north; and he shall set forth a great multitude, and the multitude shall be given into his hand.¹² The multitude shall be lifted up, and his heart shall be exalted; and he shall cast down tens of thousands, but he shall not prevail.¹³ The king of the north shall return, and shall set forth a multitude greater than the former; and he shall come on at the end of the times, even of years, with a great army and with much substance.¹⁴ In those times there shall many stand up against the king of the south: also the children of the violent among your people shall lift themselves up to establish the vision; but they shall fall.¹⁵ So the king of the north shall come, and cast up a mound, and take a well-fortified city: and the forces of the south shall not stand, neither his chosen people, neither shall there be any strength to stand.¹⁶ But he who comes against him shall do according to his own will, and none shall stand before him; and he shall stand in the glorious land, and in his hand shall be destruction.¹⁷ He shall set his face to come with the strength of his whole kingdom, and he shall bring terms of an agreement and perform them. He shall give him the daughter of women, to corrupt her; but she shall not stand, neither be for him.¹⁸ After this shall he turn his face to the islands, and shall take many: but a commander shall cause

the reproach offered by him to cease; yes, moreover, he shall cause his insolence to return upon him.¹⁹ Then he shall turn his face toward the fortresses of his own land; but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found.²⁰ Then shall stand up in his place one who shall cause a tax collector to pass through the kingdom to maintain its glory; but within a few days he shall be destroyed, neither in anger, nor in battle.²¹ In his place shall arise a contemptible person, to whom they had not given the honour of the kingdom: but he shall come in time of security, and shall obtain the kingdom by flatteries.²² The overwhelming forces shall be overwhelmed from before him, and shall be broken; even the prince of the covenant.²³ After the treaty made with him he shall work deceitfully; for he shall come up, and shall become strong with a small people.²⁴ Without warning he shall come into the richest parts of the province; and he shall do that which his fathers have not done, nor his fathers' fathers; he shall scatter among them prey and spoil and substance: moreover, he shall devise his devices against the strongholds, but only for a time.²⁵ He shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the south with a great army; and the king of the south shall war in battle with an exceeding great and mighty army; but he shall not stand; for they

11:25 Not stand – This is typical of the language found in this chapter. The rival kingdoms of men appear so powerful and stable, and are so confident – for a time. Chapter 2 has explained how human empires all pass off the scene, they cannot ‘stand’ for ever, they last only for a time, and will be finally replaced by God’s eternal Kingdom

shall devise devices against him. 26 Yes, they who eat of his dainties shall destroy him, and his army shall overflow; and many shall fall down slain. 27 As for both these kings, their hearts shall be to do mischief, and they shall speak lies at one table: but it shall not prosper; for yet the end shall be at the time appointed. 28 Then shall he return into his land with great riches; and his heart shall be against the holy covenant; and he shall do his pleasure, and return to his own land. 29 At the time appointed he shall return, and come into the south; but it shall not be in the latter time as it was in the former. 30 For ships of Kittim shall come against him; therefore he shall be afraid and shall withdraw, and have indignation against the holy covenant, and shall do his pleasure: he shall even return, and pay attention to those who forsake the holy covenant. 31 Forces from him shall appear, and they shall profane the sanctuary, even the fortress, and shall take away the continual burnt offering, and they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate. 32 Such as do wickedly against the covenant shall he pervert by flatteries; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and do exploits. 33 Those who are wise among

the people shall instruct many; yet they shall fall by the sword and by flame, by captivity and by spoil, many days. 34 Now when they shall fall, they shall be helped with a little help; but many shall join themselves to them with flattery. 35 Some of those who are wise shall stumble, to refine them, and to purify, and to make them white, until the time of the end; because it is yet for the time appointed. 36 The king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods; and he shall prosper until the indignation be accomplished; for that which is decreed shall be done. 37 Neither shall he regard the gods of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall magnify himself above all. 38 But instead he shall honour the god of fortresses; and a god whom his fathers didn't know shall he honour with gold, and silver, and with precious stones, and pleasant things. 39 He shall deal with the strongest fortresses by the help of a foreign god: whoever acknowledges him he will increase with glory; and he shall cause them to rule over many, and shall divide the land for a price.

when Christ returns. Regardless of the exact details of fulfilment, the chapter gives us the general impression of the vanity of human strength, how all human beauty fades to grey, earth's proud empires pass away, and only the things and people of God's eternal future Kingdom will ultimately stand for ever.

11:31–36 This describes the situation at the time of the Maccabees. However, Jesus speaks of the abomination as also being set up in the last days before His return (Mt. 24:15; Mk. 13:14). So whatever fulfilments these words had in the time e.g. of Antiochus, they were only precursors of the main fulfilment in our last days.

The Time of the End

40 At the time of the end shall the king of the south contend with him; and the king of the north shall come against him like a whirlwind, with chariots, and with horsemen, and with many ships; and he shall enter into the countries, and shall overflow and pass through.⁴¹ He shall also come into the glorious land, and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall be delivered out of his hand: Edom, and Moab, and the chief leader of the children of Ammon.⁴² He shall stretch out his hand also on the countries; and the land of Egypt shall not escape.⁴³ But he shall have power over the treasures of gold and of silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; and the Libyans and the Ethiopians shall be at his steps.⁴⁴ But news out of the east and out of the north shall trouble him; and he shall go forth with great fury to destroy and to devote many to destruction.⁴⁵ He shall plant the tents of his palace between the sea

and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and none shall help him.

CHAPTER 12 Nov. 3

The Faithful in the Last Days

At that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince who stands for the children of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who shall be found written in the book.² Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.³ Those who are wise shall shine as the brightness of the expanse; and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever.⁴ But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of its fulfilment: many shall run back and forth, and knowledge shall be increased.⁵ Then I Daniel looked,

11:40–45 This may refer to a latter day invasion of Israel by a “king of the north”, supported by Middle Eastern powers, which will have the temple mount in Jerusalem (:45) as its target. The invader will be destroyed by the return of Christ, at which time there will be resurrection, judgment and the establishment of God’s Kingdom on earth (12:1–3).

12:1 *Michael* – The Angel that represents Israel, Daniel’s people.

12:2 Immortality is thus given when Christ returns, after the resurrection and at the judgment seat of Christ – not at the moment of death.

12:3, 10 draw a parallel between those having wisdom and those who turn many to righteousness. Some translate “those who are wise” as “the teachers”, reflecting the play of ideas within the Hebrew sense of ‘wisdom’ – to have wisdom is axiomatically to teach it. To possess God’s Truth therefore means that we will share it with others in some form; one cannot keep good news just to themselves.

12:4 Running is an idiom for responding to God’s word (Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; Hab. 2:2; 2 Thess. 3:1). In the last days there will be some who understand the prophecies which Daniel so wanted to but couldn’t (:9), and they will respond to

and behold, two others stood, one on the river bank on this side, and the other on the river bank on that side. ⁶ One said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, How long shall it be to the end of these wonders? ⁷ I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the river, when he held up his right hand and his left hand to heaven, and swore by Him who lives forever that it shall be for a time, times, and a half; and when they have made an end of breaking in pieces the power of the holy people, all these things shall be finished. ⁸ I heard, but I didn't understand: then I said, my lord, what shall be the issue of these things? ⁹ He said, Go

your way, Daniel; for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end. ¹⁰ Many shall purify themselves, and make themselves white, and be refined; but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand; but those who are wise shall understand. ¹¹ From the time that the continual burnt offering shall be taken away, and the abomination that makes desolate set up, there shall be one thousand two hundred and ninety days. ¹² Blessed is he who waits, and comes to the one thousand three hundred and thirty-five days. ¹³ But go you your way until the end; for you shall rest, and shall stand in your lot, at the end of the days.

this knowledge powerfully. The purpose of prophecy isn't to predict the future, but so that the generation who live at the time of its fulfilment will understand (as in Jn. 13:19; 14:29).

12:7 Time, times... See on 7:25.

12:10 In the last days, “the wise shall understand” (12:10). Wisdom and Daniel are clearly associated, at least eight times (Dan. 1:17; 2:13,14,18,24,27,48; Ez. 28:3); as are Daniel and a desire to understand. Yet Daniel did not fully understand his latter day prophecies; “the wise shall understand” in the last days, Daniel was comforted. In other words, there will be a ‘Daniel’ category in the last days who will share his wisdom, sharing the character of Daniel, and who will be given the understanding he so earnestly sought.

12:13 A promise to Daniel of personal resurrection and receiving a specific place or “lot” in God’s future Kingdom on earth.

HOSEA

CHAPTER 1 Nov. 4

The beginning of the word of Yahweh that came to Hosea the son of Beeri, in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash, king of Israel.

Hosea's Family

When Yahweh spoke at first by Hosea, Yahweh said to Hosea, Go, take for yourself a wife of prostitution and children of unfaithfulness; for the land commits great adultery, forsaking Yahweh. So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; and she conceived, and bore him a son. Yahweh said to him, Call his name Jezreel; for yet a little while, and I will avenge the blood of Jezreel on the house of Jehu, and will cause the kingdom of the house of Israel to cease. It will happen in

that day that I will break the bow of Israel in the valley of Jezreel. She conceived again, and bore a daughter. Then he said to him, Call her name Lo-Ruhamah; for I will no longer have mercy on the house of Israel, that I should in any way pardon them. But I will have mercy on the house of Judah, and will save them by Yahweh their God, and will not save them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen. Now when she had weaned Lo-Ruhamah, she conceived, and bore a son. He said, Call his name Lo-Ammi; for you are not My people, and I will not be yours. Yet the number of the children of Israel will be as the sand of the sea, which can't be measured nor numbered; and it will come to pass that, in the place where it was said to them, 'You are not My people', they will be called 'sons of the living

1:2 The first three chapters of Hosea are about his marriage to a prostitute, who had children by other men and who were therefore not his children. Yet Hosea loved her, and oscillates between anger and passionate pleading with her. He fantasizes about how wonderful it would be to have her committed to him, and speculates as to how he might bring her to this. His relationship with her represented God's with Israel, and chapter 4 onwards speaks of God's situation with Israel in the language of marriage and intimate relationship. It may be possible to reason back from some of these chapters to understand other aspects of the Hosea: Gomer relationship.

The beginning – He'd have been tempted to just ignore it, to think he'd been dreaming something, to run away from it. But to his credit, he obeyed. According to the Mosaic Law, a whore should be burnt, not married. Hosea was told to break the letter of the Law, and marry a prostitute; thus he began what was to be quite a theme in both his life and his prophecy – that in the face of sin, God shows His grace. We've likely all seen this in our own lives – at our very weakest moments, the kindness and care of God for us is revealed.

1:10 *Yet the number* – "Yet" is the challenging word. In the face of all Israel's sin, in the face of the inevitable judgment which this attracted, in the very moment when it is declared, God goes on to speak of His loving salvation. This is so hard for humans to

God'.¹¹ The children of Judah and the children of Israel will be gathered together, and they will appoint themselves one head, and will go up from the land; for great will be the day of Jezreel.

CHAPTER 2 Nov. 5

Punishment and Restoration

Say to your brothers, ‘Ammi! [My people]!’ and to your sisters,

‘Ruhamah! [I will have mercy!]’.² Contend with your mother! Contend, for she is not my wife, neither am I her husband; and let her therefore put away her prostitution from her face, and her adulteries from between her breasts;³ lest I strip her naked, and make her bare as in the day that she was born, and make her like a wilderness, and set her like a dry land, and kill her with thirst.

take on board, called as we are to manifest this same grace of God. In the heat of the moment of others' sin against us, we rarely find it in us to think let alone speak of their ultimate hope of salvation by grace. But this is the challenge of Hosea.

2:3 Lest I strip her naked... and kill her – The punishment for a prostitute, a punishment which she should've had at the start. But instead of this punishment, Hosea had married her. We are perhaps nervous to equate our sinfulness, our rebellion, our unfaithfulness, with Gomer's prostitution. But this, surely, is what we are intended to do, and to thereby perceive the extent of God's patient love toward us, to the end that that grace and goodness might lead us to repentance. Because Hosea had so loved this woman, he had legitimate feelings of anger – as does God, having loved us so much. Hosea was the wounded lover, the betrayed man. And these are exactly the feelings of God over the unfaithfulness of His people. The threat to strip her naked was what was done in the case of divorce for adultery. “She is not my wife, neither am I her husband” (2:2) is a quotation from a Jewish divorce formula. Likewise the threat to withdraw her clothing, her “wool and linen” (2:9) likely refers to the obligation a husband had to his wife. Yet for all this talk of divorce, Hosea keeps wanting Gomer to return to him; in his heart he keeps coming back to her. This was an exact reflection of God's feelings for His people. Hosea did everything for this worthless woman. He gave her “the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied to her silver and gold, which they used for Baal” (2:8). He was a wealthy man, and yet gave it all to his wife, who in turn blew it all with her boyfriends on Baal worship. It's like the millionaire marrying a worthless woman who manipulates him into giving her his money, which she blows down at the casino day by day, and sleeps with the guys she hangs out with down there. But “she did not recognize that it was Me who gave her” all these things (2:8) – i.e. she didn't appreciate it. And so Hosea decides that he will withdraw this generosity from her, and then, he surmises, “she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband’” (2:7). This was Hosea's hope, and in his own mind, he put these words in her mouth. The hopefulness of Hosea was a reflection of the love he had for her. And all this speaks eloquently of the hopefulness of the Almighty Father who thought “surely they will reverence My Son” when He sent Him. And the purposeful anti-climax of the parable is that no, they don't and won't reverence His Son, and even worse, they kill Him. In the same way as Hosea had this plan to get Gomer to “return” to him, so God likewise planned that “afterward the children of Israel shall return, and seek Yahweh” (3:5). Both God and Hosea thought that their beloved would return if

⁴ Indeed, on her children I will have no mercy; for they are children of unfaithfulness; ⁵ for their mother has played the prostitute. She who conceived them has done shamefully; for she said, ‘I will go after my lovers, who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink’. ⁶ Therefore behold, I will hedge up your way with thorns, and I will build a wall against her, that she can’t find her way. ⁷ She will follow after her lovers, but she won’t overtake them; and she will seek them, but won’t find them. Then she will say, ‘I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now’. ⁸ For she did not recognize that it was I who gave her the grain, the new wine, and the oil, and multiplied to her silver and gold, which they used for Baal. ⁹ Therefore I will take back My grain in its time, and My new wine in its season, and will pluck away My wool and My linen which should have covered her nakedness. ¹⁰ Now I will uncover her lewdness in the sight of her lovers, and no one will deliver her out of My hand. ¹¹ I will also cause all her celebrations to cease: her feasts, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her solemn assemblies. ¹² I will

lay waste her vines and her fig trees, about which she has said, ‘These are my wages that my lovers have given me; and I will make them a forest’, and the animals of the field shall eat them. ¹³ I will visit on her the days of the Baals, to which she burned incense, when she decked herself with her earrings and her jewels, and went after her lovers, and forgot Me, says Yahweh. ¹⁴ Therefore behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her. ¹⁵ I will give her vineyards from there, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she will respond there, as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt. ¹⁶ It will be in that day, says Yahweh, that you will call Me ‘my husband’, and no longer call Me ‘my master’. ¹⁷ For I will take away the names of the Baals out of her mouth, and they will no longer be mentioned by name. ¹⁸ In that day I will make a covenant for them with the animals of the field, and with the birds of the sky, and with the creeping things of the ground. I will break the bow, the sword, and the battle out of the land, and will make them lie down safely. ¹⁹ I will betroth you to Me forever. Yes, I will

they distanced themselves from her (5:15). But it didn’t work out like this. Both God with Israel and Hosea with Gomer ended up *pleading* with her to return (14:1); “yet they do not return to Yahweh their God, nor seek Him, for all this” (7:10). It was and is a tragedy. In our preaching to Israel and to humanity generally, we are pleading with them to accept this most unusual love. The pain of God, the way He is left as it were standing there as a tragic figure, like Hosea was, of itself inspires us to plead with people all the more passionately; and to respond ourselves, to be the loving woman to Him the ultimately faithful man.

betroth you to Me in righteousness, in justice, in loving kindness, and in compassion. ²⁰ I will even betroth you to Me in faithfulness; and you shall know Yahweh. ²¹ It will happen in that day, I will respond, says Yahweh, I will respond to the heavens, and they will echo down to the earth; ²² and the earth will respond to the grain, and the new wine, and the oil; and they will respond to Jezreel. ²³ I will sow her to Me in the earth; and I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy; and I will tell those who were not My people, ‘You are My people;’ and they will say, ‘You are my God!’.

CHAPTER 3 Nov. 6

The Marriage Reconciled

Yahweh said to me, Go again, I love a woman loved by another, and an adulteress, even as Yahweh loves the children of Israel, though they turn to other gods, and love cakes of raisins. ² So I bought her for myself for fifteen pieces of silver and a homer and a half of barley. ³ I said to her, You shall stay with me many days. You shall not play the prostitute, and you shall not be with any other man. I will also be so toward you. ⁴ For the children of Israel shall live many days without king, and without prince, and without sacrifice, and without sacred stone, and without ephod or idols. ⁵ Afterward the children of Israel shall return, and seek Yahweh their God, and David their king, and shall come with trembling to Yahweh and to His blessings in the last days.

CHAPTER 4 Nov. 7

Against the Children of Israel

Hear the word of Yahweh, you children of Israel; for Yahweh has a charge against the inhabitants of the land: Indeed there is no truth, nor goodness, nor knowledge of God in the land. ² There is cursing, lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery; they break boundaries, and bloodshed causes bloodshed. ³ Therefore the land will mourn, and everyone who dwells therein will waste away. All living things in her, even the animals of the field and the birds of the sky; yes, the fish of the sea also die. ⁴ Yet let no man bring a case, neither let any man accuse; for Your people are like those who bring charges against a priest. ⁵ You will stumble in the day, and the prophet will also stumble with you in the night; and I will destroy your mother. ⁶ My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will also reject you, that you may be no priest to Me. Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I will also forget your children. ⁷ As they were multiplied, so they sinned against Me. I will change their glory into shame. ⁸ They feed on the sin of My people, and set their heart on their iniquity. ⁹ It will be, like people, like priest; and I will punish them for their ways, and will repay them for their deeds. ¹⁰ They will eat, and not feel satisfied. They will play the prostitute, and will not increase; because they have abandoned giving to Yahweh. ¹¹ Prostitution, wine, and new wine take away

the heart.¹² My people consult with their wooden idol, and answer to a stick of wood. Indeed the spirit of prostitution has led them astray, and they have been unfaithful to their God.¹³ They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and burn incense on the hills, under oaks and poplars and terebinths, because its shade is good. Therefore your daughters play the prostitute, and your brides commit adultery.¹⁴ I will not punish your daughters when they play the prostitute, nor your brides when they commit adultery; because the men consort with prostitutes, and they sacrifice with the shrine prostitutes; so the people without understanding will come to ruin themselves.¹⁵ Though you, Israel, play the prostitute, yet don't let Judah offend; and don't come to Gilgal, neither go up to Beth Aven, nor swear, 'As Yahweh lives'.¹⁶ For Israel has behaved extremely stubbornly, like a stubborn heifer. Then how will Yahweh feed them like a lamb in a meadow!¹⁷ Ephraim is joined to idols. Leave him alone!¹⁸ Their drink has become sour. They play the prostitute continually. Her rulers dearly love

their shameful way.¹⁹ The wind has wrapped her up in its wings; and they shall be unfulfilled in the offering of their sacrifices.

CHAPTER 5 Nov. 8

Judgments against the Priests and the House of Israel

Listen to this, you priests! Listen, house of Israel, and give ear, house of the king! For the judgment is against you; for you have been a snare at Mizpah, and a net spread on Tabor.² The rebels are deep in slaughter; but I discipline all of them.³ I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from Me; for now, Ephraim, you have played the prostitute; Israel is defiled.⁴ Their deeds won't allow them to turn to their God; for the spirit of prostitution is within them, and they don't know Yahweh.⁵ The pride of Israel testifies to his face. Therefore Israel and Ephraim will stumble in their iniquity, Judah also will stumble with them.⁶ They will go with their flocks and with their herds to seek Yahweh; but they won't find Him- He has withdrawn Himself from them.⁷ They are unfaithful to Yahweh; for they have be-

4:12 *The spirit of prostitution* – Gomer's sexual addiction was reflected in Israel's chronic unfaithfulness to Yahweh. The very process of sinning has a tendency to push people into a downwards spiritual spiral from which there is no easy exit (see 5:4).

4:15 Gilgal and Beth Aven were border towns between Judah and Israel. The nominally faithful people of Judah were slipping over the border to do quick idol worship and then returning, protesting their loyalty to Yahweh. This kind of hypocrisy can so easily be slipped into.

5:7 The way Hosea's final child is called Lo-ammi was because "you are not My people" (1:9). This suggests that although Hosea did presumably have sexual relations with Gomer, these children were not actually conceived from him – i.e. she was continuing her relations with other men; her conception of the children is said to have been "shameful" (2:5) because they were the result of her prostitution (2:4). He calls

gotten foreign children. Now the new moon will devour them with their fields. ⁸ Blow the cornet in Gibeah, and the trumpet in Ramah! Sound a battle cry at Beth Aven, behind you, Benjamin! ⁹ Ephraim will become a desolation in the day of rebuke. Among the tribes of Israel, I have made known that which will certainly be. ¹⁰ The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark. I will pour out My wrath on them like water. ¹¹ Ephraim is oppressed, he is crushed in judgment; because he is obsessed in his pursuit of idols. ¹² Therefore I am to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house of Judah like rottenness. ¹³ When Ephraim saw his sickness, and Judah his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria, and sent to king Jareb: but he is not able to heal you, neither will he cure you of your wound. ¹⁴ For I will be to Ephraim like a lion, and like a young lion to the house of Judah. I myself will tear in pieces and go away; I will carry off, and there will be no one to deliver. ¹⁵ I will go and return to My place, until they acknowledge their offence,

and seek My face. In their affliction they will seek Me earnestly.

CHAPTER 6 Nov. 9

Unrepentant

Come, and let us return to Yahweh; for He has torn us to pieces, and He will heal us; He has injured us, and He will bind up our wounds. ² After two days He will revive us. On the third day He will raise us up, and we will live before Him. ³ Let us acknowledge Yahweh. Let us press on to know Yahweh. As surely as the sun rises, Yahweh will appear. He will come to us like the rain, like the spring rain that waters the earth. ⁴ Ephraim, what shall I do to you? Judah, what shall I do to you? For your love is like a morning cloud, and like the dew that disappears early. ⁵ Therefore I have cut them to pieces with the prophets; I slew them with the words of My mouth. Your judgments are like a flash of lightning. ⁶ For I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. ⁷ But they, like Adam, have

them “her children”. Gomer appears to reason in 2:4 that the children were her lovers’ payment to her for her sexual services. And in the parallel relationship between God and Israel, Israel were unfaithful to Yahweh and “begotten foreign children”, whilst at the same time claiming to keep the sacrifices and Sabbaths of the Law (:6,7; 2:11). This would confirm that Gomer acted as Hosea’s wife, assuring him of her faithfulness, in the same way as the sacrifices and Sabbaths were intended to reflect Israel’s exclusive faithfulness to Yahweh. Our unfaithfulness to God is this painful for Him.

6:6 I desire... the knowledge of God – Israel and Gomer were “destroyed for lack of knowledge” (4:6). Yet they cried out that “My God, how we know You!” (8:2). Israel’s attitude to the Law can so easily be our attitude to the principles of the Gospel, the New Covenant, in which we stand. We can ‘know’ it all, and externally keep it... but in reality not know it at all, focusing on the external sacrifices whilst knowing nothing of the God we supposedly worship. All this was exemplified by Gomer being an observant Jewess, whilst worshipping Baal and living a shameful life.

broken the covenant. They were unfaithful to Me, there.⁸ Gilead is a city of those who work iniquity; it is stained with blood.⁹ As gangs of robbers wait to ambush a man, so the company of priests murder in the way toward Shechem, committing shameful crimes.¹⁰ In the house of Israel I have seen a horrible thing. There is prostitution in Ephraim. Israel is defiled.¹¹ Also, Judah, there is a harvest appointed for you, when I restore the fortunes of My people.

CHAPTER 7 Nov. 10

When I would heal Israel, then the iniquity of Ephraim is uncovered, also the wickedness of Samaria; for they commit falsehood, and the thief enters in, and the gang of robbers ravages outside.² They don't consider in their hearts that I remember all their wickedness. Now their own deeds have engulfed them; they are ever before My face.³ They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies.⁴ They are all adulterers. They are burning like an oven that the baker stops stirring, from the kneading of the dough, until it is leavened.⁵ On the day of our king, the princes made him sick with the heat of wine so that he joined his hand

with mockers.⁶ For they have prepared their heart like an oven, while they lie in wait. Their baker sleeps all the night- in the morning it burns as a flaming fire.⁷ They are all hot as an oven, and devour their judges. All their kings have fallen. There is no one among them who calls to Me.⁸ Ephraim, he mixes himself among the nations, Ephraim is a pancake not turned over.⁹ Strangers have devoured his strength, and he doesn't realize it. Indeed, gray hairs are here and there on him, and he doesn't realize it.¹⁰ The pride of Israel testifies to his face; yet they do not return to Yahweh their God, nor seek Him, for all this.¹¹ Ephraim is like an easily deceived dove, without understanding. They call to Egypt; they hop to Assyria.¹² When they go, I will spread My net on them. I will bring them down like the birds of the sky. I will chastise them, as their congregation has heard.¹³ Woe to them! For they have wandered from Me. Destruction to them! For they have trespassed against Me. Though I would redeem them, yet they have spoken lies against Me.¹⁴ They haven't cried to Me with their heart, but they howl on their beds. They assemble themselves for grain and new wine. They turn away from Me.¹⁵ Though

6:10 God's realization of Israel's prostitution, committed as it was amidst protestations of love for God (:4), was mirrored in Hosea's tragic and heartbreaking relationship with his prostitute wife Gomer.

7:2 *I remember... ever before My face* – Sensitive Hosea remembered every unfaithfulness of Gomer; and in this sense God too remembered every sin of His people. This is what makes His patience and grace all the more remarkable, given that He doesn't mentally function as human beings do, forgetting sins against us just because of the nature of our fading memory rather than because we have forgiven them.

I have taught and strengthened their arms, yet they plot evil against Me. 16 They return, but not to the Most High. They are like a faulty bow. Their princes will fall by the sword for the rage of their tongue. This will be their derision in the land of Egypt.

CHAPTER 8 Nov. 11

Sowing the Wind, Reaping the Whirlwind

Put the trumpet to your lips! Something like an eagle is over Yahweh's house, because they have broken My covenant, and rebelled against My law. 2 They cry to Me, 'My God, how we know You!'. 3 Israel has cast off that which is good. The enemy will pursue him. 4 They have set up kings, but not by Me. They have made princes, and I didn't approve. Of their silver and their gold they have made themselves idols, that they may be cut off. 5 Let Samaria throw out his calf idol! My anger burns against them! How long will it be until they are capable of purity? 6 For this is even made in Israel! The workman made it, and it is

no God; indeed, the calf of Samaria shall be broken in pieces. 7 For they sow the wind, and they will reap the whirlwind. He has no standing grain; the stalk will yield no head of grain. If it does yield, strangers will swallow it up. 8 Israel is swallowed up. Now they are among the nations like a worthless thing. 9 For they have gone up to Assyria, like a wild donkey wandering alone. Ephraim has hired lovers for himself. 10 But although they sold themselves among the nations, I will now gather them; and they begin to waste away because of the oppression of the king of mighty ones. 11 Because Ephraim has multiplied altars for sinning, they became for him altars for sinning. 12 I wrote for him the many things of My law; but they were regarded as a strange thing. 13 As for the sacrifices of My offerings, they sacrifice flesh and eat it; But Yahweh doesn't accept them. Now He will remember their iniquity, and punish their sins. They will return to Egypt. 14 For Israel has forgotten his Maker and built palaces; and Judah has multiplied fortified cities; but I will send

8:2 As in 7:14,16, the pain of God was that Israel's words of devotion to Him were meaningless. This was the pain Hosea would've had as Gomer protested her faithfulness to him, whilst sleeping with and getting pregnant by other men. We must ensure that the words we say in prayer and sing in song to God are really meant sincerely by us, and that we realistically live according to them.

8:13 *They will return to Egypt* – This is repeated in 9:3 and yet God says the very opposite in 11:5. We have God showing His extreme emotion, just as a betrayed and angry husband would – shouting threats one minute and then cancelling them out in expressions of deep love the next. The most hurt man on earth would, however, be nowhere near the pain and hurt felt by God Almighty at the unfaithfulness of His people. The huge extent of His love for Israel is reflected in the depth of His pain and the emotional nature of His outbursts. God has emotion and passion – for us, we who are but water, calcium and complex chemicals, specs of dust on the earth...

a fire on his cities, and it will devour its fortresses.

CHAPTER 9 Nov. 12

The Wrath of Love

Don't rejoice in jubilation, Israel, like the other nations; for you were unfaithful to your God. You love the wages of a prostitute at every grain threshing floor.² The threshing floor and the winepress won't feed them, and the new wine will fail her.³ They won't dwell in Yahweh's land; but Ephraim will return to Egypt, and they will eat unclean food in Assyria.⁴ They won't pour out wine offerings to Yahweh, neither will they be pleasing to Him. Their sacrifices will be to them like the bread of mourners; all who eat of it will be polluted. Their bread will merely be for their hunger, it will not come with acceptance as an offering into the house of Yahweh.⁵ What will you do in the day of solemn assembly, and in the day of the feast of Yahweh?⁶ For, behold, they have marched off to destruction; Egypt will gather them up, Memphis will bury them. Nettles will possess their pleasant things of silver, thorns will

come up in their tents.⁷ The days of visitation have come, the days of reckoning have come. Israel will consider the prophet to be a fool, and the inspired man to be insane, because of the abundance of your sins, and because your hostility is great.⁸ A prophet watches over Ephraim with my God. A fowler's snare is on all of his paths, and hostility in the house of his God.⁹ They have deeply corrupted themselves, as in the days of Gibeah. He will remember their iniquity, He will punish them for their sins.¹⁰ I found Israel like grapes in the wilderness; I saw your fathers as the first ripe in the fig tree at its first season; but they came to Baal Peor, and consecrated themselves to the shameful thing, and became abominable like that thing which they so loved.¹¹ As for Ephraim, their glory will fly away like a bird. There will be no birth, none with child, and no conception.¹² Though they bring up their children, yet I will bereave them, so that not a man shall be left. Indeed, woe also to them when I depart from them!¹³ I have seen Ephraim, like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place; but Ephraim will bring out his chil-

9:1 You love the wages of a prostitute – Israel are presented as sexually addicted, even paying men to sleep with her (8:9). It's one thing to sin and hate ourselves for it; it's another to love and revel in sin as Israel did.

9:4 Their offering of wine and bread to God would make them yet more unclean, just as it is possible to keep the breaking of bread service to our condemnation rather than to our blessing (1 Cor. 11:29). This stark reality means that the memorial meeting brings us to a T intersection in our lives; either we are drinking to our blessing (1 Cor. 10:16) or to our condemnation.

9:10 I saw... as – God looked upon Israel *as if* they were perfect when they left Egypt (Num. 23:21), even though they were not. He was in love with them, as He is with us, having counted His righteousness to us as we emerge from our Red Sea / baptism into Christ.

dren to the murderer.¹⁴ Give them—Yahweh, what will you give them? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts.¹⁵ All their wickedness is in Gilgal; for there I hated them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of My house! I will love them no more. All their princes are rebels.¹⁶ Ephraim is struck. Their root has dried up. They will bear no fruit. Even though they bring forth, yet I will kill the beloved ones of their womb.¹⁷ My God will cast them away, because they did not listen to Him; and they will be wanderers among the nations.

CHAPTER 10 Nov. 13

Israel is a luxuriant vine that puts forth his fruit. According to the abundance of his fruit he has multiplied his altars. As their land has prospered, they have adorned their sacred stones.² Their heart is divided, and so now they will be found guilty. He will demolish their altars, He will destroy their sacred stones.³ Surely now they will say, We have no king; for we don't fear Yahweh; and the king we have, what can he do for us?⁴ They make promises, swearing falsely in making covenants. Therefore judgment springs up like poisonous weeds in the furrows of the field.⁵ The inhabitants of Samaria will be in terror because of the calves of Beth Aven; for its

people will mourn over it, along with its priests who rejoiced over it; because its glory has departed from it.⁶ It also will be carried to Assyria for a present to a great king. Ephraim will receive shame, and Israel will be ashamed of his own counsel.⁷ Samaria and her king will float away, like a twig on the water.⁸ The high places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, will be destroyed. The thorn and the thistle will come up on their altars. They will tell the mountains, Cover us! and the hills, Fall on us!⁹ Israel, you have sinned from the days of Gibeah, there they remained. The battle against the children of iniquity doesn't overtake them in Gibeah.¹⁰ When it is my desire, I will chastise them; and the nations will be gathered against them, when they are bound to their two transgressions.¹¹ Ephraim is a trained heifer that loves to thresh; so I will put a yoke on her beautiful neck. I will set a rider on Ephraim, Judah will plough, Jacob will break his clods.¹² Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap according to kindness. Break up your fallow ground; for it is time to seek Yahweh, until He comes and rains righteousness on you.¹³ You have ploughed wickedness and you have reaped iniquity. You have eaten the fruit of lies, for you trusted in your way, in the multitude of your mighty men.¹⁴ Therefore a battle roar will

9:15 *I hated them... will love them no more* – And yet God protests His eternal and free love for Israel (14:4). See on 8:13.

10:11 *Her beautiful neck* – This isn't sarcasm, rather is it God recognizing the beauty of the woman He was having to judge. Such is His love even for those He has to reject.

arise among your people, and all your fortresses will be destroyed, as Shalman destroyed Beth Arbel in the day of battle. The mother was dashed in pieces with her children.¹⁵ So Bethel will do to you because of your great wickedness. At daybreak the king of Israel will be destroyed.

CHAPTER 11 Nov. 14

God's Love for His People

When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called My son out of Egypt.² The more I called to them, so they went away from Me. They sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to engraved images.³ Yet I taught Ephraim to walk. I took them by his arms; but they didn't know that it was I who healed them.⁴ I drew them with cords of a man, with ties of love; and I was to them like those who lift off the yoke on their necks; and I bent down to him and I fed him.⁵ They won't return into the land of Egypt; but the Assyrian will be their king, because they refused to repent.⁶ The sword will fall on their cities, and will destroy the bars of their gates, and will put an end to their plans.⁷ My people are determined to turn from Me. Though

they call to the Most High, they certainly won't exalt Him.⁸ How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned within Me, My compassion is aroused.⁹ I will not execute the fierceness of My anger. I will not return to destroy Ephraim: for I am God, and not man, the Holy One in the midst of you; and I will not come in wrath.¹⁰ They will walk after Yahweh, who will roar like a lion; for He will roar, and the children will come trembling from the west.¹¹ They will come trembling like a bird out of Egypt, and like a dove out of the land of Assyria; and I will settle them in their houses, says Yahweh.¹² Ephraim surrounds Me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit. Judah still remains with God, and is faithful to the Holy One.

CHAPTER 12 Nov. 15

Jacob to Be Israel's Example

Ephraim feeds on wind, and chases the east wind. He daily lies more and more and multiplies his desolation. They make a covenant with Assyria, and oil is carried into

11:8, 9 Here we have one of the deepest windows onto the extent of God's hurt and variation of thought within Himself as He considers the behaviour of His people. His changes of mind are as it were ethically allowable exactly because He is God and not man; they are driven by the passion of the deepest love ever known in all existence.

11:12 *Ephraim surrounds Me with lies, and the house of Israel with deceit* – Gomer must have lied to Hosea so much. Israel are criticized throughout his prophecy for just the same (see 7:13 too). The untruthfulness became compulsive and obsessive: “he daily lies more and more” (12:1). Gomer would've lied about where she was going, about how she spent Hosea’s money, about whose the children were... The key proof of our spiritual sincerity is whether we are in the core of our beings *truthful*, both with our God and with ourselves.

Egypt. ² Yahweh also has a controversy with Judah, and will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his deeds He will repay him. ³ In the womb he took his brother by the heel; and in his maturity he had power with God. ⁴ Indeed, he struggled with the angel, and prevailed; he wept, and made supplication to him. He found him at Bethel, and there He spoke with us, ⁵ even Yahweh, the God of Armies; Yahweh is His name of renown! ⁶ Therefore you also turn to your God. Keep grace and justice, and wait continually for your God. ⁷ A merchant has dishonest scales in his hand. He loves to defraud. ⁸ Ephraim said, Surely I have become rich, I have found myself wealth. In all my wealth they won't find in me any iniquity that is sin. ⁹ But I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt. I will yet again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the solemn feast. ¹⁰ I have also spoken to the prophets, and I have multiplied visions; and by the ministry of the prophets I have used parables. ¹¹ If Gilead is wicked, surely they are worthless. In Gilgal they sacrifice bulls. Indeed, their altars

are like heaps in the furrows of the field. ¹² Jacob fled into the country of Aram, and Israel served to get a wife, and for a wife he tended flocks and herds. ¹³ By a prophet Yahweh brought Israel up out of Egypt, and by a prophet he was preserved. ¹⁴ Ephraim has bitterly provoked anger, therefore his blood will be left on him, and his Lord will repay his contempt.

CHAPTER 13 Nov. 16

God's Anger against His People

When Ephraim spoke with trembling, he exalted himself in Israel; but when he became guilty in Baal, he died. ² Now they sin more and more, and have made themselves molten images of their silver, even idols according to their own understanding, all of them the work of the craftsmen. They say of them, ‘They offer human sacrifice and kiss the calves’. ³ Therefore they will be like the morning mist, and like the dew that passes away early in the morning, like the chaff that is driven with the whirlwind out of the threshing floor, and like the smoke out of the chimney. ⁴ Yet I am Yahweh your

12:3 *In his maturity he had power with God* – This suggests that Jacob reached spiritual maturity that night he wrestled with the Angel. To be that familiar with God that we can reason with Him, struggle with Him in prayer, seek to change His will over an illness or situation... this is spiritual maturity. It was by his prayer and tears that he had this “power with God” and in a sense prevailed over God’s intention to slay him (:4). This whole characteristic of striving with God was memorialized in his new name: Israel, implying ‘striver and prevailer with God and men’. And this must be the characteristic of Israel after the Spirit too. There is a confusion in the Hebrew between ‘striver’ and ‘prince’ – for the struggle comes before the crown. Our relationship with Him, our attaining of salvation, is a struggle, a wrestling, a desperate clinging on, a pleading with tears. Yet Jacob that night really is a type of us all, for we are to turn to God as Jacob did then (:6).

God from the land of Egypt; and you shall acknowledge no god but Me, and besides Me there is no saviour. ⁵ I knew you in the wilderness, in the land of great drought. ⁶ According to their pasture, so were they filled; they were filled, and their heart was exalted. Therefore they have forgotten Me. ⁷ Therefore I will be like a lion to them, like a leopard I will lurk by the path. ⁸ I will meet them like a bear that is bereaved of her cubs, and will tear the covering of their heart. There I will devour them like a lioness, tear them like a wild animal. ⁹ You are destroyed, Israel, because you are against Me, against the One who is your help. ¹⁰ Where is your king now, that he may save you in all your cities? And your judges, of whom you said, ‘Give me a king and princes?’ ¹¹ I gave you a king in My anger, and have taken him away in My wrath. ¹² The guilt of Ephraim is stored up, his sin is stored up. ¹³ The sorrows of a travailing woman will come on him. He is an unwise son; for when it is time, he doesn’t come to the opening of the womb. ¹⁴ I will

ransom them from the power of Sheol, I will redeem them from death! Death, where are your plagues? Sheol, where is your destruction? Compassion will be hidden from my eyes. ¹⁵ Though he is fruitful among his brothers, an east wind will come, the breath of Yahweh coming up from the wilderness; and his spring will become dry, and his fountain will be dried up. He will plunder the storehouse of treasure. ¹⁶ Samaria will bear her guilt; for she has rebelled against her God. They will fall by the sword. Their infants will be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women will be ripped open.

CHAPTER 14 Nov. 17

Repentance and Blessing

Israel, return to Yahweh your God; for you have fallen because of your sin. ² Take words with you, and return to Yahweh. Tell him, Forgive all our sins, and accept that which is good: so we offer our lips like bulls. ³ Assyria can’t save us. We won’t ride on horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, ‘You are

13:10 Often in Hosea, God appeals to Israel to let Him be their ‘king’ (13:10). But there is a Hebraism whereby a husband is called the ‘king’ of his wife. God’s appeal was reflected in Hosea’s desire for Gomer to as it were re-marry him, to let him truly be her king / husband. And yet she felt like Israel: “What then should a king do [for] us?” (10:3). She was so selfish that she didn’t see anything in it for her... when *so much love was being offered to her.*

14:3 Hosea’s prophecy ends with God protesting His eternal love for Israel, and a description of them in the Kingdom, when they will have ‘returned’ to Him. Remember that the God / Israel relationship was a reflection of the Hosea / Gomer situation. I take this final, majestic section to be a reflection of Hosea’s fantasy, his day dream, that one day Gomer would return to him and blossom as a person. For fantasies are all a part of true love. “From Me you will acquire fruit” (14:8) is perhaps his fantasy that *somehow*, this worn out woman with dry breasts and a miscarrying womb (9:14) would *somehow* one day still bear him children of their own, and that in him “the fatherless”

our gods!'; for in You the fatherless finds mercy.⁴ I will heal their waywardness. I will love them freely; for My anger is turned away from him.⁵ I will be like the dew to Israel. He will blossom like the lily, and send down his roots like Lebanon.⁶ His branches will spread, and his beauty will be like the olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon.⁷ Men will dwell in his shade. They will revive like the grain, and blossom like the

vine. Their fragrance will be like the wine of Lebanon.⁸ Ephraim, what have I to do any more with idols? I will answer, and will take care of him. I am like a green fir tree; from Me you will acquire fruit.⁹ Who is wise, that he may understand these things? Who is prudent, that he may know them? For the ways of Yahweh are right, and the righteous walk in them; but the rebellious will stumble in them.

[a reference to Gomer's illegitimate children] would find mercy in being accepted into the family (14:3). Hosea died with his dream unfulfilled. We are left with the question as to whether this similar loving intention of God for Israel will in fact be fulfilled, or whether it was what was potentially possible for Israel; or whether His fantasy for them will be fulfilled through a new Israel. If the latter, and we are that new Israel, then we can imagine what passionate joy the Father finds in our bumbling attempts to respond to Him and be His loyal and faithful wife. Whatever, the simple fact is that it all reflects an amazing grace, an ineffable love... and this God is our God, and Hosea who reflected all this is truly a pattern for ourselves in daily life. The very existence of such passionate love for us, love beyond reason, carries with it an inevitable warning as to our responsibilities.

JOEL

CHAPTER 1 Nov. 18

Locusts

The Word of Yahweh that came to Joel, the son of Pethuel. 2 Hear this, you elders, and listen, all of you inhabitants of the land. Has this ever happened in your days, or in the days of your fathers? 3 Tell your children about it, and have your children tell their children, and their children tell another generation. 4 What the swarming locust has left, the great locust has eaten. What the great locust has left, the grasshopper has eaten. What the grasshopper has left, the caterpillar has eaten. 5 Wake up, you drunkards, and weep! Wail, all you drinkers of wine, because of the sweet wine; for it is cut off from your mouth. 6 For a nation has come up on my land, strong, and without number. His teeth are the teeth of a lion, and he has the fangs of a lioness. 7 He has laid My vine waste, and stripped My fig tree. He has stripped its bark, and thrown it away. Its branches are made white. 8 Mourn like a virgin dressed in sackcloth for

the husband of her youth! The meal offering and the drink offering are cut off from Yahweh's house; the priests, Yahweh's ministers, mourn. 10 The field is laid waste, the land mourns, because the grain is destroyed, the new wine has dried up and the oil wastes away. 11 Be confounded, you farmers! Wail, you vineyard keepers; for the wheat and for the barley and the harvest of the field has perished. 12 The vine has dried up, and the fig tree withered; the pomegranate tree, the palm tree also, and the apple tree, even all of the trees of the field are withered away; for joy is withered away from the sons of men.

Repent!

13 Put on sackcloth and mourn, you priests! Wail, you ministers of the altar. Come, lie all night in sackcloth, you ministers of my God, for the meal offering and the drink offering are withheld from your God's house. 14 Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly. Gather the elders and all the inhabitants of the land to the house

1:2 Elders... all of you – Often the Bible brackets the elders with all the ordinary people, thus emphasizing that God relates with individuals; His appeal isn't merely to religious specialists or leaders, but to all of us.

1:12 If we lose joy, we have lost our faith. It was the same with Israel. “The vine [of Israel is] withered... for joy is withered”; the people of God were to be a people of joy, and when their joy was no more, they were no longer God's people; for “joy and gladness” were cut off from the house of God (:16). The experience of joy is the litmus test for a community of God's people. This thought gives rise to some sober self-examination, especially for those who may have come to feel that ‘holding the faith’ is a matter of glumly trudging onwards through this evil world, grimly gripping hold of our faith as we bemoan the state of those around us. To hold on to the Faith is described as holding on to the rejoicing of the hope unto the end (Heb. 3:6).

of Yahweh your God, and cry to Yahweh.¹⁵ Alas for the day! For the day of Yahweh is at hand, and it will come as a destruction from the Almighty.¹⁶ Isn't the food cut off before our eyes, joy and gladness from the house of our God?¹⁷ The seeds rot under their clods. The granaries are laid desolate. The barns are broken down, for the grain has withered.¹⁸ How the animals groan! The herds of livestock are confused because they have no pasture. Yes, the flocks of sheep are made desolate.¹⁹ Yahweh, I cry to you because the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness, and the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.²⁰ Yes, the animals of the field pant to You, for the water brooks have dried up, and the fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness.

CHAPTER 2 Nov. 19

More Locusts

Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of Yahweh comes, for it is near at hand:² a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, like the dawn spreading on the mountains. A great and strong people! There has never been the like, neither will there be any more after them, even to the years of many generations.³ A fire devours be-

fore them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is as the garden of Eden before them, and after them—like a desolate wilderness. Yes, and no one has escaped them.⁴ Their appearance is as the appearance of horses, and as horsemen, so do they run.⁵ Like the noise of chariots on the tops of the mountains do they leap, like the noise of a flame of fire that devours the stubble, as a strong people set in battle array.⁶ At their presence the people are in anguish. All faces have grown pale.⁷ They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like warriors. They each march in his line, and they don't swerve off course.⁸ Neither does one jostle another; they march each one in his path, and they burst through the defenses, and don't break ranks.⁹ They rush on the city, they run on the wall, they climb up into the houses, they enter in at the windows like thieves.¹⁰ The earth quakes before them, the skies tremble, the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining.¹¹ Yahweh thunders His voice before His army; for His forces are very great; for he is strong who obeys His command; for the day of Yahweh is great and very awesome, and who can endure it?

A Fast Is Proclaimed

¹² Yet even now, says Yahweh, turn to Me with all your heart, and with fasting and with weeping and with

2:11 His army – The pagan armies were God's in the sense that He controlled them. No evil can happen to us without God allowing it; our worst enemies are ultimately sent and permitted by Him. There is no personal Satan figure who controls these people; God is in total control.

mourning.¹³ Tear your heart, and not your garments, and turn to Yahweh, your God; for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and relents from sending calamity.¹⁴ Who knows? He may turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind him, even a meal offering and a drink offering to Yahweh, your God.¹⁵ Blow the trumpet in Zion! Sanctify a fast. Call a solemn assembly.¹⁶ Gather the people. Sanctify the assembly. Assemble the elders. Gather the children, and those who nurse from the breasts. Let the bridegroom go forth from his room, and the bride out of her room.¹⁷ Let the priests, the ministers of Yahweh, weep between the porch and the altar, and let them say, Spare Your people, Yahweh, and don't give Your heritage to reproach, that the pagan nations should rule over them. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'.

Yahweh Answered His People

¹⁸ Then Yahweh was jealous for His land, and had pity on His people.¹⁹ Yahweh answered His people, Behold, I will send you grain, new wine, and oil, and you will be satisfied with them; and I will no more make you a reproach among the nations.²⁰ But I will remove the northern army far away from you, and will drive it into a barren and desolate land, its front into the eastern sea, and its back into the western sea; and its stench will come up, and its bad smell will rise. Surely He has done great things!²¹ Land, don't be afraid! Be glad and rejoice, for Yahweh has done great things!²² Don't be afraid, you animals of the field; for the pastures of the wilderness spring up, for the tree bears its fruit. The fig tree and the vine yield their strength.²³ Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in Yahweh your God; for He gives you the former rains in just

2:13 Relents – Despite having spoken as if God's judgment was inevitably going to come, Joel knew that God can state things and then change His planned judgments because He is so sensitive to human repentance. And so Joel calls for a fast, and for absolutely everyone in the community to repent and beg God for mercy. Even those in the process of marriage were to break off the ceremony (:16) and come to a special assembly (:15) to beg God to change His mind. Joel was so certain that God's prophetic word would be fulfilled that he appealed to people with such urgency and insistence to repent, so that the prophesied judgments wouldn't happen to them. Our belief in God's word will likewise motivate our witness and impart a spirit of urgency to it which we couldn't have if we weren't so convinced that the prophecies will come true.

2:20 Northern army – Babylon and Assyria are spoken of in the Bible as the 'northern' invader, although they were situated to the East of Israel. This was because there was no easy way through the desert separating them from Israel, and travel was typically up the Fertile Crescent and then down into Israel from the north. Joel is quoted and alluded to in the New Testament as if these things will come true in the last days before Christ returns. Dan. 11:40-44 speak of a latter day "King of the north" invading Israel just before Christ's coming. Geographically, Babylon and Assyria refer to what is today Iran and Iraq.

measure, and He causes the rain to come down for you, the former rains and the latter rains, as before. ²⁴ The threshing floors will be full of wheat, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil. ²⁵ I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the great locust, the grasshopper, and the caterpillar, My great army, which I sent among you. ²⁶ You will have plenty to eat and will be satisfied, and will praise the name of Yahweh your God who has dealt wondrously with you; and My people will never again be ashamed. ²⁷ You will know that I am in the midst of Israel, and that I am Yahweh your God, and there is no one else; and My people will never again be ashamed.

The Day of the Lord

²⁸ It will happen in the last days, that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. ²⁹ And also on the servants and on the handmaids I will pour out My Spirit in those days. ³⁰ I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth: blood, fire, and pillars of

smoke. ³¹ The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes. ³² It will happen that whoever will call on the name of Yahweh shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be those who escape, as Yahweh has said, and among the remnant, those whom Yahweh calls.

CHAPTER 3 Nov. 20

Judgment on the Nations

For behold, in those days, and in that time, when I restore the fortunes of Judah and Jerusalem,² I will gather all nations, and will bring them down into the valley of Jehoshaphat; and I will execute judgment on them there for My people and for My heritage Israel, whom they have scattered among the nations. They have divided My land,³ and have cast lots for My people, and have given a boy for a prostitute, and sold a girl for wine, that they may drink.⁴ Yes, and what are you to Me, Tyre, Sidon and all the regions of Philistia? Will you repay Me? And if you repay Me, I will swiftly and speedily return your repayment on your own head.⁵ Because you have taken My silver and

2:32 This passage is quoted in Acts 2:21–41 and interpreted as meaning that whoever calls upon themselves the Name of the Lord by baptism into His Name will be saved. People from many nations were baptized into the Name just before the ‘last day’ of Judah’s destruction in AD70 (:28). It would seem that this was but a primary fulfilment of what will happen just before the final ‘last day’ of Christ’s return. There will be a special preaching of the Gospel to all nations just before Christ returns (Mt. 24:14).

3:2 Judgment on them there for My people – The basis of judgment will be how individuals have treated God’s people, both natural and spiritual Israel. Jesus was very clear that how we treat the least of His brothers or sisters is how we treat Him, and He will judge people on this basis (Mt. 25:40).

My gold, and have carried My finest treasures into your temples,⁶ and have sold the children of Judah and the children of Jerusalem to the sons of the Greeks, that you may remove them far from their border.⁷ Behold, I will stir them up out of the place where you have sold them, and will return your repayment on your own head;⁸ and I will sell your sons and your daughters into the hands of the children of Judah, and they will sell them to the men of Sheba, to a distant nation; for Yahweh has spoken it.⁹ Proclaim this among the nations: Sanctify war! Stir up the mighty men. Let all the warriors draw near. Let them come up.¹⁰ Beat your ploughshares into swords, and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weak say, ‘I am strong!’.¹¹ Hurry and come, all you surrounding nations, and gather yourselves together. Cause Your mighty ones to come down there, Yahweh.¹² Let the nations arouse themselves, and come up to the valley of Jehoshaphat; for there will I sit to judge all the surrounding nations.¹³ Put in the sickle; for the harvest is ripe. Come, tread, for the winepress is full, the vats overflow, for their wickedness is great.¹⁴ Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision!

For the day of Yahweh is near, in the valley of decision.¹⁵ The sun and the moon will be darkened, and the stars will withdraw their shining.¹⁶ Yahweh will roar from Zion, and thunder from Jerusalem; the heavens and the earth will shake, but Yahweh will be a refuge for His people, and a stronghold to the children of Israel.

God's People to Be Blessed

¹⁷ So you will know that I am Yahweh your God, dwelling in Zion, My holy mountain. Then Jerusalem will be holy, and no strangers will pass through her any more.¹⁸ It will happen in that day, that the mountains will drop down sweet wine, the hills will flow with milk, all the brooks of Judah will flow with waters, and a fountain will come forth from the house of Yahweh and will water the valley of Shittim.¹⁹ Egypt will be a desolation, and Edom will be a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the children of Judah; because they have shed innocent blood in their land.²⁰ But Judah will be inhabited for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation.²¹ I will cleanse their blood that I have not so far cleansed: for Yahweh dwells in Zion.

3:9 Sanctify war – Declaring a holy war against Israel sounds like Islamic *jihad*.

3:12–14 These verses seem to describe an invasion of Israel by many nations, resulting in them being destroyed in a valley in Israel; these verses are applied to the last days in the description of the battle of Armageddon in Rev. 16:16. God will be suddenly revealed in the Jerusalem area (:16), associated with His “mighty ones” “coming down” there (:11). Obadiah 21 speaks of the same situation. This surely refers to the return of Christ to earth from Heaven with His Angels with Him, and also the resurrection of His people, who will then also be His “mighty ones” with Him (1 Thess. 4:14; 2 Thess. 1:7). Jesus ascended to Heaven from Olivet, near Jerusalem, and the Angels promised that He would return to earth in the same way (Acts 1:11).

AMOS

CHAPTER 1 Nov. 21

The words of Amos, who was among the herdsmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.² He said: Yahweh will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem; and the pastures of the shepherds will mourn, and the top of Carmel will wither.

Judgment on the Nations around Israel

³ Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Damascus, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment; because they have threshed Gilead with threshing instruments of iron;⁴ but I will send a fire into the house of Hazael, and it will eat up the palaces of Ben Hadad.⁵ I will break the bar of Damascus, and cut off the inhabitant from the valley of Aven, and him who holds the sceptre from

the house of Eden; and the people of Syria shall go into captivity to Kir, says Yahweh.⁶ Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Gaza, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment; because they carried away captive the whole community, to deliver them up to Edom;⁷ but I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, and it will devour its palaces.⁸ I will cut off the inhabitant from Ashdod, and him who holds the sceptre from Ashkelon; and I will turn My hand against Ekron; and the remnant of the Philistines will perish, says the Lord Yahweh.⁹ Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Tyre, yes, for four, I will not relent on its punishment; because they delivered up the whole community to Edom, and didn't remember the brotherly covenant;¹⁰ but I will send a fire on the wall of Tyre, and it will destroy its palaces.¹¹ Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Edom, yes, for four, I will not turn away its

1:6 Notice that the reasons for the judgments are all because of what people did to other people. Human treatment of others is the basis for God's judgment. We also learn from this chapter that God noticed how Gentiles treated other Gentiles. He doesn't just ignore the unbelievers, zoning out on their actions and issues with each other. His sensitivity to human sin, and His total knowledge of all that goes on in this world, His reading of every motive behind every action, is simply colossal. It should encourage us that we are not alone in this world; the amazing knowledge of God means we can thereby feel His presence. The reference to "For three transgressions... and for four" can be read as meaning that God doesn't switch off, as it were, after the third sin; He is sensitive also to the fourth. He doesn't simply write people off as 'sinners' after a certain amount of sin; He keeps noticing their behaviour and the hurt of their sin continues growing within Him.

1:11 *His anger raged continually, and he kept his wrath forever* – The implication could be that anger is an acceptable emotion, but not if it becomes a continual state of mind.

punishment; because he pursued his brother with the sword, and cast off all pity, and his anger raged continually, and he kept his anger forever;¹² but I will send a fire on Teman, and it will devour the palaces of Bozrah.¹³ Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of the children of Ammon, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment; because they have ripped open the pregnant women of Gilead, that they may enlarge their border.¹⁴ But I will kindle a fire in the wall of Rabbah, and it will devour its palaces, with shouting in the day of battle, with a storm in the day of the whirlwind;¹⁵ and their king will go into captivity, he and his princes together, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 2 Nov. 22

Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Moab, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment; because he burned the bones of the king of Edom into lime;² but I will send a fire on Moab, and it

will destroy the palaces of Kerioth; and Moab will die with tumult, with shouting, and with the sound of the trumpet;³ and I will cut off the judge from their midst, and will kill all their princes with him, says Yahweh.⁴ Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Judah, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment; because they have rejected Yahweh's law, and have not kept His statutes, and their lies have led them astray, after which their fathers walked;⁵ but I will send a fire on Judah, and it will eat up the palaces of Jerusalem.⁶ Thus says Yahweh: For three transgressions of Israel, yes, for four, I will not turn away its punishment; because they have sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes;⁷ they trample on the dust of the earth on the head of the poor, and deny justice to the oppressed; and a man and his father use the same girl, to profane My holy name;⁸ and they lay themselves down beside every altar on clothes taken in pledge; and

2:1 *I will not turn away its punishment* – A tacit recognition that God can state a punishment or destiny against a person or group, and yet turn away from doing it in the light of their repentance, as happened with Israel at the time of Moses, or with Nineveh in the book of Jonah. However there is a point where such changes are no longer possible; a change of mind is no longer a possibility (Hos. 13:14).

2:2 The “fire” promised here and throughout chapter 1 is not so much literal fire as symbolic of God’s anger and condemnation (see too Jer. 17:27; Jude 7). When Jesus spoke of fire as the punishment of the wicked and used the metaphor of Gehenna, the ever burning garbage site near Jerusalem, He too wasn’t speaking literally but in harmony with His Father’s figurative usage of “fire” in the Old Testament as a metaphor for judgment.

2:7 *To profane My holy name* – In our context, we have been baptized into the same Name. We can likewise profane that Name by our behaviour. This is the essence of the meaning of blaspheming God’s Name.

2:8 *Drink the wine of the condemned* – Under the New Covenant, we too run the risk of drinking the wine of that covenant to our own condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29). As

in the house of their God they drink the wine of the condemned.⁹ Yet I destroyed the Amorite before them, whose height was like the height of the cedars, and he was strong as the oaks; yet I destroyed his fruit from above, and his roots from beneath.¹⁰ Also I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and led you forty years in the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorite.¹¹ I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazirites. Isn't this true, you children of Israel? says Yahweh.¹² But you gave the Nazirites wine to drink, and commanded the prophets, saying, 'Don't prophesy!'.¹³ See, I will crush you in your place, as a cart crushes that is full of grain.¹⁴ Flight will flee from the swift; and the strong won't strengthen his force; neither shall the mighty deliver himself;¹⁵ neither shall he stand who handles the bow; and he who is swift of foot won't escape; neither shall he who rides the horse deliver himself;¹⁶ and he who

is courageous among the mighty will flee away naked in that day, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 3 Nov. 23

The Inevitability of Judgment

Hear this word that Yahweh has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up out of the land of Egypt, saying:² You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth. Therefore I will punish you for all of your sins.³ Do two walk together, unless they have agreed where to meet?⁴ Will a lion roar in the thicket, when he has no prey? Does a young lion cry out of his den, if he has caught nothing?⁵ Can a bird fall in a trap on the earth, where no snare is set for him? Does a snare spring up from the ground, when there is nothing to catch?⁶ Does the trumpet alarm sound in a city without the people being afraid? Does evil happen to a city and Yahweh hasn't done it?⁷ Surely the Lord Yahweh will do

we hold that cup, we realize we are at a T-junction; we shall either be saved or condemned, and we should live life in the intensity of that knowledge.

2:11 *I raised up... Nazirites* – Becoming a Nazirite was totally voluntary. Yet God works through our freewill.

2:12 *You gave the Nazirites wine to drink* – Nazirites weren't allowed to drink wine (Num. 6:3). To lead others into sin, or discourage them from the spiritual commitments they have made, is reckoned by God as worthy of the strongest condemnation. We should be positive and supportive of others' spirituality rather than destructive of it. Jesus therefore had so much anger with the Pharisees and Jewish leadership for the very same reason.

3:2 We whom God has chosen in Christ are therefore more responsible for our sins than others in the world; they sin with far less accountability than we have. We must remember this when we are tempted to sin as they do.

3:6 A classic proof of the fact that God rather than any sinful Satan figure brings "evil" in the sense of disaster on earth (Is. 45:5-7).

3:7 See on 7:1-6.

nothing, unless He first reveals His secret to His servants the prophets. ⁸ The lion has roared- who will not fear? The Lord Yahweh has spoken- who can but speak it forth? ⁹ Proclaim in the palaces at Ashdod and in the palaces in the land of Egypt, and say, Assemble yourselves on the mountains of Samaria, and see what unrest is in her, and what oppression is among them. ¹⁰ Indeed they don't know how to do right, says Yahweh, who hoard plunder and loot in their palaces. ¹¹ Therefore thus says the Lord Yahweh: An adversary will overrun the land; and he will pull down your strongholds, and your fortresses will be plundered. ¹² Thus says Yahweh: As the shepherd rescues out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear, so shall the children of Israel be rescued who sit in Samaria on the corner of a couch, and on the silken cushions of a bed. ¹³ Listen, and testify against the house of Jacob, says the Lord Yahweh, the God of Armies. ¹⁴ For in the day that I visit the transgressions of

Israel on him, I will also visit the altars of Bethel; and the horns of the altar will be cut off, and fall to the ground. ¹⁵ I will strike the winter house with the summer house; and the houses of ivory will perish, and the great houses will have an end, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 4 Nov. 24

God Tries to Make His People Return to Him

Listen to this word you cows of Bashan who are on the mountain of Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who tell their husbands, Bring us drinks! ² The Lord Yahweh has sworn by His holiness that, behold, the days shall come on you that they will take you away with hooks, and the last of you with fish hooks. ³ You will go out at the breaks in the wall, each one straight before her; and you will cast yourselves into Harmon, says Yahweh. ⁴ Go to Bethel, and sin; to Gilgal, and sin more. Bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes

3:9 Hebrew poetry rhymes according to the ideas presented rather than the assonance of the words. However, this doesn't mean that in a couplet, the first part is directly equal to the second part. Subtle differences are set up in order to make a point. The lion has roared: who shall not fear? God has spoken: who can but speak forth? If a lion roars, so a man naturally fears as a result of it. God speaks, and just as naturally we can do nothing but speak it forth. Hence the hearers are to publish God's purpose to the Gentile nations around them. The lion roars, and man fears; and we are set up to expect: God speaks, and man should fear. But there is an intended dashing of this expectation. God has spoken, just as the lion may roar; but we are not to *fear* but rather to *speak it forth* to others. If we believe that the Bible is indeed the inspired word of God, if we hear that voice of Yahweh, we will inevitably speak it forth to others. Hence Peter says that he could never agree not to speak forth God's word, because to do so is a natural process for the believer (Acts 4:20).

4:4, 5 God as it were encourages sinful people in their sin; there's a downward and an upward spiral, we never remain in a neutral position in our spiritual journey.

every three days,⁵ offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim freewill offerings and brag about them: for this pleases you, you children of Israel, says the Lord Yahweh.⁶ I also have given you cleanness of teeth in all your cities, and lack of bread in every town; yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh.⁷ I also have withheld the rain from you, when there were yet three months to the harvest; and I caused it to rain on one city, and caused it not to rain on another city. One place was rained on, and the piece where it didn't rain withered.⁸ So two or three cities staggered to one city to drink water, and were not satisfied: yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh.⁹ I struck you with blight and mildew many times in your gardens and your vineyards; and your fig trees and your olive trees have the swarming locust devoured: yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh.¹⁰ I sent plagues among you like I did upon Egypt. I have slain your young men with the sword, and have carried away your horses; and I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh.¹¹ I have overthrown some of you, as when God overthrew Sodom

and Gomorrah, and you were like a burning stick plucked out of the fire; yet you haven't returned to Me, says Yahweh.¹² Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel; and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel.¹³ For, behold, He who forms the mountains, and creates the wind, and declares to man what is his thought; who makes the morning darkness, and treads on the high places of the earth: Yahweh, the God of Armies, is His name.

CHAPTER 5 Nov. 25

A Call to Repentance

Listen to this word which I take up for a lamentation over you, O house of Israel.² The virgin of Israel has fallen; she shall rise no more. She is cast down on her land; there is no one to raise her up.³ For thus says the Lord Yahweh: The city that went forth a thousand shall have a hundred left, and that which went forth one hundred shall have ten left to the house of Israel.⁴ For thus says Yahweh to the house of Israel: Seek Me, and you will live;⁵ but don't seek Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and don't pass to Beersheba; for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nothing.⁶ Seek Yahweh, and you will live; lest He

4:10 *The stench of your camps* – These words have a strange relevance to the death camps of Europe in the 1940s. The tragedy of Israel's history, and of so many individual lives, is that despite suffering so much, people refuse to return to their God. Their pain is therefore in vain.

4:13 *He who forms the mountains* – Nothing in the natural creation is static; although the mountains may appear so permanent and lifeless, God is forming them in an ongoing sense. God's ongoing, unceasing work in the natural creation is the constant comfort that we are not alone.

break out like fire in the house of Joseph, and it devour, and there be no one to quench it in Bethel. ⁷ You who turn justice to wormwood, and cast down righteousness to the earth: ⁸ seek Him who made the Pleiades and Orion, He who turns the shadow of death into the morning, and makes the day dark with night; who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth, Yahweh is His name; ⁹ He who brings sudden destruction on the strong, so that destruction comes on the fortress. ¹⁰ They hate him who reproves in the gate, and they detest him who speaks blamelessly. ¹¹ Forasmuch therefore as you trample on the poor, and take taxes of wheat from him- therefore you who have built houses of cut stone will not dwell in them. You who have planted pleasant vineyards shall not drink their wine. ¹² For I know how many are your offences, and how great are your sins— you who afflict the just, who take a bribe, and who turn aside the needy in the courts. ¹³ Therefore a prudent person keeps silent in such a time, for it is an evil time. ¹⁴ Seek good, and not evil, that you may live; and so Yahweh, the God of Armies, will be with you, as you say. ¹⁵ Hate

evil, love good, and establish justice in the courts. It may be that Yahweh, the God of Armies, will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph. ¹⁶ Therefore thus says Yahweh the God of Armies, the Lord: Wailing will be in all the boulevards; and they will say in all the streets, ‘Alas! Alas!’, and they will call the farmer to mourning, and those who are skilful in lamentation to wailing. ¹⁷ In all vineyards there will be wailing; for I will pass through the midst of you, says Yahweh.

The Day of Yahweh

¹⁸ Woe to you who desire the day of Yahweh! Why do you long for the day of Yahweh? It will be darkness for you, and not light. ¹⁹ As if a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him; or he went into the house and leaned his hand on the wall, and a snake bit him. ²⁰ Won’t the day of Yahweh be darkness for you, and not light? Even very dark, and no brightness in it? ²¹ I hate, I despise your feasts, and I can’t tolerate your solemn assemblies. ²² Yes, though you offer Me your burnt offerings and meal offerings, I will not accept them; neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat animals. ²³ Take away from

5:18 It is quite possible to be enthusiastic about the coming of Christ – the final “day of the Lord” – and yet if we don’t live a serious spiritual life, then this day will actually be our destruction.

5:22 Peace offerings were freewill offerings of devotion to God. We can make them and other sacrifices to God, worship God enthusiastically (:23), keep the feasts solemnly (:21 – cp. the breaking of bread meeting) – and yet God will be irritated by these things and angry with us if at the same time we are guilty of injustice to others (:24 and most of the chapter). Justice and not being harmful to others is of such paramount value to God.

Me the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps. ²⁴ But let justice roll on like rivers, and righteousness like a mighty stream. ²⁵ Did you really bring to Me sacrifices and offerings in the wilderness for forty years, O house of Israel? ²⁶ You also carried the tent of your king and the shrine of your images, the star of your god, which you made for yourselves. ²⁷ Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus, says Yahweh, whose name is the God of Armies.

CHAPTER 6 Nov. 26

Woe to Those Who Are at Ease

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who are secure on the mountain of Samaria, the notable men of the chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel come! ² Go to Calneh, and see; and from there go to Hamath the great; then go down to Gath of the Philistines. Are they better than these kingdoms? Or is their border greater than your border? ³ Those who put far away the evil day, and cause the seat of violence to come near; ⁴ who lie on beds of ivory, and stretch themselves

on their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall; ⁵ who strum on the strings of a harp; who invent for themselves instruments of music, like David did; ⁶ who drink wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the best oils; but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph. ⁷ Therefore they will now go into captivity with the first who go captive; and the feasting and lounging will end. ⁸ The Lord Yahweh has sworn by Himself, says Yahweh, the God of Armies, that I hate the pride of Jacob, and detest his fortresses. Therefore I will deliver up the city with all that is in it. ⁹ It will happen, if there remain ten men in one house, that they shall die. ¹⁰ When a man's relative carries his body out of the house to burn it, he will ask him who is in the innermost parts of the house: 'Is there yet any with you?'. And if he says, 'No', then he will say, 'Hush! Indeed we must not mention the name of Yahweh'. ¹¹ For behold, Yahweh says it, and the great house will be smashed to pieces, and the little house into bits. ¹² Do horses run on the rocky crags? Does one plough there with

5:26 In addition to carrying Yahweh's tent or tabernacle through the wilderness, the Israelites took with them the gods of Egypt and carried their tent with them too. Leaving Egypt through the Red Sea is like baptism into Christ (1 Cor. 10:1,2); Israel's wilderness journey is analogous to our lives now as we travel towards the promised land of God's Kingdom. We mustn't take with us the gods of this world (cp. Egypt); God's claim on us is total and exclusive.

6:1-6 The situation described here before the "day of the Lord" in those days is exactly the situation today. Self-indulgence, laziness, over sleeping, over eating, brain-washed by music and ignoring the needs of others, whilst psychologically putting the reality of God's judgment far away (:3) – this is the spirit of our age, and it heralds the final day of the Lord.

oxen? But you have turned justice into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into bitterness; ¹³ you who rejoice in a thing of nothing, who say, ‘Haven’t we taken for ourselves horns by our own strength?’ ¹⁴ For, behold, I will raise up against you a nation, O house of Israel, says Yahweh, the God of Armies; and they will afflict you from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of the Arabah.

CHAPTER 7 Nov. 27

Locusts

Thus the Lord Yahweh showed me: and behold, He formed locusts in the beginning of the shooting up of the latter growth; and behold, it was the latter growth after the king’s harvest. ² It happened that when they made an end of eating the grass of

the land, then I said, Lord Yahweh, forgive, I beseech You! How could Jacob stand? For he is so small. ³ Yahweh relented concerning this. It shall not be, says Yahweh. ⁴ Thus the Lord Yahweh showed me and behold, the Lord Yahweh called for judgment by fire; and it dried up the great deep, and would have devoured the land. ⁵ Then I said, Lord Yahweh, cease, I beg You! How could Jacob stand? For he is small. ⁶ Yahweh relented concerning this. This also shall not be, says the Lord Yahweh.

A Plumb-Line

⁷ Thus he showed me: Behold, the Lord stood beside a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in His hand. ⁸ Yahweh said to me, Amos, what do you see? I said, A plumb line.

7:1-6 God reveals His intention regarding Israel, but then Amos makes a case against this and is heard. In fact, these and other examples suggest that this is almost a pattern with God – to devise His purpose, and then in the ‘gap’ until its fulfilment, be open to the persuasion of His covenant people to change or amend those plans. This could be what 3:7 is speaking of: “Surely the Lord Yahweh will do nothing, unless He first reveals His secret to His servants the prophets”. It’s as if He reveals His plans to them *so that* they can then comment upon them in prayer.

7:2 God is open to changing His stated plan due to the mediation of others. It would even appear that Amos believed God could forgive the sins of others because of *his* prayers rather than their repentance. For Amos doesn’t merely ask God not to execute His judgments, but to actually forgive Israel. There’s an obvious similarity with the intercession of Moses; the only other person to pray “Forgive, I beseech You” is Moses – the same Hebrew words are found on his lips twice (Ex. 34:9; Num. 14:19). Moses’ amazing example had been meditated upon by Amos as he did his agricultural work – and he rose up to the same level. He prayed the same prayer. We too should be motivated in our prayer lives by Biblical examples, even using the same words. So many Biblical prayers use the words of previous Scripture. God leads us to see the similarities between our situations and those of Biblical figures – e.g. by giving Amos a vision of judgment upon Israel in terms of a locust plague, which was intended to lead Amos to see Israel as Egypt and himself as Moses in making intercession to end the plague. Amos gets into the spirit of Moses by asking God to “cease” (7:5), using the same word used to describe how the plagues “ceased” as a result of Moses’ intercession (Ex. 9:29,33,34).

Then the Lord said, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of My people Israel. I will not again change My mind about punishing them.⁹ The high places of Isaac will be desolate, the sanctuaries of Israel will be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword.¹⁰ Then Amaziah the priest of Bethel sent to Jeroboam king of Israel, saying, Amos has conspired against you in the midst of the house of Israel. The land is not able to bear all his words.¹¹ For Amos says, ‘Jeroboam will die by the sword, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land’.¹² Amaziah also said to Amos, You prophet, go, flee away into the land of Judah, and there eat bread, and prophesy there:¹³ but don’t prophesy again any more at Bethel; for it is the king’s sanctuary, and it is a royal house!¹⁴ Then Amos answered Amaziah, I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was a herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore figs;¹⁵ and Yahweh took me from following the flock, and Yahweh said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to

My people Israel’.¹⁶ Now therefore listen to the word of Yahweh: ‘You say, Don’t prophesy against Israel, and don’t preach against the house of Isaac’.¹⁷ Therefore thus says Yahweh: ‘Your wife shall be a prostitute in the city, and your sons and your daughters shall fall by the sword, and your land shall be divided by line; and you yourself shall die in a land that is unclean, and Israel shall surely be led away captive out of his land’.

CHAPTER 8 Nov. 28

A Basket of Summer Fruit

Thus the Lord Yahweh showed me: Behold, a basket of summer fruit.² He said, Amos, what do you see? I said, A basket of summer fruit. Then Yahweh said to me, The end has come on My people Israel. I will not again change My mind about them any more.³ The songs of the temple will be wailings in that day, says the Lord Yahweh. The dead bodies will be many. In every place they will throw them out in silence.⁴ Hear this, you who desire to swal-

7:14 Amos stresses that speaking forth God’s word wasn’t at all what he wished to do or was cut out for. Likewise Paul says that because preaching God’s word was against his natural inclination, therefore a calling to preach the Gospel had indeed been given to him (1 Cor. 9:17). Paul was sent to the Gentiles and not the Jews as he might naturally have preferred; the disciples were unlearned and ignorant men called to preach to the Jewish intelligentsia; women weren’t accepted as legal witnesses and yet the Lord asks women to be the first witnesses of His resurrection; always in the preaching of His word does God use those who humanly aren’t qualified to do so. He doesn’t use slick presentation, but rather human weakness in order to convert others. Amos doubtless alludes to himself in 3:8 where he says that a prophet cannot but speak out God’s word – and this is alluded to by the apostles when they say they cannot but speak out what they have seen and heard of Christ. Note how Amos doesn’t actually answer the serious false allegation against him personally, but gets on with speaking forth God’s word – for this was his life’s focus.

low up the needy, and cause the poor of the land to fail,⁵ saying, ‘Oh when will the new moon be gone, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath end, that we may market wheat, making the ephah small, and the shekel large, and dealing falsely with balances of deceit;⁶ that we may buy the poor for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes, and sell the sweepings along with the wheat?’⁷ Yahweh has sworn by the pride of Jacob, Surely I will never forget any of their works.⁸ Won’t the land tremble for this, and everyone mourn who dwells in it? Yes, it will rise up wholly like the River; and it will be stirred up and sink again, like the River of Egypt.⁹ It will happen in that day, says the Lord Yahweh, that I will cause the sun to go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in the day time.¹⁰ I will turn your feasts into mourning, and all your songs into lamentation; and I will make you wear sackcloth on all your bodies, and baldness on every head. I will make it like the mourning for an only son, and its end like a bitter day.¹¹ Behold, the days come, says the Lord Yahweh, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of Yahweh.¹² They will wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east; they will run back and forth to seek the word of Yahweh, and will not find it.¹³ In that day the beautiful virgins and the young men will faint for thirst.¹⁴ Those who swear by the sin of Samaria, and say, ‘As your god, Dan, lives;’ and, ‘As the way of

Beersheba lives;’ they will fall, and never rise up again.

CHAPTER 9 Nov. 29

God’s People to Be Destroyed

I saw the Lord standing beside the Altar, and He said, Strike the tops of the pillars, that the thresholds may shake; and break them in pieces on the head of all of them; and I will kill the last of them with the sword: there shall not one of them flee away, and there shall not one of them escape.² Though they dig into Sheol, there My hand will take them; and though they climb up to the sky, I will bring them down from there.³ Though they hide themselves in the top of Carmel, I will search and take them out from there; and though they be hidden from My sight in the bottom of the sea, there I will command the serpent, and it will bite them.⁴ Though they go into captivity before their enemies, there I will command the sword, and it will kill them. I will set My eyes on them for evil, and not for good.⁵ For the Lord, Yahweh of Armies, is He who touches the land and it melts, and all who dwell in it will mourn; and it will rise up wholly like the River, and will sink again, like the River of Egypt.⁶ It is He who builds His chambers in the heavens, and has founded His vault on the earth; He who calls for the waters of the sea, and pours them out on the surface of the earth; Yahweh is His name.⁷ Are you not like the children of the Ethiopians to Me, you children of Israel?, says Yahweh. Haven’t I brought up Israel out of the

land of Egypt, and the Philistines from Caphtor, and the Syrians from Kir? ⁸ See, the eyes of the Lord Yahweh are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the surface of the earth; except that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, says Yahweh. ⁹ For, see, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all the nations, as grain is sifted in a sieve, yet not the least kernel will fall to the earth. ¹⁰ All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, those who say, ‘Evil won’t overtake us nor meet us’.

Rebuilding

¹¹ After this I will return, and I will rebuild the tent of David that has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will restore it as in the days of

old; ¹² that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name, says the Lord who makes these things known from of old. ¹³ See, the days come, says Yahweh, that the ploughman shall overtake the reaper, and the one treading grapes him who sows seed; and sweet wine will drip from the mountains, and flow from the hills. ¹⁴ I will bring My people Israel back from captivity, and they will rebuild the ruined cities, and inhabit them; and they will plant vineyards, and drink wine from them. They shall also make gardens, and eat their fruit. ¹⁵ I will plant them in their land, and they will no more be plucked up out of their land which I have given them, says Yahweh your God.

9:11, 12 We have used the Septuagint version of these verses, because this is the form which is quoted under inspiration in Acts 15:14-18. There, James quotes these verses to prove that Gentiles could become called by God’s Name through being baptized into the Name of His Son, the Lord Jesus; and that this process was not predicated upon circumcision. We see, therefore, the huge weight given by the early Christians to every Old Testament word of God. Note that Acts 15:14 speaks of God *visiting* the Gentiles, and quotes :12 about the Gentiles *seeking* the Lord as proof of this. God is in search of man, and some men are in search of Him. They meet in that moment of baptism into His Name as it is in His Son, and the union is a wonderful and eternal one.

OBADIAH Nov. 30

Obadiah's Vision against Edom

The vision of Obadiah. This is what the Lord Yahweh says about Edom. We have heard news from Yahweh, and an ambassador is sent among the nations, saying, Arise, and let's rise up against her in battle.² Behold, I have made you small among the nations. You are greatly despised.³ The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high, who says in his heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'.⁴ Though you mount on high as the eagle, and though your nest is set among the stars, I will bring you down from there, says Yahweh.⁵ If thieves came to you, if robbers by night—oh, what disaster awaits you!—wouldn't they only steal until they had enough? If grape pickers came to you, wouldn't they

leave some gleaning grapes?⁶ How are the men of Esau searched out! How are his hidden things searched through!⁷ All the men of your alliance have brought you on your way, even to the border. The men who were at peace with you have deceived you, and prevailed against you. Friends who eat your bread lay a snare under you. There is no understanding in him.⁸ Won't I in that day, says Yahweh, destroy the wise men out of Edom, and understanding out of the mountain of Esau?⁹ Your mighty men, Teman, will be dismayed, to the end that everyone may be cut off from the mountain of Esau by slaughter.¹⁰ For the violence done to your brother Jacob, shame will cover you, and you will be cut off forever.¹¹ In the day that you stood on the other side, in the day that strangers carried away his substance,

:5 This could imply that Esau / Edom's anger with Jacob / Israel was justified to *some extent* – they were condemned because they took it too far. Unless we control our anger, we will soon go too far and slip into sin. Hence we shouldn't let the sun go down over our anger (Eph. 4:26).

:6 Every past day of judgment reveals something of the future. Edom's day of judgment is described as his hidden, secret things being searched through. This may be alluded to by Paul when he speaks of how "the hidden things" of our hearts will be revealed in the final searching of the day of judgment (1 Cor. 4:5).

:7 *Friends who eat your bread* – To eat bread together was a sign of friendship and fellowship. The breaking of bread service is therefore a sign of our personal friendship with God; it's a great honour to be invited there.

:10 The nation of Edom is judged for the same thing as the historical Esau – hatred of their brother. Our attitude to our brethren will be a major factor in determining our eternal future (Mt. 25:40).

:10-14 Pride, indifference to others' pain even though it is a judgment for their sins, resentment, feelings of superiority... These mental attitudes, rather than the many other sins of Edom, were what so angered God.

and foreigners entered into his gates, and cast lots for Jerusalem, even you were like one of them.¹² But don't look down on your brother in the day of his disaster, and don't rejoice over the children of Judah in the day of their destruction. Don't speak proudly in the day of distress.¹³ Don't enter into the gate of My people in the day of their calamity. Don't look down on their affliction in the day of their calamity, neither seize their wealth on the day of their calamity.¹⁴ Don't stand in the crossroads to cut off those of his who escape. Don't deliver up those of his who remain in the day of distress.¹⁵ For the day of Yahweh is nearly upon all the nations! As you have done, it will be done to you. Your deeds will return upon your own head.¹⁶ For as you have drunk on My holy mountain, so will all the nations drink continually. Yes, they will drink, swallow down, and will be as though they had not

been.¹⁷ But in Mount Zion, there will be those who escape, and it will be holy. The house of Jacob will possess their inheritances.¹⁸ The house of Jacob will be a fire, the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble. They will burn among them and consume them. There will not be anyone remaining to the house of Esau. Truly Yahweh has spoken.¹⁹ Those of the South will possess the mountain of Esau, and those of the lowland, the Philistines. They will possess the field of Ephraim, and the field of Samaria. Benjamin will possess Gilead.²⁰ The captives of this army of the children of Israel, who are among the Canaanites, will possess even to Zarephath; and the captives of Jerusalem, who are in Sepharad, will possess the cities of the Negev.²¹ Saviours will come up on Mount Zion to judge the mountains of Esau, and the kingdom will be Yahweh's.

:21 See on Joel 3:12-14.

JONAH

CHAPTER 1 Dec. 1

Jonah Tries to Flee from God

Now the word of Yahweh came to Jonah the son of Amittai saying, ² Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me. ³ But Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going down to Tarshish; so he paid its fare, and went down into it, in order to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of Yahweh. ⁴ But Yahweh sent out a great wind on the sea and there was a mighty storm on the sea, so that the ship was likely to break up. ⁵ Then the sailors were afraid, and every man cried to his god. They threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea to lighten the ship. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship and he was laying down, deeply asleep. ⁶ So the captain came to him and said to him, What do you mean, you sleeper? Arise, call on your God! Maybe

your God will look to us so that we won't perish. ⁷ They all said to each other, Come, let's cast lots, that we may know who is responsible for this evil that is on us. So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. ⁸ Then they asked him, Tell us, please, for whose cause this evil is on us. What is your occupation? Where do you come from? What is your country? Of what people are you? ⁹ He said to them, I am a Hebrew, and I fear Yahweh the God of heaven, who has made the sea and the dry land. ¹⁰ Then were the men extremely afraid and said to him, What is this that you have done? For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of Yahweh, because he had told them. ¹¹ Then they said to him, What shall we do to you, that the sea may be calm to us? For the sea grew more and more stormy. ¹² He said to them, Take me up, and throw me into the sea. Then the sea will be calm for you; for I know that because of me this great storm is on you. ¹³ Nevertheless the men rowed

1:3 Jonah is described as going progressively ‘down’ – down to Joppa, down into the ship, down into the hold of the ship, and then down into the depths of the sea (1:3,5; 2:6). This was the depth of his degradation. Yet he was brought up from it. Jonah was like Nineveh – the “wickedness” of Nineveh (1:2; 3:8) is the same Hebrew word used in 4:1 where Jonah was displeased “exceedingly”, i.e. ‘wickedly’. Their wickedness was paralleled with the wickedness of his hard heartedness towards them. When the sailors awoke him with the words “Get up and call ...”, they were using the very words which God had used perhaps just days earlier to call him with. We can't escape the call – God will repeat it to us through life's circumstances, even through our very efforts to avoid the call. The obvious lesson is to willingly and in love respond to the calls we receive, rather than go through the agonies of seeking to avoid them. Jonah's response: “I am an Hebrew...” was basically his response to God... he didn't want to give Nineveh a chance of salvation because he was a patriotic Jew. God does these complex things with us many times daily... if we will perceive them.

hard to get them back to the land; but they could not, for the sea grew more and more tempestuous against them.

¹⁴ Therefore they cried to Yahweh and said, We beg you Yahweh, we beg you, don't let us die for the sake of this man's life, and don't lay on us innocent blood; for you, Yahweh, have done as it pleased You.

¹⁵ So they took up Jonah, and threw him into the sea; and the sea ceased its raging.

¹⁶ Then the men feared Yahweh exceedingly; and they offered a sacrifice to Yahweh and made vows.

¹⁷ Yahweh prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah, and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

CHAPTER 2 Dec. 2

Jonah Prays from inside the Fish

Then Jonah prayed to Yahweh his God out of the great fish's belly.

² He said, I called because of my affliction to Yahweh and He answered me. Out of the belly of Sheol I cried. You heard my voice,

³ for You threw me into the depths, into the heart of the seas. The water was all around me. All Your waves and Your breakers passed over me.

⁴ I said, 'I have

been banished from Your sight; yet I will look again toward Your holy temple'. ⁵ The waters surrounded me, even to the soul. The deep was around me, the weeds were wrapped around my head.

⁶ I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth barred me in forever: yet have You brought up my life from the pit, Yahweh my God.

⁷ When my soul ebbed away within me, I remembered Yahweh. My prayer came in to You, into Your holy temple.

⁸ Those who regard lying vanities forsake their own mercy.

⁹ But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving, I will pay that which I have vowed. Salvation belongs to Yahweh.

¹⁰ Yahweh spoke to the fish, and it vomited out Jonah on the dry land.

CHAPTER 3 Dec. 2

To Nineveh after All

The word of Yahweh came to Jonah the second time saying,

² Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I give you.

³ So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of Yahweh. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, three days'

2:2 Jonah knew his Bible well; his poem is absolutely full of references to the Psalms. And yet Ps. 139 had clearly stated that we cannot flee anywhere from God's presence; for even in the deep sea, He will find us. Jonah knew this; and yet he didn't know it. He had to learn what this meant in practice. And so, incident by incident, blow by blow, our theoretical knowledge is turned into flesh, into reality for us; for the same God who worked so hard in Jonah's life is at work in ours.

3:3 It took Jonah three days to walk through Nineveh (3:3). On the first day in the city, he told them that in 40 days God would destroy them (3:4); it follows that by the time he was in the middle of the city he was telling them that they had 37 days left. So too the Jews had between 37 and 40 years notice of the destruction of Jerusalem. It is a worthwhile speculation that for Jonah to be a sign to the Ninevites by reason of being three days in the whale (Mt. 12:38-40), he must have had in his body the marks of his

journey across.⁴ Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried out and said, In forty days, Nineveh will be overthrown!⁵ The people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from their greatest even to their least.⁶ The news reached the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne, took off his royal robe, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes.⁷ He made a proclamation and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor animal, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water;⁸ but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and animal, and let them cry mightily to God. Yes, let them turn each one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands.⁹ Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we might not perish?¹⁰ God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way. God relented of the disaster which He said He would do to them, and He didn't do it.

CHAPTER 4 Dec. 3

Jonah Angry Because of God's Compassion on Nineveh

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.² He prayed to Yahweh and said, Please, Yahweh, wasn't this what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore I hurried to flee away to Tarshish, for I knew that You are a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in loving kindness, and You relent of doing harm.³ Therefore now Yahweh, take, I beg You, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live.⁴ Yahweh said, Is it right for you to be angry?⁵ Then Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made himself a shelter, and sat under it in the shade, until he might see what would become of the city.⁶ Yahweh God prepared a vine, and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head to deliver him from his discomfort. So Jonah was very glad because of the vine.⁷ But God prepared a worm at dawn the next day, and it chewed on the vine so that it withered.⁸ It

experience for all to see, as Christ did. Being inside the fish for that period may have made his flesh change colour or bear some other physical mark so that he could be a sign to them of what had happened. Doubtless he recounted his story to them – so that they were encouraged by the fact of God's love to the resurrected Jonah to repent and likewise throw themselves on God's mercy. In all this we see Jonah as a type of Christ. They would have looked upon that man as we look upon Jesus, to see the love of God manifested in him; they responded by repenting in sackcloth, casting off their materialism, and living in a way that showed their complete belief that “the judge stands before the door”. What is our response to Jonah/Jesus?

3:4 No conditions were given; but God changed His stated purpose because He is so sensitive to human repentance.

4:8 God created a great wind with which He brought Jonah and his fellows to their knees in 1:4. God here creates another great wind with which to teach Jonah some-

happened that when the sun arose, God prepared a hot east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he fainted and requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live.⁹ God said to Jonah, Is it right for you to be angry about the vine? He said, I am right to be angry, even to death.¹⁰ Yahweh said, You have been con-

cerned for the vine, for which you have not laboured, neither made it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night.¹¹ Shouldn't I be concerned for Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who can't discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

thing else. Jonah ought to have perceived the same hand of the same God at work with him. Jonah's life "ebbed away" inside the fish (2:7) – and a very similar word is used here in 4:8 about his experience as he sat under the vine. In the fish, Jonah prayed that God would save his life, and was heard. But when he was made to feel the same again, he instead prayed God to take away his life. Perhaps this shows that even when we respond well to circumstances, those same circumstances may repeat in order to test us as to whether we will continue to make that right response.

MICAH

CHAPTER 1 Dec. 4

Against Samaria and Jerusalem

The word of Yahweh that came to Micah the Morashite in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, which he saw concerning Samaria and Jerusalem.² Hear, you peoples, all of you. Listen, O earth, and all that is therein: and let the Lord Yahweh be witness against you, the Lord from His holy temple.³ For behold, Yahweh comes forth out of His place, and will come down and tread on the high places of the earth.⁴ The mountains melt under him, and the valleys split apart, like wax before the fire, like waters that are poured down a steep place.⁵ All this is because of the disobedience of Jacob, and for the sins of the house of Israel. What is the disobedience of Jacob? Isn't it Samaria? And what are the high places of Judah? Aren't they Jerusalem?⁶ Therefore I

will make Samaria like a rubble heap of the field, like places for planting vineyards; and I will pour down its stones into the valley, and I will uncover its foundations.⁷ All her idols will be beaten to pieces, and all her temple gifts will be burned with fire, and all her images will be destroyed; for as the hire of a prostitute has she obtained them, and to the hire of a prostitute shall they return.

Lamentation and Wailing

For this I will lament and wail; I will go stripped and naked; I will howl like the jackals, and moan like the daughters of owls.⁹ For her wounds are incurable; and it has come even to Judah. It reaches to the gate of my people, even to Jerusalem.¹⁰ Don't tell it in Gath. Don't weep at all. At Beth Ophrah I have rolled myself in the dust.¹¹ Pass on, inhabitant of Shaphir, in nakedness

1:8 Micah didn't just mindlessly transmit God's word to God's people. He perceived the truth of the words he was repeating, and believed absolutely that they would come true; and so he wept and rolled himself in the dust (:10). This may have been from grief, but it may also be that he thought that *his* repentance and prayer could avert the judgment upon God's people which he was prophesying.

1:10 Rolling naked in the dust... this was the extent of Micah's passion for the repentance of his audience. Our preaching isn't to be an emotionless publicity campaign for our denomination or local church, but a passionate appeal for real response. Indifference, lack of passion, is the besetting tragedy of our age. When did you last really shed tears? When were you moved, really wrenching in your gut, by the suffering of others, by the sin of this world, your own sin, your part in humanity's tragic rejection of God... when did you last *feel* for God in His pain, as He sees His beloved children and creation walk away from Him day after day, second after second? When did you last feel ecstatic joy, deep sadness... in this post-modern world of surface level emotion? It's in all this that the words of the prophets and their personal nature as people challenge us – and their spirit is to be the spirit of our testimony to Jesus in this world (Rev. 19:10).

and shame. The inhabitant of Zaanan won't come out. When you hear the wailing of Beth Ezel, you will know there is no protection there.¹² For the inhabitant of Maroth waits anxiously hoping for good, but evil has come down from Yahweh to the gate of Jerusalem.¹³ Harness the chariot to the swift steed, inhabitant of Lachish. She was the beginning of sin to the daughter of Zion; For the transgressions of Israel were found in you.¹⁴ Therefore you will give a parting gift to Moresheth Gath. The houses of Achzib will be a deceitful thing to the kings of Israel.¹⁵ I will yet hand you over to your enemy, inhabitant of Mareshah. The leader who is the glory of Israel will come to hide in the Adullam cave.¹⁶ Shave your heads, and cut off your hair for the children of your delight. Enlarge your baldness like the vulture; for they have gone into captivity from you!

CHAPTER 2 Dec. 5

The Plans of Man and the Plans of God

Woe to those who devise iniquity and work evil on their beds!

1:12 *Evil has come down* – Evil in the sense of calamity and disaster comes from God (Is. 45:5-7); it's not true that there is a personal Satan figure who brings evil, and God brings only good. Both good and evil ultimately come from God; He is in control of our lives, and has total power in the cosmos.

2:1 What people think about as they lay on their beds is known by God and is the basis of His judgment of them.

2:6 The apostles were likewise ordered not to preach, but their response was that it was impossible for them to keep quiet about God's word as it was in Christ (Acts 5:28). We cannot but share God's word with others if it really has a place in our hearts (Am. 3:8).

2:7 *Spirit... restrained?* – The prophets didn't speak their own words but God's words, because they spoke as they were moved by God's Spirit (2 Tim. 3:16; 1 Pet. 1:21). For

When the morning is light, they practice it, because it is in the power of their hand.² They covet fields, and seize them; and houses, and take them away: and they oppress a man and his house, even a man and his heritage.³ Therefore thus says Yahweh: Behold, I am planning against these people a disaster, from which you will not remove your necks, neither will you walk proudly; for it is an evil time.⁴ In that day they will take up a parable against you, and lament with a doleful lamentation, saying, ‘We are utterly ruined! My people's possession is divided up. Indeed he takes it from me and assigns our fields to traitors!’.⁵ Therefore you will have no one who divides the land by lot in the assembly of Yahweh.

There Are False Prophets

6 Don't preach!, they preach, Don't preach about these things. Disgrace won't overtake us.⁷ Shall it be said, O house of Jacob: Is the Spirit of Yahweh restrained? Are these His doings? Don't My words do good to him who walks blamelessly?⁸ But lately My people have risen up as an

enemy. You strip the robe and clothing from those who pass by, confidently assuming that they aren't in danger. ⁹ You drive the women of My people out from their pleasant houses; from their young children you take away My blessing forever. ¹⁰ Arise, and depart! For this is not your resting place, because of your uncleanness that destroys, even with a grievous destruction. ¹¹ If a man walking in a spirit of falsehood lies: I will prophesy to you of wine and of strong drink; he would be the prophet of this people.

The Promise of Deliverance

¹² I will surely assemble, Jacob, all of you; I will surely gather the remnant of Israel; I will put them together as the sheep of Bozrah, as a flock in the midst of their pasture; they will swarm with people. ¹³ He who opens the breach goes up before them. They break through and pass the gate, and go out. And their king passes on before them, with Yahweh at their head.

CHAPTER 3 Dec. 6

God's Rebuke of the People's Leaders

I said, Please listen, you heads of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel: Isn't it for you to know justice? ² You who hate the good, and

love the evil; who tear off their skin, and their flesh from off their bones; ³ who also eat the flesh of My people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones, and chop them in pieces for the pot, and as flesh within the cauldron. ⁴ Then they will cry to Yahweh, but He will not answer them. Yes, He will hide His face from them at that time, because they made their deeds evil. ⁵ Thus says Yahweh concerning the prophets who lead My people astray; for those who proclaim, Peace! to those who feed them; and whoever doesn't provide for their mouths, they prepare war against Him: ⁶ Therefore night is over you, with no vision, and it is dark to you, that you may not divine; and the sun will go down on the prophets, and the day will be black over them. ⁷ The seers shall be disappointed, and the diviners confounded. Yes, they shall all cover their lips; for there is no answer from God. ⁸ But as for me, I am full of power by the Spirit of Yahweh, and of judgment, and of might, to declare to Jacob his disobedience, and to Israel his sin. ⁹ Please listen to this, you heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, who hate justice, and pervert all right judgment. ¹⁰ They build up Zion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. ¹¹ Her leaders judge

a prophet not to speak or preach would therefore be as good as trying to restrain the Spirit of God; and this cannot be done.

My words do good – The early chapters of Proverbs emphasize how God's words give strength to those who already obey them. There is an upward spiral in spiritual life, in which the Spirit and word of God is the dynamic. Exposure to God's word confirms us in living a spiritual life. Hence the importance of daily Bible reading.

for bribes, and her priests teach for a price, and her prophets tell fortunes for money: yet they lean on Yahweh and say, Isn't Yahweh in the midst of us? No disaster will come on us. **12** Therefore Zion for your sake will be plowed like a field, and Jerusalem will become heaps of rubble, and the mountain of the temple like the high places of a forest.

CHAPTER 4 Dec. 6

The Mountain of Yahweh's Temple

But in the latter days, it will happen that the mountain of Yahweh's temple will be established on the top of the mountains, and it will be exalted above the hills; and nations will stream to it. **2** Many nations will go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of Yahweh, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths. For out of Zion will go forth the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem;

3 and He will judge between many peoples, and will decide concerning strong nations afar off. They will beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, neither will they learn war any more. **4** But they will sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and no one will make them afraid: for the mouth of Yahweh of Armies has spoken. **5** Indeed all the nations may walk in the name of their gods; but we will walk in the name of Yahweh our God for ever and ever. **6** In that day, says Yahweh, I will assemble that which is lame, and I will gather that which is driven away, and that which I have afflicted; **7** and I will make that which was lame a remnant, and that which was cast far off a strong nation: and Yahweh will reign over them on Mount Zion from then on, even forever. **8** You, tower of the flock, the hill of the daughter of Zion, to you it will

3:12 *For your sake* – Other people suffer because of the sins of others. However, when Hezekiah studied the words of Micah, he repented and begged God to change His mind about this very verse – and God changed His mind and didn't bring this evil (Jer. 26:19). So God's words of prophecy are open to renegotiation, according to prayer and repentance. This adds intensity and significance to our entreaties of God, knowing that others (e.g. Moses) have successfully reasoned with God and He has changed His stated intentions.

4:1-4 A clear prophecy of the literal establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, based around Jerusalem. 'Mountains' are symbolic of kingdoms.

4:4 *Vine... fig tree* – These words were quoted by Rabshakeh, in offering the Jews this very situation in pagan Assyria (2 Kings 18:31,32). The world around us in its advertisements and glossy images is in fact a fake Kingdom of God, imitating the true Kingdom of God. And so the choice is highlighted for us – between the kingdoms of this world for today, and the eternal Kingdom of God tomorrow.

For the mouth – The wonder of the process of inspiration is that the black print we read on white paper in the Bible is the very mouth of God speaking to us.

4:8 The Kingdom of God which Jesus will establish at His return will in fact be a re-

come, yes, the former kingdom will return, the kingdom will come to the daughter of Jerusalem.⁹ Now why do you cry out aloud? Is there no king in you? Has your counsellor perished, that pains have taken hold of you as of a woman in travail?¹⁰ Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail; for now you will go forth out of the city, and will dwell in the field, and will come even to Babylon. There you will be delivered. There Yahweh will redeem you from the hand of your enemies.¹¹ Now many nations have assembled against you, that say, Let her be raped, and let our eye gloat over Zion.¹² But they don't know the thoughts of Yahweh, neither do

establishment of the Kingdom which was earlier, when Yahweh was Israel's Kingdom on earth (Ez. 21:25-27; 1 Chron. 29:23). This “former Kingdom” will be restored, again on earth, but to a far more glorious extent.

4:10 How was the travailing daughter of Zion to be delivered / rescued in *Babylon* after having been taken captive there from Jerusalem by the Babylonians? Surely in that there, God intended a spiritual revival of the people, there they would hear Ezekiel's appeal to repent, which if responded to would enable them to build the temple which he had described (Ez. 43:10,11) and thus usher in a Messianic Kingdom. God had so many wonderful plans for His people which they didn't allow to come true for them.

4:12 God assembles the nations to judge / thresh them, but they assemble themselves (:11). This is part of a large Biblical theme – that those who are judged in fact judge themselves. The only ones who will be rejected by God are those who themselves don't wish to be in His Kingdom.

5:1 Mk. 14:65 (Gk.) says that Christ was hit with “strokes of rods”. Perhaps it was in this sense that the rod comforted Messiah (Ps. 23:4) in that He saw immediately that prophecy was being fulfilled in Him. Our darkest moments likewise can be our greatest encouragement if only we perceive them as we should. As men mocked Him and smote Him, thus they were treating their judge at the time of judgment. In His time of dying, the Lord Jesus was the judge of Israel. This explains why when we come before the cross, not only at the breaking of bread but *whenever* we reflect upon Him and His death, we are in some sense coming before Him in judgment.

5:2 A prophecy of Christ's birth in Bethlehem (Mt. 2:6). This prophecy of His birth is prefaced by a statement that Messiah would be smitten with a rod (:1) – which happened at the end of His life. In our linear way of thinking, we'd expect this to be the other way around – Messiah is born, grows up, suffers, dies... but God doesn't think

they understand His counsel; for He has assembled them like the sheaves to the threshing floor.¹³ Arise and thresh, daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn iron, and I will make your hoofs brass; and you will beat in pieces many peoples: and I will devote their gain to Yahweh, and their substance to the Lord of the whole earth.

CHAPTER 5 Dec. 7

Bethlehem the Birthplace of the Promised Ruler

Now you shall gather yourself in troops, daughter of troops. He has laid siege against us. They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek.² But you, Bethlehem

Ephrathah, being small among the clans of Judah, out of you one will come forth to Me that is to be the ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting. ³ Therefore He will abandon them until the time that she who is in labor gives birth. Then the rest of his brothers will return to the children of Israel.⁴ He shall stand, and shall shepherd in the strength of Yahweh, in the majesty of the name of Yahweh his God: and they will live, for then he will be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵ He will be our peace when Assyria invades our land, and when he marches through our fortresses, then we will raise against him seven shepherds, and eight senior leaders of men.

Deliverance and Destruction

⁶ They will rule the land of Assyria with the sword, and the land of Nimrod in its gates. He will deliver us from the Assyrian, when he invades our land, and when he marches within our border. ⁷ The remnant of Jacob will be in the midst of many peoples, like dew from Yahweh, like showers on the grass, that don't wait for man, nor wait for the sons of men. ⁸ The remnant of Jacob will be among the nations, in the midst of many peoples, like a lion among the animals of the forest, like a young lion among the flocks of sheep; who, if he goes through, treads down and tears in pieces, and there is no one to deliver. ⁹ Let your hand be lifted up

above your adversaries, and let all of your enemies be cut off.¹⁰ It will happen in that day, says Yahweh, That I will cut off your horses out of the midst of you, and will destroy your chariots. ¹¹ I will cut off the cities of your land, and will tear down all your strongholds. ¹² I will destroy witchcraft from your hand; and you shall have no soothsayers. ¹³ I will cut off your engraved images and your pillars out of your midst; and you shall no more worship the work of your hands. ¹⁴ I will uproot your Asherim out of your midst; and I will destroy your cities. ¹⁵ I will execute vengeance in anger, and wrath on the nations that didn't listen.

CHAPTER 6 Dec. 8

Yahweh's Case against His People

Listen now to what Yahweh says: Arise, plead your case before the mountains, and let the hills hear what you have to say. ² Hear, you mountains, Yahweh's controversy, and you enduring foundations of the earth; for Yahweh has a controversy with His people, and He will contend with Israel. ³ My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me! ⁴ For I brought you up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed you out of the house of bondage. I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. ⁵ My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab devised, and what Balaam the son of Beor answered him from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know

and write like that; the prophecies often appear to 'jump around' in their chronological fulfilment.

the righteous acts of Yahweh.⁶ How shall I come before Yahweh, and bow myself before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old?⁷ Will Yahweh be pleased with thousands of rams? With tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my first-born for my disobedience? The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?⁸ He has shown you, O man, what is good. What does Yahweh require of you, but to act justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?

The Guilt of the People

⁹ Yahweh's voice calls to the city, and wisdom sees your name: Listen to the rod, and He who appointed it.¹⁰ Are there yet treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and a short ephah that is accursed?¹¹ Shall I be pure with dishonest scales, and with a bag of deceitful weights?¹² Her rich men are full of violence, her inhabitants speak lies, and their tongue is deceitful in their speech.¹³ Therefore I also have struck you with a grievous wound. I have made you desolate because of your sins.¹⁴ You shall eat, but not be satisfied. Your humiliation will be in your midst. You will store up, but not save; and that which you save I will give up to the sword.¹⁵ You will sow, but won't reap. You will tread

the olives, but won't anoint yourself with oil; and crush grapes, but won't drink the wine.¹⁶ For the statutes of Omri are kept, and all the works of the house of Ahab. You live by their commands, that I may make you a ruin, and her inhabitants a hissing; and you will bear the reproach of my people.

CHAPTER 7 Dec. 9

The Misery of the People

Misery is mine! Indeed, I am like one who gathers the summer fruits, as gleanings of the vineyard: There is no cluster of grapes to eat. My soul desires to eat the early fig.² The Godly man has perished out of the land, and there is no one upright among men. They all lie in wait for blood; every man hunts his brother with a net.³ Their hands are on that which is evil to do it diligently. The ruler and judge ask for a bribe; and the powerful man dictates the evil desire of his soul. Thus they conspire together.⁴ The best of them is like a brier. The most upright is worse than a thorn hedge. The day of your watchmen, even your visitation, has come; now is the time of their confusion.⁵ Don't trust in a neighbour. Don't put confidence in a friend. With the woman lying in your embrace, be careful of the words of your mouth!⁶ For the son dishonours the father,

6:7 Micah comes to the point where he would fain make sacrifice for Israel, even to the point of offering his firstborn son, so strongly did he take upon himself the sins of his people. But he tells Israel that even this will be no good; they must repent themselves, for God doesn't work on the basis of substitution but representation. In all this, Micah came close to the spirit of the Father and Son. For the Father *would* give His firstborn for their sin.

the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house. ⁷ But as for me, I will look to Yahweh. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. ⁸ Don't rejoice against me, my enemy. When I fall, I will arise. When I sit in darkness, Yahweh will be a light to me. ⁹ I will bear the indignation of Yahweh, because I have sinned against Him, until He pleads my case, and executes judgment for me. He will bring me forth to the light. I will see His righteousness. ¹⁰ Then my enemy will see it, and shame will cover her who said to me, where is Yahweh your God? Then my enemy will see me and will cover herself with shame. Now she will be trodden down like the mire of the streets. ¹¹ A day to build your walls! In that day, He will extend your boundary. ¹² In that day they will come to you from Assyria and the cities of Egypt, and from Egypt even to the River, and from sea to sea, and mountain to mountain. ¹³ Yet the land will be desolate because of those who dwell therein, for the fruit of their doings.

7:16 Ashamed of all their might – In the day of judgment, people will be ashamed of the size of their bank accounts, the trust they put in investments, influential people, wealth, bodily strength. All human advantage will be despised – and we must live in that spirit today.

Prayer and Praises

¹⁴ Shepherd Your people with Your staff, the flock of Your heritage, who dwell by themselves in a forest, in the midst of fertile pasture land; let them feed in Bashan and Gilead, as in the days of old. ¹⁵ As in the days of your coming forth out of the land of Egypt, I will show them marvellous things. ¹⁶ The nations will see and be ashamed of all their might. They will lay their hand on their mouth. Their ears will be deaf. ¹⁷ They will lick the dust like a serpent. Like crawling things of the earth they shall come trembling out of their dens. They will come with fear to Yahweh our God, and will be afraid because of You. ¹⁸ Who is a God like You, who pardons iniquity, and passes over the disobedience of the remnant of His heritage? He doesn't retain his anger forever, because He delights in loving kindness. ¹⁹ He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities under foot; and you will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. ²⁰ You will give truth to Jacob, and mercy to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

NAHUM

CHAPTER 1 Dec. 10

Against Nineveh

A divine word about Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite.² Yahweh is a jealous God and avenges; Yahweh avenges and is full of wrath. Yahweh takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He maintains wrath against His enemies.³ Yahweh is slow to anger, and great in power, and will by no means leave the guilty unpunished. Yahweh has His way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of His feet.⁴ He rebukes the sea, and makes it dry, and dries up all the rivers. Bashan languishes, and Carmel; and the flower of Lebanon languishes.⁵ The mountains quake before Him, and the hills melt away. The earth trembles at His presence, yes, the world, and all who dwell in it.⁶ Who can stand before His indignation? Who can endure the fierceness of His anger? His wrath is poured out like fire, and the rocks are broken apart by Him.⁷ Yahweh is good, a stronghold in the day of trouble; and He knows those who take refuge in

Him.⁸ But with an overflowing flood He will make a full end of His adversaries, and will pursue His enemies into darkness.⁹ What do you plot against Yahweh? He will make a full end; affliction won't rise up the second time.¹⁰ For while they are entangled in thorns, and intoxicated with their drink, they will be consumed utterly like dry stubble.¹¹ There is one gone forth out of you, who devises evil against Yahweh, who counsels wickedness.¹² Thus says Yahweh: Though they be in full strength, and likewise many, even so they will be cut down, and he shall pass away. Though I have afflicted you, I will afflict you no more.¹³ Now will I break his yoke from off you, and will burst your bonds apart.¹⁴ Yahweh has commanded concerning you: No more descendants will bear your name. Out of the house of your gods will I cut off the engraved image and the molten image. I will make your grave, for you are vile.¹⁵ Behold, on the mountains the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace! Keep your feasts, Judah! Per-

1:4 He rebukes – These verses are full of allusion to what God did at the Red Sea – but they are written in the present tense, as if God's wonders are no less in our day too, even though they are expressed in a less visual way.

1:8 Pursue His enemies into darkness – The final day of judgment will feature the rejected being chased by Angels into darkness, where they will weep and bang their teeth in anger with themselves (Ps. 35:5,6; Job 18:18; Mt. 22:13).

1:15 The feet of him – This prophecy about Christ is quoted in Rom. 10:15 about our preaching, but with a subtle change of pronoun: "How beautiful are the feet of *them* that preach". We are the Lord Jesus to this world, because we are brethren in Him. This alone is a powerful imperative as to who we are, how we speak, the men and women we show ourselves to be. The Nahum passage is in the context of preaching to

form your vows, for the wicked one will no more pass through you. He is utterly cut off.

CHAPTER 2 Dec. 10

How Nineveh Is to Fall

He who dashes in pieces has come up against you. Keep the fortress! Watch the way! Strengthen your muscles! Fortify your power mightily! ² For Yahweh restores the pride of Jacob, as the pride of Israel; for the destroyers have destroyed them, and ruined their vine branches. ³ The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are dressed in scarlet, the chariots flash with steel in the day of his preparation, and the pine spears are brandished. ⁴ The chariots rage in the streets, they rush back and forth in the broad highways. Their appearance is like torches, they run like lightning. ⁵ He summons his picked troops. They stumble on their way. They dash to protect its wall, and the protective shield is put in place. ⁶ The gates of the rivers are opened, and the palace is dissolved. ⁷ It is decreed: she is uncovered, she is carried away; and her handmaids moan

as with the voice of doves, beating on their breasts. ⁸ Like water from a burst dam the people rush away from Nineveh. Stop! Stop! they cry, but no one looks back. ⁹ Take the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold, for there is no end of the booty, the glory of all goodly jewels. ¹⁰ She is empty, void, and waste. The heart melts, the knees knock together, their bodies and faces have grown pale. ¹¹ Where is the den of the lions, and the feeding place of the young lions, where the lion and the lioness walked, the lion's cubs, and no one made them afraid? ¹² The lion tore in pieces enough for his cubs, and strangled for his lionesses, and filled his caves with the kill, and his dens with prey. ¹³ Behold, I am against you, says Yahweh of Armies, and I will burn her chariots in the smoke, and the sword will devour your young lions; and I will cut off your prey from the earth, and the voice of your envoys will no longer be heard.

CHAPTER 3 Dec. 11

A Woe to Nineveh

Woe to the city of blood! It is all full of lies and robbery- no end

Israel the good news of their ultimate freedom from the Assyrian invasion which was then imminent. We are in a strikingly parallel situation in these last days, and should be making a special witness to Israel and the Jewish people.

2:1 Nineveh would have seemed invincible at the time Nahum prophesied. Nahum's words would have seemed as the rantings of a madman. The prophecies about Christ's return and the destruction of the present world order likewise demand faith to believe, but they will just as surely come true.

2:2 *Vine branches* – Israel were God's vineyard, the individual Israelites were the branches (Is. 5:1). Jesus uses the same figure about us – He is the vine and we who are baptized into Him are the branches (Jn. 15:5). Thus the individuals in Christ are now the true Israel of God, a nation currently without a homeland, but waiting for the establishment of our Kingdom on this earth (Gal. 3:27-29).

to the prey! ² The noise of the whip, the noise of the rattling of wheels, prancing horses, and bounding chariots, ³ the horseman mounting, and the flashing sword, the glittering spear, and a multitude of slain, and a great heap of corpses, and there is no end of the bodies. They stumble on their bodies, ⁴ because of the multitude of the prostitution of the alluring prostitute, the mistress of witchcraft, who sells nations through her prostitution, and families through her witchcraft. ⁵ Behold, I am against you, says Yahweh of Armies, and I will lift your skirts over your face. I will show the nations your nakedness, and the kingdoms your shame. ⁶ I will throw abominable filth on you, and make you vile, and will set you a spectacle. ⁷ It will happen that all those who look at you will flee from

you, and say, ‘Nineveh is laid waste! Who will mourn for her?’ Where will I seek comforters for you? ⁸ Are you better than No-Amon, who was situated among the rivers, who had the waters around her; whose rampart was the sea, and her wall was of the sea? ⁹ Cush and Egypt were her infinite strength. Put and Libya were her helpers. ¹⁰ Yet was she carried away, she went into captivity. Her young children also were dashed in pieces at the head of all the streets, and they cast lots for her honourable men, and all her senior leaders were bound in chains. ¹¹ You also will be drunken. You will go into hiding. You also will seek a stronghold because of the enemy. ¹² All your fortresses will be like fig trees with the first-ripe figs: if they are shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater. ¹³ Behold, your

3:4 And families – One aspect of the sin of prostitution and much sexual sin is that it destroys families; and God is a family God who has created the family unit as His preferred method for His people.

3:5, 6 The language of these verses is extreme. This is the fully legitimate anger of God against those who abuse His people and sin against Him. The grace and kindness of God shouldn’t let us forget His wrath with sin which is also a part of His total character and personality.

3:7 Nineveh is laid waste – At the time Nahum was speaking, she was prosperous and powerful. But God’s word is so sure of fulfilment that He can speak in the present tense, speaking of things which haven’t yet happened as if they have (Rom. 4:17). We also, by faith, must view this world with the same eyes. It’s all over for this world, right here and now, so certain is it that Christ will return and establish His Kingdom upon the ruins of the kingdoms of men.

3:9 Infinite strength – Egypt is presented in the Bible as representative of human strength. It *appeared* that their strength was infinite, but only God has infinite strength. This is an example of how the Bible often speaks of situations as they appear to people on earth, even though this is not ultimately how things are. The language of demons in the New Testament is another example. God sometimes adopts a human perspective in reasoning with us, in order to connect with us; just as we do when trying to communicate with and explain things to those (e.g. children) who understand something far less than we do.

troops in your midst are like women. The gates of your land are set wide open to your enemies. The fire has devoured your bars.¹⁴ Draw water for the siege. Strengthen your fortresses. Go into the clay, and tread the mortar. Make the brick kiln strong.¹⁵ There the fire will devour you. The sword will cut you off. It will devour you like the grasshopper. You have multiplied like grasshoppers, bred like the locust.¹⁶ You have increased your merchants more than the stars of the skies. The grasshopper strips, and flees away.

¹⁷ Your guards are like the locusts, and your officials like the swarms of locusts, which settle on the walls on a cold day, but when the sun appears, they flee away, and their place is not known where they are.¹⁸ Your shepherds slumber, king of Assyria. Your nobles lie down, your people are scattered on the mountains, and there is no one to gather them.¹⁹ There is no healing for your wound, for your injury is fatal. All who hear the report of you clap their hands over you; for who hasn't felt your endless cruelty?

HABAKKUK

CHAPTER 1 Dec. 12

Habakkuk Complains

The oracle which Habakkuk the prophet saw. ² Yahweh, how long will I cry, and You will not hear? I cry out to you Violence!- and will You not save? ³ Why do You show me iniquity, and look at perversity? For destruction and violence are before me. There is strife, and contention rises up. ⁴ Therefore the law is paralyzed, and justice never goes forth; for the wicked surround the righteous, therefore justice is perverted.

God's Reply

⁵ Look among the nations, watch, and wonder marvellously; for I am working a work in your days, which you will not believe though it is told you.

⁶ For, behold, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, that march through the breadth of the

earth, to possess dwelling places that are not theirs. ⁷ They are feared and dreaded. Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves. ⁸ Their horses also are swifter than leopards, and are more fierce than the evening wolves. Their horsemen press proudly on. Yes, their horsemen come from afar, they fly as an eagle that hastens to devour. ⁹ All of them come for violence; their hordes face the desert; he gathers prisoners like sand. ¹⁰ Yes, he scoffs at kings, and princes are a derision to him. He laughs at every stronghold, for he builds up an earthen siege ramp, and takes it. ¹¹ Then he sweeps by like the wind, and goes on further. He is indeed guilty; his strength is his god.

Habakkuk Complains again

¹² Aren't You from everlasting, Yahweh my God, my Holy One? We

1:2 The closer we are to God, the more we will be able like Habakkuk to question Him, to have dialogue with Him, rather than accepting the principles of the Bible as His cold word to us which we simply have to accept without any response from us back to Him.

1:5 Paul appropriates the words of Hab. 1:5 LXX to his work of preaching (Acts 13:2; 14:26). Even if people don't believe our message, God is still using us to work His work. In the process of preaching the Gospel we feel God working with us; the exercise of preaching is therefore largely for our benefit, and it is not therefore ever a failure even if people disbelieve the Gospel we preach.

1:6 God 'raised up' evil people in order to fulfil His purpose. The temporary 'rise and rise' of the wicked shouldn't discourage us – it is actually of God, and they are merely tools in His hands.

1:12 If we truly believe that we are *His* people, not those of this world, and that we are truly part of His eternal family, then God's eternity becomes a guarantee of our eternal salvation. If He lives for ever, so shall we (this is true also of Christ – if we are connected with His resurrection to eternal life through baptism, we too shall live for ever with Him, Jn. 14:19; Rom. 6:8; 2 Cor. 13:4; 2 Tim. 2:11).

also will not die! Yahweh, you have appointed him for judgment. You, Rock, have established him to punish.¹³ You who have purer eyes than to see evil, and who cannot look on perversity, why do You tolerate those who deal treacherously, and keep silent when the wicked swallows up the man who is more righteous than he,¹⁴ and make men like the fish of the sea, like the creeping things, that have no ruler over them?¹⁵ He takes up all of them with the hook; he catches them in his net, and gathers them in his dragnet. Therefore he rejoices and is glad.¹⁶ Therefore he sacrifices to his net, and burns incense to his dragnet, because by them his life is luxurious, and his food is good.¹⁷ Will he therefore continually empty his net, and kill the nations without mercy?

CHAPTER 2 Dec. 13

I will stand at my watch, and set myself on the ramparts, and will look out to know what He will say to me, and what answer I will get concerning my complaint.

2:2 *May run* – Running in response to God’s word is an idiom for obediently responding to it (Ps. 119:32,60; 147:15; Amos 8:11,12; 2 Thess. 3:1). The ‘plainer’ the word is made, the more clearly it is understood, the greater will be our response to it. Correct understanding of God’s word is therefore important because it is related to the extent of our ‘running’ in response to it.

2:3 The context is a prophecy concerning the coming Babylonian desolation of Jerusalem. There were some who felt that the fulfilment of these words of God was ‘tarrying’ so long that it would never come. We face the same temptation with regard to the prophecies of Christ’s return.

2:4 *The justified* – Much is made of this verse in the New Testament, to teach that we sinners are counted righteous, declared in the right as we stand in the dock before the judgment of God, on the basis of our faith in Christ – rather than our works (Rom. 1:17; Heb. 10:38). The context of this verse teaches that living by faith is the antithesis of being proud. The life of faith, trusting thereby in grace, is a life of humility.

God’s Reply

2 Yahweh answered me, Write the vision, and make it plain on tablets, that he who reads it may run.³ For the vision is yet for the appointed time, and it speeds toward the end, and won’t prove false. Though it takes time, wait for it; because it will surely come. It won’t delay.⁴ Behold, his soul is puffed up. It is not upright in him; but the justified one will live due to his faith.⁵ Yes, moreover, wine is treacherous. A proud man who doesn’t stay at home, who enlarges his desire as Sheol, and he is like death, and can’t be satisfied, but gathers to himself all nations, and heaps to himself all peoples.⁶ Won’t all these take up a parable against him, and a taunting proverb against him, and say, ‘Woe to him who increases that which is not his, and who enriches himself by extortion! How long?’⁷ Won’t your debtors rise up suddenly, and wake up those who now make you tremble, and you will be their victim?⁸ Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples

will plunder you, because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to the city and to all who dwell in it.⁹ Woe to him who gets an evil gain for his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the hand of evil!¹⁰ You have devised shame to your house, by cutting off many peoples, and have sinned against your soul.¹¹ For the stone will cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the wood-work will answer it.¹² Woe to him who builds a town with blood, and establishes a city by iniquity!¹³ Behold, isn't it of Yahweh of Armies that the peoples labour for the fire, and the nations weary themselves for vanity?¹⁴ For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea.¹⁵ Woe to him who gives his neighbour drink, pouring your inflaming wine until they are drunk, so that you may gaze at their naked bodies!¹⁶ You are filled with shame, and not glory. You will also drink, and be exposed! The cup of Yahweh's right hand will come around to you, and disgrace will cover your glory.¹⁷ For the violence done to Lebanon will overwhelm you, and the destruction

of the animals, which made them afraid; because of men's blood, and for the violence done to the land, to every city and to those who dwell in them.¹⁸ What value does the engraved image have, that its maker has engraved it; the molten image, even the teacher of lies, that he who fashions its form trusts in it, to make mute idols?¹⁹ Woe to him who says to the wood, 'Awake!' or to the mute stone, 'Arise!' Shall this teach? Behold, it is overlaid with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in its midst.²⁰ But Yahweh is in His holy temple. Let all the earth be silent before Him!

CHAPTER 3 Dec. 14

A Prayer of Habakkuk

A prayer of Habakkuk, the prophet, set to victorious music.² Yahweh, I have heard of Your fame. I stand in awe of Your deeds, Yahweh. Renew your work in the midst of the years. In the midst of the years make it known. In wrath, You remember mercy.³ God came from Teman, the Holy One from Mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and His praise filled the earth.⁴ His splendour is

2:14 A clear prediction of God's Kingdom coming on earth.

2:16 Being given the cup of the Lord is a double symbol – of blessing (1 Cor. 10:16,21; 11:26); or, as here, a symbol of condemnation (Ps. 75:8; Jer. 51:7; Rev. 16:19). This adds some intensity to the cup we take at the memorial service. We are drinking that cup either to our condemnation (1 Cor. 11:29), or to our eternal blessing. Hence the breaking of bread meeting brings us up to a T-intersection in our lives.

3:2 *In wrath, You remember mercy* – God's anger and judgments aren't the wrath of an offended deity who is more powerful than us, as it were hitting back at us because we have upset Him. His judgments incorporate mercy, and are aimed at bringing good out of evil, teaching others His ways through them (Is. 26:9).

like the sunrise. Rays shine from His hand, where His power is hidden. ⁵ Plague went before Him, and pestilence followed His feet. ⁶ He stood, and shook the earth. He looked, and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains crumbled. The age-old hills collapsed. His ways are eternal. ⁷ I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction. The dwellings of the land of Midian trembled. ⁸ Was Yahweh displeased with the rivers? Was Your anger against the rivers, or Your wrath against the sea, that You rode on Your horses, on Your chariots of salvation? ⁹ You removed the sheath from Your bow, You called for many arrows. Selah. You split the earth with rivers. ¹⁰ The mountains saw You, and were afraid. The storm of waters passed by, the deep sea roared and lifted up its hands on high. ¹¹ The sun and moon stood still in the sky at the light of Your arrows as they went, at the shining of Your glittering spear. ¹² You marched through the land in wrath. You threshed the nations in anger. ¹³ You went forth for the salvation of Your

people, for the salvation of Your anointed. You crushed the head of the land of wickedness. You stripped them head to foot. Selah. ¹⁴ You pierced the heads of his warriors with their own spears. They came as a whirlwind to scatter me, gloating as if to devour the wretched in secret. ¹⁵ You trampled the sea with your horses, churning mighty waters. ¹⁶ I heard, and my body trembled. My lips quivered at the sound. Rotteness enters into my bones, and I tremble in my place, because I must wait quietly for the day of trouble, for the coming up of the people who invade us. ¹⁷ For though the fig tree doesn't flourish, nor fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive fails, the fields yield no food; the flocks are cut off from the fold, and there is no herd in the stalls: ¹⁸ yet I will rejoice in Yahweh. I will be joyful in the God of my salvation! ¹⁹ Yahweh, the Lord, is my strength. He makes my feet like deer's feet, and enables me to go in high places. For the musical director, on my stringed instruments.

3:16 After twice approaching God with the question of “Why?”, and each time being given fresh insights into the awful nature of the judgment to come as a response, Habakkuk ends up with a trembling body and lips that ‘quivered at the sound’ of God’s word... and yet, at the very same time, feels that he still “will rejoice in the Lord” (:18), even though he doesn’t fully understand. Faith involves an element of acceptance that God is right, even though we don’t understand.

3:17 These were all the blessings promised for obedience. Habakkuk had been obedient, but didn’t seem to have received these blessings. Yet still he had the faith to rejoice in God’s grace, even though he didn’t understand the exact relationship between obedience and blessing in this life.

3:18 *Yet will I – Even if others amongst God’s people turn away and are punished for it, yet we personally can still rejoice in our personal relationship with God.*

ZEPHANIAH

CHAPTER 1 Dec. 15

Coming Destruction

The word of Yahweh which came to Zephaniah, the son of Cushi, the son of Gedaliah, the son of Amariah, the son of Hezekiah, in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah. ² I will utterly sweep away everything off of the surface of the earth, says Yahweh. ³ I will sweep away man and animal. I will sweep away the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and the idols along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the surface of the earth, says Yahweh.

Against Judah

⁴ I will stretch out My hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem. I will cut off the remnant of Baal from this place: the name of the idolatrous and pagan priests, ⁵ those who worship the army of the sky on the housetops, those who worship and swear by Yahweh and also swear by Malcam, ⁶ those who have turned back from

following Yahweh, and those who haven't sought Yahweh nor inquired after Him. ⁷ Be silent at the presence of the Lord Yahweh, for the day of Yahweh is at hand. For Yahweh has prepared a sacrifice, He has consecrated His guests. ⁸ It will happen in the day of Yahweh's sacrifice that I will punish the princes, the king's sons, and all those who are clothed with foreign clothing. ⁹ In that day, I will punish all those who leap over the threshold, who fill their master's house with violence and deceit. ¹⁰ In that day, says Yahweh, there will be the noise of a cry from the fish gate, a wailing from the second quarter, and a great crashing from the hills. ¹¹ Wail, you inhabitants of Makkesh, for all the people of Canaan are undone! All those who were loaded with silver are cut off. ¹² It will happen at that time that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and I will punish the men who are settled on their dregs, who say in their heart, Yahweh will not do good, neither

1:5 And also swear – Repeatedly the Bible condemns the human tendency to worship both the true God and also idols (1 Cor. 10:21). Yahweh has loved us so much that He is rightfully jealous over us, and our loyalty must be to Him alone.

1:12 With candles – Alluding to the Jewish custom of searching their homes for yeast, representing sin, at Passover time.

In weak moments we all tend to assume that God is somehow in limbo, indifferent and not paying attention to our behaviour or situation here on earth. The temporary silence of God doesn't mean that He is not watching intently. These people who thought that God was indifferent were themselves "settled on their dregs", they hadn't moved for a long time, and they thought God was like them. We must resist the temptation to think that God's attitudes to things and people, our own selves included, are merely a reflection of *our* attitudes (Ps. 50:21). The Bible reveals to us God's judgments, positions and emotions, and we must accept this revelation rather than assuming that God is somehow created in our own image.

will He do evil.¹³ Their wealth will become a spoil, and their houses a desolation. Yes, they will build houses, but won't inhabit them. They will plant vineyards, but won't drink their wine.

The Great Day of Yahweh Is Near

¹⁴ The great day of Yahweh is near. It is near, and hurries greatly, the voice of the day of Yahweh. The mighty man cries there bitterly.¹⁵ That day is a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness,¹⁶ a day of the trumpet and alarm, against the fortified cities, and against the high battlements.¹⁷ I will bring distress upon men, so that they will walk like blind men, because they have sinned against Yahweh; and their blood will be poured out like dust, and their flesh like dung.¹⁸ Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them in the day of Yahweh's wrath, but the whole land will be devoured by the fire of His jealousy; for He will make an end, yes, a terrible end, of all those who dwell in the land.

CHAPTER 2 Dec. 16

Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, you nation that has no shame,² before the appointed time when the day passes as the

chaff, before the fierce anger of Yahweh comes on you, before the day of Yahweh's anger comes on you.³ Seek Yahweh, all you humble of the land, who have kept His ordinances. Seek righteousness; seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden in the day of Yahweh's anger.

Against the Land of the Philistines

⁴ For Gaza will be forsaken, and Ashkelon a desolation. They will drive out Ashdod at noonday, and Ekron will be rooted up.⁵ Woe to the inhabitants of the sea coast, the nation of the Cherethites! The word of Yahweh is against you, Canaan, the land of the Philistines. I will destroy you, that there will be no inhabitant.⁶ The sea coast will be pastures, with booths for shepherds and folds for flocks.⁷ The coast will be for the remnant of the house of Judah. They will find pasture there. They will lie down in the evening in the houses of Ashkelon, for Yahweh their God will visit them, and restore them.

Against Moab and Ammon

⁸ I have heard the reproach of Moab, and the insults of the children of Ammon, with which they have reproached My people, and magnified themselves against their border.⁹ Therefore as I live, says Yahweh of Armies, the God of Israel, surely

1:17, 18 These are a series of allusions to Sodom, showing that God's sinful people were no better than the worst Gentiles. Mere association with God's people and knowing truths about God doesn't mean of themselves that we are any better than the worst sinners.

2:3 Humility is a height which we should aspire to. This is a complete inversion of human thinking and values.

Moab will be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, a possession of nettles and salt pits, and a perpetual desolation. The remnant of My people will plunder them, and the survivors of My nation will inherit them.¹⁰ This they will have for their pride, because they have reproached and magnified themselves against the people of Yahweh of Armies.¹¹ Yahweh will leave them awestruck, for He will starve all the gods of the land. Men will worship Him, everyone from his place, even from every border of the nations.

Against Cush

12 You Cushites also, you will be killed by My sword.

Against Assyria

13 He will stretch out His hand against the north, destroy Assyria, and will make Nineveh a desolation, as dry as the wilderness.¹⁴ Herds will lie down in the midst of her, all the animals of the nations. Both the pelican and the porcupine will lodge

in its capitals. Their calls will echo through the windows. Desolation will be in the thresholds, for He has laid bare the cedar beams.¹⁵ This is the joyous city that lived carelessly, that said in her heart, I am, and there is none besides me. How she has become a desolation, a place for animals to lie down in! Everyone who passes by her will hiss, and shake their fists.

CHAPTER 3 Dec. 17

Jerusalem's Future

Woe to her who is rebellious and polluted, the oppressing city!² She didn't obey the voice. She didn't receive correction. She didn't trust in Yahweh. She didn't draw near to her God.³ Her princes in the midst of her are as roaring lions, her judges are as evening wolves; they leave nothing until the next day.⁴ Her prophets are arrogant and treacherous people, her priests have desecrated the sanctuary; they have done violence to the law.⁵ Yahweh in the midst of her, He is righteous;

2:11 The pagan gods didn't exist at all, but God speaks of starving them to death. He speaks as if they exist, and then shows by exercising His great power that effectively they don't. God and His Son adopted the same approach in the New Testament with the demons or idols which were believed in.

2:12 *My sword* – God used the swords of pagan nations to do His judgments, but effectively they were *His* swords. The fact God uses people to do His will doesn't mean they are righteous. When bad things happen to us at the hands of evil people, we needn't think that God has left us at the whim of the wicked and forgotten us. He is actually using those people according to His plan.

2:15 *I am* – An allusion to the meaning of ‘Yahweh’ – ‘I am that I am’. Those who effectively deny the existence of God are themselves playing God, claiming that *I am*, rather than accepting that *He is*. Acceptance of the fact that Yahweh is the only “I am” means that we will not be “I” centred, but God centred.

3:5 *Know no shame* – The righteous admit their sins and do know shame for them; and so they will come to a position where in the Kingdom of God, they will be aware that

He will do no wrong. Every morning He brings His justice to light. He doesn't fail, but the unjust know no shame.⁶ I have cut off nations, their battlements are desolate; I have made their streets waste, so that no one passes by. Their cities are destroyed, so that there is no man, so that there is no inhabitant.⁷ I said, Just fear Me. Receive correction, so that her dwelling won't be cut off, according to all that I have appointed concerning her. But they rose early and corrupted all their doings.⁸ Therefore wait for Me, says Yahweh, until the day that I rise up to seize the prey; for My determination is to gather the nations, that I may assemble the kingdoms, to pour on them My indignation, even all My fierce anger; for all the land will be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.⁹ For then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that they may all call on the name of Yahweh, to serve Him with one neck.¹⁰ From beyond the rivers of Cush, My worshippers, even the daughter of My dispersed people, will bring My offering.¹¹ In that day you will not be ashamed for all your doings in

which you have transgressed against Me; for then I will take away out of the midst of you your proud exulting ones, and you will no more be arrogant in My holy mountain.¹² But I will leave in the midst of you an afflicted and humbled people, and they will take refuge in the name of Yahweh.¹³ The remnant of Israel will not do iniquity, nor speak lies, neither will a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth, for they will feed and lie down, and no one will make them afraid.¹⁴ Sing, daughter of Zion! Shout, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, daughter of Jerusalem.¹⁵ Yahweh has taken away your judgments. He has thrown out your enemy. The King of Israel, Yahweh, is in the midst of you. You will not be afraid of evil any more.¹⁶ In that day it will be said to Jerusalem, Don't be afraid, Zion. Don't let your hands be weak.¹⁷ Yahweh your God is in the midst of you, a mighty one who will save. He will rejoice over you with joy, He will calm you in His love, He will rejoice over you with singing.¹⁸ I will gather those who mourn with longing for the ap-

they have sinned but will not know shame for those sins (:11), so fully acceptant will they be of the work of Christ which has left them genuinely spotless and blameless before God's throne (Jude 24). Verse 19 continues the irony around the theme of "shame" by saying that the shame of sinners is known by everyone else – apart from they themselves, who "know no shame". The point is that we might as well be ashamed for our sins before others, because actually they do or will see the shame of our sins anyway.

3:7 God's judgments could have been averted if they repented. God may 'appoint' things to happen to a person, but if they repent, then that potential which He has designed will in fact not happen. In this lies the wonderful significance of repentance.

3:13 *Refuge in the name* – In our times, we can do this by being baptized into the Name.

3:18 In the Kingdom of God on earth, God will empower those who now long to be obedient to God's commands but cannot be due to circumstance or weakness. We will

pointed feasts, you will no longer suffer reproach. ¹⁹ Behold, at that time I will deal with all those who afflict you, and I will save those who are lame, and gather those who were driven away. I will give them praise and honour, those whose shame was

once in all the earth. ²⁰ At that time will I bring you in, and at that time will I gather you; for I will give you honour and praise among all the peoples of the earth, when I return your captives before your eyes, says Yahweh.

all then be able to serve God as strongly as we now wish. Our experiences in this life, even of our own weaknesses, are preparing our desire for that eternity which we will then be given.

HAGGAI

CHAPTER 1 Dec. 18

Come and Build God's House

In the second year of Darius the king, in the sixth month, in the first day of the month, the Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet to Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, saying, ² This is what Yahweh of Armies says: These people say, ‘The time hasn’t yet come, the time for Yahweh’s house to be built’. ³ Then the Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying, ⁴ Is it a time for you yourselves to dwell in your panelled houses, while this house lies waste? ⁵ Now therefore this is what Yahweh of Armies says: Consider your ways. ⁶ You have sown much, and bring in little. You

eat, but you don’t have enough. You drink, but you aren’t filled with drink. You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm, and he who earns wages earns wages to put them into a bag with holes in it.⁷ This is what Yahweh of Armies says: Consider your ways. ⁸ Go up to the mountain, bring wood, and build the house. I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, says Yahweh. ⁹ You looked for much, and, behold, it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why? says Yahweh of Armies, Because of My house that lies waste, while each of you is busy with his own house. ¹⁰ Therefore for your sake the skies withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. ¹¹ I called for a drought on the land, on the mountains, on the

1:2 The Apocryphal book of Baruch 6:2 records how Baruch changes the prophecy of Jer. 29:10, that Israel were to be 70 years in Babylon and then return: “When you reach Babylon you will be there many years, a period seven generations long, after which I will bring you back”. The 70 years are turned into seven generations. This was precisely the mindset spoken against in Haggai 1:2, whereby the Jews reasoned that the time had not yet come to rebuild the temple. “The time” referred to the time spoken of by Jeremiah – but Baruch had re-interpreted the 70 years as meaning seven generations. And yet all this was done with a surface-level reverence for God’s word – the exiles considered themselves blessed because they had God’s law (Baruch 4:4). Indeed, much of Baruch is a condemnation of idols and a demand to worship Yahweh. Human nature seeks to defer serving God until later – we’re quick to find excuses. But the Bible stresses how God’s true servants rise up and serve Him immediately.

1:9 Looked for much – The Jews in Babylon for the most part chose to remain there rather than return to rebuild God’s land and house. Many of those who did return did so, it seems, motivated by the hope of personal gain. They were more interested in building houses for themselves than in restoring God’s house, and therefore God sent famine – they didn’t get the “much” benefit and blessing for themselves which they had expected. We too can leave ‘Babylon’, the world, and sign up to God’s work from the motive of personal benefit, rather than a genuine desire to see God’s glory and His work and cause progressed.

grain, on the new wine, on the oil, on that which the ground brings forth, on men, on livestock, and on all the labour of the hands.¹² Then Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, and Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, with all the remnant of the people, obeyed the voice of Yahweh, their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet, as Yahweh, their God, had sent him; and the people feared Yahweh.¹³ Then Haggai, Yahweh's messenger, spoke Yahweh's message to the people, saying, I am with you, says Yahweh.¹⁴ Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and the spirit of Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and the spirit of all the remainder of the people; and they came and worked on the house of Yahweh of Armies, their God,¹⁵ in the twenty-fourth day of the month, in the sixth month, in the second year of Darius the king.

CHAPTER 2 Dec. 18

The Glory of the New House of God

In the seventh month, in the twenty-first day of the month, the word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying,² Speak now to Zerubbabel, the son of Shealtiel, governor of Judah, and to Joshua, the son of Jehozadak, the high priest, and to

the remainder of the people, saying,³ Who is left among you who saw this house in its former glory? How do you see it now? Isn't it in your eyes as nothing?⁴ Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel!⁵ says Yahweh. 'Be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest! Be strong, all you people of the land', says Yahweh, 'and work, for I am with you', says Yahweh of Armies.⁶ This is the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, and My Spirit dwelt among you. 'Don't be afraid'.⁷ For this is what Yahweh of Armies says: 'Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the dry land;⁸ and I will shake all nations. The precious things of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory', says Yahweh of Armies.⁹ 'The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former', says Yahweh of Armies; 'and in this place will I give peace', says Yahweh of Armies.

Blessings

¹⁰ In the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, in the second year of Darius, the Word of Yahweh came by Haggai the prophet, saying,¹¹ Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Ask now the priests concerning the law, saying,¹² If someone carries holy food in the

1:14 *The spirit* – God can work directly on the human mind [spirit] and strengthen us in the attitudes we adopt.

2:5 *My Spirit* – God dwelt amongst Israel after they left Egypt through an Angel; He makes His Angels Spirits (Ps. 104:4; Heb. 1:7). One way God's Spirit works amongst us His people is through the unseen ministry of Angels.

fold of his garment, and the garment touches bread, stew, wine, oil, or any food, will it too become holy?'. The priests answered, No.¹³ Then Haggai said, If one who is unclean by reason of a dead body touch any of these, will it be unclean? The priests answered, It will be unclean.¹⁴ Then Haggai answered, 'So is this people, and so is this nation before Me', says Yahweh; 'and so is every work of their hands. That which they offer there is unclean.'¹⁵ Now, please consider from this day and backward, before a stone was laid on a stone in Yahweh's temple.¹⁶ Through all that time, when one came to a heap of twenty measures, there were only ten. When one came to the wine vat to draw out fifty, there were only twenty.¹⁷ I struck you with blight, mildew, and hail in all the work of your hands; yet you didn't turn to Me', says Yahweh.¹⁸ 'Consider, please, from this day and backward, from the twenty-fourth day of the ninth month, since the day that the

foundation of Yahweh's temple was laid, consider it.¹⁹ Is the seed still in the barn? Yes, the vine, the fig tree, the pomegranate, and the olive tree haven't brought forth. From this day on I will bless you'.

Zerubbabel Is a Chosen Signet Ring

²⁰ The Word of Yahweh came the second time to Haggai in the twenty-fourth day of the month, saying,²¹ Speak to Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, saying, 'I will shake the heavens and the earth.²² I will overthrow the throne of kingdoms. I will destroy the strength of the kingdoms of the nations. I will overthrow the chariots, and those who ride in them. The horses and their riders will come down, everyone by the sword of his brother.²³ In that day, says Yahweh of Armies, will I take you, Zerubbabel, My servant, the son of Shealtiel', says Yahweh, 'and will make you as a signet ring, for I have chosen you', says Yahweh of Armies.

2:12, 13 Unholiness spreads easier than holiness does. In spiritual things, it's easier to slip into a downward spiral than into an upward spiral. The Jews thought that mere vague association with holy things would somehow make them holy. Our attendance at meetings, identification on a social level with God's people, breaking bread etc. will not of itself make us holy.

2:17 One of the saddest things to observe is people suffering from situations which God uses to try to bring them back to Him, and them still refusing to return to Him. So much tragic human suffering is in vain because people won't perceive the spiritual intention behind it.

ZECHARIAH

CHAPTER 1 Dec. 19

Return to the Lord

In the eighth month, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying, ² Yahweh was very displeased with your fathers. ³ Therefore tell them: Thus says Yahweh of Armies: ‘Return to me’, says Yahweh of Armies, ‘and I will return to you’, says Yahweh of Armies. ⁴ Don’t you be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets proclaimed, saying: Thus says Yahweh of Armies, ‘Return now from your evil ways, and from your evil doings;’ but they did not hear, nor listen to me, says Yahweh. ⁵ Your fathers, where are they? And the prophets, do they live forever? ⁶ But My words and My decrees, which I commanded My servants the prophets, didn’t they influence your fathers? Then they repented and said, ‘Just as Yahweh of Armies determined to do to us, according to our ways, and according to our practices, so He has done with us’.

A Man on a Red Horse

⁷ On the twenty-fourth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius, the word of Yahweh came to Zecha-

riah the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo, the prophet, saying, ⁸ I had a vision in the night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle trees that were in a ravine; and behind him there were red, brown, and white horses. ⁹ Then I asked, ‘My lord, what are these?’. The angel who talked with me said to me, I will show you what these are. ¹⁰ The man who stood among the myrtle trees answered, They are the ones Yahweh has sent to go back and forth through the earth. ¹¹ They reported to the angel of Yahweh who stood among the myrtle trees, and said, We have walked back and forth through the earth, and behold, all the earth is at rest and in peace. ¹² Then the angel of Yahweh replied, O Yahweh of Armies, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and on the cities of Judah, against which You have had indignation those seventy years? ¹³ Yahweh answered the angel who talked with me with kind and comforting words. ¹⁴ So the angel who talked with me said to me, Proclaim, saying, ‘Thus says Yahweh of Armies: I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy. ¹⁵ I am very angry with the nations that are at ease; for I was but a little displeased, but they added to

1:2 God is frequently called “Yahweh of Armies” in Zechariah because the prophecy is seeking to assure the Jews that although everything seemed quiet on earth and in the land of Judah (:11), God’s invisible armies of Angels were very actively working. We need to also be aware of this.

1:12 The Angel didn’t understand – Angels don’t sin, they have God’s nature, but they still don’t know everything (Mt. 24:36).

the calamity.¹⁶ Therefore thus says Yahweh: I have returned to Jerusalem with mercy. My house shall be built in it, says Yahweh of Armies, and a builders' line shall be stretched forth over Jerusalem'.¹⁷ Proclaim further, saying, 'Thus says Yahweh of Armies: My cities will again overflow with prosperity, and Yahweh will again comfort Zion, and will again choose Jerusalem'.

Four Horns and Four Carpenters

18 I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, four horns.¹⁹ I asked the angel who talked with me, What are these? He answered me, These are the horns which have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.²⁰ Yahweh showed me four carpenters.²¹ Then I asked, What are these coming to do? He said, These are the horns which scattered Judah, so that no man lifted up his head; but these have come to saw them off, to cast down the horns of the nations, which lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.

CHAPTER 2 Dec. 20

A Man with a Measuring Line in His Hand

I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand.² Then I asked, Where are you going? He said to me, To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its breadth and what is its length.³ Behold, the angel who talked with me went forth, and another angel went out to meet him,⁴ and said to him, Run, speak to this young man, saying, 'Jerusalem will be inhabited as villages without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it.⁵ For I', says Yahweh, 'will be to her a wall of fire around it, and I will be the glory in the midst of her.⁶ Come! Come! Flee from the land of the north', says Yahweh; 'for I have spread you abroad as the four winds of the sky', says Yahweh.⁷ 'Come, Zion! Escape, you who dwell with the daughter of Babylon'.⁸ For thus says Yahweh of Armies: 'For honour He has sent me to the nations which plundered you; for he who touches you touches the apple

1:16 God had returned to Jerusalem; through the prophets, He had called for the Jews to leave Babylon and also return to Jerusalem. But most of them preferred to stay in the soft life there. Those who returned were following where God led. The call to repentance in :3 was in terms of 'returning' to God – and the Jews could've demonstrated this by returning to Jerusalem from Babylon. God had already returned to them; they had to return to Him. God takes the initiative with us, time and again.

1:21 A horn can be understood as a symbol of power.

2:7 God urged the Jews to leave Babylon. But as the book of Esther explains, they were quite comfortable there, Jews were in high places, they didn't stay weeping by the rivers of Babylon for long; and there's archaeological evidence they were involved in banking and commerce. But God told them to escape from it – for spiritually, it would kill them. Their position was urgent. But most preferred to remain there, rather than leave it all behind and make the long and uncertain journey to a land in ruins.

2:8 *Apple of His eye* – The most sensitive spot on the human body. God is so sensitive

of His eye. ⁹ For, behold, I will shake My hand over them, and they will be a spoil to those who served them; and you will know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me. ¹⁰ Sing and rejoice, daughter of Zion; for, behold, I come, and I will dwell in the middle of you', says Yahweh. ¹¹ Many nations shall join themselves to Yahweh in that day, and shall be My people; and I will dwell in the middle of you; and you shall know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you. ¹² Yahweh will inherit Judah as His portion in the holy land, and will again choose Jerusalem. ¹³ Be silent, all flesh, before Yahweh; for He has roused Himself from His holy habitation!

CHAPTER 3 Dec. 20

Rich Clothing to Replace Filthy Garments

He showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of Yahweh, and Satan standing at his right hand to be his adversary. ² Yahweh said to Satan, Yahweh rebuke you, Satan! Yes, Yahweh who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Isn't this a burning stick plucked out of the fire? ³ Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and was standing before the angel. ⁴ He answered and spoke to those who stood before him, saying, Take the filthy garments from him. To him he said, Behold, I have caused your iniquity to pass

to us His people; His love for us is so great that He will be highly sensitive to everything done bad to us, and every pain we experience.

3:1 The context in Zechariah 3 was that of the restoration of the Jews to Jerusalem from Babylon under Ezra and Nehemiah. That situation was reflected in the Heavenly court. The Jews were trying to rebuild the temple and re-establish a system of worship there. However, "the people of the land" acted as a satan ['Satan' means 'adversary'] to the Jews. They are actually called "the adversaries of Judah" in Ezra 4:1. They wrote an accusation against the (new) inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem to the king of Persia (Ezra 4:6). The Hebrew word for "accusation" is related to that translated "satan". 3:8 tells us that the characters of verses 1 and 2 are 'men of sign' i.e. we have to interpret them. So the satans – the adversaries – stood before the angel along with Joshua the High Priest, who "was clothed with filthy garments" (:3) – without a mitre on his head (:5 implies). The inhabitants of the land, the satan, were complaining to God, manifested in the angel, that the new Jewish high priest was not really valid, as he did not wear the proper clothes (they had probably been lost during the captivity). The angel rebukes the satan, and proceeds to clothe Joshua with a set of priestly clothes and a mitre (:4,5), thus showing God's acceptance of him. The inference behind the complaint was that God had not really chosen Jerusalem for the Jews to rebuild, and that therefore they were going ahead with their plans without God behind them. But the angel says that the Lord *has* chosen Jerusalem, in the same way as He *had* chosen Joshua to be high priest. Thus Joshua represented Jerusalem. "Isn't this a burning stick plucked out of the fire?", the angel asks satan concerning Jerusalem. This is quoted in Jude 23 concerning saving repentant sinners. Thus the angel is in effect saying, 'Jerusalem has repented, therefore I have plucked them out of the fire of judgment and destruction; you should not therefore be implying that Jerusalem and the Jews are so sinful that they cannot be restored to their land with Me behind them'.

from you, and I will clothe you with rich clothing. ⁵ I said, Let them set a clean turban on his head. So they set a clean turban on his head, and clothed him; and the angel of Yahweh was standing by. ⁶ The angel of Yahweh protested to Joshua, saying, ⁷ Thus says Yahweh of Armies: ‘If you will walk in My ways, and if you will follow My instructions, then you also shall judge My house, and shall also keep My courts, and I will give you a place of access among these who stand by. ⁸ Hear now, Joshua the high priest, you and your fellows who sit before you; for they are men who are a sign: for, behold, I will bring forth My servant, the Branch. ⁹ For, behold, the stone that I have set before Joshua; on one stone are seven eyes: behold, I will engrave its engraving’, says Yahweh of Armies, ‘and I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day. ¹⁰ In that day’, says Yahweh of Armies, ‘every man will invite his neighbour to come under his vine and under his fig tree’.

CHAPTER 4 Dec. 21

Lampstand of Gold and Two Olive Trees

The angel who talked with me came again, and awoke me, as a man who is awoken out of his sleep. ² He said to me, What do you see? I said, I have seen, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with its bowl on the

top of it, and its seven lamps thereon; there are seven pipes to each of the lamps, which are on the top of it; ³ and two olive trees by it, one on the right side of the bowl, and the other on the left side of it. ⁴ I answered and spoke to the angel who talked with me, saying, What are these, my lord? ⁵ Then the angel who talked with me answered me, Don’t you know what these are? I said, No, my lord. ⁶ Then he answered and spoke to me, saying, This is the word of Yahweh to Zerubbabel, saying, ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit’, says Yahweh of Armies. ⁷ Who are you, great mountain? Before Zerubbabel you are a plain; and he will bring out the capstone with shouts of ‘Grace, grace, to it!’. ⁸ Moreover the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ⁹ The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house. His hands shall also finish it; and you will know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you. ¹⁰ Indeed, who despises the day of small things? For these seven shall rejoice, and shall see the plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel. These are the eyes of Yahweh, which run back and forth through the whole earth. ¹¹ Then I asked him, What are these two olive trees on the right side of the lampstand and on the left side of it? ¹² I asked him the second time, What are these two olive branches, which are beside the two golden

4:6 The prophets continually criticize human strength. In our terms, this may translate into situations like what we do when we feel the first onset of an illness; when a car won’t start... do we trust in human strength, on the pretensions of science, and only turn to God if all else fails? In prophetic terms, this is *awful!* That we don’t first and totally turn to our God.

spouts, that pour the golden oil out of themselves? ¹³ He answered me, Don't you know what these are? I said, No, my lord. ¹⁴ Then he said, These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.

CHAPTER 5 Dec. 21

A Flying Scroll

Then again I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, a flying scroll. ² He said to me, What do you see? I answered, I see a flying scroll; its length is twenty cubits, and its breadth ten cubits. ³ Then he said to me, This is the curse that goes out over the surface of the whole land; for everyone who steals shall be cut off according to it on the one side; and everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off according to it on the other side. ⁴ I will cause it to go out, says Yahweh of Armies, and it will enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him who swears falsely by My name; and it will remain in the midst of his house, and will destroy it with its timber and its stones.

Wickedness in the Ephah Basket

⁵ Then the angel who talked with me came forward, and said to me, Lift up now your eyes, and see what is this that is appearing. ⁶ I said, What

is it? He said, This is the ephah basket that is appearing. He said moreover, This is their appearance in all the land ⁷ (and behold, a talent of lead was lifted up); and this is a woman sitting in the midst of the ephah basket. ⁸ He said, This is Wickedness!; and he threw her down into the midst of the ephah basket; and he put the weight of lead on its mouth. ⁹ Then lifted I up my eyes, and saw, and behold, there were two women, and the wind was in their wings. Now they had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the ephah basket between earth and the sky. ¹⁰ Then I said to the angel who talked with me, Where are these carrying the ephah basket to? ¹¹ He said to me, To build her a house in the land of Shinar. When it is prepared, she will be set there in her own place.

CHAPTER 6 Dec. 22

Four Chariots from between Mountains of Brass

Again I lifted up my eyes, and saw, and behold, four chariots came out from between two mountains; and the mountains were mountains of brass. ² In the first chariot were red horses; in the second chariot black horses; ³ in the third chariot white horses; and in the fourth chariot dappled horses, all of them

5:3 This condemns theft and dishonesty amongst the exiles who had returned from Babylon. Malachi and Haggai comment that the harvests were poor and the people suffered – because their focus was on building their own farms rather than building God's house. Verses 5-11 seem to be saying that their wickedness was so great that they may as well be taken up by Angelic means and returned to Babylon ["Shinar", :11] to build a pagan temple there, as an inversion of the way they had been taken by Angelic means from Babylon to Judah in order to build Yahweh's temple.

powerful. ⁴ Then I asked the angel who talked with me, What are these, my lord? ⁵ The angel answered me, These are the four spirits of the sky, which go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth. ⁶ The one with the black horses goes out toward the north country; and the white went out after them; and the dappled went forth toward the south country. ⁷ The strong went out, and sought to go that they might walk back and forth through the earth: and he said, Go around and through the earth! So they walked back and forth through the earth. ⁸ Then he called to me, and spoke to me, saying, Behold, those who go toward the north country have quieted My spirit in the north country.

Silver and Gold Crowns for Joshua

⁹ The word of Yahweh came to me, saying, ¹⁰ Take of them of the captivity, even of Heldai, of Tobijah, and of Jedaiah; and come the same day, and go into the house of Josiah the son of Zephaniah, where they have come from Babylon. ¹¹ Yes, take silver and gold, and make crowns, and set them on the head of Joshua the son of Je-

hozadak, the high priest; ¹² and speak to him, saying, ‘Thus says Yahweh of Armies, Behold, the man whose name is the Branch: and he shall grow up out of his place; and he shall build Yahweh’s temple; ¹³ even he shall build Yahweh’s temple; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne; and he shall be a priest on His throne; and the counsel of peace shall be between them both. ¹⁴ The crowns shall be to Helem, and to Tobijah, and to Jedaiah, and to Hen the son of Zephaniah, for a memorial in Yahweh’s temple. ¹⁵ Those who are far off shall come and build in Yahweh’s temple; and you shall know that Yahweh of Armies has sent me to you. This will happen, if you will diligently obey the voice of Yahweh your God’.

CHAPTER 7 Dec. 22

Justice and Mercy

It happened in the fourth year of King Darius that the word of Yahweh came to Zechariah in the fourth day of the ninth month, the month of Chislev. ² The people of Bethel sent Sharezer and Regem Melech, and their men, to entreat Yahweh’s

6:12 Zerubbabel’s name meant ‘The branch /shoot from Babylon’. He could have fulfilled these prophecies, he was intended to – but history records he returned to Babylon. So the prophecy was reapplied to Joshua the High Priest – the Hebrew form of ‘Jesus’. But he also failed. The fulfilment has therefore been reapplied and rescheduled to be fulfilled in Jesus Christ, “the branch” (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5).

6:15 So often, God sets up very detailed potentials for His people – but they are only realized if we play our part. It must be so tragic for God, enthusiastically creating plans in such detail, which are then never operationalized because of human laziness and small minded selfishness.

You shall know – Zechariah says this several times, implying that his words weren’t taken seriously by those he spoke with. This is the experience of all God’s true children.

favour,³ and to speak to the priests of the house of Yahweh of Armies, and to the prophets, saying, Should I weep in the fifth month, separating myself, as I have done these so many years?⁴ Then the word of Yahweh of Armies came to me, saying,⁵ Speak to all the people of the land, and to the priests, saying, ‘When you fasted and mourned in the fifth and in the seventh month for these seventy years, did you actually fast to Me, really to Me?⁶ When you eat, and when you drink, don’t you eat for yourselves, and drink for yourselves?⁷ Aren’t these the words which Yahweh proclaimed by the former prophets, when Jerusalem was inhabited and in prosperity, and its cities around her, and the South and the lowland were inhabited?⁸ The word of Yahweh came to Zechariah, saying,⁹ Thus has Yahweh of Armies spoken, saying, ‘Execute true judgment, and show kindness and compassion every man to his brother.¹⁰ Don’t oppress the widow, nor the fatherless, the foreigner, nor the poor; and let none of you devise evil against his brother in your

heart’.¹¹ But they refused to listen, and turned their backs, and stopped their ears, that they might not hear.¹² Yes, they made their hearts as hard as flint, in case they might hear the law, and the words which Yahweh of Armies had sent by His Spirit in the previous prophets. Therefore great wrath came from Yahweh of Armies.¹³ It has come to pass that, as He called, and they refused to listen, so they will call, and I will not listen, said Yahweh of Armies;¹⁴ but I will scatter them with a whirlwind among all the nations which they have not known. Thus the land was desolate after them, so that no man passed through nor returned: for they made the pleasant land desolate.

CHAPTER 8 Dec. 23

Yahweh Promises to Bless Jerusalem

The word of Yahweh of Armies came to me.² Thus says Yahweh of Armies: I am jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I am jealous for her with great wrath.³ Thus says Yahweh: I have returned to Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.

7:5 We can do religious exercises such as fasting and other things which involve physical loss and discomfort for us, and yet our heart may still be far from God. Indeed, we can do these things as it were unto ourselves and not to God; but this isn’t the same as true spirituality (cp. Col. 2:21-23).

7:12 *His Spirit in the previous prophets* – The prophets, whose words are now in written form in the Bible, were inspired by God. His Spirit was in them, and was articulated through their words which we now read on paper. In this sense God’s words are Spirit and life (Jn. 6:63); and the prophets spoke not just their own words, but the words which God’s Spirit inspired (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Through absorbing God’s word into our lives, His Spirit and life will be active in us.

8:2 God’s enormous love for us His people explains why He is also so jealous over us, and why at times He has so much anger relating to us. Every thought or action of unfaithfulness or denial of Him is indescribably painful to Him.

Jerusalem shall be called ‘The City of Truth;’ and the mountain of Yahweh of Armies, ‘The Holy Mountain’. ⁴ Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Old men and old women will again dwell in the streets of Jerusalem, every man with his staff in his hand for very age. ⁵ The streets of the city will be full of boys and girls playing in its streets. ⁶ Thus says Yahweh of Armies: If it is too hard in the eyes of the remnant of this people in those days, should it also be too hard in My eyes? says Yahweh of Armies. ⁷ Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Behold, I will save My people from the east country, and from the west country; ⁸ and I will bring them, and they will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, in truth and in righteousness. ⁹ Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Let your hands be strong, you who hear in these days these words from the mouth of the prophets who were in the day that the foundation of the house of Yahweh of Armies was laid, even the temple, that it might be built. ¹⁰ For before those days there were no wages for man, nor

any wages for an animal; neither was there any peace to him who went out or came in, because of the adversary. For I set all men everyone against his neighbour. ¹¹ But now I will not be to the remnant of this people as in the former days, says Yahweh of Armies. ¹² For they will sow their seed in peace and the vine will yield its fruit, and the ground will give its increase, and the skies will give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to inherit all these things. ¹³ It shall come to pass that, as you were a curse among the nations, house of Judah and house of Israel, so will I save you, and you shall be a blessing. Don’t be afraid. Let your hands be strong. ¹⁴ For thus says Yahweh of Armies: As I thought to do evil to you, when your fathers provoked Me to wrath, says Yahweh of Armies, and I didn’t repent; ¹⁵ so again have I thought in these days to do good to Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. Don’t be afraid. ¹⁶ These are the things that you shall do: speak every man the truth with his neighbour. Execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates,

8:3 Ezra 6:14 says that the captives who returned from Babylon to rebuild Jerusalem prospered in their work and were inspired to do it by the prophecies of Zechariah. He encouraged their hands to be strong in the work (:13). Here in :3 God says that He has already returned to Zion (the temple mount); and so those who returned were as it were following Him. This prophecy that Jerusalem would surely be rebuilt would’ve encouraged the builders as they worked against so many obstacles and so much discouragement from within and without.

8:6 This question touches upon the psychology of the reason why we find it hard to believe God. We assume that if something is too hard for *us*, then it must be too hard for God. We assume that God is a man, just a bit bigger and wiser and more powerful than us, but broadly within our limitations. Thus we make God after our own image, instead of realizing that we are made in *His* image. Of course, we do this only subconsciously. The unlimited almighty of God is what true faith accepts.

17 and let none of you devise evil in your hearts against his neighbour, and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, says Yahweh. 18 The word of Yahweh of Armies came to me. 19 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: The fasts of the fourth, fifth, seventh and tenth months shall be for the house of Judah joy and gladness, and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace. 20 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: Many peoples, and the inhabitants of many cities will yet come; 21 and the inhabitants of one shall go to another, saying, ‘Let us go speedily to entreat the favour of Yahweh, and to seek Yahweh of Armies. I will go also’. 22 Yes, many peoples and strong nations will come to seek Yahweh of Armies in Jerusalem, and to entreat the favour of Yahweh. 23 Thus says Yahweh of Armies: In those days, ten men will take hold, out of all the languages of the nations, they will take hold of the skirt of him who is a Jew, saying, ‘We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you’.

CHAPTER 9 Dec. 24

Condemnation on the Enemies of God's People

A n oracle. The word of Yahweh is against the land of Hadrach, and

will rest upon Damascus; for the eye of man and of all the tribes of Israel is toward Yahweh; 2 and Hamath, also, which borders on it; Tyre and Sidon, because they are very wise. 3 Tyre built herself a stronghold, and heaped up silver like the dust, and fine gold like the mire of the streets. 4 Behold, the Lord will dispossess her, and He will strike her power in the sea; and she will be devoured with fire. 5 Ashkelon will see it, and fear; Gaza also, and will writhe in agony; as will Ekron, for her expectation will be disappointed; and the king will perish from Gaza, and Ashkelon will not be inhabited. 6 Foreigners will dwell in Ashdod, and I will cut off the pride of the Philistines. 7 I will take away his blood out of his mouth, and his abominations from between his teeth; and he also will be a remnant for our God; and he will be as a chieftain in Judah, and Ekron as a Jebusite. 8 I will encamp around My house against the army, so that none pass through or return; and no oppressor will pass through them any more: for now I have seen with My eyes.

The Coming of the King

9 Rejoice greatly, daughter of Zion! Shout, daughter of Jerusalem! Be-

9:1 Note the mutuality between God and His people – our eyes look to Him, and His eyes look to us (:8). And in that catching of the eye, that flash moment when the God who is in search of man meets the man who is in search of God, there is the energy of the Spirit.

9:7 *He will be* – Note how often God states that the intended result of His judgment of Israel’s enemies is that they will join the people of God.

9:9 The concept of a humble King was a contradiction in terms – a King was supposed to be proud and displaying his power, riding on a fine horse rather than a young ass. Je-

hold, your King comes to you! He is righteous, and having salvation; humble, and riding on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.¹⁰ I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the battle bow will be cut off; and he will speak peace to the nations: and his dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.¹¹ As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I have set free your prisoners from the pit in which is no water.¹² Turn to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope! Even today I declare that I will restore double to you.¹³ For indeed I bend Judah as a bow for Myself. I have filled the bow with Ephraim; and I will stir up your sons, Zion, against your sons, Greece, and will make you like the sword of a mighty man.

The Lord Will Appear

¹⁴ Yahweh will be seen over them; and His arrow will go flashing like lightning; and the Lord Yahweh will blow the trumpet, and will go with whirlwinds of the south.¹⁵ Yahweh

sus fulfilled this prophecy by entering Jerusalem sitting on a young donkey which hadn't been broken in (Lk. 19:30). It would've stopped and started and wandered rather than striding purposefully. It's rather like a new victorious president entering his capital city in a sputtering old car, rather than in a fleet of shining, powerful, quietly purring Mercedes. The point was that in God's Kingdom, true greatness is in humility. The mighty horse and chariot which human strength prefers is to be brought to nothing (:10; 10:5).

10:1 We shouldn't presume upon God's blessings; even in the time of rain, we are to ask for it. Even if we have food in the fridge and in the cupboard, we are to ask God to give us the food of today (Mt. 6:11).

10:3 *Because* – This implies that because Yahweh had visited His people and (potentially) made them a strong flock capable of doing His work, *therefore* the priests were at fault for not enabling Judah's spiritual revival. God is angry with those who don't play their part in enabling His potential plans for others to come true for them.

of Armies will defend them; and they will destroy and overcome with sling stones; and they will drink, and roar as through wine; and they will be filled like bowls, like the corners of the altar.¹⁶ Yahweh their God will save them in that day as the flock of His people; for they are like the jewels of a crown, lifted on high over His land.¹⁷ For how great is His goodness, and how great is His beauty! Grain will make the young men flourish, and new wine the virgins.

CHAPTER 10 Dec. 25

God's Care for Judah

A sk of Yahweh rain in the time of the spring rains; Yahweh will make storm clouds, He will give rain showers to everyone for the plants in the field.² For the teraphim have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie; and they have told false dreams. They comfort in vain. Therefore they go their way like sheep. They are oppressed, because there is no shepherd.³ My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the male goats; because Yahweh of Armies has visited His flock,

the house of Judah, and will make them as His majestic horse in the battle. ⁴ From Him will come forth the cornerstone, from Him the nail, from Him the battle bow, from Him every ruler together. ⁵ They shall be as mighty men, treading down muddy streets in the battle; and they shall fight, because Yahweh is with them; and the riders on horses will be confounded. ⁶ I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph, and I will bring them back; for I have mercy on them; and they will be as though I had not cast them off: for I am Yahweh their God, and I will hear them. ⁷ Ephraim will be like a mighty man, and their heart will rejoice as through wine; yes, their children will see it, and rejoice. Their heart will be glad in Yahweh. ⁸ I will signal for them, and gather them; for I have redeemed them; and they will increase as they have increased. ⁹ I will sow them among the peoples; and they will remember Me in far countries; and they will live with their children, and will return. ¹⁰ I will bring them again also out of the land of Egypt, and gather them out of Assyria; and I will bring them into the land of Gilead and Lebanon; and there won't be room enough for them. ¹¹ He will pass through the sea of affliction, and will strike the waves in the sea, and all the depths of the Nile will dry up; and the pride of Assyria will be brought down, and

the scepter of Egypt will depart. ¹² I will strengthen them in Yahweh; and they will walk up and down in His name, says Yahweh.

CHAPTER 11 Dec. 26

Open your doors, Lebanon, that the fire may devour your cedars. ² Wail, fir tree, for the cedar has fallen, because the stately ones are destroyed. Wail, you oaks of Bashan, for the strong forest has come down. ³ A voice of the wailing of the shepherds! For their glory is destroyed: a voice of the roaring of young lions! For the pride of the Jordan is ruined.

The Breaking of the Covenants

⁴ Thus says Yahweh my God: Feed the flock of slaughter. ⁵ Their buyers slaughter them, and go unpunished. Those who sell them say, ‘Blessed be Yahweh, for I am rich;’ and their own shepherds don’t pity them. ⁶ For I will no more pity the inhabitants of the land, says Yahweh; but, behold, I will deliver the men, every one of them, into his neighbour’s hand, and into the hand of his king. They will strike the land, and out of their hand I will not deliver them. ⁷ So I fed the flock of slaughter, especially the oppressed of the flock. I took for myself two staves. The one I called Grace, and the other I called Union, and I fed the flock. ⁸ I cut off the three shepherds in one month; for my soul was weary of them, and their soul

10:5 See on 9:9.

10:11 Repeatedly Zechariah emphasizes that it is the pride of these nations more than anything else which is the basis for their condemnation. The Nile was the pride of the Egyptians just as the Jordan was Judah’s pride (11:3).

also loathed me.⁹ Then I said, I will not feed you. That which dies, let it die; and that which is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let those who are left eat each other's flesh.¹⁰ I took my staff Grace, and cut it apart, 'That I might break My covenant that I had made with all the people'.¹¹ It was broken in that day; and thus the poor of the flock that listened to me knew that it was the word of Yahweh.¹² I said to them, If you think it best, give me my value; and if not, keep it. So they weighed for my wages thirty pieces of silver.¹³ Yahweh said to me, Throw it to the potter, the handsome price that I was valued at by them! I took the thirty pieces of silver, and threw them to the potter, in the house of Yahweh.¹⁴ Then I cut apart my other staff, even Union, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel.¹⁵ Yahweh said to me, Take for yourself yet again the equipment of a foolish shepherd.¹⁶ For, behold, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, who

will not visit those who are cut off, neither will seek those who are scattered, nor heal that which is broken, nor feed that which is sound; but he will eat the flesh of the fat sheep, and will tear their hoofs in pieces.¹⁷ Woe to the worthless shepherd who leaves the flock! The sword will be on his arm, and on his right eye. His arm will be completely withered, and his right eye will be totally blinded!

CHAPTER 12 Dec. 27

Destruction for Jerusalem's Enemies

An oracle. The word of Yahweh concerning Israel. Yahweh, who stretches out the heavens, and lays the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him says: ² Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of reeling to all the surrounding peoples, and on Judah also will it be in the siege against Jerusalem.³ It will happen in that day, that I will make Jerusalem a burdensome stone for all the peoples. All who trample

11:10 Israel rejected God's covenant, and therefore He rejected them in that He broke the unbreakable-by-Him covenant (2 Kings 17:15,20). In reality, they had rejected themselves, and broke the covenant (Jer. 31:32). It was only they who could break it, and God was only sadly confirming what they had done. And so with us. Only we can reject ourselves from God's covenant love.

11:11 It was the poor within the society of Zechariah's time who responded to God's word; and this is a principle, that it's the poor [in whatever sense] who accept the Gospel better than the wealthy (Lk. 7:22; 1 Cor. 1:26). The 'prosperity Gospel' is not Biblical.

11:14 Covenant relationship between people is broken [the horizontal level, as it were] when they break their covenant relationship with God [the vertical level] – :10. Conversely, if we are in covenant with God then we must be in meaningful covenant relationship with all those others who are in covenant with God. In our times, baptism into Christ means that we are "in" the new covenant based around God's Gospel promises (Gal. 3:27-29). We therefore are in covenant fellowship with all others who are in the same covenant status with God.

upon it will be severely wounded, and all the nations of the earth will be gathered together against it.⁴ In that day, says Yahweh, I will strike every horse with terror, and his rider with madness; and I will open My eyes on the house of Judah, and will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness.⁵ The chieftains of Judah will say in their heart, ‘The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in Yahweh of Armies their God’.⁶ In that day I will make the chieftains of Judah like a pan of fire among wood, and like a flaming torch among sheaves; and they will devour all the surrounding peoples, on the right hand and on the left; and Jerusalem will yet again dwell in their own place, even in Jerusalem.⁷ Yahweh also will save the tents of Judah first, that the glory of the house of David

and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem be not magnified above Judah.⁸ In that day Yahweh will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He who is feeble among them at that day will be like David, and the house of David will be like God, like the angel of Yahweh before them.⁹ It will happen in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem.

Look on Me Whom They Have Pierced

¹⁰ I will pour on the house of David, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication; and they will look to Me whom they have pierced; and they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for his only son, and will grieve bitterly for him, as one grieves for his

12:3 Trample upon it – The LXX of this verse is quoted in Lk. 21:24 as having a specific fulfilment in the last days before Christ returns.

12:10 This states that men would look upon the pierced (i.e. crucified) Saviour, and mourn in recognition of their own sinfulness. This verse is quoted as having fulfilment both at the crucifixion (Jn. 19:37) and also at the final judgment (Rev. 1:7). There is strong connection between these two events. The cross was “the judgment of this world” (Jn. 12:31). The cross divided men into two categories: The repentant thief and the bitter one; the soldiers who mocked and the Centurion who believed; the Sanhedrin members who believed and those who mocked; the women who lamented but didn’t obey His word, and those whose weeping isn’t recorded, but who stood and watched and believed. As we come before the cross in our minds, we are naturally driven to self-examination. There our thoughts are revealed (Lk. 2:35). This is why self-examination should occur naturally if we break bread properly, i.e. with our minds focused upon Him as He hung there.

Only son... firstborn – The Jews will come to understand something of God’s grief at the death of His only Son.

Pierced – It’s possible that the Lord Jesus still has marks in His hands and side where He was crucified – 13:6 may imply that the Jews of the last days will look upon them. He had them after His resurrection (Jn. 20:27), and marks of death were visible in the vision of Jesus which John saw (Rev. 5:6). Perhaps for absolute eternity He will carry these marks as a constant reminder to us all of the price paid for our redemption.

firstborn.¹¹ In that day there will be a great mourning in Jerusalem, like the mourning of Hadadrimmon in the valley of Megiddon.¹² The land will mourn, every family apart; the family of the house of David apart, and their wives apart; the family of the house of Nathan apart, and their wives apart;¹³ the family of the house of Levi apart, and their wives apart; the family of the Shimeites apart, and their wives apart;¹⁴ all the families who remain, every family apart, and their wives apart.

CHAPTER 13 Dec. 28

Forgiveness of Sins

In that day there will be a spring opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.² It will come to pass in that day, says Yahweh of Armies, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they will be remembered no more. I will also cause the prophets and the spirit of impurity to pass out of the land.³ It will happen that, when anyone still prophesies, then his father and his mother who bore him will tell him, ‘You must die,

because you speak lies in the name of Yahweh;’ and his father and his mother who bore him will stab him when he prophesies.⁴ It will happen in that day, that the prophets will each be ashamed of his vision, when he prophesies; neither will they wear a hairy mantle to deceive:⁵ but he will say, ‘I am no prophet, I am a tiller of the ground; for I have been made a bondservant from my youth’.⁶ One will say to him, ‘What are these wounds in your hands?’ Then he will answer, ‘Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends’.

The Refining of God’s People

7 Awake, sword, against My shepherd, and against the man who is close to Me, says Yahweh of Armies. Strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered; and I will turn My hand against the little ones.⁸ It shall happen that in all the land, says Yahweh, two parts in it will be cut off and die; but the third will be left in it.⁹ I will bring the third part into the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will test them like gold is tested. They will call on My name,

13:6 Marks – See on 12:10.

13:8 This could mean that two thirds of the Jews now living in Israel will die during the tribulation.

13:9 The purpose of Israel’s final tribulation will be to bring them to repentance; once there is repentance amongst them, then Christ will come (Is. 59:20). The quicker they repent, the shorter and lesser will be their tribulation. This explains why some of the prophecies of the last days are vague and hard to fit together chronologically – because there are various potential scenarios, depending upon the speed of Israel’s repentance. This trial of faith as gold is tried is going on in the lives of believers right now (1 Pet. 1:7) – the tribulations of our lives are therefore as intense and dramatic, in spiritual terms, as the tribulation about to break upon Israel. We shouldn’t underestimate the traumas which we go through spiritually.

and I will hear them. I will say, ‘It is My people;’ and they will say, ‘Yahweh is my God’.

CHAPTER 14 Dec. 28

The Lord Returns to Reign

Behold, the day of Yahweh comes, when your spoil will be divided in your midst. ² For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city will be taken, the houses pillaged, and the women raped. Half of the city will go out into captivity, and the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. ³ Then Yahweh will go out and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle. ⁴ His feet will stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in two, from east to west, making a very great valley. Half of the mountain will move toward the north, and half of it toward the south. ⁵ You shall flee by the valley of My mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach to Azel; yes, you shall flee, just like you fled from

before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Yahweh my God will come, and all the holy ones with you. ⁶ It will happen in that day, that there will not be light, cold, or frost. ⁷ It will be a unique day which is known to Yahweh; not day, and not night; but it will come to pass, that at evening time there will be light. ⁸ It will happen in that day, that living waters will go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the eastern sea, and half of them toward the western sea; in summer and in winter will it be. ⁹ Yahweh will be King over all the earth. In that day Yahweh will be declared as the one and only, and His name unified. ¹⁰ All the land will be made like the Arabah, from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; and she will be lifted up, and will dwell in her place, from Benjamin’s gate to the place of the first gate, to the corner gate, and from the tower of Hananel to the king’s winepresses. ¹¹ Men will dwell therein, and there will be no more curse; but Jerusalem will dwell safely. ¹² This will be the plague with which Yahweh

14:4 This must connect with Christ’s ascension from Heaven from the Mount of Olives, with the Angels promising that He would return in the same way (Acts 1:11). Immediately prior to Christ’s second coming, Jerusalem will have been captured by her enemies; Christ comes when the remnant of Jews left alive repent and cry out to Him; see on 13:9.

14:7 This may suggest that the meaning of time collapses around the time of Christ’s coming. This would provide the answer to many practical questions – e.g. how shall we each stand before Christ’s judgment seat individually and have some time in discussion about our lives; why can’t we fit all the prophecies of the last days into some chronological order?

14:11 *No more curse* – Quoted in Rev. 22:3 about the future Kingdom of God on earth. God will be literally King over all the planet (:9); and there will be topographical changes around Jerusalem (:8).

will strike all the peoples who have warred against Jerusalem: their flesh will consume away while they stand on their feet, and their eyes will consume away in their sockets, and their tongue will consume away in their mouth.¹³ It will happen in that day, that a great panic from Yahweh will be among them; and they, each of them, will lay hold on the hand of his neighbour, and his hand will rise up against the hand of his neighbour.¹⁴ Judah also will fight at Jerusalem; and the wealth of all the surrounding nations will be gathered together: gold, and silver, and clothing, in great abundance.¹⁵ So will be the plague of the horse, of the mule, of the camel, and of the donkey, and of all the animals that will be in those camps, as that plague.¹⁶ It will happen that everyone who is left of all the nations that came against Jerusalem will go up from year to year to worship the King, Yahweh of Armies,

and to keep the feast of tabernacles.¹⁷ It will be, that whoever of all the families of the earth doesn't go up to Jerusalem to worship the King, Yahweh of Armies, on them there will be no rain.¹⁸ If the family of Egypt doesn't go up, and doesn't come, neither will it rain on them. This will be the plague with which Yahweh will strike the nations that don't go up to keep the feast of tents.¹⁹ This will be the punishment of Egypt, and the punishment of all the nations that don't go up to keep the feast of tabernacles.²⁰ In that day there will be on the bells of the horses, HOLY TO YAHWEH; and the pots in Yahweh's house will be like the bowls before the altar.²¹ Yes, every pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to Yahweh of Armies; and all those who sacrifice will come and take of them, and cook in them. In that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of Yahweh of Armies.

14:12 Could this refer to nuclear warfare, used by God to punish those who use it? God will destroy Israel's enemies by turning them against each other (:13).

14:21 A Canaanite – This apparently strange ending reflects Zechariah's sadness that in his day, there had been unbelievers and even enemies allowed by God's people to have rooms right in the temple of Yahweh itself (Neh. 13:7,8). He looked forward, as all God's children do, to the time of God's Kingdom when the sheep and goats will finally be divided from each other for ever.

MALACHI

CHAPTER 1 Dec. 29

Jacob Loved, Esau Hated

A n oracle: the word of Yahweh to Israel by Malachi. ² I have loved you, says Yahweh. Yet you say, How have you loved us? Wasn't Esau Jacob's brother? says Yahweh, Yet I loved Jacob; ³ but Esau I hated, and made his mountains a desolation, and gave his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness. ⁴ Whereas Edom says, We are beaten down, but we will return and build the waste places; thus says Yahweh of Armies, They shall build, but I will throw down; and men will call them 'The Wicked Land', even the people against whom Yahweh shows wrath forever. ⁵ Your eyes will see, and you will say, Yahweh is great—even beyond the border of Israel!

Imperfect Sacrifices

⁶ A son honours his father, and a

servant his master. If I am a father, then where is my honour? And if I am a master, where is the respect due me? Says Yahweh of Armies to you, priests, who despise My name. You say, 'How have we despised Your name?' ⁷ You offer polluted bread on My altar. You say, 'How have we polluted You?' In that you say, 'Yahweh's table contemptible'. ⁸ When you offer the blind for sacrifice, isn't that evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, isn't that evil? Present it now to your governor! Will he be pleased with you? Or will he accept your person? says Yahweh of Armies. ⁹ Now, please entreat the favour of God, that He may be gracious to us. With this, will He accept any of you? says Yahweh of Armies. ¹⁰ Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on My altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says

1:4 Edom (Esau) was zealous to return and rebuild the ravaged land which God had once given him, whereas Israel wasn't, for the most part, zealous to return from Babylon to rebuild the land God had given them. And yet God still loved Israel above Edom, by pure grace. So often those who aren't God's people are more zealous for their causes than God's people are for His.

1:7 'The table of the Lord' refers to the altar. At the breaking of bread service, we eat of "the table of the Lord" (1 Cor. 10:21), the same phrase used here in the Septuagint. By breaking bread we are therefore like the priests of Israel eating at the altar. His work hasn't been delegated out to a group of specialists; we are all the priesthood (1 Pet. 2:5,9).

1:8 One doesn't give sub-standard service to their employer. One didn't bring him a defective animal as a gift. And yet Israel gave their God the lame and the blind animals, they only served Him as far as it didn't hurt them. They gave Him what cost them nothing. And yet they should not only have served Him as they served their earthly masters; but, because He is the "great God", they should have given Him even more. And so we must ask: the time we give to our careers and development in them,

Yahweh of Armies, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.¹¹ For from the rising of the sun even to the going down of the same, My name is great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to My name, and a pure offering: for My name is great among the nations, says Yahweh of Armies.¹² But you profane it, in that you say, ‘Yahweh’s table is polluted, and its fruit, even its food, is contemptible’.¹³ You say also, ‘Behold, what a weariness it is!’ and you have sniffed at it, says Yahweh of Armies; and you have brought that which was taken by violence, the lame, and the sick; thus you bring the offering. Should I accept this at your hand? says Yahweh.¹⁴ But the deceiver is cursed, who has in his flock a male, and vows, and sacrifices to the Lord a blemished thing; for I am a great King, says Yahweh of Armies, and My name is awesome among the nations.

CHAPTER 2 Dec. 30

The Priests Admonished

Now, you priests, this commandment is for you.² If you will

not listen, and if you will not lay it to heart, to give glory to My name, says Yahweh of Armies, then will I send the curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have cursed them already, because you do not lay it to heart.³ Behold, I will rebuke your seed, and will spread dung on your faces, even the dung of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it.⁴ You will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may be with Levi, says Yahweh of Armies.⁵ My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him that he might be reverent toward Me; and he was reverent toward Me, and stood in awe of My name.⁶ The law of truth was in his mouth, and unrighteousness was not found in his lips. He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and turned many away from iniquity.⁷ For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth; for he is the messenger of Yahweh of Armies.⁸ But you have turned aside out of the way. You have caused many to stumble in the law. You have corrupted the cov-

the thought we give to our secular lives, the respect we pay it... how does this compare to our attitude to Divine things?

1:10 There was nobody to even shut the doors of the temple; there was nobody willing to fulfil Ezekiel’s prophecy / command about the temple doors being shut (Ez. 44:1,2; 46:1,2,12), and so the potential situation prophesied by Ezekiel didn’t come true because God’s people in Malachi’s time just couldn’t be bothered. So much potential was wasted at the return of Judah from Babylon, and it is in our age too.

1:13 Weariness – The repetitive nature of priestly work led them to treat it as “a weariness”. They got bored with the things of the Kingdom, as in 2:10,11. Familiarity can so easily lead to our not grasping the awe of being in relationship with God.

2:7 The duty of the priests under the Old Covenant was to maintain true understanding of God’s word, witness this to the world around them, and teach it to their brothers and sisters in Israel. Although there was a special priesthood, it was clearly God’s

enant of Levi, says Yahweh of Armies. ⁹ Therefore I have also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according to the way you have not kept My ways, but have had respect for persons in the law.

Judah's Unfaithfulness

¹⁰ Don't we all have one father? Hasn't one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother, profaning the covenant of our fathers? ¹¹ Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination is committed in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the holiness of Yahweh which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. ¹² May Yahweh cut off out of the tents of Jacob the man who does this, and his descendant; may he not offer an offering to Yahweh of Armies. ¹³ This again you do: you cover the altar of Yahweh with tears, with weeping, and with sighing, because He doesn't regard the offering any more, neither receives it with good will at your hand. ¹⁴ Yet you say, 'Why?' Because Yahweh has

intention that all Israel should be like priests; they were to be a "Kingdom of priests" (Ex. 19:6), and we are to be likewise (1 Pet. 2:5,9), not assuming others will care for us spiritually, but each of us taking real responsibility.

2:10, 11 This may be a reference to how at the time of the restoration from Babylon, the Jews married unbelievers. This is described in the same terms used here – a breaking covenant with God (Ezra 10:2,10; Neh. 13:27,29). Their marriage to unbelievers led them to accept the gods of their wives – and in this lay the sin of what they did.

2:15 *Make you one* – a reference to how God joins together husband and wife in the course of their married life, not just on their wedding day. The intention is that our children will be "Godly". If we are not united, not companions with each other, or if our partner is an unbeliever, it will be so much harder for us to raise Godly children.

3:6 God does change, as witnessed by men like Moses changing His stated intentions through prayer and intercession. What is unchangeable about Him is His grace to His sinful people.

been witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion, and the wife of your covenant. ¹⁵ Did He not make you one, although He had the residue of the Spirit? Why one? He sought a godly seed. Therefore take heed to your spirit, and let no one deal treacherously against the wife of his youth. ¹⁶ For I hate divorce, says Yahweh, the God of Israel, and him who covers his garment with violence! says Yahweh of Armies. Therefore take heed to your spirit, that you don't deal treacherously.

The Judgment Day

¹⁷ You have wearied Yahweh with your words. Yet you say, 'How have we wearied Him?' In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of Yahweh, and He delights in them;' or 'Where is the God of judgment?'.

CHAPTER 3 Dec. 31

Behold, I send My messenger,

fore Me; and the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, behold, He comes! says Yahweh of Armies. ² But who can endure the day of His coming? And who will stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire, and like launderer's soap; ³ and He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi, and refine them as gold and silver; and they shall offer to Yahweh offerings in righteousness. ⁴ Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasant to Yahweh, as in the days of old, and as in ancient years. ⁵ I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be an alert witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against the perjurors, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and who deprive the foreigner of justice, and don't fear Me, says Yahweh of Armies.

Will a Man Rob God?

⁶ For I, Yahweh, don't change; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed. ⁷ From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My ordinances, and have not kept

them. Return to Me, and I will return to you, says Yahweh of Armies. But you say, 'How shall we return?'. ⁸ Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?'. In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are cursed with the curse; for you rob Me, even this whole nation. ¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this, says Yahweh of Armies, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough for. ¹¹ I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast its fruit before its time in the field, says Yahweh of Armies. ¹² All nations shall call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land, says Yahweh of Armies. ¹³ Your words have been stout against Me, says Yahweh. Yet you say, 'What have we spoken against You?'. ¹⁴ You have said, 'It is vain to serve God;' and 'What profit is it that we have followed His instructions, and that we have walked mournfully before Yahweh of Armies?' ¹⁵ Now we call the proud happy; yes, those who work wickedness are built up; yes,

3:14 Nehemiah, seeking for Israel's obedience to Ezekiel's temple vision, tried to get them to 'follow His instructions' (s.w. Neh. 7:3; 12:9,45; 13:20). For Ezekiel had prophesied that in the restored temple, God's instructions would be followed (Ez. 40:46; 44:8,14-16). But now, Judah complained that there was no benefit to them from having kept the charges (Mal. 3:14 s.w.). Partial obedience discouraged them from any further effort, because the fullness of blessing can only come from a way of life conformed to God's Kingdom vision and life. This is why people get disillusioned with religion and lose the faith – because they seek for immediate benefit as a result of keeping a few highly specific aspects of God's law, rather than willingly devoting their whole way of life to the realisation of His vision.

they put God to the test and escape'.
 16 Then those who feared Yahweh spoke frequently one with another; and Yahweh listened, and heard, and a book of memory was written before Him, for those who feared Yahweh, and who honoured His name.
 17 They shall be Mine, says Yahweh of Armies, My very own possession in the day when I make up My jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spares his own son who serves him.
 18 Then you shall return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves God and him who doesn't serve Him.

CHAPTER 4 Dec. 31

The Day of the Lord is Coming

For, behold, the day comes, it burns as a furnace; and all the proud, and all who work wicked-

ness, will be stubble; and the day that comes will burn them up, says Yahweh of Armies, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.² But to you who fear My name shall the sun of righteousness arise with healing in his rays. You will go out, and leap like calves of the stall.³ You shall tread down the wicked; for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I make, says Yahweh of Armies.⁴ Remember the law of Moses My servant, which I commanded to him in Horeb for all Israel, even statutes and ordinances.⁵ Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of Yahweh comes.⁶ He will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.

3:16 If we truly love God, we will naturally want to find and communicate with others who also do.

3:17 We are so very valuable to God – His jewels, His “very own”. We can take comfort that we are not alone in this world, He is so intensely with us.

4:2 *The sun* – A prophecy of Christ's return. He will be like the dawn, chasing away the darkness which is now on the earth.

4:5 It seems that ‘Elijah’ will come to convert some in Israel to Christ before His second coming. John the Baptist was an Elijah prophet (Mt. 11:14); this prophecy of ‘Elijah’ may therefore not necessarily require literal Elijah to appear on earth, but the work of converting some in Israel could be fulfilled by others.