

Revision 1.0

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This book is a chapter-by-chapter but not necessarily paragraph by paragraph paraphrase of the book *Prophets and Kings*. The language was simplified and in this case the volume was reduced by about 50%.

The history covered by this book begins with the reign of king Solomon and goes through the end of the Old Testament.

A free pdf of the original book can be obtained here:

[https://media4.egwwritings.org/pdf/en\\_PK.pdf](https://media4.egwwritings.org/pdf/en_PK.pdf)

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## *Introduction—The Vineyard of the Lord*

Each succeeding generation after the flood seemed to lose more and more knowledge of the true God, and their minds were becoming darkened by idolatry. The law of God which is “holy, fair, and good.” [[Romans 7:12](#)], was being replaced by laws which benefited those who were cruel and selfish. Rather than destroy them, God gave them an opportunity to learn about His law, which if obeyed, would restore His image in them.

God called Abraham to move away from his idol worshipping family, friends, and city to the land of Canaan. God also promised to bless him and his descendants, making them into a great nation, through which the world would be blessed [[Genesis 12:2](#)]. This nation would become the preservers of the knowledge of God in the world, and of His plans to bless the world with a Savior.

God wanted Israel to be a light in the darkness, by keeping His law, so He gave it to them, written on stone. He also gave them a knowledge of Himself preserved in writing, then by blessing them, He would cause others to take notice. They were to be like a voice calling out to those in darkness to come into the light by serving the true God.

God demonstrated His great power when he freed Israel from slavery to the Egyptians, and He showed it again when He settled them in the land of Canaan. He gave them a parable through the prophet Isaiah, describing them as a vineyard, planted on a hill and tenderly cared for, expecting a good harvest [[Isaiah 5:1-7](#)].

The law that God gave Israel, if obeyed, would have kept them from destroying themselves by sinful and evil actions. The tabernacle and temple were given to teach them about His mercy and love, but also to remind them of His presence among them. Through Moses, they were taught that they were a holy people, special, above everyone else on the earth. They could have become the greatest nation on earth, increasing in size until they covered the entire world. All who were willing to turn away from idolatry, like Rahab, and Ruth, were welcome to become part of the chosen people.

But Israel did not live up to the plan God had for them. Instead of being like a good vine that brought forth good fruit, they became like a weed that bore bad fruit. When they ignored God’s law, they lost its natural protection against sin and evil. Then they also lost God’s protection, and tender care, as a vineyard that was no longer pruned, and fertilized, and watered. They had been warned at the founding of their nation by Moses of the consequences of ignoring God. Sadly, more often than not, in their history they cut themselves off from the blessings of God and did

not bear the fruit He wanted from them. Instead, they became hated by other nations, and they gave God and His law a bad reputation.

But like a father who loves his wayward son, God pleaded with them and was patient with them. He sent prophets, and messengers, to teach and warn them, but Israel killed and persecuted them. The vine that was not producing good fruit was finally destroyed, and God planted another that no one could destroy. Then anyone who wished could be grafted into the new vine.

[Isaiah 27:2](#) "In that day, sing about the fruitful vineyard. <sup>3</sup> I, the LORD, will watch over it, watering it carefully. Day and night I will watch so no one can harm it. [Isaiah 27:2-3 NLT](#).

God is now gathering the fruit from His vineyard from all nations of the world. Soon He will come and will set up the glorious kingdom that He wanted from Israel. [Isaiah 27:6](#) The time is coming when Jacob's descendants will take root. Israel will bud and blossom and fill the whole earth with fruit! [Isaiah 27:6 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 1—Solomon*

During the reign of David and Solomon, Israel did have some of the glory and power that God intended for them. The name of Jehovah was honored and respected, and the Israelites did for a short time fulfill the purpose for which God had chosen them. People who came from foreign lands to learn about Jehovah were satisfied with the answers they received, and some were converted. During this time, the knowledge of God and His law increased on the earth.

In his later years, after a hard life, with difficulties that were partly brought on by his own actions, David wished to protect his young son from making some of the same mistakes he had made. He taught Solomon that it was manly to be good, and kind to his subjects. He told him to always bring honor and glory to God in his interactions with other nations. [2 Samuel 23:3](#) ... 'The one who rules righteously, who rules in the fear of God, <sup>4</sup> is like the light of morning at sunrise, like a morning without clouds, like the gleaming of the sun on new grass after rain.' [2 Samuel 23:3-4 NLT](#).

David at least partially understood God's purpose for Israel, and he tried to prepare his young son Solomon for the great responsibility ahead of him. He knew that Solomon had to be not only a strong and just king, but he had to be a good example, and a teacher of righteousness. He understood that Solomon had a great responsibility, and a huge amount of influence on Israel's faithfulness, and on how God was represented to the nations.

Unlike his father, Solomon had everything in his favor from the start. If he had followed the advice of his father, he would have had a reign like no other king. His people would have had peace, security, and would have been judged fairly. All nations of the world would have honored him and brought gifts to him. Jehovah would have been honored and could have filled the whole earth with His glory [[Psalm 72](#)].

Solomon's reign began with great promise, when he took the advice of his father, and asked God for wisdom to rule. Early in his reign, before the temple was built, he went to the tabernacle, with his captains, judges, governors, and advisors. They offered sacrifices to God, showing their commitment to be faithful to Him. Solomon must have felt overwhelmed with the responsibilities and duties of being king. At that time in his life, he understood his need of God for guidance and wisdom. That night God appeared to Solomon in a dream and said, "Ask Me for one thing that I can give you." Solomon acknowledged God's great kindness and mercy to his father, then said, "I am so young, and I don't even know how to begin to govern this great nation. "What I would most like is to have wisdom and

understanding, to be able to judge fairly.” God was pleased with Solomon’s answer and said, “Because you have asked for wisdom to do a good job, and have not asked for wealth, honor, or the death of your enemies, I will make you the wisest person the world will even know, and in addition to that I will also give you great riches, and honor.” God added, “If you remain faithful to me like your father David, I will give you a long life as well.” [[1 Kings 3:5-14](#); [2 Chronicles 1:2-12](#)].

People in position of power and influence today should also ask God for wisdom. True greatness is only possible when someone honors and obeys God. But God does not only offer wisdom to special people but is willing to give to anyone who asks. [James 1:5](#) If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. [James 1:5 NLT](#). When a person desires wisdom more than money, power, or fame, he will not be disappointed. As long as a person remains committed to God, they will not seek power and control but will pray for wisdom and understanding to make good decisions. There are temptations that come with being in positions of power and leadership, but staying connected to the source of all wisdom through prayer provides protection against evil.

The wisdom that Solomon received from God was noticed, and he was wise, fair, and merciful in all his judgments. He was wiser than the wisest person from every known kingdom [[1 Kings 4:29-31](#)]. Everyone in Israel respected him and did whatever he said because they knew that the wisdom of God was in him [[1 Kings 3:28](#)]. God was with him and made him great [[2 Chronicles 1:1](#)]. During these golden years, even the rulers of other nations looked up to and respected and honored Solomon.

The greatness of Solomon and Israel grew as the years went by, and Israel was a light to the world, and the name of Jehovah was greatly honored. The wisdom from God brought knowledge in the science of nature. This included the forces of nature, material science, and all living things. Solomon was able to see the wisdom of God in the things He created, and it increased his knowledge of, and his love for God. Solomon recorded his wisdom and knowledge in the form of wise sayings, songs, and science books about plants and animals [[1 Kings 4:32-33](#)]. The wise sayings were in line with the principles of God’s law but applied to every area of life.

[Proverbs 3:13](#) Joyful is the person who finds wisdom, the one who gains understanding.

<sup>14</sup> For wisdom is more profitable than silver, and her wages are better than gold.

<sup>15</sup> Wisdom is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.

<sup>16</sup> She offers you long life in her right hand, and riches and honor in her left. <sup>17</sup> She will guide you down delightful paths; all her ways are satisfying. <sup>18</sup> Wisdom is a

tree of life to those who embrace her; happy are those who hold her tightly.  
[Proverbs 3:13-18 NLT](#).

[Proverbs 8:13](#) All who fear the LORD will hate evil. Therefore, I hate pride and arrogance, corruption and perverse speech. [Proverbs 8:13 NLT](#).

It's sad that in his later years, Solomon did not live according to the words he wrote, but in the end grew proud and arrogant, and took the glory for himself that belonged to God.

## *Chapter 2—The Temple and Its Dedication*

This chapter is based on [2 Chronicles 5-7](#).

It was one of David's greatest wishes to build a beautiful temple for Jehovah, but he had to leave it for his son to accomplish. Solomon began the work of building the temple in the 4<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. The wood, stone, and metal work called for in the plans, required great skill and planning, and many thousands of laborers. The craftsman in charge of the whole project was a man named Hiram, from the country of Tyre. He was a master craftsman, skilled in working with gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, wood, and even colored fine linen. It was said of him that he could build or make anything that was described to him [[2 Chronicles 2:13-14](#)].

All the material was cut, formed, or shaped off site, so that the assembly of the temple on Mount Moriah was completely quiet of any sawing, hammering, or pounding. The length, width, and height of the temple were about double that of the tabernacle. Things that were made new for the temple were, the altar of incense, table of shewbread, candlesticks and lamps, all the containers used by the priests for the services, the bronze altar of sacrifice, and the laver for washing. For the casting the metal objects, they were poured into molds made in clay [[1 Kings 6:7](#); [2 Chronicles 4:19](#); [2 Chronicles 4:21](#); [2 Chronicles 4:17](#)].

When the temple was completed, its beauty was almost beyond description. The craftsmanship was perfect, from the beautifully embroidered curtains to the gold-plated wood carvings of angels. Since the area of the main temple building was 4 times larger than the sanctuary, with the exception of the ark, which was not remade, multiple pieces of the interior furniture were made, and the altar and laver outside were made much bigger. The magnificence of the temple was a fitting symbol of a house for God. The plans God had given to David were carefully followed and completed in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of Solomon's reign [[1 Kings 6](#)].

The very location where the temple was built had historical significance going all the way back to Abraham. It was the very spot where he had been commanded to sacrifice his son to prove his obedience. There Jehovah had renewed the covenant with Abraham, that through him the whole world would be blessed by the Messiah Who would sacrifice Himself for the salvation of the human race [[Genesis 22:9, 16-18](#)]. This was the place that God had told David to offer a sacrifice to stop the avenging angel after his sin of counting the people [[1 Chronicles 21](#)].

The temple had been completed in the 7<sup>th</sup> month, when people from all over the kingdom would be gathered at Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was already one of celebration, after the harvest had been completed, and the work

for the next year had not yet begun. To the usual feast activities this year would be added the dedication of the new temple that had just been completed.

This grand occasion was even attended by invited guests from other nations. The ark of the covenant had been brought from the place David had placed it after moving it to Jerusalem, and the other holy items from the tabernacle in Gibeon were reunited with it in the new temple. The ark with the law of God on the two tables of stone, was moved into its new home, under the wings of the carved cherubim, in the most holy place in the new temple. There was great rejoicing with Levite choirs and trumpets and other instruments.

As songs of praise were sung, a cloud filled with the glory of God entered the temple. As this happened the priests and Levites had to move farther away, because the glory of God was too much for them to bear. Solomon then stood up on a platform in the temple courtyard to bless the people. “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who today fulfilled his promise to my father David, when He said, ‘I have chosen Jerusalem out of all the land of Israel, as the place where My name will be known.’”

Then Solomon knelt down on his knees with his hands lifted up toward heaven and offered this prayer of dedication, “Lord God of Israel, there is no god like You in heaven or anywhere on earth, who keeps their promise and shows mercy to those who obey. How is it that a God will even lower Himself to live among men? Even the heavens cannot contain Your glory, so how much less can this temple that we have built contain it? Please hear the prayer of your servant, and his request to You, that You will keep Your eyes on this temple day and night, as the place where You said You would make Your name known. Hear my prayer and the prayer of Your people from heaven when we ask for forgiveness.

“If your people are conquered by their enemies because they have sinned against You, repent of their wickedness, and turn toward this temple and confess their sin; then hear them from heaven and forgive their sin, and bring them back to this land that You gave to their ancestors.

“If there is famine in the land, or deadly disease, or natural disasters, or hunger caused by enemies surrounding the city; then if any person lifts their hands to You toward this temple, answer their prayer, and the prayers of every person according to what is in their heart.

“If a stranger comes from a country far away because they heard about Your great name and prays to You in this temple; then hear from heaven and answer their prayer, so that all people of the earth will know about You and respect You as Your own people do.

If Your people go to war at Your request and pray toward Jerusalem and this temple; hear them from heaven and give them protection and success.

If Your people sin, because no one is sinless, and You are angry with them, and let them be conquered by enemies, and taken as prisoners to another land; if they turn toward this land and this temple from the land of their captivity, and ask for forgiveness for their sin, and return to You with their whole heart, hear them and forgive them.

God, I beg You now to see and hear the prayer offered to You here in this place. Come and make this temple, together with Your ark, a resting place. May Your priests be clothed with Your saving grace, and may Your people rejoice in Your goodness. Do not forget Your anointed king, and Your love for Your servant David.”

When Solomon finished his prayer, fire came down from heaven and burned up the offerings and sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the temple. When the people saw it, they fell on their faces to the ground and worshipped the Lord. The temple dedication continued for 7 days with sacrifices, and joyful feasting. The following week was the Feast of Tabernacles, and at the conclusion of that, the people returned to their homes, full of joy for the goodness of the Lord.

As He did at the start of Solomon’s reign, God appeared to him again in a dream, saying: “I have heard your prayer, and accept this temple as a house of sacrifices. If I have to stop the rain, or send locusts to cause a famine, or send a deadly disease because the people have turned away from Me; if My people, who are called by My name, will humble themselves, and pray, seeking My face and turning from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”.

If Israel had stayed faithful to God, the temple would still be standing today, as a sign of His favor for His chosen people, but it would not have been a temple for the children of Israel only. [Isaiah 56:6](#) "I will also bless the foreigners who commit themselves to the LORD, who serve him and love his name, who worship him and do not desecrate the Sabbath day of rest, and who hold fast to my covenant. <sup>7</sup> I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer. I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices, because my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations. [Isaiah 56:6-7 NLT](#).

Solomon was also given a promise, conditional on his faithfulness to God. [2 Chronicles 7:17](#) "As for you, if you faithfully follow me as David your father did, obeying all my commands, decrees, and regulations, <sup>18</sup> then I will establish the throne of your dynasty. For I made this covenant with your father, David, when I said, 'One of your descendants will always rule over Israel.' [2 Chronicles 7:17-18 NLT](#).

But the promises were conditional, and there were consequences for disobedience. [2 Chronicles 7:19](#) "But if you or your descendants abandon me and disobey the decrees and commands I have given you, and if you serve and worship other gods,<sup>20</sup> then I will uproot the people from this land that I have given them. I will reject this Temple that I have made holy to honor my name. I will make it an object of mockery and ridicule among the nations.<sup>21</sup> And though this Temple is impressive now, all who pass by will be appalled. They will ask, 'Why did the LORD do such terrible things to this land and to this Temple?'<sup>22</sup> "And the answer will be, 'Because his people abandoned the LORD, the God of their ancestors, who brought them out of Egypt, and they worshiped other gods instead and bowed down to them. That is why he has brought all these disasters on them.'" [2 Chronicles 7:19-22 NLT](#).

In the first part of his reign, Solomon was humble and obedient to God, and when people visited him to see if the wealth and the wonders they had heard about his kingdom were true, he would tell them all about God. People would return to their home countries with a knowledge of God, the Creator of all things, and a God who loved the human race. They also learned about nature, and science, and how they revealed the character of God. Many decided to worship this amazing God when they returned home.

The Bible teaches that we should have humility and reverence when we talk to God. Solomon called himself a little child when he first talked to God [[1 Kings 3:7](#)]. [Psalm 95:3](#) For the LORD is a great God, a great King above all gods.<sup>4</sup> He holds in his hands the depths of the earth and the mightiest mountains.<sup>5</sup> The sea belongs to him, for he made it. His hands formed the dry land, too. [Psalm 95:3-6 NLT](#). We have examples of Solomon, the disciples, Paul, Ezra, Daniel and most of all Jesus kneeling when they prayed [[2 Chronicles 6:13](#); [Acts 9:40](#); [Ephesians 3:14](#); [Ezra 9:5](#); [Daniel 6:10](#); [Luke 22:41](#)]. Just because God loves and cares for such insignificant created creatures as us, does not make Him less great or powerful. [Psalm 111:9](#) ... What a holy, awe-inspiring name he has! [Psalm 111:9 NLT](#). Moses and others were told to take off their shoes in the presence of God [[Exodus 3:5](#)].

Although God doesn't need our temples and churches, or live in them, He honors them with His presence when we worship Him. But there is a difference between true worship and just going through the motions. [Matthew 15:8](#) "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.<sup>9</sup> Their worship is a farce, for they teach man-made ideas as commands from God." [Matthew 15:8-9 NLT](#). [John 4:23](#) <sup>23</sup> But the time is coming--indeed it's here now--when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The Father is looking for those who will worship him that way. [John 4:23 NLT](#).

### *Chapter 3—Pride of Prosperity*

For the first part of his reign, Solomon honored and obeyed God, was blessed by Him, and he ruled with mercy and judged fairly. He ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, even to the border of Egypt. There was peace on all borders, and all Israelites lived safely in their own homes [[1 Kings 4:21, 24-25](#)].

But sadly, Solomon, who was given so much, turned his back on Jehovah and worshipped idols with his heathen wives. As far back as the time of Moses, God had foreseen that Israel would become a kingdom, so He gave Moses instructions for the future kings. They should have full access to a copy of the law of God, and all the writings that the priests and Levites had, and they should read it and obey what is written [[Deuteronomy 17:18-20](#)]. God even warned that they should not have many wives [[Deuteronomy 17:17](#)].

Early in his reign, Solomon made an alliance with Egypt and sealed it by marrying Pharaoh's daughter. This seemed to be a blessing for Pharaoh's daughter when she was converted and worshipped Jehovah. But as Solomon gained confidence from his success and all the praise and glory that was heaped on him, he began to forget the true source of his wisdom and success. He thought he could continue to make alliances with heathen kingdoms, sealing them by marriage, and then converting them as he had done with Egypt. Solomon thought that his wisdom and example would be so overpowering that his heathen wives would all be converted, and their home countries as well.

With all these alliances and trade between nations, Solomon became very wealthy, making silver and gold as common as stones [[2 Chronicles 1:15](#)]. With his great wealth and success, came power and confidence, and he slowly began take the credit and glory for himself rather than giving it to God. The great wealth that was pouring into the country could have been used to raise the standard of living for the poorest in the kingdom. Instead, Solomon wanted to be richer, greater, and more powerful than every other king, leading him to hoard and use the great wealth that was flowing into the country for his own glory. Eventually, to support his ambitious building projects, and the life of luxury in his palace, he had to tax his own people. Finally, he cared nothing for the well-being of his people and only cared about his own luxury, and legacy, raising taxes until he was nothing but a selfish tyrant to his own people.

To reduce Israel's dependence on their own military power, God had instructed them not to accumulate war horses. But Solomon completely disregarded this command and began to buy horses from Egypt and other lands. Eventually he had

1,400 chariots, and 12,000 horsemen [[2 Chronicles 1:16-17](#); [2 Chronicles 9:28](#); [1 Kings 10:26](#)].

Solomon also loved beautiful women and imported them by the hundreds from wherever they could be found. Of course, most of these women were heathens, who worshipped idols. And he didn't just bring them in to admire their beauty, he slept with them. Eventually Solomon began to worship the false gods of his wives [[1 Kings 11:4-5](#)]. On the Mount of Olives, very near the temple of Jehovah, Solomon built shrines to gods his wives worshipped [[1 Kings 11:6-8](#)]. He even fell so low as to build altars on which living children were sacrificed.

During the years of Solomon's fall away from God, many Israelites followed his example of having multiple wives, and marrying many heathen women, and worshipping their gods. Christians have been warned to keep themselves separate from the world, so they are not carried away by its influence. If Solomon, who had so much God given wisdom fell to the influences he surrounded himself with, how much more will we be in danger if we allow ourselves to be surrounded with ungodly influences. [Matthew 6:24](#) "No one can serve two masters. For you will hate one and love the other; you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. [Matthew 6:24 NLT](#). [2 Corinthians 6:17](#) Therefore, come out from among unbelievers, and separate yourselves from them, says the LORD. Don't touch their filthy things, and I will welcome you. <sup>18</sup> And I will be your Father, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty." [2 Corinthians 6:17-18 NLT](#).

It is not just through separation that we can remain pure, but it is also through humble dependence on God. Not everyone is in a position of power like Solomon, but those who are, unless they completely depend on God, will surely fall. Those who want the praise and admiration of others, and glory for themselves, will find themselves to be lacking in the grace of God. But the person who is all in, and does everything to please God will experience this promise: [Proverbs 10:22](#) The blessing of the LORD makes a person rich, and he adds no sorrow with it. [Proverbs 10:22 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 4—Result of Sin*

One of the main reasons Solomon became a selfish tyrant to his people was that he gave himself everything he desired, never exercising the spirit of self-sacrifice. When the sanctuary in the wilderness was built, gold, silver and other precious materials were all donated by the people, who gave freely and happily for the cause [[Exodus 35:21](#)]. Love of God and the spirit of giving were the first requirements for building a house of God.

When David was gathering the material to build the temple, he gave the people the chance to give, and he also called for skilled workers [[1 Chronicles 29:2-9](#)]. For the sanctuary in the wilderness, Bezaleel and Aholiab, were specifically called by God to lead out in the construction, but many volunteers were needed, and all were blessed by God with wisdom and understanding for the work [[Exodus 35:30-35; 36:1](#)].

The skills enhanced by God especially to Bezaleel from the tribe of Judah, and Aholiab from the tribe of Dan, were passed on to their children. At first, their descendants remained humble and unselfish, but generations later, some began asking for higher pay for their superior skill. In many cases when selling their skill to the highest bidder, they ended up working for surrounding nations. The sad result of this is that their God given talent was often used for heathen kings, making things that dishonored God.

The master craftsman who led out in the construction of the temple was Hiram, the son of a man of Tyre and a woman from the tribe of Dan. His skill was inherited from his mother, who passed them on from the skilled craftsmen who descended from Aholiab. Because of his great skill, Hiram was paid a lot of money, and eventually those who worked with him began to be unhappy with their wages compared to his. They demanded higher pay, which they were given, but the spirit of self-sacrifice that existed among the builders of the sanctuary did not exist among those who built the temple.

This spirit of demanding high pay did not end with the construction of the temple but spread throughout the kingdom. Eventually those with skills that were in great demand were living in luxury, and the poor were taken advantage of by the rich. This spirit of greed and self-indulgence could at least in part be traced back to the actions and greed of Solomon.

True followers of Jesus, like the disciples, will answer the call to give their time, effort, and even their lives in service to God. They will not do it for financial rewards, but will follow the example of their Master, who lived a life of self-denial

and sacrifice. The only service that is truly acceptable to God is that which is given freely, and joyfully, with a spirit of sacrifice.

After greed and self-indulgence, another thing that led to the downfall of Solomon, was taking the credit and glory to himself that should have gone to God. But, before that Solomon recognized the gifts of God, and also realized that the temple would be a place where the presence and name of God would be known [[1 Kings 8:29](#)]. In his prayer of dedication, Solomon specifically mentions people coming from other countries to learn about the God of Israel [[1 Kings 8:41-43](#)].

The visit of the Queen of Sheba was one example of someone who heard of the greatness of Solomon's kingdom and came and learned about the God of Israel. She heard about the temple he built, and about his great wisdom, and she came with spices, precious stones, and much gold, as well as hard questions to test him. Solomon answered her questions about science and nature, and he told her about God, who is the Creator of all things, and the king of all the earth. There was not a single question she had that Solomon could not answer [[1 Kings 10:1-3](#); [2 Chronicles 9:1-2](#)].

At the end of her visit, after the queen had seen the temple, experienced for herself the wisdom of Solomon, and even took notice of the operations of his palace, she said, "I thought that what I heard in my own country, was too good to be true, but what I have seen and experienced was even better than what I heard. Blessed be the Lord your God, who loves you, and put you on the throne, to judge Israel with justice. Your people must be so happy, and how lucky are the ones who work in the palace and can hear your wisdom every day." [[1 Kings 10:6-9](#); [2 Chronicles 9:5-8](#)].

This reaction by the queen was how God intended Israel to be a light to the nations. In fact, all the kings of the earth wanted to come visit Solomon to hear the wisdom that God had given him [[2 Chronicles 9:23](#)].

But, raised to the highest height, feeling like he was the king of the world, Solomon fell, when he started to take the glory and compliments to himself rather than redirecting them to God. Eventually Jehovah's temple became known as Solomon's temple. The true follower of God will put Him first and give Him the best of everything he has. When we hold up the name of God, and give Him glory, then He can bless our spirit and our mind. Jesus, who was God, always lifted up the name of His heavenly Father. He taught His disciples to pray, "Our Father, holy is Your name." [[Matthew 6:9](#)]. "Yours is the glory." [[Matthew 6:13](#)]. When He healed people, they glorified the God of Israel [[Matthew 15:31](#)].

[Jeremiah 9:23](#) This is what the LORD says: "Don't let the wise boast in their wisdom, or the powerful boast in their power, or the rich boast in their riches." <sup>24</sup> But those who

wish to boast should boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD who demonstrates unfailing love and who brings justice and righteousness to the earth, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken! [Jeremiah 9:23-24 NLT](#).

It was not only Solomon who had the opportunity to spread the knowledge of God's law and His goodness. The land of Israel, especially with the expanded borders during the reign of Solomon, saw lots of traffic, in travelers, and caravans, of people who came from distant lands to buy and sell goods. All of these visitors would most likely have taken note of the prosperity, peace and happiness of the Israelites. All could have been told that Jehovah and His law were the reason for their peace and prosperity, and they would have taken this knowledge to their homes or wherever they were traveling to.

Instead, both Solomon and the people used this opportunity to enrich themselves through trade with foreigners. Solomon built a fleet of ships that sailed to distant lands, that brought back lots of gold other exotic plants, animals, and precious stones [[2 Chronicles 8:18](#); [1 Kings 9:26-28](#); [1 Kings 10:11](#)].

In great contrast to Solomon, Jesus, Who had all power within Himself, never used it for His own benefit, not even having a home [[Matthew 8:20](#)]. Jesus took advantage of the centers of travel, but only for the purpose meeting many people, and spreading His teachings to as many households and nations as possible. In this way an interest was stirred up in the prophecies about the Messiah. The city of Capernaum was on the highway from Damascus to Jerusalem, as well as to Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea, and it came to be known as "His own city," because of all the time He spent there [[Matthew 9:1](#)].

Today, the ability to reach people is so many times greater than it was in the days of ancient Israel and the time of Christ. Think about how news and information used to be carried by a person on foot or at best a horse, versus how we can communicate almost instantaneously now over telephone and streaming live events all over the world. Our ability to travel such great distances in such short times was impossible in 1900, not to mention thousands of years ago in Bible times. We should take advantage of modern technology to sow the seeds of the gospel, so it will have the chance to take root and grow. We should learn lessons from the failures of Israel as described in the Bible, yet history still repeats itself with the church of God today. God is ready to bless the efforts of those who will not trust their own abilities but depend completely on Him, to save souls for His kingdom. If the church will move forward, united, showing the beauty of God's character, and His spirit of self-sacrifice, His blessings will be with them.

## *Chapter 5—Solomon’s Repentance*

Solomon was honored to have God appear to him 2 times, once at the start of his reign, and once after the dedication of the temple. Along with the promise of great and wonderful things, he was given a warning of what would happen if he failed to stay faithful to God. Sadly, Solomon did turn away from God as described in the previous chapter. This is how he reflected on it toward the end of his life.

“I constructed great buildings, I planted vineyards, gardens, and orchards, I had many men and women who did anything I asked of them. I accumulated much gold and silver and other things that kings like to collect. I had people constantly ready to entertain me with music and singing. I was greater than anyone who ever came before me.”

“I gave myself anything I desired, and I was pleased with everything I had accomplished. But in the end, when I looked back on everything I had done, it was all meaningless.”

“Then I realized how valuable wisdom is, and why it is so much better than foolishness, yet the wise person and the fool both die at the end of life. So, I hated life, and the fact that everything I accumulated and made will just be left to someone else.” [[Ecclesiastes 2:4-18](#)].

Solomon learned from personal experience how meaningless life apart from God is. The pursuit of earthly things, and the worship of false gods, left him depressed and without any joy in life, and no hope for the future.

But God did not give up on Solomon. He sent messages of warning and correction. He punished him by not protecting him from enemies such as the Edomites and the Syrians. Even one of his most trusted officers rebelled against him [[1 Kings 11:14-28](#)]. Finally, through a prophet the message was given to Solomon, “Because you have not kept My commandments, I will tear the kingdom away from your son and give it to one of your officers. But because of my promise to David, I will not do it during your lifetime, but it will happen to your son.” [[1 Kings 11:11-12](#)].

Solomon had been troubled for some time by the hopelessness and meaninglessness of life and had for the first time been threatened by enemies. This judgment from God against his kingdom and his dynasty finally woke him up from his sins and made him decide to try to turn back to God. The fact that God had sent a message to him made him realize that God was still trying to reach him. Solomon once again acknowledged the lovingkindness of God, and the fact that He is greater than the highest power on earth.

Step by step, Solomon began to climb out of the pit of sin and folly toward the state of purity and holiness from which he had fallen so far. For some time, his mind had been troubled about the future, and whether he had ruined everything he had built. Now as he was being punished by enemies, and his body was aging, he finally turned back to the fountain of life, from which he had drunk in his early years. God was ready to take him back and deliver his soul from eternal death, which he was powerless to do on his own.

Solomon could not escape the consequences of his sins, but he could warn others of the dangers of the path he had taken. He now realized that he had led many others in the nation down the path of sin, and now he wished to warn them, lest they be permanently lost because of the example he had set for them.

Solomon realized before it was too late for him that the consequences of sin do not always follow immediately, which can lead people to continue doing evil. Sometimes we see sinners having a long life and appearing to be doing well, but in the end we know that it is the people who love and obey God that will truly live long, making the life of the wicked seem like a passing shadow [[Ecclesiastes 8:11-13](#)].

In his early life, Solomon wrote many sayings, sharing the wisdom he received from God. In his later years, he wrote from his experience and tried to warn people from repeating his folly. He wrote, “Words of the wise are like painful pokes to keep an ox on the right path.” [[Ecclesiastes 12:11](#)]. “My final conclusion is that the only thing that matters is love and respect for God, and to keep His commandments. This is the only thing that we need to do. In the end God will judge each person for the things they did, even for the things they did in secret.” [[Ecclesiastes 12:13-14](#)].

[Ecclesiastes 12:1](#) Don't let the excitement of youth cause you to forget your Creator. Honor him in your youth before you grow old and say, "Life is not pleasant anymore." <sup>2</sup> Remember him before the light of the sun, moon, and stars is dim to your old eyes, and rain clouds continually darken your sky. <sup>3</sup> Remember him before your legs--the guards of your house--start to tremble; and before your shoulders--the strong men--stoop. Remember him before your teeth--your few remaining servants--stop grinding; and before your eyes--the women looking through the windows--see dimly. <sup>4</sup> Remember him before the door to life's opportunities is closed and the sound of work fades. Now you rise at the first chirping of the birds, but then all their sounds will grow faint. <sup>5</sup> Remember him before you become fearful of falling and worry about danger in the streets; before your hair turns white like an almond tree in bloom, and you drag along without energy like a dying grasshopper, and the caperberry no longer inspires sexual

desire. Remember him before you near the grave, your everlasting home, when the mourners will weep at your funeral. <sup>6</sup> Yes, remember your Creator now while you are young, before the silver cord of life snaps and the golden bowl is broken. Don't wait until the water jar is smashed at the spring and the pulley is broken at the well. <sup>7</sup> For then the dust will return to the earth, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. [Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 NLT](#).

Solomon's words of warning, though they are addressed to the young, apply to those in their later years as well. Solomon fell in the prime of his adulthood, when he should have been strong. Security for your soul does not come from having an important position, or having many things given to you. It is only by being alert, and through prayer that we can be safe in God. Even a person who has faithfully served God for most of their life, can fall to Satan's temptations, if he trusts in himself instead of God.

At any time throughout the history of the world and in every country, the law for building a good, peaceful, happy society has always been the same, "You shall love Jehovah with all your heart, and love your neighbor as yourself." [[Luke 10:27](#)]. God is the foundation of salvation, wisdom, knowledge, and stability for every society [[Isaiah 33:6](#); [Deuteronomy 4:6](#); [Psalm 19:8](#); [Psalm 15:2-5](#)].

Those who learn about Solomon's fall, and understand the warnings he wrote, will recognize the temptations that caused his downfall. The Bible is the word of God, and contains His Law, as well as the warnings that Solomon wrote, but unless we read, accept, and obey, it cannot help us. Unless we completely depend on the word of God and the power He makes available to us through prayer, we cannot resist the temptations of Satan.

No one who would make heaven unclean will be allowed to enter [[Revelation 21:27](#)]. But the example of Solomon can give everyone hope that those who have fallen very low, can still be forgiven, and can come back to being obedient children of God. [Isaiah 55:7](#) Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously. [Isaiah 55:7 NLT](#). [Hosea 14:4](#) The LORD says, "Then I will heal you of your faithlessness; my love will know no bounds, for my anger will be gone forever. [Hosea 14:4 NLT](#).

The repentance of Solomon was true and sincere, but the years of his sinful example did not just disappear. Many had been led into sin and did not change their evil ways just because he did. There were also some who did not fall into sin who did not trust him anymore. Sadly, many future kings would follow his sinful example.

In the days after his repentance, Solomon wrote, [Ecclesiastes 9:18](#) Better to have wisdom than weapons of war, but one sinner can destroy much that is good. [Ecclesiastes 9:18 NLT](#). [Ecclesiastes 10:5](#) There is another evil I have seen under the sun. Kings and rulers make a grave mistake [Ecclesiastes 10:5 NLT](#). [Ecclesiastes 11:1](#) Send your grain across the seas, and in time, profits will flow back to you. [Ecclesiastes 11:1 NLT](#).

As a king, Solomon had an influence on many people, but every person has an influence on others, even if it's just a few. Our influence can either be a blessing or a curse to them. It can either be filled with selfishness and unhappiness, or faith, hope, courage, and love. It is very sad to think that we could have an influence that could contribute to the eternal death of someone.

It is a law of life, that seeds sown will produce a harvest. One person's bitterness can be like a poison to many [[Hebrews 12:15](#)]. Evil influences can last for generations, and even for eternity.

## *Chapter 6—Splitting of the Kingdom*

This chapter is based on [2 Chronicles 10-12](#).

Solomon died and his son Rehoboam reigned in his place [[1 Kings 11:43](#)]. All Israel gathered in Shechem, where Rehoboam expected to be officially crowned as king. But in fulfillment of the punishment prophesied, Jeroboam, son of Nebat, had already been told that God would take 10 tribes from the house of Solomon and give them to him [[1 Kings 11:28-31](#)].

Jeroboam was told the reason for the split in the kingdom of Israel was because the people were worshipping false gods of the surrounding nations and had given up the worship of Jehovah. Jeroboam was also told that he would not reign over the entire kingdom, because of the promise made to David, who would always have a son on the throne [[1 Kings 11:33-35](#)].

During the bad years of Solomon's reign, to support his extravagant lifestyle, he began taxing the people very heavily, partly through labor, like slaves on his many building projects. Now the people with Jeroboam as their leader peacefully asked Rehoboam if he would agree to cut their taxes and forced labor requirements and promised to serve him if he would. Rehoboam wisely asked for some time to make his decision and told the people to return in 3 days for his answer.

Rehoboam first asked his father's advisors how he should respond, and they said, "If you are kind to the people, they will serve you faithfully forever." Then he asked his friends for their advice, and they gave him the opposite advice, suggesting that he should be tougher on them than his father was. Rehoboam liked the idea of being tough and strong, and fired the old men, and made his friends his advisors.

When Jeroboam and the people came back, Rehoboam said to them, "If you think my father was hard on you, I am tougher than my father and will make you work harder. My father only used whips to make you work, but I will use scorpions." This choice by Rehoboam and his advisors was made out of pride, selfishness, and a love of power. This abuse of power was not in God's plan for his people and Rehoboam would not be able to carry it out. When Jeroboam and the 10 tribes other than Judah and Benjamin heard this response from Rehoboam, they said, "We are not related to David, or those inheriting his kingdom. Let us return home and let the house of David rule themselves." When Rehoboam saw what was happening, he tried to stop it by sending Adoram who was the chief tax collector to try to negotiate, but they killed him by stoning. This scared Rehoboam, so he quickly got in his chariot and fled to Jerusalem.

So, the 10 northern tribes chose Jeroboam to be their king and created their own government and kingdom. Rehoboam responded by assembling the fighting men from Judah and Benjamin, which numbered 180,000, to try to force the 10 northern tribes to submit to his rule. But God sent Shemaiah to Rehoboam with a message, “Do not go fight against your fellow Israelites, and return to your own homes. I have allowed this to happen.” To their credit, they obeyed the word of the Lord, and did not attack, but went home.

For 3 years the kingdom of Rehoboam prospered, and he built strong cities and forts as a first line of defense for Jerusalem. But the real reason the southern kingdom prospered is that they recognized God as the true King and worshipped Him. Because of this, many people from the north that wanted to worship and sacrifice to Jehovah moved south and added to the strength of the kingdom.

If Rehoboam had continued on this path, with God’s blessings, he could have been a good king, with a peaceful, happy, and prosperous kingdom. But, when Rehoboam felt that things were going well, and his kingdom was secure, he stopped honoring the law of God, and introduced idol worship, and most of the people followed his example.

It is sad that Israelites who were called by God to be a light to the world were trying to become more like the surrounding nations. Most people are easily influenced, and because of sin, the tendency is toward evil. Every person has the potential to be an influence on others, and that is why it is important to realize that our lives can be a light to cheer and guide others from darkness and depression into happiness and eventually eternal life.

Because of their disobedience, God’s did not protect Judah when Shishak king of Egypt attacked them with 1,200 chariots, 20,000 horsemen, and foot soldiers without number. He took the strong border cities and forts and reached the capital. Then the prophet Shemaiah went to Rehoboam with a message, “The Lord says, because you have rejected Me, I have not protected you from Shishak.”

The people took the warning from the Lord, and humbled themselves before God, acknowledging His righteousness. Because of this the Lord did not allow Shishak to completely destroy the kingdom, but he took treasures from the temple and the palace. Then Rehoboam made shields of brass to replace the shields of gold that his father had made.

Because the Israelites had turned back to the Lord, they prospered again, but after a time they turned back to idolatry. After a relatively short reign of mostly doing evil, Rehoboam died, and his son Abijah became king.

After the kingdom of Israel was split, it never fully regained the glory it experienced under David and Solomon. In the southern kingdom, the dynasty of David had some good kings, who honored God and walked in the footsteps of their great ancestor David, and at these times God was able to bless them. But the seeds of evil sown by Solomon were never completely removed.

The southern kingdom went back and forth between good and evil, but for His good purpose, and because of His love and mercy, God preserved them from complete destruction. Even when they were carried away into captivity God did not forsake them. Their suffering was like a furnace, that purifies gold, which finally produced a people who honored God and His law.

## *Chapter 7—Jeroboam*

This chapter is based on [1 Kings 12:25-14:26](#).

Jeroboam had been promoted under Solomon, because of his natural leadership skills. Now he was in a position to implement the best of what he saw under Solomon, and to avoid the bad. But Jeroboam did not trust God and feared that the people would leave his kingdom and move south because of the sacrifices and worship at the temple. To solve this problem, Jeroboam decided to create 2 places of worship in the northern kingdom, one in Dan and the other in Bethel.

Jeroboam told his people that they would still worship Jehovah in their own country, but they would have a visible representation of their invisible God. A golden calf was made and placed at each place of the 2 worship sites. He may have had the best intentions, but he was breaking one of the 10 commandments which said, “You shall not create for yourself any image to bow down to or worship.” [[Exodus 20:4-5](#)].

Jeroboam said to the people, “It is too far for you to go to Jerusalem to worship, so think of these calves as the gods that brought you out of Egypt.” He hoped that the priests and Levites would continue in their role of leading out in worship and sacrifice, but they refused and fled to the southern kingdom, along with many other people who did not wish break the second commandment. Because of that Jeroboam took anyone who was willing and made them priests at his temples.

In His love, God would not allow Jeroboam’s bad idea to continue without a warning. While he was in the very act of burning incense at the dedication of his temple in Bethel, a prophet from the southern kingdom of Judah appeared before him and spoke this message from the Lord to the altar, “A child will be born in the dynasty of David named Josiah; and he will burn the bones of your priests upon you. This is the sign that this message is from the Lord, the altar will be broken, and the ashes will come pouring out.” Immediately, it happened just as the prophet said.

Rather than accept this message from God, Jeroboam became angry and was going to arrest the prophet. When he pointed to the prophet and said, “Arrest him,” his arm immediately withered and froze up, and he couldn’t move it. This terrified the king, and he immediately changed his attitude toward the prophet, asking him to pray to God to heal his arm. The prophet did, and the king’s arm was healed.

Now Jeroboam was grateful to the prophet and asked him to return to the palace with him where he could be refreshed and receive a reward. But the prophet answered, “Even if you offer to give me half of your palace, I would turn you

down, because God told me, ‘Eat no bread, drink no water, but go back home the by the same route you went.’” On his way home, the prophet was met by an old man who claimed to be a prophet also. The old man lied and said, “An angel spoke to me and told me to bring you back to my house to be refreshed with bread and water.” The old man repeated his message and urged the young prophet to obey, and finally he did.

When the two men were sitting at the table, the Spirit of God took over the old man and said to the prophet from Judah, “Because you disobeyed the command I gave you, you will not return home or be buried with your ancestors.” The young prophet got back on his donkey and headed home. On the way he was met by a lion that killed him but didn’t eat him, and then just stood beside the donkey and the dead body of the prophet.

God’s judgment on the disobedient prophet was carried out immediately, which only reinforced his message to Jeroboam. But the king did not repent, and continued with his plan, causing Israel to fall into sin. The idol worship and disobedience of God’s laws became worse and worse during Jeroboam’s reign. Finally, the prophet Ahijah, who had told Jeroboam that he would become king, came to him with this message from God, “God will shake Israel, like grass growing in a swift stream, and they will be uprooted from the good land that He gave them. And they will be scattered beyond the river because they have made groves to worship idols, making God angry. God will finally give up on Israel, because of the sins of Jeroboam, and the sins he led Israel to commit.”

The judgment from God was delayed for many years, giving Israel plenty of time to repent and come back to him. But the northern kingdom of Israel was ruled by one evil king after another, and things only got worse, as they went deeper and deeper into idolatry. There were always a faithful few who stayed true to Jehovah even when they were surrounded with wickedness and idolatry. Through those many dark years, God sent the prophets Elijah, Elisha, Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, and others to warn Israel and to try to call them to repentance.

## *Chapter 8—National Apostasy*

This chapter is based on [1 Chronicles 14-16:12](#)

Nadab, the son of Jeroboam sat on the throne for only a few months when he was killed by Baasha in a military uprising to take over the government. Nadab and all possible heirs to the throne were killed, fulfilling the prophecy of Ahijah because of the sins of Jeroboam [[1 Kings 15:29-30](#)]. Overlapping the evil reigns of Baasha, Elah, Zimri, and Omri in the north, Asa reigned in the south for over 40 years. And Asa did what was right in the sight of God, destroying altars and high places to strange gods, along with the images and groves. He commanded all of Judah to obey the commands of God and the southern kingdom had peace.

Asa's faith was tested when Zerah led an Ethiopian invasion with 1 million men and 300 chariots. But Asa did not put trust in his own military, and trusted God instead. He had loved and obeyed God when things were going well, and now that he was in danger, he went to God for help. Asa prayed, "It is no trouble for You to help us whether there are just a few or many coming against us. We trust that You will be with us when we go against this great army. O Lord, You are God, do not let man win against You." Asa understood that there was a battle between good and evil, and that he was not just going up against the Ethiopian army but against power of Spiritual wickedness. [Ephesians 6:12](#) For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. [Ephesians 6:12 NLT](#).

Asa's faith was rewarded when God defeated the Ethiopians, and they fled from the Lord and Asa's troops. As they returned in victory, the Spirit of God came upon Azariah, son of Oded, and said to them, "The Lord is with you while you are with Him. If you look for Him, you will easily find Him. But if you reject and leave Him, He will leave you. Be strong in the Lord and you will be rewarded."

With renewed confidence in God, Asa began a second cleansing of the land of idolatry, including some of the Israelite cities he had taken from Ephraim. Then he put out a call to his entire kingdom, but also included Israelites from the north, and even foreigners. Many people came from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon, when they saw that God was blessing Asa. This great meeting was in the 3<sup>rd</sup> month of the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Asa, and great offerings were given to God from the victory over the Ethiopians, and many oxen and sheep were offered as sacrifices. Then all the people entered into a covenant with Jehovah, to serve Him, and there was peace and rest throughout the kingdom.

Near the end of Asa's reign, in the 36<sup>th</sup> year, the king of Israel invaded Judah and took the city of Ramah. Instead of trusting God for help, Asa made an alliance with Ben-Hadad of Syria and asked for help in driving the king of the north out of his land. Then the prophet Hanani went to Asa with this message from the Lord, "Because you relied on Ben-Hadad instead of the Lord your God, now you have lost control of Syria. Didn't God deliver you from the great army of the Ethiopians because you asked Him for help. He is always looking throughout the whole earth for people who love and obey Him so He can bless them. Because you did this, you will continue to have wars." Instead of accepting the rebuke from the Lord, Asa took his anger out on the messenger and put him in prison. Then Asa began oppressing the people of his own kingdom. In the 39<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, he got very sick, but instead of asking God for help, he only called on doctors, and two years later he died, and his son, Jehoshaphat became king.

A couple years before the end of Asa's reign, Ahab became king in the kingdom of Israel. Omri, Ahab's father was more evil than all the kings of Israel before him, but Ahab was even worse [[1 Kings 16:25, 30](#)]. Even though Jeroboam had pushed Israel into idol worship, at least he claimed that they were worshipping God. But Ahab boldly took Israel into full Baal worship, completely rejecting Jehovah. This act was greatly influenced by his wife, who was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Zidon, and high priest of Baal. Ahab made a temple for Baal worship in his capital city, Samaria, and then set up altars and worship sites throughout the land. He set up the tree groves, temple prostitutes, and priests, and almost all of Israel worshipped Baal.

Under the rule of Ahab and Jezebel, Israel wandered so far from God that they were even like the people that were driven out of the land before them [[1 Kings 21:26](#)]. Images of Baal and Ashtoreth were everywhere, and the air was filled with the smoke of the offerings to them. There were also sacrifices to the sun, moon, and stars, and the people were taught that the earth, fire and water were under the control of Baal and Ashtoreth. The worship of these false gods was attractive to many because it allowed them to indulge in sinful sexual pleasures in the name of religion and worship.

Though it seemed that all Israel had forsaken God, there were a few who remained faithful, and through these few the Lord sent warning messages to the king and the people. But these warnings had no effect, and it seemed that Israel was hopelessly lost. Nothing but the miraculous power of God could save the nation, which was exactly where was coming, in one of the boldest and most faithful prophets to ever be called.

## *Chapter 9—Elijah the Tishbite*

This chapter is based on [1 Kings 17:1-7](#).

East of the Jordan River, in the mountains of Gilead, lived a man of prayer, and great faith. During the evil reign of Ahab, this man would be used by God to interrupt the spread of evil in Israel. When Elijah the Tishbite began his ministry, no one knew who he was, but God's blessing was on him and gave his words great power. He would be known as the voice crying in the wilderness, to call out people's sins, but his message also offered mercy and forgiveness from God.

Israel's great sinfulness and idol worship made Elijah sad, but it also made him angry. How could they do this after all that God had done for them? From his mountain home Elijah prayed for Israel, that they would turn back to God, even if it meant going through some hard times.

Elijah's prayers were finally answered when God sent him to Ahab to declare the Lord's punishment on Israel. He knew he would be in danger but did not hesitate to obey. He went to the palace in Samaria, and without asking anyone for permission, walked right into the presence of the king and announced that as a punishment from God, there would be neither dew nor rain for 3 years. Before Ahab could react from his surprise, and as suddenly as he had appeared, Elijah was gone. Even as he was leaving, God told him to hide by the brook Cherith where he would have water to drink and would be fed by ravens.

Word spread of the surprising and sudden announcement at the palace, but nobody believed it would actually happen. But after a few months without rain, the streams began to dry up, and the crops began to wither. Ahab tried to find Elijah, but he could not be found anywhere. Jezebel worked together with her priests to try to find him but was also unsuccessful. Worshipers of Baal believed that nature was under his control but nothing the people or priests could do would break the curse and bring rain. God was showing them how useless and helpless their false gods were.

Year after year went by with no rain, and the earth was dry and hard and, and animals began to starve from lack of food. Fields that used to grow crops were now dry and barren, and the trees in the groves dedicated to the worship of Baal were leafless. Dust swirled around carried by the hot dry air. Stored food began to run out, and the people were faced with famine and starvation.

The people had so forsaken God, that they didn't even make the connection that their rejection of Him and their sins were the reason for the drought. Jezebel blamed Elijah and claimed that if they could kill him, the gods would be satisfied

and would allow the rain to fall. Ahab was desperate to find Elijah and even looked for him in the surrounding nations. In her anger against Elijah, Jezebel began to hunt down and kill other prophets of Jehovah. Unknown to Ahab, one of his most trusted officials, a man named Obadiah, was a faithful worshipper of Jehovah and a prophet. He risked his life to save 100 prophets, by hiding them in a cave, and even bringing them food and water [[1 Kings 18:4](#)].

As the famine continued, people became more desperate, and children began to die. Maybe they were too stubborn to turn back to Him, or they failed to make the connection between their suffering and their rejection of Him. God has no pleasure in seeing people suffer, but He was willing to let them suffer from the famine, if it could save them from their sin. [[Ezekiel 18:23, 31-32; 33:11](#)].

The Israelites had been warned by prophets to turn from their worship of Baal back to Jehovah, but instead of obeying these messages, they hated the messengers. Now they were so angry at Elijah that they would gladly turn him over to Jezebel if they could only find him. There was only one way out of this famine for them, and that was to turn away from their sins. [2 Chronicles 7:13](#) At times I might shut up the heavens so that no rain falls, or command grasshoppers to devour your crops, or send plagues among you. <sup>14</sup> Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. [2 Chronicles 7:13-14 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 10—The Voice of Harsh Scolding*

This chapter is based on [1 Kings 17:8-24](#); [18:1-9](#).

Elijah was never found in the mountains by the brook Cherith where God told him to hide. But as the drought continued, his brook dried up, so God told him to go to Zeraphath in the heathen nation of Zidon where a widow would feed him. This woman was not an Israelite, but she had heard of their God and believed in Him. She did not know how to worship Him, but she obeyed and did what she knew.

Elijah went, and when he met the woman, she was gathering some wood to make a fire. Immediately, without any introduction, he asked for some water and bread. This woman was suffering from the famine as much as the Israelites were and knew she was preparing her last meal. So, she said to Elijah, “As the Lord your God lives, I don’t have any bread but only have a handful of flour and a little oil which I was about to use to make the last meal for me and my son.” Elijah said to her, “Don’t be afraid, go ahead and make the bread, but feed me first, then you can make more for you and your son, for this is what the Lord of Israel says, ‘Your container of flour will not run out, and your bottle of oil will not be used up until the day the Lord sends rain.’”

This widow had been used to treating strangers with kindness and providing for their needs, and she and her son had never gone hungry. This Phoenician woman trusted in the God of Israel, and did as Elijah asked, and the 3 of them ate and the flour and oil did not run out.

One day the son of the widow got very sick and died, and she said to Elijah, “What have I done now, did God kill my son because of some past sin?” But Elijah took her son up to the loft where he slept and laid him on his bed. Then he used his body to warm the body of the child, and he asked the Lord to give life to the child. He repeated this 3 times, and then God answered his prayer and the child lived. When he returned the child to the widow, she said, “Now I know for sure that you are a man of God, and you speak His words.” The woman had kindness and faith, and she was rewarded for both.

God still expects us to be kind to strangers today. [Hebrews 13:2](#) Don't forget to show hospitality to strangers, for some who have done this have entertained angels without realizing it! [Hebrews 13:2 NLT](#). [Isaiah 58:10](#) Feed the hungry, and help those in trouble. Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you will be as bright as noon. <sup>11</sup> The LORD will guide you continually, giving you water when you are dry and restoring your strength. You will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. [Isaiah 58:10-11 NLT](#). [Matthew 10:40](#) "Anyone who receives you receives me, and anyone who receives me receives

the Father who sent me. <sup>41</sup> If you receive a prophet as one who speaks for God, you will be given the same reward as a prophet. And if you receive righteous people because of their righteousness, you will be given a reward like theirs. <sup>42</sup> And if you give even a cup of cold water to one of the least of my followers, you will surely be rewarded." [Matthew 10:40-42 NLT](#).

During the years of the famine Elijah continued to pray for Israel's repentance. With sadness he watched the suffering and death from the famine. It had been about 100 years since the glorious reign of David, when Israel had sung hymns of praise to God. At that time, Israel recognized God as the Creator of all things and believed that He had all nature under His control. This understanding went all the way back to the days of Moses, who wrote: [Deuteronomy 28:12](#) The LORD will send rain at the proper time from his rich treasury in the heavens and will bless all the work you do. You will lend to many nations, but you will never need to borrow from them. [Deuteronomy 28:12 NLT](#).

At last, the time came, when God told Elijah to go see Ahab again. At this very time, Ahab and Obadiah were out searching for water for their animals and had split up to cover more ground. Elijah found Obadiah, who recognized him and immediately bowed down to him and said, "Is it really you, Elijah?" Elijah answered by saying, "Go tell Ahab that I am here." Ahab had desperately been looking for Elijah for 3 years and had not found him. Obadiah was sure that God would protect Elijah from Ahab by hiding him away again, and when he returned with Ahab, Elijah would be gone. Then Ahab would be angry with him and punish him by killing him. But Elijah promised Obadiah that he would not disappear, and that God wanted him to talk to Ahab today.

When Ahab came face to face with Elijah, he was angry at him but also afraid. He said, "Are you the one who has been causing this trouble for Israel?" Elijah answered, "It is not me, but you and your father's house that has troubled Israel, by rejecting the commandments of the Lord, and leading Israel to worship Baal."

Today, there is a need for a strong, straight forward voice of reproof for the people of God who are not faithful. There are too many sermons that are enjoyable to listen to, but do not give people the hard truths from the word of God. John the Baptist called the Pharisees poisonous snakes. [[Luke 3:7](#)]. In fact, the same John lost his life because he reproved the sin of Herod and his wife Herodias. After telling him the story, Nathan plainly said to king David, "You are the man." [[2 Samuel 12:7](#)].

If plain reproof was heard more often from the pulpit today, the power of God would be seen more often. The desire to please men leads many to hold back in preaching the truth. People who desire peace, when God has not spoken peace,

should be asking Him for forgiveness for their lack of moral courage. True love desires the honor of God first, and secondly, the salvation of souls. God is calling for men like Elijah, Nathan, and John the Baptist, who are willing to bravely speak the message of reproof, even if they have to sacrifice everything to do it. He is calling for men to do battle against the power of darkness, both the supernatural, but also in places of power on earth. Those who answer the call will hear the words, [Matthew 25:23](#) "The master said, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!' [Matthew 25:23 NLT](#)."

## *Chapter 11—Carmel*

This chapter is based on [1 Kings 18:19-40](#).

When they stood face to face, it was Elijah who commanded Ahab, saying gather all Israel and the priests of Baal and Ashtoreth on Mt Carmel. Ahab obeyed as if he had no other choice and sent messengers throughout the kingdom, and many responded. Before the drought, Mt Carmel was a beautiful place with green slopes covered with flowers and leafy trees. Now everything was brown, and the altars of Baal and Ashtoreth could easily be seen in their leafless groves. On the top of the mountain was a broken-down altar of Jehovah.

The mountain could be approached and seen from many parts of the kingdom of Israel, and many would be watching from the valley below. On the appointed day the king and his priests and prophets with the usual procession that accompanied royalty made their way to the summit. The priests knew that for 3.5 years, they had been helpless to convince Baal to send rain on the land. They were worried now about what they would be asked to do.

Elijah appeared to be alone against the king, and the priests and prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth, but with him were many unseen angels. Unashamed and unafraid, Elijah spoke out for all to hear, “How long will you remain undecided? If the Lord is God, serve Him, but if Baal is god follow him.” There was no response, but everyone watched and wondered what would happen next.

All of God’s creation is watching our world in the closing scenes of the battle between good and evil. God’s people are close to entering the promised land, but there are many, even generations who have gradually become blind to the truth. They have ignored the warnings and messages that God has sent them, and many are not willing to take their unpopular stand for Him. But at all times, God has always had strong men of truth, like Joseph, Elijah, and Daniel, who are not ashamed to stand for Him. Because of their boldness and faithfulness, these men receive special blessings on their efforts. They will be given a voice to stand up and demand that people choose who they will side with, whether it will be the small group who are faithful to Jehovah, or the vast majority who are not.

Elijah continued, “I am the only one representing Jehovah, and Baal has 450 representatives here. Let them choose 1 of the 2 bulls we brought and cut it into pieces and lay it on top of the wood on their altar. I will take the other and prepare it for the altar of Jehovah. The God that answers with fire will be the winner.” The contest was so straight forward and reasonable that no one could disagree, and Elijah told his opponents to go first.

The priests of Baal prepared their sacrifice and began their ritual, of dancing, jumping, screaming, and even cutting themselves as they circled the altar, calling out to their god to hear them. This continued from morning to noon with no response to their cries. As their desperation grew, the priests would have liked to sneak some fire under their sacrifice, but Elijah was watching them closely. At this point Elijah couldn't resist a little kidding around, so he said, "Surely Baal is a real god, so maybe you should cry out louder. Or maybe he is talking and not paying attention to you. Perhaps he is sleeping and needs to be woken up." The priests continued until evening, when they were all bloody from their self-inflicted cuts, and were completely exhausted. Finally, they had to give up in failure. Satan would gladly have lit the fire to consume the sacrifice, but God would not allow this either, so he remained helpless and could only watch.

Then at the time for the evening sacrifice to Jehovah, Elijah told the people to come closer, and he repaired the broken altar according to the law, using 12 stones. Elijah put the wood and the sacrifice on the altar, but then strangely dug a trench around the altar. Then he commanded some people to fill 4 large jugs of water and pour it over the sacrifice. And repeat it 2 more times leaving his sacrifice, the wood, and the altar completely wet and the trench full of water. Then with no leaping, dancing, shouting, or cutting himself, Elijah simply raised his hands toward heaven and prayed. "Lord God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am your servant, and am only doing what you ask of me. Hear me and let these people know that You are God, so they will turn their hearts back to You again."

As soon as Elijah finished his prayer, fire, like lightning, came down from heaven, and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, licked up the water in the trench and even the stones. This incredible display of power was seen in the valley surrounding the mountain where most of the people were gathered and watching. The fire made them think of the pillar of fire they had read and heard about that protected their ancestors as they came out of Egypt. The people closest on the mountain bowed down to the ground, and began to chant, "The Lord He is God, the Lord He is God." The united voices from the mountain could be heard in the valley all around. Then the people saw how wicked they had been and understood why God had stopped the rain. They had to admit that the God of Elijah was the one and only true God, over all their false gods.

God then told Elijah to destroy all the priests and prophets of Baal, who had been teaching, and conducting the idol worship. Elijah told the newly converted Israelites to grab the priests and prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth and not let any of them get away, and they were taken to the brook Kishon where they were killed.

## ***Chapter 12—From Jezreel to Horeb***

This chapter is based on [1 Kings 18:41-46; 19:1-8](#).

The door was open for a great spiritual revival in the kingdom of Israel. The people had seen undeniable, and powerful evidence of the power of Jehovah. The land was about to be watered with rain, and the people were celebrating. But there were still no clouds in the sky, so Elijah had gone off to pray in privacy.

In humility and faith Elijah prayed for Israel, asking that their repentance and acknowledgement of God would be rewarded with rain. Time and again Elijah had sent his personal attendant to go look over the sea to see if there were any rain clouds. Each time he came back without seeing any, Elijah continued pouring out his heart to God in prayer. On the 7<sup>th</sup> time, he came back and said there was a little cloud, about the size of his hand.

With great faith, Elijah immediately got up from his prayers, knowing that God would send rain. [James 5:17](#) Elijah was as human as we are, and yet when he prayed earnestly that no rain would fall, none fell for three and a half years! [James 5:17 NLT](#). If we have faith like his, we can also do great things for God. Throughout the history of God's people, there have been giants of faith, who have done righteous things, received promises from God, stopped lions, put out great fires, escaped being killed by the sword, did amazing acts in battle, and had great armies flee from them [[Hebrews 11:33-34](#)]. God's promise to us is, [Mark 9:23](#) "What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked. "Anything is possible if a person believes." [Mark 9:23 NLT](#).

It was nearing the end of the day when Ahab would be returning to his palace. But dark clouds were quickly gathering, and the rain began to pour down. The rain was coming down so hard that Ahab could not even see the path ahead of him. So, Elijah, with special strength from God, ran before the horses that were pulling Ahab's chariot, guiding them all the way from Mt. Carmel to the city gates. There are people who think some tasks should be done by others, who are less important than they are. They don't want to be seen doing the work of a servant. These people can learn a lot from the example of Elijah. When Ahab entered the city gates, Elijah stayed outside the city, wrapped himself in his cloak, and laid down on the ground to sleep.

When they were together, Ahab excitedly began telling Jezebel about the wonderful things that had happened that day. He told of the great and amazing power of Jehovah, that had proved beyond any doubt that He was God, and Elijah was his messenger. But when he told of how the priests and prophets of Baal and Ashtoreth were killed, Jezebel lost control of herself in anger. She refused to

accept the choice of the people, and she said, “Elijah is a dead man.” Then she even sent a messenger to Elijah that night, to deliver this message, “Jezebel says, so let the gods kill me or worse, if I do not make your life as one of those priests and prophets you killed, by this time tomorrow.”

It might seem that after facing the king, challenging hundreds of prophets to a contest, and winning the people over, Elijah would have been completely unafraid of this new threat. But wet, tired, and feeling all alone, he fled for his life. When he reached Beersheba, he told his servant to stay there and traveled for another day into the wilderness alone.

Elijah should not have run away from Jezebel. God would not only have protected him from her, but would have punished her, and the faith of the king and the people would have been strengthened. Then a great reformation could have taken place in the nation. But instead, as often happens, when coming down from a great high, an emotional low followed. And at that time Satan got to him, and he became depressed, and his faith grew weak.

Feeling completely alone while running for his life into the wilderness, Elijah came to a juniper tree and sat in its shade to rest. On top of his emotional low, he was completely exhausted, and discouraged, and prayed, “I can’t take it anymore God, please take my life, I am no better than my ancestors.” Then he fell asleep.

Everyone will go through times of disappointment and discouragement in their life. At those times it is easy to wonder if there really is a good God who loves us. Sometimes death seems better than continuing to live in hardship, pain, suffering, and hopelessness. If at those times, our eyes could be opened, we would see angels of God around us trying to help us turn our discouragement and despair, into new faith and hope.

When Job was sad and discouraged, he prayed: “I wish I had never been born, then I would not have experienced these terrible things that have happened to me. I wish God would just kill me, then I would have relief from this grief that I feel. I will not be quiet, I will express the deep sadness I feel, I will complain about how bitter I am. I hate my life, and I wish I could die; it will end at some point anyway. Life is short, so just let me die already.” [[Job 3:3](#), [6:2](#), [6:8-10](#), [7:11](#), [7:15-16](#)].

But God did not give Job the death he asked for but instead gave him this answer: “You will be faithful, and not fearful. Your misery will pass away just as water flows downhill. Your life will be so good in the future that these dark days will seem as light as the morning. Have hope that things will get better, because they will. You will be able to lie down to sleep without being afraid. You will be able to comfort and help many people. But the wicked will see no future, their only hope is death.” [[Job 11:15-20](#)].

Job was able to come out of his depression and said: “Even if God chooses to kill me, I will trust Him, because in the end, He will save me. I know that my Redeemer lives, and when life on this earth has come to an end, even though my body has returned to dust, I will see God. I will see Him with my own eyes, and that thought excites me.” [[Job 13:15-16](#), [19:25-27](#)].

We must have faith, which leads to hope and courage, in order to serve God. Being discouraged, shows a lack of faith, because God is able and willing to give His followers the strength they need to get through anything. The plans of those who oppose God may seem well organized and well supported. But He can use obstacles to strengthen the faith of His servants, and when He is ready, He can overcome anything for them. In the end, it is not our strength, but His that overcomes, when we have enough faith. [2 Corinthians 12:9](#) Each time he said, "My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness." So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. <sup>10</sup> That's why I take pleasure in my weaknesses, and in the insults, hardships, persecutions, and troubles that I suffer for Christ. For when I am weak, then I am strong. [2 Corinthians 12:9-10 NLT](#).

As Elijah slept, he was awakened by an angel who had brought him a jug of water and baked some bread for him. He got up, ate and went back to sleep immediately. A second time the angel did the same thing for him, and then after that Elijah went 40 days and nights without food as he traveled to Horeb, the mountain of God.

## *Chapter 13—Why are you here?*

This chapter is based on [1 Kings 19:9-18](#).

Elijah had hidden in a cave on Mt. Horeb and was tired and discouraged. He had showed great faith in confronting Ahab, and the false priests on Mt. Carmel. But he needed more faith to confront Jezebel, and to continue the work of reform in Israel. While in the cave, an angel spoke to him and asked, “Why are you here? You have followed God’s directions at each step of the way, and He even gave you strength to run before horses, but who told you to flee into the wilderness?”

Elijah answered, “I have been very bold for Jehovah, when the whole nation of Israel has forsaken Him. They have broken His altars, and killed His prophets, and I alone am left, and now they are trying to kill me.” The angel told him to stand at the entrance of the cave and wait for God to speak to him.

First a great windstorm struck the mountain and even broke off large rocks which fell to the ground. But Elijah didn’t hear the voice of God. Then he felt a violent earthquake but still didn’t hear God speaking. Finally, a great fire burned all around him, and still, he didn’t hear any words from God. After all of that, Elijah then heard God speak to him with a still small voice. After having just complained, Elijah was now humbled. He also realized that God does not always work in grand, powerful ways, but a quiet, firm trust in Him would always meet his needs. It is not by great and impressive presentations, or logic that cannot be argued against that people are truly converted, but by the quiet influence of the Holy Spirit.

In the quiet voice, God asked Elijah, “What are you doing here?” Elijah answered, “I have boldly stood up for You, while the children of Israel have forsaken You, broken down Your altars, and killed Your prophets. Now I am the only one left and they are trying to kill me.” God then let Elijah know that the sin in Israel would not go unpunished, and that people would be given the opportunity to make a choice to stand on the side of good or evil. God said, “Go back by way of Damascus, and anoint Hazael to be king over Syria. When you reach Israel, anoint Jehu to be king, and Elisha the son of Shaphat to succeed you as prophet. Evil doers will be punished first by attacks from Hazael of Syria, and those who survive will be killed by Jehu, and those who escape from Jehu will be killed by Elisha. And one more thing, you are not alone in being faithful to Me, there are 7,000 people in Israel that have not worshipped Baal and kissed his idol.”

The wickedness that exists today is similar to what was going on in Israel in Elijah’s day. Human ideas, science, and wealth are worshipped like idols. People think they have evolved to the state where their reason and logic is superior to the word of God. They say God’s law doesn’t apply anymore. They have rejected the

law of God which brings happiness and salvation. But as in Elijah's time, there are always some who remain faithful to God, who study to learn more about Him every day, and who look forward to the end of sin when He returns. There are also some who worship false gods, but who do so with a good and honest heart. They are in need of Bible truth, and when they hear it, they will turn from idolatry and fearlessly stand on God's side and obey His law.

Like Elijah, God asks many today, "What are you doing here, when I have asked you to go spread the good news of salvation to the world?" These followers of Christ need to learn the joy that He experienced by seeing sinners saved. God also calls families to leave their comfort zone of large churches, being surrounded by people who already have the truth, to go where it is needed. Some will even be called to places in the world where there is great darkness for lack of the good news of salvation. Answering this call will require sacrifice, but it is never more than Christ sacrificed to bring salvation to the world. People are willing to go through hardship to gain knowledge for the hope of wealth and power. Are there some who will sacrifice as much to bring salvation to others?

If people who are sacrificing much to do the work of God become discouraged for lack of results, they should remember the experience of Elijah. It is at times of weakness that Satan brings his greatest temptations, to try to cause God's people to fail. After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness, Moses lost sight of the source of his power and stumbled. Elijah showed faith during the famine, and the dangerous confrontation with Ahab and the priests of Baal, but after the great demonstration of God's power, in a moment of weakness, he lost faith in God's power to protect him. Human beings cannot stand against the power of Satan's temptations with their own strength, but all who cling tightly to God will have victory.

Jesus said to Peter, [Luke 22:31](#) "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift each of you like wheat. <sup>32</sup> But I have pleaded in prayer for you, Simon, that your faith should not fail. So when you have repented and turned to me again, strengthen your brothers." [Luke 22:31-32 NLT](#). Since Christ loved us enough to die for us, we can be sure He will never abandon anyone who comes to Him for forgiveness and help. God even sends angels to come the aid of those who are pressed upon by evil.

The prophet Ezekiel had a vision where he saw what looked like human hands under the wings of angels [[Ezekiel 10:8](#)]. This means that it is power from heaven that makes plans succeed. Human beings should not feel that God's work is dependent on them for success. We are sinful and limited beings, but God is perfect and limitless, and He will accomplish what He wants on earth.

## *Chapter 14—In the Spirit and power of Elijah*

History repeats itself and there are always people like Ahab and Jezebel. Though there may not be a gold image, people today are just as surely bowing down to the gods of this world: riches, fame, pleasure, and the false belief that it is right to follow desires of our heart. There are even many who call themselves Christians, that have more in common with those who hate God. As he did with Eve, Satan tempts people with the idea that they can become like gods if they don't let themselves be held back by God's law. Today many modern thinkers treat the Bible as a fairy tale.

The purpose of God's law from the beginning was to show us how to live in true happiness. Having rejected God's law, Satan wanted to get us to join him in rebellion against God. One of his greatest ideas was to slightly change the law so that people would be breaking it while thinking they are keeping it. This is not unlike the ancient prank where troublemakers would sometimes turn signposts to point in the wrong direction, causing great trouble for travelers. So little changed, yet so much harm could come of it.

Through His law, God commands us to keep the 7<sup>th</sup> day holy. Satan's approach has been to keep the law but change the day to the 1<sup>st</sup>. Before Israel received the law written on stone, he used Pharaoh to cause them to forget the Sabbath by forcing them work on it. Because of that, they were in a good position to appreciate and enjoy the Sabbath rest. In addition to the law, God reminded them of the importance of the Sabbath every week, by not allowing them to collect their food on that day.

The Sabbath was also to be a sign to us that we are holy, but after sin, it could still be a sign of the holiness that God wishes to give us. When Israel forgot the Sabbath, they also forgot their holiness, and they fell into idolatry [[Ezekiel 20:12, 16, 19-20](#)]. One of the reasons God allowed the Jews to be taken as captives to Babylon was because they broke the Sabbath [[Ezekiel 22:8, 31](#)]. After they were allowed to return home from Babylon, Nehemiah prevented them from trading on the Sabbath, hoping to keep them from bringing the same punishment on themselves again [[Nehemiah 13:18](#)].

Sadly, in their attempt to keep from breaking the Sabbath, the Jews began to add laws to keep from breaking laws. By the time of Christ there were laws upon laws upon laws for Sabbath keeping that had made it a terrible burden. Jesus rebelled against these manmade laws while keeping the true spirit of the Sabbath. When they accused him of breaking God's law, He said "I did not come to destroy the law Moses gave you, but I am the fulfillment of those laws. But God's law will

never pass away, even when the earth comes to an end, and after that it will be kept perfectly.” [[Matthew 5:17-18](#)]. As was mentioned above, Satan was able to get people to change the Sabbath day of worship from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 1<sup>st</sup>, and eventually he will succeed to the point that those who keep the 7<sup>th</sup> day will be treated as law breakers.

Today many treat the Bible as old and out of date for these modern times, and the law of God gets treated the same way. Our minds and bodies which are supposed to be the temple of God, are polluted with selfishness, envy, pride, and evil intentions. In fact, not only is God’s law set aside today, but those who keep it are made fun of. In the world today, violence and crime can be seen as the results of rejecting God’s law. It is only the smallest fraction of people on the earth who keep the true Sabbath, and laws will one day be made by men to enforce the keeping of the false Sabbath. Satan knows that those who honor the laws of men over the law of God will be destroyed in the end, and this is his goal. Respecting human ideas, and laws above those of God, is as bad as worshipping idols. But a day will come when man’s pride will be brought low, and God will be exalted [[Isaiah 2:11](#)].

But the world will not be destroyed without a warning. God will raise up men, who like Elijah, will speak boldly for Him. They will condemn the church for becoming so much like the world, and they will call people out of it, to keep the true Sabbath and the law of God. “Fear God and worship Him who created the heavens the earth and the waters. Babylon [the corrupted church] is fallen, because she caused all nations to sin using the power of the government that she controlled. If anyone obeys her, he will be marked, then he will receive the wrath of God, poured out, with full strength, and will be consumed with fire.” [[Revelation 14:7-10](#)].

People will be forced to make a decision between keeping the commandments of God, or following the teachings of the fallen church. Elijah said, “How long will you remain undecided? If the Lord is God, follow Him, but if Baal is, follow him.” [[1 Kings 18:21](#)]. The message for today is: “Babylon the great is fallen. Come out of her My people, so you don’t participate in her sins, and get punished with her.” [[Revelation 18:2, 4-5](#)].

Soon people will be forced to make a choice, whether they will keep God’s commandments, or the laws made by man. The true 7<sup>th</sup> day Sabbath is one of God’s commands, and the false 1<sup>st</sup> day Sabbath is man’s. The choice to obey God will be made more difficult with threats of prison and death. But surviving that persecution will purify God’s people even as gold is separated from impurities in the fire. Many great leaders in the church will fall, and when they fail to obey God, they will not be covered with Christ’s righteousness.

Even as there were faithful followers of Jehovah amid all the Baal worship, there are faithful worshippers of God scattered throughout every country. Keeping the false Sabbath is the mark that people will need to avoid being persecuted. But God's true followers will remain obedient to Him even when they are surrounded by wickedness, disobedience, and threats of death. At that time, they will shine like the stars, as lights seen in the darkness. Elijah was not aware of any other followers of God and thought he was alone. Today, we should not make the same mistake, to think that there are no other faithful followers of God.

## *Chapter 15—Jehoshaphat*

This chapter is based on [2 Chronicles 17-20](#).

Jehoshaphat was 35 years old when he became king of Judah. His father Asa had trusted and obeyed God for most of his life, leaving a good example for his son. Jehoshaphat followed the good example of his father and not the bad. In Judah, there remained some high places where people burned incense and Jehoshaphat didn't get rid of these right away [[1 Kings 22:43](#)], but God blessed him for his own faithfulness, and the kingdom was very stable under him. The people of Judah were happy for the stability and their good king, and they gave him great riches and honor. This made him even stronger in the Lord, and he removed the high places and groves for idol worship and temple prostitution throughout Judah [[2 Kings 22:46](#)].

Jehoshaphat realized that the people needed to be taught the law of God, and to understand that their safety and prosperity depended on keeping it. So, he appointed people over the different regions of his kingdom to organize the priests to teach the people the Holy Scriptures. This instruction was well received by many, and there was a revival in the kingdom because of it. If people today would study, learn, and keep God's law, there would be much more peace in the world.

The kingdom of Judah lived in peace and prosperity for many years, with surrounding nations paying taxes to them. Jehoshaphat was a wise and successful king, and he made Judah strong, and safe, and he had many brave and mighty men in his army.

One mistake Jehoshaphat made was to allow his son to marry Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. He did this to maintain peace with the kingdom of Israel, but this was not an act God approved of. Years later many of the royal family of David would be killed because of this.

Though Jehoshaphat remain faithful to God himself, he was friendly toward the wicked kingdom of Israel and even joined them in battle against the Syrians. Before going into battle, Jehoshaphat wanted to ask God if their plans to attack Ramoth-Gilead would be successful. Ahab called his false prophets, and they said "Go, go and God will make you successful." But Jehoshaphat did not trust these prophets and asked if there was a true prophet of God available. Ahab answered, "There is a man named Micaiah, the son of Imlah, but I hate him because he always prophesies bad things for me" [[1 Kings 22:8](#)]. Jehoshaphat insisted, so Ahab sent for him and when he came, he said, "I saw all Israel scattered on the hills like sheep without a shepherd. And God said, let them return to their homes in peace." But, since Jehoshaphat had already promised Ahab he would go with him,

they decided to go anyway. In the battle the next day, Ahab was shot, and word was sent out to the army, “Every man, retreat to your own cities and homes.” Before the end of the day, Ahab was dead.

After the defeat, when Jehoshaphat returned home, he was met by a prophet who gave him this message from the Lord, “Should you join the wicked and befriend those who hate the Lord? Because of this God will punish you, but He still loves you because of your devotion to Him.”

In his later years, Jehoshaphat continued his efforts to educate and convince the people to be faithful to God. He even extended his efforts into the kingdom of Israel. Another thing that Jehoshaphat did that was very good for the kingdom was to set up fair and impartial judges throughout the land. Then he established a supreme court in Jerusalem, composed of priests and Levites, to which people could appeal if they thought they did not get justice in their local court.

Jehoshaphat commanded the judges that they must never take bribes or even gifts from anyone. He also told the judges to base their decisions on the law of God. The chief priest, Amariah, was the highest authority in the court system. Even though it should have been implied by fair and impartial judgment, Jehoshaphat specifically instructed the judges to, “Defend the poor and fatherless. Give justice to those who are being treated unfairly and deliver them from the power of wicked people.”

Near the end of his reign, the Moabites and Ammonites and other allies prepared to attack Judah. Even though he had been preparing his whole reign to defend his kingdom by building up forts, and keeping a strong army, the first thing he did was to humble himself and ask God for help. He commanded all the people of Judah, to pray to God and ask for His protection. From the court of the temple, Jehoshaphat prayed, “O Lord God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and don’t You rule over all the kingdoms of the heathen? Aren’t You so strong and powerful that no kingdom can defeat You? Didn’t you drive out the people from the land before our ancestors moved in? Didn’t we build this temple to honor and worship You? Didn’t you promise that if bad things were happening and we came to the temple and prayed for Your help, that You would hear and help? Now, see how the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites, whom you would not let us harm when we came out of Egypt, are repaying us for that kindness. God, please deal with them for their wickedness. We are too weak to defend ourselves against them, and we look to You for help.”

All the people joined with Jehoshaphat in humbling themselves and praying to God for help. Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon a Levite, a descendant of Asaph, and he said, “Jehoshaphat, people who live in Jerusalem, and everyone in the kingdom of Judah, listen to what the Lord has to say to you. ‘Do not be afraid or

worried about this great army coming to attack you. The battle is not yours but God's. Tomorrow when you go out to meet them, when they come up by the cliff of Ziz, you will not need to fight them at all. Just stand still and watch and see the salvation of the Lord.” Then Jehoshaphat and all the people bowed down and worshipped the Lord, and the Levites stood up to praise the Lord God of Israel with singing.

The next morning, as Judah prepared to march out to battle, Jehoshaphat had these words of encouragement for them, “Listen O Judah, and you residents of Jerusalem. Believe in the Lord Your God, and you will be safe and secure, believe in His prophets and you will prosper.” Then Jehoshaphat put the choir at the front, and they sang songs of praise and thankfulness to the Lord for the promised victory. If more praising of God could be heard today, there would be more hope, courage, and faith among God's people.

That day, the Lord caused the Ammonites and Moabites to turn on the Edomites and destroy them. Then they turned on each other and fought until everyone was dead. When the people of Judah arrived, they saw the great army of their enemies all dead. We should remember that we are weak, but God is strong, and He is our defender.

Then the people of Judah gathered many valuable items from their dead enemies. When they arrived back at Jerusalem, they gathered at the temple and they worshipped God with singing, and musical instruments. The following Psalm must have expressed their feeling perfectly at the time.

[Psalm 46:1](#) ... God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. <sup>2</sup> So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. <sup>3</sup> Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! Interlude <sup>4</sup> A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High. <sup>5</sup> God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed. From the very break of day, God will protect it. <sup>6</sup> The nations are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble! God's voice thunders, and the earth melts! <sup>7</sup> The LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress. Interlude <sup>8</sup> Come, see the glorious works of the LORD: See how he brings destruction upon the world. <sup>9</sup> He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire. <sup>10</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world." <sup>11</sup> The LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress. Interlude [Psalm 46:1-11 NLT](#).

Because of the faith of Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah, God was with them, and they were feared by all the surrounding nations, so they had peace and safety.

## ***Chapter 16—The Fall of the House of Ahab***

This chapter is based on [1 Kings 21](#); [2 Kings 1](#); [2 Chronicles 21-23](#).

One example of the bad influence Jezebel had on Ahab was the following story. Right next to Ahab's palace was a vineyard that belonged to Naboth. Ahab wanted this property to plant an herb garden, and asked Naboth to sell it to him, or trade it for an even better piece of land. But Naboth declined the king's offer saying that the land had belonged to his family for generations and the law didn't even allow him to sell it outside of his tribe [[Numbers 36:7-9](#)].

Ahab, who must have been used to getting his way, went home upset, crawled into bed and wouldn't eat. When Jezebel heard what had happened, she marched in Ahab's bedroom and yelled at him, "Are you not king of all Israel? Get up, eat, and be happy. I will get that property from Naboth for you." She then wrote a letter from Ahab to the elders of the city, that said, find 2 men who are willing to testify that Naboth blasphemed God and the king, and then carry out the sentence that the law demands by stoning him. Then she signed the letter with the king's ring.

The wicked elders of the city did just as the letter demanded, and then Jezebel told Ahab, "Go and take possession of the vineyard you wanted." Meanwhile, God told Elijah to go meet Ahab in Naboth's vineyard, and give him this message, "This is what the Lord says, 'Have you killed Naboth and stolen his land?'" Ahab answered, "How did you find me so quickly?" Elijah said, "I have found you because you are doing wicked things. The Lord says, 'I will send evil on you and your children. Your whole family will be wiped out just like the dynasties of the wicked kings, Jeroboam, and Baasha before you. This is because I am angry that you have led Israel into sin. As for Jezebel, dogs will eat her by the wall of Jezreel. Your children that die in the city will be eaten by dogs, and those who die outside the city will be eaten by birds.'"

When Ahab heard all this bad news, rather than getting angry at Elijah, or God, he tore his royal robes and put on clothes of mourning, and fasted, and was quiet. Then God said to Elijah, "Since Ahab humbled himself, he will not have to see all this evil, but it will come after he dies." Less than 3 years later, Ahab died in battle against the Syrians, and his son Ahaziah who sat on the throne, continued the evil practices of his parents, and Jeroboam.

Shortly after Ahaziah became king, he accidentally fell down from an upper floor in his palace and was seriously injured. He then sent some servants to inquire of Baal-Zebub the god of Ekron, whether he would recover or not. But these servants met Elijah on their way and received this message from him. "Is it because there is no God in Israel, that you are asking questions of the god of Ekron? Well, here is

the answer to your question from Jehovah, “You will not get up from your bed, and you will die from your injury.” When the servants returned with this message, the king asked who gave them this message? They said, “He was a hairy man with leather underwear.” Then Ahaziah knew it was Elijah and that the message could come true. Wishing to negotiate a different outcome, the king sent a company of 50 soldiers to bring Elijah to him. When he was told the men were destroyed by fire from heaven, he sent another 50, and the same thing happened. Knowing what had happened to the previous 2 groups, the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> group, humbly knelt and asked that his life and the lives of his men would be spared. Then he asked Elijah if he would come with them back to the king, which he did. When Elijah stood in front of the king in person, he said, “Because you sent messengers to Baal-Zebub, you will not get up from this bed, but you will die on it.”

People today may not worship golden statues of false gods, but idol worship is still very common. Students are educated in science and human knowledge, which leads to a more refined form of idolatry, but the result is the same. There are also secret associations where rituals are observed, and mediums communicate with spirits. People eagerly accept messages from the spirit world but reject the word of God. Some are frightened by the thought of communicating with spirits but embrace other more pleasing forms of the same thing in Christian Science, and Eastern Religions. Mystical healings through electricity, magnets, or exercising the power of the mind, are forms of idolatry embraced by many Christians. Satan is behind all these modern forms of idolatry and often takes control of people’s lives through their rituals and practices. If God was angry at Ahaziah, how much more would He be against people who should know better.

Ahaziah did not have a son, so his brother Jehoram sat on the throne and reigned for 12 years. Jezebel was still alive and continued her evil influence, but Jehoram was not as wicked, and he destroyed the images of Baal that his father had made. But he continued the calf worship that Jeroboam had begun [[2 Kings 3:2-3](#)].

During the reign of Jehoram, king Jehoshaphat of Judah died and his son, also named Jehoram reigned. Since Jehoram of Judah was married to the daughter of Jezebel, he was influenced by her and her mother, and he worshipped Baal. He even made high places in the mountains of Judah, leading his people into sin and temple prostitution.

Even though Elijah lived in the north, he could not remain silent as Jehoram dragged Judah into Baal worship, which had nearly destroyed Israel. He wrote a letter to Jehoram which read, “This is what the Lord God of David your father says: ‘You have not followed the example of your father Jehoshaphat and your grandfather Asa, but instead of followed the example of the kings of Israel. You

have also killed your brothers who were better than you. Now a great plague from the Lord will fall on the land, and will affect your children, your wives, and even you.” Then the Lord stirred up the Philistines and the Arabians who came and attacked Jerusalem, and carried away the king’s treasures, his wives, and all his sons except for the youngest. After this he was struck with the plague, and suffered terribly for 2 years, until he finally died. Then his youngest son Ahaziah, also known as Jehoahaz sat on the throne [[2 Kings 8:24](#)].

Ahaziah did as his mother Athaliah, daughter of Jezebel, advised, and he followed the example of the kingdom of Israel under Ahab [[2 Kings 8:27](#)]. Because of the family connections, he was good friends with his uncle Jehoram, king of Israel. One day he was visiting his uncle at Jezreel, who had been wounded in battle against the Syrians. Jehu was the commander of the army, but had also been secretly anointed by God’s command, to be the next king of Israel. At the time he was anointed, he was given the command to destroy the house of Ahab, to punish it for all the prophets and other good people that Jezebel had killed [[2 Kings 9:6-8](#)].

The army crowned Jehu as king of Israel, and then he immediately obeyed the command given to him. He killed Jehoram, and Ahaziah, who just happened to be visiting, then he went and killed Jezebel, and all the rest of the royal family of Ahab. He also killed all the priests and prophets of Baal, broke down the images, and destroyed its temple [[2 Kings 10:11,19,28](#)]. When Athaliah, the king’s mother in Judah, heard that her son was killed, she immediately began to kill all the possible heirs to the throne so that she could reign. But one baby named Joash was hidden away by Jehoida, the high priest and his wife, while Athaliah reigned for 6 years.

When Joash was still just a boy, the priests, Levites, and people of Judah, had had enough of Athaliah’s wicked reign and were ready to introduce the true heir to the throne. In the temple courtyard Jehoida the high priest anointed Joash and placed a crown on his head and the people shouted, “Long live the king.” [[2 Kings 11:12](#)]. When Athaliah heard the commotion, she went to see what was going on and she saw the boy with a crown and the princes and people rejoicing with trumpets. Then Athaliah tore her clothes and shouted, “Treason, Treason.” [[2 Kings 11:14](#)]. But Jehoida was ready for this and had soldiers arrest her and her supporters, and they took them out of the temple and executed them. This ended the life of the last remaining member of the family of Ahab. Though she had not corrupted the whole nation of Judah, she had seduced some to participate in Baal worship. But after her death, the people destroyed the temple of Baal, broke the altars and images and killed the priests [[2 Kings 11:18](#)]. Then the people of Judah recommitted themselves to serve the Lord, and there was rejoicing and the city had peace.

## *Chapter 17—The Call of Elisha*

God told Elijah to call Elisha to follow him as a prophet in Israel [[1 Kings 19:16](#)]. Elisha's father and his entire household were among those who had remained faithful to God and had not worshipped Baal. They were a wealthy family, but Elisha grew up working alongside his father's hired servants. His parents taught him about God, and he lived a quiet life in the country, doing manual labor. He was gentle, honest, and loved and honored God. He also had skills in leadership as well as teaching. By faithfully doing jobs around the home, he was preparing himself for bigger and more important duties. Many people feel like they want to do something great for God, and in the meantime neglect their daily duties. It is because of this that they are unfit to be given more important work for God. The mother who trains her children to love, obey, and honor God is doing His work just as much as the person preaching from the pulpit.

Elisha was plowing a field when Elijah found him. Without saying a word, Elijah simply threw his mantle, or outer coat on Elisha and continued walking. Elisha heard the Spirit of God calling to him and understood Elijah's action. He immediately stopped plowing and ran after Elijah, and said, "Let me say goodbye to my parents and then I will follow you." Elijah answered, "Go back to your work, I didn't tell you to follow me." But Elisha felt God calling and was willing to give up his comfortable life to wait on Elijah like a servant. Then he killed a pair of the oxen that he was plowing with, and using the wooden yoke to build a fire, he boiled the meat and fed everyone. Then he went with Elijah. [[1 Kings 19:20-21](#)].

The rich young ruler received a similar call from Jesus, to give up his life of comfort and accept a life of uncertainty. But unlike Elisha, he turned away, sad that cost of following Jesus was so high. [[Matthew 19:16-22](#)]. Not everyone is asked to serve God as Elisha was, and He doesn't ask everyone to sell everything they own like the rich young ruler. He does ask that He be the #1 priority in our lives, and that we try to keep our eyes open for opportunities to do big or small things each day for Him. It doesn't matter if you are a pastor, doctor, farmer, business owner, mechanic, or any other profession, we should always be watching for opportunities to tell others about the good news of salvation.

Elisha could have been tempted to regret his decision to follow Elijah. There was very much a master/student relationship and Elisha humbly and willingly served Elijah, doing even the simplest tasks like pouring the water when his master washed his hands. Elisha may have been enthusiastic about starting his prophetic ministry, but the tasks assigned to him at first were small and seemed unimportant. It is by humbly working with and learning from those who have the experience and the faith from doing the work of God, that young inexperienced workers should be

trained. In the same way the disciples, who lived and worked with Jesus, taught the next generation of workers for Him. [[1 John 1:1-3](#)]. It is a great responsibility, and an honor to train young workers for the cause of God. People who do this, work hand in hand with God, to train new workers that He has called. Many whom God calls are hardworking people, from farms, factories, and many other types of jobs. If those who are called will be humble, teachable, faithful, obedient, and willing to sacrifice, they will develop into people that God can give great responsibilities to.

Elijah, the greatest prophet since Moses, had been called to do big things. He did things on a large scale, attacking the evil that Ahab and Jezebel had seduced the nation with. He had killed hundreds of false priests and prophets in a single day and had at least stopped the momentum of the downward fall into idolatry. The people had been brought to face to face with the power of God, and many were beginning to return to Him. Elisha's job would be to patiently, quietly, and firmly lead them and teach them what God wanted for them. Samuel had started schools to teach young people about the beauty of God's law and what He wanted for His people. Elijah had restarted these schools that had closed for lack of leadership.

Just before Elijah was taken to heaven, he had taken Elisha on a tour of the schools, repeating the teachings that had been given before. He reminded them of the privilege that it was to be loyal to the God of heaven. He stressed the importance of keeping the teachings simple, so they could be repeated in the school, and when they went out to teach the people. Elijah was encouraged and happy to see how well the schools were doing.

As he made this last round of visits to the schools in Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho, he told Elisha to stay as he went on. God had revealed to Elisha and the students that Elijah would be taken to heaven. Now he would not miss a moment of time left with his master, and each time said, "As the Lord lives, I will not leave your side." As the two traveled, they came to the Jordan River and needed to cross. Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up and hit the water with it, and the water parted and they crossed on dry ground. When Elijah knew the time was near, he asked Elisha if he had one wish, what it would be. Elisha knew that the man he was about to replace was so honored by God, that he was about to be taken to heaven. Elisha wanted nothing more than to be able to be successful at the work God had called him to, and so he asked for twice as much of the Spirit of God that Elijah had. Elijah answered, "That is a big request and hard to grant, but if you are with me when I am taken, you will receive what you desire." Not long after, as they were walking and talking, horses and chariots that looked like they were on fire came down and picked up Elijah and took him to heaven [[2 Kings 2:1-11](#)].

Elijah represents those who will be taken to heaven at the second coming of Christ without having died. Elijah and Moses came down to talk to Jesus when He appeared in glory before His disciples on the mountain. It was a small representation of the second coming, where Jesus was clothed in glory, and He had with Him those He was saving, some who were alive at the time, and many who were resurrected. Those who were raised from the dead were given perfect bodies that would never break down, and would live forever, and those who were alive were changed in an instant [[1 Corinthians 15:51-52](#)].

When Elisha saw Elijah going up to heaven he said, “My father, my father, the chariots and the horsemen of Israel.” As a symbol of the work that was being passed on, Elijah had thrown his mantle down, and Elisha picked it up. When he reached the Jordan River on his way back, he copied the actions of Elijah, hitting the water with the mantle, and he said, “Where is the Lord God of Elijah?” and the waters parted the same way and he crossed on dry land. Some of the students from the school in Jericho had followed at a distance and saw the miracle at the river crossing, and they said, “The Spirit of Elijah is now with Elisha,” and they came and bowed down before him [[2 Kings 2:12-15](#)].

When a person who has done a great work for the Lord is finished, God can raise up someone else to continue that work. In some cases, the successor may do even greater things. Elisha had humbly followed Elijah around and served him, as a servant serves his master, but now he would take his place. He was faithful in the seemingly unimportant duties of a servant, and now he would also be faithful in greater duties of being a prophet to the nation of Israel.

## *Chapter 18—The Healing of the Waters*

At the time of Abraham, the Jordan Valley was green like the Garden of Eden. That is why Lot chose to live there when given the choice by Abraham [[Genesis 13:10,12](#)]. But when Sodom and the nearby cities were destroyed by fire, most of the area became a deserted wasteland. But there was a beautiful valley that had sprung back to life because it was watered by springs and streams. This is where the Israelites had camped near Jericho, on the west side of the Jordan River, just after crossing it. But the people of Jericho worshipped Ashtoreth, and had polluted the land, which God cursed when He destroyed the city. “The curse of God will be on anyone who rebuilds the city of Jericho. When they lay the foundation of the city, their firstborn son will die, and when they complete the gate of the city, their youngest son will die.” [[Joshua 6:26](#)].

For 500 years, no one had challenged the curse of rebuilding Jericho. But during the reign of Ahab, when Jezebel had revived the worship of Ashtoreth, a man named Hiel rebuilt the city. And when he laid the foundation, his firstborn Abiram died, and when he finished the city gate, his youngest son Segub died [[1 Kings 16:34](#)].

It was the school of the prophets near Jericho where Elisha first went after Elijah was taken to heaven. While there, people from the city came to him and said, “My lord, we beg you to notice how pleasant the surroundings of this city are, but there is no good water source. The spring that used to be the primary source of water is not drinkable now.” Elisha asked for some salt, and then he threw it in the spring and said, “This is what the Lord says, ‘I have healed these waters, and no one will ever die from drinking them again, and the land will flourish from them as well.’” [[2 Kings 2:19-22](#)]. Even though the city of Jericho had been rebuilt in direct disobedience to the command of God, He did not see the need to continue cursing them.

Salt was a symbol used by Jesus hundreds of years later when He said to His disciples, “You are the salt of the earth.” [[Matthew 5:13](#)]. God chooses people, not to play favorites, but that through them, He can bring salvation to the rest of the world. If God’s people do not add the flavor of His love and salvation to the world, they are like the bitter stream of Jericho that brought death. In addition to flavor, when more salt is used, it can preserve or make food last longer. Salt being nearby will not preserve the food, but it must be absorbed, and as a side effect, it changes the flavor of the food. In this way, God’s people can preserve the entire world from becoming corrupt by bringing salvation to some, who in turn can share it with others.

The human heart that receives the word of God is like a pure clean stream that brings life as it flows. As streams join together, they become a river, which is more powerful, and can bring more life. Streams and rivers create a path of green grass and trees that grow on their banks, winding wherever the pure clean water flows. Those who are cleansed by what they learn from the Bible, will naturally want to share what they have learned, and will begin to participate in the work of saving others. God's way of living brings not only spiritual health, but physical and mental as well. "Give and it shall be given to you." [[Luke 6:38](#)]. The word of God is like a fountain, or a well of living waters [[Song of Solomon 4:15](#)].

## ***Chapter 19—A Prophet of Peace***

This chapter is based on [2 Kings 4](#).

The ministry of Elisha was pretty different from that of Elijah, who confronted and condemned those who led out in sin. The mission of Elisha was to quietly and peacefully teach the people, performing many miracles to increase their happiness and faith. But he could be harsh if he needed to be, like the time when he was mocked and disrespected by young people making fun of Elijah's ascension and his bald head. God inspired him to speak a curse on them which resulted in them being attacked by bears [[2 Kings 2:23-24](#)]. If people thought they could make fun of and disrespect Elisha, his mission might have been less successful. For the rest of his ministry, no one ever dared to make fun of him, or question his authority as a prophet of God.

Sadly, many parents think that it is harmful to confront, correct, or punish their children, and instead let them always have and do what they want. This is one of the worst things that happen to children and can bring a lifelong curse on them. Children should be taught to show reverence for God, and respect for His representatives. The name of God should never be spoken lightly or in cursing. Angels cover their faces when they speak His name. Children should also be taught to be polite and kind.

Elisha's kind and friendly spirit allowed him to influence many people in Israel. One example is the relationship he had with a family in Shunem. In his travels, whenever he passed through that town, an important woman would feed and shelter him. One day she told her husband that she wanted to make a private room for him, with a bed, a table, and a chair, where he could stay whenever he passed through town. Elisha stopped and stayed often and wanted to show his gratitude in some way. When he realized that the couple had not been able to have a child, he asked the Lord to give them a son.

One hot morning, when the boy was with his father in the field, his head started hurting, so he was sent home to his mother. She held him on her lap, but by noon he had died. She carried him to Elisha's room and laid him on the bed, then immediately set out to find the man of God. Together with a servant she rode as quickly as she could to Mount Carmel where Elisha was at the time. He recognized her in the distance and sent his servant Gehazi to meet her, and ask if everything was ok, but she would not stop or answer his questions. When she reached Elisha, in great distress she told him what had happened to her son. He then told Gehazi to take his staff and go quickly and lay it on the child. But the mother would not leave without Elisha, so he followed her back. Gehazi did as he was told but when Elisha

and the woman arrived, he told them that the child was still dead. Elisha immediately went up to his room and closed the door and began praying. Then he laid his body on the child to warm him, then got up and walked around, and then returned to warming the boy. Suddenly the child woke up and sneezed 7 times. Then Elisha called for the woman and happily returned her son alive and well. Of course, she was filled with joy and bowed and thanked Elisha.

The woman of Shunem showed great faith because even when her son was dead, she still hoped that he would be brought back to life. Just as Christ the great giver of life raised her son up, He will do the same for His faithful people who have died, when He returns the second time. Jesus cares about our sorrow and comforts us with these words of God written by the prophet Hosea, “I have paid the price to bring them back from the grave, I will take them to heaven. O Death, I will be like a plague to you, O Grave, I will destroy you.” [[Hosea 13:14](#)]. Jesus has the keys to the grave [[Revelation 1:18](#)]. [1 Thessalonians 4:16](#) For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. <sup>17</sup> Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. [1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NLT](#).

The ministry of Elisha was like that of Jesus, who was a teacher and performed miracles. The things Elisha said were confirmed by the Holy Spirit and by the power of his miracles. Once when there was a famine in the land, he was visiting the school at Gilgal. The students were trying to feed themselves, so they made a pot of soup and went into the field to gather things to put in it. One of them found some gourds and shredded them into the soup. When they began to eat, suddenly someone recognized something poisonous in the soup, and shouted out for everyone to stop eating. Elisha asked for some flour, and after he threw it in the pot, he said, serve it up for the people now, and no one was harmed from eating it. During the same famine, a hundred men were gathered to eat, and they only had 20 pieces of bread and some corn on the cob. Elisha told his servant to feed the people, and he said, “With what?” Elisha said the little food we have will feed everyone and there will be some left.

Jesus also told his disciples to feed a great crowd with very little food, and they questioned Him just like Elisha’s servant had. When God says to do something, we should not think in terms of what we can do, but what He can do. Gifts cheerfully brought with prayers for blessings can be multiplied by God.

## *Chapter 20—Naaman*

This chapter is based on [2 Kings 5](#).

Naaman was an honorable man and a military commander in the Syrian army, and the Lord had given him victories which made the king like him. But he became sick with leprosy. Since the time, Ben-Hadad of Syria had defeated and killed Ahab, they had continued attacking the land of Israel. On one of these raids, they carried back a girl, whom Naaman brought to serve his wife. This child must have been taught to love and serve God, and to respect the prophet Elisha. In her situation as a slave in a foreign land, she could have been bitter and hated God, but instead, without realizing it, she fulfilled the purpose for which God had chosen the Israelites. She loved her mistress and wanted healing for her master. She said, “I wish my master could go see the prophet in Samaria, because he could heal his leprosy.” She wanted and believed that God’s blessings could be shared with people that were Israel’s enemies.

The behavior of this young girl tells us a lot about her parent’s and the way they raised her. There is no greater responsibility than that given to mothers and fathers, to train their children to love and obey God. But along with that, they should also train them to love others, and to be kind, fair, honest, and respectful. Parents who succeed at this are giving their children something of much greater value than worldly treasure, and in fact are giving them something of eternal worth. When children have grown into adults, those who have been taught to do so from childhood, will stand with Christ in service to His kingdom, no matter what their job in life is.

When Naaman heard the words of the Hebrew maid, he believed, and got permission from his king, to go and be healed. As gifts, he took 750 pounds of silver and 150 pounds of gold [[2 Kings 5:5](#)], and 10 changes of clothes. When he arrived in Israel, he went to the king with a letter from the king of Syria that said, “See, I have sent my servant Naaman to you to be healed of his leprosy.” But when the king read the letter, he tore his clothes, and said, “Am I God, to take life or give life, that this man expects me to cure him of leprosy? He is just looking for an excuse to attack me.”

Elisha was told about what happened at the palace, and sent a message to the king saying, “Why did you tear your clothes? Send the Syrian to me, and he will learn that there is a prophet in Israel.” When Naaman arrived at Elisha’s house, he was greeted by a servant that simply said to go wash himself in the Jordan River 7 times and he would be healed. Naaman had expected the prophet to come out to him and call on the name of the Lord his God and wave his hand over him and cure

him of the leprosy. But when that didn't happen and Elisha didn't even give him the courtesy of seeing him in person, Naaman's pride was hurt. He said to his servants, "Aren't the rivers Abana and Pharpar in Damascus better than any river in Israel? Why wouldn't I be better off washing in them?" So, he turned and left in a rage.

Naaman had brought some wise servants with him, and they knew how to calm their master down and reason with him. They said, "If the prophet had asked you to do some great or dangerous task, you would have done it right? So, why not just do this simple thing to be healed?" Naaman listened to their words, and as he calmed down, their logic worked on him, and he set aside his pride and went to the Jordan. He waded out into the river and then submerged himself 7 times, and when he came up on the 7<sup>th</sup> time, his skin was clean like that of a newborn baby." With great excitement and thankfulness, Naaman hurried back to Elisha's house. When Elisha came out to meet him, he said, "Now I know that the only real God in the entire world is right here in Israel." Then Naaman tried to give the gifts he brought to Elisha, but the prophet refused to take them. He then asked if he could take some dirt back with him so that he could kneel down on it when he worshiped the God of Israel. Then he added, "May God forgive me if my master makes me go into the temple of Rimmon with him, and he leans on me when he bows down to worship, and I lean over to support him." Elisha answered, "Go in peace."

When Gehazi saw the gold, silver, and even the clothes that Elisha had turned down, he wanted some for himself. It had been a privilege for him to work so closely with Elisha, and to see the gifts from heaven that were freely given. As he thought to himself about what he could do with some silver and nice clothes, he thought, why shouldn't this Syrian pay for something so valuable from Israel's God. Finally, he convinced himself that he should chase after Naaman and get something from him. When Naaman saw Gehazi from a distance, he stopped and got off his chariot to greet him. When Gehazi arrived, Naaman asked him, "Is everything ok?" In answering, not only did Gehazi lie, but even worse, he dragged Elisha into his lie. He said, "2 young men have just arrived from Mount Ephraim, so my master sent me to ask you if you give him 75 pounds of silver and 2 changes of clothes for them?" Naaman, was happy to share, and doubled the request, giving the requested amount for each man. Then he had one of his men carry it back, but before they got back to Elisha's house, Gehazi sent Naaman's servant back, and hid the goods in his own house.

When Gehazi returned, Elisha asked him, "Where have you been?" But Gehazi lied again and said, "I didn't go anywhere." Then Elisha said, "Do you think I didn't see when the man got down from his chariot to greet you? Is this the time to receive gifts and rewards, of money, clothes, land, animals, or even servants?"

Because of what you did, the leprosy of Naaman will be on you and your family forever.” And immediately Gehazi became a leper and could no longer remain with Elisha. Because of his greed, Gehazi had led Naaman to believe that payment was accepted for the healing he received from God.

Many people try to keep their sins hidden from other people, but they cannot hide it from God. [Proverbs 19:5](#) 5 A false witness will not go unpunished, nor will a liar escape. [Proverbs 19:5 NLT](#). Nothing is hidden from the eyes of God [[Hebrews 4:13](#)]. Gehazi thought he could deceive Elisha, but God showed the prophet exactly what happened. God is truth, and anything that is not true, is from Satan. Of God’s faithful people at the end, it is said, they speak nothing that is untruthful [[Revelation 14:5](#)].

Years later when Jesus gave examples of non-Israelites who received blessings from God, he mentioned Naaman the Syrian. Many lepers in Israel were never healed because they didn’t have faith. In every country there are people who may not have heard of the true God, but they live lives of integrity, like Naaman, doing what they believe is right. If they continue living this way, God will find ways to keep giving them more and more light, until one day they will recognize Him and will worship Him as the only true and living God.

## *Chapter 21—The Close of Elisha’s Ministry*

This chapter is based on [2 Kings 6-7](#).

Elisha had been called to prophetic ministry while Ahab was still king of Israel. Many changes had taken place during his years of service to God. God had allowed the Syrians to attack Israel, using it as punishment for their unfaithfulness. In fact, Hazael the Syrian was chosen by God for this very purpose. Jehu had also been chosen by God to destroy the house of Ahab and to continue Elijah’s campaign against Baal worship. But as the kings of Israel continued to promote idol worship, the Syrians continued to have military success against them. During the reign of Jehoahaz, who followed Jehu on the throne, Israel seemed to be on the verge of losing control of the entire kingdom to Syria. But the work started by Elijah and continued by Elisha was having an effect on the lives of at least some people.

God allowed Israel to be defeated by other nations because sometimes that was the only thing that would get them to turn back to Him. He also chose Jehu to destroy many of the altars to Baal, because He knew that if the temptation was removed, at least some would come back to Him. Elisha was a strong and steady voice for God, and he was honored and respected throughout the kingdom. Even idol worshipping kings of Israel asked for his advice, and once Benhadad, king of Syria, sent messengers to ask if he would die from his sickness.

For a time, Elisha was telling the king of Israel the battle plans of the Syrians, and this kept him from losing to surprise attacks. After this happened several times, the king of Syria was convinced there was a traitor who was sharing his plans with the king of Israel. He said, “Which one of you is for the king of Israel?” But one of his men answered, “None of us are. It is the prophet Elisha that tells the king of Israel everything, even the words you speak in your bedroom.” When the king learned that Elisha was in Dothan, he sent a great army with horses and chariots to surround the city. When Elisha’s servant saw that the whole city was surrounded, he was terrified and told his master. But Elisha said, “Don’t worry, there are more on our side than theirs.” Then he asked God to let his servant see, and he saw the mountain full of horses and chariots that shone like fire, and angels, surrounding the city to protect them.

Elisha then asked God to blind the entire Syrian army, and then he went out to talk to them. He told them, “This is not where you need to be, follow me and I will bring you to the man you are looking for.” So, Elisha led the entire blind Syrian army to Samaria. When they arrived, the king of Israel said to Elisha, “My father, shall I kill them all?” But Elisha said, “No, would you kill prisoners of war?”

Instead show some hospitality by giving them some bread and water and then send them home.”

This miracle and act of kindness kept Syria from attacking Israel for a while, but eventually king Hazael was determined to conquer Israel, and he came with a great army and surrounded the city of Samaria. This siege resulted in a great famine inside the city walls, and the children were paying for the sins of their parents. The famine went on so long and got so bad that people were doing desperate things, and anything remotely edible became very expensive. Then Elisha prophesied that the famine would end the next day. The next morning, the Lord made the Syrians hear the sound of chariots and horses like a great army, and they ran for their lives, leaving everything behind. Now there were 4 lepers that had been banished to live outside the city, and they decided to go ask the Syrians for food. They figured, if they were killed, they were going to die of hunger anyway. When they reached the camp, they found it completely deserted, and they ate and drank and then carried off some gold and silver. Then they said to each other, “We are terrible people, because we have not shared the good news with the people in the city.” So, they went back and told the people in the city, and just as Elisha had said, there was so much food in the Syrian camp, that food was cheap and the famine was over.

For many years, Elisha served the people of Israel, even though most of them had rejected God and worshipped idols. When things were really bad, he was still willing to give his advice to the kings of Israel, even though they were all wicked. Even though it seemed hopeless, little by little, Elisha made progress in bringing people back to the Lord. We can follow Elisha’s example by not giving up even though the world seems full of wickedness. The power of God will be with His true followers, and nothing will be able to stop them from sharing the good news of salvation with the world. If they will reject the temptations of the world, and cover themselves with the righteousness of Christ, there will be a great and glorious day for the true church of God.

Elisha understood the importance and value of the schools of the prophets. He spent much of his time with them, teaching, and performing miracles. At one of the locations the attendance at the school was outgrowing their study and living space. The students suggested that they could do some building to give them more space, and that they could start by going to the Jordan river to cut some trees. Elisha went with them, and as the boys were cutting, someone’s axe head flew off the handle and sunk into the river. The axe was borrowed and now the boy wondered how he would be able to replace it. But Elisha took a stick and threw it in the water where it had flown, and miraculously the axe head floated to the surface. Excitedly, the boy went out in the water and recovered the borrowed axe head.

Elisha was so well known and respected that when he was near death, the wicked young king Joash visited him to pay his respects. Joash wept and said, “O my father, my father, and the chariot and horsemen of Israel.” Then Elisha said to the king, “Take your bow and arrows, and open the window toward the east. Now shoot an arrow toward the cities of Israel occupied by the Syrians.” As the arrow flew, Elisha said, “The arrow of the Lord’s deliverance from Syria. You will completely defeat the Syrians in Aphek.” Next Elisha told Joash to take the rest of his arrows and hit the ground with them, so he did it 3 times and then stopped. Then Elisha said, “Why did you stop? You should have hit it many times, but now you will only defeat the Syrians 3 times.” [[2 Kings 13:14-19](#)].

When God asks us to do something, we should do it with all our might. God can perform miracles, to accomplish what we can’t, but he expects us to have faith and do what we can. Even if the situation seems hopeless, if we act in faith, God can turn it into a glorious victory. In fact, the greater the faith, the greater the miracles God can perform.

God has faithful servants in the world who will not turn from doing His work even if threatened with prison or death. Elisha was one of those, who never failed to do what God asked of him, even when the task seemed impossible. Elisha was not taken to heaven like Elijah, but instead suffered a lingering sickness until he died, but he never lost faith in God. During those hours of suffering, he was comforted to see angels, even as he saw the army of the Lord protecting him at Dothan.

Elisha knew that death was not the end, and he had confidence that he would be called from the grave. [Psalm 116:15](#) The LORD cares deeply when his loved ones die. [Psalm 116:15 NLT](#). [Proverbs 14:32](#) The wicked are crushed by disaster, but the godly have a refuge when they die. [Proverbs 14:32 NLT](#). [Psalm 49:15](#) But as for me, God will redeem my life. He will snatch me from the power of the grave. Interlude [Psalm 49:15 NLT](#). [Job 19:25](#) "But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. [Job 19:25 NLT](#). [Psalm 17:15](#) Because I am righteous, I will see you. When I awake, I will see you face to face and be satisfied. [Psalm 17:15 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 22—Nineveh, that Great City*

This chapter is based on [Jonah](#).

When the people were dispersed from the tower of Babel, one of the groups settled on the banks of the Tigris River. By the time of the divided kingdom of Israel, this group of people had grown into a great nation called Assyria. At the time, the capital city Ninevah, was so large that according to [Jonah 3:3](#), it would take 3 days to either cross or walk around it [which measure was used is uncertain]. There was great wealth and power in the city of Nineveh, but there was also great wickedness, including stealing, lying, and murder. But God loves all people and still saw some hope for the Ninevites. [Psalm 33:13](#) The LORD looks down from heaven and sees the whole human race. [Psalm 33:13 NLT](#). So, God gave them an opportunity to repent and save themselves from destruction.

God spoke to the Israelite prophet, Jonah, and told him, “Get up, go to Nineveh, that great city, and warn them that their wickedness has been noticed by God.” Jonah thought to himself, that would just be stating the obvious, and it wouldn’t change anything. It didn’t occur to him that maybe God saw something in the people of Nineveh that he didn’t. While he was wavering, Satan tempted him to think about his safety, and pointed out that they wouldn’t listen to him anyway. So, Jonah decided to run in the opposite direction from where God wanted him to go, by getting on a ship going to Tarshish.

If he had stopped to think about it, Jonah would have realized how ridiculous it was to think that he could run away from God. He had gone down below deck and while he was sleeping, the Lord sent a great storm upon the ship. The sailors had thrown most of the cargo into the sea to lighten the ship, and still they feared that they would not survive. Finally, they resorted to praying to their gods to save them from the storm. When someone found Jonah, they woke him up and said, “Don’t you realize that we are all about to die from this storm. Get up and pray to your god and beg him to save us.” The sailors were thinking that this was not a normal storm, and that it was caused by the gods because they were angry at one of them. So, they decided to cast lots to find out who the guilty person was. When Jonah was chosen, they said to him, “Tell us why this is happening to us. What is your job? Where are you from?” Jonah said, “I am an Israelite, and I worship the God of heaven, the One who made the sea and the dry land.”

Then they men were really afraid, realizing that they were on the sea, and the God who made the sea was punishing them because of Jonah. So, they said to him, “Tell us what we can do to calm this storm down.” Jonah, said, “I know this storm is threatening our lives because of me, so get me off the ship by throwing me

overboard.” But the men didn’t like that idea, but finally they realized there was nothing they could do to save themselves. So, they prayed to Jonah’s God saying, “We beg You O Lord, do not let us die in this storm because of this man. And do not hold us responsible for his blood, because You are doing this to him.” Then they took Jonah and threw him overboard and the sea immediately became calm, and the men greatly feared the power of the God of Jonah, so they offered a sacrifice and made promises to Him.

But God was not finished with Jonah yet, and He commanded a huge fish to swallow Jonah to save him from drowning. Jonah survived in the stomach of the fish for 3 days and 3 nights, and later described his experience like this:

“I called out to the Lord because of the trouble I was in,  
and He heard me.

Out of the land of the dead I called,  
and You heard me.

You threw me into the depths of the sea,  
and I sank to the bottom.

You will not allow me in Your presence,  
but I will still look toward Your temple.

I am surrounded by water, even my soul is drowning,  
and seaweed is wrapped around my head.

I sank down to the true base of the mountains, and the earth was holding me as  
a prisoner, yet You saved me from dying, O Lord my God.

When I felt like I was about to die,  
I remembered You.

I sent up a desperate prayer,  
and You heard me.

Those who worship false gods, are hurting themselves,  
but I will sacrifice to You and praise You.

I will keep the promises I made to You.  
Salvation comes from You alone O Lord.”

Jonah learned his lesson, and the fish vomited him out onto the land. So, God spoke to Jonah again and said, “Get up, go to Nineveh that great city, and tell them what I told you to say.” And Jonah obeyed God, and as soon as he arrived at the city he began to shout out, “In 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed.” From street to street, he went throughout the entire city and repeated this message.

The people listened and repeated the message, and the Spirit of God also spoke to the hearts of the people. Then they realized that they were indeed wicked, and they

repented in humility. The king even commanded everyone, that no one should eat or drink anything, but they should wear rough clothes of mourning and put ashes on their heads. They should all stop their wickedness and violence, and pray to the God of Israel, and hope that He will have mercy on them. And everyone repented and humbled themselves, and God had mercy on them, and suspended their sentence of destruction.

Instead of being happy that he had played a part in changing an entire city for the better, he became angry because he felt that God had just made a liar out of him. Then Jonah complained to God, “This is why I didn’t want to warn Nineveh. I knew that You are a merciful God, and slow to anger, and full of kindness. I knew that if they repented, You would not destroy them.” Once again Jonah disagreed with God, which led him to say. “O Lord, I beg you to just kill me. I would rather die than see Nineveh spared.” God responded, “Do you have a right to be angry?”

Jonah made a little shelter east of the city where he sat and watched to see what would happen. As he waited, God caused a gourd plant to quickly grow on his shelter providing some nice shade, for which he was very grateful. But the next day a worm came and killed the plant, and it withered and died. Then a hot wind from the east blew in, and the sun was very intense, and again, Jonah wished he could die. God said, “Jonah, do you have a right to be angry about the death of the gourd plant?” And Jonah said, “Yes, I do! Angry enough to wish I were dead.” Then the Lord said, “You feel bad about the death of the gourd which you didn’t plant, or care for; it sprung up quickly and died quickly. Shouldn’t I spare Nineveh, that great city, with more than 120,000 people who didn’t really know right from wrong before you told them? And there is also a lot of cattle in the city as well.”

Jonah didn’t understand why God would spare Nineveh, but by his actions, the glory and mercy of God was revealed to the Ninevites. People living in darkness are like they are in prison. They cried out to the Lord, and He saved them. He brought them out of darkness, out of the shadow of death, and broke them out of their prison. He sent His word to them and healed them and delivered them from destruction. [[Psalm 107:10, 13-14, 20](#)].

When Jesus lived on earth, He mentioned the good that was accomplished by the preaching of Jonah. He said, “The people of Nineveh repented after hearing the preaching of Jonah, so they will judge you, because you are rejecting someone greater than Jonah here and now.” [[Matthew 12:40-41](#)]. Jesus wants people to understand the real priorities in life. [Mark 8:36](#) And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? <sup>37</sup> Is anything worth more than your soul? [Mark 8:36-37 NLT](#). In the ministry of Jesus on earth, most rejected Him, but He persisted and accomplished what He came to do. God needs people today who like

Jonah, will preach the truth from the Bible to cities that need the knowledge of God and His law. It is impossible to fully describe the wickedness in cities today.

Satan has always tried to keep people from knowing the law of God, because those who keep it will live with more justice, mercy, and love. Man likes to talk about the increase in knowledge today, but what God sees is their wickedness. Advances in technology have made it possible for every person to know about God's law, but instead, there is evil today that is like the days of Noah. Even though God is merciful and compassionate toward those who break His law, people should realize that the earth was destroyed in Noah's day because of its wickedness. The time is coming, when the Spirit of God will be withdrawn from the world, and at that time, there will be great destruction and loss of life from earthquakes, windstorms, fire and flood. It may be discouraging to preach about God and His law in wicked cities today, but though many will reject the message, there are some who will accept it.

The message for the world today is, [Matthew 24:44](#) You also must be ready all the time, for the Son of Man will come when least expected. [Matthew 24:44 NLT](#). When He comes, the people of the world will be judged, and the wicked will be punished. [Isaiah 26:21](#) Look! The LORD is coming from heaven to punish the people of the earth for their sins. The earth will no longer hide those who have been killed. They will be brought out for all to see. [Isaiah 26:21 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 23—The Assyrian Captivity*

The last years of the northern kingdom of Israel were filled with the worst violence and killing in its history. In their entire history, there had not been a single king who worshipped God. Kings were murdered and short-lived dynasties replaced them. For more than 200 years, God had sent messenger after messenger, trying to get them to turn back to Him. [Hosea 10:13](#) "But you have cultivated wickedness and harvested a thriving crop of sins. You have eaten the fruit of lies--trusting in your military might, believing that great armies could make your nation safe. <sup>14</sup> Now the terrors of war will rise among your people. All your fortifications will fall, just as when Shalman destroyed Beth-arbel. Even mothers and children were dashed to death there. <sup>15</sup> You will share that fate, Bethel, because of your great wickedness. When the day of judgment dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed. [Hosea 10:13-15 NLT](#).

Israel prospered under a few kings, but most were weak and wicked. One of the ways God tried to get His people to turn back to Him was by allowing them to be conquered by other nations. Because they were so rebellious, they suffered a lot under the power of other kingdoms. Some kings turned to surrounding heathen kingdoms like Assyria, for protection. [Hosea 4:6](#) My people are being destroyed because they don't know me. Since you priests refuse to know me, I refuse to recognize you as my priests. Since you have forgotten the laws of your God, I will forget to bless your children. <sup>7</sup> The more priests there are, the more they sin against me. They have exchanged the glory of God for the shame of idols. <sup>8</sup> "When the people bring their sin offerings, the priests get fed. So the priests are glad when the people sin! [Hosea 4:6-8 NLT](#).

In their last 50 years of existence as a kingdom, Israel was as wicked as the people that brought on the flood. They worshiped nature instead of the God that made it and bowed down to creatures instead of the Creator. When they worshipped Baal and Ashtoreth, there was no law to keep them from doing whatever they desired. There was also great unfairness in the kingdom, where the rich lived in luxury and did whatever they wanted, and the poor had no justice. [Amos 5:11](#) You trample the poor, stealing their grain through taxes and unfair rent. Therefore, though you build beautiful stone houses, you will never live in them. Though you plant lush vineyards, you will never drink wine from them. <sup>12</sup> For I know the vast number of your sins and the depth of your rebellions. You oppress good people by taking bribes and deprive the poor of justice in the courts. [Amos 5:11-12 NLT](#).

Even though Israel was so wicked, God kept giving them chances to turn back to Him. Over and over through prophets He called for them to return to Him. [Hosea 6:1](#) "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces; now he will heal us.

He has injured us; now he will bandage our wounds. <sup>2</sup> In just a short time he will restore us, so that we may live in his presence. <sup>3</sup> Oh, that we might know the LORD! Let us press on to know him. He will respond to us as surely as the arrival of dawn or the coming of rains in early spring." [Hosea 6:1-3 NLT](#). [Amos 5:4](#) Now this is what the LORD says to the family of Israel: "Come back to me and live! <sup>5</sup> Don't worship at the pagan altars at Bethel; don't go to the shrines at Gilgal or Beersheba. For the people of Gilgal will be dragged off into exile, and the people of Bethel will be reduced to nothing." [Amos 5:4-5 NLT](#). [Amos 5:14](#) Do what is good and run from evil so that you may live! Then the LORD God of Heaven's Armies will be your helper, just as you have claimed. <sup>15</sup> Hate evil and love what is good; turn your courts into true halls of justice. Perhaps even yet the LORD God of Heaven's Armies will have mercy on the remnant of his people. [Amos 5:14-15 NLT](#).

The time for repentance and mercy finally ran out and Israel suffered the consequences of their choices. Before that, there was one last period of glory under Jeroboam II, when Israel experienced prosperity and military success. But Israel still did not turn back to God. Finally the sentence was pronounced on them, [Amos 7:11](#) He is saying, 'Jeroboam will soon be killed, and the people of Israel will be sent away into exile.'" [Amos 7:11 NLT](#). But this is how the idolatrous priest Amaziah responded to Amos. [Amos 7:12](#) Then Amaziah sent orders to Amos: "Get out of here, you prophet! Go on back to the land of Judah, and earn your living by prophesying there! <sup>13</sup> Don't bother us with your prophecies here in Bethel. This is the king's sanctuary and the national place of worship!" [Amos 7:12-13 NLT](#).

Even still the sentence was fulfilled gradually. Pul, king of Assyria invaded, but King Menahem gave him 37 tons of silver to not attack. Menahem got that money by taking it from the rich people in his kingdom. [[2 Kings 15:19-20](#)]. Later the Assyrians under Tilgath-pileser invaded and took entire tribes captive, and scattered them abroad [[1 Chronicles 5:26](#); [2 Kings 15:29](#)]. During the reign of Hoshea, the last king of Israel, the people had one more opportunity to save themselves. King Hezekiah began his rule in Judah, and started a great reformation, re-opening the Temple, and celebrating the Passover. He sent messengers throughout the whole land of Israel, including the northern kingdom, to invite them to come to the Passover. There were some who humbled themselves and accepted the invitation, but most made fun of the messengers and laughed at them [[2 Chronicles 20:10-13](#)].

2 years later, when the Assyrians invaded, they surrounded Samaria to starve them into submission. This led to a famine, and many people died from hunger, disease and the sword. Eventually Samaria fell, and the people of Israel were scattered throughout the Assyrian empire. God allowed the Assyrian empire to do what they did to Israel to punish them for their wickedness and disobedience to Him [[Isaiah](#)

[10:5](#)]. What God could not accomplish by making Israel a shining light on a hill, a strong, prosperous, and good kingdom, would be done by scattering them throughout the world.

## *Chapter 24—Destroyed for Lack of Knowledge*

The special blessings and promises made to Israel had been conditional on their obedience from the beginning [[Exodus 19:5](#)]. They heard the 10 commandments spoken by God with their own ears, and then heard the other laws given through Moses, and the people said with one voice, “All that the Lord said, we will do.” [[Exodus 24:3](#)]. Nearly 40 years later as they were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses presented them with commands of God and the reasons they should obey. “Now, Israel, listen to the laws I have taught you, and also to the punishments if you break them. If you obey, you will live well in the land the Lord, the God of your fathers gives you. Do not add to these laws or treat any of them as less important. Keep them and do them, and you will be seen as a wise and understanding people in the eyes of the nations around you.” [[Deuteronomy 4:1-6](#)].

It would take some effort to preserve the knowledge of these laws in every home from generation to generation. They must learn them, remember them, and pass them on to the next generation. If they didn't, their descendants would look around and learn from surrounding nations, to make carved images to bow down to, or to worship the sun, moon, or stars. They were commanded not to forget [[Deuteronomy 4:16, 19, 23](#)].

Moses warned them that if they would forsake God, and worship idols and carved images, God would allow them to be carried away as captives to foreign lands [[Deuteronomy 4:26-28](#)]. So, Satan focused his effort on getting the people to forget the words of God, so they would suffer the consequences that were promised. But what he didn't take into account, was how patient, merciful, and long-suffering God was, and how many chances He would give them, and how often had He sent messengers to try to bring them back to Him. But they would eventually run out of opportunities, and God said of them, [Hosea 4:6](#) My people are being destroyed because they don't know me. Since you priests refuse to know me, I refuse to recognize you as my priests. Since you have forgotten the laws of your God, I will forget to bless your children. [Hosea 4:6 NLT](#).

But the history of Israel was not unique in the history of the world. In every place and time that people ignored the laws of God, there was great wickedness. It was that way in the days of Noah before the flood, and when it got too bad, God destroyed them. This pattern of extreme wickedness followed by destruction was repeated for the city of Sodom. When God's law was forgotten in Israel, it was said of them, [Hosea 4:1](#) Hear the word of the LORD, O people of Israel! The LORD has brought charges against you, saying: "There is no faithfulness, no kindness, no knowledge of God in your land. <sup>2</sup> You make vows and break them; you kill and

steal and commit adultery. There is violence everywhere--one murder after another. [Hosea 4:1-2 NLT](#).

For the 10 tribes in the northern kingdom, there was no prophecy of restoration as an earthly kingdom. But there were prophecies of final victory and restoration for any who were faithful to God when the entire world became so wicked that it would no longer be allowed to live in rebellion against Him. The history of sinful earth will be brought to a close, and after a long time without a king, any Israelite who chose to be faithful and obedient to God will join the kingdom of Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. [Isaiah 10:20](#) In that day the remnant left in Israel, the survivors in the house of Jacob, will no longer depend on allies who seek to destroy them. But they will faithfully trust the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. [Isaiah 10:20 NLT](#). Just before that a message will go to all the people of the earth saying, "Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him Who made heaven and earth, the sea and the water under the earth." [[Revelation 14:6-7](#)]. Those who hear and believe will reject their idols, and will worship God, and they will obey Him and keep His commandments. [Revelation 14:12](#) This means that God's holy people must endure persecution patiently, obeying his commands and maintaining their faith in Jesus. [Revelation 14:12 NLT](#).

A day is coming when fields and vineyards will produce more than can be harvested, and the hills will drip with sweet grape juice. My people who have been exiled to distant lands will be brought together, and they will build homes and live in them. They will plant crops and eat from them, they will plant vineyards, and drink from them. Then, they will never be removed from the land that I give them. This is what the Lord your God says. [[Amos 9:13-15](#)].

## *Chapter 25—The Call of Isaiah*

In the southern kingdom, Uzziah had a long reign, during which Judah experienced the most prosperity since the death of Solomon nearly 200 years before. For many years he obeyed God and ruled with wisdom and God blessed him with military success. He recovered cities that Judah had lost, and he built forts to strengthen and defend the country. Judah did business with lots of countries, and great riches flowed into Jerusalem as a result. Uzziah became very great, and his name was known far and wide. But toward the end of his reign, he became proud and thought he was above the law. He went into the temple to burn incense, which by law, only the priests, descendants of Aaron, are allowed to do. Azariah, the high priest, and others tried to stop him, but Uzziah got angry, thinking no one could tell him what he couldn't do. So, God struck him with leprosy for this act of disobedience and defiance, and he fled from the temple, and Uzziah was a leper until the day he died [[2 Chronicles 26:15-21](#)].

In the last years of his father's reign, Jotham was the acting king. And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, except that he didn't remove the high places where people sacrificed and burned incense [[2 Kings 15:34-35](#)]. It was during this time that Isaiah, a member of the royal family, was called by God to be a prophet. In the years he served God as a prophet, he saw Judah invaded by Israel and Syria. He saw the end of Israel as a kingdom, and saw their people scattered throughout the Assyrian empire. He saw invasions of Judah by Assyria, and Jerusalem, completely surrounded by a huge Assyrian force, that would have been the end of the southern kingdom, had they not been miraculously saved by God. But, as time went on, he began to see many of the evil things that the northern kingdom was destroyed for, creep into the southern kingdom. Eventually, because of their wickedness, he began to see the removal of God's protection from Judah.

One of the evils that made God angry was the way the rich took advantage of the poor. The rich kept getting richer, and the poor poorer. Those who had money and power were never held accountable for any wrongdoing because they bribed judges. Meanwhile the poor, the widows, and the orphans could never get justice in court [[Isaiah 5:8](#); [3:14-15](#); [10:1-2](#)]. In addition to that, the wealthy were proud, they had drunken parties, and they indulged themselves in whatever they desired. It got so bad that one could wonder if Israel was as bad as Sodom and Gomorrah.

This is the time that Isaiah was called to be a prophet. He was called to give messages of warning and reproof to Judah. He was afraid because he knew that people would hate him and make fun of him and on top of that it seemed hopeless. Isaiah was near the temple one day as he thought about his fears, and the task God was calling him to do. Suddenly he seemed to be able to see into the most holy

place of the temple, a place that he could never enter. Then his vision transformed, and he saw Jehovah sitting on a throne, and glory filled the temple. He saw seraphim, angels, on each side of the throne, and they shielded their faces from looking directly at God. And they said, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of armies. The whole earth is full of His glory.” The sound of praise to God seemed to grow until it filled the room and began to shake the gate and even the gatepost [[Isaiah 6:1-4](#)].

As Isaiah’s vision continued, he became overwhelmed with a sense of the purity and holiness of God, and this made him very self-conscious. He said, “Oh, I’m in trouble, my mouth is unclean, and the mouths of all my people are unclean, yet I have seen the King, the Lord of heaven’s armies.” Right there and then, Isaiah realized that he was unfit to be a spokesman for God. Just then a seraph angel went to him and took a live coal from the altar and touched it to his lips and said, “See, this has touched your lips, and your sins are taken away.” Then he heard the voice of God say, “Whom shall I send, who will go for Us?” and Isaiah answered, “Here I am, send me.” [[Isaiah 6:5-8](#)].

Then Isaiah was sent with this message for the people of Judah, “When you hear what I say, you will not understand, when you see what I do, you will not comprehend. Your hearts are hard, your ears are plugged, and your eyes are closed. If not, you would see and hear and understand, then you would be converted and healed.” This seemed like a discouraging message, so Isaiah asked, “How long will it be this way?” and the answer was, “Until the cities and houses are empty and in ruins, and all the people have been taken to a land far away.” [[Isaiah 6:9-12](#)].

War, exile, and humiliation were the consequences of their sins, and this punishment was the only thing that would cause them to repent. But with this bad news, there was some good, which was that the land would not remain empty forever. The tree would be cut down, but the stump would remain, like a holy seed, and from it would spring up new growth. This promise, that God would eventually be able to fulfill His purpose with Judah, even though bad times lay ahead, was an encouragement to Isaiah. He would faithfully serve God and his people for 60 years, and whenever his messages were rejected by the people, he would always be strengthened by the memory of the vision where he saw the King of kings, and Lord of lords. When things were going bad for the kingdom, he had the promise and the assurance that Judah would be restored, and that in the end the church of God would win.

## *Chapter 26—Look at Your God!*

When Isaiah was a prophet, the people's view of God was very dark. Satan had been able to get them to believe that God was responsible for sin, suffering, and death. People also saw God as being very harsh and demanding and always looking for ways and reasons to punish them. God's law which was supposed to bring happiness and love, was made out by Satan to be a burden and to keep them from enjoying life. He claimed it was impossible for people to keep the law, and that God didn't punish everyone fairly and equally. The people of Israel had no excuse for having this distorted picture of God, considering all the things He had done for them, and His mercy and patience with them. Isaiah wrote, when they suffered, He suffered. His presence brought salvation to them, His love and pity delivered them. He carried them all the days of old [[Isaiah 63:9](#)]. His promise to them at the beginning was, My presence will go with you [[Exodus 33:14](#)]. When God showed His glory to Moses, He said of Himself, "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and full of goodness and truth, showing mercy to thousands, forgiving sins, but condemning the guilty." [[Exodus 34:6-7](#)].

But God's goodness, love, and mercy, were not only for Israel. God also said to Moses, "As truly as I live, the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord." [[Numbers 14:21](#)]. God's glory is to be declared among the nations, and His wonders shown to all people [[Psalm 96:3](#)]. In his first vision, Isaiah heard the angel say, "The whole earth is full of His glory." [[Isaiah 6:3](#)]. Today, these prophecies are nearing their fulfillment. Missionaries are able to travel all over the world, sharing the good news of a loving, merciful, and forgiving God. God showed His kindness to us and shared the wealth of His grace through Jesus Christ [[Ephesians 2:7](#)].

When Isaiah saw God in His vision, he got a sense of his unworthiness and sinfulness, but he also received assurance that his sins were forgiven. His gratefulness at being forgiven and accepted by God made him want the same for his people. His message to them was, "Wash yourselves and be clean, stop doing evil things. Learn to do good things and speak out against those who oppress others. Defend the orphans and stand up for widows. Come and let us reason together, though your sins may be red as scarlet, they can be made white as snow, even though they are red like crimson, they will be white as wool." [[Isaiah 1:16-18](#)]. Isaiah also gave them messages about the greatness of their God. "This is what the Lord God says, 'Who created the heavens and the earth, and everything on it? Who gives breath to every living thing? And Who give the spirit to every person?' [[Isaiah 42:5](#)]. 'The Holy One says, 'Who can you compare Me to? Is anyone like Me?' Look up and see who created everything. Who made all the stars, and knows

about each one? Every single one of them is there because of His great strength and power.” [Isaiah 40:25-26].

For those who feared that God would not take them back, Isaiah had these messages. Israel, why do you say, ‘God doesn’t notice me, and He is not giving me justice.’ Don’t you know, and haven’t you heard? The everlasting God, the Lord and Creator of all things never gets tired, He sees everything, and He can give strength to the weak. Eventually, even the young run out of energy, and young men stumble. But those that wait on the Lord will receive new strength, they will soar like eagles, they will run and never get tired, they can walk forever and not faint [Isaiah 40:27-31]. Don’t be afraid because I am with you. Do not be worried, because I am your God. I will give you strength, I will help you, I will hold you up with my righteous right hand. I will strengthen your right hand and will help you, says the Lord, your Redeemer, and the Holy One of Israel [Isaiah 41:10, 13-14].

Isaiah’s call to repentance was clear. [Isaiah 55:6](#) Seek the LORD while you can find him. Call on him now while he is near. <sup>7</sup> Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the LORD that he may have mercy on them. Yes, turn to our God, for he will forgive generously. [Isaiah 55:6-7 NLT](#). Have you wandered away from God? Have you tried to enjoy what God’s law forbids, only to find that in the end, it doesn’t bring happiness? Are you not happy with your life and are alone with no true friends? Your sins are gone, as if they had been covered with a thick cloud. Come back to Me because I have redeemed you [Isaiah 44:22]. Turn your ear toward Me, hear, and your soul will live. Then I will make an everlasting promise to you, as I promised to David [Isaiah 55:3]. Those whom the Father has given to Me will come to Me, and whoever comes to Me will surely be accepted [John 6:37]. Make the prayer of David your own, [Psalm 51:7](#) Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. [Psalm 51:7 NLT](#).

Isaiah asked to people of Judah to look at their God and accept His love and forgiveness, and some did. But one day in their future, many would look at their God in the person of Jesus, their King in His beauty [Isaiah 33:17]. And in the final day when the earth is redeemed from sin, many will say, [Isaiah 33:22](#) For the LORD is our judge, our lawgiver, and our king. He will care for us and save us. [Isaiah 33:22 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 12:1](#) In that day you will sing: "I will praise you, O LORD! You were angry with me, but not any more. Now you comfort me. <sup>2</sup> See, God has come to save me. I will trust in him and not be afraid. The LORD GOD is my strength and my song; he has given me victory." <sup>3</sup> With joy you will drink deeply from the fountain of salvation! <sup>4</sup> In that wonderful day you will sing: "Thank the LORD! Praise his

name! Tell the nations what he has done. Let them know how mighty he is! <sup>5</sup> Sing to the LORD, for he has done wonderful things. Make known his praise around the world. <sup>6</sup> Let all the people of Jerusalem shout his praise with joy! For great is the Holy One of Israel who lives among you." [Isaiah 12:1-6 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 27—Ahaz*

When Ahaz became king, Isaiah was confronted with wickedness unlike any that had existed in Judah before. People who had resisted the seductive practices associated with idol worship were already being pressured to participate. Now, the king and his court were leading out in the idolatry. Even some of the priests, while still going through the forms of worship to Jehovah, were also teaching idol worship. During this time, according to the prophet Micah, sinners were claiming to trust in God, boastfully saying, “Is not the Lord among us?” No evil will come to us. And at the same time, they would be murdering people and bribing judges [[Micah 3:10-11](#)]. At the same time Isaiah spoke out against this evil, calling them Sodom and Gomorrah, and asking why they were even bothering to offer sacrifices to God [[Isaiah 1:10-12](#)]. Sacrificing with a wicked heart is hateful to God [[Proverbs 21:27](#)]. If the sinner refuses to repent, God cannot provide grace and forgiveness. The Lord’s hand is not weak that it cannot save, and His hearing bad so He cannot hear. It is your sin that makes it so He cannot save and will not hear [[Isaiah 15:1-2](#)].

Solomon wrote, the land is in trouble when the king is a child [[Ecclesiastes 10:16](#)]. The rulers of Judah didn’t know right from wrong, so they were no better than children. Isaiah told them that their weakness among the nations was a result of their wickedness. To try to get their attention, God would take away things they needed for survival, including bread and water. And finally, He said, “You will be ruled by babes.” [[Isaiah 3:1-4, 8](#)]. Ahaz was so wicked, he burned his own son in fire like the heathen do [[2 Chronicles 28:2-3](#); [2 Kings 16:3](#)]. Micah sadly declared, there are no more good people on the earth, there is no one who does what is right. The best of them is like a thorn bush [[Micah 7:2-4](#)]. Except for the few left who serve the Lord, the kingdom was no better than Sodom and Gomorrah [[Isaiah 1:9](#)].

In every age there have always been a few who are faithful to God. Through these, God in His love and mercy, keeps reaching out to the wicked, trying to get them to change their ways. His compassions fail not [[Lamentations 3:22](#)]. I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked. Turn from your evil ways and live, O house of Israel [[Ezekiel 33:11](#)]. Satan leads us into sin and then leaves us helpless and hopeless. God says, “Take hold of My strength, and make peace with Me.” [[Isaiah 27:5](#)].

In those dark days, when any in Judah and Israel tried to buy God’s favor with sacrifices and offerings, Micah told them what God wanted from them, [Micah 6:8](#) No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. [Micah 6:8 NLT](#). Hundreds of years before, Moses told the people what God expected from

them. [Deuteronomy 10:12](#) "And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you? He requires only that you fear the LORD your God, and live in a way that pleases him, and love him and serve him with all your heart and soul. <sup>13</sup> And you must always obey the LORD's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good. [Deuteronomy 10:12-13 NLT](#). Centuries later when Jesus was asked what the most important commandment was, the answer was essentially the same. [Matthew 22:37](#) Jesus replied, "'You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' <sup>40</sup> The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments." [Matthew 22:37-40 NLT](#). God promises blessings for those who show love, kindness, and mercy to others [[Isaiah 58:10-11](#)].

Because of the evil actions of Ahaz, Judah and Jerusalem were in great danger from the combined forces of Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel. If they had been faithful to God, Judah would not have been afraid of the armies coming against them. But for God's own reason, this was not the time for the kingdom to come to an end. In fact, He sent word to Ahaz through Isaiah to not worry about Israel and Syria because their nations would soon come to an end [[Isaiah 7:4-9](#)]. But Ahaz did not believe and instead sent the following message to the king of Assyria asking for help, "I am your servant and your son, so please come and save me from the Syrians and Israelites." Of course, this request came with a lot of silver and gold of his own but also some taken from the temple [[2 Kings 16:7-8](#)].

The king of Assyria did help Ahaz but now realizing how much wealth must be in Jerusalem, it was not long before he was threatening them. During this low time for Judah, instead of turning to the Lord, Ahaz sacrificed to the gods of the king of Syria. Not only did he do this, but he would not let anyone else worship God, by closing and locking the doors of the temple [[2 Chronicles 28:19-24](#)]. But even this could not keep Isaiah and Micah and the few faithful followers of Jehovah from continuing to worship Him. To them, God was their sanctuary [[Isaiah 8:14](#)].

## *Chapter 28—Hezekiah*

Hezekiah, son of the wicked Ahaz, was very different from his father, and wanted to save Judah from the path of ruin that they were following the northern kingdom of Israel on. As soon as he took power, he immediately began working with some faithful priests and Levites to open and restart the temple services. In talking with them, he said, “Our fathers have sinned greatly, and done evil in the eyes of the Lord. They have forsaken Him and turned away from His temple. Now I will make a covenant with the Lord God, so that hopefully His great anger will turn away from us.” [[2 Chronicles 29:6, 10](#)].

At this time, idol worship was widespread throughout the kingdom, and along with that the nation was weak and not respected by their surrounding neighbors. The northern kingdom was completely falling apart at the same time. There was a lot of violence and murder, and many were being taken captive by Assyria to other lands. If things didn't change, Judah would quickly be following in the footsteps of her sister to the north.

The priests and Levites worked quickly and soon they were able to open the doors of the temple and resume services. In the first service that was held at the temple, Hezekiah and some of the leading men of Jerusalem assembled and offered sacrifices and prayed, asking God to forgive the nation. The king was very happy when he heard the songs of praise to God and saw the people worshipping.

The work of the prophets Isaiah and Micah were now bearing some fruit. There was always at least a small group who remained faithful, but now that the temple was open and Jehovah could be worshipped in public, more were willing to join them. A reformation was started that would at least stop the downward slide of evil and idolatry that the nation was on. As always, God was willing forgive and accept those who truly turned back to Him. [Deuteronomy 4:30](#) "In the distant future, when you are suffering all these things, you will finally return to the LORD your God and listen to what he tells you. <sup>31</sup> For the LORD your God is a merciful God; he will not abandon you or destroy you or forget the solemn covenant he made with your ancestors. [Deuteronomy 4:30-31 NLT](#).

Now the prayer of Solomon when the temple was first opened and dedicated could be answered. [1 Kings 8:33](#) "If your people Israel are defeated by their enemies because they have sinned against you, and if they turn to you and acknowledge your name and pray to you here in this Temple, <sup>34</sup> then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your people Israel and return them to this land you gave their ancestors. [1 Kings 8:33-34 NLT](#). The answer given to Solomon was fulfilled now on this occasion. <sup>2</sup> [Chronicles 7:14](#) Then if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves

and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and restore their land. [2 Chronicles 7:14 NLT](#).

For many years the Passover had not been celebrated, and now Hezekiah determined that he would resume this yearly gathering. He did not do this half-heartedly but even sent messengers throughout the northern tribes, inviting them to the next Passover. Though many rejected the invitation, some from Asher, Manasseh, and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem. But from Judah, the people all obeyed the king to participate in the Passover [[2 Chronicles 30:10-12](#)].

In preparation, the idolatrous shrines were all cleared away from the streets of Jerusalem. And when everyone was assembled for the Passover week, peace offerings were offered, and many people were able to learn what God wanted from them. The priests and Levites led out in praising and worshipping God, and there was great happiness among all the worshippers [[2 Chronicles 30:21-22](#)]. The Passover was a 7-day feast, but at the end of the week, the people didn't want to leave, so it was decided to continue for another week. This gave more time for the priests to teach and read from the scriptures, so the people could learn more of what God expected of them. [2 Chronicles 30:26](#) There was great joy in the city, for Jerusalem had not seen a celebration like this one since the days of Solomon, King David's son. [2 Chronicles 30:26 NLT](#). When everyone went home, they broke down all the idols, cut down the groves, and destroyed the altars and worship places. This happened throughout the land of Judah and Benjamin, and even in Ephraim and Manasseh [[2 Chronicles 31:1](#)].

Everything Hezekiah wanted to do for the kingdom was good and right in the eyes of God. And Judah prospered both spiritually and financially. Hezekiah trusted the Lord God of Israel and obeyed His commandments with all his heart. And he was successful at everything he did because he put all his effort into it and God blessed him [[2 Chronicles 31:20-21](#); [2 Kings 18:5-7](#)].

During the reign of Hezekiah, Assyria captured Samaria, the capital city of the northern kingdom of Israel. And they scattered the remaining people of Israel among the nations they had conquered. With this success, many of the surrounding nations began to doubt the power of the God of Israel. Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, had long since moved on from their repentance after the preaching of Jonah, and were in full defiance against the God of heaven. In the later years of Hezekiah's reign, Assyria would invade the kingdom of Judah, thinking the God of Israel had no power over them. It was a confrontation that would ultimately prove which God was more powerful.

## ***Chapter 29—The Ambassadors from Babylon***

About 15 years into Hezekiah’s reign, he got an incurable sickness. When that realization set in, the prophet Isaiah paid him a visit and gave him this message, “This is what the Lord says, get your household affairs in order because you will die from this sickness.” [[Isaiah 38:1](#)]. But knowing he had served God faithfully all his life, Hezekiah thought that God owed him, so he prayed, begging and pleading with God to save his life. With tears freely flowing, he cried to God, reminding Him that he had been faithful and obedient to Him [[2 Kings 20:2-3](#)]. Since the days of David, no king had done as much as Hezekiah to build up the kingdom of God. Now he could plead as David did with God: [Psalm 88:2](#) Now hear my prayer; listen to my cry. <sup>3</sup> For my life is full of troubles, and death draws near. [Psalm 88:2-3 NLT](#). “You are my hope O Lord God. I have trusted You since I was young. You have held me up since I was a baby, so don’t leave me now when I am weak. Don’t be far from me and quickly come to help me. Don’t leave me until I have finished showing Your power to everyone.” [[Psalm 71:5-18](#)].

Before Isaiah had even left the palace, God told him to go back to Hezekiah and say, “Thus says the Lord, the God of David your father. I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day you will be able to get up and go to the temple, and you will get 15 more years of life. And I will protect this city from the Assyrians, for My own sake, and for the sake of my servant David.” [[2 Kings 20:4-6](#)].

With gratefulness to God, Hezekiah said this prayer, “When I thought my life was ending, I said, I will go down to the gates of the grave. The later part of my life is being taken from me. I will no longer serve the Lord from the land of the living. I won’t even be among the living because my life is being cut short. I waited until I was torn apart as if by lions. I chattered like a crane or swallow and mourned like a dove. My eyes grew tired of looking up, but I cried for help. What can I say, I have been given this sickness, so I will humbly accept it. Lord, your discipline is good because it leads to life and health. So, You will heal me and allow me to live. This sadness of thinking I was going to die is good for me, and in the end, You saved me and forgave my sins. The dead cannot praise You, those who have gone down to the grave can no longer have hope in You. Only the living can praise You as I am doing right now. Parents teach their children about You. The Lord has decided to save me, so I will sing songs of praise in the temple every day of my life.” [[Isaiah 38:10-20](#)].

Then Hezekiah asked if there was a sign that this message really was from God. So, Isaiah asked, would you like God to move time backward 10 degrees on the sundial, or forward 10 degrees? Hezekiah answered, “The shadow always moves

forward on the sundial, so I would like to see it go backward.” And God made the shadow go backward on the sundial that was made by his father Ahaz [[2 Kings 20:8-11](#)].

In the good land of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, lived a wise and studious race of people. At the time, they lived under the power of the Assyrian empire, but they were destined to rule the world. Their astronomers who watched the sky took notice of the shadow going backward on the sundial, and they wondered how it happened and what it meant. When their king Merodachbaladan learned that it was a miracle performed by the God of heaven, as a sign for the king of Judah, he sent ambassadors to congratulate him on his recovery, but also to learn about the God who could perform such wonders.

This was a perfect opportunity for Hezekiah to tell foreigners about the one and only living God. In fact, that was exactly why they came and what they wanted to learn. But instead, Hezekiah thought of his own greatness, and showed them around his palace, and let them see all the silver and gold and treasures that he owned. There was nothing of value that he did not show them [[Isaiah 39:2](#)]. Instead of returning home with the wonderful news of God that they would have shared with their people, those ambassadors took home the knowledge of the incredible wealth that could be had if they were to conquer the kingdom of Judah. This visit tested Hezekiah on his thankfulness to God for his healing, and he failed.

Then Isaiah went back to Hezekiah and asked where did those men come from and what did they want? He answered, “They came from a faraway country called Babylon, to congratulate me.” Isaiah asked, “What did you show and tell them?” Hezekiah answered, “I showed them how wealthy I am. There is not one thing of value that I did not show them.” Then Isaiah said, listen to the word of the Lord, “A day will come when everything you own, and everything that has been collected by all the kings before you, will be carried away to Babylon. In addition to that some of your descendants will be taken as captives and will be servants in the palace of the king of Babylon.” Hezekiah accepted the word from the Lord and he and the people of Jerusalem humbled themselves so that this bad thing did not happen in their generation [[2 Chronicles 32:26](#)]. Hezekiah continued in his faithfulness to God for the remainder of his reign, and the kingdom prospered, but the seed that was sown would eventually spring up and produce a harvest of death and destruction.

We should all learn from Hezekiah’s example, that we should not miss opportunities to tell others about the love and mercy of God. If our hearts and minds are truly filled with His love, it will more naturally flow out to others. Every day we have a responsibility to impress others with our words and actions. One

unkind word, or one mean or unfair action can have a negative influence on someone else. Our words and our actions can never be taken back or undone, but we can choose whether to make them like good seeds or bad. A kind word or act might influence a person to be nice or helpful to someone else, which can produce a chain of good that we might never know about. True followers of Christ will leave a path of good seeds planted in the lives of people they interact with. These seeds have the potential to spring up, producing a harvest of souls for the kingdom of God.

## *Chapter 30—Deliverance From Assyria*

In the latter half of Hezekiah's reign, it seemed as if nothing could save Judah from Assyria. But Hezekiah had faith in the power of Jehovah to protect them and said, "Be strong and courageous, and don't be afraid of the king of Assyria. Don't worry about how many soldiers he has in his army because there are more on our side. He only has people in his army, but we have the army of the Lord our God to fight our battles." [[2 Chronicles 32:7-8](#)]. The prophet Isaiah also had this encouraging message from God, "Do not be afraid of the Assyrian king even though he still looks strong. Be patient, because he will be defeated, like Midian and Egypt from your history. He is acting as if he can control you, but soon his power over you will be broken." [[Isaiah 10:24-27](#)]. Earlier, in the last year of Ahaz, Isaiah had this message from God, "Whatever I want to happen will happen, and I will break the power that the Assyrians have on My land. He will no longer have any power over you. This is what I want to happen on earth, and I have power over all nations. The Lord has said it, and who can change it. His hand is ready to act, who can stop it." [[Isaiah 14:24-27](#)].

Even though they had these promises from God, Assyria did have enough power over Judah for a while to make them pay a tribute, or tax. During this time Hezekiah wisely prepared for a siege, by strengthening the city walls and making sure he had a continuous water source inside the walls of Jerusalem. He also destroyed the water sources outside the city so that any surrounding army would have to bring in their own water. He made arrows and shields, and he organized the people for war [[2 Chronicles 32:3-6](#)]. At this time, many people from northern kingdom of Israel had already been removed and scattered by the Assyrians. The Assyrians had already besieged Samaria and captured it, and so they had a foothold not far from the border of Judah.

Hezekiah had done his part and now he waited in faith for the fulfillment of God's promise of protection. The people felt secure and trusted the words of Hezekiah [[2 Chronicles 32:8](#)]. When the day finally arrived, the Assyrian forces were so confident of their victory, that one part of their army went south to fight the Egyptians, and the other part surrounded Jerusalem. There was no human way that Judah could hope to match forces with the Assyrians surrounding their city, and there was no nation that could come to their rescue. Their only hope was in the promises given to them by God.

Because of the wickedness of Israel and Judah, the miraculous power of God had not been seen much, and they were seen as weak, and the name of God that had caused fear among the nations in days past was now ridiculed [[Isaiah 52:5](#)]. Rabshakeh, one of Sennacherib's generals sent this message to king Hezekiah,

“This is what the great king of Assyria says, ‘What reason do you have for any confidence? You say you have been planning for this and are ready but those are only words. Who is giving you the confidence to rebel against me?’” [[2 Kings 18:19-20](#)]. These talks were not done face to face in a room but were shouted from the ground to the top of the wall. Hezekiah’s officials asked that these conversations take place in Syrian so the people on the wall would not understand, but Rabshakeh laughed at the idea and shouted out louder in the Jewish language. “Listen to the words of the great king, the king of Assyria. Do not let Hezekiah deceive you by telling you that you can be saved from my power. Don’t listen to him when he says to trust in the Lord and that your city will not fall to the king of Assyria. In fact, make an agreement with me by coming out with a present and surrendering to me and I will let you keep living in your own houses, eating from your own trees, and drinking from your own wells. And when I do relocate you, I will give you equally nice land with fields and vineyards. Be wary of trusting Hezekiah when he tells you the Lord will deliver you. Have any of the gods of the surrounding nations saved them from the king of Assyria? Your God couldn’t even save Israel and Samaria from me. In fact, name just one god that has saved his people from me?” [[Isaiah 36:13-20](#)].

The people of Judah didn’t say a word in response to what Rabshakeh said, but they tore their clothes and went to Hezekiah and told him everything that was said. When Hezekiah heard the words and the challenge to the God of Israel, he tore his clothes and put on clothes of mourning and went to the temple. The king sent a messenger to Isaiah to tell him what was said, and asked him to pray that God who heard the words of Rabshakeh, will deal with him and save them [[2 Kings 19:1-4](#)]. They both prayed, and God gave a message to Isaiah for Hezekiah. “Do not be afraid of the words which you have heard. The servants of the king of Assyria said boastful things, blaspheming Me. I will deal with him, causing him to receive news that he is needed, and when he returns home, he will die by the sword.” [[2 Kings 19:6-7](#)].

King Sennacherib who was with the army to the south, near the border of Egypt, sent a letter saying, “Since the gods of other nations have not been able to save their people from me, so the God of Hezekiah will not be able to deliver His people from me either. Don’t let your God deceive you by telling you that Jerusalem will not be conquered by me. Listen, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to other nations, completely destroying them. What makes you think you will be any different?” [[2 Chronicles 32:17](#); [2 Kings 19:10-13](#)]. When Hezekiah got this letter, he took it to the temple, and prayed earnestly, asking for help from heaven. “O Lord God of Israel, who sits between the cherubim, You alone are the God of all kingdoms on the earth. You created the heavens and the earth. Bend Your ear to

hear and turn Your eyes to see what Sennacherib is saying about You. It is true that the kings of Assyria have destroyed many nations, whose false gods, of course could not do anything to save them. Now O Lord our God, I am begging You to save us, so that all the earth will know that You are the only true God.” [[2 Kings 19:15-19](#)].

The honor of Jehovah was at stake, and because of the prayers, He would be able to take action. When he dedicated the temple, Solomon had prayed that God would defend His people so that the earth would know that He is God, and there is no other [[1 Kings 8:59-60](#)].

Through Isaiah, God had more encouraging words for Hezekiah, spoken against the king of Assyria. “Who do you think it is that you have blasphemed? I am the Holy One of Israel. You have been speaking against Me when you claim you will invade My land. Your messengers have defied Me and they boast about your achievements. They say with your many chariots, you have conquered the highest mountains and cut down the tallest trees. Also, that you have dug wells and washed your feet in many lands and stopped the rivers from flowing in Egypt. But what you don’t realize is that I knew long ago that you would be conquering strong cities, and I have allowed it. That is why the people you attack are so afraid and powerless. They are easy victories for you like grass that can be trampled under your feet or scorched by the sun. But I know everything about you, and I know where you live. I hear all the things you say about Me that are not true. Because of that and your arrogance, I will lead you around, as if by a hook in your nose, or a bridle in your mouth. I will make you turn around and go back to where you came from.” [[2 Kings 19:20-28](#)].

The invading Assyrian army had already done a lot of damage to the land of Judah, but God promised to miraculously provide for their needs. Hezekiah was told, “The food that grows up on its own will be enough to feed your people for the next two years, and then in the third year you will be able to plant and harvest. All those who survive the siege will flourish, and some will spread out from there and establish themselves away from Jerusalem. I am the Lord of heaven’s armies that will make this happen. As for the king of Assyria, he will not step foot in the city, he will not shoot a single arrow into it, nor will he make a bank with earth to reach the top of the wall. He will return the way he came, because I will defend this city for My own name’s sake, and for the sake of My servant David.” [[2 Kings 19:29-34](#)].

That night, the angel of the Lord went into the Assyrian camp that surrounded the city, and killed 185,000 men [[2 Kings 19:35](#)], including the strongest men, and all the commanders of his army. News of this was carried to Sennacherib, who was

still blocking the path from Egypt to the land of Judah, and he became very afraid, and he went back home in shame. But the fulfillment of the prophecy was not complete yet. On returning home, when he went into the temple of his god to worship, he was killed by his own children, and his son Esarhaddon took the throne in his place [[2 Chronicles 32:21](#); [Isaiah 37:38](#)].

God was victorious over the proud Assyrians, and the honor of Jehovah was restored among the surrounding nations, and in Jerusalem there was great rejoicing. The prayers of the Jews had included much confession and repentance, and they fully realized their helplessness and dependance on the power of God to save them. Now the temple courts were filled with the sound of singing. “God is known in Judah, and His name is great in Israel. His temple is in Jerusalem, and that is where He can be found. He breaks the fiery arrows of the enemy, and their shields and swords He destroys. You are more majestic than mountains. The bravest enemies have been plundered as they slept. No one can lift a hand against us. At the blast of Your breath O God of Jacob, horses and chariots are stopped still. You should be feared greatly, who can stand before You when You are angry. You passed judgment from heaven, the earth trembled and was silent before You. You stand up as judge against the oppressor of the poor. You turn the anger of men against them. Make promises to the Lord and keep them. Bring offerings to the Awesome One. He breaks the pride of princes, and the kings of earth are afraid of Him.” [[Psalm 76](#)].

Assyria was a powerful empire, that ruled over nations and kingdoms. In symbolic language given to the prophet Ezekiel, Assyria was described this way: “Assyria was a tall cedar in Lebanon, with strong and beautiful branches, providing shade for the forest below. Great nations were like smaller trees growing in its shade. No other tree could compare to it. Other cedars in the garden were small compared to it. Branches of the fir and chestnut trees could not compare. In fact, no tree in the garden of God was as beautiful. Every tree in the garden of God was envious of it.” [[Ezekiel 31:3-9](#)].

But instead of using their power for the benefit of others, they used it to punish and harm. They had no respect for God, and no mercy on fellow human beings. They had a practice of forcing other nations to worship the gods of Ninevah, whom they exalted above the Most High. In His mercy, God sent Jonah to warn them, and for a short while they humbled themselves and repented, but then they returned to worshipping their idols, and conquering other nations. The prophet Nahum described Assyria this way: “Cursed are you, bloody city, full of lies and robbery, and also full of victims. The whip cracks, horse hoofs pound, and the chariot wheels rattle and rumble. So many are killed that people stumble over the bodies. The Lord of heaven’s armies says, ‘I am against you.’” [[Nahum 3:1-5](#)].

The Lord is slow to get angry, and has great power, and He will not let the guilty go unpunished. His power can be displayed by great windstorms, and clouds are like dust under His feet. At His command oceans and rivers dry up. Green pastures and forests turn brown. In His presence, great mountains shake, and hills melt away. The earth trembles and people die. Who can stand before His anger, and who can survive His fury? His anger is like a blazing fire, and mountains turn to ash [[Nahum 1:3-6](#)].

The glory of the Assyrian empire was great, and its final downfall would also be great. So, the great city Nineveh, that was safe and secure, that boasted that there was no one like her, would become desolate. She would become the home of wild beasts [[Zephaniah 2:15](#); [Nahum 2:10-11](#)]. Continuing the parable of Assyria as the tallest cedar in the forest: “Thus says the Lord God, because you were the tallest tree, you became proud and put yourself over all others. Therefore, I have handed you over to another mighty heathen nation that will destroy you as you deserve. A new terror of the nations will cut you down, and you will lay on the ground with your branches scattered across the mountains and valleys. Everything that was living in your shadow has gone away. Let no other tree be so boastful even if it is the tallest, for all things die and decay. I made all nations shake with fear at the sound of your fall.” [[Ezekiel 31:10-16](#)]. The pride of the Assyrian shall be brought down [[Zechariah 10:11](#)].

Let the fall of Assyria be a lesson to all nations of the world to the end of time. Those who in arrogance and pride exalt themselves above God will be brought down.

## *Chapter 31—Hope for the Heathen*

The ministry of Isaiah had a clear message for the heathen. Others who were not descendants of Abraham could be counted as part of God's chosen people. The Jews did not agree with him, but he continued to preach this message. The apostle Paul, who was called to bring the gospel to the Gentiles quoted Isaiah, "I was found by those who were not looking for Me, I showed Myself to those that were not asking for Me." [[Romans 10:20](#)]. The Israelites seemed unable or unwilling to understand God's intention for the heathen. He wanted Israel to remain separate so they would not be corrupted, but His intention was that He could bless all nations through them. God's promise to Abraham was: [Genesis 12:2](#) I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you." [Genesis 12:2-3 NLT](#). [Genesis 18:18](#) "For Abraham will certainly become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him. [Genesis 18:18 NLT](#). [Genesis 22:18](#) And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me." [Genesis 22:18 NLT](#).

The great miracles that accompanied Israel's release from Egyptian slavery and their taking of the Promised Land gave the opportunity for many heathen nations to learn something about God. At one point, even Pharaoh asked for a blessing [[Exodus 12:31-32](#)]. Before any part of Canaan had been given to the Israelites, Rahab, the heathen prostitute, had this to say, [Joshua 2:11](#) No wonder our hearts have melted in fear! No one has the courage to fight after hearing such things. For the LORD your God is the supreme God of the heavens above and the earth below. [Joshua 2:11 NLT](#). Later the Gibeonites were included in the covenant promise when they gave up their idolatry and worshipped the God of heaven. King David wrote, [Psalm 22:27](#) The whole earth will acknowledge the LORD and return to him. All the families of the nations will bow down before him. [Psalm 22:27 NLT](#). [Psalm 68:31](#) Let Egypt come with gifts of precious metals; let Ethiopia bow in submission to God. [Psalm 68:31 NLT](#). [Psalm 102:15](#) Then the nations will tremble before the LORD. The kings of the earth will tremble before his glory. [Psalm 102:15 NLT](#).

If Israel had done as God had intended, all nations of the earth would have shared in her blessings, but instead, they looked at all other nations as beyond hope of God loving or accepting them. They made no attempt to share the truth, so the heathen remained ignorant of God's purpose for them. When the Israelites were finally dispersed among the nations, many would finally learn about the true God, their Creator, and their Redeemer. They would learn about His law, and the Sabbath day. [Isaiah 52:10](#) ... All the ends of the earth will see the victory of our God.

[Isaiah 52:10 NLT](#). Isaiah also wrote, “Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, ‘The Lord is keeping me separate from His people.’” [[Isaiah 56:3](#)]. [Isaiah 56:6](#) "I will also bless the foreigners who commit themselves to the LORD, who serve him and love his name, who worship him and do not desecrate the Sabbath day of rest, and who hold fast to my covenant. <sup>7</sup> I will bring them to my holy mountain of Jerusalem and will fill them with joy in my house of prayer. I will accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices, because my Temple will be called a house of prayer for all nations. <sup>8</sup> For the Sovereign LORD, who brings back the outcasts of Israel, says: I will bring others, too, besides my people Israel." [Isaiah 56:6-8 NLT](#).

Many of Isaiah’s prophecies were about the Messiah, and so they would not be fulfilled until Jesus came. [Isaiah 9:2](#) The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine. [Isaiah 9:2 NLT](#). The Light of the world would bring salvation to every nation, language, and people. [Isaiah 49:6](#) He says, "You will do more than restore the people of Israel to me. I will make you a light to the Gentiles, and you will bring my salvation to the ends of the earth." [Isaiah 49:6 NLT](#). [Isaiah 66:12](#) This is what the LORD says: "I will give Jerusalem a river of peace and prosperity. The wealth of the nations will flow to her. Her children will be nursed at her breasts, carried in her arms, and held on her lap. [Isaiah 66:12 NLT](#). And they shall declare My glory among the nations [[Isaiah 66:19](#)].

The prophet Isaiah understood that his people were to prepare the way for the everlasting kingdom. [Isaiah 52:7](#) How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who brings good news, the good news of peace and salvation, the news that the God of Israel reigns! [Isaiah 52:7 NLT](#). Arise, shine, for the light has come and the glory of the Lord is shining upon you. Look, darkness is covering the earth, and evil darkness the people, but the glory of the Lord will be seen on you. The Gentiles will come to your light, and kings will be attracted to the brightness of your rising. Look and see all the people coming to you, your sons will come back, and daughters will be born at home. Strangers will build up your walls, and kings will serve you. In My anger I punished you, but I also showed mercy to you. Your gates will no longer need to be shut day or night. The wealth of Gentiles and their kings will march before you [[Isaiah 60:1-11](#)]. Look to Me and be saved, everyone on the earth. I am God and there is no other [[Isaiah 45:22](#)].

Many of Isaiah’s prophecies were for the future from his time and were fulfilled by the first coming of Jesus. But some of them can be applied to modern times as missionaries travel all over the world, bringing the light of the gospel where only darkness existed before. [2 Chronicles 16:9](#) The eyes of the LORD search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. ... [2](#)

[Chronicles 16:9 NLT](#). There are people who live in darkness but are longing for something better. As they respond to the Spirit of God, they begin to behave different than those around them. Though they have never heard of Jesus, or read the law of God, they are honest, and they love their neighbor as themselves. They are willing to stick to their principles even if it threatens their lives. “When I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me. He will bring me forth to the light, I will see His righteousness.” [[Micah 7:8-9](#)].

God’s plan of salvation does not have a limit on the number of people it can save. He would like to save every single person, and He will not let a single person who desires something better be disappointed. They are treated as if they have prayed and angels are sent to bring deliverance and peace. [Isaiah 49:25](#) But the LORD says, "The captives of warriors will be released, and the plunder of tyrants will be retrieved. For I will fight those who fight you, and I will save your children. [Isaiah 49:25 NLT](#). [Psalm 146:5](#) But joyful are those who have the God of Israel as their helper, whose hope is in the LORD their God. [Psalm 146:5 NLT](#). [Psalm 112:4](#) Light shines in the darkness for the godly. They are generous, compassionate, and righteous. [Psalm 112:4 NLT](#). [Isaiah 42:16](#) I will lead blind Israel down a new path, guiding them along an unfamiliar way. I will brighten the darkness before them and smooth out the road ahead of them. Yes, I will indeed do these things; I will not forsake them. [Isaiah 42:16 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 32—Manasseh and Josiah*

Judah was prosperous during the reign of Hezekiah, but during the long reign of his son, [2 Chronicles 33:9](#) ... Manasseh led the people of Judah and Jerusalem to do even more evil than the pagan nations that the LORD had destroyed when the people of Israel entered the land. [2 Chronicles 33:9 NLT](#). As a result of this, Judah became a nation full of great evil, violence, oppression, and there was no justice for the common people. During the reign of Hezekiah, many people had been faithful to God, and now there were some who continued to worship Him and keep His law. These tried to resist the rising tide of evil in the land, and many were killed by Manasseh because they stood against him. [2 Kings 21:16](#) Manasseh also murdered many innocent people until Jerusalem was filled from one end to the other with innocent blood. This was in addition to the sin that he caused the people of Judah to commit, leading them to do evil in the LORD's sight. [2 Kings 21:16 NLT](#).

Isaiah who had faithfully served God as a prophet for more than 50 years was one of the first to be killed. Paul wrote this about how some of the faithful suffered persecution and death. “Some were tried in court and unjustly condemned, some were cruelly whipped, some were put in chains and in prison. Some were stoned to death, others sawn in half, and others killed with the sword. Many were poor, they were made fun of and abused. They lived in the desert, or mountains, and hid in caves. The world was not worthy of them.” [[Hebrews 11:36-38](#)].

It was written of Manasseh, “He was more wicked than any king that came before him, and he was even more wicked than the Amorites who occupied the land before Israel.” Because of this wickedness God said, “The people of Judah would be taken as captives to other lands, and their enemies would carry away their treasures.” [[2 Kings 21:11-14](#)]. But this would not be the end of them as a nation. God would not abandon them completely, and He would bring them out of captivity.

As a preview of what was to come, Assyrians invaded Judah and took Manasseh as a prisoner to Babylon. While he suffered in prison, he came to his senses, and he humbled himself before God, and begged for forgiveness. God heard his prayer, and he was allowed to return to Jerusalem [[2 Chronicles 33:11-13](#)]. Though he didn't forget his renewed commitment to God when he returned, the effect of his evil influence before he repented could not be reversed. Manasseh's son Amon was one of those who didn't change his evil ways just because his father had repented, and when he took the throne at the age of 22, he did all the evil things his father had done before his repentance [[2 Kings 21:19-22](#)]. He was so wicked that after only 2 years on the throne, his own servants killed him, and his son Josiah became king [[2 Chronicles 33:23-25](#)].

Josiah became king when he was only 8 years old, but from the start he knew right from wrong. [2 Kings 22:2](#) He did what was pleasing in the LORD's sight and followed the example of his ancestor David. He did not turn away from doing what was right. [2 Kings 22:2 NLT](#). The most natural thing would have been for Josiah to follow the example of his father and grandfather, but somehow at that young age, he chose to do right, and God was able to use him. Followers of Jehovah had been in the minority for a long time, and they had been persecuted, while the wicked were prospering financially. They must have wondered if the promises of God to the nation could ever be fulfilled. 10 of the 12 tribes had been dispersed and no longer existed as a nation and it seemed the last two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were on the verge of being destroyed. Prophets were even predicting the destruction of Jerusalem. The prophet Habakkuk wondered as well and asked God, "O Lord, how long must I call out to You, while it seems You don't hear. There is violence everywhere, but you are not delivering us from it. Will I never stop seeing evil deeds? Do I have to keep watching all this misery? I am surrounded by destruction and violence and people who love to argue and fight. The law does us no good when judges take bribes, and the wicked far outnumber the righteous." [[Habakkuk 1:2-4](#)].

Unfortunately, God's answer was not what Habakkuk wanted to hear. The punishment for the sins of Judah was coming soon in the form of the Chaldeans from Babylon. They are a fierce and terrible people who will carry away the princes of Judah and the best people as captives to Babylon. The land would be turned into a wasteland and nothing would be saved.

Habakkuk was a person of strong faith and hoped that even though the best of Judah would be carried away as captives to Babylon, God would still fulfill His promises to them. God gave him this answer to his continuing prayers. Write your vision and make it clear so that anyone can read it. There is a specific time for its fulfillment, and when the time comes, it will happen, it will not fail. The time for its fulfillment may seem delayed, but wait for it because when its time comes, it will surely happen without delay. The just will survive by having faith [[Habakkuk 2:2-4](#)]. The message to Habakkuk was that if God gives a promise, He will keep it and if it doesn't happen when you think it should, just be patient. This promise is for us today just as it was for the Jews at that time. For people tempted to lose faith in the promise, they could take hold of this message God had for Paul. "My grace is enough for you, and My strength is more obvious when you are weak." Paul's response was: "Most gladly will I glory in my weakness so that God's power will be shown through me. So, I will be pleased when I am sick, suffering, in need, and even when I am being persecuted for the sake of Christ. Because when I am weak, that is when I am actually strong." [[2 Corinthians 12:9-10](#)].

We need to develop the faith of the prophets and apostles, a faith that is strong, and patient. Everything prophesied will be fulfilled, if not before, then when Jesus returns as our Lord, Savior, and King of kings. His return may seem delayed, but like the prophet said, but the promise will be fulfilled.

But bad times were prophesied to come first. The prophesy of Zephaniah during the reign of Josiah, though given for the people of the time, can apply to the time of the end as well. “The great day of the Lord is near; in fact, it is rushing toward us. It will be a day of mourning, even strong men will be crying. It will be a day when the anger of God will be poured out, a day of trouble and distress, a day of desolation, of darkness and without hope. Thick clouds will cause darkness; the trumpet will sound the alarm. Strong cities and battle forts will fall.” [[Zephaniah 1:14-16](#)]. Zephaniah also preached a message that repentance might allow you to hide during the day of the Lord’s anger. “Gather together you shameless nation. Gather before judgment falls on you, before the opportunity to repent blows away in the wind. Before the fierce anger of the Lord falls on you. Search for the Lord, like humble people who obey Him. Try to do what is right, try to be humble, and maybe you will be able to hide in the day of the Lord’s anger.” [[Zephaniah 2:1-3](#)].

It was too late for Judah to avoid judgment, but there was still hope for the future. “A time will come when I will deal with those who are persecuting you. I will save the weak and helpless and gather those who have been chased away. Those who had been captives will receive glory and fame instead of mocking and shame. On that day I will gather you together and bring you home. I will give you a good reputation among the nations.” [[Zephaniah 3:19-20](#)]. [Zephaniah 3:14](#) Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout aloud, O Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, O daughter of Jerusalem! <sup>15</sup> For the LORD will remove his hand of judgment and will disperse the armies of your enemy. And the LORD himself, the King of Israel, will live among you! At last your troubles will be over, and you will never again fear disaster. <sup>16</sup> On that day the announcement to Jerusalem will be, "Cheer up, Zion! Don't be afraid! <sup>17</sup> For the LORD your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs." [Zephaniah 3:14-17 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 33—The Book of the Law*

In the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Josiah's reign, something happened that would delay the coming judgment. Nearly 100 years before, the first Passover of Hezekiah's reign was celebrated. During his reign, Hezekiah had priests read to the people from the writings of Moses, the laws God had given them. Learning about the laws and keeping them was one of the reasons Judah prospered during his reign. But Manasseh had closed the temple and stopped the teaching and reading of the law of God. Now Josiah wanted to restore the temple to its former glory, so he appointed people to clean and repair it. As Hilkiah the high priest was going through the dust covered artifacts, he found a copy of the writings of Moses. He gave it to a scribe named Stephan who read it and then showed it to the king.

Josiah was deeply moved by what he heard, and was surprised how clearly the conditions were stated for life and death, blessings and curses [[Deuteronomy 30:19](#)]. Before they entered Canaan, the promise given through Moses if they obeyed was, [Deuteronomy 31:6](#) So be strong and courageous! Do not be afraid and do not panic before them. For the LORD your God will personally go ahead of you. He will neither fail you nor abandon you." [Deuteronomy 31:6 NLT](#). The book was full of promises of God to save all who would trust Him. He saved them from slavery to the Egyptians and would make them the leader of nations. As Josiah listened to the words being read, he recognized the similarity between the curses and what life was like in the kingdom at the time. He was shocked at how clearly it was stated that bad things would follow if they disobeyed.

Remember the old days, think about the generations past. Ask your father and he will show you, and your elders, and they will tell you. When the Most High divided up the human race, He assigned land to each nation. But the children of Israel were His special possession. He was with them in the desert, He guarded them, and taught them, and protected them as if they were the most important to Him [[Deuteronomy 32:7-10](#)].

But Israel abandoned God, and they didn't take Him seriously. They made Him jealous by worshipping strange gods, and they made Him angry by doing terrible things. They offered sacrifices to demons and worshipped any new god they saw. They ignored the Rock that was their Father, and God that gave birth to them as a nation. The Lord pulled away from them, He was angered by His own sons and daughters. He said, "I will abandon them to their own wickedness and see what happens to them. They are a wicked generation that doesn't know right from wrong. They have made Me jealous by worshipping things that aren't God. They have made Me angry with their idolatry. Now I will make them jealous and angry through the Gentiles. I will send disasters on them, and they will be shot down with

arrows. They will suffer from famine, sickness, and deadly diseases. If only they were a nation that was wise and could understand the relationship between their actions and the bad things that happen to them. How can one enemy chase 1000 of you, and 2 cause 10,000 to flee, unless God is against you? These evil things have been building up in storage, and I will release them in due time. The day of disaster will come and the evil chasing you will catch you.” [[Deuteronomy 32:15-35](#)].

Josiah now realized how much God loved them and how merciful He had been, but he also learned how much God hates sin. In the 8<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, when he was only 16, he trying to learn about the God of his ancestor David. When he was 20, he began to remove the temptations for his people, by destroying the idols and cutting down the trees in the groves where they were worshipped. He burned the bones of the priests on their altars and then broke them down. He did this throughout Jerusalem and all of Judah. But even this was not enough to satisfy him. He went throughout the territory formerly occupied by the northern kingdom of Israel and even though it was mostly in ruins, he destroyed the altars, idols, and groves throughout the entire land [[2 Chronicles 34:3-7](#)].

As Josiah continued to listen to Shaphan read the words from the book of the law, he was so moved that he wanted all of his people to have the same experience. He wondered if there was still time to reverse the course of the kingdom and avoid the punishment and disaster that was almost on top of them. He tore his clothes and prayed earnestly that God would forgive the sins of the nation. Then Josiah sent messengers to the prophetess Huldah and requested that she ask God if there was any way they could avoid the coming disaster that was due to them because of the wickedness of their parents [[2 Kings 22:13](#)].

God’s answer to Josiah was, “I will bring disaster and evil upon this city and the people. All the bad things written in the book will be fulfilled because they have burned incense to other gods and made Me angry with all their evil deeds.” But there was a message specifically for Josiah from God, “Because you tore your clothes, wept, and humbled yourself before Me when you heard the curses I was going to bring upon this nation because of their wickedness, you will not have to live through it.” [[2 Kings 22:15-20](#)].

Though Josiah could not change the eventual judgment that would fall on Judah, he understood that God would still forgive individuals who humbled themselves and repented. So, he decided to do everything he could to give the people the knowledge so they could decide for themselves if they wanted to repent. Josiah began to plan for a great gathering of all the people, both leaders and the common people from all over Jerusalem. His plan was to have the words of the book of the covenant read to everyone. When the day came, the king stood by the pillar of the

temple and made a promise for himself to obey God and keep His commandments. Then Josiah encouraged the leaders of the nation to join with the people and with him in the promise he made to serve the Lord. The people were deeply touched and decided to join the king in repentance and asking God for forgiveness [[2 Kings 23:1-3](#)].

Now that many people had repented, Josiah wanted to do everything in his power to remove the temptations to return to their old way of life. So, he turned his energy to destroying everything related to idol worship. He killed all the priests, and everyone who did magic, and those who communicated with evil spirits. Then he cleansed Jerusalem and all of Judah of every idol, image, shrine, grove, and anything related to idolatry [[2 Kings 23:20-24](#)]. These included images that had been set up by Solomon more than 300 years before [[1 Kings 11:6-8](#)], and had stood through the reigns of many good kings.

Hundreds of years before when the kingdom was first divided, Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom, didn't want his people to go to the temple in Jerusalem. So, he had set up altars and images in the north for people to worship at. When he was dedicating the altar at Bethel, a prophet showed up and made this prophecy about the altar, "O altar, altar, this is what the Lord says, 'One day a child shall be born to the dynasty of David named Josiah. He will kill your priests and will burn their bones on you.'" [[1 Kings 13:2](#)]. After cleansing Jerusalem and Judah, Josiah went beyond his borders to the north and was doing the same to the territory formerly occupied by the kingdom of Israel. When he came to Bethel, Jeroboam's 300-year-old altar was still standing. Josiah destroyed the whole place, burning and grinding everything down to dust. Before that, when he saw some tombs of priests nearby, he dug up the bones and burned them on the altar, fulfilling the word of the Lord [[2 Kings 23:15-16](#)].

But Josiah didn't stop there, he decided to hold a great Passover feast, as described in the book of the law. It was later said, "There has not been a Passover like this since the days of the Judges. Not even during the reign of any king of Israel or Judah." [[2 Kings 23:22](#)].

Josiah's faithfulness was pleasing to God, but there were many in Judah who still refused to repent, and the sins of past generations had set the kingdom on the path to destruction. Josiah reigned for more than 10 years after this great Passover, but he died in battle against Egypt at the young age of 39. All the people of Jerusalem and Judah mourned for Josiah. The prophet Jeremiah wept, and songs were written of him. Later it was said of him that there was not another king who turned to the Lord with all his heart, soul, and strength like Josiah [[2 Chronicles 35:24-26](#)].

## *Chapter 34—Jeremiah*

Jeremiah was called by God to be a prophet in the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of king Josiah. He was also a Levite, so he had been trained for service to God from the time he was a child. With Josiah as king, they were happy and good years for someone to be trained for temple service. He was still very young when he received the call to be a prophet and felt unworthy because of his age. But God said to him, “Do not say you are so young, because you will go to whom I send you, and I will tell you what to say.” Then God touched his mouth with His hand and said, “Look, I have put words in your mouth, I have given you authority over kingdoms and nations, don’t be afraid of them because I will protect you. Be confident when you stand in front of someone, or I might let you look confused. Look, I have made you strong, like a city with strong walls that cannot be defeated. You will be strong like an iron pillar or bronze walls. You will speak against kings, priests, and people of the land. They will oppose you but they will not defeat you, for I am with you and will save you [[Jeremiah 1:6, 17-19](#)].

Jeremiah would stand before the nation for 40 years as a preacher of truth and righteousness. Though he had a willing listener in Josiah, many people still did not worship God, and his message was that the kingdom would fall and even the temple would be destroyed. The Lord said, “From the north, disaster will fall on all the land. I will pronounce My judgment for all your wickedness and for abandoning Me for other gods.” [[Jeremiah 1:14-16](#)]. Wicked kings who followed Josiah would throw Jeremiah in prison for predicting their destruction, and also for pointing out their sins. He would live to see the defeat and destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, and he would live in sorrow for the sad state of his people after that.

But Jeremiah was not only a prophet of doom and gloom. He was given visions and messages about their release from captivity, and their re-settling in the land. He saw that the covenant promise would be renewed with them, and they would be like a watered garden again, and would not be sad [[Jeremiah 31:12](#)]. From the beginning of his ministry, Jeremiah tried to get the people to build their spiritual life on a solid foundation of faith, obedience, and good works.

God even gave Jeremiah messages to the Israelites left in the north; to turn back to Him so His anger would not fall on them. Though their nation had already been destroyed, He wanted them to remember that they were once married to Him, that He was merciful, and that His anger would not last forever. Just admit that they had sinned and return, and He would take them back [[Jeremiah 3:12-14](#)].

Probably more than any other prophet, Jeremiah taught from the book of Deuteronomy, and the laws that Moses had given them. He showed that keeping all those laws would lead to the greatest spiritual blessings both to the nation and individually. “Ask for the old way, find the good path and walk it. Then you will find rest for your soul.” [[Jeremiah 6:16](#)]. One day God told Jeremiah to be present at one of the main city gates and preach about the importance of keeping the Sabbath day holy. Many of the people living in Jerusalem were ignoring the Sabbath commandment and were doing their usual everyday activities. Through Jeremiah, God said: “If you carefully obey Me, by keeping the Sabbath holy, and doing no work on that day, then kings and princes will sit on the throne of David. They will ride horses and chariots through the city gates, and the people of Judah will occupy this city forever.” [[Jeremiah 17:24-25](#)].

As is usually the case, the promise of good things for obedience came with promises of bad things that would happen if they disobeyed. If they failed to keep the Sabbath holy, the city would be destroyed by fire. Jeremiah worked hard to try to bring about change in the hearts of the people of Judah, but it seemed like an overwhelming task because of the number of people who needed to repent. He preached, “O Jerusalem, wash the wickedness from your heart, so that you can be saved.” [[Jeremiah 4:14](#)].

After “good” king Josiah had died, he was replaced by weak, unstable successors, who also cared nothing about God’s law. Jeremiah now felt even more hopeless about saving Judah, but he would not remain silent. On one occasion Jeremiah was commanded by the Lord to stand in the temple court and speak to the people as they came to worship. “Hear the word of the Lord, you people of Judah. This is what the Lord of heaven’s armies, the God of Israel says. Even now if you quit your evil ways, I will allow you to remain in this place. Don’t be fooled by those who say that nothing will happen to us because the Lord’s temple is here. They chant the Lord’s temple is here, the Lord’s temple is here. I will only show mercy to you if you stop your evil thoughts and deed and be fair with everyone. Stop taking advantage of foreigners, orphans, and widows. Stop murdering innocent people and stop worshipping idols. Only then will I allow you to remain in this land.” [[Jeremiah 7:2-7](#)]. This was clearly not just about idolatry, because Jeremiah was speaking to the people who came to the temple to worship God. Just going to the temple and participating in the ceremonies alone was not going to save them. There needed to be a true change in their hearts.

Jeremiah also took his message to the streets of Jerusalem. “Pay attention to the terms of the promise God made with you and do your part.” [[Jeremiah 11:6](#)]. He reminded the people of the promise made with their ancestors when they came out of Egypt. “Obey My voice, and I will be your God, and you will be My people. Do

all the things I commanded you, and things will go well for you.” But they repeatedly broke their side of the promise and did evil things [[Jeremiah 7:23-24](#)].

When he was alive, Josiah’s heart was right with God, and he had prayed for his people, but after his death, it seemed that the chance for saving the nation had passed. Even if the great prophets, Moses and Samuel were praying for the nation at that time, the people were mostly worthy of being cast out by God. So, where would they go when they are cast out by God? Some will die by the sword, some by famine, and some will be carried away as captives [[Jeremiah 15:1-2](#)]. 100 years before, the northern kingdom had used up God’s mercy and no longer existed as a nation, and now Judah was following in their footsteps. Eli’s sons thought the ark, the symbol of God’s presence among them, would save them in battle with the Philistines. In the same way, the people in Jeremiah’s day thought that strictly performing the temple sacrifices would keep them safe, even though they were breaking most of God’s other commands. This should be a lesson to people today, who faithfully attend, and even have positions of responsibility in church, outwardly appearing to be obedient to God. That will not save them if in their private lives, when no one else knows, they break God’s commands. God hates sin and will eventually bring consequences on people who repeatedly break His law.

Jeremiah message which had changed from a call to repentance, to a prediction of destruction and captivity, angered the priests and leaders of Judah. They began to threaten him with death if he would not stop preaching messages of doom and destruction. But Jeremiah faithfully stood before the princes and the people preaching, giving them the message God gave him for them. The courage and confidence with which Jeremiah delivered his messages made the people respect him and may have saved his life. People in power were divided over what to do with him, some wanting to kill him and other’s not wanting to kill God’s messenger.

God does not always choose to preserve the earthly life of His messengers, but in Jeremiah’s case, though many were against him, none succeeded in killing him. God had promised him at the beginning of his ministry, “They will fight against you, but they will not win, because I will save you. I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked and the terrible.” [[15:20-21](#)]. Just because he would not be killed by his enemies did not mean that his life would be easy. He was made fun of and ridiculed when he delivered God’s messages to the people [[Lamentations 3:14](#); [Jeremiah 20:7-10](#)]. But God gave him strength to endure and promised that in the end the poor would be delivered and the evil doers would not prosper [[Jeremiah 20:11-13](#)]. Jeremiah learned that God’s mercy never runs out, His compassion never fails, and His faithfulness is great [[Lamentation 3:22-24](#)].

## *Chapter 35—Approaching Doom*

During Jehoiakim's reign, he received many warning messages about the coming doom. The Assyrian empire was no longer a threat, and Egypt, which had been controlling and protecting Judah was soon about to be defeated. In the east, the Babylonian empire was quickly rising and would soon be the dominant power in the world. In just a few years, the king of Babylon would be God's instrument of punishment for the unrepentant people of Judah. He would attack them repeatedly, carrying off only a few prisoners the first time, but later thousands, and tens of thousands, to live in exile from their homes. The kings of Judah were merely his puppets but when they each rebelled, his punishments on the nation grew more and more harsh, eventually ending with the total destruction of Jerusalem and the temple.

During these years, Jeremiah continued to deliver God's messages to the people. Advice was given to cut ties with Egypt, and since they had completely lost their independence to Babylon, the people were advised to be obedient, cooperative, and friendly to avoid unnecessary violence against them.

To give the people an example of what obedience looks like, Jeremiah invited some Rechabites to come meet with him and he offered them wine as refreshments. But they refused to drink any saying, "Our father Jonadab, the son of Rechab, commanded us and our descendants to never drink any wine ever." Then God said to Jeremiah, "Will you not listen to my instructions and My commands? Why can't you be like the Rechabites, who refuse to drink wine because their father Jonadab, commanded them to never drink wine. Watch now, as I bring upon Judah and Jerusalem all the terrible things I have promised, because they have not listened to My words or responded to them." [[Jeremiah 35:6, 12-17](#)]. The Rechabites were obedient to their father, and obeyed God as well, but the rest of the people of Judah did not obey God and as a result they would suffer the most during the attacks by Babylon. But, for their faithfulness, the Rechabites received a blessing from God.

God had chosen Israel to be a holy nation, and a kingdom of priests [[Exodus 19:6](#)]. But now, even though their destruction and scattering was unavoidable, Jeremiah had faith in the promises that God would bring His people back together. "I will gather the remainder of My people from all countries where they have been scattered and bring them back to their homes. A day will come, says the Lord, that a Descendant of David will arise, and a King will reign and prosper, and will judge the world and there will be justice. In His days, Judah and Israel will be saved, and His name is The Lord Our Righteousness." [[Jeremiah 23:3-6](#)].

The prophecies of destruction and captivity were intermingled with prophecies of final deliverance and glory. In that time, the children of Israel would look back on how God brought them back to their homes from where they had been taken as captives, even as earlier generations looked back on the exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. These prophecies were repeated in the homes of faithful, God-fearing families, and would be remembered by their children when they were in Babylon. In those families, the words of scripture were also taught, and years later, when Daniel and his friends were serving in the court of Nebuchadnezzar, they could bring a knowledge of the living God, and the Creator of all things, to other nations of the earth. The scriptures and the promise of a return to the promised land were also a comfort and a guide for those who studied and remembered them.

Jeremiah did not just give his message in the city of Jerusalem but went around the countryside giving God's message of mercy and compassion, but also judgment. He reminded the people of the law of God and the blessings that would come for keeping it and the curses for breaking it. "If you disobey Me and do not listen to Me, I will punish you with the sword, and scatter you among the heathen, and your land will be left desolate and your cities destroyed." [[Leviticus 26:21, 28, 33](#)].

As Jeremiah was preaching the message of doom for Judah, Jehoiakim, their king should have led the nation in confession and repentance. But instead, he was overtaxing his subjects in both money and labor to build a luxurious palace for himself. Jeremiah became angry when he saw this and said, "Woe to him that builds his house unfairly, using forced labor with no pay. Do you think you have the right to reign because you live in a luxurious house? Your father treated his subjects fairly, and gave everyone justice, including the poor, and he did well. But you want what belongs to others, and are willing to take it by force, even killing if necessary to get whatever you want. So, this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim, son of Josiah. 'People will not weep for you when you die, and you will be buried like a wild donkey, that is dragged out and thrown outside the city gate.'" [[Jeremiah 22:13-19](#)].

In the 4<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah gave this message to all the people living in Jerusalem, and all of Judah. "I have been giving the Lord's messages to you for 20 years, since the 13<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Josiah. But His messages have been ignored and rejected, so this is what the Lord of heaven's armies says: 'Because you have not listened to My words, My servant Nebuchadnezzar will come with a great army from the north and will destroy this land and all the surrounding nations. People will be shocked at the destruction, and the land will be left empty while you and even the surrounding nations serve the king of Babylon for 70 years.'" [[Jeremiah 25:8-11](#)].

But words alone were not sufficient to describe the terrible things that were going to happen. So, God told Jeremiah to act out a parable. “Gather some elders and leading priests and go to the valley of Ben-Hinnom. After describing the terrible things that Judah has done, break a clay pot, and say, ‘This is what the Lord of heaven’s armies says, in the same way, I will break this people and this city, as one might smash a clay jar into pieces so it cannot be put back together.’” Then when he went back to the city, he went to the court of the temple and cried out to all the people, “This is what the Lord of heaven’s armies, the God of Israel says, ‘I will bring upon this city and upon all her towns, all the evil things that I have promised because they are stubborn and do not pay attention to My words.’” [[Jeremiah 19](#)].

Jeremiah’s words angered some of the leaders in the kingdom and they threw him in prison. But even from prison he continued to speak the message given to him by God [[Jeremiah 20:9](#)]. Then God told Jeremiah, beginning with the messages I gave you during the reign of Josiah, write down all the things I have told you will happen to Israel, Judah, and even the surrounding nations. Maybe someone will read it and turn from their sins so that I can forgive them. So, Jeremiah dictated them to his faithful friend, Baruch, and he wrote it all down on a scroll. Then Baruch went out of the prison where Jeremiah was still being held and read the words to the people gathered at the temple [[Jeremiah 36:2-8](#)].

In the 9<sup>th</sup> month and the 5<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Jehoiakim, a national fast had been called for, and many people came to the temple from around the nation. On this occasion, Baruch took the scroll and read to the people who were at the temple. After this Baruch was called to read the words of the scroll to the princes of the kingdom. They took the message seriously and said they would pass it on to the king, but they suggested that Baruch hide because they suspected the king would not be happy with the message and would want to kill the messenger. When the scroll was read to the king, and he heard the words condemning the sins of the nation, and the warnings of what was going to happen, the king became furious, grabbed the scroll, and threw it in the fire. The king and many of the princes did not repent and did not believe the warning of bad things to come, but some of the princes tried to stop the king from burning the scroll. The king then tried to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch, but he couldn’t find them because the Lord hid them [[Jeremiah 36:9-26](#)]. Through the words on the scroll God was still trying to reach the people and get them to repent. When He sees people struggling in darkness and wickedness, He tries to bring them light and understanding. It would do no good for Him to send messengers that will say things to make them feel good about themselves in their evil ways. Instead, He wants them to ask, “What must I do to be saved?” [[Acts 16:30](#)].

But King Jehoiakim and the princes rejected their last warning from God, and their final judgment was pronounced on them. “Thus says the Lord about Jehoiakim king of Judah: ‘His children will not sit on the throne of David and his dead body will be left out in the heat of the day and the cold of night. I will punish him and his children, and his helpers for their sins. I will bring on them and the people living in Jerusalem all the terrible things I have been predicting.’” [[Jeremiah 36:30-31](#)].

For the benefit of others, God told Jeremiah to write all the messages on a scroll again. Rejecting God’s warning and persecuting His servants is something that still happens today. Like Jehoiakim, they would rather listen to people who tell them they are good, and that good things will happen. God’s messengers today will need the same courage and patience that was needed from His prophets in the past. They should continue to faithfully do the work God has given them and remember that even Jesus Himself and his apostles suffered persecution.

God’s last messages to Jehoiakim were not about saving them from being conquered by Babylon. They recommended that he be obedient and cooperative, and maybe he would gain the respect of the king of Babylon. Jehoiakim had actually been allowed to remain as king over the people of Judah, as long as he remembered that he was under the authority of the king of Babylon. In fact, he promised to do so, and then broke his promise, when he rebelled against Babylon. Then God sent groups of Chaldeans, Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites to attack the land of Judah, and Jehoiakim was powerless against them [[2 Kings 24:1-2](#)].

Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim took the throne briefly, but was powerless and had to surrender when Jerusalem was surrounded by the Babylonian army. This time Nebuchadnezzar took the king, his mother, his wives, his officers, and the best people of the land, as prisoners to Babylon. He also took everything of value from the temple and from the king’s palace [[2 Kings 24:13-16](#)]. Then Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah, one of Josiah’s sons, governor over what remained of Judah, but he changed his name to Zedekiah.

## *Chapter 36—The Last King of Judah*

At first Nebuchadnezzar trusted Zedekiah, and if he had proved trustworthy, things would have been much better for the people of Judah, not only there at home, but also for the ones taken to Babylon. Jeremiah was advising, Zedekiah and all the Jews, even those taken to Babylon, to quietly submit to Babylonian rule and try to live peacefully wherever they were. This went against their national pride and Satan took advantage of this by raising up false prophets to promise deliverance, and the restoration of the kingdom. As things were getting stirred up, God told Jeremiah to warn the people and Zedekiah with details of the great suffering that would follow if they continued on this path of rebellion. Jeremiah wrote, do not be deceived by your false prophets because the deliverance from the Lord will not come for 70 years. God’s message through Jeremiah to the Jews was, “Build houses and live in them, plant gardens and eat from them, contribute to the peace of the city where you are made to live, and even pray for that city, because if they have peace, you will also.” [[Jeremiah 29:5-7](#)].

There were two men in Babylon who claimed to speak for God, but they were evil men. Jeremiah had condemned them and warned the people about listening to them. This made them angry, so they tried to get people to not trust Jeremiah. But God gave a message through Jeremiah that these men would be arrested by Nebuchadnezzar and killed, and not long after it happened just as Jeremiah said.

In the end days men will arise and create confusion and rebellion among people who claim to be followers of God. They will teach that there is no absolute standard for right and wrong and that God’s law is not for everyone. Then, when their teaching produces evil results, they will blame God’s true followers.

God saw into the future and knew that Babylon would arise and conquer Israel and all the surrounding kingdoms. In His mercy, He advised them through Jeremiah, to surrender to the king of Babylon and save themselves much death and destruction. But ambassadors from Edom, Moab, Tyre, and other nations visited Zedekiah to plot a rebellion against Babylon. When they were there, God gave Jeremiah a message for them. “Tie up yourself and put a yoke on your neck and give yokes to the ambassadors to take to their kings. And give this message to them, ‘I have given all your land to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, and you will serve him, his son, and his grandson, until the end of his kingdom. And if you do not surrender to him, you will suffer famine, disease, and death by the sword. Do not listen to the false prophets who advise you not to surrender, but to fight against him. Nations who surrender to him, will even be able to continue living in their own countries and on their own land.’” [[Jeremiah 27:2-11](#)].

One who stood up to oppose Jeremiah was the false prophet Hananiah. He said he had a message from God and said, “This is what the Lord of heaven’s armies says, ‘I have broken the yoke of the king of Babylon, and within 2 years, I will bring back all the precious things that Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple. I will also bring back Jeconiah, son of Jehoiakim, and all the captives from Judah that were taken to Babylon.’” But Jeremiah continued to preach his message of surrender, and even quoted the prophets Hosea, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, and others, saying the same thing. Then Hananiah confronted Jeremiah and grabbed the yoke from his neck and broke it, then said, “This is what the Lord says, in the same way I will break the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon from the neck of all the surrounding nations within 2 years.” Rather than arguing with him at that time, Jeremiah simply walked away. Then God gave Jeremiah a message, “Go tell Hananiah, ‘This is what the Lord says. You have broken these wooden yokes, but if the people listen to you, their wooden yokes will be replaced with ones made of iron. And they will serve Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.’ As for you, Hananiah, the Lord has not spoken through you, and you are making these people believe a lie. So, this is God’s message for you, ‘Look, I will remove you from the face of the earth. You will die because you have caused people to rebel against Me.’” So, Hananiah the false prophet died that year in the 7<sup>th</sup> month [[Jeremiah 28:2-17](#)].

Nebuchadnezzar had learned of the visit of the ambassadors from the other nations, and now Zedekiah was afraid of what would happen. So, he went to Babylon to renew his promise to serve the king of Babylon. Since Nebuchadnezzar had already learned about the God of Israel, from Daniel and other Hebrew captives, he made Zedekiah swear his promise in the name of the Lord God of Israel. Keeping his promise would not only have been good for Judah, and himself. But Zedekiah didn’t humble himself when Jeremiah brought him messages from the Lord, and he rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, and he did what was evil in the eyes of God [[2 Chronicles 36:12-13](#)].

As Jeremiah continued to bring God’s messages to the people in Judah, Ezekiel began his ministry as a prophet to the captives in Babylon. He brought messages of warning and comfort and also confirmed the message of Jeremiah. In the 6<sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah’s reign, Ezekiel received a vision of the idolatry that was being practiced in Jerusalem, and even in the courtyard of the temple. He saw engravings on the walls of creeping animals, all kinds of unclean beasts, and idols the Israelites were worshipping. Then he saw 70 leaders of the people offering incense to the idolatrous images that he saw on the walls, and they said, God doesn’t even see us doing this because He has abandoned our land. As the vision continued, Ezekiel saw women weeping for Tamuz, and he saw 25 men facing east, with their

backs to the temple, worshipping the sun. Finally, in the vision, Ezekiel was asked, “Now that you’ve seen all this, do you think it is a small thing that the people are doing all these wicked things in the temple? But there is more: they have filled the land with violence, and it is as if they are turning their nose up at Me. Because of this I will not spare them, I will have no pity, and even if they call out to Me loudly, I will not listen.” [[Ezekial 8:10-18](#)]. This wickedness was also written by the historian who wrote, “All the leading priests and people sinned more and more, following the evil practices of other nations, and they polluted the temple that had been dedicated to the Lord.” [[2 Chronicles 36:14](#)].

The day of judgment was near, but the people said, “There is plenty of time and the prophecies are not true.” But through Ezekiel, God said, “The days have arrived that all the prophecies will be fulfilled. I am the Lord, I will speak, and My words will be fulfilled right away. They will be fulfilled in your lifetime because you are rebellious. I will do what I say, says the Lord God.” [[Ezekiel 12:22-28](#)].

The most guilty in leading the nation to destruction was king Zedekiah. He ignored all the advice given by the Lord through prophets. He broke the promise he made to Nebuchadnezzar, which he swore in the name of the Lord God of Israel. And he tried to rebel by joining forces with Israel’s oldest enemy, Egypt. This is what God said about Zedekiah to Ezekiel, “Will he do well and escape after the things he has done? Can he break promises and then be saved? As surely as I live says the Lord God, in Babylon he shall die. Pharaoh with his great army cannot save him.” [[Ezekiel 17:15-18](#)]. Wicked Zedekiah would be the last king of Judah, and the throne of David will be empty until Christ Himself will set up His kingdom [[Ezekiel 21:25-27](#)].

## *Chapter 37—Carried Into Babylon*

In the 9<sup>th</sup> year of Zedekiah's reign, Nebuchadnezzar brought his entire army and surrounded Jerusalem [[2 Kings 25:1](#)]. It appeared hopeless for Judah, and instead of messages of hope and deliverance from the Lord, there were messages of punishment and deliverance into the hands of enemies. "Look, I am against you. I have unsheathed My sword to punish you, and I will not put it back. You will wilt in fear, your hands will be weak, and your knees will be like water and will not be able to support you. My anger will be poured out on you, My wrath will be blown on you. You will be delivered into the hands of cruel men who will destroy you." [[Ezekiel 21:3-7, 31](#)].

Egypt made an attempt to help the besieged city, which succeeded in drawing the Chaldeans away from surrounding Jerusalem. This gave Zedekiah hope, and he even asked Jeremiah to pray for the nation. But Jeremiah said the Chaldeans would be back and would destroy the city. The word of the Lord was, "Do not deceive yourselves, the Chaldeans will not leave. Even if you were able to fight against them and wound all of them, they will still set your city on fire." [[Jeremiah 37:9-10](#)]. Those left in Judah would be taken into captivity to learn the lessons they refused to learn in times of independence and peace.

At this time the ark of the covenant was still in the temple but trusting the word of the Lord that the city and temple would be destroyed, good men decided to hide the ark. They took it and hid it in some cave and that knowledge was lost, and it remains hidden to this day.

At this time Jeremiah felt there was nothing more he could do for the people of Judah, so he decided to leave the city. But wicked men went to the authorities and lied, saying Jeremiah was a traitor and was going to join the Babylonians. So, he was thrown in prison [[Jeremiah 37:15](#)].

Meanwhile Egypt was hopelessly fighting the armies of Nebuchadnezzar, because the word of the Lord through Ezekiel was, "Look, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt. Though they are trying to be a staff of help to Judah, the power of Egypt is like a broken stem of grass that grows by the river. Everyone in Egypt will know that I am the Lord when they are completely defeated by the king of Babylon." [[Ezekiel 29:3,6](#)].

While Zedekiah was nervously waiting to see if Egypt would succeed against Babylon, he called for Jeremiah, who was in prison, and asked if there was any new message from the Lord? Jeremiah said, yes and the message is, "You will be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." Then Jeremiah asked, "What have I done to you or the people of Judah that I deserve to be put in prison? Where are

your prophets who told you that the king of Babylon would not attack. Now, I beg of you to please not send me back to the dungeon because I would die there.” So, Zedekiah made Jeremiah stay in the courtyard of the prison guard, and the king also ordered that he be given a piece of bread each day [[Jeremiah 37:17-21](#)].

At this time Zedekiah wanted to trust and believe Jeremiah but he was afraid to show it because the princes and the people might call him a traitor. Jeremiah continued to advise anyone who would listen that they should surrender to the Babylonians, because resisting would surely end in death. The words from God were, “Whoever stays in the city will die, but whoever goes out and surrenders to the Chaldeans will live. This city will definitely fall to the king of Babylon.” [[Jeremiah 38:2-3](#)].

Finally, the princes got so angry with Jeremiah that they went to the king and said, “This man is a traitor and is discouraging resistance so he must die.” The king was afraid of the princes, so he didn’t stand up to them, and he pretended that he agreed with them and allowed them to do to Jeremiah as they wanted. So, they threw him down in a pit where he sank into the mud, and they didn’t even give him any water. Then Ebed-Melech, an Ethiopian who served in the king’s house went to the king and begged for permission to rescue Jeremiah before he died, and he was told he could return him to the courtyard of the prison guard [[Jeremiah 38:4-13](#)].

Once again, the king called Jeremiah to speak with him in private and asked what was going to happen. Jeremiah asked, “If I tell you, are you going to kill me? If I give you advice, will you follow it?” Then, Zedekiah promised Jeremiah that he would not turn him over to the men who wanted to kill him, so he was told, “If you go out of the city and surrender to the Babylonians, you will live and the city will not be set on fire, but if you don’t, the city will be burned to the ground and you will die.” But Zedekiah was afraid the Babylonians would hand him over to the Jewish captives and they would make fun of him. But Jeremiah said they wouldn’t do that, and he continued to beg him to turn himself over and save his life [[Jeremiah 38:15-20](#)].

The king was really torn over what to do, and he really believed Jeremiah, but he couldn’t bring himself to go against the will of the princes and the words of the false prophets. He was too weak to follow his conscience and instead followed the popular path of resistance. He didn’t even want the people in his court to know that he had been talking to Jeremiah because they might make fun of him. Even at the end, if Zedekiah had taken a strong stance, the people would have respected his courage and conviction. Many would have followed, and Jerusalem would have been spared destruction, and the people saved from horrible deaths.

In the end, Zedekiah was taken prisoner, and his sons were killed as he was forced to watch. That was the last thing he would see because, next his eyes were ripped out, and then he was taken to Babylon as a prisoner where he died horribly. The beautiful temple that had stood for over 400 years, was torn down and everything was set on fire, and the walls of Jerusalem were broken down [[2 Chronicles 36:19-21](#)].

Nebuchadnezzar had learned that Jeremiah was urging surrender and cooperation with Babylon, and to reward him for this, he told Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, to take good care of him. Of course, do not harm him and give him anything he asks for [[Jeremiah 39:11-12](#)]. After he was released from prison, Jeremiah decided to stay with the few poor people who were left to take care of the land. The Babylonians appointed Gedaliah as governor, but some troublemakers rebelled against him and killed him, then they persuaded the poor people that they should abandon the land and go to live in Egypt. To this Jeremiah said, “Do not go to live in Egypt,” but the people ignored him and went anyway. Jeremiah was given a message from God telling the people what they would suffer if they went to Egypt. But God also told them He would have mercy on those who obeyed and returned to the land of Judah.

Jeremiah mourned over the wickedness of his people and the sad state of their nation, but he also understood that it was because of the mercy of God that the Jewish people were not completely destroyed. Meanwhile, he continued to try to get any who would listen to return to the Lord. Speaking of Jerusalem that was destroyed, and the people of God in captivity, Jeremiah said, “How has the city that used to be full of people become so empty. She has become like a widow. She was once great among the nations, but now she weeps bitterly into the night. Her lovers have abandoned her, and her friends have betrayed her. Judah has gone into captivity and living among the heathen, she finds no rest. The gates of Jerusalem are empty because no one comes to the annual feasts anymore. The Lord has punished her for all her many sins.” [[Lamentation 1:1-5](#)]. “The Lord in His anger cast a shadow over Jerusalem. The most beautiful city in Israel lies in the dust, and even the temple was not spared. Homes were destroyed, the great walls of Jerusalem have been brought down to the ground, and the royal family has been dishonored. Israel is weak in the face of His anger, and He did nothing to protect them as enemies attacked. He consumed the whole land like a raging fire, as if He was Israel’s enemy, killing even their finest youth.” [[Lamentations 2:1-4](#)]. “What can I say about you? What can I compare you to O daughter of Jerusalem? How can you be comforted when your wound is as large as the ocean? Who could ever heal you?” [[Lamentations 2:13](#)]. “O Lord, don’t forget what has happened to us, and how we have been shamed. Our land has been taken over by strangers and

aliens. We have become a nation of orphans and widows because our fathers have sinned and are no more. Former slaves now rule over us, and we feel hopeless.” [[Lamentation 5:1-3, 7-8](#)]. “You, O Lord, exist forever, and your throne spans generations. Why have You forgotten us and abandoned us for so long? Bring us back to You again and bring back the good days.” [[Lamentations 5:19-21](#)].

## *Chapter 38—Light Through the Darkness*

The Jews who survived the death and destruction that marked the end of their kingdom and nation must have been discouraged beyond description. The only hope they could hang on to came from the prophecies from God through prophets such as Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, and of course Moses. During the wilderness wandering after leaving Egypt, the Israelites had learned, remembered, and taught their children the law of God and His promises. They were to do this by repeating them in their homes, writing them on their door posts and gates, singing them, chanting them, and meditating on them day and night. [Joshua 1:8](#) Study this Book of Instruction continually. Meditate on it day and night so you will be sure to obey everything written in it. Only then will you prosper and succeed in all you do.

[Joshua 1:8 NLT](#). Every 7 years, when the Israelites gathered for the Feast of Tabernacles, they were to listen to the book of the law being read. Men, women, children, and even strangers living among them, were expected to hear and obey all the words written in the book of the law [[Deuteronomy 31:10-13](#)].

How different could their history have been if they had done this? Only by keeping God’s law and obeying his words could they hope to fulfill His promises as a nation. They experienced national greatness and power during the reign of David and the early years of Solomon’s reign, by obeying the law of God. In the days leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem, and after, Jeremiah’s message was to hear and obey the law of God and keep the promises your ancestors made to Him.

Not long before the destruction of Jerusalem, when it was already under the control of Babylon, Jeremiah acted out a parable that was a message from God about His promise to the nation. In the presence of witnesses, he legally bought a piece of land for 17 pieces of silver (about 7 ounces) in the village of Anathoth. To the people this must have seemed like a waste of money, especially with his message of surrender to the king of Babylon. On top of that, Jeremiah was old and could not hope to benefit from this land even if God’s promises were fulfilled. But this was a message of hope for the future from God. Continuing to act out the parable, Jeremiah then told Baruch to take the signed documents and seal them in a clay jar. Then he said, “This is what the Lord of heaven’s armies, the God of Israel says, ‘Houses and fields and vineyards will be owned again in this land.’” [[Jeremiah 32:6-15](#)].

Nebuchadnezzar’s armies were about to overwhelm the walls of Jerusalem, and thousands were dying in an attempt to defend the city. But thousands were also dying from starvation and disease because of the siege. Even as this was happening, Jeremiah was still praying for his people. “Lord God, You made heaven and earth, nothing is too hard for You. You show love and mercy to

thousands, but children suffer because of the wicked things their fathers did. You watch what everyone is doing so they can be fairly rewarded for their deeds. You made Your name great when You brought Your people out of Egypt with great miracles. You promised to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, and You did. But they did not obey You or keep Your commandments. So, You have caused all this evil to happen to them.” As Jeremiah probably wondered how God would still fulfill His promise to His people, this answer was given to him, “Look, I am the Lord, the God of all people. Is anything too hard for Me to do? I will gather them from all the countries where they will be driven, and I will bring them back to this place. I will give them protection, and they will be My people, and I will be their God. Even as I have brought this evil upon them, I will bring good things. Fields will be bought again in this land because I will bring the captives back.” [\[Jeremiah 32:17-44\]](#).

Before he was released from prison by Nebuchadnezzar, God spoke to Jeremiah again, “This is what the Lord, the Maker of all things says, call to Me and I will answer you and show you great things that you do not know. This is what I say about the houses of this city and the palace that has been destroyed. I will bring health, healing, and peace and I will bring the captives of Judah and Israel back and will build them up as I did before. I will cleanse them from their sins, and I will forgive them. And My name will be praised, and honored before all the nations of the earth, because of what I do for them. There will also be fear and trembling for all the goodness and prosperity I bring. This land that will be desolate will once again have shepherds and their flocks. It will have the voice of joy and gladness, the voices of brides and grooms. Voices will also say, Praise the Lord of heaven’s armies, for the Lord is good, and His mercy lasts forever. He will bring the captives back to this land as He did the first time, and there will be praise and sacrifices in the house of the Lord. I, the Lord will do all these good things that I have promised to Israel and Judah” [\[Jeremiah 33:1-14\]](#).

In the great and happy day when Israel and Judah will be reunited, the Lord will be recognized as their King, and they will be His people. Sing with gladness and shout among the nations and say, O Lord, save Your people. Then, I will bring them from the north and gather them from the coasts of all the earth, even together with the blind and the lame. They will come with tears of joy streaming down their face. They will walk on smooth paths beside quiet streams, so they do not stumble. I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is My first-born [\[Jeremiah 31:1, 7-9\]](#).

Israel who had once been favored among all the nations of the world, would now have to learn to obey God in exile. Until they learned this, He could not do for them all that He wanted. I will correct you, and allow you to suffer as punishment for your own good [\[Jeremiah 30:11\]](#).

He that allowed Israel to be scattered, will gather him as a shepherd. The Lord has redeemed Jacob and bought him back from his conqueror. Then they will come and sing on the heights of Jerusalem, they will be full of joy because of the great gifts from the Lord, the abundant grain harvests, the wine and the olive oil, and even their healthy flocks and herds. There will no longer be sorrow, because it will be turned into joy. Priests and My people will be satisfied with My goodness says the Lord [[Jeremiah 31:10-14](#)].

The day will come says the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the houses of Israel and Judah. It will be different from the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I brought them out of Egypt, the one they broke even though I was a faithful husband to them. At that time, I will put My law inside them and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be My people. They won't have to teach anyone about Me because they will all know Me. I will forgive them and remember their sins no more [[Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)].

## *Chapter 39—In the Court of Babylon*

This chapter is based on [Daniel 1](#).

Among the captives taken to Babylon, were some young men who were as firm as steel to their beliefs, who would honor God at all costs. These men would succeed at bringing a knowledge of Jehovah to heathen nations. They represented God well and gave Him a good reputation. Babylon would have boasted that the presence of captured Israelite religious items in their temple was a sign of the superiority of their gods. But through these men, God was able to show His superiority.

Nebuchadnezzar asked Ashpenaz to choose some of the best and the brightest of the young people from the royal family from Judah. He was to select men who were handsome, wise, well educated (especially in science), and had the ability to serve in the palace. Among those chosen were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. These men were not chosen to be slaves but were to fill important positions in the kingdom. For 3 years they were educated in the Chaldean language, science, and politics.

Nebuchadnezzar did not demand that these men abandon their religions but hoped to eventually show them the superiority of his gods. Part of this influence would begin with them getting new names, that recognized the gods of Babylon. Daniel was given the name Beltshazzar, Hananiah was named Shadrach, Mishael was named Meshach, and Azariah was named Abednego. In addition to the names, and peer pressure, was added the temptation that the idolatrous practices were sexually enticing.

The first occasion those 4 men chose to take a stand on principle was in the area of diet, and religious ceremony. The best meat and wine, which was also served on the king's table, was provided for these privileged young men. But they knew that some of it had been offered to idols, and to them, eating it would mean participation in worshipping those idols. To these 4 even pretending to go along but secretly avoiding the meat that was offered to idols was not good enough for their conscience. Possibly allowing anyone to think they were breaking God's law even if they weren't, was not acceptable to them. On top of that, there was the drinking of alcohol in the form of wine that they also wanted to avoid. They knew that it would weaken them morally, physically and mentally, which was not a good thing if they wished to resist the temptation surrounding them in the court of Babylon.

With God's blessing, and probably friendliness and a good attitude, these 4 men were already well liked by Ashpenaz. When presented with their request to eat vegetables and water instead of the king's meat and wine, the people in charge of

them were afraid of what might happen to them for not following the king's orders. They reasoned, they might lose their life for disobeying the king if these men would look less healthy and the king found out that they were given permission to not eat the food he ordered for them. So, Daniel appealed to Melzar, who was in charge of the Israelites, asking for a 10-day trial of the food and water they requested. Against his better judgment, Melzar agreed to the trial, and at the end of 10 days, instead of looking less healthy, they look better than everyone else.

During the 3-year training period, these young men continued to be faithful to obey God's laws. God noticed the faithfulness of Daniel and his 3 friends, and blessed them with knowledge, skill, learning, and wisdom in all areas of study. On top of that Daniel was given the gifts of a prophet which gave him the ability to interpret dreams and visions. These words of God were fulfilled in this case, "He who honors Me, I will honor." [[1 Samuel 2:30](#)].

At the end of 3 years, the king examined all the chosen young men, and he found Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, to be 10 times better than not just the other students, but all the wise men in his kingdom. These 4 young men were not only smarter, wiser, and retained more knowledge, but they were even more physically attractive and strong. This was the result of honoring God, but also the natural result of obeying nature's laws. The knowledge of God was the foundation on which all their other learning was built, and the Holy Spirit was their guide. They prayed for wisdom, but they also lived their lives in a way that allowed God to bless them. They aimed for excellence and achievement for the purpose of honoring God. These 4 young men walked with God as Enoch did.

The success of Daniel was the result of cooperation between God and man and may be achieved by anyone who lives as he did. Some want to do great things as Daniel did but do not lay the foundation of small things done right. They ignore the daily duties that seem unimportant while they wait for the grand task they believe is their destiny.

Many do not realize the importance the physical body can have on mental and spiritual development. Satan knows that we are weaker to resist his temptations if our physical bodies are weakened by unhealthful living. Because of this he often first tempts us with things of a physical nature rather than spiritual. Our physical desires must be controlled by our will power which we should ask God to help us control. In ancient Israel, the animals brought for sacrifice were to be physically perfect. Paul taught that we are to bring our bodies to God as living sacrifices that are holy and acceptable to Him [[Romans 12:1](#)].

## *Chapter 40—Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream*

This chapter is based on [Daniel 2](#).

God didn’t waste any time making His name known to Nebuchadnezzar by giving him a dream. When he woke up, he was so bothered by the fact that he couldn’t remember his dream that he called his wise men, magicians, and fortune tellers, and asked them to tell him what he dreamed. Not sure they understood the king’s request, the wise men said, “O king, live forever. Tell your servants the dream and we will tell you what it means.” Nebuchadnezzar was not happy with this answer and threatened to kill them if they could not give him the answer, but he also promised them great rewards and honor if they could tell him the dream and what it meant.

Threatening their lives or promising rewards did not help the men to come up with the answer for the king, and they begged him again, to tell them the dream. Nebuchadnezzar became angry and felt they were stalling for time to make up something and repeated his threats to kill them if they couldn’t give him the answer he was looking for. He even added, “If you tell me the dream, then I will know that your interpretation is trustworthy.”

The magicians and wise men knew there was no way they could tell the king what he dreamed, so they tried to reason with him by telling him, “There is not a man on the earth who can tell you what you dreamed, and there is no king or ruler that has ever asked such a thing. Only the gods could tell you what you dreamed, and they are not here for us to ask.” This made the king furious, and he immediately ordered the death of all the wise men of Babylon. By this time, Daniel and his friends were classified as wise men and fell under the death decree of the king. Daniel asked Arioch, the captain of the king’s guard, “How did this death decree from the king happen so suddenly.” He was told the story of the king’s dream and the wise men who failed to tell the king what he wanted to know. Daniel then asked to be taken to the king so he could beg for a little time to pray to God for the answer the king wanted. Nebuchadnezzar agreed and Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah immediately began to pray with faith, knowing that God could use them to bring glory to His name. Binging their requests and difficulties to God in prayer was something they were used to doing, and He had given them help and answers in the past. Now, with humility they brought their request to God.

That night God gave Daniel a vision where he saw the king’s dream and was also given the meaning of it. Upon receiving the answer to their prayers, the first thing Daniel did was to thank God with this prayer, “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for He is the source of all wisdom and power. He is in control of world

events, He can tear down kingdoms, and He can set them up. He is the source of wisdom for those who are wise, and He is also the source of knowledge for those who study. He can reveal things that are secrets. He knows what is hidden in the darkness, and He is full of light. I thank You and praise You, O God of my fathers, who has given me wisdom and strength, and has given me the answer we asked You for. You have shown us what the king wants to know.”

Immediately Daniel went to Arioch and told him not to kill the wise men, but to bring him to the king, because he knew what the dream was and what it means. Right away Arioch brought Daniel to the king and trying to get some credit for himself said, “I have found a man among the captives from Judah who can tell you what you want to know.” Then Nebuchadnezzar spoke to Daniel, “Are you able to tell me what I dreamed and tell me what it means?” Daniel answered, “The secret you have demanded cannot be discovered by wise men, magicians, or fortune tellers, but there is a God in heaven that can reveal secrets, and in this dream, He showed you what will happen in the future. The dream was given to you because, before you fell asleep, you wondered what would happen in the future. He who knows the secrets of the future, chose to reveal the answer to you. This secret has also been shared with me, not because I am wiser than everyone else, but so that you and others can know the answer to your unspoken questions.”

“You, O king, saw a great, bright, awesome, and frightening statue of a man. The head was made of fine gold, the chest and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet of iron and clay. You stared at it until a stone cut without hands struck the statue at its feet and broke it into tiny pieces, that were blown away like the husk removed from wheat on the summer threshing floor. After that no trace of the statue remained, but the stone that destroyed it grew and became a great mountain that filled the entire earth.”

As Nebuchadnezzar listened, he remembered the dream, and he knew that Daniel was describing it exactly as he had seen it in his sleep. The King of kings was showing king Nebuchadnezzar that He has power over the kingdoms of the world, and he can set them up or tear them down. He also revealed to Nebuchadnezzar his part in heaven’s plan, which extended all the way to the end of time.

Daniel continued, “You O king, are a king of kings, because the God of heaven has given you a great, and powerful, and glorious kingdom. All of the known world, including everywhere that people or even animals live, is under your dominion. You are the ruler over all of it. You are the head of gold. After you will come another kingdom that is not as great as you, even as silver is not as valuable as gold. After that will come another kingdom represented by the brass that will rule over the whole earth. The 4<sup>th</sup> kingdom will be strong as iron, and will break and

conquer all nations, even as iron can break anything. The feet of iron and clay represent kingdoms that will not be united, even as iron and clay do not mix. They will be partially strong like iron, but also partly weak like clay, and they will not be united as a single nation. In their days, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, and it will conquer the whole world and will last forever. This kingdom is represented by the stone that was carved without human hands. This great God is showing you the history of the world, and the outcome is certain, and the interpretation of the dream is sure.

Nebuchadnezzar was overwhelmed and humbled, and he bowed down to the ground in worship saying, “It is true that your God is a God over all gods, and a Lord over all kings. He can reveal any secret, just as He revealed all this to you.” Then Nebuchadnezzar cancelled the decree to kill all the wise men, and he gave Daniel many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon, and placed him over all government officials, and over all the wise men. At Daniel’s request, Nebuchadnezzar also gave Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego important positions in the province of Babylon, but Daniel was in the king’s court.

In human history, nations rise, and nations fall, and it seems like it depends on the leadership of great men. But the Bible teaches that there is one who is greater than all, who knows all things, the Merciful One, who directs human history according to His own will. “God made the world and everything in it. One human race turned into many nations, but God set their boundaries, and the times for them to rise and fall. He gave evidence that they will realize there is someone in control, so that people will try to find Him, even as a person uses their feeling in the dark to find something.” [[Acts 17:24-27](#)].

When God made the world, he wanted people to be good to each other and to love and honor Him. Keeping His law would have made both individuals and nations prosper. The blessings He gave to Israel were not only for them, but every nation that followed those laws would have received the same blessings. Hundreds and thousands of years into the future, the All-knowing One saw the rise and fall of nations. He revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that the kingdom of Babylon would fall and would be followed by another. As each one would fail to honor the true God of heaven, it would fall and another would arise. If the kings of Babylon had honored Jehovah, they would have been given wisdom and power and would not have fallen. But they only asked for answers from Him through men like Daniel, when they were troubled, and as a last resort.

The one who studies the Bible, and the history of nations can see the fulfillment of prophecy beginning with the fall of Babylon. When Babylon took upon themselves the glory for their own success, the Medo-Persian’s, who had not yet trampled on

God's law, carried out God's punishment on them. But each kingdom that followed seemed to be more wicked than the last, and bolder in rejecting Jehovah. The power of every ruler on earth comes from God, and their success and longevity depend on how they exercise that power. His word to each is, "I prepared you for battle, even though you didn't know Me." [[Isaiah 45:5](#)]. His message to Nebuchadnezzar, "Replace your sins with goodness, and by showing mercy to the poor, and by doing so, you may extend your prosperity," [[Daniel 4:27](#)] could apply to every nation and kingdom.

Righteousness exalts a nation [[Proverbs 14:34](#)], and a throne is established by righteousness [[Proverbs 16:12](#)]. Mercy and truth preserve the king, and kindness holds up his throne [[Proverbs 28:20](#)]. To understand these principles, is to understand that God's law is the best guide for the success of nations, which makes it look like He is the one that removes kings, and sets up kings [[Daniel 2:21](#)].

## *Chapter 41—The Fiery Furnace*

This chapter is based on [Daniel 3](#).

At first Nebuchadnezzar had acknowledged the greatness of Jehovah, who had revealed the history of the world to him. For a while he had even respected Him, but Nebuchadnezzar's heart was not cleansed of worldly ambition, and of thinking that he was the greatest. The power and success of his kingdom made him proud, and he turned back to his gods, and ambitions for himself. Remembering the image of which he was the head of gold, he decided to make a huge idol based on the one he had dreamed about, so that all could see the head of gold that represented him. He received encouragement for this idea and as his plans moved forward, he decided that he would make the entire image of gold, showing that his kingdom would never fall, but would last forever. Knowing Daniel would not approve, he instead developed his plans with the wise men who at one time he had wanted to kill. The symbol that God had used to communicate the history of the world, was to be changed to glorify one man and one nation, in defiance of the will of God. Satan was working behind Nebuchadnezzar to try to change God's plan for the human race.

Drawing on the incredible wealth he had already accumulated, and thinking big as he was accustomed to doing, Nebuchadnezzar made the image 60 feet tall, covered entirely with gold. Then in a land where golden idols were worshipped, what else would you do with an image so grand and so valuable, but worship it? So, a royal command was sent out, that on the day the statue was dedicated, all subjects of the kingdom should show their loyalty by bowing down to the image.

When the day came, assembled on the plain of Dura, there was a very large crowd of Babylonians, but also many people of other nations that Nebuchadnezzar had conquered. Present were kings, now subjects of Babylon, governors, advisors, treasurers, judges, and all other government officials. The command was given in different languages so all could understand that when they heard the music start, they were to bow down and worship the golden image. Satan and many of his evil angels were present that day, hoping to cause the fall of the few faithful Israelite captives, that God was using to bring His blessings, and a knowledge of Him to heathen nations.

Nebuchadnezzar was very satisfied as he looked over the great assembly of people, who were all bowing down to his image. Then some of his wise men, men who were jealous of the rewards that had been given to Daniel and his friends, said to the king, "O king, live forever. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, whom you set over the affairs of Babylon, have disobeyed your command. They do not worship

our gods, and they refused to bow down to the image you have set up.” When they were brought before Nebuchadnezzar, he asked them, “Is it true that you do not worship my gods, and did not bow down to the golden image I set up?” Rather than immediately punishing them, Nebuchadnezzar was extremely generous, when he reminded them of the punishment for disobedience, and tried to convince them to bow down. But those 3 men understood the act of bowing down to the image, as an act of worship, which should only be given to Jehovah. Nebuchadnezzar recognized that these 3 men had something special, that his other wise men lacked. They had been completely trustworthy, honest, and faithful in every task they performed. The king made it clear that there would be no exceptions to this command, and they would be thrown into the fiery furnace, if they refused to obey. He even added, “What god could possibly deliver you from my punishment?” But the men calmly replied, “O Nebuchadnezzar, this is not a hard decision for us, and we can give you our answer right away. Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the fiery furnace, and He will save us if He chooses to. But even if He chooses not to save us, we will not worship your gods or bow down to the golden image you have set up.”

Nebuchadnezzar became very angry with that response, and he commanded that the furnace be heated 7 times hotter than usual. Then he ordered his mightiest soldiers to tie up those men, leaving all their clothes on, to catch fire more quickly. The furnace was so hot, that the strong men who threw Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace, were killed. As Nebuchadnezzar watched, he couldn't believe what he was seeing. He asked, “Didn't we throw 3 men in the furnace? Why am I seeing 4 men walking around in the furnace, completely unharmed, and the 4<sup>th</sup> looks like the Son of God.”

How would Nebuchadnezzar know what the Son of God looked like, to be able to say such a thing? The only possible explanation for that would be from the example shown by the lives of Daniel and his 3 friends. The honesty, trustworthiness, faithfulness, firmness to principle, and of course the things they said about the God they worshipped, left a deep impression on everyone around them. From the character of those 4 men, Nebuchadnezzar thought he recognized their God.

Then Nebuchadnezzar went closer to the furnace and called out to them and said, “You servants of the most high God, come out, and come here.” So, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego came out, and they were completely unharmed. The only thing that had burned were the ropes that bound them. The king's princes, governors, captains, counselors, and wise men, saw that not a hair of their heads was singed and there was not even the smell of fire on them.

Nebuchadnezzar was amazed and completely forgot about his golden image. He said, “Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, who has sent His angel to deliver His servants that trusted Him. He completely defeated my punishment, when they refused to worship any god except their own.” Then Nebuchadnezzar made a decree, “that any people, nation, or language, that says anything bad about the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, will be cut in pieces, and animal waste will be piled on top of their broken-down houses. For there is no other god that can deliver in this way.”

It pleased God that Nebuchadnezzar wished to publish His name abroad, and to show reverence and allegiance to Him throughout the Babylonian empire. But it was not right for him to force this belief, with the threat of death, on all his subjects. God gives everyone the freedom to choose whether they will serve Him or not.

When His people take a stand against earthly powers, in faithfulness to Him, it gives God the option to show His power, by saving His faithful servants. In this case, the news of the great miracle, and the power of God, was carried by many people back to their countries, and people.

In later days, many of God’s faithful will have to take a stand against so called Christians, who are in truth inspired by Satan, to persecute those who keep the true Sabbath of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment. True followers of God will be willing to lose their life, rather than disobey Him. Whether God chooses to miraculously save them, as He did for the 3 men in the fiery furnace, or not, He will always be with them, to comfort and strengthen them. The trouble in the last days will be worse than any that has ever been experienced in human history. But Satan and all his armies will not be able to defeat the weakest of God’s people who trust in Him, and angels who are stronger will be sent to protect them. Jehovah will show that He is a God of gods and is able to save in the most desperate situations, those who trust in Him.

## *Chapter 42—True Greatness*

This chapter is based on [Daniel 4](#).

Nebuchadnezzar was truly a great king, and was even called a “king of kings,” by God [[Ezekiel 26:7](#)]. At times he had recognized that Jehovah was greater than he was, and that God’s kingdom was everlasting. He gave glory to God after the dream of the image was revealed to him, and once again when he was humbled on the plain of Dura. But as Nebuchadnezzar continued to defeat nation after nation, his fame and glory grew, until he began to be thought of as the greatest king to come along in ages. At times of peace between his military campaigns, he had built the city of Babylon to be one of the wonders of the world. With all the praise that was heaped on him, it is not surprising that he would be proud and think highly of himself. Even though he had recognized at times the power and rule of Jehovah, his growing pride was making him an unfit instrument for God’s use.

God gave Nebuchadnezzar another dream to warn him of the danger he was in. In his dream, Nebuchadnezzar saw a great tree growing in the middle of the earth. It was very tall, and its branches spread out to the ends of the earth. Animals enjoyed the shade it provided, and birds nested in its branches. The leaves were beautiful, and it produced so much fruit that there was plenty for everyone. As the king watched, a Holy Angel called out in a loud voice, “Chop down the tree, cut off its branches, strip off the leaves, and waste the fruit. Let the animals that used to rest under it and the birds that nested in it scatter. But leave a band of iron and brass around the stump. Let it get damp with dew each morning and let his place be with the animals in the field. Let his mind and thoughts change from that of a man to a beast and let 7 times pass over him. This is what has been decreed by the angels and holy ones so that he will learn that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whoever He wishes.”

Nebuchadnezzar was greatly troubled by this dream because he felt it was predicting something bad that was going to happen. So, he called in all the wise men, magicians, and fortune tellers, and told them the dream and asked what it meant. But none of them could or would give him an answer, so he called for his friend Daniel and said, “O Belteshazzar, master of the wise men and magicians. I know the spirit of the holy gods is in you and no secret can hide from you, so tell me what my dream means.”

After hearing the dream, it was immediately obvious to Daniel what it meant, but he looked troubled and remained silent for a while. Daniel realized that the dream was about the judgment of God on the king because of his pride. Nebuchadnezzar could tell that Daniel knew something but was hesitant to say it, so he reassured

him and said don't be afraid to tell me the truth. Then Daniel said, "My lord, people that hate you would love the dream, and your enemies would be happy to hear the interpretation. The tree you saw, O king is you. You have become great and strong, and you have conquered the whole earth."

O king, this is what the Most High says will happen to you: "They will drive you from your palace and you will live among the beasts of the field. You will eat grass like oxen, and you will be wet with dew each morning. And you will remain this way for 7 years, then you will realize that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and sets up whoever He wishes to be king. But just as the stump was left in the ground, your kingdom will be returned to you after you acknowledge that that God in heaven rules."

Daniel understood that often God's judgments are conditional, so he begged Nebuchadnezzar to repent and turn to God, so he wouldn't need to go through that horrible experience to learn his lesson. He pleaded, "O king, please take my advice and replace your sins with righteousness, show you have really changed by being kind to the poor. It may be that you can hold off the judgment from God."

Nebuchadnezzar took Daniel's advice for a while, but his heart was not really changed. After a while his old habits returned, along with his pride and ambition. He stopped being kind to the poor and began to be unfair to his subjects. He used his power to glorify himself and he began to doubt the dream and eventually was even embarrassed that he believed it in the first place. One year after he had the dream, Nebuchadnezzar was walking in his palace, taking pride in his power and accomplishments, and the things he had built, and said, "Look at this great Babylon, which I have built by my own strength, for the honor of my own greatness."

No sooner had the words left his lips, when a voice was heard from heaven saying, "O king Nebuchadnezzar, your kingdom is taken from you, and you will be forced to live with the beasts of the field. You will eat grass like oxen for 7 years, and then you will know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and sets up whoever He wishes to be king." As soon as the voice finished speaking, Nebuchadnezzar's pride along with his intelligence, wisdom, and ambition were all gone. The Creator who had given him these gifts, took them all away, leaving him with instincts and behavior of an animal. He was herded from the palace to the field where he ate grass, and his hair grew and covered his body like feathers, and his nails grew like birds' claws.

For 7 years Nebuchadnezzar remained in this condition, and everyone in his kingdom knew what had happened and they were all amazed. At the end of 7 years, his human mind was restored, and in humility he repented and gave thanks

to the God of heaven. When he returned to the throne he made this public proclamation: “I Nebuchadnezzar lifted my eyes to heaven, and my understanding returned to me, and I blessed the Most High, and I praised and honored Him that lives forever, whose reign is everlasting, and His kingdom spans generations. All the people of the earth are nothing compared to Him, He commands the armies of heaven and does whatever He wants on earth. No one can stop Him or even question what He does. When my mind was returned to me, my kingdom was restored as well. I was treated as king again; in fact I was more respected than before.”

Nebuchadnezzar was truly changed this time, and he became a humble child of God. Instead of being harsh and cruel as before, he was a wise and compassionate king. He who had once defied Jehovah, now wanted everyone to know, honor, and worship Him who is the King of kings, and Lord of lords. Nebuchadnezzar himself gave praise, and honor to the King of heaven. He recognized that everything God does is the right thing, and it is always fair, and that He is able to humble those who are proud.

God’s name and character were honored from the most powerful kingdom on earth. This was the last act of Nebuchadnezzar recorded in the Bible.

## *Chapter 43—The Unseen Watcher*

This chapter is based on [Daniel 5](#).

After having lived in Babylon for more than 60 years, Daniel was an old man. Nebuchadnezzar had died and his successors to the throne were neither as wise or ambitious as he was, and the empire was in decline. Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, sat on the throne, and was in love with the glory and power that came with his position. Even though he would have known and heard the stories of his grandfather, he chose to reject and defy the God of heaven.

At that time, the Medes and Persians under the command of Cyrus had surrounded the city of Babylon. It was thought that the walls of Babylon were so big and strong that it was impossible for anyone to break through or get over them. The gates of brass were also thought to be unbreakable, and they had plenty of food and water from the Euphrates River.

Cities under siege usually worry about starvation, but in his pride and self-confidence, Belshazzar decided to throw a great feast. More than 1000 guests were invited, including princes, administrators, wise men, the rich, and the powerful, and of course many beautiful women both in attendance and for entertainment. Wine flowed like water and most of the guests became very drunk. As is often the case when people are drunk, they did things they might not normally do, including sexual acts. To show his power, and disrespect for Jehovah, Belshazzar brought out the goblets Nebuchadnezzar had taken from the temple in Jerusalem. He ordered that the sacred golden cups be used to serve wine to his wives, concubines, and guests. As they drank, they praised the gods of gold, silver, brass, iron, wood and stone.

As this drunken party went on, an unseen guest was watching. Finally, He made His presence known by showing a hand without blood or body, writing on the palace wall. Everything became quiet as the hand traced characters in an unknown language on the wall. Guests couldn't help but feel that they were being judged for bad things they had done. The writing on the wall glowed like fire causing everyone to feel like something bad was about to happen. Belshazzar was the guiltiest for defying Jehovah, and he was the most terrified by the handwriting on the wall. As he stood there in fear not knowing what to do, his knees knocked together.

Belshazzar desperately wanted to know what the writing on the wall said, but couldn't understand it, so he called his wise men, magicians, and fortune tellers, but they couldn't read it either. He grew desperate and offered as a reward, a scarlet robe, a gold necklace, and the highest position in the kingdom under him,

but no one could read it. The secrets and wisdom of heaven cannot be bought or sold.

Finally, the queen mother, who remembered how Daniel had answered hard questions for Nebuchadnezzar, said to Belshazzar, “O king, live forever. Don’t look so worried. There is a man in your kingdom, who has the spirit of the holy gods in him. Nebuchadnezzar made him the chief over all the wise men, magicians, and fortune tellers, because understanding, and wisdom, like the gods was found in him. He was honest and trustworthy, understood the meaning of dreams, and could solve difficult problems. Let this man Daniel, whom the king named Beltshazzar be called, and he will read the handwriting on the wall for you.”

When he arrived, Belshazzar asked, “Are you Daniel, one of the captives from Judah? I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you, and that you have light, understanding, and great wisdom. My wise men have not been able to read this writing on the wall, but if you can read it for me, I will give you a great reward.” Daniel calmly answered the king, “You can keep your gifts, and give your rewards to someone else, but I will read the writing on the wall and tell you what it means.”

But first Daniel gave Belshazzar a short history lesson, reminding him of Nebuchadnezzar’s pride and fall, and of how he eventually recognized the power, and mercy of the God of Israel. Then he boldly rebuked Belshazzar for his great wickedness and told him he should have learned from Nebuchadnezzar’s example. The sin of defying God by using His holy cups to drink wine, while at the same time praising false gods was specifically mentioned. Finally, Daniel read the message on the wall for Belshazzar, “Mene, Mene, Tekel, Parsin. Now, this is what it means. Mene: God has brought the number of the days of your kingdom to an end. Tekel: You have been weighed on the scale and didn’t measure up. Parsin: Your kingdom will be divided and given to the Medes and Persians.”

Daniel was rewarded as promised with the robe, gold necklace, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> highest position in the kingdom, but it meant nothing. Before the feast was even ended, a messenger hurried before Belshazzar and announced that the city had fallen. The Medes and Persians under the command of Cyrus, had diverted the Euphrates River and invaded the city through the riverbed. Babylon was not expecting enemies inside the city, and they were completely unprepared to fight off an attack. That night, Belshazzar was killed and Darius the Mede sat on the throne of Babylon.

More than 100 years before, Jeremiah had predicted this night for Babylon [[Jeremiah 51:31](#)]. He also wrote many other prophecies predicting the fall of Babylon. “O, how the praise of the whole earth is taken! How has Babylon become

desolate among the nations.” [Jeremiah 51:41]. “The hammer of the whole earth has been broken, and Babylon has become desolate among the nations.” [Jeremiah 50:23]. “At the news of the fall of Babylon, the earth trembles.” [Jeremiah 50:46]. “Babylon has suddenly fallen and been destroyed.” [Jeremiah 51:8].

Though it was not fulfilled that same night, it was also prophesied of Babylon, “The glory of kingdoms became as Sodom and Gomorrah.” [Jeremiah 50:40]. “The broad walls of Babylon shall be broken, and her high gates will be burned with fire.” [Jeremiah 51:58]. “You shall be desolate forever says the Lord.” [Jeremiah 51:26]. Before Babylon was even a major power, the prophet Isaiah wrote about their wickedness, humiliation, and fall [Isaiah 47].

Every nation that has risen to power on earth has been watched by the Holy Watcher, to see if they will do God’s will. The great empires such as Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome all fell short of His ideal and have fallen away. Lesser nations have had the same opportunity and suffered the same fate.

During his exile, Ezekiel saw a vision by the Chebar River. A great cloud came from the north, surrounded by fire and brightness. Within it were intersecting wheels—perhaps a wheel within a wheel—and four living beings. Above them was a throne like sapphire, and on it sat One who looked like a man. The wheels moved in perfect harmony, guided by the hands of cherubim [Ezekiel 1:4-21; 10:8-11].

The cause and effect of events on earth may seem complicated, but the One who sits on the throne watches everything. Every nation and every person make their own choices, and their actions decide their own fates while also playing a part in His larger plan.

God has given us prophecies that, when compared with history, show us where we are in His plan. We can be certain that even as history has occurred as prophesied, so will events in the future. Signs today tell us that we could be on the verge of events predicted by Jesus to occur just before His return. “You will hear of wars and rumors of wars; nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines, infectious diseases, and earthquakes all over the world.” [Matthew 24:6-7]. The Bible is the only source of truth about the great and terrible things that will occur before the history of our world comes to an end, and it makes men’s hearts tremble with fear. “Look, the Lord makes the earth a wasteland because the people have broken His laws.” [Isaiah 24:1-6]. “I have heard the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war. People cry out because of the destruction, for the whole land is spoiled.” [Jeremiah 4:19-20].

But it is not all bad news. “Because you have made the Lord your hiding place, and the Most High your home, no evil will happen to you, and the plague will not reach your home.” [Psalm 91:9-10]. “O daughter of Jerusalem, the Lord will buy you

back from your enemies. Many nations are teaming up against you, and intend to harm you, but they don't know of the Lord's plans for you." [[Micah 4:10-12](#)]. "I will bring again the captives of Israel and have mercy on their homes." [[Jeremiah 30:18](#)]. God will not fail His people in the hour of their greatest danger. Eventually the plans of God will be completed, and then everyone will keep His law.

## *Chapter 44—In the Lion’s Den*

This chapter is based on [Daniel 6](#).

After Darius the Mede took the throne, he immediately began to organize his government. He chose 120 princes to rule over the provinces, made them report to 3 presidents, one of whom was Daniel. Among the 3 presidents, he made Daniel chief, because he saw in him the same excellence that Nebuchadnezzar saw. In fact, Darius was thinking about making Daniel ruler of the entire realm. But this special treatment of Daniel made the other leading men jealous. So, thinking they would just find some fault with him and report it to the king, they spied on him but could not come up with a single thing. They found Daniel to be faithful, reliable, honest, and he didn’t even make any mistakes. They finally concluded that the only thing they could use against him was his religion.

The other presidents and the princes began to scheme of a way to make Daniel’s prayer to his God a crime worthy of death. They decided to trick Darius into making a law that no person in his kingdom could make a request of any god or man except himself. They sold this idea to him by telling him he was so great that he was like a god, and his subjects should recognize that. The penalty they set for breaking this law would be death in the lion’s den. Darius enjoyed the flattery, and thought highly of himself, and so he signed the proposed law.

Satan did not like the idea of the most powerful man in the world being influenced by Daniel to believe in Jehovah, so he and his evil angels stirred up the jealousy and influenced the actions of the presidents and princes. Daniel knew this law was made to get rid of him and could have chosen to pray in his closet where no one could see him. But if he did that it would look like the king’s command was stopping him from praying to God, and Daniel wanted everyone to know that no king, or law, or threat of death could get between him and the King of kings. Daniel is an example to Christians today of how they should behave when their faith is challenged, or ridiculed, or even used to threaten their lives.

Now, all that remained for those jealous princes was to wait and watch to catch Daniel in the act of prayer so they could report him to the king as a law breaker. Daniel did not disappoint them, as they watched him pray to God 3 times through the open window that faced Jerusalem. The next day they innocently went to the king, and after confirming that the law was in effect, they said, “There is a man who is one of the captives from Judah, who has no respect for you or your laws. Three times a day he prays to his God, in direct violation of your law.” When Darius heard this, he realized that the law was not proposed for his honor and greatness, and he had been tricked into destroying his faithful friend, Daniel.

Darius got very mad at himself and immediately began trying to find a legal way to save Daniel. As he was doing this the princes reminded him that according to the law of the Medes and Persians, no law signed by the king can be changed, and the penalty must be carried out by sunset.

As sunset was getting close, the king was left with no other choice but to have Daniel brought to the lion's den. Then Darius said to Daniel, "Your God whom you serve continually, He will protect you, right?" Then Daniel was put into the den, and a stone was used to cover the opening, and the king put his royal seal on the stone so he would know if anyone tampered with it. That night Darius spent a sleepless night in his palace, refusing both food and music.

Early the next morning, Darius rushed to the den, had the stone removed, and said, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is your God whom you serve continually able to deliver you from the lions?" Daniel answered from inside the den, "O king, live forever. My God has sent His angel to shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me. My God had judged me innocent, and my actions have not hurt you." The king was so happy to hear that Daniel was alive and immediately brought him up out of the den. When Darius looked over Daniel, he found no sign of any harm had come to him, because of his faith in his God.

Now that the king was so relieved and happy, he realized that he was really angry with those princes who had tricked him. So, he immediately had them all arrested, together with their wives and children, and had them all thrown into the lion's den. The lions were so hungry that they broke the bones of those people before they even hit the ground.

Once again, a heathen king made a public proclamation, praising the God of Daniel as the only true God. Darius wrote, "To all people, nations, and languages on the entire earth, may peace be multiplied unto you. I wish to make it known in every part of my kingdom, that all people should fear and respect the God of Daniel. He is the only living God, and His kingdom will never be destroyed. He rules over the entire earth, and He can save, rescue, and do miracles in heaven and on earth, and it was He who saved Daniel from the power of the lions."

Daniel held high positions during the reigns of Darius the Mede, and Cyrus the Persian. Both kings, through their close association with Daniel, recognized Jehovah as the living God, whose kingdom will never be destroyed.

We should like Daniel, maintain a constant and steady trust in God. Whether he was standing at the right hand of the king, or in the lion's den, he was the same person. We should have the same faith and trust in God, whether we are experiencing great trial or great success. Another lesson we can learn from the life of Daniel, is that a person can be a success in business, or government, and at the

same time be completely devoted to doing God's will. Those looking to find fault with Daniel could not find a single thing in all his business dealings that they could use against him. Strict obedience to God's laws bring success in this world. This fact is shown over and over again in the life of Daniel, from the time he was a young prisoner of war, to the times when he quickly rose to power under multiple kings and two empires.

By giving him visions, some of which he didn't even understand, God was able to use Daniel to benefit all humanity down to the end of time. [Daniel 12:4](#) But you, Daniel, keep this prophecy a secret; seal up the book until the time of the end, when many will rush here and there, and knowledge will increase." [Daniel 12:4 NLT](#). [Daniel 12:9](#) But he said, "Go now, Daniel, for what I have said is kept secret and sealed until the time of the end. [Daniel 12:9 NLT](#).

Some of those words of Daniel have begun to be understood, which must mean we are in the last days. It is important that we study them because they may contain messages from God intended for us. Satan doesn't want us to study and understand them, so he tries to get us to believe they are still sealed. But Daniel himself wrote, "The wise will understand." [[Daniel 12:10](#)]. The book of Revelation also contains messages for those living in the last days. [Revelation 1:3](#) God blesses the one who reads the words of this prophecy to the church, and he blesses all who listen to its message and obey what it says, for the time is near. [Revelation 1:3 NLT](#).

The power, wealth, and glory of empires, pass away like the flower or grass withers in the heat [[James 1:10-11](#)]. The only things that last are those that are built on the foundation of God's law and the principles of His government. Those who understand this can, like Daniel and his friends, live under the principles of this government, and when He comes, they will be ready to enter His kingdom which will never pass away.

## *Chapter 45—The Return of the Exiles*

The Jews had been counting their years in exile and must have realized that the great general, Cyrus, was the one prophesied to release them from captivity. More than 100 years before, and even before the fall of Jerusalem, Isaiah wrote this prophecy: [Isaiah 45:1](#) This is what the LORD says to Cyrus, his anointed one, whose right hand he will empower. Before him, mighty kings will be paralyzed with fear. Their fortress gates will be opened, never to shut again. <sup>2</sup> This is what the LORD says: "I will go before you, Cyrus, and level the mountains. I will smash down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron. <sup>3</sup> And I will give you treasures hidden in the darkness--secret riches. I will do this so you may know that I am the LORD, the God of Israel, the one who calls you by name. [Isaiah 45:1-3 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 44:28](#) When I say of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd,' he will certainly do as I say. He will command, 'Rebuild Jerusalem'; he will say, 'Restore the Temple.'" [Isaiah 44:28 NLT](#). [Isaiah 45:13](#) I will raise up Cyrus to fulfill my righteous purpose, and I will guide his actions. He will restore my city and free my captive people--without seeking a reward! I, the LORD of Heaven's Armies, have spoken!" [Isaiah 45:13 NLT](#).

There were more recent prophecies from the lifetime of many who were still alive. [Jeremiah 25:12](#) "Then, after the seventy years of captivity are over, I will punish the king of Babylon and his people for their sins," says the LORD. "I will make the country of the Babylonians a wasteland forever. [Jeremiah 25:12 NLT](#). [Jeremiah 29:14](#) I will be found by you," says the LORD. "I will end your captivity and restore your fortunes. I will gather you out of the nations where I sent you and will bring you home again to your own land." [Jeremiah 29:14 NLT](#). [Jeremiah 29:10](#) This is what the LORD says: "You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again. <sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you," says the LORD. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. <sup>12</sup> In those days when you pray, I will listen. [Jeremiah 29:10-12 NLT](#).

Before the fall of Babylon, in the 1st year of Belshazzar's reign, Daniel received a vision. He must have been thinking about their soon release from captivity and was probably praying for more information. Some parts of the vision were interpreted for him but at the end some of it left him very troubled [[Daniel 7:28](#)].

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Belshazzar, Daniel received another vision, which provided more details of the future, but a conversation he heard in the vision about the sanctuary puzzled him. "After 2,300 days the temple will be cleansed." [[Daniel 8:14](#)]. He wondered if the temple referred to the Jewish temple, and what possible connection it could have with the 70-year captivity that was soon to end. The angel Gabriel

explained the part of the vision that he probably already understood, but then said, “Seal up the part about the evenings and mornings, because it refers to many days in the future.” Then Daniel fainted and was sick for several days, before he could get up and go back to work [[Daniel 8:26-27](#)].

Returning to the present in the story, Daniel continued to study the prophecy of Jeremiah that seemed very clear that his people should be released very soon [[Daniel 9:2](#)]. Daniel knew that many of the promises of God were conditional on obedience, so he pleaded with God to forgive their sins. Daniel, who was called “greatly beloved,” in heaven, was now including himself with the rest of his people as he earnestly prayed for God’s mercy and forgiveness for sins [[Daniel 9:3-4](#)].

“O Lord, great and awesome God, who keeps His promises to those who obey Him and keep His commandments. We have sinned, and done wicked things, and rebelled against You by ignoring your laws. We are also guilty of not listening to your servants, the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings, and leaders, and all the people.”

“O Lord, You are righteous, but the people of Judah and Israel have been shamed because we have been driven from the land You gave us because of our sins. You are merciful and forgiving even though we have rebelled. O Lord, I beg You to turn away from Your anger toward Jerusalem, and the holy temple mount, which is justified because our fathers have sinned.”

“Now O God, please hear the prayer of Your servant, and listen to my request. Cause Your face to shine upon Your temple which lays in ruins right now. Please turn Your ear toward us, and hear, open Your eye toward us and see the desolation and destruction of the city that was called by Your name. I am not asking You for anything because we deserve it but because of your great mercy.”

“O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and do. Do not delay Your promise, for Your own sake, for Your city, and Your people that are called by Your name.” [[Daniel 9:4-9, 16-19](#)].

God heard Daniel’s prayer and even before he finished Gabriel appeared to him. This time Gabriel gave him a prophetic period that would be connected, not with the exact end of the 70-year exile, but with the command to rebuild Jerusalem. This one was a 70-week prophecy.

Daniel’s prayer was in the first year of Darius, who was succeeded by Cyrus 2 years later, in the 70<sup>th</sup> year after the first captives had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar. Cyrus was aware of Daniel because of the lion’s den miracle, and his faultless performance in Darius’ court. That placed Daniel in the perfect position to inform Cyrus of the prophecy in which he was mentioned by name.

Cyrus read for himself the words of the prophet Isaiah, written more than 100 years before, “This is what the Lord says to Cyrus, His anointed. I have prepared you for battle, even though you didn’t know Me.” The words of the prophet went on to describe how Cyrus would enter Babylon, through the gates of bronze. Then he read, “For Jacob My servant’s sake, and Israel, My chosen, I have called you by name, though you didn’t know Me. I have raised you up in righteousness, and I will guide your ways. You will release My captives and build My city, though there is no treasure or reward in it for you.” [[Isaiah 45](#)].

The words of God touched his heart, and Cyrus made a proclamation throughout his entire kingdom. “The Lord God of heaven has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and has asked me to build Him a house in Jerusalem in Judah. Wherever you are in my kingdom, I am calling His people to return to Jerusalem, and to build the house of the Lord God of Israel. I also command that the local governments where you currently live, supply you with silver, gold, animals, and even freewill offerings.” [[Ezra 1:1-4](#)].

The decree of Cyrus even gave specific architectural direction, stating: “Let the foundation of the temple be well laid. Let the width and height of the building be 90 feet, with three rows of great stones, and a row of wood. The cost of building the temple will be paid out of the king’s treasury. Let the gold and silver vessels that Nebuchadnezzar took from the original temple be taken from Babylon to be placed in the new temple.” [[Ezra 6:3-5](#)].

The king’s decree was carried to the farthest reaches of the empire and there was great rejoicing among the Jews. Many were aware that the 70<sup>th</sup> year of their exile had arrived and were hoping that the prophecy would be fulfilled. Now their prayers had been answered, and their hearts were filled with hope.

“When we, the captives from Jerusalem returned home, it was like a dream. Our mouths were filled with laughter, and our tongues with singing. The heathen even said, ‘The Lord has done great things for them.’ The Lord has done great things for us, and we are glad.” [[Psalm 126](#)].

The leaders of Judah, Benjamin, and the Levites began to organize the people who wanted to go home. Their friends and neighbors gave them valuable gifts, supplies, and even animals. Cyrus had his treasurer Mithredath bring out the things Nebuchadnezzar took from the temple. Gold and silver platters, knives, basins, and other items, 5,400 pieces in all, were handed over to the Jews who were going home [[Ezra 1:5-11](#)].

Cyrus appointed Zerubbabel, a descendant of king David, as governor of the roughly 50,000 people who returned, and Joshua was the high priest at the time. In addition to the contributions of Cyrus and the friends and neighbors who didn’t

return, the leaders of the returning party, gave generously toward the costs of rebuilding the temple [[Ezra 2:64-70](#)].

After arriving safely, the first thing they did was to build an altar in the same place that the original altar stood. The people were all united, as they dedicated the altar, and resumed the temple services. Then, while everyone was still gathered, they kept the Feast of Tabernacles [[Ezra 3:1-6](#)].

The Jews were greatly encouraged by the daily sacrifices, but the destruction all around them was a sad reminder of the disobedience of their ancestors. Right now, more than personal property and rebuilding their own homes, they desired to see the glory of God occupying the temple again as a symbol of His presence among them.

As the builders examined the temple site, they found that some of the original foundation stones from the days of Solomon were still usable. These together with much new material were made ready to lay the foundation. When the time came to place the cornerstone of the foundation, it was done in the presence of thousands of witnesses, with great rejoicing, music, and praise to God. But a few of the people who were old enough to have seen the original temple, wept out loud. It was ok to be sad about the mistakes of the past, but with the obvious working of God through Cyrus, to send them back to their homeland, they should not have dampened the enthusiasm and discouraged the workers. But some who saw what was happening began to shout for joy to drown out the sound of weeping that was destroying the moment [[Ezra 3:11-13](#)].

The Jews had been proud of the glory of the original temple, and the grand ceremonies that were conducted in it, but many did not benefit from those services because they did not participate with humble and repentant hearts. God is not honored by grand religious ceremonies, but by followers who reveal His character of love, goodness, and holiness to the world. A church gathering that is the poorest in the country, with members who reveal the character of Christ to the world, will be joined by angels in their worship and praise to God.

“Give thanks to the Lord for He is good, His mercy never ends. Let those who have been saved from the hand of the enemy praise Him. Sing songs of praise to Him, tell people of the wondrous things He has done, give glory to His holy name. You who seek the Lord, rejoice, for He will satisfy the hunger of your soul with goodness.” [[Psalm 107:1-2, 9](#)].

## *Chapter 46—The Prophets of God Helping them*

As they started building the temple, the Jews who had returned to Jerusalem, attracted the attention of the Samaritans. These were people whose ancestors were partially from the northern tribes of Israel, but also from many other people who were moved to the land by the Assyrians. In addition to their ancestry being mixed by intermarriage, their religion was also mixed. In later years the Samaritans claimed to worship the true God, but their religion more closely resembled idolatry. They claimed that their images represented the living God, so they treated their images with reverence.

As the Jews began to build, the Samaritans came and asked Zerubbabel if they could join in and help to build the temple, because they sacrifice to and worship the same God. But the Jews rejected their offers and rudely told them, “You people have nothing in common with us, and we don’t want anything to do with you. We will build the temple to the Lord God of Israel on our own as we have been commanded to do by Cyrus, king of Persia [[Ezra 4:1-3](#)].

The task of rebuilding the temple seemed overwhelming to the few Jews who had chosen to return, but if they had accepted the help from the Samaritans, they would have opened the door for the temple services and their own worship to be mixed with idolatry. Back when the Israelites first entered Canaan, their instructions from Moses were to make no alliances and do not intermarry with the people of the surrounding nations [[Deuteronomy 7:2-4](#)]. They were also told what would happen if they did disobey this command. “The Lord will scatter you among the nations and you will serve other gods, and you will never feel safe or secure.” [[Deuteronomy 28:64-67](#)].

Zerubbabel and the other leaders realized that what they had just come out of was a fulfillment of this curse, and they wisely did not begin their resettlement in the land by making an alliance with idolaters. Instead, they chose the blessing side of the promise, “If you seek the Lord with all your heart and all your soul, you will find Him.” [[Deuteronomy 4:29](#)]. These principles of not making alliances and not intermarrying with unbelievers applies to God’s people at all times, including now. Christians should never fall into the trap of thinking that in order to witness to the world, they must become like the world. This world should be thought of as a temporary home, and we should be alert to the danger that surrounds us. In fact, we are more in danger from worldly people who try to befriend us and say nice things to us, than from those who hate us. Finally, we should not be fearful and worried about the danger that surrounds, because all who trust in God will be protected from evil.

When the kind words and friendly offers of help from the Samaritans were rejected, they became enemies and tried to hinder the progress of the building. They did this during the entire reign of Cyrus and continued into the reign of Darius [[Ezra 4:4-5](#)]. The Samaritans went as far as to hire people to secretly try to interfere with the plans of the Jews. They also spread lies and rumors about the Jews so that people would suspect them of things that were not true. Satan was working hard behind the scenes to try to get the kings of the Medo-Persian empire to stop the building. The angel Gabriel struggled for 3 weeks against the strong evil angel assigned to the king of Persia, until finally Michael, Christ Himself, came to help to help him [[Daniel 10:13](#)]. Spiritual forces were definitely at work, but the forces of evil were held back, and during the reign of Cyrus and his son Cambyses, the building on the temple slowly moved forward.

The Jews should have done everything in their power to take advantage of the heavenly forces working behind the scenes to help them succeed, but over the years, many of them became distracted and discouraged. Over time, the Samaritans even became bolder in trying to stop the building and causing trouble for the Jews. Many of the workers abandoned the work on the temple and went to work on their own homes. Finally the Samaritans succeeded in getting Artaxerxes to make a decree to stop the building of the temple and the walls of Jerusalem [[Ezra 4:7-24](#)].

For more than a year, the temple was ignored, and the people tried to get their own farms and businesses going. But because they had neglected the temple, God's curse was upon them, and nothing they did succeeded. Even nature seemed to be against them, and the produce of their fields, gardens, and vineyards was very poor. This continued into the reign of Darius Hystaspes.

But God did not give up on His people, and He called Haggai and Zechariah to be prophets. They explained to the people that because they were ignoring God and had stopped working on the temple, they would never have success in their personal lives and businesses. Haggai said, "Is it the time to be living in your own completed houses while the house of God lies in ruins? This is that the Lord of heaven's armies says, 'Why have you done so little? Why are you more concerned about your own buildings and homes? How has focusing on your own lives and businesses worked out for you? You plant a lot of seeds, but harvest little. You are always hungry, and thirsty and are never satisfied. You put on clothes, but they don't keep you warm. It's like you are putting your money into bags with holes.'" [[Haggai 1:4-6](#)]. The message from God through the prophet continued, "You expected a lot and ended up with little. What you did bring home, I blew away. Why? Because My house lies in ruins and none of you are working on it. For this reason, I will even stop the dew from falling on the land. I will cause a drought and

your fields of corn, your vineyards, and your olive trees will not produce much.” [[Haggai 1:9-11](#)].

The Jews took the words of Haggai to heart, and Zerubbabel, Joshua, and all the people obeyed the word of the Lord God, through the prophets. Then Haggai received some words of encouragement from the Lord, and the people began working on the house of the Lord God again [[Haggai 1:12-13](#)]. Not long after, the word of the Lord to Haggai was, “Be strong O Zerubbabel, be strong, O Joshua, and be strong all you people of the land, for I am with you, says the Lord of heaven’s armies.” [[Haggai 2:4](#)].

God’s children today can take the same message to heart, “Be strong for I am with you.” If only they knew what God can and will do for those who trust and obey Him, they would keep their faith in Him, and they would not need to stumble and fall. With God’s power, no difficulty could stop them or discourage them. They would realize that He provides wisdom and help and will do all the good things He desires through them.

Haggai’s words begging the people to turn back to God and be faithful and obedient to Him were re-enforced by Zechariah, as were the words of encouragement when they did. But with their crops and businesses failing, and enemies all around them, the people moved forward in faith and worked hard on the temple. As they did their part, God continued to encourage them through Haggai and Zechariah and reminded them of the rewards that awaited them. They were even told that the Desire of all ages, the Teacher, and the Savior of all humanity, would stand within the walls of this temple.

The governor, Zerubbabel had been faithful to God, but over the years since the return from Babylon, he had been faced with many difficulties and challenges. But God had a personal message for him, “In that day, says the Lord of heaven’s armies, I will honor you, O Zerubbabel, My servant, I will make you like my ring that I would sign or authorize things, for I have chosen you.” [[Haggai 2:23](#)]. As God’s children, sometimes we experience trials and hardship, but these difficulties can increase our faith and make us stronger.

After the reign of Cyrus had ended, the enemies of the Jews took this opportunity to appeal to the new king Darius, to try to get him to stop the building. At that time, a governor serving the Medo-Persian empire in a region across the Euphrates River, came to see what the Jews were doing. When he saw what they were doing, he asked them who had given them permission to build. The governor was told that Cyrus himself had authorized it and even paid for the work to begin. An official letter was then written to Darius to verify these claims.

In the meantime, the Jews continued to work on the temple in faith, not knowing if they would have to stop. During this time of uncertainty, God gave them a message through the prophet Zechariah. In a vision he saw an angel asking, “O Lord of heaven’s armies, how long will You not have mercy on Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, which you have been angry with for 70 years?” Then the angel said to Zechariah, this is the response I got from the Lord of heaven’s armies, “I am very jealous for Jerusalem, and am very upset with the heathen that are living in comfort. They have punished My people more than they deserved. Now, I am returning to Jerusalem with My mercy, and My house will be built. And measurements will even be taken to start the reconstruction of Jerusalem.” [[Zechariah 1:12-16](#)].

Then Zechariah saw a man with a measuring tape, so I asked him where he was going. He said, “To measure Jerusalem to see what the length and width of it are.” Then an angel told me, “Run and tell the man that Jerusalem will be filled with towns and people but won’t need walls, because the Lord will be a wall of fire around her, and there will be glory within.” [[Zechariah 2:1-5](#)].

When the Darius the king searched in the archives for the decree of Cyrus, he found it, and what seemed like a problem turned into a blessing for the Jews. This brought to the attention of the current king, the desires and the unfinished decree of Cyrus, which brought him to answer, “Let the work on the house of God continue, and do not hinder it in any way.” In fact, Darius even made a decree of his own stating, “Let the taxes collected for the king in the regions surrounding Jerusalem, be used to support the reconstruction of the temple. Also, supply them with whatever animals are needed for burnt offerings to the God of heaven. Also give them wheat, salt, wine, and oil and whatever else the priests need so that they can offer sacrifices to the God of heaven and pray for the king and his sons.” To his decree, Darius even included the punishment for any who might try to change it. He concluded by adding, “Let the God which is at Jerusalem destroy any kings or people who might try to hinder the construction or destroy His temple. I, Darius, have made this decree. Let it be carried out immediately.” [[Ezra 5-6](#)].

## *Chapter 47—Joshua and the Angel*

Good progress was being made on the temple construction, which made Satan more determined to try to hinder the work. He tried to discourage the Jews by reminding them of their sins, hoping to get them to give up trying to obey God. Because Israel had been chosen by God to keep the knowledge of Him alive on the earth, Satan had a special hatred for them. If they were obedient to God, he could not harm them. So, his highest priority was to lead them into sin, and when he succeeded, they were conquered by their enemies.

Even though the Israelites from the tribe of Judah had been taken as captives to Babylon, God did not give up on them. He sent prophets to tell them when they were sinning, and to try to get them to see their error and repent. When the Jews humbled themselves and repented, God brought them back to their homeland, where they were rebuilding the temple. Now Satan had resumed trying to destroy them again.

In vision, Zechariah saw Joshua the high priest dressed in dirty clothes, standing before the Angel of the Lord, asking for God's mercy and for Him to keep His promise to His people. In the vision, Satan was there to oppose him and to point out the sins of Israel as the reason God should not fulfill the promise and take them back as His special people. Joshua cannot deny Satan's claims that they are guilty, but he confesses their sins and shows evidence of their repentance. Then in the vision, the Angel of the Lord, who is Christ, silences the accuser, and says, "The Lord who chose Jerusalem, that plucked them out of the fire and saved them, rebukes you Satan." Since God had accepted Joshua as the high priest, the command was given to take away his filthy clothes and replace them with clean and better ones." This vision symbolized that the sins of Joshua and those of his people were all forgiven and covered with clean clothes that represented the righteousness of Christ. Then God had a message for Joshua, "If you are faithful in following Me, and obey My commands, you will continue to serve as high priest and will be in charge of the Temple." Joshua was given the conditional promise that he would walk among angels as he served in the temple, and in the end join those who stand around the throne of God. Joshua was also told, "My Servant, the Branch, the Deliverer, the hope of Israel, the coming Savior, was the reason his sins could be forgiven." It was the reason his filthy clothes could be replaced with clean ones, and if they continued to obey, they would be honored among the nations of earth as the chosen of heaven [[Zechariah 3:1-8](#)].

Satan's accusations against Joshua and the Jews, is the same thing he always does to God's people. He is called the accuser of the brethren, because he accuses them before God day and night [[Revelation 12:10](#)]. He does not accuse them because he

hates their sin. In fact, he is happy when any person sins because it gives him power over them, and because he knows it hurts Christ. But through God's plan of salvation, Jesus can break Satan's hold on sinners. Satan knows that those who ask for forgiveness will receive it. That is why he tries to discourage people by convincing them that their sins are too many or too great to be forgiven, and when they don't ask for forgiveness, their sin and guilt stay with them.

In our own strength we are helpless against Satan, and even when we confess our sins to God, we are not worthy to be saved. But because Jesus lived a life of perfect obedience to God, and died to pay the price for our sins, He can cover our forgiven sins with His perfect life and make us appear worthy of salvation. This is why Jesus can rebuke Satan when he keeps trying to accuse us of sins we have been forgiven for. The perfect and righteous life of Christ can be used like a clean change of clothes to replace our filthy dirty ones [[Zechariah 3:4](#)]. Satan has no power over those who are covered by the righteousness of Christ. In fact, Christ even offers His strength to help us resist sin temptation and sin [[Isaiah 27:5](#)]. Just like Joshua in Zechariah's vision, we can have angels standing beside us.

Most of the world is under Satan's power, even many who call themselves Christians, but there is a small group who resist him with the power of Christ. If he cannot claim their soul, he will try to end their lives using people and governments that he does have power over. Laws will be made that cannot be kept without breaking God's law. Those who are truly obedient to God will be threatened, lies will be told about them, they will be betrayed by friends and family, even if it means turning them into the authorities to be killed [[Luke 21:16](#)]. They understand their true condition and realize that without the mercy and righteousness of Christ to cover them, there would be no hope for them. They plead with God to forgive their sins, and Satan is there to point out their "filthy clothes," hoping to get them to give up in despair.

When Satan accuses them before God, he brings up the specific sins he knows they committed. He says they are not worthy of heaven any more than he is. He asks, "Will God keep me out of heaven, and let these who have committed the same sins, in?" But God rebukes him and says, "I died for them, and their names are written on the palms of My hands. Yes, they have sinned, but they have repented and I have forgiven them."

In the last days, God's people will more clearly see the sinfulness of the world and will try to warn the wicked of their danger, but they will be laughed at and made fun of. But just as a furnace is used to separate the impurities from gold, so the heat of accusations and persecution from both people and Satan, will purify God's true people. It may seem that God has forgotten about them, but He will not let them

suffer more than they can handle, and when they come out of the fire, the things of earth will have been burned off and they will represent the image of Christ perfectly.

The closer God's people grow to Him, the more they will understand how terrible sin is and what it cost Him. This will make them want their hearts and lives to be completely cleansed of sin and they will plead with God to take away their "dirty clothes" and replace them with the clean robe of Christ's righteousness [[Zechariah 3:4](#)]. The faithful who are hated by the world will have their names written in the Lamb's book of life, alongside the names of all the others throughout earth's history who will be saved. They resist the temptations of the devil, and their past forgiven sins will be transferred to Satan, the originator of sin, who will have to suffer the consequences of those sins.

There will be a time when faithful ones will receive the seal of God and have the Father's name written on their foreheads. It is they who will stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion, and they will sing a new song that only the 144,000 can sing. They will follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These are the ones who are redeemed from among the people of the world, and they stand without fault before the throne of God [[Revelation 14:1-5](#)]. That is the time when the last words to Joshua in Zechariah's vision will be fulfilled. "My Servant the Branch" will be introduced as Christ the Redeemer of His people. In that day the branch of the Lord will be beautiful, and glorious, and the gathering of those who were saved by His sacrifice will be a lovely scene [[Isaiah 4:2](#)].

## *Chapter 48—Not by Might, nor by Power*

Right after the vision about Joshua, Zechariah had a vision about Zerubbabel. In his vision an angel came and woke him up and asked, “What do you see?” I said, “I see a golden candlestick, with a bowl above it and 7 tubes from the bowl to the seven lamps, and an olive tree on each side of the bowl.” Then I asked the angel, “What do these things mean?” He answered, “This is a message to Zerubbabel, ‘Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of heaven’s armies.’” Then Zechariah said, “But what is the meaning of the 2 olive trees, and the branches that drip oil which is carried away by the golden tubes?” The angel replied, “These are the 2 anointed ones that stand by the Lord of the whole earth.” [[Zechariah 4](#)].

In the vision, olive trees provided oil to keep the lamps in the sanctuary burning continuously. So, anointed ones in the presence of God, where there is great light, love, and power, carry it to His people, that can then share it with others on earth. When God’s people receive gifts and blessings from heaven, they should share them with others.

In the rebuilding of the temple, Zerubbabel had faced many difficulties. Enemies had directly threatened and hindered the work, and even got the king to put a halt to the work [[Ezra 4:4-5, 23](#)]. But God continued to work behind the scenes to remove the things that blocked them. The words of encouragement to Zerubbabel in the vision continued, “Who are you, great mountain in front of Zerubbabel? You will become a flat plain. He will succeed and put the finishing touches on the temple, and people will shout, ‘May God bless it. May God bless it.’”

There have often been great mountains blocking the path God has asked His people to take. He allows them to test their faith, and if they continue to trust Him, the mountains will disappear. “Nothing will be impossible for you.” [[Matthew 17:20](#)]. Human power did not establish the Christian church, and human power will not be able to destroy it. The church was built on the foundation of Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages, and the gates of hell cannot win against it [[Matthew 16:18](#)]. Do not put your trust in men, or even princes, because they will not be able to help you [[Psalm 146:3](#)]. The work of God will succeed, “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of heaven’s armies.” [[Zechariah 4:6](#)].

The Jews continued working with the encouragement and advice of Haggai, and Zechariah, and they finished the temple, as God commanded. The Persian kings, Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes all were moved by God to help. The temple was completed on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day of the 12<sup>th</sup> month, in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Darius [[Ezra 6:14-15](#)].

Barely more than a month later, on the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month, the Jews kept the Passover with the new temple [[Ezra 6:16-19](#)]. This 2<sup>nd</sup> temple was not as magnificent as the 1<sup>st</sup>, nor was there any visible signs that God had accepted it. There was no cloud of glory, and there wasn't even an ark and mercy seat in the most holy place between the cherubim. But God told Haggai this about the temple, "The glory of this later temple will be greater than the former. The Desire of all nations will fill the house with His glory, says the Lord of heaven's armies." [[Haggai 2:7-9](#)].

People have tried to understand this prophecy, but the only possible interpretation was the presence in that temple, of Jesus of Nazareth, the Desire of all nations. Those who refuse to accept Jesus for who He was cannot come up with an explanation for how the second temple could be greater than the first. But instead of the cloud of glory that came on the first, the physical presence of God was present in the second. In Him existed all the fullness of the Godhead [[Colossians 2:9](#)]. God Himself took on human flesh [[1 Timothy 3:16](#)].

## *Chapter 49—In the Days of Queen Esther*

This chapter is based on [Esther 2-10](#).

The 50,000 Jews that returned to build the temple in response to the decree of Cyrus, were a small portion of the hundreds of thousands of Jews who chose to stay in Medo-Persia. The majority chose to stay in the relative comfort of their existing lives rather than endure the danger and hardship of traveling back to their homeland, only to have to rebuild their homes and cities. Around 60 years after the decree of Cyrus, Darius made a similarly generous decree for Jews to return to their homeland. God in His mercy was prompting more Jews to return home, knowing that dangerous and difficult times lay ahead during the reign of Ahasuerus.

“Get up, and flee from the north, where I had scattered you in all directions, escape from Babylon where you are now staying. After a time of prosperity in your homeland, I allowed nations to steal your things, but anyone who touches you is touching the apple of My eye (My most precious possession), so I will shake My hand against them. At that time, their slaves will turn on them and take their things. Then you will know that the Lord of heaven’s armies is with you.” [[Zechariah 2:6-9](#)].

Even when they were taken as prisoners of war, God wanted His people to bring glory to His name. Some did, and those were primarily the ones who chose to return home and build the temple. God, through the prophet Ezekiel, referred to them as a tender twig of the highest branch of a tall cedar tree. That twig would be planted on a high mountain in Israel, and it will become a great and beautiful tree, in which birds of the air will nest [[Ezekiel 17:22-23](#)].

Most of those who ignored the decree of Cyrus to return home also ignored the warnings of the prophets that they should leave. Darius who had treated the Jews well, was followed on the throne by Xerxes the Great. Having refused God’s warnings, and opportunities, those Jews were about to be faced with a great threat to their lives. Haman the Agagite had a lot of power in the Medo-Persian court, and Satan was working through him to destroy God’s people. Haman was a proud and ambitious man, and when Mordecai the Jew refused to bow down to him, he became very angry. So angry in fact, that he was not content to destroy Mordecai alone, but wanted to destroy all Jews, throughout the entire empire.

Haman lied to Xerxes about a certain people scattered throughout the empire, causing him to make a decree for their destruction. The decree said that on a certain day, all Jews everywhere were to be killed, and their property could be taken. This was the work of Satan, trying to rid the earth of the people who kept

alive the knowledge of God on the earth. The king's decree was carried throughout the empire, and Jews everywhere began to fast, and weep, and covered themselves in rough cloth (usually used for making sacks), and ashes. Like the law that caused Daniel to be thrown in the lion's den, no decree of the Medes and Persians can be taken back or changed.

But God was working behind the scenes to preserve His people. Esther, a Jew who respected and obeyed God had become the queen of the Medo-Persian empire. Her cousin, who was like a father to her, convinced her that she should appeal to Xerxes to save her people. Mordecai even said, "Who knows whether you have become queen for this very reason?" Esther realized that God's help was needed, so she told Mordecai to have the Jews fast and pray for 3 days, as she and her maidens would also do, then she would go in to see the king.

After 3 days, when Esther went in before the king, he was happy to see her and asked what he could do for her. She invited him and Haman to dinner where she told the king about the decree to end her life and the lives of all her people. The king had Haman killed, and gave Mordecai, his position, and told them to find a legal way to save her people. For this purpose, a new decree was issued, which gave the Jews permission to gather together and defend themselves against any who might try to follow the first decree. When they heard the new decree, the Jews throughout the empire were filled with joy and happiness. In fact, at that time many people became Jews, because they were afraid of what the Jews would do to their enemies.

The day came and angels from God were standing with the Jews to help with their protection, but most who might have carried out the first decree of the king to destroy the Jews were afraid to take action, and the Jews were able to defend themselves.

Since Mordecai had taken Haman's position, he was the king's right-hand man. The Jews respected and honored him greatly, and he promoted things in the kingdom that were good for all Israelites. God was able to use Mordecai to bring the Jews into good favor with the Meo-Persian court. This prepared the way for Artaxerxes I, the successor of Xerxes the Great to support the return of many Jews to Jerusalem with Ezra.

The experience of the Jews facing a death decree in the days of Esther is not unique. This is what is written in Revelation about the last days, "The dragon was angry with the woman, and made war on the few of them that keep the commandments of God and speak the truth of Jesus Christ." [[Revelation 12:17](#)]. One day a decree will be made that will target people of God that are hated as Haman hated Mordecai. They will be the keepers of the true Sabbath, and they will

be hated by those who reject the true Sabbath. They will be a small group, and Satan will stir up great anger against them. Wealthy, smart, and powerful people will work together with churches and governments to try to get them to change or give up their unpopular beliefs. Lies about the true Sabbath keepers will make them hated by many, and when they cannot be convinced through logic or arguments to go along with the majority, laws will be made to force them to comply or suffer the penalty. The fight over the true Sabbath will be the last great battle between truth and error. Though they may appear to be faced with defeat, we can know that in the end, God will bring honor to His law and save His people.

## *Chapter 50—Ezra, the Priest and Scribe*

This chapter is based on [Ezra 7-8](#).

Artaxerxes Longimanus became king of Medo-Persia about 70 years after the first group of Jews returned to their homeland under Cyrus. During his long reign, Artaxerxes showed great favor toward God's people through his trusted and beloved friends, Ezra and Nehemiah. He is the one who made the last decree commanding the completion of Jerusalem in 457 B.C. Ezra and Nehemiah accomplished great things for the Jews during his reign, leading multiple groups of Jews back home. The walls of Jerusalem were finally completed, the temple services were organized, and the Jews became much more committed to obeying God.

Ezra was trained as a priest because he was a descendant of Aaron. But he was not satisfied with his life as it was and had a great desire to study the history of his people and learn more about the law of God. This led to a deep study of all the writings that he could get his hands on. In addition to the writings of Moses, he studied the history of the prophets and kings, and even the books of poetry. From this study, he learned why the temple and Jerusalem had been destroyed, and why they were living in captivity in a heathen land. He was such an outstanding person that he was noticed and even became friends with Artaxerxes, with whom he spoke freely about the God of heaven, and His purpose for the Jews in Jerusalem.

As Ezra dug deeper into the holy writings of his people, they changed his heart, and he realized that he needed to share this knowledge with his people so they could also receive God's blessings. Ezra learned that he could give control of his mind and will to God, which brought true holiness to his life. These lessons, he shared with both young and old who came to learn from his wisdom. God was able to use Ezra to bring some honor back to the job of priest, and he became known as a man with great knowledge of history and the law of Moses. Whether he was in the court of the king of Medo-Persia or in Jerusalem, Ezra was continually sharing the truths he had learned from the holy scriptures. Because of his love for the holy scriptures, Ezra spent a lot of time gathering all the copies of the writings he could find. Then he would copy them and distribute them so they could bring knowledge and a blessing to more people.

The relationship Ezra had with Artaxerxes allowed him to share God plan for His people. He told the king of his desire to go to Jerusalem to encourage and help them to finish building the walls of city, but also to create more interest in the study of God's word. Artaxerxes was very impressed with Ezra, and not only did he send him to Jerusalem, but gave him official authority to continue the work, and

also gave him great financial support including precious gifts for the temple. This official authority came with a royal decree commanding the restoration of the city of Jerusalem. Artaxerxes did this not only because of his relationship with Ezra but for the God of heaven. A personal letter giving him authority from the king started as follows, [Ezra 7:12](#) "From Artaxerxes, the king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the teacher of the law of the God of heaven. Greetings. [Ezra 7:12 NLT](#). The king and even his 7 counselors generously and freely gave offerings to the God of Israel and said that any additional expenses would be paid out of the royal treasury. Artaxerxes added, [Ezra 7:23](#) Be careful to provide whatever the God of heaven demands for his Temple, for why should we risk bringing God's anger against the realm of the king and his sons? [Ezra 7:23 NLT](#).

But the decree of Artaxerxes went into even greater detail, it gave priests and Levites their original jobs according to the law of Moses and stated that they didn't have to pay the various taxes to the empire. He selected people to govern and judge the Jews according to their laws. He even added that the Jews should teach the law of God to any who didn't know it, as well as the laws of the kingdom, so they wouldn't be punished. And he did all these things, because the wisdom of God of flowed through the advice of Ezra.

This decree provided yet another opportunity, and some encouragement for the Jews who had been dispersed to return to their homeland. And it brought great rejoicing to those who had been studying and learning about God's will for His people. [Ezra 7:27](#) Praise the LORD, the God of our ancestors, who made the king want to beautify the Temple of the LORD in Jerusalem! <sup>28</sup> And praise him for demonstrating such unfailing love to me by honoring me before the king, his council, and all his mighty nobles! I felt encouraged because the gracious hand of the LORD my God was on me. And I gathered some of the leaders of Israel to return with me to Jerusalem. [Ezra 7:27-28 NLT](#).

A time and place were set to meet so that everyone who wanted to return to Jerusalem could travel together. When the day came, Ezra was very disappointed with the turnout. Many who owned houses, land, and businesses were living comfortably had decided to stay, which influenced many others who were undecided about whether they would return. In addition to this, when Ezra looked over the people who had gathered, he was surprised to see that there were no Levites. In their captivity the Jews had been given a great amount of religious freedom, and the opportunity to continue their way of life, but those rights were not guaranteed. In fact, the recent near-death experience caused by Haman, should have been a sign that they should leave. So, Ezra sent out another call to Levites begging them to change their minds and join the returning group. In response to this call, 40 priests and 220 Nethinim showed up and were ready to join the group

returning to Jerusalem. Altogether, this was not just a group of men, but there were wives, children, many things they owned, as well as great treasures that the king had donated for the temple and its services.

Ezra knew there were great dangers along the way for an unprotected group of people carrying so many valuable things. But after all the things he had told the king about God's protection, he was embarrassed to ask the king for an armed escort. Ezra saw this as a way to demonstrate their faith in the power of God to protect those who keep His law and obey Him. So, before they left everyone gathered for prayer and fasting and a re-commitment of their lives, family, and possessions to God. Then Ezra chose 12 of the leading priests, that he knew he could trust, and divided up all the gold, silver, and precious things that had been donated for the temple and made them personally responsible for their portion. This is a lesson for us today, that we should carefully choose the people that we place in charge of money that has been donated to God.

In the 7<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Artaxerxes, the group finally left where they were camped by the river on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the first month of the Jewish calendar. God was with them and protected them from all enemies for the 4-month journey to Jerusalem, and they arrived in Jerusalem on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the 5<sup>th</sup> month.

## *Chapter 51—A Spiritual Revival*

When Ezra arrived in Jerusalem, there was a great need for spiritual leadership. Years before, the temple had been completed under the leadership of Zerubbabel and Joshua, but the walls of Jerusalem had not been completed. The first group to return had remained faithful to God but many of their children and grandchildren did not. Some leading men were even living in sin that was obvious to everyone, and this made it difficult for anyone to try to promote keeping the law of God. The new group that just arrived with Ezra were strong in faith and their good influence prepared the way for positive changes to come.

Four days after arriving, the 12 men brought the things they were responsible for, and everything was accounted for both by quantity and weight. Sacrifices were made at the temple, for forgiveness for sins, and for thanksgiving for the safe trip. The king's decree was also shown to the governors on the that side of the river so they could do their part [[Ezra 8:34-36](#)].

One of the first things Ezra chose to deal with was the intermarriage with heathen people who didn't worship God. Some of the chief priests and Levites were the guiltiest of this and had even done the same for their sons and daughters. When Ezra learned this, he was shocked and tore his clothes and even pulled out hair from his beard [[Ezra 9:1-3](#)]. He knew that intermingling with heathens was one of the main things that had led Israel to be unfaithful to God in the past.

At the time of the evening sacrifice, Ezra tore his clothes again and fell on his knees to pray. "O my God, I am ashamed to lift up my face to You. Our sins are so many they are reaching up to heaven. When our fathers sinned, their kings and priests were defeated by other nations, some were killed by the sword, and others taken as captives to other lands. Now by Your grace, You have brought us back to our homeland and given us a temple again. You have given us relief from our enemies and have caused the Persian kings to show us mercy. The walls of Jerusalem are even being rebuilt. What can we say O God, now that we are disobeying Your commands again. You have punished us less than we deserve for our sins, brought us back home, and we are breaking Your commandments again. You should be angry enough with us to destroy us, but there are still some of us left today." [[Ezra 9:6-15](#)].

When the people saw Ezra's sadness and heard his prayer, they were touched, and many who had sinned began to cry [[Ezra 10:1](#)]. Shecaniah stood up and admitted that everything Ezra said was true, and that they should all make a promise to God, that they will give up their sins and obey the law of God. Then Ezra stood up and made the priests and Levites and all the people promise to obey the Lord [[Ezra](#)

[10:2-5](#)]. This was the beginning of a great change in Judah, and Ezra examined each case of the men who had married heathen women, taking into consideration the rights and support of the women and children. Every decision Ezra made was based on the law, and his desire was that each person would understand the holiness of the law, and the blessings that would come if it was obeyed.

Wherever Ezra went, he taught people what was most important, which was to study the Holy Scriptures and to honor and keep the law of God. When they studied, they found prophecies that told of a Messiah which was to come. More than 2000 years later, the writings and example of Ezra still inspire people to study the Bible and keep the law of God.

Ezra had a great love for the salvation of people, and this was the motivation for his actions. Even though the law was so important to him, he was still very gentle and understanding of those who had sinned. We should like Ezra, be firm as a rock on what is right and wrong, but at the same time, have compassion for those who have sinned. That doesn't mean leaving them to live in sin but teaching them a better way to live.

Today, Satan wants people to believe that the law of God is old and doesn't apply anymore, or that it has been replaced and doesn't need to be kept anymore. Because of this, the world needs people, who like Ezra, will treat the law as holy and perfect [[Psalm 19:7](#)], and will teach others to love studying the Bible and treat every word as important. The great amount of sin that exists today is mostly because people are not studying the Bible and obeying God's law. When the Bible is ignored, the natural desires to sin are not held back. When people think they are free from having to keep God's law, a flood of sin and evil follows. When this happens, people will lie, cheat, and betray each other, and will more often break human laws, leaving the world on the edge of ruin. The command to have no other gods before Me [[Exodus 20:3](#)], still applies, and as stated again in the New Testament, "You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only." [[Matthew 4:10](#)].

The law of God is perfect, never changes, has always existed, and will always exist. We have no power to make it weaker or stronger, or more or less honorable. But a last great battle between human laws and the law of God is coming. It will not be a battle over which church is right, but whether the religion is based on the Bible or not. Many have given their lives to preserve and share the holy word of God which has been passed down to us. Even though it cost so much to some, many today place no value on it. Many in the church today ignore portions of the Bible that are the foundation of the Christian faith. A 7-day creation, the beginning

of sin, how sin is forgiven, and the never changing law of God are all rejected by many Christians.

People who place complete trust and belief in the Bible are called weak minded. But Christians should be preparing for what is coming by deeply studying the Bible and trying to live according to its principles. Do we really want to trust our eternal lives to a religion that is made up in the minds of people, based on repeating words or performing rituals, but ignoring uncomfortable truth? The words of the Bible alone should be preached from the pulpit, allowing people to say, [Luke 24:32](#) ... "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" [Luke 24:32 NLT](#). Many people have a longing for God in their lives, that can only be filled with His words from the Bible.

Great light came from men like Abraham, Moses, and other men of God, as well as the prophets down through the centuries. Because of the Bible, we have the accumulated light of those men of God, but we have so much more. We have the actual words of Christ, that all those men longed for, and we have the fulfillment of His sacrifice to save all people from sin, when He rose from the grave. Since the collection of writings, that is the Bible have been assembled, reformers who protested against the corrupt Christian church were willing to lose their possessions, their freedom, and even their lives to share the precious words of God and the good news of salvation with others. We should be willing to do as much today.

The words of the prophet Joel can still apply today. Blow the trumpet in Jerusalem, call for a fast, gather the people, let the priests and religious teachers weep and say, "Spare Your people, O Lord, and do not let them be destroyed." His answer is, "Turn to Me with all your heart with fasting and weeping. Tare your hearts and not your clothes, and return to the Lord your God, for He is good, merciful, slow to anger, full of kindness, and willing to save you from the evil you deserve." [[Joel 2:12-17](#)].

## *Chapter 52—A Man of Opportunity*

This chapter is based on [Nehemiah 1-2](#).

Nehemiah was a Jew who worked in the palace in Persia, bringing the king his drinks and making sure they were safe by tasting them himself. In his position, he was often in the presence of the king, and because of his faithfulness, and his abilities, the king would at times ask for his advice and even thought of him as a friend. But even though he had this position of influence, he did not forget God or his people. Nehemiah would often think of them in Jerusalem and wish for them to have security and success. God was about to use him to bring a great blessing to His people in their homeland.

Nehemiah would pay close attention to any news from Jerusalem and had become sad on hearing the struggles they were going through. The temple had been completed, but not the wall of Jerusalem, and this left them vulnerable to enemies, and as a result the temple services were often interrupted. This news left Nehemiah very sad, took away his appetite, and made him cry. In his prayer, he begged God to forgive his people for their sins and give them the strength and courage to finish rebuilding the city and their nation.

At least part of Nehemiah's motives for wanting success for his people were for the honor of God. As he prayed, he reminded God of His words, "If you turn to Me and keep My commandments, even if you are scattered all over the world, I will gather you together and bring you to the place that I have chosen to make My name known." [[Deuteronomy 4:29-31](#)]. This promise was made to Israel even before they had entered Canaan. Nehemiah had prayed for his people often, but then he realized, that maybe he could do something besides praying to help them. If he could get the king's permission, he could go in person, to lead out in the completion of the walls and set up the government so Israel could be recognized as a nation again.

Nehemiah began to pray that the king would let him go and help his people. He prayed and waited for 4 months for the right opportunity to ask the king. One day the king noticed that Nehemiah was sad and troubled about something, so he asked, "Why do you look sad? Are you sick, or are you troubled about something?" He was worried about what the king would say, but this was his opportunity to talk to the king about what was on his mind, so he said, "Let the king live forever, but why should I not be sad, when the capital city of my people still lies in ruins?" Then the king asked, "Is there something I can do for you?" This was the chance he was waiting for, and he didn't want to mess it up, so he said a quick prayer that God would help him say the right thing.

We should do as Nehemiah did, by saying a quick silent prayer for guidance from God when we are faced with choices. No matter what we are doing, when faced with danger, or difficulty, God has promised to be with us and to help us if we ask. We have access not only to a great source of power, but also of love and comfort in our times of need. After his prayer, Nehemiah felt it was the right time to bring his request to the king. He asked to be released from his job for a time, and for the king's permission to complete the walls of Jerusalem and make it a strong city once again. And the king agreed to everything that Nehemiah asked for.

Since the king was so agreeable to his request, he decided to try to make it official business by asking for a military escort and for letters from the king to the governors on the Jerusalem side of the Euphrates River. He even had the king give orders to supply wood from the forests of Lebanon. God's people can learn a lesson from Nehemiah, by not just praying for a cause, but by planning and taking action as well. God can motivate people to give financial or material support for a cause, but Nehemiah still had to ask, and even though the givers didn't share the same faith or belief in God, their gifts were still acceptable.

## *Chapter 53—The Builders on the Wall*

This chapter is based on [Nehemiah 2-4](#).

Nehemiah arrived safely in Jerusalem, delivering the letters from the king to governors along the way, who each greeted him with honor. But his arrival in Jerusalem was not well received by the enemies of the Jews who were trying to hinder the reconstruction. The leaders of that opposition were Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian. From the time that he first arrived, Nehemiah would be hindered and opposed by these men and their followers. Realizing that these men were his enemies, Nehemiah hid his intentions from them, while he secretly began to plan how he would get the support of the Jews. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> night, he went out at midnight with just a few trusted people to look over the broken-down sections of the wall. He was sad as he looked at the condition of the city and thought of its history and past greatness. After he finished looking, Nehemiah spent the rest of the night in prayer.

At this time, even the local Jewish priests and rulers didn't know what he was planning. Nehemiah had authority from the king to command the people, but rather than use it, he wished to gain their support. The next day when he gathered some people for a meeting wishing to gain their support rather than just telling them what they must do. He knew that things would go much better if the people were willing partners in the project rather than just workers. When he presented his plans, the people were impressed with the detailed knowledge he had of the city, and the troubles they were going through. He told them that he came to them with the full support of the king, which in itself was an answer to prayer. Nehemiah stood before the Jews with the authority of God, the king of Persia, and now he asked if they would follow his lead and work with him to complete the wall of Jerusalem. The people saw that God was with Nehemiah, and they all responded together saying, "Let us rise up and build."

When the enemies of the Jews finally learned of the renewed enthusiasm to complete the walls, they laughed and said, "What do you think you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?" But Nehemiah answered, "The God of heaven will help us to succeed. We are his servants and will get up and start building." The priests were some of the first to catch Nehemiah's excitement, which was good because they could have really hindered the work if they were not in support of it. In fact, most of the priests and rulers put their full support behind Nehemiah, but there were a few rich Tekoites who were not supportive, and because of this their family was shamed for generations.

In every religious movement, there are some who make no effort to help, even though they can see that God is leading. Their names are written in heaven, and they will be judged for their failure to follow God's leading, which they were aware of. But Nehemiah's excitement and confidence far outweighed the negative influence of the few Tekoite families who refused to help, and the Jews were also inspired with patriotism for their nation. Leaders were given different sections of the wall which they would be responsible for completing, and the people went to work.

As the work began, Nehemiah's energy remained high, and he kept an eye on all the workers, making sure that nothing was blocking their progress. He encouraged workers who were slow, motivated the lazy, and complimented those who did good work. He closely watched their enemies, who sometimes would gather in the distance to watch, and sometimes would approach and try to distract the workers. One of their enemies, Sanballat said, "What are these weak Jews doing? Will they strengthen themselves? Will they find good stones to use out of the ruins?" Tobiah said, "The wall they are building would crumble if a fox walked on it."

But Nehemiah and the builders had more to worry about than just being made fun of. Some enemies would pretend to be Jews and join the work crews, causing trouble and distraction from within. Rumors were circulated to try to distract, and one time a lie was spread that Nehemiah was planning to make himself king of the Jews and rebel against the Persian empire. But Nehemiah depended on God to know how to deal with the distractions, and the work progressed to the point where the walls were half the final height.

When their enemies, including the Samaritans, saw that they were failing to stop the work, they became more desperate and started planning to use violence. Even as the Samaritans were planning their attack, some of the Jewish leaders were becoming unhappy, and started complaining about the difficulties of completing the work. There were even some Jews who had refused to help, that were now actively trying to distract and discourage the workers.

But none of this opposition seemed to hinder or discourage Nehemiah, in fact it gave him more motivation to succeed and complete the work. He was not blind to the fact that violence could be used against them, but he told the rich and the rulers to remember that the Lord is great and terrible to their enemies, and fights for them, their families, and their homes. Eventually, Nehemiah had half the people stand guard with sword, spears, and bows, and the other half would work with a sword strapped to their side, and the priests stood watch with trumpets to signal danger. Everyone was moved inside the walls, both for their own protection, and to

guard the work in progress, but also to save the time of travelling between work and home.

Like the people in Nehemiah's day, Christians can face difficulties today, from enemies, and people pretending to be friends. Satan will move his followers to make fun of and threaten God's people with violence. One of his best tools are people who act like or claim they are Christians, but whether knowingly or not, they hinder the work of God. But like Nehemiah, God's people should trust Him, and in faith, move forward in doing His work. Whenever God's people are faced with trouble, they can confidently say, if God is with us, who can succeed against us? [[Romans 8:31](#)], and they can remember the words of Nehemiah, "Our God will fight for us."

## *Chapter 54—A Rebuke Against Extortion*

This chapter is based on [Nehemiah 5](#).

While the reconstruction on the walls of Jerusalem was still in progress, it was brought to Nehemiah's attention that there were many poor people that were being taken advantage of by the wealthier Jews. The poor didn't even have enough money to buy food, so they had to buy on credit, promising to pay back much more than the food was worth. Then, to pay their taxes to the Persian empire, they had to borrow money from the wealthy, who charged them high interest rates. This forced many of the poor to sell themselves, their children, and their land to the rich, leaving them hardly better off than slaves.

Some of the laws given to Israel through Moses were specifically to prevent this from happening. Every 3<sup>rd</sup> year a tithe was to be collected to help the poor. Every 7<sup>th</sup> year, landowners were not supposed to plant and were to allow the poor to help themselves to anything that grew on its own. There were also laws against charging the poor any kind of interest [[Exodus 22:25](#); [Deuteronomy 23:19](#)]. But there's even more, "If there is anyone among you that is poor, you should not harden your heart against them. You should share with them what they need and want. There will always be poor among you, and you should be generous to them." [[Deuteronomy 15:7-11](#)]. Following these laws would have reminded the Jews that that God owns everything, and He wanted them to use what they had to help bring His blessings to others.

But now the poor came to Nehemiah with their complaints saying, "Look, we have sold our sons, and daughters into slavery, and we cannot redeem them because we had to sell our land as well." When he heard this Nehemiah became very angry and immediately took action. He understood that the guilty were the rich people, whose support he depended on for the reconstruction of the wall, but this did not stop him from confronting them. When he had gathered them together, he directly told them they were wrong in how they were treating the poor. Then he showed them according to the law given through Moses exactly how they were supposed to deal with the poor. But he also read to them from their own history about a specific incident from the time of king Ahaz. Judah was worshipping idols, and God allowed them to be defeated by the Israelites from the north, even though their enemies were more wicked. But when Israel intended to make slaves of the people from Judah, God spoke through the prophet Oded to tell them that what they were doing was wrong. "You plan to keep the people of Judah as slaves, but are you now just as guilty of sinning against the Lord your God?" [[2 Chronicles 28:10](#)]. He warned them that God was angry at them for intending to enslave their relatives, and if they continued it would bring punishment on them from the Lord. To their

credit, the military left the captives and even the things they had taken from Judah. Then the leaders from the tribe of Ephraim took care of the captives, clothing and feeding them and caring for their injuries, then walked them back to Jericho [[2 Chronicles 28:15](#)].

Then Nehemiah and some of the wealthy Jews paid off the heathen to free the poor that were in debt to them. He also told the wealthy to not only release their fellow Jews from slavery, but also to give them back their land, and to return the money that had been taken as interest. From that time on, they were not allowed to charge the poor any interest on loans and could not even ask for anything of value to hold in case the loan could not be repaid. In his position given by the king, Nehemiah had a pretty good salary, but rather than hoard his wealth, he showed by example how the wealthy should treat the poor, by giving freely for their needs. To their credit, the wealthy Jews all accepted the rebuke, and promised to do everything Nehemiah said.

We should remember the warning, “The love of money is the root of all kinds of evil.” [[1 Timothy 6:10](#)]. Often wealth is gained in evil ways, one of which is to barely pay the poor enough to survive, leaving them with no hope for anything better. Meanwhile the wealthy live in great luxury, giving themselves anything and everything they want. James describes why some wealthy people will be punished when Christ returns. You have hoarded up treasure; you have held back pay that was owed to your workers; the cry of those who work in your fields has reached the Lord of heaven’s armies. You live in luxury, giving yourself everything you desire, even things that are not good for you. You condemn and kill the innocent, because they are helpless before you [[James 5:3-6](#)]. This even describes some people who call themselves Christians, and when the church allows them to remain a member, it gives Christianity a bad reputation. This is why the church is responsible for condemning the open sins of her members, because if she doesn’t, she is saying it is ok to do those things. Christians should not think something is ok just because the culture accepts it. Every act that takes advantage of the weak, the poor, the stranger, or those who don’t know any better, is as if it were done to Christ, and is written in a book in heaven.

Instead of taking advantage of people, we should do the opposite, and be generous, kind, and merciful to people who have less than us. Even that is less than what the Son of God did for us. We are all sinners and had no way to pay the price to be redeemed from sin, but Jesus paid it for us. Everything we do for those less fortunate than ourselves, is an act of gratitude for what Christ did for us. Paul said, “Let us do good to all people, especially the members of your own church.” [[Galatians 6:10](#)]. Jesus said, “Whatever you would want people to do to you, you should do for them.” [[Matthew 7:12](#)].

## *Chapter 55—Heathen Plots*

This chapter is based on [Nehemiah 6](#).

Sanballat and the other enemies of the Jews were not strong enough to openly attack them, so they continued to try to frustrate them and discourage them from completing the wall. The wall was almost complete, and soon they would be shut outside the gates and would not be able to enter the city to cause trouble. So, they came up with a plan to try to get Nehemiah to come meet with them somewhere outside the city, where they planned to kill or capture him. They sent message after message to him, and he declined each time saying, “I am doing important work here, and cannot stop to meet with you.” So, Sanballat tried another approach, sending a letter to Nehemiah that said, “It is being reported among the heathen, that you are planning to declare yourself king of the Jews, and that you have even set up prophets to support you in this. So, if you don’t want me to spread these rumors, let’s meet.” By leaving the letter unsealed so that anyone involved in transferring them to Nehemiah could read it, Sanballat intended to try to start the rumors, and cause the Jews to be worried about it.

Nehemiah knew he was not planning this and suspected that Sanballat had made it up himself, so he sent a written response saying: “These rumors are completely made up by you.” When this plot failed, the enemies of the Jews tried another approach, this time getting the help of Shemiah, a man Nehemiah had trusted. Shemiah acted like he feared for his life and hid in a room next to the temple. This was a very secure location, and he tried to get Nehemiah to hide as well for his own safety. But if Nehemiah had hidden out of fear for his life, he would have looked like a coward and shown a great lack of faith in God. Others would have become fearful and hidden as well, and the city would have been unprotected. But instead, Nehemiah said, “Should someone like me run and hide? Who in my position would go and hide himself in the temple? I will not.” Nehemiah saw through this plot and concluded that Shemiah and other influential men had been bribed by Tobiah and Sanballat to do this.

Even with the plots against them, the work on the city walls continued, and in less than 2 months from the start, they were complete. The walls were thick enough for people to walk on, and defense stations were set up on them. When their enemies looked up at the walls from the outside, they were very discouraged and realized that God had been with the Jews and helped them.

But trouble did not end with the completion of the wall. Several of the wealthy men were secretly communicating with Tobiah because he was married to the daughter of Shechaniah, so they supported him. Other families had also given their

daughters in marriage to heathen, and now these connections were a constant source of trouble for the Jews, like the mixed multitude that came out of Egypt with Israel. Their loyalties were divided, and they were not fully committed to obeying God and doing His work.

Now Tobiah and others who had been trying to prevent the Jews from succeeding pretended that they wanted to be friendly and even to help them. Some of the Jews who had connections to Tobiah recommended him to Nehemiah as a capable person who would be of great service to the Jews. At the same time, they were betraying Nehemiah by secretly sharing his plans with Tobiah.

There were other Jews who were taking credit for what Nehemiah had accomplished, and were not showing any gratitude to him. In the past, Nehemiah had acted boldly and decisively in defense of the poor, but now that he was being attacked, he did not use his authority to defend himself. Calmly and unselfishly, he went about his business, even though people were trying to steal his authority.

Satan's best success against the cause of God is through those on the inside, who claim to be participating in the work. It is easier to defend against fierce, open opposition than it is to detect secret enemies on the inside. Nehemiah's approach to handling Satan's attempts to defeat the work of God, was to stay focused and not get distracted. He said, "I am doing important work and cannot meet with you." But at the same time that he was ignoring distractions, he prepared for open attacks with watchmen and the ability to defend themselves [[Nehemiah 4:9](#)].

In the last days Satan will do everything he can to distract and defeat the work of God, so God's people must, like Nehemiah, not get distracted, and not allow enemies to infiltrate through marriage or a fake show of friendship. And those who take the time to stop and meet with the people trying to hinder the work, are stopping their own work to do so. They should not worry about defending truth against error, because truth will win over error in the end.

People who let their guard down and hurt the work of God, weaken their coworkers, and damage their reputation for future usefulness in the work of God. "Those that reject the law praise wickedness." [[Proverbs 28:4](#)]. When those who claim to work for God want peace and unity with the world, we should have nothing to do with them. That advice comes from Satan and should be quickly and firmly rejected.

Nehemiah's enemies failed to stop him because of his strong dedication to the work of God, and his dependence on God to accomplish the work. A lazy person easily gives in to temptation but the person who has good goals, and works hard to achieve them, doesn't easily give in to evil. A person of strong faith and purpose, gets stronger because they are supported by a never-ending source of grace from

the throne of God. Help from God is available to meet and handle every emergency that we cannot handle on our own. The Holy Spirit has been given to us to help whenever we face any difficulty, or need hope, or confidence, but He also teaches us things and helps to purify our thoughts. The Holy Spirit can also create opportunities to advance the work of God, and if we cooperate with Him, our human effort can produce great results.

## ***Chapter 56—Instructed in the Law of God***

This chapter is based on [Nehemiah 8-10](#).

It was the time of the Feast of Trumpets, and many people had gathered in Jerusalem for it. Though the walls and gates of Jerusalem had been completed, many parts of the city still lay in ruins. The people's attention was directed to a large wooden platform, on which stood a now aged Ezra, surrounded by Levites. When Ezra spoke, he blessed the Lord their God, and the people said amen and bowed their heads and worshipped the Lord.

But communicating with the people was not as simple now, because they did not all understand the same language. Because of marriage with people of other nations, not everyone understood the Hebrew language. Now everything had to be translated into languages that the people could understand. So, Ezra and some of the priests and Levites began to explain the law of God so that everyone could understand. And the people listened carefully and reverently to the reading of the book of the law, and the words of the Most High God. Then the people understood that they had been guilty of breaking God's law, and they were truly sorry, and even cried because they felt guilty. But Nehemiah told the people to not be sad, but to be happy because of God's great mercy toward them. Then because it was a holy day, they spent the day in religious services, and in talking and sharing stories about the blessings of God that they had experienced. At the end of the day, they were reminded that because it was holy day of rejoicing, when they went home, they should share a meal with anyone who didn't have anything prepared.

The next day, the reading and explaining of the law continued, and when the 10<sup>th</sup> day of the 7<sup>th</sup> month came, they experienced the holy services of the Day of Atonement according to the command of God. Then from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the month the Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated. The people were told to go out into the fields and hills and collect tree branches of olive, pine, myrtle, and palm, and then make booths, or shelters with them. Some whose homes were nearby, set up the shelter on their rooftop, and others made theirs in the outer courts of the temple. And there was great gladness as Ezra continued reading from the book of the law every day. As the people listened day after day, they became fully convinced of their sin, but they also realized how the sins of their ancestors were the reason they had been conquered and scattered to foreign lands. So, they decided and promised to depend on God's mercy, and to obey His commands. And on the second day after the end of the Feast of Tabernacles, they separated themselves from the heathen among them.

As the people bowed down before the Lord, confessing their sins and asking for forgiveness, they were told to have faith and believe that God had forgiven them. They could show their faith by speaking of the mercies of God and praising Him for His goodness. Then all the people stood up and lifted their arms to heaven and sang:

“Blessed is Your glorious name,  
Which is higher than all blessing and praise.  
You, even You are Lord alone;  
You have made heaven, and all the angels.  
You made the earth,  
And all living things on it.  
You made the seas,  
And all that lives in them.  
You preserve everything:  
And all the angels of heaven worship You.”

After the song ended, the leaders told the people the history of Israel, and how they had been so ungrateful to God even though He had been so good to them. Then all the people promised to keep all the commandments of God. They had already suffered punishment for their sins, and now they realized that God had been fair with them. Then to prove and remind themselves of the promise they made, it was written and signed by the priests, Levites, and the leaders of the people. Then the people swore a promise to obey God’s law and all His commands that were given to them by Moses, the servant of God. Next, they promised not to intermarry with the heathen people of the land, and they showed their desire to completely follow the Lord by promising to stop breaking the Sabbath. Later, to remove at least one of the temptations to break the Sabbath, Nehemiah would prevent heathen merchants from bringing their goods into Jerusalem and setting up shop on the Sabbath.

Obedying all the commands of God included returning a tithe (10<sup>th</sup>) of what they produced or earned. But in addition to that the people promised to give a certain amount to support the temple, the priests and Levites, so the public worship services could continue. The practice of bringing the first fruits of their harvest, and the first born of their flocks and herds, and paying a price to the temple for their first-born sons was also resumed. Israel’s actions showed that they had truly returned to God and now they were to trust in His promise of forgiveness and rejoice that they once again had His favor. Nehemiah had succeeded in getting the

Jews to return to God and now as long as they stayed faithful to their promise, God could fulfill His promise to them to bless them.

People today who are convinced that they are sinners and are weighed down with a sense of guilt can receive encouragement from this story. Israel's sin was great, and their repentance came with deep humility, and thankfulness shown by generous sacrifice. Every sinner who listens to the Holy Spirit and recognizes their guilt, will see that they are condemned to die because of their sins. But the purpose of this is not to bring hopelessness and despair, but to bring repentance and forgiveness which has already been promised. The repentant sinner can immediately rejoice in the knowledge that their sins have been forgiven, and they can then experience the love of God heal their wounds and cleanse them of their guilt and give them assurance of salvation.

## *Chapter 57—Reformation*

This chapter is based on [Nehemiah 13](#).

The people of Judah had publicly promised to obey the law of God, but not everyone was truly converted. When Ezra was gone and Nehemiah had returned to Persia, evil crept back. Because of intermarriage between the families of Eliashib the high priest and Tobiah the Ammonite, Tobiah was given an apartment that was connected with to temple. In fact, before that it had been used as a storeroom for tithes and offering. Because of their cruelty toward Israel, the Ammonites and Moabites were supposed to be shut out of the temple [[Deuteronomy 23:3-6](#)]. In defiance of this command, the high priest removed God's money to make room for this Ammonite.

When Nehemiah returned from Persia, he was furious and took all of Tobiah's things and threw them out of the temple apartment. Then he commanded that the rooms be cleansed, and the offerings be brought back. Next Nehemiah learned that offerings had not been used properly making people not want to even give their tithe. In addition to that, many of the Levites had not been paid, so they had to go find work elsewhere.

Nehemiah brought the Levites back to their temple jobs, and the people began to bring their offerings to the temple again. Then honest and trustworthy men were put in charge of the offerings and were responsible for paying the temple workers. In Nehemiah's absence, the Sabbath had begun to be treated like any other day, as heathen traders had been allowed to do business in Jerusalem on that day. Not only were the people buying, selling, and trading, but some were working in their fields as well. The people Nehemiah left in charge could have stopped this business on the Sabbath, but they were profiting from it, so they allowed it to happen. So, he said to them, "What evil is this that you are allowing to happen on the Sabbath day? Don't you realize that it is because of things like this that our fathers brought destruction on the city?" Then, since Nehemiah felt he couldn't trust the current leaders, he put his own people in charge of the city gates, and he told them to close them before the sun sets and not open them again until the Sabbath was over.

When Nehemiah saw that the merchants were still coming and waiting outside the city gates, hoping to still do business, he told them if they came back again on the Sabbath he would arrest them. Then he placed Levites in charge of the city gates.

Now Nehemiah had to deal with the intermarriage problem again as it threatened Israel with idolatry. He wrote, "I saw Jews married to women from Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab, and their children were learning to speak the languages of their mothers and could not speak the native language of the Jews." This caused

great confusion and to make it worse it was men in high positions of leadership that had done this, which made it an example that others might follow. Nehemiah reasoned with these men, reminding them of the example of Solomon, and how even though he was the wisest king, he fell away from God because of his wives. He also reminded them of the punishment that fell on Israel in the past because of these sins and changes were needed to turn away God's anger. Then Nehemiah demanded, "You shall not give your daughters in marriage to their sons, nor take their daughters for your sons or yourselves." As Nehemiah began to deal with the leaders one by one, some of them pleaded to not have to divorce their heathen wives, but there were no exceptions, and whoever would not separate from their heathen wives, were immediately removed from office. A grandson of the high priest that had married a daughter of Sanballat, was even banished from Israel for defiling the priesthood.

Many who would not separate from their heathen wives willingly left the people of Judah and joined with the Samaritans. Hoping to improve the relationship between the two peoples, the Samaritans tried to make their religion more like the Jews, and some of the former Jewish priests and leaders set up their own competing temple on Mount Gerizim. Even though their religion was mixed with heathenism, they claimed that their worship was superior to that of the Jews, and that they were the true people of God. This competition turned into a great source of hatred between the 2 nations which lasted for generations.

The church of God today needs men like Ezra and Nehemiah who are not afraid to call out sin regardless of who the sinner is. When it comes to sin, God doesn't treat anybody differently based on how important they are or think they are. People in the role of Ezra and Nehemiah, who call out the sin in others should do it with humility, and with the Spirit of Christ. They should also be confessing their own sins as they confess the sins of others. Those who accept this role in the church will not only have people openly hate them, but there will be people who act friendly to their face but oppose and criticize them when they are not around. Those who do this make the job 10 times more difficult for the ones who try to keep the Church of God pure, but their actions also give enemies of God something to criticize.

The example of Nehemiah shows that you don't have to be a priest or a prophet to have a great impact on the work of God. Anyone who prays a lot and is willing to act can accomplish great things for God. Nehemiah was a man that was willing to be used by God for the important job of setting his people on the right path and he used all his energy to accomplish it. Whenever he saw evil, he took such a strong stand against it that people were moved to take his side. His loyalty, patriotism, and love for God motivated people to follow him.

Taking immediate and decisive action when God leads will produce the best results, but delay and weak action bring dishonor to Him. If leaders of a church have a plan of action, and are excited about it, members will join in and do their part. But if leaders have no definite direction and are not enthusiastic about anything, the church members will not know what to do, and will be lazy, and even looking to satisfy their own pleasure.

In the story of Nehemiah and Ezra, and their enemies, Sanballat and Tobiah, we can see the contrast between good and evil, and we are free to choose which we will copy. The Jews who returned from exile to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple were weak, but under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, God was able to use them to preserve a knowledge of Himself and His law on the earth. These leaders faced many struggles and great opposition, but humbly and in faith, they moved forward, relying on God for strength, and believed that God would succeed in accomplishing His purpose. Like Hezekiah, Nehemiah clung to the Lord, always followed His will, and kept His commandments, and God was with him [[2 Kings 18:6-7](#)].

The words of Isaiah described the work that Nehemiah led out in. [Isaiah 61:4](#) They will rebuild the ancient ruins, repairing cities destroyed long ago. They will revive them, though they have been deserted for many generations. [Isaiah 61:4 NLT](#). [Isaiah 58:12](#) Some of you will rebuild the deserted ruins of your cities. Then you will be known as a rebuilders of walls and a restorer of homes. [Isaiah 58:12 NLT](#). In Nehemiah's day, the repairs that were needed were both the literal wall of Jerusalem, but also the keeping of God's law. Today, there are parts of the law of God that are broken, that must be repaired. When the broken knowledge of the law is repaired, those principles of truth, justice, and purity will protect souls for salvation. The following words from the prophet Isaiah specifically address the keeping of the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment. [Isaiah 58:13](#) "Keep the Sabbath day holy. Don't pursue your own interests on that day, but enjoy the Sabbath and speak of it with delight as the LORD's holy day. Honor the Sabbath in everything you do on that day, and don't follow your own desires or talk idly. <sup>14</sup> Then the LORD will be your delight. I will give you great honor and satisfy you with the inheritance I promised to your ancestor Jacob. I, the LORD, have spoken!" [Isaiah 58:13-14 NLT](#).

In the last days, the broken Sabbath commandment must be repaired. God's true followers must show the world that His law is the foundation of true happiness, and that the Sabbath commandment is a reminder that God created us. They must teach the importance of keeping all 10 of God's commandments. By doing so they will be the rebuilders of walls and homes spoken of in [Isaiah 58:12](#).

## *Chapter 58—The Coming of a Deliverer*

There were many centuries of darkness as men and women waited for the coming of a Deliverer to free them from slavery to sin and death. It was when Adam and Eve were kicked out of Eden that the first promise of a Deliverer was given. [Genesis 3:15](#) And I will cause hostility between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring. He will strike your head, and you will strike his heel." [Genesis 3:15 NLT](#). Adam and Eve felt guilty, but even before they understood or experienced the full extent of the evil caused by their sin, they were given a promise of hope. They would have to suffer under the power of Satan because they had chosen to believe him over God, and now that they were under his power, it would be easier to choose sin. But they were given the promise so they would not lose hope. The Son of God offered to sacrifice His life, not only to give them the choice, but also the power to choose to once again become children of God.

God placed Adam in charge of the world, but when he sinned, that authority passed to Satan, making him the god of this world [[2 Corinthians 4:4](#)]. But when Jesus died and paid the penalty of sin, He not only redeemed the human race, but also took the dominion of this world back from Satan. Paul referred to it as the “purchased inheritance” [[Ephesians 1:14](#)]. Since Christ bought it, He can give it back to the righteous as their inheritance [[Psalm 37:29](#)].

Before the human race was redeemed, the plan was revealed to men such as Adam, Seth, Enoch, Methuselah, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and others. Through them the knowledge was preserved and shared with others. Then God chose a nation of people to preserve and pass down this information together with His law. The Redeemer, Savior, Son of God, and King, would come as a descendant of those men, and the chosen Israelite nation. The knowledge and the hope of this was given to Abraham and his descendants as the promise, “All the families on earth will be blessed through you.” [[Genesis 12:3](#)]. When Jesus finally walked among men, He said, “Your father Abraham longed to see My coming, and when he saw it, he was glad.” [[John 8:56](#)]. Jacob told of the coming of the King, through the descendants of his son Judah. [Genesis 49:10](#) The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from his descendants, until the coming of the one to whom it belongs, the one whom all nations will honor. [Genesis 49:10 NLT](#). Even the fallen prophet Balaam was inspired to say, [Numbers 24:17](#) I see him, but not here and now. I perceive him, but far in the distant future. A star will rise from Jacob; a scepter will emerge from Israel. ... [Numbers 24:17 NLT](#). Just before he died, Moses repeated the message God spoke to him, “I will raise up a prophet out of their descendants that is like you, and I will put My words in His mouth, and He will say everything I command Him to say.” [[Deuteronomy 18:18-19](#)].

The practice of sacrificing animals was designed to be a reminder of the coming Savior. It began with Adam and was continued by the faithful line of descendants down to Jacob, then it was continued in the tabernacle services, and then finally the temple. Once a year, the Day of Atonement pointed forward to the end of the battle between God and Satan and the end of sin from the universe. All the sacrifices were symbols, pointing forward to a perfect sacrifice, and the tabernacle and the temple were models of one in heaven, where Christ our High Priest ministers for our salvation [[Hebrews 9:23](#); [8:1-2](#)].

When God said to the serpent in Eden, there will always be conflict between good and evil people in this world [[Genesis 3:15](#)], Satan has known that there will always be some good to oppose the evil. Since Satan knew he couldn't eliminate good on this earth, he did his best to distort God's communication with humanity. One of the ways he did this was to get people to misunderstand the purpose of the sacrifices by causing them to believe they were to win the favor of angry gods. And for those who had chosen evil, he found ways to make it lead to worse evil, and to make it exciting and attractive, so that eventually it would be as if sinners were bound with chains.

Satan studied the word of God to man, so that he could learn how God planned to provide salvation to the human race. He studied the prophecies and learned that He was to be brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and that His face and body were so transformed in His suffering that He barely looked human [[Isaiah 53:7](#); [52:14](#)]. He was despised and rejected by man, and He experienced many sorrows even seeming cursed by God. But He used His power to help the poor and needy, and broke the power of those who oppressed them [[Isaiah 53:3-4](#); [Psalm 72:4](#)].

Satan was shocked and even trembled with fear when he read these prophecies, but he was determined to use them to come up with a plan to get the Jews to reject the Savior. Before the flood Satan had been able to bring about widespread evil and rebellion against God. But after the flood, God worked through Abraham, a descendant of Shem, to keep alive the knowledge of Him and his plans on the earth. Down through time, as the need arose, God raised up messengers to remind people of the truth, and of the meaning of the sacrifices, and how they pointed forward to the Messiah.

The enemy of truth and righteousness was very successful in getting the descendants of Abraham to worship false gods, making it difficult for the world to learn from them a true knowledge of God. It seemed that Satan's shadow was keeping the whole earth in darkness, but the prophecies from the scriptures still provided hope for any who would read them. David wrote of the coming of the Christ as the light of the morning from the sunrise on a cloudless day [[2 Samuel](#)

[23:4](#)]. Hosea prophesied, that His coming would be like the morning [[Hosea 6:3](#)]. Malachi wrote that the Sun of Righteousness would arise with healing in His wings [[Malachi 4:2](#)]. Isaiah wrote, people living in darkness would see a great light [[Isaiah 9:2](#)].

The Jewish scriptures which make up the Old Testament of the Bible, especially the book of Isaiah, were full of prophecies that they understood to refer to the Messiah. However, there were probably many that they didn't understand, such as the ones that predicted sorrow, hardship, and rejection. There were also prophecies that made it clear that the Messiah was not just coming to bring light to them, but to the entire world [[Isaiah 49:6](#); [40:5](#)]. In fact, many prophecies that did not fit the picture the Jews had about the Messiah were probably not understood until after they were fulfilled.

To those who were poor and had difficult lives, prophecies like the following one were an encouragement to them: [Isaiah 61:1](#) The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon me, for the LORD has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to comfort the brokenhearted and to proclaim that captives will be released and prisoners will be freed. <sup>2</sup> He has sent me to tell those who mourn that the time of the LORD's favor has come, and with it, the day of God's anger against their enemies. [Isaiah 61:1-2 NLT](#).

This prophecy must have been popular: [Isaiah 9:6](#) For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup> His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will make this happen! [Isaiah 9:6-7 NLT](#).

Prophecies such as the following must have brought sadness to those who read it: [Isaiah 53:1](#) Who has believed our message? To whom has the LORD revealed his powerful arm? <sup>2</sup> My servant grew up in the LORD's presence like a tender green shoot, like a root in dry ground. There was nothing beautiful or majestic about his appearance, nothing to attract us to him. <sup>3</sup> He was despised and rejected--a man of sorrows, acquainted with deepest grief. We turned our backs on him and looked the other way. He was despised, and we did not care. <sup>4</sup> Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. <sup>6</sup> All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all. <sup>7</sup> He was oppressed and treated harshly, yet he never said a word. He was led

like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep is silent before the shearers, he did not open his mouth. <sup>8</sup> Unjustly condemned, he was led away. No one cared that he died without descendants, that his life was cut short in midstream. But he was struck down for the rebellion of my people. <sup>9</sup> He had done no wrong and had never deceived anyone. But he was buried like a criminal; he was put in a rich man's grave. <sup>10</sup> But it was the LORD's good plan to crush him and cause him grief. Yet when his life is made an offering for sin, he will have many descendants. He will enjoy a long life, and the LORD's good plan will prosper in his hands. <sup>11</sup> When he sees all that is accomplished by his anguish, he will be satisfied. And because of his experience, my righteous servant will make it possible for many to be counted righteous, for he will bear all their sins. <sup>12</sup> I will give him the honors of a victorious soldier, because he exposed himself to death. He was counted among the rebels. He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels. [Isaiah 53:1-12 NLT](#).

The following prophecies from Psalms may have just sounded like David writing of his sorrows and trouble, but after the crucifixion, it was clear what they were about: [Psalm 69:20](#) Their insults have broken my heart, and I am in despair. If only one person would show some pity; if only one would turn and comfort me. <sup>21</sup> But instead, they give me poison for food; they offer me sour wine for my thirst. [Psalm 69:20-21 NLT](#). [Psalm 22:16](#) My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and feet. <sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones. My enemies stare at me and gloat. <sup>18</sup> They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing. [Psalm 22:16-18 NLT](#).

There was no other way for fallen humanity to be saved, so because of His love for us, Christ did it. [Isaiah 59:16](#) He was amazed to see that no one intervened to help the oppressed. So he himself stepped in to save them with his strong arm, and his justice sustained him. [Isaiah 59:16 NLT](#).

The way Jesus lived was the opposite of what many expected of the Messiah. He was not honored by the world with position or wealth, and he didn't attract followers the way people normally do. [Isaiah 42:2](#) He will not shout or raise his voice in public. <sup>3</sup> He will not crush the weakest reed or put out a flickering candle. He will bring justice to all who have been wronged. [Isaiah 42:2-3 NLT](#).

Very different from the religious leaders and teachers of His day, Jesus did not show off, and He didn't say things to get the praise of the people. Humanity needed the knowledge of God, and this living example from the Maker of the world was necessary, to keep them from sinking lower and lower into sin. The prophecies said the Messiah would show justice, and would bring attention to God's law and make it honorable [[Isaiah 42:4](#), [21](#)]. But He would make a distinction between the burdensome man-made laws and the law of God. In great

contrast to the religious teachers of His day, Jesus also made it clear that His message was also for the Gentiles. Jesus brought knowledge that would help people to break out of the darkness that imprisoned them. He taught that glory and praise belonged to God and should not be given to carved images. The things He taught were so different, that they seemed like new teachings [[Isaiah 42:6-9](#)].

The Messiah would be born of a virgin who was a descendant of King David [[Isaiah 11:1](#)]. She would become pregnant without being with a man, and her son would be called Immanuel. He would choose good over evil before He is old enough to eat yogurt and honey [[Isaiah 7:14-15](#)]. [Isaiah 11:2](#) And the Spirit of the LORD will rest on him--the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> He will delight in obeying the LORD. He will not judge by appearance nor make a decision based on hearsay. <sup>4</sup> He will give justice to the poor and make fair decisions for the exploited. The earth will shake at the force of his word, and one breath from his mouth will destroy the wicked. <sup>5</sup> He will wear righteousness like a belt and truth like an undergarment. ... <sup>10</sup> In that day the heir to David's throne will be a banner of salvation to all the world. The nations will rally to him, and the land where he lives will be a glorious place. [Isaiah 11:2-5](#), [10 NLT](#).

[Zechariah 6:12](#) Tell him, 'This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: Here is the man called the Branch. He will branch out from where he is and build the Temple of the LORD. <sup>13</sup> Yes, he will build the Temple of the LORD. Then he will receive royal honor and will rule as king from his throne. He will also serve as priest from his throne, and there will be perfect harmony between his two roles.' [Zechariah 6:12-13 NLT](#).

This is the invitation the Messiah would give to all people: [Isaiah 55:1](#) "Is anyone thirsty? Come and drink--even if you have no money! Come, take your choice of wine or milk--it's all free! <sup>2</sup> Why spend your money on food that does not give you strength? Why pay for food that does you no good? Listen to me, and you will eat what is good. You will enjoy the finest food. <sup>3</sup> "Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David. [Isaiah 55:1-3 NLT](#).

And to Israel specifically was given the promise: [Isaiah 55:4](#) See how I used him to display my power among the peoples. I made him a leader among the nations. <sup>5</sup> You also will command nations you do not know, and peoples unknown to you will come running to obey, because I, the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, have made you glorious." [Isaiah 55:4-5 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 46:13](#) For I am ready to set things right, not in the distant future, but right now! I am ready to save Jerusalem and show my glory to Israel. [Isaiah 46:13 NLT](#).

The words and actions of the Messiah were all intended to glorify God the Father, and to show His never-ending love for all humanity. [Isaiah 40:9](#) O Zion, messenger of good news, shout from the mountaintops! Shout it louder, O Jerusalem. Shout, and do not be afraid. Tell the towns of Judah, "Your God is coming!" <sup>10</sup> Yes, the Sovereign LORD is coming in power. He will rule with a powerful arm. See, he brings his reward with him as he comes. <sup>11</sup> He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young. [Isaiah 40:9-11 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 29:18](#) In that day the deaf will hear words read from a book, and the blind will see through the gloom and darkness. <sup>19</sup> The humble will be filled with fresh joy from the LORD. The poor will rejoice in the Holy One of Israel. <sup>20</sup> The scoffer will be gone, the arrogant will disappear, and those who plot evil will be killed. [Isaiah 29:18-20 NLT](#).

Even the birthplace of the Messiah was given in prophecy. [Micah 5:2](#) But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, are only a small village among all the people of Judah. Yet a ruler of Israel will come from you, one whose origins are from the distant past. [Micah 5:2 NLT](#). This prophecy was used by the Jews to give the birthplace of the Messiah to king Herod. [Matthew 2:6](#) 'And you, O Bethlehem in the land of Judah, are not least among the ruling cities of Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel.'" [Matthew 2:6 NLT](#).

The time when the Messiah would come was also given in prophecy. [Daniel 9:24](#) "A period of seventy sets of seven has been decreed for your people and your holy city to finish their rebellion, to put an end to their sin, to atone for their guilt, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to confirm the prophetic vision, and to anoint the Most Holy Place. [Daniel 9:24 NLT](#). Using the day for a year principle, 70 weeks was 490 years, and the event was given in the next verse. [Daniel 9:25](#) Now listen and understand! Seven sets of seven plus sixty-two sets of seven will pass from the time the command is given to rebuild Jerusalem until a ruler--the Anointed One--comes. Jerusalem will be rebuilt with streets and strong defenses, despite the perilous times. [Daniel 9:25 NLT](#).  $7+62=69$  weeks (483 days/years) from the command to rebuild Jerusalem, to the Anointed One. The command given by Artaxerxes Longimanus in [Ezra 6:14](#); [7:1-9](#) can be shown to have occurred on 457 B.C. in our dating system. With no year 0 between B.C. and A.D., 483 years from 457 is  $(-457 + 483 + 1 = 27)$  A.D. 27 when the Messiah would be anointed, which was when Jesus was baptized and anointed by the Holy Spirit for His ministry. [Mark 1:15](#) "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" [Mark 1:15 NLT](#). The angel went on to explain the last 7 years of the 490. The first half of the 7 was the ministry of Jesus primarily to the Jews, and in the middle of the 7 years, the

temple sacrifices would end [[Daniel 9:27](#)]. Jesus was crucified, the true sacrifice, to which all the animal sacrifices pointed. The sacrificial services were no longer needed, and the veil of the temple was torn, showing the sacredness of the temple and its services had ended. The second half of the last 7 years was the continued ministry to the Jews by the disciples. In A.D. 34, Stephen was stoned and the Jews sealed their rejection of the gospel, and at time the disciples were scattered by persecution, sending the gospel to the gentiles [[Acts 8:4](#)]. Not long after, Saul the persecutor was converted and became Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles.

The time for the coming of the Messiah had not been given before it was revealed to Daniel, and many Jews were expecting it to come at any time. Many people died believing but not having seen the fulfillment of the promise. Even when the time prophecy was given, many did not interpret it correctly. Centuries passed after the last prophet and many Jews wandered away from faithfulness to God and hope for the future was dim. At that time, it seemed the words of the prophet Ezekiel applied. "Time passes, and prophecies come to nothing." [[Ezekiel 12:22](#)]. [Galatians 4:4](#) But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. <sup>5</sup> God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. [Galatians 4:4-5 NLT](#).

When the Messiah finally appeared, he came as a man [[Philippians 2:7](#)]. According to the word of God, Satan was allowed to bruise His heel, which he did by making Jesus suffer humiliation, pain, and sorrow. As Jesus lived and remained sinless, He was paying the price for sin, so that human beings could be set free from it. If Satan had succeeded in getting Jesus to sin, even just one single time, he would have won, and humanity would have remained under his control. Satan had a lot to lose if he could not get Jesus to sin, so he tempted Him continuously. At the end, when Jesus hung in pain and humiliation on the cross, the wounds He received would be the reminders of His victory over sin. But the death which seemed like Satan's victory, was the very thing that crushed the serpent's head [[Genesis 3:15](#)]. Through death, Jesus destroyed the devil who had the power to bring death [[Hebrews 2:14](#)]. Through death, Jesus gained the victory over death, opening the gates to the grave for all His followers.

Jesus had made it possible for the worst sinner to find their way back to the Father. [1 John 3:2](#) Dear friends, we are already God's children, but he has not yet shown us what we will be like when Christ appears. But we do know that we will be like him, for we will see him as he really is. [1 John 3:2 NLT](#). [Isaiah 25:1](#) O LORD, I will honor and praise your name, for you are my God. You do such wonderful things! You planned them long ago, and now you have accomplished them. [Isaiah 25:1 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 59—The House of Israel*

Many of the prophecies in the Bible about Israel actually apply to God's people, and not just the nation of Israel. Today, with God's help, the followers of Jesus are fulfilling this prophecy. [Isaiah 27:6](#) The time is coming when Jacob's descendants will take root. Israel will bud and blossom and fill the whole earth with fruit! [Isaiah 27:6 NLT](#). The word of God, the Bible, is more easily available today, than at any other time in history. With this knowledge of Him and His law, God is able to bless His people and make them a blessing to the world [[Genesis 12:2](#)]. God would have preferred that after their return from captivity, the Jews would be able to fulfill this prophecy of bringing a blessing to the world, to prepare it for His first coming. This was God's word to them through the prophet. [Zechariah 8:3](#) "And now the LORD says: I am returning to Mount Zion, and I will live in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the Faithful City; the mountain of the LORD of Heaven's Armies will be called the Holy Mountain. ... <sup>7</sup> "This is what the LORD of Heaven's Armies says: You can be sure that I will rescue my people from the east and from the west. <sup>8</sup> I will bring them home again to live safely in Jerusalem. They will be my people, and I will be faithful and just toward them as their God. [Zechariah 8:3, 7-8 NLT](#).

The return from exile was their second chance and God didn't want the Israelites to repeat the same mistakes that led to their captivity in the first place. He demanded true justice in their courts, having mercy and compassion for each other, and no oppression of widows, orphans, visitors, and the poor. Be honest and tell the truth to each other, and again fair and impartial justice in court [[Zechariah 7:9-10; 8:16](#)]. There would be great rewards, both spiritual and earthly for obedience and faithfulness. If they obeyed, their harvests would be plentiful in every way, and all the other blessings that had been promised in the past would be fulfilled. Judah and Israel had been seen as cursed nations, but they could again be seen as a blessed nation [[Zechariah 8:12-13](#)].

After returning from their Babylonian captivity, the tendency toward idol worship was no longer a major problem for the Jews. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the importance of the temple services, religious worship, and keeping the law of God, was stressed so much that it really took hold. Great success under the leadership of these men and even after they passed gave plenty of evidence that God had forgiven them.

Though they may not have fallen way through idolatry, in later generations they still became selfish and turned away from what had made them great. God's message to them in the days of Malachi was, to remember the lessons of the past and that the blessings of God and their success as a nation depended on them

keeping their side of the agreement with God [[Malachi 1:2-9](#)]. The Levites as the religious teachers of the nation were missing out on great blessings because of their evil ways [[Malachi 2:4-9](#)]. The people were all warned that disobedience would bring judgment, but that there was still opportunity to repent and be forgiven, and that God would still come back and be among them [[Malachi 3:7](#)]. How could every heart not respond to this kind of love and forgiveness? God pleaded with the Jews to become partners with Him in blessing the world.

But the promise of God to bless the world through the Messiah, born as a Jew, was ultimately not dependent on them keeping their part of the agreement. The word of God through Malachi was, “My name will be great among all the nations of the whole earth, and they will all worship Me because they respect and fear Me.” [[Malachi 1:11](#)].

God was not done trying to get the Jews to allow Him to pour out His blessings on them, when He reminded them that they were robbing Him by not returning their tithes and offerings to Him. “How have we robbed You they asked?” God’s response was, because you have not been returning your tithes and offerings, you have been cursed. “Test Me,” God challenged, “and see if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour out such a great blessing on you that you will not be able to receive it all. I will not allow your crops to be destroyed, and all nations will call you blessed, because your land will be a delight.” [[Malachi 3:7-12](#)].

Everything comes from God because it was all made by Him, and even the success of our work is due to His blessings. So, what He asks for really is just a portion of what is already His, but like all of God’s commands, this one is also for our good, because it can teach us to be thankful to Him. Anything beyond the tithe, or 10<sup>th</sup>, is called a freewill offering which means that it is up to us how much we want to give, but anything we do give should be given willingly and cheerfully. This money can then be used in places where God might have used it if He were in our place.

Malachi continues the theme of the Old Testament that keeping God’s law leads to true happiness and success. This was the way that God intended the rest of the world to take notice and learn about Him. But the Jews took God’s command to not marry unbelievers and turned it into an excuse to look down on and shut out any foreigner from participating in their religion or gaining a knowledge of Him. At the same time that they were shutting out other people, they began to lose the true meaning and blessings of the religious services themselves and were just going through the motions. They began to consider the keeping of religious laws as a sign of their own righteousness [[Romans 10:3](#)]. The more laws they could make

and keep, the more righteous they thought they were, but what they were really doing was increasing their distance from God.

So many laws were made, covering the tiniest details of everyday life, originally with the purpose of ensuring that God's law was kept. But eventually it became impossible for anyone to know and keep them all. At the same time, God's actual 10 commandments were lost sight of, and anyone who wanted to obey God thought they had to keep all these other laws which were a very heavy burden.

The Jews continued to look forward to the coming of their Messiah, but as they grew farther away from God, so did their understanding of His mission. Instead of salvation from sin, they looked forward to freedom from foreign occupation and a return to national greatness and world power. This was a big part of Satan's plan to get the Jews to reject their Savior when He came. For more than 1000 years, the nation of Israel had looked forward to the coming of the Messiah. Their hopes, songs, culture, religion, prayers, all focused on His coming, yet when He came, they didn't recognize Him. [John 1:11](#) He came to his own people, and even they rejected him. [John 1:11 NLT](#). He was like a root in dry ground, and there was nothing beautiful or majestic in their eyes that attracted them [[Isaiah 53:2](#)].

In fact, it was worse than just not recognizing and not being attracted to Him, they hated Him because His life was a reproof to their selfishness. God had made them the caretakers of His vineyard and when He sent his Son to them, they hated everything about Him, and finally when they were forced to choose, they rejected Him and crucified Him on a cross. The language of Israel as a vineyard, came from their own scriptures, in the writings of Isaiah. "The vineyard of the Lord of heaven's armies is the house of Israel." [[Isaiah 5:7](#)]. Jesus expanded on this symbol in a parable that began this way, [Matthew 21:33](#) ... "A certain landowner planted a vineyard, built a wall around it, dug a pit for pressing out the grape juice, and built a lookout tower. Then he leased the vineyard to tenant farmers and moved to another country. [Matthew 21:33 NLT](#). Through the parable, Jesus wanted the Jewish leaders to understand the blessings God had poured out on their nation, and the responsibility they had to obey Him. He showed them the glory that could have been theirs through obedience, and the ruin they were bringing on themselves.

The parable continued as follows, [Matthew 21:34](#) At the time of the grape harvest, he sent his servants to collect his share of the crop. <sup>35</sup> But the farmers grabbed his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. <sup>36</sup> So the landowner sent a larger group of his servants to collect for him, but the results were the same. <sup>37</sup> "Finally, the owner sent his son, thinking, 'Surely they will respect my son.' <sup>38</sup> "But when the tenant farmers saw his son coming, they said to one another, 'Here comes the heir to this estate. Come on, let's kill him and get the estate for ourselves!' <sup>39</sup> So they

grabbed him, dragged him out of the vineyard, and murdered him. [Matthew 21:34-39 NLT](#). When He finished telling the story, Jesus asked the priests a what the landowner should do to the caretakers. They had listened carefully and responded, he will give those caretakers a painful death and lease the vineyard to people who will give him his share of the crop [[Matthew 21:41](#)].

Then Jesus asked them if they had heard the story about how during the construction of the temple, there was a foundation stone that the builders rejected, but eventually they found that it was the most important foundation stone of the building. Then He said to them, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation that will produce fruit [[Matthew 21:42-43](#)].

The Jews could have saved themselves from being rejected if they had accepted Jesus. But their jealousy of Him kept them from accepting Him as their Messiah, and since they rejected the light, they were then left in darkness. This rejection eventually led to the unleashing of their hatred on one another and against Rome causing the destruction of the temple and of Jerusalem. The children of that generation would end up dying horribly painful deaths, and millions were sold into slavery.

The nation that replaced the Jews as God's chosen people is the church. All the conditional promises that were made to the Israelites would be fulfilled for the true followers in God's church. Today, the church is relatively free to complete the work of taking the message of salvation to the world, but for many centuries it was not so. There have often been laws against the free practice of religion, and penalties as severe as death for disobeying them. There was a long period of time when large numbers of people were prevented from reading the word of God for themselves. It was a period for God's true church that was in some ways like the Israelite captivity in Babylon. Even as the Jews had more freedom to worship God after their release from captivity, the church today has great freedom to spread the message of salvation to the world and people are responding. The message is, [Revelation 14:7](#) "Fear God," he shouted. "Give glory to him. For the time has come when he will sit as judge. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and all the springs of water." [Revelation 14:7 NLT](#).

Satan's captivity of God's people ended when Babylon fell, that great city, that made all nations participate in her sins [[Revelation 14:8](#)]. God's call is, "Come out of her My people, so you are not participants in her sins, and you do not suffer punishment with her." [[Revelation 18:4](#)] When Israel was released from Babylon, they went back to the Promised Land, and soon, those who are released from spiritual Babylon will enter into the heavenly Canaan.

Unbelievers in Malachi's day said, "Where is God's justice?" The answer: [Malachi 3:1](#) "Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies. <sup>2</sup> "But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. <sup>3</sup> He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD. <sup>4</sup> Then once more the LORD will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past. [Malachi 3:1-4 NLT](#).

Before the ministry of Jesus began, John the Baptist preached: "Repent tax collectors, sinners, Pharisees, and Sadducees, because the kingdom of heaven is at hand." [[Matthew 3:2](#)]. Today, in the spirit and power of Elijah and John the Baptist, God's people are calling attention to the coming judgment and the return of Christ Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. At that time, will be the hour of God's judgment, when every person will be judged for what they have done. Everyone in the world who is willing to listen should be told that they have a choice to make that will determine where they spend eternity. Those with the knowledge of how we can be set free from sin by Christ, are chosen by Him to share the good news to every nation, language, and person.

In the dark days before the second coming, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in His wings [[Malachi 4:2](#)], and true followers of God will share this message of healing to the world. Just before the second coming, the evil in the world will be the worst in earth's history, and examples are given of the time of Noah just before the flood, and of the sinfulness of Sodom just before it was destroyed. [2 Thessalonians 2:9](#) This man will come to do the work of Satan with counterfeit power and signs and miracles. <sup>10</sup> He will use every kind of evil deception to fool those on their way to destruction, because they refuse to love and accept the truth that would save them. [2 Thessalonians 2:9-10 NLT](#). Satan has been able to deceive even church leaders to preach error to their entire congregations.

The dark days will bring great trials, hardship, and persecution to God's people, but out of the darkness the light of God will shine. [2 Corinthians 4:6](#) For God, who said, "Let there be light in the darkness," has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ. [2 Corinthians 4:6 NLT](#). In the beginning God was able to bring light and life to the world when it was covered with darkness [[Genesis 1:2-3](#)]. And Isaiah writes, [Isaiah 60:1](#) "Arise, Jerusalem! Let your light shine for all to see. For the glory of the LORD rises to

shine on you. <sup>2</sup> Darkness as black as night covers all the nations of the earth, but the glory of the LORD rises and appears over you. [Isaiah 60:1-2 NLT](#).

When Jesus came to earth, He had the anointing of the Holy Spirit and He went about doing good [[Acts 10:38](#)]. Jesus read this of Himself in the synagogue: [Luke 4:18](#) "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, <sup>19</sup> and that the time of the LORD's favor has come." [Luke 4:18-19 NLT](#). Jesus asked His disciples to do the same: [Matthew 5:14](#) "You are the light of the world--like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. ... <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father. [Matthew 5:14, 16 NLT](#). When speaking of true worship, Isaiah wrote: [Isaiah 58:7](#) Share your food with the hungry, and give shelter to the homeless. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help. <sup>8</sup> "Then your salvation will come like the dawn, and your wounds will quickly heal. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the LORD will protect you from behind. [Isaiah 58:7-8 NLT](#).

When the world is full of spiritual darkness, the glory of God should shine out from His church by comforting those that are sad, helping those in need, and softening life's hardships. If we have Christ in our heart, we will be full of sympathy for others. To many who have lost all hope, speak words of courage and cheer to them, and share the words of hope from the word of God. Many are sad because they have an incurable sickness, so pray for them and comfort them by telling them about Jesus.

The world is full of darkness, but no person should be excluded from receiving the light from the Sun of Righteousness. The message of hope should be carried to the farthest ends of the earth, and darkness and gloom will disappear where the bright beams of Sun of Righteousness shine. Christ wants every Christian to be surrounded with light and peace and to have joy in their lives. Just before Christ comes with great power and glory, the world will be full of darkness, but light should be shining out from every true Christian. When He finally comes, He will be welcomed by His people, but the wicked will run from His presence.

[Revelation 7:9](#) After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands. <sup>10</sup> And they were shouting with a great roar, "Salvation comes from our God who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!" <sup>11</sup> And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living beings. And they fell before the throne with their faces to the ground and worshiped God. <sup>12</sup> They sang, "Amen!

Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and strength belong to our God forever and ever! Amen." [Revelation 7:9-12 NLT](#).

[Revelation 19:6](#) Then I heard again what sounded like the shout of a vast crowd or the roar of mighty ocean waves or the crash of loud thunder: "Praise the LORD! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. <sup>7</sup> Let us be glad and rejoice, and let us give honor to him. For the time has come for the wedding feast of the Lamb, and his bride has prepared herself. [Revelation 19:6-7 NLT](#).

[Revelation 7:14](#) And I said to him, "Sir, you are the one who knows." Then he said to me, "These are the ones who died in the great tribulation. They have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white. [Revelation 7:14 NLT](#).

## *Chapter 60—Visions of Future Glory*

God gave messages to the church of His plans for the future to encourage in dark days. These promises should be comforting to them in the final days, as the battle between good and evil is coming to a close. One of the things Isaiah was told by God to do was, “Comfort My people!” [[Isaiah 40:1](#)]. He was not left to do this on his own but received visions that would give hope and joy to God’s people of all future generations. There have been times when God’s people have been terribly persecuted, and it was promises like those that gave them hope to remain faithful. The great hope to which all of God’s people can look forward to is when God will make everything beautiful forever [[Isaiah 60:15](#)]. [Isaiah 43:1](#) But now, O Jacob, listen to the LORD who created you. O Israel, the one who formed you says, “Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine.”<sup>2</sup> When you go through deep waters, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown. When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you.<sup>3</sup> For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior. I gave Egypt as a ransom for your freedom; I gave Ethiopia and Seba in your place.<sup>4</sup> Others were given in exchange for you. I traded their lives for yours because you are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you. [Isaiah 43:1-4 NLT](#).

God can offer full and free forgiveness for our sins because he paid the price through His death. [Isaiah 43:25](#) “I--yes, I alone--will blot out your sins for my own sake and will never think of them again.”<sup>26</sup> Let us review the situation together, and you can present your case to prove your innocence. [Isaiah 43:25-26 NLT](#). [Isaiah 60:16](#) ... You will know at last that I, the LORD, am your Savior and your Redeemer, the Mighty One of Israel. [Isaiah 60:16 NLT](#).

More messages of hope, not specifically to Israel, but to God’s people of all ages. [Isaiah 25:8](#) He will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears. He will remove forever all insults and mockery against his land and people. The LORD has spoken! [Isaiah 25:8 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 61:3](#) To all who mourn in Israel, he will give a crown of beauty for ashes, a joyous blessing instead of mourning, festive praise instead of despair. In their righteousness, they will be like great oaks that the LORD has planted for his own glory. [Isaiah 61:3 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 52:1](#) Wake up, wake up, O Zion! Clothe yourself with strength. Put on your beautiful clothes, O holy city of Jerusalem, for unclean and godless people will enter your gates no longer.<sup>2</sup> Rise from the dust, O Jerusalem. Sit in a place of

honor. Remove the chains of slavery from your neck, O captive daughter of Zion. [Isaiah 52:1-2 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 54:11](#) "O storm-battered city, troubled and desolate! I will rebuild you with precious jewels and make your foundations from lapis lazuli. <sup>12</sup> I will make your towers of sparkling rubies, your gates of shining gems, and your walls of precious stones. <sup>13</sup> I will teach all your children, and they will enjoy great peace. <sup>14</sup> You will be secure under a government that is just and fair. Your enemies will stay far away. You will live in peace, and terror will not come near. <sup>15</sup> If any nation comes to fight you, it is not because I sent them. Whoever attacks you will go down in defeat. <sup>16</sup> "I have created the blacksmith who fans the coals beneath the forge and makes the weapons of destruction. And I have created the armies that destroy. <sup>17</sup> But in that coming day no weapon turned against you will succeed. You will silence every voice raised up to accuse you. These benefits are enjoyed by the servants of the LORD; their vindication will come from me. I, the LORD, have spoken! [Isaiah 54:11-17 NLT](#).

With the righteousness of Christ as her armor, the church marches toward her final battle to conquer the world. Satan is as a blasting storm, but God provides protection for His church [[Isaiah 25:4](#)]. On that day, only the righteous will be delivered, but before that will be days of judgment.

[Isaiah 33:14](#) The sinners in Jerusalem shake with fear. Terror seizes the godless. "Who can live with this devouring fire?" they cry. "Who can survive this all-consuming fire?" <sup>15</sup> Those who are honest and fair, who refuse to profit by fraud, who stay far away from bribes, who refuse to listen to those who plot murder, who shut their eyes to all enticement to do wrong – <sup>16</sup> these are the ones who will dwell on high. The rocks of the mountains will be their fortress. Food will be supplied to them, and they will have water in abundance. [Isaiah 33:14-16 NLT](#).

God's word to His people is: [Isaiah 26:20](#) Go home, my people, and lock your doors! Hide yourselves for a little while until the LORD's anger has passed. <sup>21</sup> Look! The LORD is coming from heaven to punish the people of the earth for their sins. ... [Isaiah 26:20-21 NLT](#). [Isaiah 24:1](#) Look! The LORD is about to destroy the earth and make it a vast wasteland. He devastates the surface of the earth and scatters the people. <sup>2</sup> Priests and laypeople, servants and masters, maids and mistresses, buyers and sellers, lenders and borrowers, bankers and debtors--none will be spared. <sup>3</sup> The earth will be completely emptied and looted. The LORD has spoken! <sup>4</sup> The earth mourns and dries up, and the crops waste away and wither. Even the greatest people on earth waste away. <sup>5</sup> The earth suffers for the sins of its people, for they have twisted God's instructions, violated his laws, and broken his everlasting covenant. <sup>6</sup> Therefore, a curse consumes the earth. Its people must pay the price for

their sin. They are destroyed by fire, and only a few are left alive. <sup>7</sup> The grapevines waste away, and there is no new wine. All the merry-makers sigh and mourn. <sup>8</sup> The cheerful sound of tambourines is stilled; the happy cries of celebration are heard no more. The melodious chords of the harp are silent. [Isaiah 24:1-8 NLT](#).

[Joel 1:15](#) The day of the LORD is near, the day when destruction comes from the Almighty. How terrible that day will be! <sup>16</sup> Our food disappears before our very eyes. No joyful celebrations are held in the house of our God. <sup>17</sup> The seeds die in the parched ground, and the grain crops fail. The barns stand empty, and granaries are abandoned. <sup>18</sup> How the animals moan with hunger! The herds of cattle wander about confused, because they have no pasture. The flocks of sheep and goats bleat in misery. [Joel 1:15-18 NLT](#). [Joel 1:12](#) The grapevines have dried up, and the fig trees have withered. The pomegranate trees, palm trees, and apple trees--all the fruit trees--have dried up. And the people's joy has dried up with them. [Joel 1:12 NLT](#).

[Jeremiah 4:19](#) My heart, my heart--I writhe in pain! My heart pounds within me! I cannot be still. For I have heard the blast of enemy trumpets and the roar of their battle cries. <sup>20</sup> Waves of destruction roll over the land, until it lies in complete desolation. Suddenly my tents are destroyed; in a moment my shelters are crushed. [Jeremiah 4:19-20 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 2:17](#) Human pride will be humbled, and human arrogance will be brought down. Only the LORD will be exalted on that day of judgment. <sup>18</sup> Idols will completely disappear. <sup>19</sup> When the LORD rises to shake the earth, his enemies will crawl into holes in the ground. They will hide in caves in the rocks from the terror of the LORD and the glory of his majesty. <sup>20</sup> On that day of judgment they will abandon the gold and silver idols they made for themselves to worship. They will leave their gods to the rodents and bats, <sup>21</sup> while they crawl away into caverns and hide among the jagged rocks in the cliffs. They will try to escape the terror of the LORD and the glory of his majesty as he rises to shake the earth. [Isaiah 2:17-21 NLT](#).

[Jeremiah 4:23](#) I looked at the earth, and it was empty and formless. I looked at the heavens, and there was no light. <sup>24</sup> I looked at the mountains and hills, and they trembled and shook. <sup>25</sup> I looked, and all the people were gone. All the birds of the sky had flown away. <sup>26</sup> I looked, and the fertile fields had become a wilderness. The towns lay in ruins, crushed by the LORD's fierce anger. [Jeremiah 4:23-26 NLT](#). [Jeremiah 30:7](#) In all history there has never been such a time of terror. It will be a time of trouble for my people Israel. Yet in the end they will be saved! [Jeremiah 30:7 NLT](#).

The day of wrath to the wicked is the day of deliverance to the church. [Isaiah 35:3](#) With this news, strengthen those who have tired hands, and encourage those who have weak knees. <sup>4</sup> Say to those with fearful hearts, "Be strong, and do not

fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you." [Isaiah 35:3-4 NLT](#). [Isaiah 25:8](#) He will swallow up death forever! The Sovereign LORD will wipe away all tears. He will remove forever all insults and mockery against his land and people. The LORD has spoken! <sup>9</sup> In that day the people will proclaim, "This is our God! We trusted in him, and he saved us! This is the LORD, in whom we trusted. Let us rejoice in the salvation he brings!" [Isaiah 25:8-9 NLT](#).

The voice of God will raise His sleeping saints, as if they were being released from the prison of death. [Isaiah 26:19](#) But those who die in the LORD will live; their bodies will rise again! Those who sleep in the earth will rise up and sing for joy! For your life-giving light will fall like dew on your people in the place of the dead! [Isaiah 26:19 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 65:18](#) Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy. <sup>19</sup> I will rejoice over Jerusalem and delight in my people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard in it no more. [Isaiah 65:18-19 NLT](#). [Isaiah 33:24](#) The people of Israel will no longer say, "We are sick and helpless," for the LORD will forgive their sins. [Isaiah 33:24 NLT](#). [Isaiah 35:6](#) The lame will leap like a deer, and those who cannot speak will sing for joy! Springs will gush forth in the wilderness, and streams will water the wasteland. <sup>7</sup> The parched ground will become a pool, and springs of water will satisfy the thirsty land. Marsh grass and reeds and rushes will flourish where desert jackals once lived. [Isaiah 35:6-7 NLT](#). [Isaiah 55:13](#) Where once there were thorns, cypress trees will grow. Where nettles grew, myrtles will sprout up. These events will bring great honor to the LORD's name; they will be an everlasting sign of his power and love." [Isaiah 55:13 NLT](#). [Isaiah 35:8](#) And a great road will go through that once deserted land. It will be named the Highway of Holiness. Evil-minded people will never travel on it. It will be only for those who walk in God's ways; fools will never walk there. [Isaiah 35:8 NLT](#). [Isaiah 40:2](#) "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem. Tell her that her sad days are gone and her sins are pardoned. Yes, the LORD has punished her twice over for all her sins." [Isaiah 40:2 NLT](#).

[Isaiah 60:18](#) Violence will disappear from your land; the desolation and destruction of war will end. Salvation will surround you like city walls, and praise will be on the lips of all who enter there. <sup>19</sup> "No longer will you need the sun to shine by day, nor the moon to give its light by night, for the LORD your God will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory. <sup>20</sup> Your sun will never set; your moon will not go down. For the LORD will be your everlasting light. Your days of mourning will come to an end. <sup>21</sup> All your people will be righteous. They will possess their land forever, for I will plant them there with my own hands in order to bring myself glory. [Isaiah 60:18-21 NLT](#).

In vision, Isaiah even heard such beautiful music in heaven, that is impossible to describe on earth. [Isaiah 35:10](#) Those who have been ransomed by the LORD will return. They will enter Jerusalem singing, crowned with everlasting joy. Sorrow and mourning will disappear, and they will be filled with joy and gladness. [Isaiah 35:10 NLT](#). [Isaiah 51:3](#) The LORD will comfort Israel again and have pity on her ruins. Her desert will blossom like Eden, her barren wilderness like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found there. Songs of thanksgiving will fill the air. [Isaiah 51:3 NLT](#). [Psalm 87:7](#) The people will play flutes and sing, "The source of my life springs from Jerusalem!" [Psalm 87:7 NLT](#). [Isaiah 24:14](#) But all who are left shout and sing for joy. Those in the west praise the LORD's majesty. [Isaiah 24:14 NLT](#).

On the new earth, we will live lives of usefulness, building houses, planting and tending food that we will be able to eat. [Isaiah 65:21](#) In those days people will live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of their own vineyards.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the past, invaders will not take their houses and confiscate their vineyards. For my people will live as long as trees, and my chosen ones will have time to enjoy their hard-won gains. [Isaiah 65:21-22 NLT](#). Our minds will think of greater and more amazing things, and our bodies will be able to do things that were not possible on earth. The greatly enhanced powers of mind, body, and soul will in themselves be topics of study.

What heaven will truly be like was something that prophets who saw it in vision wondered about and wished they could understand. [1 Peter 1:10](#) This salvation was something even the prophets wanted to know more about when they prophesied about this gracious salvation prepared for you.<sup>11</sup> They wondered what time or situation the Spirit of Christ within them was talking about when he told them in advance about Christ's suffering and his great glory afterward.<sup>12</sup> They were told that their messages were not for themselves, but for you. And now this Good News has been announced to you by those who preached in the power of the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. It is all so wonderful that even the angels are eagerly watching these things happen. [1 Peter 1:10-12 NLT](#).

We who are living in the last days are about to experience what all God-fearing people have prayed for and looked forward to all their lives. When we finally stand in the presence of God, we will be so overwhelmed with everything, that all the trouble of our former lives will seem as nothing, and we will hardly even remember it. [Isaiah 65:17](#) "Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth, and no one will even think about the old ones anymore. [Isaiah 65:17 NLT](#). [Hebrews 10:35](#) So do not throw away this confident trust in the Lord. Remember the great reward it brings you!<sup>36</sup> Patient endurance is what you need now, so that you will continue to do God's will. Then you will receive all that he has promised.<sup>37</sup> "For in just a little

while, the Coming One will come and not delay. [Hebrews 10:35-37 NLT](#). [Isaiah 45:17](#) But the LORD will save the people of Israel with eternal salvation. Throughout everlasting ages, they will never again be humiliated and disgraced. [Isaiah 45:17 NLT](#).

[James 5:7](#) Dear brothers and sisters, be patient as you wait for the Lord's return. Consider the farmers who patiently wait for the rains in the fall and in the spring. They eagerly look for the valuable harvest to ripen. <sup>8</sup> You, too, must be patient. Take courage, for the coming of the Lord is near. [James 5:7-8 NLT](#).

The law of heaven will be the only law for all the people saved by God, and they will all get along like one happy family. They will all be filled with songs of praise and thanksgiving to God, and there will be no more sin or death. Every Sabbath, and every new moon, all people will gather to worship the Lord. God's glory will be revealed, and all people will see it, and they will all praise Him. The dry and barren places of Jerusalem will become like the garden of Eden and the glory of Lebanon. There will no longer be any forsaken people, or dry and desolate land. God will rejoice over His people as the husband rejoices over his bride. [[Isaiah 66:23](#); [40:5](#); [61:11](#); [51:3](#); [35:2](#); [62:4-5](#)]