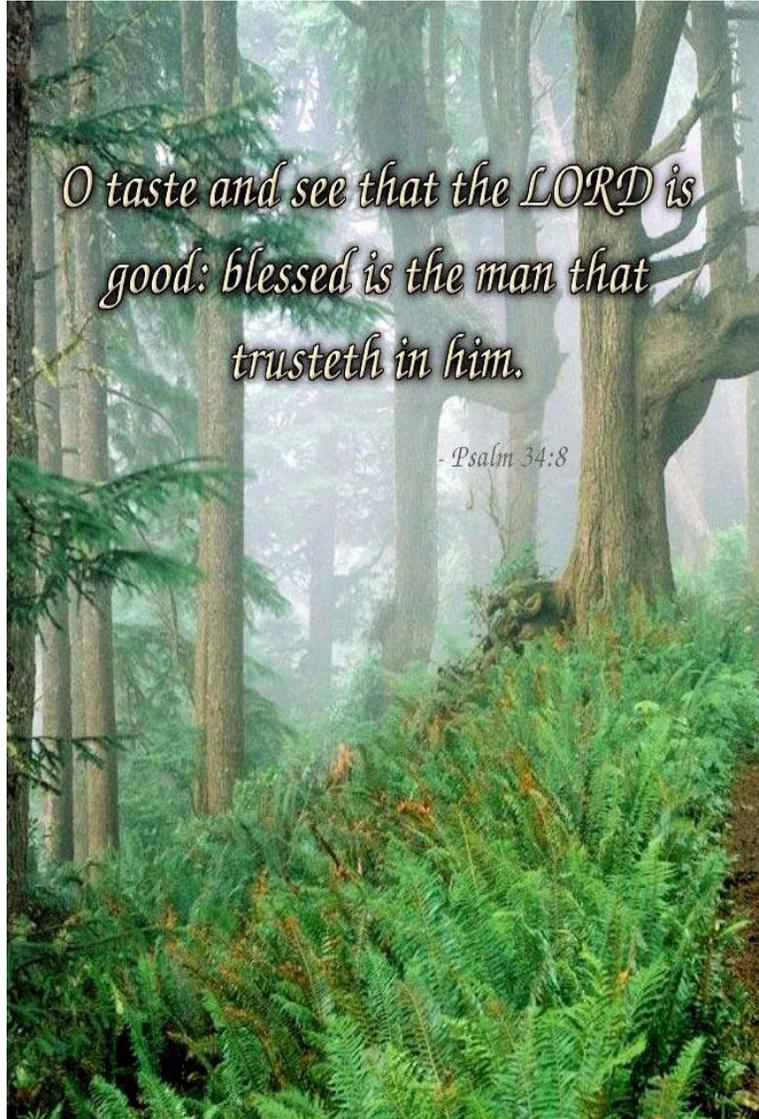


Daily Devotional

June 2017

*O taste and see that the LORD is
good: blessed is the man that
trusteth in him.*

- Psalm 34:8



Foreword

This month we will read in Isaiah, Philippians, and then Isaiah again. Do you feel like there is a distinct difference between our readings in the Old Testament and those in the New? I don't mean in terms of the way truth is developed, for there is quite a difference in style between the Psalms and the Epistles. I mean, do you see a difference in terms of the truths themselves. I hope that you see our readings are an integrated revelation from the mind of God to us.



That's one of the reasons I have us constantly move back and forth. The other reason is to provide variety. The Old Testament provides rich illustration, while the New Testament provides much more by way of concentrated doctrine. But both provide the same storyline—God's love for His creation and His great redemptive plan to save that which He created. Keep reading!

In His grace,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Redig'.

Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

Return to Isaiah

Thursday, June 1: Read Isaiah 30:1-14

These chapters of Isaiah might seem a bit obscure to you, but as you read them, keep asking yourself, “In Isaiah’s prophecies to Israel, what lessons has God tucked away in His word that He wants me to understand and apply?” If you do, you are going to find these chapters to be very rich in content. Take for example Verse 1 of this chapter:

“Woe to the obstinate children,” declares the Lord. . .

Did you make the application that *obstinate children* are a problem? Here is the backstory—both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms of Israel are going to come under discipline at the hands of foreign nations. In particular, we are heading to a grand drama in Chapters 36-37. In the same way, you and I are going to face trials in this life, and God wants one thing from us! He wants us to turn to Him in dependent trust. Do you see God’s indictment of the people when they fail to do so?

“...forming an alliance, but not by My Spirit, heaping sin upon sin; who go down to Egypt without consulting Me. . .”

You see when the people of Israel felt threatened by the military might of Assyria they turned to Egypt rather than to God. The might of Egypt loomed larger in their thinking than did the capability of God. You know we too *turn to Egypt* when we count on our ingenuity, friends, bank account, and any manner of other things. God wasn’t going to have any of that then, and He won’t accept it from His Church now! How well did it work out for the Israelites?

. . .this sin will become for you like a high wall, cracked and bulging, that collapses suddenly, in an instant. (v13)

Build a picture in your mind of the imagery created by this verse and then realize that’s how it works out when you trust anything or anyone other than God above!

Return to Isaiah

Friday, June 2: Read Isaiah 30:15-33

Do you want to know where you can find deliverance in each and every trial of this life? Verse 15 tells us:

This is what the Sovereign Lord, the Holy One of Israel says: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength. . ."

Do you want to know why He will deliver you? Verse 18 makes that clear:

Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion.

Notice as you read through the rest of the chapter, it does not say you won't have trials. In fact, it makes it clear we will. Instead, it says that God will see us through. It says He will be with us and guide us. Our salvation is found in repentance, which is changing our minds about the object of our trust. In the case of Israel, they must turn from trusting in Egypt to trusting in the Lord. For us, it is turning from all manner of things to the same object laid out in Chapter 30—the Lord!

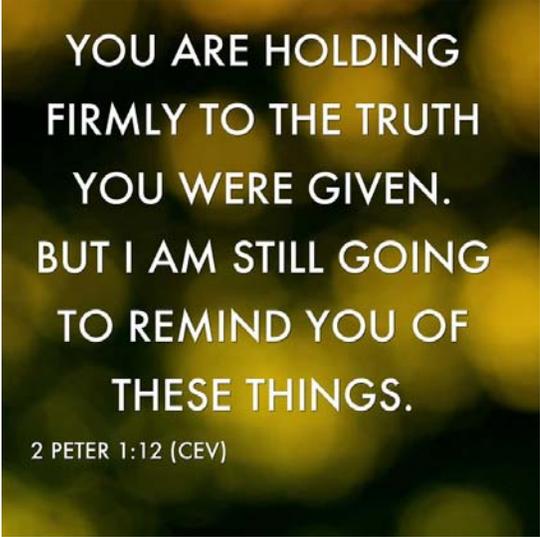
Then, what is it that keeps us going day to day? *Quietness* and *trust* will see us through! Trust is easier to explain. We rest in the truthfulness of God's promises to us. But to what does quietness refer? Let me suggest it is a settled mindset that God is on the throne and He will work things out according to His purposes (Isaiah 46:10) It is a mindset that doesn't allow changing circumstances to create a lot of internal turmoil, but rather a certain calmness that comes from realizing that God is in control and He will work things out. Picture this, the Christian who calmly, no matter what is happening, turns to the Word of God to find applicable promises, and simply trusts in them. Why this would be a kind of strength that would be able to move from one trial to another and never falter. Trusting in the Egypts of our day—not so much!

Return to Isaiah

Monday, June 5: Read Isaiah 31

You can't help but come to the conclusion that the prophets of Israel were dealing with a people who were "slow to hear and understand." I say that because there is so much repetition in prophecy, and that is probably the first thing you noticed about Chapter 31. If you understood the devotionals of the last two days, then you couldn't help but respond to Chapter 31 with "Here it is again!"

Before we discuss this chapter, I think we need to realize that we are equally slow to respond. It is so important for us to hear the same truths of God's Word over and over again. I always try to bring them in a fresh way if I can, but I am not the least bashful about repeating, because we need it!



YOU ARE HOLDING
FIRMLY TO THE TRUTH
YOU WERE GIVEN.
BUT I AM STILL GOING
TO REMIND YOU OF
THESE THINGS.

2 PETER 1:12 (CEV)

Verse 1 continues the message from God:

"Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help. . .but do not look to the Holy One of Israel. . ."

Now there are many tempting sources of help out there, such as strength, intelligence, wealth. But the decisive factor is found in Verse 3:

*"But the Egyptians are men and not God;
their horses are flesh and not spirit."*

Continued on the next page

Return to Isaiah

Monday, June 5: Read Isaiah 31 continued

Trusting in anything other than God is to trust in a lesser object. And, in both the physical and spiritual realm, flesh and blood cannot save. But the Spirit of God can!

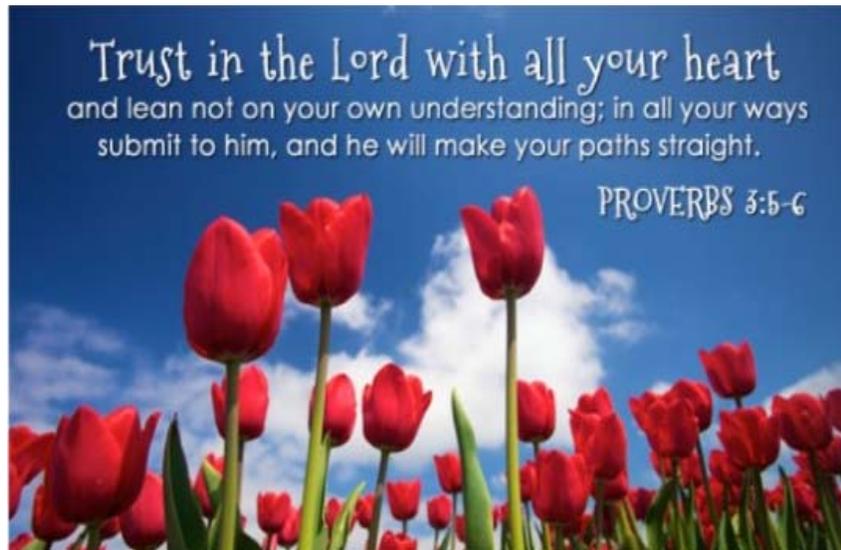
A perfect example of this is coming and is introduced in this chapter. The Assyrians have destroyed the northern Kingdom and are shortly going to surround Jerusalem. Two options for help—the Egyptians or God Himself. Egypt is soundly defeated and is a poor second choice, but look at Verse 8.

*Assyria will fall by a sword that is not of man;
a sword, not of mortals will devour them.*

We will learn of this supernatural defeat in Chapter 37, but for now, listen to the admonition of Scripture:

*Return to Him you have so greatly revolted against,
O Israelites. Isaiah 31:6*

Good advice—in their day and ours!



Return to Isaiah

Tuesday, June 6: Read Mark 9

One struggle faced by every single Christian can be found in Mark 9:24, and you should immediately be able to make the connection to what we have been learning from the book of Isaiah. For the call to live a life of dependence upon God is not an Old or a New Testament thing, it is a people of God kind of thing! Consider verse 24:

Immediately the boy's father exclaimed, "I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!"

Fantastic snapshot of our struggle. As Christians we have believed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. That's how we became Christians. However, the ongoing challenge of the Christian life is to perpetuate a life of faith, trusting in the promises we learn from God's Word, through one challenge after another. Now let's understand the context. In Mark 9, a man has brought his demon possessed son to Jesus after the disciples have been unable to help. The man comes to Jesus with a mixed attitude of hope and doubt. Hope that perhaps the teacher could help and doubt because nothing else has helped. Jesus immediately challenges the man at the most significant point—the point of faith:

"everything is possible for him who believes."

It is very important to note that Jesus is not calling for faith in faith, nor is He advocating faith that everything will turn out well. This man is standing before the Lord Jesus Christ not sure if He can help. Jesus is making it clear that for the one who believes, in who He is and what He is capable of, everything is possible. The man completely gets it and responds with both an expression of faith and very keen insight. For even when we do trust, we must realize how important it is for us to move from faith to faith. We must understand the immense importance of the Spirit of God and the Word of God in *helping* our unbelief!

Return to Isaiah

Wednesday, June 7: Read Isaiah 32

Let me comment for a moment on the challenge of reading prophecy. We are heading to Chapters 36-39 which are a narrative of real historical events, They will be fascinating and also easier for us to understand. The last few chapters we have been reading are prophecy—warnings of pending judgment. They are relatively easy to understand as well, simply because they make it clear that God wants His people to stop doing something. It is also not hard to understand that in the same way He wanted them to stop looking for security in this world, He wants us to avoid this vain hope as well.

The next few chapters present a greater challenge to understand. These chapters talk about things that are to come for Israel, most of which are still to come. Furthermore, it is often a challenge to understand exactly what the fulfillment of these prophecies will look like, as well as what kind of application we should make within the midst of the Church age. For these are prophecies that apply solely to Israel and not the Church.

With that in mind, just two short considerations for today. First, let me challenge you to see in Verse 1 that with respect to Israel's future, this can really only be satisfied by the coming reign of Christ:

*See, a king will reign in righteousness
and rulers will rule with justice.*

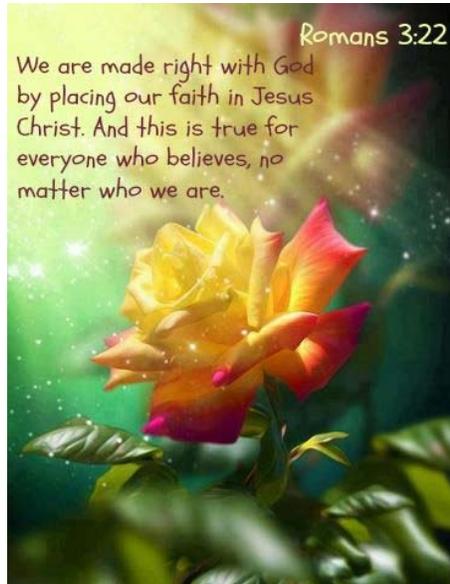
With that in mind, you will see hints throughout the next few chapters of a glorious future for Israel that has not yet occurred following Isaiah's prophecy.

Return to Isaiah

Wednesday, June 7: Read Isaiah 32 continued

Second, a point of application. Man's need to somehow be justified before God has been a problem since the fall. How is he ever going to be able to stand before the Holy God of Isaiah 6 and not come under condemnation? That's why being justified by faith in Christ is so essential—it allows us to acceptably stand before God. (Romans 3:22).

Isaiah 32:17 hits this from another angle that should be so precious to every born again child of God.



The fruit of righteousness will be peace.

That is a peace between the saved sinner and God, in other words reconciliation.

*The effect of righteousness will be quietness
and confidence forever.*

Even when our thoughts and actions are contrary to our new nature in Christ, after confession, we can return to the truth of our righteous standing in Christ. In that standing we can have a quiet confidence that God loves us and is at work conforming us to the image of His Son.

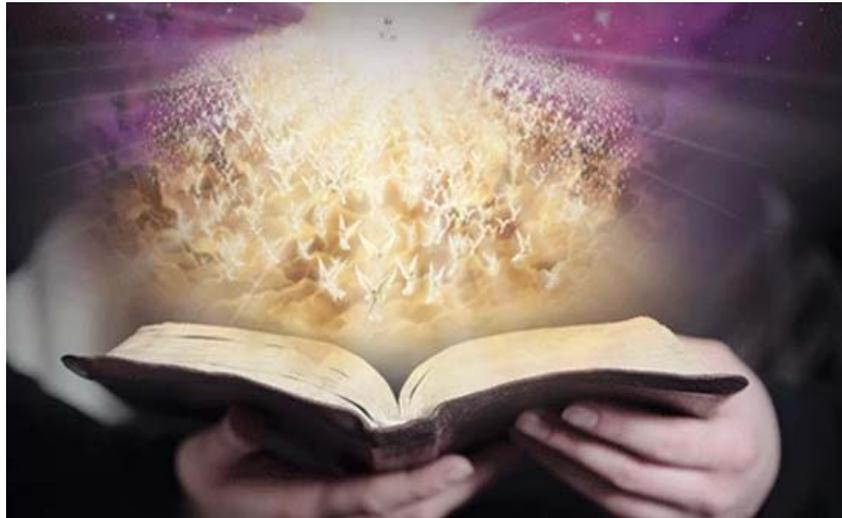
Return to Isaiah

Thursday, June 8: Read Isaiah 33

Chapter 33 continues the prophetic picture of Israel's future. It is a picture of distress followed by peace, greatness, and prosperity. Some argue that this is simply a picture of Israel's cyclical history. In other words, she has historically gone through times of persecution and prosperity. While that is true, that interpretation fails to take into account the very specific language in this chapter that can only truly be said to be fulfilled if we are talking about a yet future time when Christ returns. Consider:

Your eyes will see the King in His beauty and view a land that stretches afar. (v 17)

For the Lord is our judge, the Lord is our lawgiver, the Lord is our king: it is He who will save us. (v22)



Return to Isaiah

Thursday, June 8: Read Isaiah 33 continued

There is almost always something that can be extracted from prophecy that has direct application. The prophecy may not be specifically to us, but it most certainly is for us. In this chapter, consider Verse 6:

*He will be the sure foundation for your times,
a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge;
the Fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.*

The Lord Jesus Christ is the sure foundation during the time of His coming kingdom, but also right now in our day, because He is a rich store of salvation, wisdom, and knowledge right now! For,

Salvation is found in no one else. . .Acts 4:12

For it is Jesus,

*...in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom
and knowledge. Colossians 2:3*

How is it that we can receive this salvation, wisdom, and knowledge, that which is said to be treasure? The answer to this has always been the same. The Fear of the Lord is the key. Specifically, to recognize who God really is, manifest respect for His capability, with an outcome of obedience to Him. As lost sinners, that means to recognize our need before a holy God and turn in faith to the person and work of Jesus Christ. As saved children of God, it is to walk in the power of the Spirit and in the light of the Word of God, which naturally leads to obedience to Him. In both cases, He is indeed a “rich store of *salvation*.”

Return to Isaiah

Friday, June 9: Read Isaiah 34-35

There is a tendency to read prophecy as if it is figurative language that could be fulfilled in any number of ways. I encourage you to see that prophecy most often contains very specific language that requires specific fulfillment. For example, who is the audience for Isaiah 34:1?

Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear and all that is in it, the world and all that comes out of it!

If we take these words at their *normal* meanings, is there any way to interpret this other than to say it is directed to mankind in general? Furthermore, consider Isaiah 34:2:

The Lord is angry with all nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter.

Doesn't this have to again apply to the nations of the world in general, and is it not a pronouncement of judgment to come? Or stated another way, would this prophecy be fulfilled if one of Israel's neighbors had a military setback? Of course not—this is not the picture painted by the words used. Then consider a few excerpts from Chapter 35:

The desert and the parched land will be glad. . .they will see the glory of the Lord, the splendor of our God. . .Be strong and do not fear; your God will come, He will come with vengeance; with divine retribution, He will come to save you. . .and a highway will be there. . .only the redeemed will walk there, and the ransomed of the Lord will return. They will enter Zion with singing; everlasting joy will crown their heads."

We believe that prophetically two things are going to happen: first, a glorious time for Israel yet to come. Second, It is going to involve the reign of a sovereign power unlike anything the world has ever seen.

Return to Isaiah

Monday, June 12: Read Isaiah 36

With this chapter we abruptly switch gears from prophecy to historical narrative, and you will find it to be a fascinating interlude. Assyria has already completely dominated the Northern Kingdom deporting much of its population. As we arrive at Chapter 36, they have overrun the south and have surrounded the fortress of the capital city of Jerusalem.

Rather than engage in a direct siege of the city, the Assyrian commander decides to engage in what we would call psychological warfare. And the cruelty of the Assyrians to conquered peoples was so well known, this would have been a very *tense* time for the population of Jerusalem.



Notice how in Verse 6 the psychological warfare begins with the Assyrians revealing their awareness of the Israelites efforts to obtain help from Egypt. I guess God wasn't the only one aware of that plan. Continued on the next page

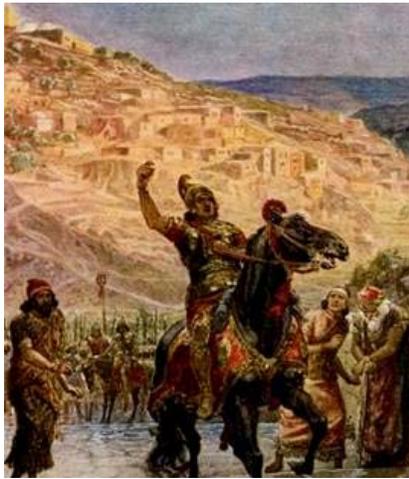
Return to Isaiah

Monday, June 12: Read Isaiah 36 Continued

Just as God said, their trust in Egypt turned out to be nothing more than a “splintered reed of a staff” that broke and pierced the hand of the one who depended upon it.

The psychological warfare continues with the commander mockingly offering to give the Israelites the mounts for the cavalry they don't have. And despite the protestations of Jewish leadership, all of this back and forth is being done in Hebrew so everyone within earshot of the city wall can hear what is going on.

Then the Assyrian gets to the heart of his message. And, at this point, he goes too far when he declares:



Do not let Hezekiah mislead you when he says, "The Lord will deliver us." Has any god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? Where are the gods of these countries . . . How then can the Lord deliver Jerusalem from my hand?"

Isaiah 36:18

It is one thing to be used to discipline a rebellious people. It is another thing altogether to challenge the Creator of heaven and earth!

Return to Isaiah

Tuesday, June 13: Read Isaiah 37

Hezekiah was a godly and capable man for much of his reign, and he shows his dependence upon the Lord in the opening verses of this chapter. He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and went straight to the temple in order to come before the Lord.

Notice carefully that Hezekiah's message to God through Isaiah, now in his priestly role, is not one of pleading for God to protect the Jewish people from the evil Assyrians. Rather, Hezekiah responds to the Assyrian ridicule of the living God!

As the story unfolds, Jerusalem gets a brief reprieve, but the Assyrian spokesman is emphatic:

Do not let the God you depend on deceive you when He says, "Jerusalem will not be handed over to the king of Assyria." Isaiah 37:10

Hezekiah again goes straight to the temple and lays the additional words of blasphemy directly before the Lord. His prayer is a marvel of faith and understanding:

O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, enthroned between the cherubim, you alone and you alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. . . Give ear, O Lord, and hear; open your eyes, O Lord, and see; listen to all the words Sennacherib has sent to insult the living God. . . Now, O Lord our God, deliver us from his hand, so that all kingdoms of each may know that you alone, O Lord, are God."
Isaiah 37:16, 17, 20

Continued on the next page.

Return to Isaiah

Tuesday, June 13: Read Isaiah 37 continued

The Lord responded through Isaiah, beginning with the words: “*Because you have prayed to Me. . .*”

Two things to note: First, the Angel of the Lord came and put to death 185,000 soldiers as they surrounded Jerusalem. Later, Sennacherib was killed precisely according to prophecy. Never underestimate the capability of our God to reach into circumstances in any way He pleases.



Second, some say, “Why pray if everything is already predestined?” I would suggest, prayer is capable of moving the hand of God, and it is up to us to be in alignment with His will!

Finishing Philippians

Wednesday, June 14: Read Philippians 4

We are going to take a break from Isaiah in order to finish Philippians. Although we read all of Chapter 4 for today, we are going to focus on just the first four verses. Paul begins in Verse 1 with terms of affection that are found almost nowhere else in his letters. But even in the midst of his joy, he felt it necessary to warn and correct. Why does he feel the need to caution the believers to “*stand firm?*” Why publicly mention these two ladies, one of whom has a name that means *fragrant* and the other *fortunate*?

The simple answer is that there was some kind of disunity between these two ladies, both of whom had contended at Paul’s side for the cause of the Gospel. He wanted to nip it in the bud before it allowed Satan to have a foothold within the fellowship and drive the wedge further. A more comprehensive answer takes into account the fact that the bulk of the content within the New Testament epistles is cautionary in nature. In other words, it is either telling us to be careful not to get tangled up in some kind of sin or warning us to stop doing some kind of sin.

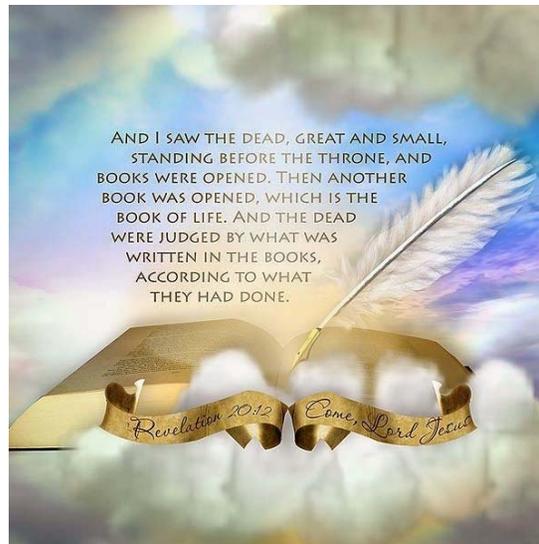
Why so much space dedicated to warning us? Let me illustrate using a ship on the ocean as an example. If you take a ship, large or small, that is perfectly on course and center the rudder, in no time at all you will be off course. That is because the wind and waves are constantly pushing the ship one way or the other causing it to *wander* off course. The same is true of a local fellowship of believers. You can have perfect doctrinal agreement and sweet fellowship, and, if you are not constantly on your guard, in no time at all you will have wandered off course. You will discover cracks of disunity, forsaking your first-love, and a hundred other potential failings. So let us take Paul’s warnings to heart, and guard our fellowship carefully.

Finishing Philippians

Thursday, June 15: Read Malachi 3
(Philippians 4:3)

Perhaps you are still wondering about Paul's reference to those whose names are written in the "Book of Life" in yesterday's reading (Philippians 4:3). For today's devotional, let's consider this "Book of Life" and see if we can't learn more about it. Consider the following:

- In a variety of different settings, God has made it clear that He is a *keeper* of records. In Malachi 3:6 in today's reading, a *scroll of remembrance* was recorded listing those who feared the Lord and honored His name. In Psalm 139:16 we are introduced to a book that records the *number of our days*. And in Revelation 20:12-14, not only do we have *Book of Life*, but also what is often referred to as the *Book of Works*. So, although there are a variety of records kept by God, let's restrict the rest of our time to the *Book of Life*.



Finishing Philippians

Thursday, June 15: Read Malachi 3

(Philippians 4:3) continued

- I would suggest to you that having our *names written in heaven* is synonymous to having them recorded in the Book of Life. And as Luke 10:20 teaches us, this is the one thing that should cause us to rejoice above all else.

“...nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather rejoice because your names are written in heaven.”

- Revelation 13:8 and 21:27 both label this book as the *Lamb’s Book of Life*. That is very helpful, for it tells us whose names are recorded. For Jesus Himself told us that He is the “way, the truth, and the life.” (John 14:6) In John 5, those who refuse to believe in Jesus as Messiah are said to be those who refuse to come to Him to have life. (John 5:40) In other words, those who place their faith in Jesus, as the Son of God, and what He accomplished on the cross in dying for our sins, they are the ones, the only ones, who have their names recorded in the Book of Life. And what cause for rejoicing!

On the other hand, do we really grasp how much is at stake if we reject God’s provision of Jesus Christ as Savior? Those who do reject Christ are people for whom Christ died, the work is done, yet their names are never recorded in the Lamb’s Book—*the Book of Life!*

Finishing Philippians

Friday, June 16: Read I Thessalonian 5 (Philippians 4:4-7)

Starting in Philippians 4:4, we have the first of three imperatives, which means the first of three commands:

Rejoice in the Lord always.

In your Bible, Philippians 4:7 and I Thessalonians 5:16 are probably very similar. In the Greek text of Scripture, the word translated joy or rejoice, and its associated grammar, are exactly the same. A Scriptural command to do something right now. Now I don't think about these commands so much as a *to do* list from God, but rather, a non-negotiable statement of what God desires as part of the Spirit-filled walk of every Christian.

I think it is important to make this distinction, because this is not the kind of thing you can force yourself to do. Go ahead and try. See if you can force yourself to rejoice in every single thing that happens today, this week, this year! By now I think most of us are aware that the Christian Life is a supernatural kind of life that can only be lived by means of the grace God provides to do so. Specifically, the Holy Spirit enabling the new life within. You see I think it is possible for the Christian to go through all kinds of trials, and yet, rejoice.

The first key to doing this is right in the passage—did you catch it? It says, “*Rejoice in the Lord.*” You see it is not telling us to rejoice in circumstances, but rather in the midst of circumstances to keep our eyes on the Lord. Should we do so, our joy will naturally continue. I think of Job, who struggled with circumstances until he had a clear vision of the sovereignty and capability of the Lord, then he repented of his discouragement and exalted the Lord.

And we can do the same.

Finishing Philippians

Monday, June 19: Read II Corinthians 10 (Philippians 4:5)

The second of three imperatives in Philippians 4:4-7 is:

Let your gentleness be evident to all.

I want to look at this verse from the perspective of men, and dedicate today's devotional to all those men who have the desire to manifest the character of Christ. I am focusing on the men, because, in general, gentleness is not seen as a virtue in our day and age. In particular, I can't ever remember it being connected in any way with the concept of manliness. I know what you are thinking, "How do we know that Philippians 4:5 applies to men?" Did you catch the very first verse of our reading in II Corinthians?

*"By the meekness and gentleness of Christ,
I appeal to you. . ."*

The great apostle Paul is modeling gentleness, and who does he identify as a model—none other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. And then there is a very convicting passage from Isaiah Chapter 42. In Verse 1, God is speaking of the coming Messiah, and this is what He says:

*"Here is My servant, whom I uphold, My chosen
One in whom I delight. . ."*

And now look at Verse 3, as it speaks of our Lord Jesus Christ at His First Advent:

*A bruised reed He will not break, and a smoldering wick
He will not snuff out.*

Now although the word *gentle* is not used, what word would you choose to summarize the nature of Jesus as He ministered to a lost world during the time of His First Coming? Gentle fits pretty well, doesn't it? If the Lord could be gentle with the lost and hard-hearted Jews, then men, I would challenge you that we should strive to do the same with our wives, children, and extended families.

Finishing Philippians

**Tuesday, June 20: Read Matthew 4:6-7
(Philippians 4:6-7)**

We are on our third of three straight imperatives: First, “rejoice always,” second, “let your gentleness be evident to all,” and finally:

...be anxious about nothing.

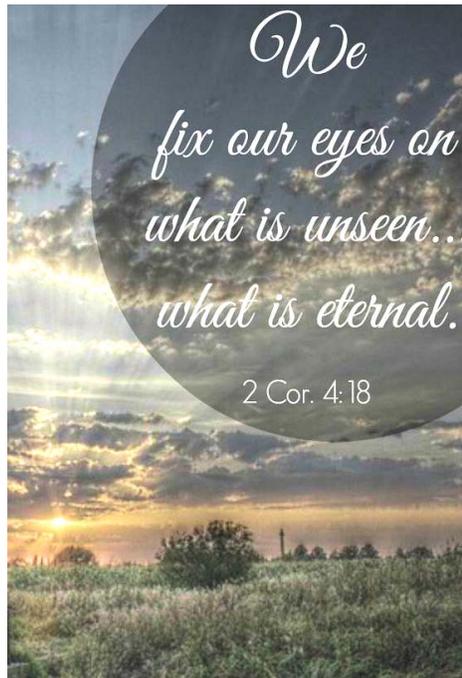
These three parting commands to the church at Philippi certainly cover a lot of ground don't they. Let's start with the word translated *anxious*. It means to give thought to, to look out for a thing, and to be anxious. This range of meanings is actually helpful to us. What kinds of things do we look out for, give thought to, or worry about? Certainly, material possessions is one of many items. Jesus addresses this in no uncertain terms in today's reading.

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

Matthew 6:19

And why do you worry about clothes? For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them.

Matthew 6:28



Finishing Philippians

Tuesday, June 20: Read Matthew 4:6-7

(Philippians 4:6-7) Continued

Not only are these things transitory, but the Lord will provide what we need. Thus, we have no need to allow these things to occupy our thinking!

Another thing that can cause us to worry are the “*storms of life*.” I think of Peter in Matthew 14 where he is walking on the water—at least until he sees the wind. How do you see wind? By the size of the waves! You know the trials of this life are like that—we see a problem, and then we fixate on all that *might* lie behind it.



Jesus would say the same thing to us He said to Peter,

“You of little faith. . .why did you doubt” Matthew 14:31

By way of application, here is what will happen if we can discipline ourselves to trust God in all circumstances, and bring our concerns to Him, with thanksgiving,

*...the peace of God, which transcends all understanding,
will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*

Philippians 4:7

Finishing Philippians

Wednesday, June 21: Read Proverbs 23 (Philippians 4:8-9)

Philippians 4:8 says,

*...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right,
whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is
excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.*

Now I have two additional passages I would like you to consider in order to further qualify the admonition from Philippians. First, Proverbs 23:7 says,

...for as he thinks within himself, so he is. . .

This is an interesting passage in that there is a variant reading that says, “do not eat the food of a stingy man—he is always thinking about the cost.” In other words, he may feed you, but inside he is begrudging you partaking of what he set before you. And, in the judgment of God, it is what is happening on the inside that counts.

Second, consider I Corinthians 15:33, which says,

Bad company corrupts good character.

All together, this is a very important lesson! Bad company corrupts your character by getting you to think about things that are unsavory and out of bounds for God’s people. (By the way, I think bad company can include movies, music, television, as well as people!) And since what is going on in your mind is what you are in God’s estimation, this is a problem. On the other hand, a steady intake of that which is noble, right, lovely, admirable and that which is excellent and praiseworthy is also going to influence the thinking and thus the character. So you and I need to be very careful what we let in, especially in terms of images, for those that have corruptive power can be very hard to shed. Personally, I am blessed by the fact the Word of God cautioned me about television 2000 years before it came to be! And all God’s people said, “Amen!”

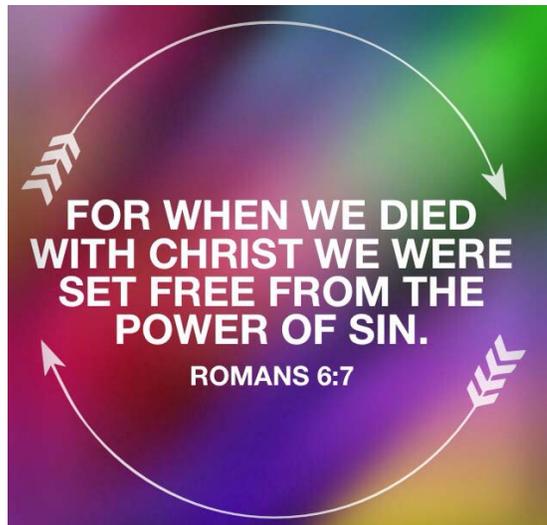
Finishing Philippians

Thursday, June 22: Read Ezekiel 4
(Philippians 4:10-16)

By now you might be thinking, "He is really taking a while to finish off this fourth chapter of Philippians!" We are close, but there are two more things we just can't bypass before closing. To begin with, consider Paul's testimony in Philippians 4:13:

I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.

Paul's testimony is meant to remind us that this should be our testimony as well. For God has repeatedly declared that He is our enabler: Consider Zechariah 4:6, Romans 7:6, Romans 1:19 to name just a few instances.



With this being the case, our own weaknesses cease to matter to God. He told Paul, in the midst of his personal weakness,

"...My power is made perfect in weakness."
II Corinthians 12:9

And once we understand this and begin to trust God to work through us, we should expect:

...that Christ's power may rest on me. II Corinthians 12:9

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Finishing Philippians

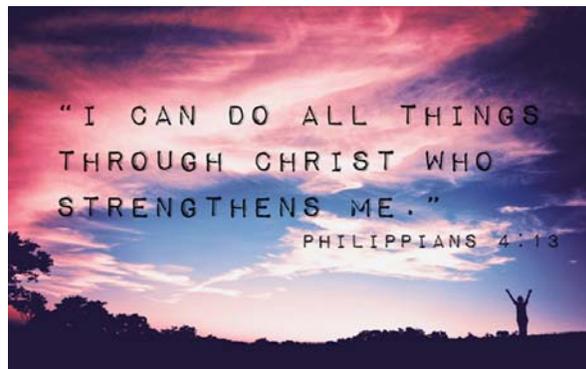
Thursday, June 22: Read Ezekiel 4

(Philippians 4:10-16) Continued

We typically think about the power of God being a provision in times of trial and testing, I want to point out something important from the context of Philippians 4. Although Paul has much to say about the trials of ministry throughout his writings, including this fourth chapter, notice the specific context right before Verse 13.

...I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.

I think it is important to note that this passage is telling us that as we keep our focus on the Lord and trust Him, He will provide in both times of blessing and times of adversity. Why am I making a point of this? Because I think it so important, especially for Christians in America, that we *pass the test* of both adversity and prosperity. Each has its own potential pitfalls, and in each we can do all that God desires if we will turn to Him for the strength to do so!



Finishing Philippians

Friday, June 23: Read Genesis 22

(Philippians 4:19)

At the close of this great book of Philippians, Paul is returning thanks to the church at Philippi for the support they have provided, and in turn he tells the church,

And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Meditate upon this for a few moments. This is a promise that God will meet all needs according to His glorious riches—through Christ Jesus. Although the word grace is not found in this passage, it certainly is an example of grace in action, where grace is God's abundant answer for our ever changing need! Now perhaps you are wondering whether we can really make such broad application of this passage, or is it more limited in scope. To address that concern is why I had you read Genesis 22. I know we were there not long ago, but did you recall what Abraham said after God provided a ram as a burnt offering in the place of his son Isaac:

Abraham called that place, The Lord Will Provide.

Genesis 22:14

This is literally Jehovah-Jireh and is one of the names for God. Do you see it? God has always been a God of grace who meets our needs according to His glory and goodness and not our worth. Consider Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David right down to you and me. God wants us to depend upon Him, and He, in turn, will meet our needs. He is not stingy, metering out a bit of blessing here and there. He is generous according to His riches in Christ. Sometimes it takes a bit of time for us to realize that the riches we have in Christ are not of the same kind the world desires, but they are glorious none the less!

One question—can you think of a Christian who didn't have his or her needs met? We'll consider that tomorrow.

Finishing Philippians

Monday, June 26: Read Psalm 22
(Philippians 4:19)

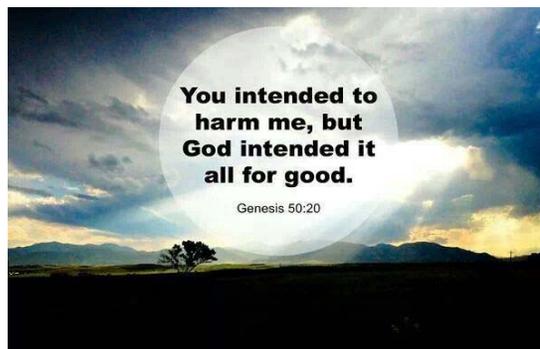
Psalm 37:25-26 says,

*I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the
righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.
They are always generous and lend freely;
their children will be blessed.*

The implication is very much like our closing verse in Philippians, is it not? God will supply the needs of His people and He will do it in such a way it is clearly a blessing.

The question I raised yesterday was this: are there times when Christians don't have their needs met? Don't hard things sometimes happen to Christians, things that can't be mended, and are difficult to grasp? Let me ask it this way, "When you lose a spouse of 50 plus years, how exactly is God supplying all your needs?"

Now there are many Biblical answers to why Christians face difficult circumstances. Consider these: to build character (James 1:2), to refine faith (I Peter 1:7), to cause us to depend upon God's strength (II Corinthians 12:9), and, as in the life of Joseph, to accomplish God's plans (Genesis 50:20).



Finishing Philippians

Monday, June 26: Read Psalm 22

(Philippians 4:19) Continued

These and other verses are helpful, but they still don't get to the core of the answer to this question. To go a step further requires the testimony of God's people. So many times I have heard the testimony of Christians who have come through the most horrific circumstances, even the loss of a child or spouse, and they have the most compelling witness of how God carried them through it.

That helps also, but then we read Psalm 22.

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from saving Me, so far from the words of My groaning? . . . Dogs have surrounded Me; a band of evil men has encircled Me, they have pierced My hands and My feet." Psalm 22:1, 16

As you may have gathered, this psalm speaks prophetically of Jesus Christ and his suffering on the cross. Jesus during His incarnation epitomized dependence upon God. Did God supply His needs? Of course He did, for He did not abandon the Lord Jesus to the grave, nor did He let His Holy One see decay. (Acts 2:27) Furthermore,

God exalted Him to the Highest place and gave Him a name that is above every name. . . Philippians 2:9

Sometimes it is simply a matter of *first the cross, and then the crown!*

Return to Isaiah

Tuesday, June 27: Read Isaiah 38

Now that we have finished our study of Philippians, we return to where we left off in the Book of Isaiah.

When we left Hezekiah at the close of Chapter 37, he had shown himself dependent upon the Lord, and the Lord in turn had proven Himself more than capable of destroying the most powerful army in the region. The first thing to note about Chapter 38 is the opening words, “In those days. . .” This actually takes us back to the time before the Assyrian siege of Jerusalem recorded in Chapters 36-37. For the historical narrative of these two chapters is not in chronological but rather in thematic order.

So first we learn of Hezekiah in the midst of a great national drama—and now we turn to a personal drama for this great king. As we begin, Hezekiah has been given some very bad news straight from the prophet Isaiah:

*Put your house in order, because you are going to die;
you will not recover.*



Return to Isaiah

Tuesday, June 27: Read Isaiah 38 continued

This seems both pretty final and pretty firm. So how did Hezekiah respond? The text tells us he “*prayed to the Lord*” and “*wept bitterly.*”

Then something happens that I find very surprising, God changes His mind and gives Hezekiah another 15 years. This brings all kinds of questions to mind: Why did God change His mind? Why put Hezekiah through this if He was going to heal him? I thought God didn’t change? Good questions, but instead of answering them I am going to leave you with one thought—PRAYER MATTERS!

Don’t let anyone ever tell you that everything is predetermined and so it doesn’t matter whether we pray or not. There are many Scriptures that make this truth clear, and I think my favorite is I John 5:14-15:

*This is the confidence we have in approaching God:
that if we ask anything according to His will,
He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—
whatever we ask—we know that we have
what we asked of Him.*

This keeps it very simple for me. We ask—realizing we need to line up with His will. God hears and answers in keeping with His plans and purposes. It is not a recipe to get what we want, but it is a means of aligning ourselves with the will of God and being blessed accordingly.

Return to Isaiah

Wednesday, June 28: Read Isaiah 39

Chapter 39 has always bothered me. There is much that is positive about Hezekiah's life and his dependence upon the Lord in times of crises, and we would do well to imitate him. However, his attitude in Chapter 39 strikes me as something we should avoid. Envoys from Babylon come, and Hezekiah gives them the *grand tour* of the treasures of his kingdom. You get the sense that he is *showing off*. Notice how Isaiah just *happens* to show up on the scene; and I sense a tone of rebuke in the way he questions Hezekiah. And then Isaiah gives a prophetic message to Hezekiah, which is basically all bad news:

...everything in your palace. . .will be carried off to Babylon. . .your own flesh and blood. . .will be taken away and they will become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon.

How does Hezekiah respond? In essence he says, "Great!" "*There will be peace and security in my lifetime.*" Do you see what's bothering me? He is saying that as long as my life finishes in comfort, I don't care what is coming for my descendants and my people. Does that seem right to you? Is it possible for us to be guilty of the same thing? Of course!

Let me give you an alternative. What if we had read that Hezekiah fell to his knees and beseeched the Lord to preserve the people and to give them leaders that would help them follow after the Lord? What if he had doubled his efforts to work with his son in order to prepare him to be a godly leader (or find someone else who was)? Did not Hezekiah just see God change His mind in answer to prayer, why didn't he learn from that? But he didn't, and his own son, Manasseh, was the worst king in the history of Israel. I wonder how much Hezekiah's affection for comfort and security contributed? I consider this a warning!

Return to Isaiah

Thursday, June 29: Skim Chapters 40-48

Note: Isaiah 42:8-9, 43:25, and 44:28-45:4

The next 27 chapters of Isaiah are chock full of material and quite involved, which explains why they are rarely studied. But there are countless blessings here, and with a little organization we can give ourselves an initial framework. Even within the limited confines of this devotional. You won't be disappointed! We will divide our study into three major parts. The first part is 40-48, which make absolutely clear God's sovereignty over all things.

Chapters 1-39 are filled with prophecy of the discipline that is coming for the sin of Israel—first from the Assyrians, and then the Babylonians. In short, it is telling the southern kingdom of Israel that they are going into exile. There is none of that in the last 27 chapters of the book. In fact, it is written from the perspective that the exile has already occurred, and now the people are coming back. It even names the king, Darius, whom God is going to use to promote the return of Israel.

For this reason, there are many theologians, especially those who do not believe in the supernatural inspiration of the Bible, who teach that this portion of Isaiah was written by one or two Jewish scribes at a much later time. They say that Isaiah could never have known the name of Darius, decades before his reign. There is no time to deal with the details, but two things for you to consider:

- If God was going to proclaim His intent to discipline His people for sin, why wouldn't He also comfort them upon their return and make it clear He was the power behind their return?
- Isaiah's personal knowledge of the future may have been limited. But anyone who seriously implies that the God of the Bible doesn't know the name of every human being who ever has or ever will live is mired in unbelief!

Return to Isaiah

Friday, June 30: Read Isaiah 40

As I mentioned yesterday, the prevailing view in academic circles is that these last 27 chapters of Isaiah are written by a much later author (called Deutero-Isaiah). One of the main reasons stated for this opinion is the change in tone and emphasis that occurs after Chapter 39. In addition to the fact that Jesus himself attributes a portion of Isaiah 53 to Isaiah, the first few verses of chapter 40 settle it for me.

*Comfort, comfort My people, says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and proclaim to her that
her hard service has been completed, that her sin has
been paid for, that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.*

What an awesome God who created and loves us. Yes, it is true that He is holy and places high demands upon His people including sending discipline for sin. But who else but our God would take such sinful people back with words of comfort and encouragement?

The reason this settles authorship for me, is that, just as God spoke against sin in the first part of the book, this is exactly the kind of thing I would expect the God I know through the Scriptures to say to His people after their discipline is complete. For it is not Isaiah's tone that has changed, it is God's tone that has changed following the repentance of His disciplined people. Those who can't see this fail to see God, and not man, as the origin of Scripture!

Return to Isaiah

Friday, June 30: Read Isaiah 40 Continued

How about a word of application? Can we expect God to deal the same way with us should we turn from sin and back to Him? Of course! That's part of the reason this is included in the canon of Scripture. This is God's way with His people:

*"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for
My own sake, and remembers your sins no more."
Isaiah 43:25*

It is for *His* sake because He loves us, and it is compatible with His character because of the cross!



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He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

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