

April to June 2011

**“The Love of God as revealed
in the Old Testament”**

by
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About the Author



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GOD'S LOVE IN THE BEGINNING

The first verse in the Bible tells us, *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* Everything that God made was *"very good"* (Gen 1:31). Man and creation could have enjoyed that perfect and flawless relationship with God forever if not for the terrible fall of man into sin. Not contented with only a third of the hosts of angels following his downfall, Satan continued to rebel against God. And he got what he wanted: the rebellion of mankind. Man, who was created in God's image, could have passed God's test by faithfully obeying the commandment of God. But, man failed. That was the darkest time in human history.

Despite man's failure and disobedience, God's love for him remains unchanged. This is especially evident when God sought man out in the Garden of Eden almost immediately after man had sinned. At that point, surely God knew Adam had sinned against Him by eating the forbidden fruit. Yet, He called out unto Adam, *"Where art thou?"* (Gen 3:9). What a yearning and longing for man to come back! Sin has destroyed the beautiful relationship between God and man. Sin has caused man to drift far away from his Creator. Out of fear, man ran from the thrice-holy and loving God (Gen 3:10).

But God sought man out to offer him a perfect solution: a Redeemer, the seed of the woman, whom He will send to save him (Gen 3:15). Why? God's love for man is the reason. However, there is no biblical explanation why God must love man so. Is man so good and lovely for God to love? Only God knows. How can we thank Him enough for seeking us out? Time and time again, He calls for us, *"Where art thou?"* Have you heard His call? Will you answer? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: We seek Him because He first sought us.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for seeking me out.

SATURDAY, APRIL 2

GENESIS 6:1-8

ROMANS 5:6-8

“...while we were yet sinners,
Christ died for us.”

GOD’S LOVE GOES UNRECIPROCATED

Sin has forever changed the relationship between God and man. When man was driven out of the Garden of Eden, it was a strong message to him that there will always be a big gap between him and God. The beautiful union and sweet fellowship have been severed. Man no longer has open access to God. Now, man being sinful in his nature can only approach the thrice-holy God with great fear and trembling. And he must always come with a blood sacrifice, for without the shedding of blood is no remission of sin (Heb 9:22). This is God’s way for sinful man to have access to Him.

The availability of such an access to God reveals that God still loves to fellowship with man. God could have shut off all opportunity of fellowship with man, but He did not. God continues to love man even though he does not deserve it. But, was God’s love reciprocated? Did sinful man appreciate the love of God? Genesis 6:5 gives us the answer, “*And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.*” Instead of confessing and repenting of all his sins, and thanking God for His great love, sinful man is set to rebel against God even more and more. Such defiant acts of man bring pain and grief to the heart of God (Gen 6:6).

It is no wonder that God had to destroy wicked men from the face of the earth (Gen 6:7). Enough is indeed enough! For that reason, God sent the global flood to destroy the whole earth. Even then, it was not a total destruction. God saved eight souls. God could have destroyed all men, yet He did not. Why? God still loves man and is determined to keep His promise made in Genesis 3:15. Would there be a need for the Saviour to come if all were to perish in that global flood? O, how deep is the Lord’s love for us! May we love Him as He has loved us. Amen.

THOUGHT: How can God still love us when we do not love Him at all?

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, help me to love Thee as Thou hast loved me.

GOD'S LOVE IN HIS PRESENCE

It is hardly called love when one claims to love you and yet has no desire at all to be with you. One of the many ways God shows His love is by His presence. That is a very powerful evidence of God's love.

Joseph experienced terrible sibling rivalry. His ten brothers hated him because Jacob their father loved Joseph more than them. Joseph's brothers almost took his life but they changed their mind and sold him to Egypt instead. It was in Egypt that the Scriptures testified that God was with Joseph. This is a powerful testimony of God's presence in Joseph's life. Because God was with Joseph, everything in his life happened for a good purpose. God made all that Joseph did to prosper and he found favour with men.

God's presence does not mean that there will be no more trouble. Troubles may keep coming but the Lord's presence will give us the strength to overcome one difficulty after another. That was what happened to Joseph. When Potiphar's wife failed to seduce Joseph, she took revenge by accusing Joseph of taking advantage of her. As a result, Joseph was thrown into jail. But because God was with Joseph, he was treated differently in jail. The jailer put his trust in Joseph and let him take charge of the other prisoners. It was all because God was with him.

The God of Joseph is the same God we believe in today. As He was with Joseph, so He is with us. May we be assured of God's presence as Jesus also promised us in the Great Commission in Matthew 28:20: "... *I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen.*"

THOUGHT: How do I know if God is with me?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for being with me all the time.

MONDAY, APRIL 4

GENESIS 45:1-8; 50:19-20

ROMANS 8:28-39

*"We are more than conquerors
through him that loved us."*

GOD'S LOVE IN HIS PURPOSE

We may not understand many things that happen in our lives. In the case of Joseph, while going through difficult times, he too may not fully comprehend all the troubles that came upon him one after another. It may be that it was only at the very moment he saw his own brothers in Egypt to buy food during the great famine that he finally understood the hand of God that was behind him all this while, starting with Jacob favouring Joseph that led to Joseph's brothers hating him. The hatred was so strong that they had to get rid of him by selling him to Egypt. In Egypt, it was no accident that Joseph worked in Potiphar's household where he was wrongly accused of taking advantage of Potiphar's wife and subsequently was thrown into prison. And there in prison, because he correctly interpreted the dreams of his fellow prison mates, it resulted in an opportunity for him to interpret Pharaoh's dream. It was no ordinary dream. It was a dream that called for preparation for the great famine. That led Joseph to become the prime minister of Egypt, to take charge of this preparation that eventually enabled him to save his own family from the great famine.

The trials that Joseph went through were real. They brought him much pain and discouragement, yet in the end we are glad he realized God's good purpose. God truly loves His own. God's intention is never to destroy but to build up His children and to lead them to safety. You may be going through a difficult situation now which you have no answer to. Do not fret! Do not give up! Always remember the life of Joseph as well as Romans 8:28: *"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Am I no different from a dummy since God's sovereignty is all that counts?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, open my eyes to see Thy invisible Hand working in my life.

TUESDAY, APRIL 5

EXODUS 2:23-3:10

PSALM 4

“...when I was in distress; have mercy upon me, and hear my prayer.”

GOD HEARS THE CRY OF HIS CHILDREN

Joseph helped his family to settle down in the land of Egypt. From seventy souls, they grew and multiplied and increased abundantly until the land was filled with them (Exod 1:7). For 430 years, the children of Israel were under the rule of the Egyptians. However, due to their increasing numbers, the Egyptians felt threatened. So, they made the life of the children of Israel more and more difficult in order that they may remain as slaves and not try to rebel. The affliction was so great that the children of Israel cried out to the Lord for deliverance. The Lord heard them. He had already prepared a deliverer for them. His name was Moses. He was born for such a time as this, in the midst of the suffering of God's people in the hands of their cruel masters. God's way done according to God's timing is the best solution to all problems. Forty years of training as a prince in the Egyptian palace and another forty years of training as a shepherd in Midian taking care of Jethro's flock helped prepare Moses adequately to lead God's people out of the land of bondage, and to be their leader for the remaining forty years of his life.

Many a time, we want God's approval for our way of solving our problems. It does not work this way since God's ways are not our ways. His thoughts are far higher than ours (Isa 55:8-9). And we know full well that His ways are far better than ours. We are guilty of not only wanting our own way, but also our own timing. We want the solution now! We want the problem fixed now! If this is our attitude, we have not learnt to wait upon God. God's timing is never late or early. He is always on time! He knows the best time and the exact solution to every one of our problems. All that is required of us is to trust in Him fully, not doubting or allowing our hearts to be filled with anxiety. We can be sure He hears all our cries for He has promised in His Word never to leave us nor forsake us (Heb 13:5). He will surely save. Let us learn to trust in Him more. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Will God hear only when we cry?

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, hear my humble cry and do not pass me by.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6

EXODUS 34:1-9

PSALM 6

*“Have mercy upon me,
O LORD; for I am weak.”*

GOD IS MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS

Exodus 34:6-7 contains one of the most beautiful descriptions of the nature of God: “...*The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third and to the fourth generation.*” To say that the God of the Old Testament is all but a God of wrath and judgment is to misrepresent the living and true God. This lopsided understanding of God’s nature would be easily corrected by the description found here in this Bible passage.

The second giving of the same set of commandments on Mount Hebron shows how merciful and gracious the Lord is to His stiffnecked and rebellious children. The first time the Ten Commandments were written on two tables of stone was on Mount Sinai. Moses threw the tables of stone onto the ground and broke them because the children of Israel had committed spiritual adultery in worshipping the golden calf. They had broken God’s holy law even before receiving it. The second giving of the same set of law reveals how merciful and gracious the Lord is towards the same people.

Mercy is when after we have sinned, God withholds the punishment we deserve. Grace is when God shows His kindness and goodness towards us even though we do not deserve it at all since we are so unworthy. How great is His love towards us who are so unloveable and undeserving! How can we thank Him enough? May we not take Him for granted, but trust and obey Him in all that we do. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If God punishes us because of our sins, is He still merciful? If He withholds His blessing from us, is He still gracious?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me not to take Thee for granted, but to trust and obey Thee in all that I do.

THURSDAY, APRIL 7

LEVITICUS 11:44-45

1 PETER 1:13-25

*“Be ye holy in all manner
of conversation.”*

BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY

The theme of the book of Leviticus is holiness. How is love related to holiness? The Bible teaches that God is love. But what kind of a love does God have? Warren W. Wiersbe in his Bible commentary quoted American theologian Augustus H. Strong: “Love is central in God. But holiness is central in love.” In other words, God’s love is a holy love. It is a love that teaches exclusiveness and separation; not mixed, not adulterated. God’s love is pure and holy. God does not love both righteousness and evil. He loves only righteousness. God does not love both cleanness and uncleanness. He loves only cleanness. God’s demand for holiness in His children is based upon His own holy nature. It cannot be otherwise. Look at all the fine details of the types of offerings required by both the priesthood and the common people, the careful consecration of Aaron and his sons to priesthood, the abstinence from unclean things, and the keeping of feasts according to God’s law. All these show how painstaking it is to maintain holiness in that love relationship between God and man. There is no playing the fool from the beginning to the end for each requirement. Failure to keep any of them results in serious consequences, even death! Thank God that all these are shadows and types in which the final fulfilment is already accomplished in Christ once and for all. Holiness is now found in the Person of Jesus Christ, not in offerings, animals or feasts.

Though God demands holiness from His people, it is more than just rituals and outward declarations. It is true holiness that begins from a heart that loves God. This is the holiness the loving God desires from us, even today. Although we are not required to follow the Levitical laws, the way to holiness is to follow Christ. He is our example of holiness. Let us be holy even as our loving God is holy. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: No character of God is more loving than holiness.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be holy as Thou art holy.

A DOUBLE SANCTIFICATION?

Leviticus 20:7 tells us that we are to sanctify ourselves. The next verse tells us that God is the One who sanctifies us. Is this a double sanctification? The answer is no. There is only one type of sanctification, and it is sanctioned by God Himself. No man is to use his own way or method to sanctify himself. He is not to rely on his own understanding and wisdom to do the sanctification work. Because of a fallacious understanding of what sanctification means, some have chosen to live their lives in seclusion, cutting off all contact with the world, thinking that they can be sanctified and purged of all uncleanness through this means. However, this type of sanctification is unbiblical and not accepted by God at all. The only means of sanctification that is approved of God is that which is written in His holy Scriptures. True sanctification must be directed by God and therefore we find it clearly defined in His holy Word. In Leviticus 20:1-6, God condemns those who seek after other means of spiritual power in life. This is equivalent to spiritual adultery. As such, God has to warn His people. He commanded them to sanctify themselves from such evil and to follow God wholeheartedly and faithfully. They are to do so by obeying His commandments (v 8). Since sanctification is done by obeying God’s Word, it can be said that God is the One who sanctifies them who obey His Word.

Thank God that there is only one approved type of sanctification based upon God’s holy Word. If left to our selves, our unbiblical sanctification will bring us nothing but misery and emptiness. God does not just save us from our sins and leave us to find our way to live a sanctified life. He gave us His Word of truth to guide us so that we might be truly sanctified and be set apart for His eternal glory. Amen.

THOUGHT: Justification is at one point. Sanctification is for a period. Glorification is forever.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, sanctify me through Thy truth, for Thy Word is truth.

SATURDAY, APRIL 9

NUMBERS 6:24-26

1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-13

*“Don’t miss any divine blessing pronounced
by the minister on the Lord’s Day.”*

THE LORD BLESS THEE, AND KEEP THEE

At the close of each of our worship services, not only do we have the minister to pronounce the benediction, we also sing the benediction as worded in Numbers 6:24-26. This beautiful gem of a Scripture passage has been called “The Lord’s Prayer of the Old Testament.” This benediction was a blessing which was to be pronounced by the priests during worship in the temple. It was a pronouncement by God’s appointed servants to His people. God called Moses to give these beautiful words to Aaron for him to say to the people (v 23). It was a guide for Aaron to bless the people. Therefore, it is not a prayer to God but a pronouncement of blessing upon God’s people. God specifically gave this calling to the priests, Aaron and his sons. In the New Testament, all believers are priests (1 Pet 2:5, 9), as such, every believer can do it. Therefore, do not say “Bless you” without proper thinking because God hears and the blessing of a believer has potency in the eyes of God. However, in the Bible Presbyterian church context, only the ordained minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ is permitted to pronounce the benediction at the worship service. This is probably due to the high honour given to the ordained minister as it is the entire congregation that is to be blessed. It is also a safeguard against abuse. The ordained minister represents God in sending God’s people off into the world with His blessings.

The benediction begins with the Lord’s blessing and keeping of His people. This is the promise of care and protection by God. The picture of God’s face shining and turning upon us indicates God’s pleasure and delight in us. It is not an angry look, as if His wrath is still burning against us. It is His smiling face, shining brightly with love and compassion. The blood of Jesus shed on the cross has forever washed away our sins and iniquities that once upon a time stood between us and God. Now it has been forever removed. We stand justified as a saint because of Christ. We are blessed and kept by God forever. His face shines upon us in delight. O how blessed we are! Amen.

THOUGHT: Should the minister pronounce the benediction in his own words or just recite from Scriptures?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, bless me and keep me in Thy love.

GOD TURNED CURSING INTO BLESSING

Balak the king of Moab was threatened by the presence of the children of Israel. He feared them for what they had done to the Amorites, and also *"because they were many"* (Num 22:3). So, he thought of a solution to overcome the powerful children of Israel, howbeit a spiritual one. And that is: to curse Israel! He managed to get Balaam, a soothsayer, to do the job. However, the Lord stopped Balaam. Instead of cursing Israel, Balaam pronounced four blessings upon Israel. Although Balaam was no true prophet of God, he realized that he could not do anything against God. Truly, he coveted the attractive rewards offered by the king of Moab, and so he insisted in helping Balak. But he could not earn the reward since God would not permit him to curse Israel. Instead of cursing, God put words into Balaam's mouth to bless Israel.

We see how God protected His own children. No man is able to harm or curse them without God's permission. Hypothetically, even if Balaam managed to curse Israel, God is still able to reverse the curse and turn it into a blessing. God's people have been mocked at and have suffered under persecution century after century. Has God forgotten them? No, God continues to watch over His own. He continues to grant them His sufficient grace to go through sufferings, even to the point of death! God's blessing is not always measured by physical deliverance or materialism. The blessings of God's love, grace and wisdom of His Word are far better than the removal of problems and the provision of gold or silver. His love is sufficient to motivate us to keep living for Him. His grace is sufficient to see us through each trial. His Word is bright enough to light our path. May God continue to bless His children. Amen.

THOUGHT: If a believer commits suicide, can I still say "God's grace is sufficient"?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may Thy blessing keep flowing upon me.

MONDAY, APRIL 11

DEUTERONOMY 7:6-13

1 JOHN 4:17-19

*"We love him, because
he first loved us."*

THE REASON WHY GOD LOVES YOU

If there is any reason God loves us, it is what the Bible has written in Deuteronomy 7:8: *"But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers..."* The first reason we are told is that God loves us. God loves us because He loves us. Can this be considered a valid reason? Yes, however it applies only to God. We cannot say we love God because we love God, because this can never be true. We love Him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). Love begins with God. God does not need any reason in order to love us, for He is the sovereign God. His will and ways are perfect and far beyond human understanding.

The second reason God loves us is that He has made a promise to the patriarchal fathers. Is God therefore under an obligation to love us? When God makes an oath or promise, He knows what He is saying. He is not making a rash statement as man is most prone to do. He is also not making empty promises. By His own name, He keeps all His promises. Yet, He is not under any obligation to make any promise to us. He chooses to do it because He loves us. He wants us to know that He loves us so deeply that He is willing to give His only begotten Son to be our sinless sacrifice on the cross to save us from our sins. He seals it by giving us His Word. The theme of the entire Scripture is Jesus Christ - how salvation is to be found only in Him.

Do we need any more reasons why God should love us? He loves us even when we are His enemies. He loves us when we are most unlovable. And so it must touch our hearts to love Him in return. There is every reason for us to love God. But one reason is more than enough: all because He first loved us. Will you love Him? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why did God not save all perished souls since He loves them?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for loving me.

TUESDAY, APRIL 12

DEUTERONOMY 8:1-10

PROVERBS 3:5-6

"He shall direct thy paths."

GOD LED HIS PEOPLE ALL THE WAY (I)

What kind of a people did God lead out of the land of bondage? Was it a group of obedient, well-behaved, submissive and happy people? Far from it! It was a people that had been described as rebellious, always complaining and stiffnecked. Deuteronomy 8:2 testifies that God led these people all the way for forty long years in the wilderness. What longsuffering and love God has for these people!

God's leading included providing all that they needed in their journey. They did not have to work for it or to purchase it. Everything that was needed for the journey was provided by God. The supply of food and drink came fresh and clean every day without fail. The heavenly manna that was collected for Sabbath remained as fresh as the day before. The clothes on their backs and their footwear could last forty years. Imagine the condition of their clothings at the end of their forty-year journey was exactly the same as when they left Egypt! And their clothings continued to fit every individual nicely. If this is not a miracle, then what? God went before them by day in the pillar of a cloud to lead the way; and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light (Exod 13:21). Indeed, God led His people ALL THE WAY!

God may not lead us in the same way as He led the children of Israel to the Promised Land more than 3,000 years ago. But we know God continues to lead His people through His Word and Spirit as we sojourn on this temporal earth. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He will lead us all the way to Glory Land. Let us continue to trust in Him for His leading and guidance. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If I am walking on the wrong way, does it mean God has stopped leading me?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.

GOD LED HIS PEOPLE ALL THE WAY (II)

To where does God lead His people? Deuteronomy 8:7-8 says, *“For the LORD thy God bringeth thee into a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths that spring out of valleys and hills; A land of wheat, and barley, and vines, and fig trees, and pomegranates; a land of oil olive, and honey.”* In short, God leads His people to a good land. This is God’s promise to Israel. In order for Israel to be a nation, there must be a people and a land. God saved the children of Israel from the great famine through the hands of Joseph, and over 430 years He caused them to increase from seventy souls to two million people. They had the people. Only a land of their own was lacking. For that reason, God led them out of Egypt to a good land in Canaan which He had prepared for them.

Whenever God gives to His children, He gives the best. It may not necessarily be the best in quality or in quantity by earthly standards. But it is certainly the best for His children in the eyes of God. What God gives must be the best. Many a time, we measure success in terms of dollars and cents, size of properties and cars, popularity and the number of friends we have. But God wants us to see His leading beyond that which is physical and to see the spiritual. He gives us His spiritual success. A few of the many spiritual evils we face daily are fleshly lust, greed, covetousness, discontentment, bitterness, and wickedness. Victory over these evils is far better than a big fat bank account gotten by dishonesty and lies.

When God leads us, He provides us with the necessary spiritual equipment to fight the spiritual warfare before us. We become weak and vulnerable when we choose to use our man-made defence and weapons. We will only be fighting a losing battle. Why be foolish and stubborn when God has already provided weapons and ammunition necessary for our warfare? Let God lead you, for victory is secured already. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Can God still lead me when I am in the wrong direction?
PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I always walk in Thy way.

THURSDAY, APRIL 14

DEUTERONOMY 10:12-19

JAMES 2:1-10

*“If ye have respect to persons,
ye commit sin...”*

GOD ALSO LOVES THOSE WHO DO NOT KNOW HIM

God has openly declared His love for the children of Israel. How about others: the non-Jews, Gentiles of other nations? Deuteronomy 10:18 reveals that God “...loveth the stranger, in giving him food and raiment.” This verse describes Gentiles as strangers. God has made Himself known to the children of Israel through the covenants He has made with them whereas there is no such arrangement made for the Gentiles. Strangers do not know God. But does that therefore mean that God does not love them? No, God also loves those who do not know Him by giving them “*food and raiment.*”

An appropriate term to describe such a love is “common grace.” God causes the sun to shine and rain to pour down upon both the good and evil. This is God’s general blessings, not just in the physical aspect but also the spiritual aspect. God genuinely offers His salvation to everyone without distinction. John 3:16 says, “*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish; but have everlasting life.*” God loves everybody, great and small, Jew and Gentile.

Such love must constrain us to love others as well. Deuteronomy 10:19 must also be our response: “*Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.*” God loved us when we were still strangers to Him. Now that we are no more strangers spiritually (for we have been adopted by Him to enjoy the privileges as sons and daughters of the Most High God, to be partakers of the new and better covenant fulfilled by Jesus Christ), we must not forget that there are still many more strangers who are still outside this covenant. Let us go and tell them about Christ. May God be merciful and gracious to open their eyes and receive them into His covenant. Amen.

THOUGHT: If one has already been chosen to salvation, why doesn’t the Lord call him as early as possible?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for including me in Thy covenant.

FRIDAY, APRIL 15

JOSHUA 1:1-9

2 CORINTHIANS 12:1-10

“My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

GOD ENCOURAGES (I)

Moses, the great servant of God, has passed away. Who will take his place? Only God has the right to appoint, just as He appointed Moses to lead the children of Israel. It pleased God to call Joshua for the important task, and he obeyed. As a result, the leadership of Israel was passed on to Joshua. God is indeed good. He has not left His people without a spiritual leader. God’s encouragement was much needed as Joshua undertook this heavy responsibility. Three times the Lord said to Joshua, *“Be strong and of a good courage...”* In these three times, God revealed to Joshua the areas in which he must be strong and of a good courage.

First, the division of the land. Joshua 1:6: *“Be strong and of a good courage: for unto this people shalt thou divide for an inheritance the land, which I swear into their fathers to give them.”* The time will come when Joshua needed to divide the land among the people. Once all the land was conquered by the children of Israel, there will be a need to be firm in dividing the land among the tribes of Israel. Joshua needed to be strong and of a good courage to allocate the land fairly and accordingly. He was not to show favouritism, personal judgment, or anything that was of earthly wisdom and understanding. He was not to keep the best land for his own family and tribe. He must be spiritually and morally strong not to have anything to do with bribery, partiality or any form of corruption. The land was to be divided according to God’s decision and promise. If Joshua was not strong enough, he would give in to the people’s demands. If he was not courageous enough, he would be a men-pleaser instead of a God-pleaser. How important it was for Joshua to be strong and of a good courage in distributing the land to the eleven tribes.

THOUGHT: No man is too old to start serving God. Joshua was about ninety years old when he succeeded Moses to lead Israel. He served for approximately twenty years before the Lord called him home at the age of 110.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be strong and of a good courage to stand firm in the Christian faith.

SATURDAY, APRIL 16

JOSHUA 1:1-9

PHILIPPIANS 3:1-16

“...what things were gain to me,
those I counted loss for Christ.”

GOD ENCOURAGES (II)

Second, the observance of the law. Joshua 1:7: “*Only be thou strong and very courageous, that thou mayest observe to do according to all the law, which Moses my servant commanded thee: turn not from it to the right hand or to the left, that thou mayest prosper whithersoever thou goest.*” There will be many advice and opinions flooding the ears of Joshua from the people around him. If he was not careful, one wrong decision can lead to his spiritual downfall. Joshua was to obey very carefully all the commandments of God. This is the only way to prosperity. This prosperity promised by God goes beyond that which is material. It is a spiritual prosperity that will bless him and his generation as well as the generations to come. In keeping the commandments, one realizes that God is always righteous, just and holy. It also makes one realize that man can never observe the law perfectly because of sin. Christ is the only cure for the sin of man. The law directs sinful men to the law-giver who is Christ. Knowing Christ becomes the greatest blessing.

Third, the confidence of God’s presence. Joshua 1:9: “... *Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.*” If God is not with us, there is every reason for us to be afraid and lose faith. But not when God has promised that He is with us. We have the confidence that He is in our midst. We can trust in His promise. As such, we can be strong and of a good courage since we are not alone. God is with us all the time. There is no need to fear. With this confidence, Joshua was ready to lead the children of Israel to fight and conquer the land. We too can be confident in our daily spiritual warfare because God is with us. May God help us.

THOUGHT: Why am I still discouraged when God has already encouraged me?

PRAYER: Lord, forgive my unbelief.

PALM SUNDAY

Today is Palm Sunday. We commemorate Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem on a donkey, fulfilling the prophecy in Zechariah 9:9. Jesus should not be portrayed as a lowly king just because He was riding on a donkey and not a royal warrior horse. He is forever the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Riding on a donkey signified that He came in peace, not to war. He is rightly known as the Prince of Peace. As Jesus rode into Jerusalem to observe the Feast of the Passover, the people laid down their garments, and spread branches of trees on the road. And the people cried, "*Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the LORD; Hosanna in the highest*" (Matt 21:9, fulfilling the prophecy in Ps 118:26). "*Hosanna*" means "save us." It was believed that the people expected Jesus to end the Roman occupation and to restore Israel to the state of independence. It was ironical that the people thought that way. It was even more ironical when the same crowd who had shouted "*Hosanna!*" cried "*Crucify him!*" five days later. Man changes but God will never change. His redemption plan will be fulfilled, and it was.

Although Jesus began His earthly ministry at age thirty, his entire life was a life of perfect obedience to God the Father. The life and ministry of Christ was about to reach its climax in this final week, commonly known as the "Passion Week" that ends with Good Friday (His crucifixion) and Easter (His resurrection). Will these be just religious events that happened 2,000 years ago for our remembrance, and nothing more? We need God to open our spiritual eyes to see wondrous things out of Christ's redemptive work, and that His resurrection power of life over death may forever rest upon us. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Was Jesus' three-and-a-half-year ministry too short?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for giving me Thy only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to save my soul from perishing.

NEVERTHELESS THE LORD RAISED UP JUDGES (I)

Before Moses died, Joshua was chosen by God to be Israel's next leader. But no provision was made for a leader after Joshua's death. Why? It is clear that it was not God's desire to have Israel ruled by one man. It was God's intention that Israel should be ruled by Him alone. Gideon, one of the early judges, refused to set up a royal dynasty. He said, *“I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the LORD shall rule over you”* (Judg 8:23).

Under the influence of Joshua's last address, the children of Israel sought the Lord for direction. Israel had a good start after the passing away of Joshua. However, it did not last long since it did not prepare the next generation to continue the legacy and mission. There were still works undone which would need the next generation to complete.

The failure of the first generation is the cause for the downfall of the generations to come. As the Chinese saying goes: *“They cut the grass, but they fail to pull out the roots.”* Israel may have obeyed God, but they did not do so completely. The inhabitants of the land were not driven out completely. The Israelites failed to overcome the enemies and allowed these pagan nations to continue living in their tribal territories.

As a result of their failure to drive out the Canaanites out of the land as God had commanded (Judg 2:2), the presence of these enemies became a threat and thorn in their flesh. They had to suffer the consequences of their disobedience. The enemies were thorns to them and their idols led them astray. Yet there was still hope. The merciful and gracious God raised up judges to deliver them.

THOUGHT: Why is it easier for evil to influence good and not the other way round?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to obey Thee completely.

TUESDAY, APRIL 19

JUDGES 2:6-23

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-17

*“... in the last days perilous
times shall come.”*

NEVERTHELESS THE LORD RAISED UP JUDGES (II)

Judges 2:6-23 is an excellent summary of the whole book of Judges. It shows the cycles of disobedience, discipline, despair and deliverance. The book of Judges records seven cycles of the apostasies of Israel during the theocracy period. An “apostasy” is a deliberate turning away from God. When Israel fell into apostasy and disobedience, God disciplined her by allowing her to be enslaved by foreign powers. It was only after the people cried out to Him in great despair and were determined to repent that God sent a judge to deliver them from their oppressor.

Each judge served as a ruler, and was looked upon as a saviour and one who protected the people from the enemies. The judges give us a picture of what the promised Saviour will be like. They show us the need of a good, righteous, strong and firm Judge whom God must provide to rule over His people. Only Jesus Christ is worthy to be our Judge.

We are living in a time no different from the time of the Judges, for everyone does what is right in his own eyes. Living a self-righteous life can bring upon a person the wrath of God. Are you doing what is right in your own eyes? If so, you are under the wrath of God. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God. Do not be caught in this kind of life! God will not punish us if we live our lives according to His righteousness. God is still a God of love. He is gracious and abundant in mercy. The fact that God loves us does not mean He will not punish us when we disobey Him. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Since God knows I will fall into sin, why didn't He stop me?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that Thy Word always reminds me not to sin but to walk in Thy righteous path.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20

RUTH 1:1-18

RUTH 4:1-15

*“Thy people shall be my people,
and thy God my God.”*

THE BEAUTIFUL END OF JUDGES (I)

The book of Ruth is about the circumstances by which a widow named Ruth finds rest by marrying Boaz, her deceased husband's kinsman. It demonstrates that there were still faithful believers among the children of Israel even during the dark period of the Judges.

The events in the book of Ruth shine like a little glimmer of light in the spiritual darkness of Israel during this period, giving hope for the future of Israel. The book of Ruth has been called the most beautiful short story ever written and Ruth has been called “The Mary of the Old Testament.” Today, the Jews still read this book in the synagogue during the annual feast of Pentecost which marks the end of grain harvest. There are no miracles, dreams, revelations or supernatural happenings in this book, but God is clearly working through His divine providence.

God's grace extends to all, whether Jew or Gentile, who will put their trust in Him. In the book of Judges, we see the Israelites moving away from God to the idolatrous worship of the Gentile nations around them. In the book of Ruth, we witness the opposite happening: a Gentile moving away from the idolatrous worship of her nation to the true worship of Jehovah of Israel. The account of Ruth is a type of Christ's relationship to the Church – His Bride. Boaz is a type of Christ, the Kinsman-Redeemer, while Ruth, who is of Gentile origin, is a type of the Church, comprising of Gentile believers. The book of Ruth is a beautiful end to the period of the Judges. Your end could be the same if only you will put your trust in Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. Will you? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: How can anything good come out of a bad situation?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to believe in Thee despite bad times.

THURSDAY, APRIL 21

RUTH 4:1-15

PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

“He humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.”

THE BEAUTIFUL END OF JUDGES (II)

It is very fitting that the account of the period of the Judges should end on this note. The account of Ruth begins in tragedy and ends in triumph. What seemed like a hopeless situation turned out to be one in which the Lord was fully glorified and His purposes accomplished.

The love of Boaz and Ruth, along with their sensitivity to the laws of Israel, was refreshing in a time when great apostasies and idolatries prevailed in the Holy Land. Many had abandoned the truth of Scripture and the faith of their father Abraham. Among the rugged, dry barrenness of the Judges period, the book of Ruth is indeed a precious gem to behold. Indeed, there is always a remnant that God preserves for His eternal glory.

The world we are living in is not going to be more receptive to Jesus Christ and His true unadulterated gospel of life. The world seeks to paint a different Jesus against the Holy Scriptures. If we are not careful, we may follow the wrong Jesus who is no Jesus at all. Guard yourself from falsehood by knowing the Word through and through. This is the only way to protect ourselves and the generations to come.

Tomorrow is Good Friday. Let us think of how our Saviour made all the sacrifices for us in order that we may have a beautiful end to our life. His sacrifices include His coming to earth, putting on human flesh, to dwell among sinful men, to suffer and die on the cross. What is better than to be forgiven of all our sins and be reconciled to God? Jesus has given us a most blessed hope in this hopeless world. He has filled our empty hearts with meaning and love from above. May we love Him more because of what He has done for us. Amen.

THOUGHT: To be in Christ is to have a beautiful end that has no end.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for giving me Jesus.

GOOD FRIDAY

The one purpose of Christ’s coming to earth is to save fallen man and redeem the lost creation. *“For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many”* (Mark 10:45). The death of Jesus is central to the Gospel message. It is the heart of God’s plan of salvation for fallen man. It was God’s sacrificial love that sent His only begotten Son to be nailed on the cross for our sins. His love for us is so deep that nothing can ever separate us from Him (Rom 5:8; 8:35, 38-39).

At the cross, the spotless Lamb of God gave His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Christ’s obedience to the Father’s will won Him a mighty victory over sin and death. By His death on the cross, Christ removed the barrier separating man from God. When He cried *“It is finished!”* the veil of the temple was rent in two, opening the way into God’s holy presence for all who turn to Him. Christ has opened the way to Heaven to all who believe in Him.

Have you believed in this wonderful gospel of salvation that can change your life right now? It changes the way you look at life. It changes the way you look at death. It changes the way you look at yourself. You will not live as if there is no hope for tomorrow. There will be no more uncertainty as you live for Christ. Life will always be joyful and hopeful despite pain and sicknesses, failures and weaknesses of the flesh. This is the joy and hope of a redeemed child of God. On this special day, tell your loved ones, friends, and even a stranger, of the goodness of the Lord. Tell them how good this Good Friday is! May the Lord help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: What is so good about Good Friday when it is about a man who was punished for the sins of men?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me always to remember the great love of my Saviour on the cross of Calvary.

THE MESSAGE OF EASTER SUNDAY (I)

Tomorrow is Easter Sunday. The glorious message of Easter Sunday is: Christ has defeated death by rising bodily from the dead. Defeat has turned into victory. Death has turned into life. We believe in the living Saviour who died, was buried, and on the third day rose again bodily from the dead. Do you believe? There are at least six points as to what would happen if Jesus had not risen from the dead.

1) If Christ had not risen from the dead, He would be a great liar. On several occasions, Jesus predicted His resurrection. In John 2:19, He said, “*Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.*” How could He raise the temple in just three days? He was referring to His own body but His disciples could not understand this until His resurrection. If He had not risen from the dead, then He must be a great liar. And if Jesus is indeed a great liar, how can we believe Him or any of His words?

2) If Christ had not risen, our preaching would be in vain (1 Cor 15:14). If the resurrection part of the gospel was removed, we would be left with sad news, not good news. Without the resurrection, we only have half the gospel. Half the gospel cannot save sinners at all. Therefore, if Christ had not risen from the dead, surely our preaching of the gospel is in vain. Apart from the resurrection of Christ, the gospel has no saving power.

3) If Christ had not risen, not only would our preaching be in vain, our faith would in vain too. We would yet be in our sins (1 Cor 15:17). Faith in a dead Saviour is empty and useless. If Jesus is still dead in the grave, He will have no power to save us and surely our faith will be in vain.

THOUGHT: Since I am going to receive a new glorious body, why can't I cremate the old body?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to look forward to the glorious body which Thou hast promised.

THE MESSAGE OF EASTER SUNDAY (II)

4) If Christ had not risen, Christians down through the centuries would have been spreading a great lie and many great and godly men would have died willingly for a lie. If Jesus had not risen again, there would be no need to go to church. Why bother? If Jesus had not risen from the dead, you would have nothing but lies. And all Christians would be liars.

5) If Christ had not risen, *"then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished."* If Jesus had not risen from the dead, we would have no hope. Christ's resurrection is a guarantee for the future resurrection of His people. So if Christ had not risen, there would be no such guarantee. There would be no comforting words for those bereaved families whose loved ones passed away in the Lord.

6) If Christ had not risen, Apostle Paul says in 1 Cor 15:19, *"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."* We would only have a dead Christ who is still buried in the grave if He had not risen from the dead. We would have no hope beyond the grave. Then are not Christians the most miserable people on earth, since they believe in a dead Saviour who rose not from the dead? If Christ had not risen, it would mean that Jesus had failed to conquer death and sin.

Thank God that all these are only "if's". For Christ has indeed risen from the dead! It is a universal law that a truth is established when two or three witnesses vouch together for it. But Christ did not have only two or three witnesses. He had more than 500 living witnesses according to 1 Corinthians 15:6! This is the truth and it has stood the test of time. Do not doubt! Just believe by faith! Amen and Amen.

THOUGHT: "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fear is gone. Life is worth the living just because He lives."

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I can live because Jesus lives.

MONDAY, APRIL 25

1 SAMUEL 3:1-21

2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

*“The time will come when they
will not endure sound doctrine.”*

MAN REJECTED GOD (I)

When the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt, the Lord promised to deliver them, which He did under Moses' leadership. He offered them the Promised Land, but when they arrived at Kadesh Barnea, they were afraid to enter. So for the next forty years, they remained in the wilderness. It was only after all the adults of that faithless generation had passed away that the next generation of Israelites could enter the Promised Land under Joshua's leadership. The land was theirs, but they had to conquer it. Joshua led Israel to victory over much of the land, but not all. Because the conquest was not a complete one, those nations that remained unconquered became a snare to Israel. They caused Israel to fall into the sin of idolatry.

During the time of the Judges, Israel sank morally and spiritually, falling away from the Lord. This dark period lasted about 400 years. During this period, seventeen judges were raised by God to be His guardian for Israel. The last judge was Samuel. He was also the first prophet after Moses to be called by God for Israel. Samuel was called and tested to see if he qualified to be God's prophet. A faithful prophet must deliver not only joyous but also the most unwelcomed messages from the Lord. It was a very difficult task for Samuel to deliver a message of divine judgment to Eli, his teacher. By the faithful discharge of this first assignment given to him by God, he qualified for the prophetic office. As he grew up, all of Israel (from Dan to Beersheba) recognized him as a prophet of the Lord; and through him the Lord spoke again to His people. Samuel was the man who held Israel together during the last days of the theocracy.

How we need strong and godly men like Samuel to lead God's people today! Christians today are turning to men who can make the church rich and powerful. It is no more the faithful preaching of God's Word, especially against sin, that the people want to hear. They want to hear messages that can boost their self-esteem and confidence in the flesh. Is this not a clear sign of rejecting God? May God be merciful to us.

THOUGHT: God's Word can build. It can destroy, too.

PRAYER: Father, may I be glad to receive Thy Word.

TUESDAY, APRIL 26

1 SAMUEL 8

TITUS 1:16

*“They profess that they know God;
but in works they deny Him.”*

MAN REJECTED GOD (II)

Samuel was Israel’s last judge. Using his old age and the waywardness of his sons as excuses, the elders of Israel approached Samuel and demanded for a king like the neighbouring nations. Samuel was saddened and somewhat offended by the request. Before he took action, he prayed to God first. In reply, God said to Samuel, *“Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them”* (1 Sam 8:7). Samuel did as God instructed.

Why did the people of Israel want a king? For years the Israelites had wanted a king. When Samuel grew old, they became more demanding. The people gave Samuel three reasons why they wanted a king. First, Samuel’s sons were evil and corrupt men, unfit to follow the footsteps of their father. Second, almost every nation around Israel had a king and the Israelites wanted to be like them. And third, they wanted a military commander to make them stronger in the eyes of their enemies (1 Sam 8:5, 20). Are these reasons valid? No! They forgot that God was the One who called His servants to lead Israel. It was never the responsibility of man to do so. Israel also failed to realize how privileged they were that God was their divine King. This was far better than all the other nations around them who only had a human being as their king. With God as the King of Israel, no nation was strong enough to go against Israel. Yet Israel failed to see that they were the strongest because of God. They chose rather to see that they were weak without a human king. What irony! Israel will suffer the consequences of rejecting God as their King and having a human king over them. However, God still loves them despite their rejection of Him.

Knowing this, let us not reject God by the way we live our lives, but let us honour and obey Him always. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Leaving no time for God is no different from rejecting God.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to live my life unto Thee.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27

2 SAMUEL 11:1-17; 12:1-12

PSALM 51

*“Restore unto me the
joy of thy salvation.”*

GOD’S MERCY IN DAVID’S SINS (I)

The Bible does not honour the heroes of faith to the neglect of their sin. In fact, one of the marks of the truthfulness of Scripture is its balanced presentation of both the bright and dark sides of the lives of men of God.

David, the second king of Israel, committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his army officers, Uriah. He then planned for her husband to be killed in battle. David admitted that he had done wrong after Nathan the prophet pointed it out to him. He confessed his sin and God forgave him (Ps 32, 51).

God’s mercy spared David physical death (see Exodus 21:12) but not severe chastening. David had to suffer the consequences of his sin. God reserved a fourfold judgment on David and his family. Nathan delivered this fourfold judgment in response to David’s wish that the rich man be judged fourfold for his act.

The first judgment: “... *the sword shall never depart from thine house.*” David’s sons (Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah) were slain in tragic, violent ways. Amnon was killed by his own brother. Absalom was slain by Joab in a particularly vicious way, wringing from David that poignant cry, “*O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!*” David had hoped that Absalom would succeed him on the throne. Absalom’s name means “The father of peace.” But this young man became a headstrong rebel who died a violent death on the battle field. Adonijah soon followed him. The sword never departed from David’s house. His sons learned from their own father to be violent men.

THOUGHT: If one does not deserve to be pardoned, he needs mercy. But if one deserves to be pardoned, he needs no mercy.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, be merciful to me, a sinner.

THURSDAY, APRIL 28

2 SAMUEL 12:1-23

JOHN 8:1-11

*“Neither do I condemn thee:
go, and sin no more.”*

GOD’S MERCY IN DAVID’S SINS (II)

The second judgment is given in verse 11: *“Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house.”* If you trace the record of David’s house, it is a tale of hate, incest, greed, insurrection and murder. David’s daughter, Tamar, was raped by David’s son, Amnon. And Absalom, another son of David, took matters into his own hand and killed Amnon as an act of revenge for the defilement of Tamar.

The third judgment is also recorded in verse 11: *“I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.”* That was fulfilled in the rebellion of Absalom when he forced David his father into exile and took his ten wives to the roof of his house (the same place where David set his eyes on Bathsheba the first time) and violated them before all of Israel.

The final judgment is in verse 14: *“The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die.”* That judgment was fulfilled when the child born out of their adulterous act died shortly after birth. An innocent life suffers because of the sins of others. How unfair! Yet we know that God is perfectly fair. All sins come with a price, and at times a very heavy price. Sin is never free. It will come after us till we pay every cent. We cannot get away with anything. We may try to run away and hide ourselves, but sin will always catch up with us. There is no way to avoid the consequences of sin. This is the law of inevitable consequence: we reap what we sow. There is no way we can reverse that law. The marks of sin were borne by David for the rest of his life. Such was the testimony of a great man, even a man who goes after God’s own heart!

Think of God’s mercy upon you when you are being spared from a severe punishment for your sins. Amen.

THOUGHT: Jesus has saved me from the power of sin. Why do I still sin?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for saving my soul.

FRIDAY, APRIL 29

1 KINGS 1:1-17, 30-40

PSALM 75

*“God is the judge: he putteth down,
one, and setteth up another.”*

PROMOTION COMES FROM THE LORD

King David, now about seventy years old (971 BC), was very weak. Everyone was concerned about which of David's fourteen sons (two had already died) was going to become Israel's third king. God had chosen Solomon even before he was born, and He told David about this (1 Chron 22:9). Not many were aware of this prophecy. When the time came for David's successor to be appointed, there was therefore a conflict. Adonijah, the fourth son of David (and at least thirteen years older than Solomon), made an attempt to proclaim himself the king without David's knowledge. He thought he could succeed because he had convinced two of the most influential men of David's court to support him: Joab (his chief military commander) and Abiathar (one of the high priests).

It was Nathan the prophet (who earlier had rebuked David for his sin of adultery) whom God used to stop Adonijah's attempt. Nathan, together with Bathsheba, came to David and informed him about what was going on and asked whether he had authorized it. David immediately arranged for Solomon to be crowned in public at Jerusalem to put a stop to any question regarding his choice of the next king. Solomon was led on a mule outside Jerusalem, and anointed by Zadok the other priest, and Nathan. Solomon's coronation was marked by such great rejoicing that even those who were at Adonijah's proclamation feast could hear it. When they learnt what David had done, all of them left Adonijah, fearing the wrath of Solomon, because Adonijah's act would now be seen as rebellion.

The lesson we learn from this account is that promotion comes from the Lord (Ps 75:6-7). Solomon made no personal attempt to put himself on the throne.

THOUGHT: Since promotion comes from the Lord, does that mean I do not have to work hard?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be the best Christian at home, at work in school and in church.

SATURDAY, APRIL 30

1 KINGS 11:30-38, 12:25-30

PROVERBS 4:5

“Get wisdom, get understanding:
forget it not.”

GOD PROMISED BUT MAN FORGETS!

The Lord had promised Jeroboam that his reign would be established if he obeyed His commandments. But when Jeroboam took control of the northern tribes, his lust for power caused him to use religion for his own political ends.

As long as Jerusalem was the centre of worship for the Israelites, Jeroboam felt that his rule was not secure. The Law required all male Israelites to go up to Jerusalem three times a year to offer sacrifices. This would provide opportunities for the southern kingdom to influence them toward overthrowing him.

Jeroboam should have consulted the Lord concerning this problem. Instead, he chose to change the religion of the ten northern tribes by making two golden calves at Dan and Bethel, by establishing a new priesthood and by proclaiming a new feast day for Israel. This new cult religion became a great stumbling block for the northern kingdom for hundreds of years after that. It became known as the sin of Jeroboam “*who made Israel to sin*” (1 Kings 14:16; 15:26, 34; 16:26; 22:52, etc).

On one feast day of this new cult, Jeroboam was offering incense at the Bethel shrine. The Lord sent an unnamed man of God to proclaim judgment on this new cult. He pronounced a prophecy concerning King Josiah (300 years before he was born), that the altar would be broken and Jeroboam’s hand would be paralysed. Jeroboam seemed to repent after this, but it was short-lived (1 Kings 13:33).

When man forgets God’s promises, it is the beginning of his downfall. It will do us well if we make that extra effort to remember God’s promises. Not only will it save us from incurring God’s wrath, we will constantly be found in His favour. May God help us not to forget His precious promises. Amen.

THOUGHT: Does my forgetfulness mean I do not care enough to remember?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, thank You for all Thy precious promises.

BLESSED LABOUR DAY (I)

Today, the whole world celebrates Labour Day to appreciate the labour of man in whatever profession they are in. However, today is also the Lord's Day, and we are commanded to rest from all our labour (Exod 20:10). This day is set aside for the Lord and we are to come together to worship Him. Labour Day or not, we continue to rest from our labour every Lord's Day for the Lord of the Sabbath.

Labour is ordained by God. Before sin entered into this world, God has already commanded man to labour. *"And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it"* (Gen 2:15). It was only after sin came and the curse was pronounced upon man that labour becomes difficult and brings sweat to the face (Gen 3:19a). But in the beginning it was not so. Labour used to be sweet and easy, but sin changed that. Now the ground is cursed because of man's sin; and man has to labour hard in order to feed himself as well as his family (1 Tim 5:8).

There is nothing wrong with labour. Labour is good as it was given before sin came into the world. Even Jesus our Lord and Saviour laboured during His life on earth: *"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work"* (John 9:4). But not all labour is acceptable in the eyes of God. Some labours are done in vain. According to 1 Corinthians 15:58, the only labour that will never be in vain is the work of the Lord. Jesus says, *"Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed"* (John 6:27). Are you ready to labour for the Lord?

THOUGHT: Does labouring for the Lord means serving in church only?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to labour today for things that last for eternity.

MONDAY, MAY 2

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

HEBREWS 6:10

*“God is not unrighteous to forget your
work and labour of love.”*

BLESSED LABOUR DAY (II)

Does labouring for the Lord mean serving in church only? If so, then all Christians should leave their secular profession and work in the church, and the church office must be big enough for the congregation! Is this what 1 Corinthians 15:58 teaches? No! Not everyone is called to serve God full-time in the church. Yes, there are those who are specially called, but not all are. In fact, most are called to hold secular professions as the Spirit of God leads them. 1 Corinthians 15:58 is a verse that was given to the Corinthian church and to us as well. The work of the Lord is simply how we may be a blessing to the people around us, and maintaining a good testimony for Jesus Christ. To be a blessing, others must see God’s love in our life. That is why Apostle Paul qualifies the work of the Lord as done not in vain when it is done in the Lord. We are Christians regardless of whatever profession we hold. However, if others do not know we are Christians or we have been a stumblingblock to their coming to Christ, then we are no blessing at all.

While we do the work of the Lord by being good Christians, we do it from the heart and not in hypocrisy. The Pharisees and scribes of Jesus’ days would love all their works to be seen by men in order to receive high praise and honour from them. Although they seem to be doing God’s works, they were not done in the Lord, but in the name of “self.” They themselves could not enter into the kingdom of heaven, and they also prevented others from entering in (Luke 11:52). That is why Jesus condemned them! How we labour in the Lord is important. Either we are a blessing or a stumblingblock.

May we labour willingly, honestly, sincerely, truthfully, and lovingly for the Lord’s sake! For we know our labour is not in vain in the Lord. Let us keep on abounding in the work of the Lord in these last days. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: What is the reward for my labour in the Lord?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be faithful in my labour for Thee.

TUESDAY, MAY 3

1 CHRONICLES 1:1-34

1 CHRONICLES 11:1-3

*All of God's promises shall be fulfilled
"according to the word of the LORD."*

GOD KNOWS US PERSONALLY

When you look at the genealogies recorded in the Bible, are you tempted to skip them? Genealogies may seem dry to us, but there is a purpose why the writer of Chronicles, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, recorded the genealogies in the first nine chapters. They remind us that God knows each of His children personally, even down to the number of hairs on our heads (Matt 10:30). We can take comfort in the fact that who we are and what we do are written forever in God's mind. If our names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, we belong to Him forever (Rev 21:27).

God is faithful and keeps His promises to them whom He knows. We see the fulfilment of God's promise to David when he was made king over all Israel (1 Chron 11:1-3). We can be sure that His promises to us will be fulfilled as well. He has promised blessings to those who follow Him, who come to Christ in repentance, and who obey His Word. Obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings judgment.

1 and 2 Chronicles, as well as 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, contain chronicles of the pattern of sin, repentance, forgiveness, and restoration of the nation of Israel. God knows His people. He knows how they struggled in life, and provides His sufficient strength and grace to carry them through. God knows us too for He is the same God we believe in today. God is patient with us and forgives our sins when we come to Him in true repentance (1 John 1:9). We can take comfort in the fact that He hears our prayer of sorrow, forgives our sins, restores us to fellowship with Him, and sets us on the path to joy. Only God knows us better than ourselves. May we learn to trust in Him daily. Amen.

THOUGHT: God knows me so well that His knowledge of me is more than mine. I can know God so well and yet my knowledge of Him cannot even be compared to a drop of water in the vast ocean.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for knowing me personally.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 4

2 CHRONICLES 1:1-12

1 JOHN 1:8-10; JAMES 3:13-17

*“He is faithful and just
to forgive our sins.”*

WHAT WE REALLY NEED

The reader of the Chronicles is invited to evaluate each generation from the past and to discern why each was blessed or punished. But we are also to compare the plight of these generations to our own, both corporately and individually. God hates sin and will not tolerate it. If the Chronicles teach us anything, it is that God desires to forgive and heal those who will humbly pray and repent (1 John 1:9). We all need forgiveness. King Solomon acknowledged God as the God of great mercy (2 Chron 1:8) as he worshipped God in the temple and offered a thousand burnt offerings to Him (2 Chron 1:6). For a king to do so, it means he was subjecting himself to Someone greater than him, and that is God Himself, who has the power to forgive sins.

If you could have anything from God, what would you ask for? Fabulous wealth? Perfect health for you and your loved ones? The power over life and death? God made an offer to King Solomon and he chose none of these things. What he asked for was wisdom and knowledge to complete the task God had assigned to him and to do it well. The lesson for us is that God has given each of us a commission to fulfil and the greatest blessing we can seek from God is the ability to carry out His will for our lives. For that, we need the *“wisdom that is from above”* (Jas 3:17) to discern His will, as well as the understanding and intimate knowledge of Him in order to motivate us to Christ-likeness in both deed and attitude (Jas 3:13).

Truly we need forgiveness and wisdom. God could have cut off such availability to us, but He did not. Have you asked for them?

THOUGHT: One may be illiterate, yet with God’s wisdom he can be wiser than he who has received the highest education.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy forgiveness of my sin and Thy wisdom to do Thy will.

GOD REOPENS THE DOOR TO ISRAEL

The book of Ezra begins where the book of 2 Chronicles ends. In the book of Ezra, we see God’s promise fulfilled. The Jews returned to the Promised Land after being held captive in Babylon for seventy years. They were able to do so because God opened the door for them. Indeed He did, and it should amaze us how God is always ready to restore His children back to Himself. Does this not show that His love endures from everlasting to everlasting?

Cyrus, king of Persia, made a proclamation that allowed the Jewish captives in Babylon to return to their homeland. They could return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin, along with priests from the tribe of Levi, began to make preparations to return to Jerusalem. About 50,000 Jews were concerned enough to leave their comfortable homes in Babylon to return to Jerusalem under Zerubbabel. The number was 42,360, excluding 7,337 servants (Ezra 2:64-65). When the people arrived in Jerusalem, they rebuilt the altar for burnt offerings and offered sacrifices to God. They also celebrated the Feast of the Tabernacles, in joyous thanksgiving to God. It was under this joyous atmosphere of celebration and festivity that plans to rebuild the temple was made. The people provided money and materials. When the materials were ready, the workers began laying the foundation of the Temple. Every one contributed to the Lord’s work.

When God opens the door, things begin to change, and often for the better. It is important to keep our eyes opened to God’s open door of opportunities to serve Him more and more. Opportunity might knock only once. If we miss it, it is to our regret and loss. God is still patient with us. Let us seize every opportunity that God gives and use it for His eternal glory. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Sometimes there is more than one door opened to me and I can only choose one. How do I know which one?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, give me eyes of wisdom to see Thy open door, and to enter it with confidence and peace.

GOD'S WORK WILL NEVER FAIL

The work of God is often fraught with much opposition. The work of rebuilding the Temple met with interference from neighbours who were not sympathetic to the restoration of Jerusalem. The Samaritans, under the guise of friendship, requested to be part of the work of reconstruction. When their offer was rejected, they were offended. They then falsely reported to the Persians that the Jews were building fortifications and planning a revolt. As a result, the king ordered that the work on the Temple be stopped.

However, the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, strongly exhorted the people to resume the work on the temple. Zerubbabel and Jeshua took the lead. When the work was once again challenged, the king was persuaded to call for his men to examine the records to determine whether construction had been authorised. When they discovered that indeed there had been an official authorisation for the rebuilding of the temple in the decree of Cyrus, the king commanded that the people could resume the rebuilding of the temple. Within four years (520-516 BC), the work was completed. And the Temple was dedicated amid great rejoicing. Indeed, God's work will never fail.

This account of the completion of the temple is not a fairy tale. It is a true event and a great testimony of God's unfailing work among His people. Are you disappointed because of a failed relationship, or a broken marriage? We need to see His hand at work by faith. And when we can see that, we will rejoice and not fret. This should build up our faith and trust in God, for His work in us will never fail. It is time to look up and let God work a work in you that testifies of His awesome power and might. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is there really light at the end of the tunnel?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to trust in Thee more because Thou never fail.

SATURDAY, MAY 7

EZRA 7

EZRA 9

*"...yet our God hath not
forsaken us in our bondage..."*

SPIRITUAL REFORM MATTERS!

About eighty years after the first return under Zerubbabel in 538 BC, Ezra led the second group back to Jerusalem. It is highly possible that Ezra was born after the first group had left. His purpose in returning was to instruct the people in Jerusalem in the Word of God (Ezra 7:10).

Soon, Ezra discovered that the Jews had mingled with their heathen neighbours and married heathen wives. Even the rulers and priests were involved in committing this sin. Ezra rent his garment, plucked off his hair and beard, and sat confounded until the hour of evening sacrifice. Then he prayed, asking God to forgive His people. The people repented of their sins and promised to obey God. Indeed, the Word of God and fervent prayer are the well-springs of effective spiritual change.

Spiritual revival often begins with prayer and confession of sins. God is always ready to forgive every repentant soul. Spiritual reform matters. What is the point of a beautifully renovated and glorious temple of God when the spiritual leaders and worshippers are carnal and have not forsaken their sinful lifestyles? What is the point of a strong membership of thousands when God's Word is not faithfully preached and heeded, and when the church resembles the world rather than God-fearing children? We need to be reminded of God's wrath against sin and wickedness. We are not to take for granted His faithfulness toward us. He has kept His promises to us, fulfilling them one by one before our eyes. How can we still take Him for granted and not forsake the world to follow Him? May we take the step of faith and sing from our heart, "Take the world, but give me Jesus. All its joys are but a name; but His love abideth ever, thru eternal years the same. O the height and depth of mercy! O the length and breadth of love! O the fullness of redemption, pledge of endless life above!" (Fanny Crosby)

THOUGHT: The more I crucify "self," the more self-less I will be.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for reforming me spiritually.

GOD PREPARED THE WAY

Nehemiah was the cupbearer of king Artaxerxes of Persia. He was sad when he heard that the wall of Jerusalem was broken down. He prayed and pleaded with God to remember His covenant with Israel, that He would bless them if they repented of their sins. God prepared the way for Nehemiah by granting him favour in the sight of the king. The king appointed Nehemiah governor of Judah. When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, he investigated the state of the wall. He proposed to the rulers and the people that the wall and gates be rebuilt. The project was well organized and everyone was involved. But it was not without problems. While the people were repairing their wall, their enemies, Sanballat (ruler of Samaria) and Tobiah, came to discourage them.

Nehemiah faced a series of problems created by the enemies that could have brought the rebuilding project to a standstill. Opposition came from the enemies outside. There were also internal struggles among the Jews themselves. But Nehemiah, a man of prayer and wisdom, brought the people through the problems. In fifty-two days, the rebuilding of the wall of Jerusalem was completed.

Nehemiah was not only concerned about the restoration of the wall, he was also concerned with the spiritual lives of the people. After the wall was built, the people turned to Ezra for religious instruction. Ezra read the Law and the people shouted, "Amen! Amen!" (see Neh 8). The people worshipped the Lord and sought Him to forgive them of their sins. They pledged to keep the Law's requirements on marriage, the Sabbath, taxes, tithes and offerings to the Lord. This was a spiritual revival under Nehemiah and Ezra.

Revival comes from God, and He will prepare the way for His people that they may turn to Him and glorify Him with a transformed life. May the Lord revive us today!

THOUGHT: Is it wrong to call gospel meetings "Revival Meetings"?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may Thou revive us today.

MONDAY, MAY 9

ESTHER 1

ESTHER 2

*"...the king loved Esther
above all the women..."*

THE WISE PLAN OF GOD (I)

While nearly 50,000 Jews had returned with Zerubbabel to Jerusalem and rebuilt the temple of God, there were still many Jews (perhaps two to three million) scattered in the provinces of the Persian empire who had not returned. The book of Esther relates an event concerning these Jews (who had not returned) that was to have an impact on all Jews, even those who had returned to the Holy Land.

The Book begins in king Ahasuerus' palace in Shushan. The king was about to launch his great military campaign against Greece. He held a banquet to motivate his officials and generals for warfare. He wanted Queen Vashti to attend the great celebration to exhibit her beauty. She refused and was banished. She was dismissed because the king feared that all the wives in Persia would follow her example and disobey their husbands. Later on, the king longed for Vashti, but the Persian law was irreversible, so she could not be reinstated. As his servants suggested, a great beauty contest was organized. God's unseen hand was working to prepare the way for Esther to become the new Queen of Persia. Esther was a female Benjamite Jewess, an orphan raised up by her cousin, Mordecai. She was told by Mordecai to keep her Jewish identity a secret. After about a year's preparation, it was Esther's turn to be seen by the king. The king chose her above all the rest to be his queen. But no one knew that this new queen of Persia was not a Persian, but a Jew.

Later, Mordecai became the king's saviour by thwarting an assassination plot planned by two of the king's servants. The king was grateful to him and his deed was recorded in the Persian records. Somehow, he forgot to reward Mordecai. This small detail was planned by God because, later on, Mordecai would be remembered for his loyalty at a more crucial time. God's plan is always the best! Are you included in God's plan?

THOUGHT: How do I know if I am are not following God's plan?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be patient to see Thy plan unfolding before my eyes.

TUESDAY, MAY 10

ESTHER 3

ESTHER 4

“...if I perish, I perish.”

THE WISE PLAN OF GOD (II)

Four years after Esther became queen, Haman was promoted to be the prime minister. He was a proud man and loved the honour of people bowing to him. However, Mordecai refused to bow to him. This made Haman so angry that he wanted not only to destroy Mordecai, but also all the Jews (after he found out that Mordecai was a Jew).

Haman planned to issue a decree permitting all the people to kill the Jews in the empire on a day chosen by casting lots (Purim). God's unseen hand caused the day chosen to be eleven months later. However, he needed to get the king to authorise this decree. To do this, he lied to the king, accusing the Jews of being rebellious troublemakers and pleased the king by giving him 10,000 talents of money. Haman's proposal was approved and sent out. The lives of the Jews were endangered and everywhere they became sorrowful. Esther did not know about it until Mordecai informed her. This showed how isolated she was, even though she was the queen. Mordecai asked her to use her position as queen to deliver her people even though this would not be easy. Esther might lose her life if she offended the king by going to see him without being summoned. She fasted for three days, and then courageously went to see the king.

The king was in a favourable mood when Esther came. Not only was the king pleased to see her, he even offered to grant her any requests up to half of his kingdom. However, Esther answered the king by giving a personal invitation to the king and Haman to attend a banquet she was hosting. Both the king and Haman attended the banquet. At the banquet, again the king gave the same offer to Esther. Esther again replied with another invitation for the king and Haman to attend another banquet the following day. Why did Esther do this? Twice, she did not take up the king's offer. The wise plan of God was about to unfold. Timing is important. Do not run ahead of God. You can be sure God's timing is the best.

THOUGHT: How do I know I am following God's timing?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to trust Thee fully in Thy plan for me.

THE WISE PLAN OF GOD (III)

Haman's pride swelled because he had been invited by the queen herself to a private meal with the king. On the way home, however, he was “*full of indignation*” (v 9) when he saw Mordecai refusing even to stand to honour him. Haman then called all his friends to boast of his importance as he was invited by the queen. He also expressed his extreme resentment of Mordecai. His friends wickedly advised him to use his power to get rid of Mordecai once and for all by building a gallows and getting the king's permission to hang Mordecai.

Haman was extremely pleased with the idea and he acted on it immediately by spending the night building a 22.5-metre-high gallows. That night, the king could not sleep. So he ordered his servants to read the Persian records to him. Through this, he discovered that his life had been saved by Mordecai and that Mordecai had not been rewarded for it. While the king was thinking of a way to reward Mordecai, Haman came to see him. The king did not know that Haman had come to get permission to hang Mordecai. Anyway, the king asked Haman for his opinion as to how to reward a person whom the king wanted to honour. Haman thought the reward was for him, and so suggested the highest possible honour, only to discover that it was for his enemy, Mordecai, and that he himself had to ensure that Mordecai be rewarded accordingly. The following day, according to the king's command, Haman reluctantly led Mordecai (wearing the king's robes and riding on the king's horse) through the streets of the city. Haman was completely humiliated by this! If this is not the wise plan of God, then what is?

Truly the wisdom of God is higher than man's! Evil shall never prevail over good. God will ensure that the wicked be punished and the righteous rewarded. If you are suffering as a result of your faith, count it all joy. You are part of God's plan.

THOUGHT: How much must I suffer before I can be relieved?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be willing to suffer for Thee.

THURSDAY, MAY 12

ESTHER 7

ESTHER 8

*“For how can I endure to see the evil
that shall come unto my people?”*

THE WISE PLAN OF GOD (IV)

Having been severely humiliated, Haman went home in anger. The king’s servants came to fetch him to the queen’s second banquet. At the banquet, the king again offered to grant Esther any request up to half his kingdom. This time, Esther sought the king to spare her life and also the lives of her people. The king was angry that someone should attempt to harm his own queen. When Haman was exposed to be the one, Haman panicked and sought for pardon. But it was too late. His plot against Mordecai was also exposed. The king immediately ordered Haman’s execution on the gallows which Haman had built to hang Mordecai. If this is not divine intervention, then what is? God’s wisdom is indeed higher than man’s.

Mordecai was appointed the new prime minister. Due to the irreversible nature of Persian law, a new decree was issued that gave the Jews the right to fight back against those who attack them. The Persian empire now had a queen and a prime minister whom everybody knew were Jews. This made the authorities afraid of them, so that on the day the Jews were under attack, the Persian authorities helped the Jews and not their enemies. The Jews were able to defend themselves so well that a total of 75,800 of their enemies died. An annual feast for the Jews was instituted by Mordecai to commemorate this great deliverance. This became known as the Feast of Purim (the Persian word for “lots”) for Haman had cast lots to determine the time of the Jews’ destruction. This feast is still celebrated by the Jews today.

God does not forsake His people. He is still watching over them. The preservation of God’s people, especially during the post-exilic period, shows that God’s promise will never be broken. God’s promise of the Messiah to save His people has proven true after the 400 years of inter-testamental silence. God is good. How can He be otherwise? May we His people love Him and obey Him, and never doubt His wise plan for us! Amen.

THOUGHT: Since God hates sin, why did He not destroy it?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for watching over me.

WHERE IS GOD WHEN I AM SUFFERING? (I)

Whenever we suffer, we think of Job. Job is certainly not one who deserved to suffer, yet he did. His moral integrity and his selfless service to God heighten the doubt and question for his "downfall." Behind the scene, Satan charged that no one loves God from pure motives, but only for material blessings (Job 1:10). To refute Satan's accusations, God allowed him to deal Job two episodes of assaults. Job lamented in his sorrow and loss, but did not deny God (Job 1:21; 2:10).

Job's three friends were the only ones who came and mourned with him in seven days of silent sympathy. Though they brought no comfort to Job, they confronted Job without talking behind his back. They accused Job of suffering because of his sin. Job's responses to their simplistic assumptions made the debate cycles increase in emotional fervour. He first accused his friends of judging him, and later appealed to the Lord as his Judge and Refuge.

Job had three basic complaints:

- (1) God did not hear him (Job 13:3, 24; 23:3-5; 30:20);
- (2) God was punishing him (Job 6:4; 7:20; 9:17) and
- (3) God allowed the wicked to prosper (Job 21:7).

His defences were much longer than his friends' accusations. In the process of defending his innocence, he became guilty of self-righteousness. Job was not perfect. He had his weaknesses too.

We cannot take it for granted that we will always enjoy prosperity and health, and that no trouble will ever come our way. God was still good towards suffering Job. He was moulding Job's faith and helping him to be stronger in the Lord.

THOUGHT: How can I know the strength of my faith if I am not tested?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for all the trials that Thou hast sent me, for Thou used them to strengthen my faith.

WHERE IS GOD WHEN I AM SUFFERING? (II)

After Job’s five-chapter closing monologue (Job 27-31), another friend, Elihu, freshened the air with a clearer perspective and more accurate view than those offered by Eliphaz, Bildad or Zophar (Job 32-37). He told Job that he needed to humble himself before God and submit to God’s process of purifying him through trials.

After Elihu’s preparatory discourse, God Himself ended the debate by speaking to Job from the whirlwind. In His first speech, God revealed His power and wisdom as Creator and Sustainer of the physical and animal world. Job responded by acknowledging his own ignorance and insignificance and offered no rebuttal (Job 40:3-5). In God’s second speech, He revealed His sovereign authority and challenged Job with two illustrations of His power to control the uncontrollable. This time, Job responded with a repentant heart by acknowledging his error (Job 42:1-6). If Job could not understand God’s ways in the realm of nature, how then could he understand God’s ways in the spiritual realm?

God made no reference to Job’s personal sufferings and hardly touched on the real issue of the debate. However, Job caught a glimpse of the divine perspective; and when he acknowledged God’s sovereignty over his life, his worldly goods were restored twofold. Job prayed for his three friends who had hurt him deeply, but Elihu’s speech was never rebuked. Thus, Satan’s challenge became God’s opportunity to build up Job’s life. *“Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy”* (Jas 5:11; 1:12).

Where is God when we are suffering? He is right there with us! In fact, He will never leave us nor forsake us. May we learn to trust in the Lord and not waver in our faith in Him. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is suffering a biblical commandment?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for allowing me to suffer.

SAVIOUR, SAVIOUR, HEAR MY HUMBLE CRY (I)

As we read the words of David in Psalm 38, we find this godly, righteous man at the end of his tether. He was downcast and discouraged, and his struggle had drained him of all strength. We can imagine David slumped in great despair. Perhaps what troubled him most was that he could not understand why he was suddenly cast so low. This man hungered for the Lord, pouring out his heart daily in prayer. He humbled himself to God's Word. He had written psalms that extolled God's glory, but now, in his depressed state, all he could do was cry, "Saviour, Saviour, hear my humble cry. Why are all these happening to me?" Like David, many discouraged Christians today try to figure out why a child of God can feel so empty and broken in spirit. David probably counted every failure, sin and foolish deed in his life. At some point he must have thought: "O Lord, have all my reckless acts left me so wounded that I am now beyond hope?" David reasoned that God must be chastening him (vv 1-4).

David's description here is something that the children of God may face at some point in their life. The time may come when a believer is overwhelmed by this sudden and unexpected experience: discouragement. The spirit of discouragement is Satan's weapon against God's people. Most often, he uses it to try to convince us that we have brought God's wrath upon ourselves by not measuring up to God's holy standards. Is David's humble cry your cry because of discouragement?

Discouragement can be so serious that David, a man after God's own heart, was dumbfounded in God's presence (vv 13:14). Here is a discouraged man who has no answer or argument left. "Lord, I'm too down and discouraged to even lift my hand up to you. I cannot pray, because I am too confused to speak. I am drained and empty. I have nothing more to say." When you are reduced to nothing, that is when God's power is made perfect. Come to Him, you are just within reach of God's powerhouse! Do not wait anymore. Come!

THOUGHT: How can I encourage myself in the Lord?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy encouraging words.

MONDAY, MAY 16

PSALM 38

PHILIPPIANS 1:27-30

*“And in nothing terrified by
your adversaries.”*

SAVIOUR, SAVIOUR, HEAR MY HUMBLE CRY (II)

The great prince of preachers, Spurgeon, has led multitudes to Christ through his powerful sermons. But he himself suffered great discouragements. He often felt he had accomplished nothing in his life. He once lamented: “I’ve got the blackest heart in Britain.” Frequently he would go into his garden, raise his hands to God and cry: “Lord, I’ve never desired You more, yet my spirit has never been so low. Why is this happening?”

David voiced the universal cry of the righteous soul that endures an attack of discouragement: *“I am ready to halt, and my sorrow is continually before me”* (v 17). The word *“halt”* here in Hebrew means *“fall.”* Was David really at the end of his rope? When you are discouraged, you will not feel like praying. When communication breaks down, you are on your way to a losing battle. That happens to married couples or parents and children who start a cold war and never intend to stop. After days, weeks, months, years passed by, the gap grows wider and wider until there is nothing left in the relationship to hold on to. The same can happen to us. We must not let our communication with God suffer. We must still go to the secret place and be in our Saviour’s presence. Do not try to pray our way out of despair. This is the time for God’s Spirit to work in us. Let Him lift us out of the pit. When we go to the Lord, be honest with Him. Tell Him how weak and helpless we feel. Let Him know: “Lord, I’m filled with dryness. I have no more strength left. If I am ever going to get out of this depression, only You can make it happen, not I.” In such low times, the Lord is very patient with us. He knows our condition, and He sympathises with us. So, simply enter into His presence and trust His Spirit to do in us what He has been sent to do. It does not matter how cast down we are. The comforting truth is that God will never forsake us! Don’t forget this!

THOUGHT: “Self help with God’s help is the best help.” (Timothy Tow)

PRAYER: Father, may Thy power be made perfect in my weakness.

TUESDAY, MAY 17

PSALM 38

2 CORINTHIANS 7:8-11

*“For godly sorrow
worketh repentance ...”*

SAVIOUR, SAVIOUR, HEAR MY HUMBLE CRY (III)

Confession and repentance are almost indispensable in every prayer that we utter to God. David said in verse 18: *“For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin.”* Both confession and repentance are found here. We have to make known our sin to God. Every one of them. Every evil thought; every unedifying word uttered from our crooked mouth; every sinful act, behaviour and attitude that could have stumbled another. We have to declare all these to God. Are you doing it? Will you do it? We are to repent! There is no point confessing without repenting. David said, *“I will be sorry for my sin”* (v 18). When you say sorry, do you really mean it? If you are caught by the traffic police for speeding and you are slapped with a fine, do you immediately zoom off and speed again? Are you really sorry about it? There is no point confessing without a mind to repent.

A heart that confesses and repents is what qualifies as a humble cry. *“Saviour, Saviour, hear my humble cry.”* The cry will not be humble at all if there is no confession and repentance. You need to do it right. It may not be right before men but it must be right before God. David has sinned, but he did not continue in it. He confessed and he repented by doing that which was good in the eyes of God (v 20).

At the same time, it does not mean that if you do good, people are going to thank you or appreciate you. We must be prepared for that. If others have been kind to us and we have received good things from them, we must never forget to thank them and appreciate them. But when it is we who have done good to others and yet are not appreciated, we must not take it to heart. Do not do good because you want praises, or be recognised. Do not do good for self-glory. Do good because we love God and one another in Christ. God will bless that goodness when we do it for Christ.

THOUGHT: How can I do good to those who do not like me?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I confess all my sins to Thee. May Thy Spirit help me to remember Thy Word that I might not sin against Thee.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 18

PSALM 92

2 THESSALONIANS 2:13-17

*“But we are bound to
give thanks always to God ...”*

THE SABBATH SONG (I)

According to the preface, Psalm 92 is a song for the Sabbath day. This is the only psalm in the Bible that is identified as having been written for the Sabbath day, a day that God has appointed for our rest. We are to cease from all the daily work of life, and give special attention to God. This special psalm was written for that day. As this psalm is also a prayer, we should study it prayerfully and even pray along with it.

The psalmist said, *“It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD.”* Then he shifted into prayer: *“. . . and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High . . .”* (v 1). It is right that our songs of praise to God be in the mode of prayer. Our prayers should be praises, and our praises should be prayers. In addition, thanksgiving should be a prayer and praise, and our prayer and praise should be expressions of thanksgiving!

Take note of when the psalmist said we should give thanks: *“To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night”* (v 2). What a great approach to each day. Not just on the Sabbath day, but every day when we wake up in the morning! As we are about to face a new day, not knowing what that day may hold, it is good that the first thing we do is to thank Him in advance for His *“lovingkindness.”* We may not know what the day holds for us, but we know that whatever it holds, He is the One who holds the day. He promises to fill it with His lovingkindness. At the end of the day, it is good that we thank Him by declaring His faithfulness every night. It is good to look back at the end of the day, recount the ways that God has proven His faithfulness to us, and thank Him for each of them.

THOUGHT: If thanksgiving can minister to the heart, is there such a thing called the ministry of thanksgiving?

PRAYER: Father, may Thou fill my heart with thanksgiving today.

THURSDAY, MAY 19

PSALM 92

COLOSSIANS 3:17

“...giving thanks to God and the Father
by him (Jesus Christ).”

THE SABBATH SONG (II)

In the original language, “*night*” is in the plural; which may suggest many “watches of the night.” There may be many times in the night when we awaken to fret over the events of the day, or worry over what may happen tomorrow. It is good, even at such times, to declare His faithfulness, even at every watch of the night! In other words, our expressions of thanks are to be offered to God all the time, both day and night.

Take note of how in verse 3 we are to give thanks: “*Upon an instrument of ten strings, and upon the psaltery...*” We are to express our praise and thanks to Him skilfully, thoughtfully and purposefully through music and song. The “*instrument of ten strings*” was something like a guitar. The “*psaltery*” was a hollow-bodied instrument. These suggest that melodies and beautiful tunes were offered to God. The psalmist also says, “*Upon the harp with a solemn sound.*” The word used suggests the idea of a meditative or instructive kind of music. Perhaps the “*harp*” was a solemn kind of instrument that was suited for this. This suggests that we are to offer praise and thanks to God in a solemn, beautiful and meditative melody.

The psalmist is not giving us a list of what instruments we are to use to worship God today. These musical instruments are used according to the period and culture of his time. Today, we have ours and we use the organ and piano which are sufficient to aid us in our worship of God. Even if we do not have any of these instruments, we can still worship the Lord in spirit and in truth. It should not be such that without them, we cannot worship God. We can still offer praise and thanks to God in a solemn, beautiful and meditative melody, even without any musical instruments. Let us also give thanks and sing with melody in our hearts to the Lord (Eph 5:19). Amen.

THOUGHT: Is it wrong to “Christianise” secular music?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to worship Thee with thanksgiving.

THE SABBATH SONG (III)

Take note of why in verse 4 we are to give thanks: *“For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands.”* This is why we can give thanks to God in times of trial and trouble. Our thanksgiving has content. It has good reasons. We are to be glad and triumph in the works of God’s hands. There are five reasons why it is a good thing to give thanks to God.

The first reason is that His works were great and deep. The psalmist said in verse 5, *“O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.”* The greatness of God’s works shows the power of His hand. There is nothing that He cannot do. And when He does it, He does it perfectly. There is not one shade of imperfection but every single thread is woven together perfectly and beautifully. That is the greatness of God’s works. God’s thoughts do not merely describe His good idea, but rather His thoughts are well-thought-through plans and purposes. Nothing is left out. He shows His redeemed people that the plans and purposes that He has designed for them are much deeper and more profound than they could possibly imagine.

The best time to give thanks to God is not after a trial but during the trial. That is also the most difficult. This is because in order to do so, we need to have a faith that is strong enough to admit the profound depth of His plan for the good of His people. With this good faith, we are able to thank Him for how far beyond our grasp His good plan is, even before we witness it! Of course, after the trial is all over, and the dust has settled, and after we finally see what He was doing through it, we should be able to declare and say, *“Oh, the depth of Thy wisdom, O Lord! How unsearchable Thy wisdom truly is, and how profound Thy ways truly are! Thy thoughts and plans and designs for me are deeper than I ever could have known!” Amen.*

THOUGHT: Many forget to give thanks to God for what He has done for them. Am I one of them?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that Thou art my everything.

SATURDAY, MAY 21

PSALM 92

REVELATION 15:4

*“Who shall not fear thee, O Lord...?
for thou only art holy ...”*

THE SABBATH SONG (IV)

The second reason why it is a good thing to give thanks is that the sovereignty of God stands forever (vs 7-9). We live in a time when people live as they please, and sadly the way they are pleased to live is in rebellion against God’s holy standards.

It is hard to be “thankful” at a time when the world makes you feel like a loser for living a righteous life before God. But it is then that we read these very sober words from the psalmist: *“When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever”* (v 7). The Bible warns that the wicked will have their day in the sun. They will spring up or sprout, but their glory is only like “grass.” It will be short-lived, and will vanish away easily. That is biblically true of the temporal glory of depraved and wicked man. They may “*flourish*” in this world for a time, but the psalmist says that they flourish for that short time only and that *“they shall be destroyed for ever.”*

God’s holy standards may be rebelled against, but He Himself will never change. He is the same yesterday, and today, and forever (Heb 13:8). He remains forever the “*most high*” God. Nothing can alter Him or His holy reign. We live in a very dark world; and sometimes the darkness seems overwhelming and overpowering. But how thankful we can be that, even in the midst of such great darkness, God Himself never changes. He always remains “*most high for evermore.*” One day, His Son will come and rule upon this earth as the perfect and righteous Judge. His holy standards will prove to stand forever. We can be assured that in that day, at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10-11). Our confidence in God’s sovereignty will stand supreme. Amen.

THOUGHT: Since God is sovereign, why did He allow evil to exist?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for Thy sovereignty in my life.

THE SABBATH SONG (V)

The third reason why it is good to give thanks is that God preserves His people (vs 10-11). In contrast to the wicked, the psalmist praised God and said, *“But my horn shalt thou exalt like the horn of an unicorn: I shall be anointed with fresh oil”* (v 10). In the Bible, the *“horn”* is a mark of power and strength. The unicorn is a strong animal, but its strength is symbolized by its horn. And the anointing of oil is a mark of God’s appointment and call. So here we see the symbols of the high calling of God upon the life of those He redeems. While they are in the midst of this dark and sinful world, He has exalted their horns like that of a unicorn and has placed His anointing upon them as if with fresh oil. What a great privilege it is to be called by Him! God’s preservation of His redeemed people is a reason why we must thank Him.

The fourth reason why it is a good thing to give thanks is that God blesses His people (vs 12-14). The psalmist described God’s favour to His people beautifully in these verses. He said, *“The righteous shall flourish like the palm tree: he shall grow like a cedar in Lebanon”* (v 12). A palm tree is a symbol of richness and beauty, and a cedar is a symbol of strength and stability. Together, they give us a picture of the wonderful, future state of glory that we, who are God’s redeemed people, whom He declares *“righteous,”* will one day enjoy. We will flourish and be beautiful. We will remain strong and stable. What is more, we will be greatly privileged and honored. The psalmist went on to say, *“Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God”* (v 13). We will not be just any tree growing in just any place! We will be growing and flourishing in God’s house. We may not be much to look at right now. We may at times feel very weak as we go through the trials of life on this earth. But we are assured of a great and glorious destiny. We will be raised from the grave to dwell forever with Him in His house, and flourish before Him in His courts! Amen.

THOUGHT: Can a child of God stop growing spiritually?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for strengthening me spiritually.

THE SABBATH SONG (VI)

The glorious prospect in eternity is not the only thing we have to be thankful for. The things in verses 12 to 14 also describe who we are right now. We are the recipients of His favour in Christ today. And a life that is lived in the blessings of His favour in Christ will prosper, even now. The psalmist said, *“They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing”* (v 14). Our spiritual fathers had walked in God’s favor through Christ for many years, and what a blessing they are! They are still fruitful, fresh and flourishing. They are still “young” in the Saviour’s love. They demonstrate that after many long years, His favour still rests upon them to prosper their souls. Here then is another thing that we can be thankful for, even in a time of trial. God’s favour through Christ will always result in prosperity. Some of it we may experience now, but we will certainly experience the full abundance of it throughout eternity! How much we will have to be thankful then! How much we should be thanking Him now!

And finally, we have one more reason why it is good to give thanks to God. It is that His works always declare His righteousness (v 15). No matter what we may experience in life, no matter what trial may come our way, we can be assured that all of it will eventually prove that God was righteous in all His dealings with us. The psalmist said that *“Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; To shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him”* (vv 13-15). All that He does with us, or through us, or allows to happen to us, will result in proving that He is upright, good and righteous. What a privilege to forever be the living proof of God’s righteousness! How we should thank Him for this! It is always good to give Him thanks because He is always good! He is always loving. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is there an end to my spiritual growth?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to grow in grace.

TUESDAY, MAY 24

PROVERBS 8:17

1 JOHN 4:7-21

“His love is perfected in us.”

I LOVE THEM THAT LOVE ME

Wisdom loves her lovers and seeks her seekers. One is already wise when he seeks to be wise. Such is Solomon’s case. Instead of power and wealth, he asked God for wisdom. Was he not wise to ask for wisdom? God granted him his wish and he became the wisest man ever to live on earth. Why did Solomon seek for wisdom? Was it not because he loved wisdom? If not, why did he seek wisdom?

What is true of wisdom in general is true of the wisdom embodied in the Lord Jesus Christ. You seek wisdom, you seek Christ. That’s it! Him we are to love and to seek, and in return we shall enjoy His love and find Him. One of God’s attributes is wisdom. He is the all-wise God, and we are to seek Him. And not just seeking Him, but to seek Him early. It is never too soon to seek the Lord. Early seekers make certain finders. We should seek Him “*early*” by diligence. Hebrews 11:6: “*But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.*” Diligent businessmen are early risers, and diligent saints seek God diligently. Those who find God to be their enrichment give their hearts to seeking Him. We must seek Him first, and thus earliest.

The blessing is that He will be found. He reveals Himself more and more clearly to our search. The motivation of our search for Him is love. Why? “*We love him because he first loved us*” (1 John 4:19). How do we know this? By His Son Jesus Christ, we know and we are left with no excuse. Happy men who seek Him are those whom God loves because He loves them who love Him. Do you?

THOUGHT: I made the choice to believe in Jesus when I was touched by the gospel. Yet it is the Holy Spirit who gave me full power to make that choice.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I have found Thee because Thou hast first found me.

GOD AND THE MEANING OF LIFE (I)

Do you have any worry? Are you happy? King Solomon had explored every aspect of life. And here is what he found in Ecclesiastes 1:2: *“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”* Why such a letdown? Is not life fun and laughter? Is not life exciting and great? Solomon, having received the highest wisdom from God and under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that enabled him to pen this book, certainly has the answer for us.

Vanity is emptiness. Everything and anything is nothing but emptiness. That was what Solomon was saying. But why? Everything and anything that man can work for and have will not belong to him forever. Since this is the case, why does man have to work so hard for it and own it in the first place? Is this not vanity? Indeed it is. Naked came we into this earth, and naked we return to dust leaving everything behind. There is absolutely nothing we can carry out of this world. Vanity is indeed vanity.

At this point in your life, what would it take for you to be happier and not have worries? Some may say more wealth and better health. Some may go for fame and power. Still others may want more time to do the things they enjoy. Everyone has different desires and expectations. But even if we could achieve everything, would we really be happy? If yes, then it is most logical to keep pursuing the things we are pursuing and teach our children to do the same. But if not, is there something that we must do? God has given us the answer. And it is our duty to search for the answer. Otherwise we will have no peace and we will find no rest for our weary souls. Are you ready to find out?

THOUGHT: Is it possible for a sinner to live a meaningful life without God?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, my heart is filled with thanksgiving because Thou hast made my life full of meaning.

GOD AND THE MEANING OF LIFE (II)

The word "vanity" in Hebrew contains the thought of a vapour that is useless and so putting your trust in it is meaningless. In Ecclesiastes 2:4-8, Solomon listed all the different things he had tried. See if you can identify with him. *"I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees: I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts."*

Yet, all these are meaningless. When Solomon died, his son took over and wrecked everything within a few short years. What is the point of Solomon working so hard all his life? Some might argue that since we cannot take any thing with us to the grave, let us enjoy as much as we can while we are still alive. Solomon tried that too. He said, *"So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun"* (Eccles 2:9-11). If satisfaction is in pleasure, Solomon would have found it. If satisfaction is in being the greatest king, the wisest man, or in today's terms, the greatest sportsman or the richest man in the world, Solomon would have attained it. But so what? Solomon said, *"... for all is vanity and vexation of spirit"* (Eccles 2:17).

THOUGHT: Since it is a good thing to enjoy the fruits of my labour, how should I go about enjoying them?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee that I can enjoy the fruit of my labour.

FRIDAY, MAY 27

ECCLESIASTES 2:18-26

PSALM 146:5

*“Happy is he that hath the
God of Jacob for his help...”*

GOD AND THE MEANING OF LIFE (III)

Just work and do not think so much! This was Solomon’s attempt to throw himself into his work. Just do it! That turned out to be vanity too. We read, *“For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity”* (Eccles 2:22-23).

So, what are we living for? If leaving a legacy is meaningless, if pleasure for pleasure’s sake is meaningless and even work is meaningless, what is left for us? Only God can make it meaningful for us. This is because God has a loving purpose in making earthly things meaningless to us. He wants us to let go of them and hold on to Him. Only when we do that will God give our lives true meaning and happiness.

We read in the text, *“There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit”* (Eccles 2:24-26). Our lives have meaning once again because God has made it meaningful for us. Do not live your life without God. Serve Him. Commune with Him. Read His Word. Sing praises to Him. Speak for Him. Bear a good witness for Him. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If life is meaningless without God, why are there so many enjoying life but are yet without God?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to look to Thee (and not his sinful world) for satisfaction.

SATURDAY, MAY 28

ECCLESIASTES 2:26

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14-17

*“For we are unto God a
sweet savour of Christ...”*

GOD AND THE MEANING OF LIFE (IV)

Wait! Did not verse 26 say, *“This also is vanity and vexation of spirit”*? This refers to the sinner and not the man who is good in God’s sight. There is a great difference between a sinner and a saint. One is out of God’s favour, the other is God’s beloved. To one, all that he does is emptiness, while to the other, all that he does is full of meaning. It does make a difference whether one is in Christ or not.

Therefore, all who are in Christ should not worry because God our Heavenly Father cares for us and always gives us what we truly need, even when He is testing our faith to make us strong. So, be happy, for we who believe in Him have the blessed hope of eternal life! Also, be happy by giving thanks to God because He has made our life meaningful. And so, we work as hard as Solomon with all the wisdom God gives us. In all of this labour, be happy! Sometimes we may not see the fruit of our labour. But it is definitely not in vain when our labour are in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58).

Does this mean that a believer’s life is like a walk in the park or like sitting on the beach enjoying the clear blue sea and cool of the day? Do not let anyone deceive you with the health-and-wealth gospel. There is more to it than that. There will be crosses. There will be storms. There will be turbulence. There will be days when you feel like you are spinning around with no safe anchor. But even then do not worry, be happy! God’s love for us has not changed. He promises to go through the valleys with us. Life without God is an empty trip, while life with God is a meaningful journey. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: “Just do it”? Or “Just do it in the Lord”?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I can trust in Thee and be happy, and not worry.

I AM MY BELOVED'S AND HIS DESIRE IS TOWARD ME

The Song of Solomon is a poem about the love of Solomon and a Shulamite woman. It is a description of pure love and the sacredness of marriage. At the beginning, the couple longed for one another. They met and conversed, both expressing their mutual affection. In the end, Solomon married the Shulamite woman. The Song of Solomon pictures the purity of love which is unknown in today's world. Lust is love in the world of Hollywood, and this has gripped many hearts and ruined innumerable lives. The pure love between Solomon and the Shulamite describes God's love for His people, the invisible church or bride of Christ. The highest and most intimate love among men is the love between husband and wife; God has commanded that only in death are husband and wife allowed to part. This love is akin to the love of God which has been shed abroad in every believer's heart at the time of salvation. It is an unconditional and sacrificial love given by God to all believers. This is the love of God that caused Him to give His only begotten Son to die for our sins!

Song 7:10 describes Solomon and the Shulamite woman as husband and wife. The love between them had matured and strengthened. The Shulamite woman declared Solomon as her beloved. And the word arrangement is such that the Shulamite woman says, "I am my beloved's beloved." They loved each other very much. It was a mutual love. The love between them was strong and real. Every act was an expression of their love for one another. The Shulamite woman was confident of Solomon's love for her. Pure and sincere love evokes such assurances in the heart of the one who is loved. This must be the love between every Christian husband and wife. In the same way, we belong to God because of Christ. Since we are His beloved, He will take care of us. We must never doubt His love. This must be our assurance as Christians, because of God's love for us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Can God's love for me be measured?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy everlasting love.

MONDAY, MAY 30

ISAIAH 43:1-21

1 SAMUEL 3:1-18

“... Speak, LORD, for
thy servant heareth...”

I HAVE CALLED THEE BY THY NAME

It moves our hearts when a person of high status and authority remembers us and calls us by our name. It is especially so when you are in a crowd and he stops in front of you and addresses you by name correctly. Immediately, your pride is filled to the brim and you feel so important that day. Are we delighted that God knows us and calls us by our names? Even though it is unlikely that today He will call out to us in an audible voice out of heaven just as He did to young Samuel, He calls us in His still small voice through His Holy Spirit upon our hearts. Thank God that we are important enough to Him that He is willing to call us personally. God is interested in us and He desires us to be interested in Him as well.

There are two different types of calling: general call and special call. It is the second type of call that is referred to here in Isaiah 43:1. It is a special call that is enabled by the Holy Spirit when He opens up the spiritual deafness of His people in order that they might hear Him calling out to them clearly. Not every one receives this special call. There are many who may have heard the true gospel of Jesus Christ many times over, but they still do not believe. This is because they simply lack this special call. There are others who heard Christ for the first time and yet believe. It is because of the Holy Spirit's removal of their spiritual blindness and deafness that they may receive salvation. God decides who He will call. This decision was already made even before the foundation of the world.

It is our privilege and honour that our Creator is truly interested in us personally. He knows us better than we know ourselves. It is He who keeps watch over us and leads us each step of the way. When we go astray, He ensures that we are brought back to His righteous path. All thanks and praise be to God. Amen.

THOUGHT: Can God issue a special call without the general call?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for calling me personally.

TUESDAY, MAY 31

ISAIAH 61:1-3

LUKE 4:16-19

*“This day is this scripture
fulfilled in your ears.”*

BEAUTY FOR ASHES

Jesus turned to Isaiah 61 and read it out to the people on one particular Sabbath in a synagogue (Luke 4:16-19). This passage is significant because it is the prophecy that was fulfilled by Christ. God has appointed Him to preach the gospel to the people by which they will find salvation in Him. These people have been described as the *“meek ... broken-hearted ... captives ... them that are bound.”* The tactic of God’s enemy is to bring fear and oppression unto God’s people. But Christ has come to protect us and save us from the hands of the enemy.

The Lord promised *“beauty for ashes”* in verse 3. What are *“ashes”*? They are nothing more than what remains after something is burnt completely. It is a picture of what was before. Something was lost and you long for it, but you can never have it back. And so it symbolizes a form of grief and loss. That is why in times of mourning, people put on sackcloth and ashes to express their sorrow and loss. Here is a beautiful play on words. Instead of expressing sorrow and loss, the word *“beauty”* gives a contrasting meaning. Christ gives His mourners the beautiful *“garments of salvation”* (v 10) which is also His *“robe of righteousness.”* Instead of mourning, it is a time of rejoicing.

The word *“beauty”* means embellishment. When Christ promised that beauty shall be added to the ashes, it means that these ashes will be changed and transformed into something that is beautiful to behold and admire. When that happens, there will be outbursts of joy and shouts of thanksgiving and great celebration. So then, *“beauty for ashes”* is not a fantasy but a reality. However, only those whom God loves and calls are part of it. Are you part of it?

THOUGHT: Is it reasonable for me to ask God why He did not choose every one to be saved?

PRAYER: Father, I thank Thee for calling me to Thy salvation.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1

JEREMIAH 31:1-4

ROMANS 3:10-19

"There is none that seeketh after God."

GOD LOVES WITH AN EVERLASTING LOVE

Jeremiah was a contemporary of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel. His ministry stretched from 627 BC to about 580 BC. King Josiah of the southern kingdom, Judah's last good king (640 to 609 BC), instituted spiritual reforms when the book of the Law was discovered in 622 BC. Jeremiah, who was on good terms with king Josiah, lamented when the king was killed in 609 BC in a battle with Egypt. The northern kingdom, Israel, was already conquered by the Assyrians since 722 BC. Jeremiah prophesied that Israel will one day be restored because God has said. *"...Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee"* (Jer 31:3).

God declares the depth of His love for His people. His love for them began from eternity past and will last to eternity future. His love, like God Himself, is eternal, unchangeable and sovereign. God loves, not only for some time now or in time past, but for all eternity with the same strong love. Since His love stems from eternity past, it could not be due to anything that man has done. Some believe it is because God has already foreknown that there are those who will seek Him diligently and therefore He loves them in return. This is a fallacious belief of God's election and love. By this, it could imply that God did not love the rest as He also foreknew that there are those who would not seek Him diligently. Is this true? The truth is: *"...there is none that seeketh after God"* (Rom 3:11). No, not even one! (see Ps 14:1-3; 53:1-4; Rom 3:10-19). Those whom God has chosen before the foundation of the world are such people who have no ability to seek God at all. And therefore God said unto them, *"...Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love..."* (Jer 31:3). Period. How can we thank God enough? How can our worship, praise and honour of Him be ever enough? Let us dwell in the everlasting love of our God and enjoy Him both now and forevermore. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why does God love me with an everlasting love?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy eternal love for me.

THURSDAY, JUNE 2

LAMENTATIONS 3:19-26

ROMANS 5:1-11

*“While we were yet sinners,
Christ died for us.”*

WITH LOVINGKINDNESS HAVE I DRAWN THEE

There is none that seek after God. It is purely His election and love that stand independently from eternity. God’s love is not passive but active. God acts upon His everlasting love. God says, “...*therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee*” (Jer 31:3). Because none will seek after God or do anything to incline towards Him, God therefore draws man to Himself. God is under no obligation to draw us to salvation. He could have left us to perish in our sins. Yet God’s love calls out to us unconditionally.

Imagine God standing on one side and a sinful man on the other, with no connection between them. Then, God stretches forth His hand to pull the man to His side. The illustration of the mother spider shows this unbroken cord of love for her baby spiders. Each baby spider is connected to the mother spider through a silky cord on their bodies. When danger is sensed, the mother spider would pull the cords to draw her frightened babies to safety. God too has drawn us to Himself with an unbroken cord of love.

It is with lovingkindness that God draws us to Himself despite our disobedience, rebellion, ungodliness and wickedness. Apostle Paul declares aptly, “*But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us*” (Rom 5:8). Why should God love us? Who do we think we are? We are such unworthy and undeserving people! Why should He love us with an everlasting love? Yet He does, and He draws us to Himself. How can we ever thank Him enough? What we truly deserve is the most horrible death: to be thrown into the lake of fire and be condemned forever. But out of His mercy and grace, He chose to give us what we do not deserve, and that is His everlasting love. All thanks and glory be to God for His everlasting love, even His unbroken cords of love for us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Christ has died for me but He has also lived for me and is still living for me.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy unbroken cord of love.

FRIDAY, JUNE 3

LAMENTATIONS 3:19-26

PSALM 34:8

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

GOD IS GOOD

As suggested by the title “Lamentations,” this book is filled with sorrow and grief over the destruction of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. It was a sad day for God’s people. They became a people who have no more freedom, dignity, strength and power. Their city gates were desolate. Their cities were laid in ruins. Some of the people were exiled, many were enslaved, and all led miserable lives under their cruel lords. How can it still be said, “*The LORD is good...*” (Lam 3:25)? It is indeed hard. Yet, it was what prophet Jeremiah declared in Lamentations 3:25. Is God good when His people suffer? Is God good when the enemies are destroying His people? We must understand why God’s people suffer and come under the hand of their enemies. It was all because they have chosen to sin against God and to grieve His heart by running to other gods. God has already warned them against spiritual compromise and adultery. But they failed to take heed. Therefore, God has to wake them up by letting them fall into the hands of their enemies. It was through intense oppression and persecution that they remembered God and then sought Him for deliverance. Did God answer them? Yes! This is the wonderful testimony to God’s children that indeed God is good.

God is good to them that wait upon Him. Too many prefer to run ahead of God and pierce themselves with pain and sorrow in the end. But those who wait upon God patiently receive His manifold blessings. God is also good to them that seek Him. In order to take this step of seeking God, you need the spirit of humility and submission. Too many have sought after God because they are more interested in His blessings. The object of our seeking must always be God, and none else, not even His rewards. May our good God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: How long do I have to wait upon God? How far should I seek Him?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to wait upon Thee and to seek after Thee.

SATURDAY, JUNE 4

EZEKIEL 14:21-23

HEBREWS 12:5-13

*“God dealeth with you
as with sons...”*

GOD’S GOOD PURPOSE

The Holy Land was stained with wickedness, spiritual filth and adultery. God had sent His prophets to warn and exhort His people to repent and return to Him. But they refused. As such, enough was enough, God had to pour His wrath upon them. God withheld His blessings and protection, and allowed Jerusalem to fall into the hands of the enemies. That was it! Affliction, misery and sorrow were all over the land.

Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem in three stages. First, in 605 BC, he overcame Jehoiakim and carried off key hostages, including Daniel and his three friends. Second, in 597 BC, the rebellion of Jehoiakim and Jehoiachin brought further punishment, and Nebuchadnezzar made Jerusalem submit a second time. He carried off ten thousand hostages, including Jehoiachin and Ezekiel. Third, in 586 BC, Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the city after a long siege and disrupted all of Judah. Is there no more hope for Jerusalem, the city of God? Well, do not forget that the God of hope is still in control.

Ezekiel’s message is one of horror and hope, of condemnation and consolation. In other words, God will destroy but He will also save; He will punish the evildoer but He will also deliver those who repent. The affliction that God’s people face is always to bring them to the safe arms of God for peace and comfort. Those who reject Him will suffer and perish in the end. Although many still harden their hearts against God, a remnant will turn to Him for safety. Though small, this remnant will bring comfort to God’s people and be a living testimony of God’s grace and mercy.

Trials are good because they will expose the heart of man and show his true colours. Only those who truly trust in the Lord by faith will pass the test. This is God’s good purpose. Are you going through some tough tests now? Will you pass? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is it possible for false believers to pass the test of faith?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to understand Thy good purpose for me.

GREATLY BELOVED OF GOD WITH AN EXCELLENT SPIRIT

In three places (Dan 9:23; 10:11,19), the angel Gabriel told Daniel how much he meant to God. To be called the greatly beloved of God is an affirmation of God's love for Daniel. This is a great honour and privilege.

Daniel had witnessed the downfall of Jerusalem and was deported to Babylon. He lost his home and was given no chance at all to rebuild it. His heart must have been filled with anguish and disappointment, but there was nothing he could do. In the midst of this, he continued to put his faith and trust in God. In Daniel chapter one, we read how he was determined not to defile himself with the king's food. The meat could have been offered to idols or were forbidden under Moses' dietary laws. So Daniel refrained and ate only vegetables, while maintaining a good spirit throughout. When the going gets tough, it is easy to give up and compromise one's faith. However, Daniel kept his heart right and served through the reign of three successive kings: Nebuchanezzar, Belshazzar and Darius. Daniel was fully submissive to God and chose to let God lead him instead. How was Daniel able to do it? What was his secret? He was a cut above the rest because of his excellent spirit (Dan 6:3).

It is easy to become disappointed with life. Husbands feel that they are always being nagged at. Wives do not feel loved or appreciated. Parents become disappointed with their children. Children are bitter against their parents. Why are these in our homes today? Are we not the beloved of God? Have we forgotten to make God the Centre of our lives? Let us ask the Lord for this excellent spirit that has helped Daniel to go through all the difficult times victoriously. May we be like Daniel, the greatly beloved of God with an excellent spirit, be it at home, in school or at work. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Are there any conditions for a Christian to meet in order to be called the beloved of God?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for being the Centre of my life.

MONDAY, JUNE 6

DANIEL 10

JOHN 16:23

*“Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father
in my name, he will give it you.”*

GOD ANSWERS PRAYER

Most people know about God answering King Solomon’s request for wisdom. Few know that Daniel also had asked God for wisdom to understand why the holy city and the temple were still in ruins and not rebuilt. This was when Daniel received a vision during the reign of Belshazzar. This vision disturbed Daniel very much because he understood what it meant, but he could not understand why it was so. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned. You may have great knowledge and understanding, able to analyse things well and come to good conclusions. Yet without God’s wisdom, you will never understand God’s purposes. This was what Daniel desired to know. And God was pleased to grant him his desire. God therefore sent an angel to enlighten Daniel. And he was strengthened to receive the explanation as well as a prophecy of the end times. And this stretched to the last chapter of the book of Daniel where he was asked to prepare for his own death and to hope for the new day (Dan 12:13).

God answers prayers. And the popular belief is that God’s answer to every prayer is either “Yes,” “No” or “Wait.” However, it is clearly taught in the Scriptures that God will answer “Yes” to His children. The humble and right attitude of prayer was set by Jesus when He prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. He prayed: *“Not my will but thine be done.”* How will such a prayer be answered? Is it a “Yes,” “No” or “Wait”? We know the answer. God’s answer will always be “Yes”! God’s will will always be done. Jesus says, *“... Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you”* (John 16:23). This is the case when we pray for God’s will to be done. Are you praying for God’s will to be done in your life? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Since God’s will will be done anyway, is there then a need for me to pray?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for answering my prayers.

TUESDAY, JUNE 7

HOSEA 2:14-23

HOSEA 11

“Behold, I will allure her...”

BEHOLD, I WILL ALLURE HER

The book of Hosea is about God’s love for His people. If you have not read it, do read. The evidences of the unfailing love of a husband towards his wayward, immoral and undeserving wife are easily seen. Hosea, whose name means “Salvation,” is a prophet of the northern kingdom. He is called by God to prophesy during Israel’s last hours. Israel was enjoying a time of prosperity and economic growth. But inwardly, she was morally corrupt and spiritually defiled.

Hosea’s marriage is used as an illustration of God’s marriage with Israel. It is a story of one-sided love and faithfulness that represent the relationship between Israel and God. As Gomer was married to Hosea, Israel was married to God. Gomer went after other men just as Israel went after other gods. Even after the adultery of Israel, God pursued her and took the initiative to restore His relationship with her. In Hosea 2:14, He says, *“I will allure her.”* Hosea was again commanded by God to illustrate this to the nation Israel by taking back Gomer, his adulterous wife. Gomer was not the one seeking reconciliation. It was Hosea, the offended and innocent party, who took the initiative. He wooed her and bought her back for fifteen pieces of silver and some barley (Hosea 3:2). Imagine Gomer’s response to Hosea’s wooing. She must have considered Hosea to be a fool from all points.

But this is a clear picture of God’s unconditional love. The most “illogical” thing happened! Even when we do not seek Him but are actively rebelling against Him, He reaches out to us for us to be reconciled to Him. He is eager to forgive and to shower us with His grace and mercy. He is courting and wooing us back into the covenantal relationship with Him. And the divorce, or the judgment, is His discipline designed to bring us back to a relationship with Him. He is always waiting for us to respond positively to Him. Will you respond positively to Him?

THOUGHT: Since God’s love is unconditional, why then must sinful man repent of his sins?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy unconditional love.

I WILL LOVE THEM FREELY

Hosea's life illustration through his marriage with Gomer was a rebuke from God to Israel. At last, Gomer was restored to Hosea and she remained faithful to him to the end. Israel was rebuked for her unfaithfulness and hardness of heart and failure to return to God. God continued to call out to her and gave her the chance to repent. There is absolutely nothing that can stop God from loving His own. But Israel's iniquities continued to stand in between. The only way out is faith. Faith will enable Israel to call out to God and say, *“Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously...”* (Hosea 14:2). God is the initiator of restoration. However, it requires us to respond in repentance. We must seek Him and know Him. If not, we will be destroyed for a lack of the knowledge of God. Knowing God is our business. We must seek Him.

God desires to love us freely. Does this imply that He is not able to love us freely? We must understand that God cannot compromise His holiness and close an eye to our sins. No matter how strong His love is, our sins will separate us from Him, and He demands justice and righteousness. In fact, God demands a payment for our sins. Romans 6:23 says, *“For the wages of sin is death...”* Death is the payment for our sins! But thank God for the second part of Romans 6:23, *“...but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”* This is the way of escape. Christ took away our death punishment (spiritual) by bearing all our sins on the cross on our behalf. Only when Christ stands as our Mediator between us and God, God is able to love us freely again for our sins have been paid for in full. What is still standing between you and God? Is it your sin? Or is it Jesus Christ? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: How is Jesus' physical death able to save me from eternal death?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for loving me freely through Jesus Christ.

THURSDAY, JUNE 9

JOEL 1

JOEL 2:1-27

*“Fear not, O land; be glad and rejoice:
for the LORD will do great things.”*

THE DAY OF THE LORD (I)

Disaster struck the southern kingdom, Judah, without warning. An ominous black cloud descended upon the land – the dreaded army of locusts. In a matter of hours, the cloud of insects stripped the grapevines and fruit trees, and ruined the grain harvest. The economy was brought to a further standstill by a drought and the people were desperate.

Joel, God’s prophet during the reign of Joash (835–796 BC), seized the opportunity to proclaim God’s message. Although the locust plague and drought had been terrible judgments, God’s future judgments during the day of the Lord will make these plagues pale in comparison. *“The day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?”* (Joel 2:11). Even so, it was not too late for the people to repent and return unto the Lord. The Lord was quick to restore and bless the land. He caused the enemies to flee, and prosperity and safety were brought back to the land again.

The condition for such redemption is the repentance of the people. This is a fair demand. You obey, you will be blessed. You disobey, you will be cursed. We do not pick and choose which commandment to obey and which to put aside. We are to obey all His commandments happily and faithfully. Many have looked upon the Bible as a spiritual menu booklet. They pick only items that are easy to keep, and that are convenient and will not cause too much of a hassle to them. Our attitude toward God has become a by-the-way thing, requiring little or no sacrifice from us. There is no consecration or commitment to the Lord. Do we need the “plague of locust and drought” to fall upon us to remind us to walk close to God according to His commandments? I pray and hope not. May God be merciful unto us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Every disobedient act comes with a consequence.

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, may I not sin and provoke Thee to anger.

FRIDAY, JUNE 10

JOEL 2:28-3:15

JOEL 3:16-21

*“The LORD will be hope of his people, and
the strength of the children of Israel.”*

THE DAY OF THE LORD (II)

God’s gracious warning will fall on deaf ears. Ultimately, the swarming, creeping, stripping and detestible insects will come again in a fiercer and more terrible form. It is described as *“the great and the terrible day of the LORD...”* (Joel 2:31). When that day comes, only those who repent and call upon the name of the LORD shall find help and deliverance. Judgment is sure, but who shall escape?

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31). Why does sinful man not take heed and repent that he may escape this terrible judgment? It just shows how bent he is to rebel against God, just like Satan and his hosts who have chosen the path of destruction. For Satan and his fallen angels, they have taken a path of no return. Their destiny is fixed. They stand condemned forever and no hope of redemption is offered to them. But for man, redemption is offered to him. Yet, man foolishly rejects God’s offer.

While the LORD will be the hope of His people, there is no more hope for those who reject Him. While the LORD will be the strength for His children, there is no strength for those who refuse Him. There is everything to gain for those who would turn to God for salvation. To those who harden their hearts against God, they suffer great loss, even their souls.

Do not wait for that great and terrible day to come before you make that decision to believe in Christ. You may not get out alive. By the time you think you are ready, it may be too late. The door of grace may forever be shut to you. There will be no more second chance then. The chance and opportunity is now. Today is the day of salvation. God loves you enough to warn you. Will you receive Jesus and be saved today? May God help you. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is the day of the LORD a single day or a period of many days?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, take away my unbelief.

SATURDAY, JUNE 11

AMOS 3

1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-4:2

*“Moreover it is required in stewards,
that a man be found faithful.”*

MORE IS GIVEN, MORE IS REQUIRED (I)

Amos prophesied *“in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake”* (Amos 1:1). It was a period of national prosperity and the economy was booming and boundaries were expanding for Israel. But with prosperity came increased materialism, immorality and injustice. During those years, Assyria, Babylon, Syria and Egypt were relatively weak in politics and military might. Thus, the people of Israel found it difficult to imagine the disaster predicted by Amos. It was only three decades later in 722 BC that Israel fell to the Assyrians.

Is the statement “More is given, more is required” true? It is true in the sense that the more responsibilities one is given, the more work is to be done to ensure these responsibilities are not neglected or compromised. Israel enjoyed material blessings and peace in the land. Such prosperity should not be taken for granted. Believers should not turn to the Lord only in times of adversity. We are to remember God also in times of prosperity. It is during good times that believers often fail to see the greater need to look to God, to be thankful and grateful for His blessings, and to fear Him and keep His commandments.

Israel took Amos’ message of warning lightly. There was no sign of repentance, and therefore judgment fell upon them terribly. Such an example is a warning to us. More is given, more is required and expected. Whatever blessings the Lord has given us, let us not keep for our own but also share the blessings with others. May we also not keep ourselves so busy with our secular endeavours that we have no time for God. It is high time we reorganize our life and work schedule to spend more time with God in prayer, and in His Word and works. Do not forget to share your blessings too. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Am I living for Jesus by-the-way?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to share Thy blessings with others.

MORE IS GIVEN, MORE IS REQUIRED (II)

Everything that Israel ought to be doing, they did not. Instead, they did the opposite. Instead of seeking good, they sought evil. They might not necessarily be out to do evil. In fact, they could be most sincere and passionate in going about doing good. What they were doing may be "good" in the eyes of man, but not in the eyes of God. They would rather compromise their faith because of their friendship with the heathen world. And due to the accumulation of material gains, they did not mind pursuing other gods. As a result, they caused the land to be spiritually corrupted, filled with idolatry. It was no wonder that God's glory left them. It was not as if Israel had no guidance and spiritual support. Israel had God's judicial and moral laws to govern them and to lead them on the righteous path. Not only that, the ceremonial law reminded them of the living and true God that was still in control of their lives. And yet, they forgot Him and chose to live ungodly lives before Him.

They were the ones who "forced" God to judge them severely. If only they sought God and repented of their sins, they could have enjoyed the great blessings and sweet fellowship with Him. Only judgment and destruction await them now. The sins of Israel were heaped as high as heaven, eg: empty ritualism, oppression of the poor, idolatry, deceit, self-righteousness, arrogance, greed, materialism and callousness. The people had repeatedly broken every aspect of their covenantal relationship with God. Nevertheless, God's love was evident in His offer of deliverance if the people would turn back to Him. God graciously sent Amos to warn the people of Israel of their fate if they refused to repent. Unfortunately, they rejected his plea, and therefore the course of judgment could not be altered. God had loved them so much that He gave them chance and chance again. But they blew it. And so they only had themselves to blame for refusing to return to God. They would rather face the terrible judgment of God. May we take heed not to take God's grace for granted. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is it better to ask God not to bless us too much?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to appreciate every blessing from Thee.

MONDAY, JUNE 13

OBADIAH 1-14

ROMANS 1:18-32

*“For the wrath of God is revealed
from heaven against all ungodliness
and unrighteousness of men...”*

EVIL SHALL NOT PREVAIL (I)

A struggle that began in the womb between twin brothers, Esau and Jacob, ultimately led to a struggle between their respective descendants: the Edomites and the Israelites. The first tension between them arose during Israel’s forty-year wilderness journey. The Edomites refused to let Israel pass through their land, forcing them to take a longer and more dangerous route. Though the Edomites had every right to do so, they failed to show kindness to God’s people. Since the time of Esau, the bitterness of the Edomites towards Jacob and his descendants had never ceased. The second tension happened when Israel was oppressed by their enemies and the Edomites did not raise a finger to help Israel. And they did not just look on. They joined the enemies to afflict Israel. No wonder God had to judge Edom.

For Edom, there was no plea to return, no word of consolation or hope. Edom’s fate was sealed, and no deliverance was possible. God will bring total destruction upon Edom, and there will not even be a remnant left. Edom shall disappear from the face of the earth. The book of Obadiah draws a picture of Edom’s day in court, complete with her arraignment, indictment and sentence. Obadiah, a prophet of poetic justice, described how the Judge of the earth will overthrow the pride and wickedness of Edom and restore the house of Jacob. In other words, evil shall not prevail. God will surely take vengeance for His suffering children. Indeed, those who bless Israel shall be blessed. But those who curse Israel shall be under the wrath of God and His severe judgment. God loves Israel and will protect her and punish those who trouble her.

God will take care of us because we are His children. If you remain disobedient and do not belong to God, be very fearful because God will surely judge you. Evil shall not prevail. Amen.

THOUGHT: Since I believe that good and evil exist on earth, can I agree with the Yin-Yang concept?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to do good according to Thy will.

TUESDAY, JUNE 14

OBADIAH 15-21

HEBREWS 2:1-4

“How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...”

EVIL SHALL NOT PREVAIL (II)

The closing verses in the book of Obadiah give hope to God’s people that they will repossess not only their own land, but also that of Edom and Philistia. The judgment on Edom was a consolation to afflicted Israel. God was using the destruction of the enemies to heal Israel’s wounds. Evil shall not prevail. God’s love, justice, righteousness and goodness will overshadow all earthly powers.

The Edomites will receive the same plight as Israel’s because they rejoiced at the oppression of Israel. Never did they realize that they will be treated in the same manner. What a humiliation and shame for laughing at the downfall and calamities of others! The day of the Lord’s vengeance shall ensure that Edom’s ultimate destruction will come to pass. Such a “compensation” was more than enough for Israel’s comfort and relief.

“And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame...” (Obad 18). The fire is the agent that burns things up. One who is a fire is totally different from one who is on fire. One is burning others, while the other is being burnt. Here, God empowered Israel to burn her enemies. Edom will be burnt till even the ashes will not be left. The final victory was given to Israel. Not only will Israel be back in the Holy Land, the territories of the enemies shall also belong to Israel. All her enemies shall be overcome and none shall escape. Indeed, God is great and gives victory to His children. Evil shall not prevail. God and His goodness shall prevail forever. Are you disheartened because those who do evil seem to be prospering while those who do good are being oppressed and not acknowledged? God knows and He will reward accordingly, both good and evil. To those who do evil, you can be very sure they will receive their deserved “reward.” As for those who trust in the Lord and do good, God will surely bless them. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: My sins were forgiven when I believe in Jesus. So why do I still have to account for all my wrongdoings?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that evil shall never prevail.

GOD IS DETERMINED TO SAVE AND NOT DESTROY (I)

Jonah was an unusual prophet. He did not obey God’s call promptly. Not that he did not love to serve God, he was just not comfortable with what God had instructed him to do. Jonah’s refusal to be sent to Nineveh was understandable. Any Jew would also refuse. Nineveh was such an ungodly Assyrian city. Moral corruption, immorality, cruelty and all kinds of vices could be found there. Jonah must be thinking that they were unworthy even to hear the gospel message, much less to be saved. And so, instead of going north-east to Nineveh, he boarded a ship to sail westward to Tarshish. This going in the opposite direction was a deliberate act of Jonah not to heed God’s calling. It is like saying, “O God, I can obey any thing that You want me to do, but not this one thing!”

But God did not let Jonah go. Who can run away from the presence of the Lord? That was what Jonah was trying to do (Jon 1:3,10). God was determined to save the Ninevites and not destroy them if they should repent. Is not God gracious, merciful and loving even to those who are not His chosen people? This is what Jonah must learn about God and His love. But, he learnt it the hard way.

Jonah boarded a ship that was westbound. Soon, it was in trouble because God sent a great wind (Jon 1:4). When one is not following the will of God, not only does he bring trouble to himself, he will also affect others. So was the case of Jonah. The crew and passengers were all in it with Jonah and they were about to perish in the rough seas. It was only when Jonah was thrown overboard that they were saved. Perhaps, not only physically, but spiritually saved too since they experienced the power of God and they bowed to God in worship. Even in Jonah’s disobedience, God used him indirectly to call people to salvation. God is so good. He is most gracious, merciful and loving. Amen.

THOUGHT: Why did God choose Jonah to be His messenger to Nineveh?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thou art gracious, merciful and loving to me, an unworthy sinner.

GOD IS DETERMINED TO SAVE AND NOT DESTROY (II)

Jonah should have been listed in the Guinness Book of World Records for surviving a three-day-three-night ordeal in the belly of a fish. It was a miracle! However, that is not the focus. The prayer made inside the big fish was the key. There in the fish belly, Jonah was thoroughly convinced of the Lord’s sovereignty and how he had foolishly challenged Him. After the fish spat him out, Jonah obeyed when the Lord called him again.

Without delay, he headed towards Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. On arrival in Nineveh, the *“exceeding great city of three days’ journey,”* Jonah cried out to the Ninevites with God’s message of doom. However, he was a messenger without a “personal touch.” He came to them preaching with no expectation of any good response or to see any repentance or conversion. How could God’s messenger do that? Yet this was Jonah. It was manifested even more clearly when, to his surprise, the Ninevites believed the God of his message. They responded by fasting and repenting of their evil. This was what every true prophet and messenger of God prayed to see. But not Jonah. Instead of seeing with great delight the people’s repentance and souls wonderfully saved from the wrath of God, Jonah was angry and disappointed.

Jonah was not hopeless. He was just being petty. The care that he had over the gourd and the sadness he expressed when the gourd withered revealed his heart of compassion. And this was what God wanted to show him: the compassion He had towards the Ninevites who were once evil but who have now repented and believed in Him. God was determined to save and not destroy. Like Jonah, we too must learn of God’s graciousness, mercy and love (Jon 4:2). May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: The book of Jonah ends abruptly. Did Jonah remain in Nineveh to conduct a mass follow-up on the new converts?

PRAYER: O Heavenly Father, Thou art my compassionate God.

ONLY GOD CAN BE TRUSTED

Micah was the prophet of the downtrodden and exploited people of Judean society. He prophesied during the reign of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He ministered to both the northern and southern kingdoms. For the northern kingdom, it was already in bad shape. The entire kingdom was in great turmoil under the oppression of the Assyrians. For the southern kingdom, it was a time of great social injustice. There were those who imposed their power upon the poor and weak for selfish ends. The kingdom was filled with corrupt rulers, false prophets and ungodly priests. Micah exposed all of them, including the judges who were bought by bribes and merchants who used deceptive weights. The pollution of sin had permeated every level of society in Judah and Israel. The whole earth was called to witness God’s indictment against His people (Mic 1:2; 6:1-2). The guilty verdict led to a sentence of destruction and captivity.

It was indeed very frightening to live in such a land of immoral filth and injustice. There was literally no one you can trust, not even your best friend or your own blood kinsmen. For all you know, you may be betrayed for some dishonest gains. The only one who can be trusted is God. No wonder Micah says in Micah 7:7, *“Therefore I will look unto the LORD; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me.”*

Are you putting your trust in man? Beware! Only God can be trusted fully, and you can be absolutely sure He will not fail you. However, at the same time, we are not to be paranoid and start seeing anyone and everyone around us as dishonest, untrustworthy, harbouring evil and ulterior motives, etc. We are to trust God more than we trust man. Trusting God involves no risk, but full assurance. Trusting man involves risk and there is no guarantee that he or she will remain faithful and honest to the end. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is God teaching me not to trust man at all? For example: Should husband and wife trust each other?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to trust Thee fully.

SATURDAY, JUNE 18

MICAH 6:1-7:20

EPHESIANS 2:4

*“He retaineth not his anger for ever,
because he delighteth in mercy.”*

GOD IS NOT UNREASONABLE!

Reading Micah 6, one can clearly see the picture of a courtroom setup. Israel was put on trial before the LORD in the presence of the “unshakable witnesses” (the mountains and the hills, and the strong foundations of the earth). God is bringing His complaint against Israel. Israel was invited to the witness stand to give her answer. Israel could not answer since God had done nothing evil towards her. God had been good and faithful. God had redeemed Israel from her harsh earthly master, Egypt. Yet Israel repaid Him with rejection and rebellion. God’s case against Israel was very strong. How did Israel respond? Did she humble herself and repent? Not at all! Israel responded arrogantly (Mic 6:6-7), as if God was so unreasonable. Israel seemed to be saying “God, you ask too much from us. Even if we were to give you thousands of ram, ten thousands of rivers of oil, and even our firstborn, you will never be satisfied.” Men in their depravity refused to change, expecting God to lower His standards for them. Sinful men had no case against God. God’s request for them was reasonable. What He expected from them went beyond the animal sacrifices and services. Micah 6:8: *“He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?”* God stopped the unreasonable accusation of Israel and answered her simply with what He actually required them to do. He required only three things: to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God. Israel had failed in all these. She was dishonest, cruel to her own countrymen, was proud and went after other gods. God had proved His case before the court. Israel was afflicted because of her sins. It was a just return for her evil and rebellion against God.

God is never unreasonable! His high standard proves His perfection in holiness, righteousness and truth. This is the perfect standard He sets for us. We have failed but Christ has succeeded. Have you put your trust in Jesus? Amen.

THOUGHT: Anything that is less than perfect cannot be God.

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to be perfect as Thou art perfect.

THE LORD IS SLOW TO ANGER

Nineveh was given the privilege of knowing the one living and true God. Under Jonah's preaching, this great city of "three days' journey" had repented, and God had graciously withheld His wrath. However, in less than one hundred years, Nahum, a prophet who ministered during the early reign of King Josiah, proclaimed the downfall of this same city. The Assyrians had forgotten their revival and had returned to their old ways of violence, idolatry and wickedness. As a result, God used Babylon to destroy the city till no trace of it remained. This was a prophecy fulfilled in painful detail. However, the destruction of the capital city of Assyria was a message of comfort and consolation to Judah and all who lived in fear of the cruelty of the Assyrians.

God is fair. As He is slow to anger, He gave Nineveh sufficient time to repent. When Jonah finally went to preach to the people of Nineveh, the whole city responded with repentance and humbled themselves before God. Only then the judgment of doom was not meted out. But their humility soon turned to arrogance as Assyria reached its zenith as the most powerful empire in the world. The judgment of doom once again was pronounced. Unlike Jonah, Nahum did not have to go to Nineveh, but declared his oracle from afar. There was no hope of repentance for Nineveh. It shall surely be destroyed.

Though the Lord is slow to anger, it does not mean He will forever open His door of grace. One day it will be closed. The door was finally closed to unrepentant Nineveh and they paid a high price for it. The same God is still slow to anger towards us. Are there sins that you have committed and have not repented of? Beware. His wrath is burning against you. The fact that you are still alive and not consumed by Him means He is still slow to anger. But once the grace period is over, and if you are still unrepentant, you will end up like Nineveh. Will you repent? Amen.

THOUGHT: Why did God not send Nahum to Nineveh?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may I repent of all my sins and submit to Thee.

MONDAY, JUNE 20

NAHUM 3

ROMANS 3:1-23

“For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

THE PREY DEPARTED NOT!

Nahum closed his brief writings with God’s reasons for Nineveh’s complete destruction. It served as a warning to all who took God for granted. Knowledge may be power but it does not necessarily save. The people of Nineveh had the knowledge of God since Jonah had earlier ministered to them. In less than two generations, they abused this knowledge. Instead of worshipping God and doing good works, they went against Him and afflicted His people. It has been described as *“the prey departeth not”* (Nah 3:1). Their cruelty was so severe and great that none could escape. God must judge them. This was the message of consolation and hope to the *“prey.”* Just when we think we are overwhelmed by the enormous problems and difficulties we face, God is there for us that we may hide safely in Him.

Seeing how Jonah, Obadiah and Nahum ministered to the people, we see a unified theme of the way God wants us to deal with our enemies. Jonah demonstrated that God wants to use us to reach our enemies, and that God loves our enemies just as much as He loves us. Obadiah condemned Edom for not helping God’s people when they were in dire need. This teaches us that we are also to help one another. Nahum taught Judah to trust the LORD for vengeance, and that the wicked will be punished in the end.

We must never take things into our own hands and run ahead of God. *“...Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord”* (Rom 12:19). The wicked shall never escape and those who trust in Christ shall be saved forever. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: There are so many Christian martyrs in church history. Why did God let them perish and not save them?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, may Thy grace be sufficient for me to stand firm against the fiery darts of the evil one.

TUESDAY, JUNE 21

HABAKKUK 1

HABAKKUK 2

“The LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him.”

GOD IS SOVEREIGN

Habakkuk was one unique prophet who just could not wait to see God’s hand come to punish erring Judah. Although Habakkuk had repeatedly warned God’s people to turn from evil and to repent, they stubbornly refused to change their sinful ways. It was then that Habakkuk questioned the Lord as to when He was going to judge this sinful generation. As stubborn Judah did not respond to the warnings of God, God had to wake them up from their slumber. God revealed to Habakkuk that He would raise up the Chaldeans to afflict Judah (Hab 1:6). The Chaldeans will come swiftly, violently and completely. This coming storm from the east will be God’s judgement on Judah’s crimes.

However, this led Habakkuk to further ask God as to why He would use a more wicked nation to punish Judah. Will the evil Babylonians be punished too? Habakkuk stood upon a watchtower to wait for God’s reply (Hab 2:1). God answered with a series of five woes: greed and extortion (Hab 2:9-11), violence (Hab 2:12-14), immorality (Hab 2:15-17), and idolatry (Hab 2:18-20). The Babylonians would not escape from the judgment of their sins. Although Judah was guilty of the same offences and stood under the same condemnation, God chose to deal with His people first. The Lord concluded His answer with a statement of His sovereign majesty: *“But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him”* (Hab 2:20).

From all angles, there is without a doubt that God is sovereign. He is in full control. This is why we His creatures must behold Him with great fear and trembling. Who can stand before Him? There is nothing that happens without His knowledge. Let us bow down and worship Him. If there is any sin in us, let us confess and repent before Him. *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Heb 10:31). May God be merciful. Amen.

THOUGHT: Since God is sovereign, who am I to question Him for what He is doing in my life?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I praise Thee that Thou art my sovereign God.

DO YOU REALLY KNOW GOD?

Habakkuk began by questioning God, but he concluded by writing a psalm of praise for the person (Hab 3:1-3), power (Hab 3:4-12), and plan (Hab 3:13-19) of God. He was thoroughly convinced and acknowledged God’s highest wisdom in the coming judgment of Judah by the hands of the Babylonians. Although it terrified him that the Lord was sending a severe judgment upon Judah, he knew and trusted the Lord for salvation. God’s sovereignty and His redemptive work in the past gave Habakkuk confidence in His divine purposes, and hope at a time when he would otherwise despair. Habakkuk declared, “*Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation*” (Hab 3:18).

Habakkuk desired God to wake Judah out of their wickedness so that they may come to repentance. His desire was not that they be destroyed and perished without redemption. He knew God’s hand would save as history had proven it. He hoped God would use a “sugar cane” instead of the rod of destruction. Habakkuk was looking forward to the spiritual revival (Hab 3:2) and that Judah would be like “*the just (who) shall live by his faith*” (Hab 2:4).

It is amazing that in this short psalm or prayer which Habakkuk uttered before God, how much he knew the attributes of God: God is holy (Hab 3:3-5), powerful (Hab 3:4), sovereign controller of all creation (Hab 3:6-11), the Destroyer of the wicked (Hab 3:12-16), salvation for the anointed (Hab 3:13), and strength for the weak (Hab 3:19). And from chapter one, Habakkuk knew God as everlasting (Hab 1:12) and pure (Hab 1:13). Habakkuk’s high knowledge of God brought him to a higher level of intimacy and close relationship with his God. How much do we know God? It is more than just the mere knowledge of Him. Are we really convinced and fully convicted that He is what the Scriptures have described Him to be? Is He real in our life? May the increased knowledge of God lift us to a higher plane of spiritual maturity. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: Will I ever have full knowledge of God?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to know Thee more from Thy Word.

THURSDAY, JUNE 23

ZEPHANIAH 1

ZEPHANIAH 2

*“Seek ye the LORD,
all ye meek of the earth...”*

GOD STILL BOTHERS TO WARN

Prophet Zephaniah traced his lineage back four generations to Hezekiah. That made him a member of the royal family and a distant cousin of King Josiah. In the opening verse, the prophecies of Zephaniah were given *“in the days of Josiah.”* Josiah came to the throne in 639 BC when he was only eight years old. It was likely that Zephaniah had an important influence and spiritual impact on the young king.

As a whole, the book of Zephaniah is a fierce and grim book of warnings about the coming day of the Lord. Desolation, darkness and ruin will strike Judah and the nations because of the wrath of God upon sin. Zephaniah looked beyond judgment, however, to a time of joy when God will cleanse the nations and restore the prosperity and peace of His people, Israel. The impact of the evil reigns of Manasseh and Amon proved too strong on Judah that it never really recovered spiritually. What was seen as a revival was merely outward change, but the inward heart of corruption still lingered among the people. Josiah’s reforms were too little, too late, and the people reverted to their idolatrous worship and falsehood soon after Josiah was gone. The Lord had placed upon the prophet Zephaniah the burden of declaring His judgment and doom upon the guilty Jerusalem and Judah. It was a warning that the time was up and that doom was imminent to all *“them that are turned back from the LORD; and those that have not sought the LORD, nor enquired for him”* (Zeph 1:6). Zephaniah could have pronounced the judgment that was coming without any call for the people to repent, just as Jonah did. Chapter 2:1-3 reveals that Zephaniah appealed to the people to seek the Lord. We see the enduring love and mercy of God that He still bothered to warn them. He still gave them the last hour to come back to Him in repentance. *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance”* (2 Pet 3:9). Amen.

THOUGHT: Am I testing the Lord’s patience by keeping my secret sins?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to come to Thee with true repentance.

FOR THE REMNANT’S SAKE

The judgment is not only to punish those who sin and rebel against God, but also to sift out the remnant of God who belong to Him. Where would the crown be without the cross? It is the Lord’s will that His children have to go through the fire, so that out of it, they will become purer and stronger than before. It is also a test to see if they are true believers or not. There are many pseudo-Christians today. They talk like one, they act like one, they sing like one and they may even pray like one. But they may not necessarily be truly saved and born again. They themselves know and of course God knows too.

We should not be afraid when troubles come, but be strong in the Lord and let our faith in Him be revealed. Only those who are not His children need to fear. God promises to gather all those who “*call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent*” (Zeph 3:9). God’s children will not be found alone. They will be able to carry one another’s burdens together as God’s children.

Zephaniah closed the book with a psalm of praise (Zeph 3:14-20). This psalm is a song of rejoicing by Zion and the remnant of Israel. There are six promises God gives to His children:

- 1) God’s deliverance – God will remove the calamities, wars, afflictions, enemies, etc.
- 2) God’s presence – There will be no more separation between God and man. Man is able to enjoy God forever and ever in His holy presence.
- 3) God’s delight in His children – He will even burst into singing for them!
- 4) God’s comfort for the sorrowful – All tears will be wiped away and all will be at peace with God.
- 5) God’s freedom upon those that are locked up in prison.
- 6) God’s honour for those who persevered – They will no more be shamed.

May the remnant of God find peace and rest in these promises of God. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is there such a thing as the “remnant of the remnant”?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that I am part of the remnant.

SATURDAY, JUNE 25

HAGGAI 1

1 THESSALONIANS 1:9

“...and how ye turned to God from idols
to serve the living and true God.”

CONSIDER YOUR WAYS

The Jews were exiled throughout the Babylonian and Persian empires for seventy years. It was in 538 BC that the king of Persia issued a decree to allow the Jews to return home. In the first return, the exiles numbered only 42,360 (Ezra 2:64). Under the leadership of Zerubbabel, they began rebuilding the temple of God. The rebuilding works were hindered by their personal affairs. As a result, after having only completed the temple foundation, they forsook the rebuilding of the temple. It was only resumed fifteen years later when a prophet named Haggai came and exhorted the people to restart the rebuilding work. It is very easy to be distracted when we are serving the Lord. Personal ambitions and pursuits to satisfy the lust of our flesh can be very real. That was the case with the Jewish returnees. They began well but lacked focus on the rebuilding work. They were distracted and began to build “*ceiled houses*” for themselves and claimed that the time for building the temple had not yet come (Hag 1:2). God then withdrew His blessing and they sank into an economic depression. Because of their indifference to God and their self-indulgence, they did not even realize what the real reason was for their decline. God had to wake them up through His prophet Haggai, calling them “*to consider* (their) *ways*.” Zerubbabel the governor, Joshua the high priest, and all the people responded when their spirits were stirred up, that is, they were provoked and pricked in their conscience. After twenty-three days, they began to work on the temple again.

How are you serving the Lord today? Are you giving Him leftover time and strength? Are you serving Him half-heartedly? Are you serving Him out of convenience? A service that is without sacrifice is hardly a service. And if you think you have already given so much to serve the Lord, think again! When is our service ever enough? God deserves the whole of us, all our devotion and self, and our whole heart. We will forever owe Him this debt for saving us from our sin through the Lord Jesus Christ. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: More love, more service. Less love, less service.

PRAYER: Father, help me to serve Thee whole-heartedly because I love Thee.

YET YE TURNED NOT TO ME

In a few short weeks, the enthusiasm of the Jewish returnees turned into discouragement. As they were building, they remembered the glory of the original temple built by Solomon, and bemoaned the pale look of the present temple in terms of its size and value. Solomon's temple was not only large but also filled with gold and silver, and beautiful cedars from Lebanon. But there were none of these in the present temple because the people were too poor. Even the trees were not imported but had to be taken from the nearby mountains (Hag 1:8). Their discouragement could only be removed by God. God's timely encouragement through Haggai ministered to Zerubbabel and Joshua. God assured them that He was with them, and reminded them of the covenantal relationship they had with Him since the beginning. God also promised that the time would come when He would fill this present temple with glory even greater and more glorious than Solomon's.

The returnees continued the rebuilding work into the third month. It was a wonder that the rebuilding work took such a long time to complete. There was another problem with the people. It was a spiritual problem. Their hands and legs might be at work, but their hearts were clearly not in it. God, who knew the inner thoughts and intents of men, testified: *"...in all the labours of your hands; yet ye turned not to me"* (Hag 2:17). God is seriously concerned about how we are serving Him. So what if we can produce the perfect result? If we do not do it willingly or purposefully for the Lord, it will still be in vain.

Let us turn to Him. There is a dire need for us to be sanctified by God's Word and Spirit, and be obedient (as did the returnees) to continue the works of God. In so doing, God's promise of blessings will come and His name will be glorified by our life and service. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: If my motive is right before God, does it mean I will never fail?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me serve Thee lovingly and purposefully.

MONDAY, JUNE 27

ZECHARIAH 7

1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

“...always abounding in the work of the Lord,
forasmuch as ye know that
your labour is not in vain in the Lord.”

TURN YE UNTO ME (I)

Zechariah was a contemporary of Haggai the prophet, Zerubbabel the governor, and Joshua the high priest. He ministered to the returnees while they were rebuilding the temple of God. He was commissioned by God to remind the people of the future importance of the temple. The temple must be rebuilt, for one day the Messiah's glory shall inhabit it. But future blessing is contingent upon present obedience. The people were not merely building a building, they were building the future. With that as their motivation, they entered into the building work with wholehearted zeal and hope, for their Messiah was coming.

The purpose of Zechariah was similar to Haggai's, that the returnees might turn to the Lord (Zech 1:3). The only difference was Zechariah provided a stronger and longer message of the coming Messiah. After the series of eight night visions on the future deliverance of Judah and its coming glory, the temple building was almost coming to completion in chapter 7. The returnees sent representatives to the priests and prophets to enquire if they should continue to fast in the fifth month as they had been doing for “*so many years*” (Zech 7:3). Seventy years had passed since the destruction of the temple (see 2 Kings 25:8-9), and now the rebuilding of the temple was near completion. Was it still necessary to mourn for the destruction? God's answer exposed the intents and motives of their hearts. God questioned them: “...*did ye at all fast unto me, even to me?*” The answer was obvious. The people's sorrows for the destruction of the temple was self-pity and not true repentance unto God. God reminded them that the reason why Jerusalem was destroyed in the first place was not that they did or did not keep fasts and other rituals, but that they lacked justice, mercy, and compassion (Zech 7:9-10). It is important that we examine our motives for serving the Lord. If it is not a pure motive, we must never think that we can ignore it for God will surely hold us accountable. If God were to judge, who can escape? May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: “You reap what you sow.”

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to serve Thee with a pure motive.

TUESDAY, JUNE 28

ZECHARIAH 8

1 TIMOTHY 1:5

*“Now the end of the commandment is
charity out of a pure heart, and of
a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.”*

TURN YE UNTO ME (II)

While the disobedience of God’s people in the past brought destruction to God’s city and God’s house, so the obedience of God’s people today will bring blessing. God means what He says and says what He means. *“Thus saith the LORD”* occurred a total of fourteen times in chapter eight alone. Eleven times the phrase described Him as *“the LORD of hosts.”* This shows that He is the God of a great angelic army. God is serious about the restoration of Jerusalem. The following are His testimonies: God was zealous for Zion (Zech 8:2). He will dwell in Jerusalem (Zech 8:3). The city will be well populated (Zech 8:4-5). The city will be marvellous (Zech 8:6). The Jews will be gathered back to Jerusalem (Zech 8:7-8). He gives encouragement to build the temple (Zech 8:9-13). He gives encouragement to speak the truth (Zech 8:14-17). Indeed, there is a call for truth, justice and peace among the people.

After the promise of Jerusalem’s future glory, the Lord reinstated the fasts. They would no more be fasts of mourning and sorrow. Now, they were to be fasts of joy, because Jerusalem would be regaining its future glory. But when would this future glory come? The returnees in Zechariah’s time thought that the fulfilment of the prophecy was at hand with the rebuilding of the temple. In part, perhaps, it was fulfilled as Jerusalem was rebuilt over the next several decades. However, verses 20 to 23 indicate that the final fulfilment of Jerusalem’s glorification is yet to come. As a result of the pure motives in their fasting and prayer, the Jews will serve as a witness to the nations. *“Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you”* (Zech 8:22-23). What a great testimony! Amen.

THOUGHT: Why is fasting not a common practice in churches today?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, help me to bear a good Christian testimony.

WHEREIN HAST THOU LOVED US?

The temple of God was finally completed under the leadership of Zerubbabel, Haggai and Zechariah in 516 BC. About 100 years later, whatever reforms that were seen in God's people in the Holy Land had become a thing of the past. This was because the people had allowed complacency and lukewarmness of their faith to set in. Priests and sacrifices were disregarded. The people were not bringing forth their tithes and offerings to God. There were mixed marriages with the pagan nations, and divorces among them were on the rise. The moral and spiritual condition of God's people had become worse and worse.

It was at such a time that Malachi was sent by God to rebuke the people for their sin. It was always man who caused a rift in his relationship with God. And yet sinful man turned around and accused God of not showing enough love. Man accused God: "... *Wherein hast thou loved us?*" (Mal 1:2). God has always loved man whom He made in His image. God has always loved him from eternity past and will love him in eternity future. God gave the example of Jacob and Esau. God chose Jacob but rejected Esau. This election was already made even before they were conceived in Rebekah's womb, showing that Jacob could not have done anything to deserve God's election. God loves Jacob and that is out of His sovereign will and good pleasure. God hates Esau and that means he is not the recipient of the special grace which Jacob has received. Esau received that which he deserved, and that is God's judgment. Jacob received that which he did not deserve, and that is God's salvation. God compared the Jewish returnees to Jacob for this is how God loves them. So, how can they accuse God of not loving them?

Israel is our object lesson. If God's choice of Israel made Israel God's people, then His choice of us makes us His people. He has done the same with us. And we need to remember that God's choice of us is not because of what we have done. May God help us. Amen.

THOUGHT: "Love sent my Lord to the cross of shame." (Avis B. Christiansen)

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for Thy love for me.

THURSDAY, JUNE 30

MALACHI 3

MALACHI 4

*“For I am the LORD, I change not;
therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”*

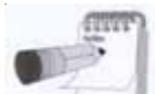
I WILL SPARE THEM

Through a series of questions and answers, God sought to pierce the Jews’ hearts of stone. But in each case, the divine accusations were denied: How has God loved the people (Mal 1:2-5)? How have the priests despised God’s name (Mal 1:6-2:9)? How have the people profaned the covenant (Mal 2:10-16)? How have the people wearied God (Mal 2:17-3:6)? How have the people robbed God (Mal 3:7-12)? How have the people spoken against God (Mal 3:13-15)? All these revealed the sad state of spirituality of God’s people. Rebellion had become more subtle than before. They dared to accuse God for what He was not. They dared to deny what they had blatantly committed against God. Clearly they had not really known Him and trusted in Him. They had taken lightly their own hypocrisy, infidelity, mixed marriages, divorce, false worship and arrogance. Facing this bunch of stubborn and rebellious people of the chosen nation, their destruction seemed to be the most logical and only solution for God. But God said, *“For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed”* (Mal 3:6). He chose to be patient and longsuffering because He was not willing that any should perish and be consumed by the eternal lake of fire. He said, *“And they shall be mine...in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him”* (Mal 3:17).

The problem did not lie with God, but with sinful man. So sinful had the nation of Israel become that God’s words to the people no longer had any impact. For four hundred years after Malachi’s ringing condemnations, God remained silent. Only with the coming of John the Baptist (Mal 3:1; 4:5-6) did God again communicate to His people through a prophet’s voice. God assured His people that a time was coming when the wicked will be judged and those who feared Him will be blessed. Malachi ended with the bitter word *“curse.”* Although the people were finally cured of idolatry, sin continued to abound among them. Only the coming Messiah can show them the way of escape. Amen.

THOUGHT: Is questioning God always wrong?

PRAYER: Heavenly Father, I thank Thee for sparing me.





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