

Faithbuilders Devotional Series

Through the Bible in a Year
A Daily Devotional

August

Pastors Mike Fast & David Curtis

Day 213 – August 1st
2 Kings 23:1-28; 2 Chronicles 34:29-35:19; Nahum 1-3 — His Wrath

“When God saw that the Ninevites from Assyria had put a stop to their evil ways, He had mercy on them and didn’t carry out the destruction He had planned.” That is a quote from the book of Jonah 100 years before Nahum and 150 before the fall of Nineveh and Assyria. Jonah had just preached the gospel to the 120,000 who lived in the city and they repented.

The Assyrians were a great but evil empire, but things changed for a time, long enough for God to temporarily put off His judgment. Yet after the passing of a generation or two, they returned to their evil ways and were in fact the tool God used to conquer Israel in 722 BC. Assyria was a proud and wicked empire and Nahum prophesied that God’s wrath was about to bring about their destruction, but listen to how Nahum describes God’s justice: “The LORD is slow to get angry, but His power is great, and He never lets the guilty go unpunished” (1:3). It’s slow but sure, great but direct, severe but fair.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 214 – August 2nd

Habakkuk 1-3; Zephaniah 1:1-2:7 — Questions and Answers

Imagine the opportunity to physically sit across from God and ask Him questions. Many times I've yearned for that kind of opportunity. Habakkuk is describing that kind of situation, via a vision.

Habakkuk asks God if He's even been listening to his calls for help. Habakkuk asks God if He's aware of all the sin and violence taking place in Judah. God answers with a yes, and that He is sending the Babylonians to punish Judah. I don't think Habakkuk liked the answer he got because his next questions were asking God why He would not protect and help Judah. That's kind of typical of us sometimes—we don't like the answer we get.

The majority of the first chapter contains the questions Habakkuk asked God, and the second chapter contains God's answers and what He will also do to Babylon. In the third chapter Habakkuk concludes the book with a prayer of triumph. His questions were answered and he rejoiced in his new understanding of God's love, power and sovereignty. Through faith and trust, may our appreciation of God grow each day.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 243 – August 31st

Ezekiel 32:1-16; 37:1-39:29 — Taking the Good with the Bad

In the movie, *It's a Wonderful Life*, the lead character George Bailey, played by James Stewart, makes the statement that he wished he had never been born. Those of you who know the movie know that George was given a glimpse of what his family, friends and whole town would have been like if he had not been born. Even though George Bailey hadn't led a charmed life or accomplished all he had hoped for, he had made a difference in many lives. He realized that life was in fact worth living and was given the opportunity to make things right.

That movie strikes a chord with all of us because we all wonder at times if our life has amounted to anything, if it would change the world if we weren't there.

As we think about consequences, we must recognize that they come in both good and bad varieties, that even the smallest action can be used by God to bring about a positive consequence in someone else's life. If you ever doubt the significance of your life, just think of George Bailey and the lesson he learned.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 242 – August 30th
Ezekiel 34:1-36:38 — Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a really curious thing. All this week we have been thinking about consequences in life. Now, forgiveness is like the exact opposite of consequences. When we are forgiven, the one who forgives decides not to bring about potential consequences against us. For example, some insurance companies offer what is called accident forgiveness. It used to be a guarantee that your rates would go up if you were in an accident, but if you have accident forgiveness, you don't have to face that consequence.

While Israel did endure consequences and discipline from the Lord for their actions, they did eventually experience restoration. The restoration was based on God's sovereign decision to forgive and to bless His people on account of His covenant faithfulness. It wasn't as if their consequences had changed because they had changed.

In the same way, we can experience forgiveness for our sins because of Jesus' atoning death on the cross. Because of God's sovereign decision to forgive and extend grace, we are freed from the guilt and consequences associated with our sin.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 215 – August 3rd
2 Kings 23:29-30; 2 Chronicles 35:20-27; Jeremiah 47-48;
Zephaniah 2:8-3:20 — My Decision

Zephaniah's prophetic message contains words of warning and judgment for Judah if they don't repent and humble themselves before God. It also contains words of judgment against the enemies of Judah. By the end of the book, a powerful message of hope becomes very clear. God is watching out for His people and in the end they will be brought home and restored before the LORD.

However, in the midst of this message, there is a small unassuming phrase that represents the core of this week's theme. God has been discussing His plans in the prior passage and then makes the comment in the middle of 3:8, "For it is My decision to..." Although some people may think that sounds insensitive, I find it reassuring. The God of creation who can see to the end of time has everything under control, and His plan will not be changed by our mortal short-sighted wishes to see something different. It is His decision. Trust Him with whatever you are struggling through right now.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 216 – August 4th

2 Kings 23:31-24:4; 2 Chronicles 36:1-5; Jeremiah 22:1-23; 25:1-14; 26:1-24 — It's In the Application

Jeremiah 26 elaborates on the evil of King Jehoiakim and the nation at that time. The prophet Jeremiah does exactly as God asks of him and stands before the leaders announcing the judgment of God if they do not change. For their wickedness, God was to destroy the temple at Shiloh. But what was the response after Jeremiah shared the message? “Kill him!” they shouted, and the people mobbed him. They threatened him and accused him of being a traitor, a capital offense.

Jeremiah reminded them that, if they repented, God would not bring about this disaster, but if they killed him it would only prove their evil. Some of the old men remembered how King Hezekiah had listened to a prophet and his kingdom was saved from disaster after they repented. So they let Jeremiah go. But they missed the point! They let Jeremiah live but they did not change, they did not repent. And within a very short amount of time they were conquered by Babylon. Lesson: Don't miss the point. Apply things personally.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 241 – August 29th

Jeremiah 42:1-44:30; Ezekiel 33:21-33 — Seeking Wisdom

“The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice” – Proverbs 12:15 (NIV)

Have you ever found yourself asking for advice and yet you have already concluded in your mind what you think should be done? This is precisely the situation that the leaders of Israel were in. When Jeremiah gave the answer from the Lord, they concluded that Jeremiah must be lying since it didn't match what they thought the Lord would say.

Seeking wisdom and counsel does absolutely no good if you don't listen to it. Routinely we are instructed in Proverbs to seek and listen to counsel.

While none of us can know exactly what the future will hold, it seems that a principle in life is that you will suffer consequences if you ignore wise counsel. It was true for Solomon's son Rehoboam who lost control of 10 of the 12 tribes of Israel because he ignored wise counsel. It was true for the remnant of Israel who ignored Jeremiah and suffered their fate in Egypt.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 240 – August 28th

2 Kings 25:22-26; Jeremiah 40:7-41:18; Lamentations 5:1-22; Obadiah — Compassionate

Response

When hurricane Katrina leveled the gulf coast and nearly destroyed the entire city of New Orleans, I heard someone comment on how they felt the city was being judged because of the excessive sin it promotes. Now I do not pretend to know why God allowed that hurricane and the massive damage that resulted, but I do know that it is not our position to sit back and gloat or to pass judgment even if God is suing the disaster to judge or discipline.

This was precisely what Edom did to Israel when God’s judgment was carried out by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Because Edom refused to act with compassion towards Israel, God communicated His judgment on them through Obadiah.

So, even if someone is enduring consequences brought on by their own actions, our response is still to extend compassion and mercy.

My Prayer List:

Day 217 – August 5th

Jeremiah 25:15-38; 36:1-32; 45:1-46:28 — The Purpose of His Wrath

“...The cup of anger from the LORD...” (Jer. 25:17)

If we were to make a list of what brings about God’s wrath, what would it contain? In our reading up to this point, here are some of the items we have read that have brought about His wrath: Apostasy (2 Chr. 34:24-25), Sympathy with evil (Lev. 10:1-6), Unfaithfulness (Josh. 22:20), Provocations (2 Kings 23:26), Fellowship with evil (2 Chr. 19:2), Mockery (2 Chr. 36:16), Idolatry (Judg. 2:11-14; Ps. 78:58-59), Intermarriage (Ezra 10:10-14), Profaning the Sabbath (Neh. 13:18), Speaking against God (Ps. 78:19-21), Sin (Num. 32:10-15), Unbelief (Ps. 78:21-22), Error (2 Sam. 6:7), Disobedience (Josh. 7:1, 11-12).

God’s wrath appears when His desires are ignored, yet even in that there is purpose. “According to the Scriptures, the wrath of God is God’s moral integrity.” His wrath is that attempt to bring man back on course when he takes a dangerous path. Though God’s wrath is powerful and great, it is also slow, fair and just.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Week 32 — August 6th-12th

2 Kings 24:5-9; 2 Chronicles 36:6-9; Jeremiah 7-20; 22:24-24:10; 29:1-31:14; 49:1-33; Daniel 1-3

As a pastor, I have often been reminded of the power and effectiveness of a fitting illustration. As a student, I am reminded of this principle time and again. My capacity to learn, retain and understand things increases with illustrations. As we read Scripture, it is very apparent that God is aware of that tendency in us. He is always using illustrations and word pictures or just simply showing us how to do something. For example, Jesus called out to them, “Come, follow me, and *I will show you* how to fish for people!” (Mark 1:17)

The reading passages this week will each focus on a specific illustration, object lesson or visual aid.

Bible Discussion Guide:

What purposes do illustrations serve?

Test your ability to retain the lesson by merely remembering the illustration. For example: What was the message/lesson of the broken jar?

How about the images of Nebuchadnezzar?

...broken heart?

Day 239 – August 27th

Lamentations 2:1-4:22 — Spoiled Children

“Why should we, mere humans, complain when we are punished for our sins?” – Lamentations 3:39

A sign of maturity in the process of human cognitive and emotional development is the ability to accept consequences for our actions. As a parent of young children, I am fully aware that this is an ability that children must learn as opposed to being born with it.

In the reading today it seems as though the nation of Israel is still learning this lesson. Like a spoiled child who has never been disciplined, Israel responded to the Lord with shock and dismay that He would pour out His anger on them.

In the New Testament, Peter picks up on this theme in 1 Peter 2:20-21. Peter says that you will be rewarded for suffering if you suffer for doing good. However, if we suffer for doing wrong there is no reward.

We all must deal with the consequences for our actions. It doesn't matter if we were right or wrong, every action will bring about some consequence.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

What is it that gives significance to a life?

...linen belt?

Is the responsibility of a watchman a fair one?

...potter at the wheel?

Consider the story of the negligent hotel employee. How might the verdict be different if he had alerted the guest, who then chose to not leave until the rope fire escape was the only viable option.

...shepherds?

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement:
“Successful evangelism is taking the initiative to share the gospel and leaving the results up to God.”

...spoiled figs?

An idol is anything you yield to, other than God. What do people have a propensity to yield to? What do you have a propensity to yield to?

Why do you think people continue to sin in spite of a full awareness of the consequences?

Jeremiah had a soft heart. Describe the benefits of a soft heart. Describe how it was displayed in the life of Jeremiah.

God is the potter and you are the clay. Are you 100% content with the Potter’s design? Are you content knowing God can do whatever He wants with you? Or does that sound too harsh?

Is it fair for a leader to be judged more strictly than others? Why or why not?

“Happy (blessed) are those whom you discipline, LORD” (Ps. 94:12). Does that really make sense? Define this statement.

Have you ever ignored good advice and regretted it? Could you share your story with the group?

What is the root reason for our unwillingness to accept someone else’s counsel? How can we change that underlying cause?

Can you share an example of a time when forgiveness doesn’t eliminate all consequences for our actions?

If consequences can still result even with forgiveness, what purpose does forgiveness serve?

If we forgive someone, what rights over that person do we voluntarily give up?

Make a list of people who have had a positive impact in your life. How would your life be different if one or more of those people never existed?

Week 35 – August 27th-September 2nd

2 Kings 25:22-26; 1 Chronicles 4:24-5:26; 6:3b-15, 49; 7:1-8:28; Psalm 137; Jeremiah 40:7-44:30; 52:28-30; Lamentations 2:1-5:22; Ezekiel 32:1-39:29; Obadiah

The reality of the exile has set in and life as the Israelites knew it is gone. They are now living with the consequences of their idolatry and disobedience to the Lord’s covenant. Thus, our theme for this week is consequences. Whether we want to admit it or not, we all live with consequences. As we will discover, some consequences are good and some are bad, and all of them are real.

Bible Discussion Guide

How do you generally deal with consequences? Do you get frustrated or do you accept them and work through them?

Sometimes we receive negative consequences, even if we do what is right. How does this possibility affect how you live your life?

What is your first reaction to witnessing someone else dealing with the consequences of life? Are you quick to judge or quick to help?

If God decides what consequences He will bring about for His purposes of judgment and discipline, what is our role to be?

Day 218 – August 6th

Jeremiah 19-20; Daniel 1 — Better or Broken

Smash! Bang! Crack! No, it’s not the scenes from a Batman series fight. It’s the sound of a large clay jar being shattered as it’s thrown to the ground.

In the preceding chapter, Jeremiah is at the pottery shop and a lesson is given concerning the potter and the clay, but now the illustration is made with the finished product, something unable to be reshaped. God evidently thought the Israelites were missing some of the seriousness and finality to Jeremiah’s repeated message of coming judgment, so God lays out this outline for him to follow: first, present the people’s sins; next, raise and smash the clay jar you bought; then, inform the people that this will happen to them! It was a powerful message and one would like to think it produced tremendous results. In reality, the result was a beating and prison time for Jeremiah. The message obviously struck some chord of conviction. I warned someone about a direction in life in which they were headed and recently found that they ignored the warning and are suffering the consequences. Cultivate a soft heart to hear God’s words.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 219 – August 7th

Jeremiah 7:1-8:3; Daniel 2-3 — Idols and Images

The image of Daniel, chapter two, is that of a statue with various layers representing various world empires. However, a rock representing God’s kingdom crushed the entire statue. King Nebuchadnezzar concludes that, if his portion of the image in the dream was the head of gold which represented a limited time period, then why not make an entire statue of gold representing a timeless empire? He then commanded the people to bow to that. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would not bow down to the image or what the image represented—a defiance against God’s plan.

God frequently commands us not to surrender to idols. Why? What harm is there in bowing to a golden image? Daniel’s friends knew the whole picture. We tend to think of an image, but it’s much larger than that. If we surrender to anything other than God, we have made a statement about our lack of trust or faith in His plan and power. Other than an image (idol), to what do you have the potential of surrendering? (e.g. complacency, greed, a desire for status—popularity in the community, wealth, the one people listen to, etc.)

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 238 – August 26th

2 Kings 25:8-21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 39:11-40:6; 52:12-27; Lamentations 1 — “Time’s Up!”

“The LORD, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent His prophets to warn them, for He had compassion on His people and His Temple. But the people mocked these messengers of God and despised their words. They scoffed at the prophets until the LORD’s anger could no longer be restrained and there was no remedy” (2 Chron. 36:15-16).

Contrary to what many think, the Lord’s patience does have a limit. Peter noted, “The Lord isn’t really being slow about His promise... No, He is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so He is giving more time... But the day of the Lord will come as unexpectedly as a thief...” (2 Pet. 3:9-10).

Restoration is a beautiful thing, but there will be a time when its offer runs out. You can’t rely on waiting until the last minute of your life to get things in order. You may not have that opportunity. The same will be true for mankind historically. There will be a day when the whistle blows, when the trumpet calls. Don’t wait too long to receive God’s promise of restoration, reconciliation and salvation.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 221 – August 9th
Jeremiah 12-15 — Clean Linen

Jeremiah, being a priest, was familiar with linen as it was the material of which the priests' garments were made. The belt was worn close to the skin. The linen belt was to be representative of an intimate relationship between God and Judah (13:11).

But then Jeremiah is instructed to bury it, then come back after a long time and recover it. By then the belt was ruined. It illustrated how Judah, after leaving the care of God, would come to ruin.

This is true of all people. There is a passage in Romans, chapter one, which describes the same process:

“Yes, they knew God, but they wouldn't worship Him... their minds became dark... So God let them go ahead and do what their hearts desired. As a result, they did vile and degrading things... That is why God abandoned them to their shameful desires...”

If we turn away from the One who can keep us clean, should we be surprised if we get dirty? A life of walking away from an intimate relationship with the Savior will only lead to ruin.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 236 – August 24th
Jeremiah 32-33; Ezekiel 26:1-14 — Fully Restored

God's encouraging words of restoration came in the form of promises to Israel. His promises of restoration were part of His plan for Israel. It's important for us to remember that His plan covers everything: the beginning, middle and end.

His restoration is not haphazard. I can think of some building projects I've been involved in that were not thought through. For instance, a building restoration is a well-planned process. First, you must know the original state or condition of the building. Second, you must know the full extent of decay/disrepair of the current condition. Third, having an accurate picture allows you to know the true cost for the restoration project. Finally, after the price is paid and the work completed, the building is once again the beautiful building it was originally created to be.

God had a plan from the beginning concerning Christ's restoration of the kingdom (see Acts 3:21). God also had a plan concerning our restoration: “He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ in His physical body. As a result... you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault” (Col. 1:22).

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 235 – August 23rd

Jeremiah 21, 34; Ezekiel 24:15-25:17; 29:1-16; 30:20-31:18 —
Crime but No Time?

Picture the familiar scene: A wrong has been done, a punishment must be made and the offender is suddenly sorry. It is possible to apologize for getting caught and not for the offense. This was the case with King Zedekiah. He had been warned time and again of God’s coming judgment if he would not change. Now the judgment came and suddenly he wanted it taken away. He requested of Jeremiah, “Please ask the LORD to help me... perhaps He will do this for me... and this...” (21:2). He did not admit his sin. He was only sorry for getting caught and having to reap the penalty of which he had been warned often. And then he suggests a few things the Lord could do.

Make it personal as you consider three of the factors of that situation: Have you been guilty of expecting God to get you out of the trouble you put yourself into? Is it easier to ignore God’s warnings when things are going well? Is it possible to just use God when it’s to our advantage?

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 222 – August 10th

Jeremiah 16, 17, 18, 35 — Turning Clay

I remember my first experiences at the potter’s wheel. It wasn’t safe to be anywhere near me. With the centrifugal force of the wheel a chunk of clay can fly a long way. Of course, even if something did stay on the wheel, it didn’t mean it was going to look good. Some of the things I first turned were too thick, some too thin, some were so warped people just assumed they were abstract art (and I never told them otherwise).

I restarted and reformed so many pieces that were not turning right or just didn’t look right. Sometimes the clay itself would be too dry. Sometimes it would have hidden air pockets (which don’t last through the fire).

A lot of things can happen while you’re working clay, but I have never had my clay tell me what it wanted or didn’t want. God is the potter and we are the clay. Don’t rebel against that, but embrace it. Surrender to God’s plans for your life. Let God shape you now so that you will not harden the wrong way (consider the next chapter talking about the jar Jeremiah shattered).

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 223 – August 11th

2 Kings 24:5-9; 2 Chronicles 36:6-9; Jeremiah 22:24-23:32; 49:1-33 — Judging the Shepherds

“Dear brothers and sisters, not many of you should become teachers in the church, for we who teach will be judged by God with greater strictness” (James 3:1).

James knew there was nothing wrong with aspiring to teach, but he was fully aware of an additional responsibility that came with the position. James had read these same passages we are reading today. He knew how the life of a leader could affect others. God made that very clear in the passages today. God accused the present leaders of Judah with leading God’s flock to destruction and abandonment (Jer. 23:2). Therefore, He declares; “I will send disaster upon the leaders of my people—the shepherds of my sheep—for they have destroyed and scattered the very ones they were expected to care for.”

God expects us to be serious with the gifts and positions He has given to each of us. There is nothing flippant about the way God bestows things upon us, nor in the way He expects us to act. He has entrusted each of us with something special. How are you tending what He has entrusted to you?

My Prayer List:

Day 234 – August 22nd

2 Kings 24:20b-25:2; Jeremiah 39:1; 52:3b-5; Ezekiel 22:17-24:14 — In the Cooking Pot

Have you ever felt like you were in the “cooking pot?” In the 1987 AFC Championship football game between Cleveland and Denver, Ernest Byner fumbled the ball just as he got ready to score a touchdown. That mistake cost the Cleveland Browns the championship, a trip to the Super Bowl and is what most people remember about Ernest Byner. Even though Ernest Byner had an otherwise stellar fourteen-year career in the NFL and is ranked 16th on the all-time rushing list, many angry Cleveland fans will not forget the “infamous fumble.” His fumble ruined an otherwise impressive performance, as he finished the game with 67 rushing yards, 7 receptions for 120 yards and 2 touchdowns.

When you’re in the “cooking pot,” you wish you could do things over. No one felt that more than Judah. They were under siege for 2 ½ years. If they could back up the clock for a do-over they would. But they had ignored the warnings cried out for years by God’s prophets. Maybe not from a fumble, but most of the times we have wound up in the “cooking pot,” we have gone there willfully.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 233 – August 21st
Ezekiel 20:1-22:16 — Preventing Decay

One of the aspects of the dictionary definition for “restore” is “to recover from ruin or decay.” The importance of that spiritually is enormous. Restoration is expressed throughout Scripture, and the facet of its recovering something from decay is foundational. We are ruined and decaying because of sin, and we need the salvation that Jesus Christ offers. Even as believers, each day we must strive to walk in the Spirit and not in the flesh. We need to avoid following the desires of our old sinful nature (Gal. 5). If we choose to go down that road, we will be in need of some restoration. In today’s passage, the people were in need of a purging, a cleaning (20:38). And even at that, there was hope in the end. God said, “When I bring you home from exile, you will be as pleasing to Me as an offering of perfumed incense” (20:41). God cleanses thoroughly.

“Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin... Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.” Psalm 51:2, 7

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 224 – August 12th
Jeremiah 23:33-24:10; 29:1-31:14 — Spoiled due to lack of Discipline

“Spoiled children are more tolerated in homes than spoiled food.”

I read this quote and thought of the illustration in chapter 24 of the two baskets. One is filled with good figs, and the other is filled with spoiled figs that could not be eaten. God then explains what each basket of figs is representing. The good figs represent those Judeans who go through the discipline and will return to the land. The spoiled figs represent those Judeans who ran from the discipline. Neither group was better at the beginning, but in the end discipline was to refine them (Jer. 21:9).

We describe a spoiled child as a manipulative, unpleasant youth who lacks discipline. Spoiled figs are here analogous of the same predicament, yet with adults. None of us appreciate receiving discipline at the time (Heb. 12:11), and on the flip side, it’s often uncomfortable to have to discipline others (e.g. our children). Discipline from God proves His love for us (see Heb. 12). Don’t be discouraged when God corrects you. “He corrects those He loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights” (Prov. 3:11-12).

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Week 33 – August 13th-19th

2 Kings 24:10-20; 1 Chronicles 3:10-16; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14; Jeremiah 27:1-28:17; 31:15-40, 37:13-38:28; 51:15-52:3a; Ezekiel 1:1-16:63

The reading for this week will deal with Israel in exile. While there are still some who remain in Jerusalem, the main shift of the Scriptures has been on those who are living in exile in Babylon. Particularly we see this in Ezekiel, whose ministry was directly to God’s people living in exile. Because they were dark days for God’s people, both those left in Jerusalem and those in exile, there is a recurring theme of hope that we will be looking at this week.

Bible Discussion Guide

Review Jeremiah 31:31-34 where the promise of a new covenant is revealed. You might also want to look up the references cited from the book of Hebrews in the Aug. 13th devotional. How is the new covenant different than the covenant God had established with Israel at Mt. Sinai?

The author of Hebrews calls it a better covenant. Why does he do this?

How is the new covenant a source of hope for Israel? What about for us?

Day 232 – August 20th

Ezekiel 17-19 — Hope at the End of the Trial

Adolph Hitler was an avid believer in astrology and consulted with his special astrologist before making any decisions. One day in consulting with him, Hitler asked, “On what day will I die?” “You will die on a Jewish holiday,” replied the astrologist. “How can you be so sure of that?” asked Hitler. “Any day you die will be a Jewish holiday,” replied the astrologist.

As we continue reading through the books of the prophets, we will frequently be hearing warnings of coming judgment for Israel. Yet, there are statements of hope sprinkled throughout the passages that we dare not miss. They are wonderful words of inspiration, promise and hope. In today’s passage, Ezekiel prophesies of judgment and then ends with words of hope: And the Sovereign LORD says, “I will take a tender shoot from the top of a tall cedar and I will plant it on the top of Israel’s highest mountain. It will become a noble cedar...” (17:22).

Occasionally, the time of hope is many years away (like this passage referring to the time of the Messiah), but hope is nonetheless there. There *is* hope.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

How does knowing that God's patience does have a limit affect the believer and the unbeliever?

Have you ever been disappointed by a false hope. Can you share that experience with the group? How did it affect your life?

How does God's omnipresence and your knowledge of it affect your faith and your relationship with Him?

If you knew, like Ezekiel did, that some will listen to you and some will ignore you, would you be encouraged or discouraged?

Why can we have confidence and hope that some people will respond to the gospel message?

How does reading about God's judgment on Israel encourage our faith and trust in Him?

Compare the new covenant passage in Ezekiel 11:14-21 with Jeremiah 34:31-34. How are they the same? How are they different?

How does reading these new covenant passages impact your understanding of your relationship with God?

What are some of the ways people try to avoid facing God's judgment?

Why would Ezekiel mention that even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel and Job would not be sufficient to save them? What does this say about the spiritual attitude or condition of Israel at the time?

Why can we have hope and confidence in facing God's judgment?

A great testimony was shared in church some time back in which the individual described time in "the cooking pot" (a difficult time). And one of his comments was a desire to back up the clock and do it over. The Aug. 22 devotional describes the same thing. Is there an upside to time spent in "the cooking pot?"

Walk through the questions at the end of the August 23rd devotional.

There are many prophecies describing the restoration of the nation Israel. Things have already been fulfilled concerning Israel that many did not think possible. There's a fascinating prophecy in chapter 26 about the city of Tyre along the Mediterranean. It prophesies how the ancient city would be destroyed so completely that its surface would be smooth and its stones would be cast into the sea. Well, just a few years after the prophecy, Nebuchadnezzar laid a 13-year siege against the city, but didn't totally fulfill all the details of Ezekiel's prophecy. He bothered it enough that the city rebuilt itself offshore on an island, and became again very strong, proud and wealthy. But 250 years after Nebuchadnezzar, Alexander the Great, 332 BC, determined to seize the city and, to do so, he created a causeway to the island produced from the ruins of the former ancient city, moving every stone out. Prophecy was fulfilled perfectly.

What impact does fulfilled prophecy have on us?

Week 34—August 20th-26th

2 Kings 24:20b-25:21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21; Jeremiah 21, 32-34, 39; 40:1-6; 52:3b-27; Lamentations 1; Ezekiel 17-28; 29:1-16; 30:20-31:18

We just spent the weekend with longtime friends who have fully restored the home he grew up in. It is a beautiful place on a tremendous piece of property. They could tell you firsthand of the work, planning and money spent to tackle such a project. He now has a plethora of new stories about planning departments, architects, permits, unrealistic estimates, and on and on.

There may well be a downside to restoring anything (work, money, etc.), but there is also an upside, and that is the finished project. God offers restoration (reconciliation, salvation and forgiveness) to us and, in a similar way, there was a downside. A tremendous cost was necessary: the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.

As you read this week’s passages, note the emphasis on various aspects of restoration.

Bible Discussion Guide:

What part does hope play in the life of the believer and why does it matter?

Define restoration (see Aug. 21). Describe the process (some possible hints are found in the Aug. 24 devotional).

Day 225 – August 13th

Jeremiah 31:15-40; 49:34-51:14 — New Covenant

The days in which Jeremiah ministered were certainly dark days. Judah as a nation was falling apart and God’s covenant people, the Israelites, had essentially abandoned God at this point. However, as you read today, because of God’s faithfulness there is still hope.

Jeremiah 31:31-34 delivers the promise of a new covenant. It is the covenant that Jesus spoke of during the last supper (Matt. 26:28). It is the covenant that was sealed with the shed blood of Christ. And it is this passage from Jeremiah that was quoted by the author of Hebrews as he contrasted the new and the old covenants (Heb. 8:8-12)

It is a better covenant (Heb. 8:6) because it involves an internal change. Instead of being focused on external obedience and works, Jeremiah says that God will write His word on their hearts. We, as members of this new and better covenant, have the word of God emblazoned on our hearts through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

It was this promise of a future covenant that gave hope to the faithful few in Jeremiah’s day and it continues to give us hope as well.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 226 – August 14th

2 Kings 24:10-20; 1 Chronicles 3:10-16; 2 Chronicles 36:10-14; Jeremiah 37:1-10; 51:15-58; 52:1-3a — False Hope

Ever since the kingdom of Israel became divided under Rehoboam (1 Kings 12), the kings of both Israel and Judah led God’s people through a downward spiral of idolatry and disobedience. This had resulted in Israel no longer being a major player on the world political scene as it had been under David and Solomon. We see in Jeremiah 37 that the only relief Israel had from the Babylonians was when Egypt threatened to attack. While this gave Judah some hope, Jeremiah was quick to point out that trusting in Egypt was a false hope.

False hope can be quite devastating. As we see in the Old Testament, anytime God’s people trusted anyone or anything other than the Lord, it resulted in a false hope. I think this is a key lesson for us to glean from the Old Testament. Anytime we trust someone other than the Lord, including ourselves, for our salvation or for the strength to battle temptation, it will result in tragedy.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 231 – August 19th

Ezekiel 14:1-16:63 — Righteousness of Christ

“All our righteous acts are like filthy rags” – Isaiah 64:6

In Ezekiel 14, the Lord patiently reveals to His people that they have no hope of avoiding His judgments. The point that He is repeatedly making is that your righteousness cannot save you from God’s judgment. He further strengthens the point by declaring that even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel and Job would not spare the people of judgment. This statement rings true for us as well because our righteousness is not sufficient to save us in the face of God’s judgment.

Praise be to God that the story does not end there, for we have a glorious hope in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Because of the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus we can, through faith, have His righteousness credited to our account. This is the only way we can know and experience the hope of salvation. Attempting to avoid God’s wrath by our own righteousness is as futile for us today as it was in Ezekiel’s day.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 230 – August 18th
Ezekiel 10:1-13:23 — Personal Relationship

At the start of this week, we read about the coming of the new covenant in Jeremiah 31:31-34. In God’s expression of hope to Israel through the prophet Ezekiel, we read more details of the coming covenant (Ezekiel 11:14-21). As part of the new covenant, God will do a heart transplant in His people, removing the old heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh that obeys God. This is a picture of what happens in the lives of Christians today. When we come to faith in Christ, God regenerates that life and puts in them a new heart and his Holy Spirit, who now enables them to follow God.

Another element of the new covenant mentioned in this passage is the emphasis on personal relationship with God. “Then they will truly be My people, and I will be their God” (11:20b). While Israel belonged to God as His covenant people, whom He had redeemed, under the new covenant the personal connection we have with the Lord is stronger because of the Holy Spirit, who indwells each believer.

My Prayer List:

Day 227 – August 15th
Jeremiah 37:11-38:28; Ezekiel 1:1-3:15 — God’s Omnipresence

Leaving home for an unfamiliar world can indeed be a frightening experience. It will be an experience that will be repeated thousands of times in the coming weeks by young men and women heading off to college. For the Christian, it is helpful and comforting to know that God is there with you in that new and different place.

This is also a truth that God’s people who were living in exile in Babylon needed to know. Because the Jewish system of worship was centered around the temple in Jerusalem as the dwelling place of the Lord, it was especially difficult for these exiles to understand that God is omnipresent and is not limited to a single physical location. The vision Ezekiel received served to accomplish just that. The wheels moving in every direction speaks to God’s ability to be present in every situation everywhere.

All of us have that place where God feels especially present and that place where we always feel like we are home. However, we can know and have confidence that, no matter where we are, God will be present with us and our relationship with Him is not dependent upon a location or building.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 228 – August 16th

Jeremiah 27:1-28:17; 51:59-64; Ezekiel 3:16-4:17 — Hope Springs Eternal

Those of you who know me, know that I love baseball. The game is a wonderful gift from God, in my opinion. Someone once said that the great thing about baseball (professional baseball that is) is that every team goes into the season knowing they will win sixty games and lose sixty games and the rest of them are up for grabs. This gives each team hope in Spring Training.

Ezekiel received a similar statement of hope in 3:27. The Lord told Ezekiel that, when he delivers a message from the Lord, “some will listen, but some will ignore you.” What a comfort and hope to know that some will listen.

We too can share in that hope and comfort Ezekiel had when we share the gospel message. Scripture teaches us that God indeed has elected some to believe in Him. So, while everyone with whom we share the gospel may not repent and believe, we can have the confidence that some will. And since we do not know who God has elected we are to obediently move forward with the command to preach the word, knowing that some will believe.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____

Day 229 – August 17th

Ezekiel 5:1-9:11 — That’s Not a Threat, It’s a Promise

“For I am the LORD! What I threaten always happens.” – Ezekiel 12:25

Ezekiel paints a very bleak picture for the fate of God’s people. But for those who have been reading the Scriptures closely, it should come as no surprise, because Moses informed Israel as to what would happen if they refused to listen to the Lord (Deuteronomy 28:15-68). Even though God is pouring out His judgment on Israel, there is hope in knowing that He is fulfilling His promises by doing so. This is because there is more to God’s promises in Deuteronomy than just words of destruction. Two chapters later in Deuteronomy 30:1-10, Moses prophesies concerning God’s promise of restoration when those who remain repent and return to the Lord.

While many of us make idle threats, the Lord doesn’t. His promises are real and trustworthy. Reading about God fulfilling His promise of judgment reinforces our hope of salvation and the promises that we have in Christ.

My Prayer List:

Taking every thought captive to Christ: _____
