

Bible notes for adults

explore

APRIL — JUNE 2008

IN THIS ISSUE

91 days of life-changing Bible study from 2 Kings, 2 Peter, Obadiah, Luke, Nahum and Joshua.

IT'S SERIOUS

Please allow 15 minutes each day to work through the Bible passage with the notes. It's a meal, not a snack!

Readings from other parts of the Bible can throw valuable light on the study passage. These cross-references can be skipped if you are already feeling full up, but will expand your grasp of the Bible.

Sometimes a prayer symbol will encourage you to stop and pray through the lessons—but it is always important to allow time to pray for God's Spirit to bring His word to life, to shape the way we think and live through it.

WE'RE SERIOUS

All of us who work on *Explore* share a passion for getting the Bible into people's lives. We fiercely hold to the Bible as God's word—to honour and follow, not to explain away. At the foot of each page, there is also a plan for reading the whole Bible in a year.

Contributors to this issue:

★ Tim Chester ★ Martin Cole
★ Phil Crowter ★ Tim Thornborough

If you need further help, please write to:

The Good Book Company
Elm House, 37 Elm Road
New Malden, Surrey, KT3 3HB, UK

For details of our church subscription scheme, and our other Bible-teaching and training materials, please call us on 0845 225 0880, or visit www.thegoodbook.co.uk

How to use Explore

Find a time you can read the Bible each day



Find a place where you can be quiet and think



Ask God to help you understand



Carefully read through the Bible passage for today



Study the verses with *Explore*, taking time to think



Pray about what you have read

DON'T PANIC!

The Ultimate Exam Survival Kit



Exams are a time of real stress for many young Christians – their future resting on their results. It's a time when they most need the guidance and re-assurance that God's Word can give to them. That's why we've developed **Don't Panic** – a new Exam survival guide.

It includes 20 daily Bible readings for stressed-out students, revision timetables, and practical short articles on doing revision, exam technique and dealing with stress. Get hold of a copy of **Don't Panic** for yourself, or for school or college students you know who will be facing exams this summer.

Call us to order on 0845 225 0880

or visit: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

Price: £2.50



FOOLING AROUND

Tuesday April 1: Proverbs 26 v 1-12

The fool in 'Proverbial' thinking is not what we might call a twit. The fool is the person who ignores true wisdom, because he refuses to take God seriously. And, rather worryingly, that includes you and I today as we read this section. If we refuse to take it seriously and change, then the jester's cap fits firmly on our own heads—see verse 9!

FOOL'S PARADISE: read verse 1-12

Many of these proverbs try to help us make the right reaction to foolish people and behaviour that we encounter.

★ *Do any of the descriptions chime with someone you know or a situation you have been in recently?*

★ *How does it help you know how you should have reacted at the time?*

Did you notice the opposites of verses 4 and 5?! This is not the Bible contradicting itself. Rather, it is a lesson in wisdom. There is great value in showing fools the folly of their statements by pointing out where their line of argument ends up. But such replies can lead us into pride at our 'cleverness' or into mockery as we parody their godless wisdom. They can lead us down the same route of godlessness.



TIME OUT

Wisdom is not easily attained. **Read 2 Corinthians 11 v 1-15** to see Paul wrestling with the same problem. If you find being wise in these situations hard—you're in good company!

FOOLS IN THE CHURCH?

The godless fools are not only all around us in the world, but they have also infiltrated the church. Peter quotes verse 11 in reference to false teachers who were plaguing the congregations of the early believers. **Read 2 Peter 2 v 17-22** and notice the vehemence with which Peter denounces those who teach error.



TIME OUT

We must beware who we call 'fool' (**see Matthew 5 v 22**). The final judgement in this matter belongs to God alone. But by their teaching and their lives, we can discern who the false teachers are.

★ *Re-read the section, thinking how the various proverbs might apply to our attitude towards false teachers. Pray through your conclusions...*

BLINDED

Wednesday April 2: 2 Kings 6 v 1-23

Whether we look at the media, the scientific world and the political sphere, or at our own workplaces, schools and neighbourhoods, it is easy to feel overwhelmed by the prevailing hostility to the gospel. And so we ask: 'What shall we do?'

A TRIVIAL INCIDENT: read v 1-7

Elisha restores a lost axe-head. Sandwiched between stories that deal with international affairs, this incident appears rather trivial. Who cares about a borrowed axe-head when the Arameans are on the march? But perhaps its triviality is the point. God cares not only about the nations, but about you and your needs.

MAKING THE BLIND SEE: read v 8-18

When the King of Aram discovers that Elisha is able to predict his every move, he sends 'a strong force' to capture him. When Elisha's servant sees the forces lined up against them, he despairs. But he only sees part of the picture. In response to Elisha's prayer, his eyes are opened to the forces of God.

MAKING THE SIGHTED BLIND: read v 19-23

Verses 17 and 18 form a wonderful contrast. Elisha prays and his servant sees. He prays again and the Arameans are blinded. The story then takes a comic turn as Elisha fools the helpless Arameans and leads them to the heart of Israelite power. What did they think they would do when they reached Elisha, now that they were blind? They are then treated to a feast—though there must have been an interesting atmosphere as they ate.

★ *How could we show confidence in God's supreme power like Elisha?*



- ★ *Are you feeling overwhelmed?*
- ★ *Do you feel part of a despised minority at work or among friends?*
- ★ *Are you weary of being the lone voice in discussions?*
- ★ *Do you look with despair on the state of your church?*

Then ask God to open your eyes afresh to His power.

Read Psalm 2. The nations rage against God and His King. But God is not bunkered down in heaven with the door barricaded. No, He laughs at their ridiculous attempts to frustrate His purposes in the gospel. And He will fulfil His purposes.

IF GOD CAN SAVE...

3

Thursday April 3: 2 Kings 6 v 24 – 7 v 20

HOW FAR WE HAVE COME: *read 6 v 24-33*

The king of Aram besieges Samaria, causing a famine within the city so terrible that even a donkey's head is a priceless source of nourishment. In 1 Kings 3 the writer describes Solomon hearing the case of two women in dispute about living and dead babies. It is an example of the goodness of life under the rule of God's anointed. Verses 26-31 are a tragic parody of that story. How far they have fallen! How far the nation has declined! But far from turning back to God, Joram openly defies God's word by ordering Elisha's execution.

AN ARMY OF FOUR LEPERS: *read 7 v 1-16*

Joram is helpless to do anything. But God ends the siege with 'an army' —of four lepers. The amazing turnaround is encapsulated in market prices. Food, one day an expensive scarce resource, becomes cheap and plentiful (v 1, 16).

IF GOD CAN SAVE... *Read v 17-20*

The message of this story is surely that God can save His people. But such a message would have raised questions in the minds of the first readers of 2 Kings. They had seen Jerusalem destroyed. They had been defeated and taken into exile in Babylon.

★ *But if God can save Samaria, why did He not save Jerusalem?*

The answer lies in the story of Joram's right-hand man, who doubted God's word. Jerusalem has been destroyed, not because God has lost His power to save or met His match in the gods of Babylon. But because Judah, like Joram's officer, *doubted God* and rejected His word. This story illustrates God's power to save, but it also illustrates the decline of the nation into unbelief. The days of Solomon are well and truly over. Ahead is only judgment. But God still has the power to save those who trust His word.



APPLY

Read Hebrews 4 v 1-2. The writer to the Hebrews talks about a different generation of Israelites, but the principles are the same. The word of God was of no value because they did not put their faith in it. In the gospel we, too, have heard God's word of promise. We, too, must believe in God's power to save if the gospel is to have any value for us. As you imagine the Aramean army fleeing in the face of four lepers, ask God to strengthen your confidence in His power to save.

★ *How can you show that confidence in your life today?*

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Friday April 4: 2 Kings 8 v 1-29

THE RETURN OF THE SHUNAMMITE WOMAN: *read v 1-6*

We return once again to the Shunammite woman whose story is not yet quite finished. Once again she is blessed for her commitment to God's prophet. She has obeyed Elisha's command to avoid famine. God's blesses those who respect and obey His word.

★ *How have you seen this in your own life, or in others?*

SOME UNFINISHED BUSINESS: *read v 7-15*

This episode seems to be about the future of Ben-Hadad, but turns out to be about the future of Hazael. This unfinished business goes back to 1 Kings 19 v 15, where Elijah was told to anoint Hazael. Whether Elijah disobeyed or God always intended this command to be carried out by Elijah's successor is not clear. What is clear is that Israel's undoing happens at God's instigation. The grammar of v 11 is uncertain, but it seems the news creates a moment of tension because Hazael himself is linked to Ben-Hadad's fate. The false word of v 10 suggests a plot in the making. The tension is broken when Elisha starts sobbing. We can sometimes think of the prophets as coolly proclaiming doom. But Elisha, like the God he served (see Ezekiel 33 v 11), is passionately committed to the people he serves.

★ *How can we follow Elisha's example here?*

AN UNFINISHED PROMISE: *read v 16-29*

The focus switches back to the southern kingdom of Judah and its next two kings: Jehoram and Ahaziah. Rather than returning to the ways of David, they both follow the ways of the northern dynasty of Ahab, to whom both are linked by marriage—which no doubt had something to do with it. The writer describes the involvement of each in an unsuccessful military campaign. Judah loses control of Moab—another step in its decline towards exile. And yet God remains faithful to His promise to David (v 19). Jehoram and Ahaziah may be unfaithful, but God is faithful.



APPLY

What is the writer telling us? Judgment comes at God's instigation, but God is also faithful to His promise. We, too, live in a society that has turned from God. And living for God is tough.

★ *Think of a specific situation or incident where that is true for you.*

We can be faithful to God because God is still faithful to His promise. The Shunammite woman is our model: God's watches over those who respect and obey His word.

★ *How can you show your faithfulness to God in that situation?*

FULFILMENT

Saturday April 5: 2 Kings 9 v 1-37

The key refrain in this chapter and the next is: 'in accordance with the word of the Lord'. It has been a long time coming, but God's word of judgment against Ahab's dynasty is not left unfulfilled.

JEHU ANOINTED: read v 1-13

Elijah was told to anoint Jehu as king back in 1 Kings 19 v 16. Now at last the deed is done. Elisha's messenger anoints Jehu king and tells him that he is to fulfil the judgment against Ahab's house. His fellow officers overcome Jehu's initial reluctance and the coup is underway immediately.

JORAM KILLED: read v 14-26

Jehu now marches to Jezreel where Joram is nursing his wounds. The scouts sent out by Joram join the coup. Why is this important? Because it forces Joram himself to ride out and so he meets his end on Naboth's land, Naboth being the owner of the vineyard whose death was engineered by Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kings 21. **See 1 Kings 21 v 19 and 29.** The dynasty of Ahab meets its bloody end in the manner decreed by Elijah. Jehu recognises that what he does is 'in accordance with the word of the Lord' (v 26).

Read v 27-29. Ahaziah, the king of Judah, is in the wrong place at the wrong time. But then he, too, is associated with the dynasty of Ahab (see 8 v 27).

JEZEBEL KILLED: read v 30-37

Jezebel is defiant to the last. Zimri was an army officer who had murdered a king and then reigned for just seven days (1 Kings 16 v 8-20). So when Jezebel calls Jehu 'Zimri', she is suggesting his power will be short lived. The details are macabre, but they are important because they represent the fulfilment of God's word. **Read 1 Kings 21 v 23-24.**



APPLY

Judgment was delayed, but it inevitably came, because God's word is certain. Today people doubt the coming of God's judgment.

See 2 Peter 3 v 3-10.

★ *What arguments does Peter give for the certainty of God's coming judgment?*

Read 2 Peter 3:11-15.

★ *How does Peter urge us to live in the light of the coming judgment?*

★ *What will that look like for you today?*

PURGED

Sunday April 6: 2 Kings 10 v 1-36

Ahab's son is dead. Ahab's wife is dead. But Elijah had prophesied a bloody end to the entire family (1 Kings 21 v 21; 2 Kings 9 v 8).

KILLED: AHAB'S FAMILY: read v 1-11

Seventy sons may refer to male family members. Jehu forces the leaders of Samaria to choose sides: either nominate a king and fight, or join him. When they choose to join him, Jehu tests their loyalty by demanding the severed heads of Ahab's descendants. The prophetic word has come to pass (v 10). **Read v 12-14.** Relatives of Ahaziah, King of Judah, come bringing greetings. The Hebrew word is *shalom* or 'peace'. But this is not a time of peace. It is a time of judgment. **Read v 15-17.** Jehu moves on to Samaria and finishes off Ahab's family. With him is Jehonadab who, according to Jeremiah 35, founds a group dedicated to the old ways of Israel—even to the point of living in tents!

KILLED: AHAB'S PROPHETS OF BAAL: read v 18-27

Jehu weaves a deception to ensure he can slaughter all the Baal prophets and only the Baal prophets. He even participates in their sacrifice, but in the end they are the ones who are 'sacrificed'.

Read v 28-31. The sores that have festered in Israel's side since 1 Kings 16 v 31-32—Ahab's dynasty and Baal worship—are now removed. Jehu has done what is right in God's eyes—the only northern king to receive this commendation (v 30). But Israel does not turn back to God. They return instead to the sins of Jeroboam—the other archetypal unfaithful king (v 29, 31). **Read v 32-36.** As a result the kingdom declines still further from the glory days of David and Solomon.

★ *What other forms can idolatry take?* **Read Colossians 3 v 5.**

★ *What does 2 Kings 10 teach us about how we should treat such idolatry?*

Peace through violence rarely seems to work and Jesus calls us to a different way. **Read Matthew 5 v 43-48.** Yet Jehu has done what is right. Only in the hands of God can violence achieve peace because only God is truly just. But Jehu has not finished God's work. The world has not yet been purged of evil and idolatry. The Day of Judgment is still to come. But for those who are in Christ 'it is finished'. Praise God that through one terrible act of violence—the cross of Jesus—peace has been made (see Romans 5 v 1-2).

RESTORATION

7

Monday April 7: 2 Kings 11 v 1 – 12 v 21

Read 11 v 1. This verse is something of a shock. The ray of hope in the sorry account of 2 Kings is God's faithfulness to His promise to David—His promise that one of David's sons would always reign. Now the line of David is to be wiped out.

THE THRONE RESTORED: read 11 v 2-21

We discover that Athaliah has failed to destroy the whole royal family—one child has escaped. Jehoiada, the chief priest, plots a coup that will restore the throne to the line of David. At the change of the guard—when twice the normal number of soldiers could gather without suspicion—Joash is proclaimed king. The people renew the covenant with God and put an end to Baal worship in Judah. The house of David has survived.

★ *When we fall into sin or times are tough, we can doubt God's promise to keep us to the end. When the church is despised and the ungodly flourish, we can doubt God's purposes in history. How does 2 Kings 11 speak to these doubts?*

THE TEMPLE RENOVATED: read v 12 v 1-16

Joash sets about restoring the temple. But the priests are not enthusiastic about spending the money on renovations. Twenty-three years on not much has happened (v 6), which suggests that it was not a high priority for Joash himself either.

Read 12 v 17-21. His grisly end and the enigmatic statement of v 2 suggest that Joash started well, but lost his way—a view confirmed in 2 Chronicles 24 v 17-22.

SOLOMON AND JOASH

It is worth comparing Solomon and Joash:

- ★ both reign for forty years (1 Kings 11 v 42 and 2 Kings 12 v 1)
- ★ both build or rebuild the temple (1 Kings 5 v 15-18 and 2 Kings 12 v 11-12)
- ★ but Joash's restored temple is a poor reflection of Solomon's temple (1 Kings 7 v 50 and 2 Kings 12 v 13)
- ★ but Solomon receives tribute from the nations (1 Kings 10 v 14-29), while Joash is forced to give tribute to the nations (2 Kings 12 v 18)

The house of David has been restored—God has been faithful to His promise. But it is a pale reflection of its former glory—the people have been unfaithful (12 v 3).

THREE REASONS FOR HOPE

Tuesday April 8: 2 Kings 13 v 1-25

2 Kings 13 tells the stories of two kings of Israel who both just about hold on to power. The stories hint at dark days ahead for Israel, but they also offer hope.

GOD LISTENS TO HIS PEOPLE: *read v 1-9*

The books of Kings were written after the exile of Judah into Babylon. They were written for people who were puzzled and distressed by the defeat of God's people. The story of Jehoahaz is one more reminder of the reasons for their defeat. It was God's anger against their sin (v 3). Jehoahaz's army is decimated (v 7) because he follows the sins of Jeroboam (v 2). But the story also reminds us that God listens to those who seek Him (v 4). The story invites us to turn to God in time of trouble and find His favour.

GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES: *read v 10-19*

Jehoash also does evil in God's eyes (v 11). But when he seeks help from Elisha, he is promised victory. Because he does not obey wholeheartedly it is not complete victory, but it is victory none the less. **Read v 22-25.** God preserves Israel because of His covenant with Abraham. This is a surprise. God's covenant with David has given Judah stability. Will the covenant with Abraham give the northern kingdom of Israel the same hope? And yet the readers already know that Israel has been destroyed. So could it be that the covenant with Abraham means there will be a new Israel?

Look at Romans 9 v 6-9 and Galatians 6 v 16 to find the answer.

GOD GIVES LIFE TO THE DEAD: *read v 20-21*

This is a wonderful end to the story of Elisha. But what is its point? The Hebrew word for 'threw' in v 21 is the same as the word for 'banish' in v 23 (see also 'thrust' in 17 v 20). God is going to 'throw' both Israel and Judah into exile. The nations will die. But God brings the dead back to life. **Read Ezekiel 37 v 11-14.** The bones represent the dead nation—but God gives new life.



APPLY

Do things ever seem hopeless to you? Does your Christian faith seem fragile? Here are three reasons to have hope:

- ★ **God listens to His people**—he is ready to help in time of need (1 Peter 5 v 7)
- ★ **God keeps His promises**—he will see us through to the end (1 Peter 1 v 5)
- ★ **God gives life to the dead**—Jesus is the firstfruits: we will share His resurrection (1 Corinthians 15 v 20-23),

A FORETASTE OF EXILE

9

Wednesday April 9: 2 Kings 14 v 1-29

Another chapter about two kings: a good(ish) king who goes into exile and an evil king who restores Israel. Now what's the lesson in that?

AMAZIAH: read v 1-7

The account of Amaziah starts well enough: he does what is right (v 3); he obeys the law (v 6); he has military success (v 7). But all is not as it should be. The usual formula describing a good king of Judah is changed. Amaziah does not follow the ways of David, but only those of his father Joash. And what happened to him?

JUDAH IN EXILE: read v 8-20

Amaziah gets carried away by his military success and takes on Jehoash, king of Israel. Jehoash is victorious. The repeat of the summary of Jehoash's reign (v 15-16 and 13 v 12-13) suggests that even in Judah he is the king that counts—Judah has been subjugated to Israel...

- ★ Jehoash breaks down the wall of Jerusalem (v 13)
- ★ Jehoash carries off the treasures of the temple (v 14)
- ★ Jehoash takes hostages into exile (v 14).

Sounds familiar? It would have done to the first readers of 2 Kings. They had been defeated by Babylon, the walls of Jerusalem had been destroyed, the treasures plundered and the people exiled. So perhaps their exile was part of a pattern. **Read v 21-22.** And perhaps there could be restoration after exile.

JEROBOAM II: read v 23-29

Here is more hope for the exiles in Babylon. Jeroboam restores the boundaries to the glory days of Solomon (1 Kings 8 v 65). But this is not because Jeroboam is a good king—he did evil in the eyes of the Lord' (v 24). This restoration takes place because of God's word (v 25) and because of God's mercy (v 26). Verse 27 says God will not blot out Israel. But Israel had been blotted out. So could it be that God would bring Israel back from the dead; that God would create a new Israel?



The question is answered in Jesus, who creates a new people of God. But He does so *not* because of our goodness. 2 Kings is keen that we learn that lesson. We will never be good enough to achieve or merit deliverance.

- ★ *Praise God that our status as the people of God depends entirely on His unchanging nature and endless mercy!*

LIFE OUTSIDE THE PROMISE

Thursday April 10: 2 Kings 15 v 1-38

Read 10 v 30. Because Jehu got rid of Baal worship in Israel, God promised that his sons would reign for four generations. And God has been faithful to that promise despite the evil done by those kings. The last of the four—Jeroboam II—has even extended the borders (14 v 25). But now the promise is over. What will happen without the protection of God's promise?

1. THE KINGS OF ISRAEL: read v 8-31

- ★ **Zechariah:** reigns for 6 months—assassinated
- ★ **Shallum:** reigns for 1 month—assassinated
- ★ **Menahem:** reigns for 10 years—defeated by Assyria
- ★ **Pekahiah:** reigns for 2 years—assassinated
- ★ **Pekah:** reigns for 20 years—assassinated—defeated by Assyria.

And the terrible brutality of these times is summed up in two words:

1. **Conspiracy.** That and 'assassination'. With one exception, all Israel's last kings are assassinated. The exception is Menahem, but he hardly gives the people stability and peace (v 16).
2. **Defeat.** The two kings who reign for any length of time—Menahem and Pekah—both lose land to Assyria. This is the beginning of the end for the northern kingdom of Israel.

2. THE KINGS OF JUDAH: read v 1-7 and 32-38

The account of the last Israelite kings is sandwiched between the record of two kings of Judah: Azariah (also called Uzziah) and Jotham. We get little more than the bare facts of their reigns—especially compared to 2 Chronicles 26-27 which has a lot more to say about them. For the writer of 2 Kings, they are a model of stability—not because Judean kings are better (the next chapter will destroy that notion), but because Judah is living under the promise of God.

God promised Jehu a dynasty of four generations. God promised David a dynasty for all generations (2 Samuel 7 v 11-16). Life outside the promise of God is violent, short and troubled, with destruction on the horizon. But for those within the promise there is hope.



TIME OUT

- Look back over the last few chapters of 2 Kings.
- ★ *How many of the events described have contemporary parallels?*
 - ★ *Where can those of us witnessing such events, or even caught up in them, find hope and stability?*
 - ★ *What does it mean for us to hope in the promise of God?*

UNDER THE INFLUENCE?



Friday April 11: 2 Kings 16 v 1-20

Do you influence the places in which you live and work? Or are you influenced by them? If we are to stand firm for Jesus, what do we need?

THE WAYS OF THE NATIONS: *read v 1-4*

According to 2 Kings, a mediocre king does what is right, but not in the ways of David. Ahaz is 'unlike David' altogether. The people of God were called to demonstrate the wonderful ways of God. But Ahaz follows the 'detestable ways of the nations' (v 3)—even sacrificing his own child. This shocking incident shows the stupidity of man-made religion. We do not need to appease God because He has sacrificed His child for us. Following the nations leads to two things:

- ★ **POLITICAL COMPROMISE: *read v 5-9.*** Ahaz turns from God's rule and the security it brings. As a result he is left vulnerable, and Aram and Israel besiege him. But instead of turning back to God for help, he turns to Assyria. He finds security of sorts, but there is a high price to pay. Judah now has obligations to Assyria (v 7-8).
- ★ **SPIRITUAL COMPROMISE: *read v 10-20.*** It is not clear whether the new altar is a requirement of Assyrian protection or an innovation to which Ahaz took a shine. We are told that the other changes to the temple were 'in deference to the king of Assyria' (v 18). It is no longer the word of God that defines the practice of Judah's faith, but the norms of the world around.



APPLY

Think about your life at church, in the home and at work. What shapes your behaviour: the word of God or the norms of the world? **Read 1 John 2 v 15-17.** The people of God can *learn* from the wisdom of the world, but we need to do so *carefully*. It is tempting to adopt the latest cultural trends or theories. But we must not let ourselves be put under an obligation to the world. We must not let the world define the behaviour or strategies of the people of God.



TIME OUT

Read Isaiah 7 v 1-17. Isaiah tells the same story from a different perspective. God offers to rescue Judah if only Ahaz will 'stand firm in his faith' (v 9). Ahaz's refusal to accept a sign is, despite his pious words, a demonstration of unbelief. But a sign will be given—a child born of a virgin. Only through the son of a virgin will the line of David produce a king who brings God's rule.

Read Matthew 1 v 22-23. Jesus is God's king and 'God with us'.
'If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.'

Isaiah 7 v 9

THE MEANING OF HISTORY

Saturday April 12: 2 Kings 17 v 1 – 41

This is an important chapter in 2 Kings and not just because it describes the end of the northern kingdom of Israel. It also gives us an interpretation of its history—it tells us what these terrible events mean.

THE FACTS OF HISTORY: *read v 1-6*

The facts are presented with brutal simplicity. Hoshea turns from Assyria to Egypt, but there is no help from Egypt. Samaria is taken and the people deported.

THE MEANING OF HISTORY: *read v 7-17*

2 Kings was written to explain Israel's destruction and Judah's exile. There have been plenty of hints throughout the story, but now the reasons are set out in full:

- ★ The people turned from God's deliverance—v 7.
- ★ The people turned from God's word—v 12-16.
- ★ The people followed other gods—v 9-12, 15-17.
- ★ The people followed the nations—v 8, 11, 15.

This is a definition of sin. Sin is not simply evil or immoral acts. Sinful acts stem from the fundamental issue: not worshipping God and not trusting His word. Sin is to opt to be part of a rebellious world rather than to live under the rule of God's word.

Read v 18-23. God declares His judgment and it is a definition of hell. The heart of God's judgment is not just military defeat, but to be removed from God's presence (v 18, 20 and 23). They will no longer be His people. He will no longer be their God.



TIME OUT

Israel was destroyed because it turned to other gods and followed the ways of the nations.

- ★ *Is it different for His people today? How do you see the patterns of Israel's apostasy mirrored in the church of today?*

ONE GOD: *read v 24-33*

The Assyrians resettle the land with people from other nations. They are taught the ways of the Lord (v 28), but they combine the worship of God with the worship of their old gods. (The Samaritans in the gospels are the descendants of these people.) **Read v 34-41.** The writer is not impressed. They worship the Lord (v 33), but they do not worship the Lord (v 34). God is only truly worshipped if He is worshipped alone. The author explains the importance of serving God alone (v 34-39).

- ★ *What was he saying to his first readers—the exiles in Babylon?*
- ★ *What is he saying to you?*

BUILDING GOD'S WAY

Sunday April 13: Proverbs 24 v 1-14

BUILDING A KINGDOM: read verses 1-9

An encouragement to remember a fundamental truth of the Christian life: *'Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders build in vain.'* (Psalm 127 v 1).

Most of us are involved in building houses of various kinds:

- ★ a career that honours God
- ★ a family that serves the Lord
- ★ a church that is reaching out with the gospel
- ★ a Christian work that keeps faithful to the Bible

These verses urge upon us the seriousness of house-building of any kind. Any endeavour must have at its heart a commitment to be faithful to God's word, and be prepared to do some hard thinking, and to take serious advice from wise people. There may be times when we have to jump at opportunities, but careful, considered building work always stands the test of time.



PRAY THRO'

So, whatever you are trying to build, now's the time to recommit the whole endeavour to the Lord. Ask Him to equip you to build it wisely.

Read Matthew 7 v 24-27

RESPONSIBLE RESCUE: read verses 10-12

Sobering verses for us. Evangelism is not just a 'bolt-on module' to the Christian life—it is at the very heart of why God has chosen us. We are to rescue those who are stumbling down the broad road that leads to destruction. **Read verses 11 and 12 again, very carefully.** Verse 12 warns us that we cannot brush off our responsibility to be evangelists. You have been told!

- ★ *Pray that you would find an opportunity to warn someone today...*

TAKE THE HONEY TEST! read verses 13-14

Eat a spoonful of honey, urges the father. See how wonderful it tastes. God's wisdom is just like that. But unlike the honey which is now just a taste on the lips and will soon be a memory, God's words will lead to everlasting life.



PRAY THRO'

- ★ *Do you really believe that God's words and wisdom are 'honey for the soul'?*
- ★ *Does your enthusiasm for hearing God's word taught and reading it day by day show that this is what you really believe?*

THERE IS NO-ONE LIKE HIM!

Monday April 14: 2 Kings 18 v 1-12

★ *What qualities mark someone out as a hero today?*

In 2 Kings 18 we meet one of the heroes of the writer of 2 Kings: Hezekiah. But the reason why he is counted a hero is very different from what makes a hero in the world today.

A KING LIKE DAVID: read v 1-6

Time and again we have met kings of Judah who have done what is right in the eyes of the Lord like their father David, but have failed to remove the high places and sacred stones (1 Kings 15 v 11,14; 22 v 43; 2 Kings 12 v 2-3; 14 v 3-4; 15 v 3-4, 34-35). But Hezekiah is different. He even destroys the bronze snake (Numbers 21 v 4-9) because people were offering incense to it. This is a radical act. The 'Nehushtan' was not something imported from other nations, but part of Israel's heritage. But Hezekiah understands that true religion is about trusting God, not venerating external objects.



TIME OUT

True religion is based not on sacred objects or places—however great their heritage—but on a relationship with the living God.

Are there unhelpful ways in which Christians venerate buildings, objects and stories from our heritage?

★ *When might it be acceptable to use pictures, or images of God or Jesus?*

A KING UNLIKE HOSHEA: read v 7-12

Hezekiah enjoys military success because, like David, God is with him (v 7 and 1 Samuel 18 v 12-14). He throws off the oppressive rule of the Assyrians and defeats the Philistines. In case we think this is an easy thing to do, we are reminded of the political context. It is during Hezekiah's reign that the northern kingdom of Israel has fallen to the might of Assyria.

★ *Hezekiah throws off the rule of Assyria. Hoshea buckles underneath it. What is the difference? Compare v 6 and v 12.*

Hezekiah earns a unique commendation from the writer of 2 Kings. There was no-one like him before or since. Hezekiah is one of the writer's heroes. The reason for this is simple: he trusted in the Lord and obeyed His word (v 5-6). The writer is inviting us ourselves to model greatness. Not greatness as the world see it, but greatness in God's kingdom which is to be someone who is faithful to God in the face of adversity. It is greatness that we see fully fledged in the Lord Jesus.

★ *Pray that you would be a true Christian hero today. And pray that God would make our Christian leaders into such heroic men and women.*

A WAR OF WORDS

Tuesday April 15: 2 Kings 18 v 13 – 19 v 8

Hezekiah declares a day of rebuke and disgrace. Why? Because the people of God have no power to defend God's honour (19 v 3).

★ *Is that sometimes how you feel about God?*

1. DO NOT LISTEN TO HEZEKIAH: *read 18 v 13-25*

Assyria comes to attack the newly independent Judah. Hezekiah tries to buy off Sennacherib, but he is unsuccessful. Sennacherib comes against Jerusalem and his threat is not easily dismissed. There is, says Sennacherib, no help:

★ **on earth**—because Egypt is unreliable (v 21)

★ **from heaven**—because you have destroyed your shrines. (This was commanded by God, but people may have felt vulnerable without their 'religion') (v 22)

★ **from within**—because your army is meagre compared to the Assyrians (v 23-24).

Even the claim that Assyria is God's agent (v 25) is hard to dismiss when Judah has recently seen Israel fall to the Assyrians.

Read 18 v 26-37. Hezekiah's officials ask the envoys not to speak in Hebrew so the common people will not understand. Instead the commander shouts so all can hear:

★ **The Lord cannot deliver you:** Sennacherib alone can give you security and prosperity (v 28-32)—a parody of Deuteronomy 8 v 7-9 and 30 v 19.

★ **The Lord cannot deliver you:** Sennacherib alone is sovereign (v 32-35). At stake is the uniqueness of God. Who is 'the great king' (v 28)—Sennacherib or God? And to whom should we listen? The field commander keeps saying: 'Do not listen to Hezekiah' (v 29, 30, 31, 32).

Who we are is shaped by what we hear—the magazines we read, the programmes we watch, the adverts we see. Many of these voices claim that security and prosperity can be bought with a credit card. Many pour scorn on the uniqueness of Christ.

★ *What can you do to ensure that the voices that shape your life are those that witness to the uniqueness of God and His salvation?*

2. DO NOT BE AFRAID OF ASSYRIAN WORDS: *read 19 v 1-4*

Hezekiah responds with mourning and prayer. He asks Isaiah to intercede for what is left of Judah. Their only hope is that God Himself will be provoked to act (v 4). **Read v 5-8.** Hezekiah has rightly judged the character of God. Sennacherib has blasphemed and so God will intervene. The people of God need not fear the hostile words of a hostile world.

THE PRAYER OF HEZEKIAH

Wednesday April 16: 2 Kings 19 v 9-19

Have you ever heard of the competition prize that involves racing round a supermarket throwing as much as you can into a trolley in one minute? Sometimes our prayers can seem a bit like that. Is there an alternative? How can we do business with God in prayer?

Read v 9-13. Sennacherib again threatens Jerusalem. He is, it seems, keen to be done with this troublesome city so he can focus on the threat from Egypt.

1. CONFIDENCE IN THE REIGN OF GOD: *read v 14-18*

Having Sennacherib turn up on your doorstep is a bit like having the US army turn up outside your house. Assyria was the superpower of the day. No other nation had withstood it. Hezekiah acknowledges Sennacherib has a powerful case (v 17-19). What's more the northern kingdom of Israel had recently been destroyed by Assyria. Hezekiah must choose between the greatest power in the known world, whose army he can see surrounding his capital, and a God whom he cannot see. **Re-read v 15.** But the God of Israel is not some national deity. He is unique. He is the Creator. He is the God of heaven—enthroned between the cherubim. He is the God of all the earth. Hezekiah is confident in the reign of God and this gives him confidence in prayer.



TIME OUT

The best way to teach people about prayer is to teach them about God. The best way to improve our praying is to know more of God.

★ *How will you go about this?*

2. CONCERN FOR THE REPUTATION OF GOD: *read v 20*

Hezekiah did not spread Sennacherib's letter out in the temple to inform God, but to provoke God. He is saying: 'Look God, your reputation is at stake.' And Hezekiah wants God's glory to be known to the nations. His logic is simple: God saves His people. The nations hear. And so God is glorified. The same logic applies today. God has saved His people through Jesus Christ. The nations hear and God is glorified. God is glorified when the nations hear the gospel and are glad. There is no better way to pray for the glory of God than to pray for world mission. And there is no greater argument when praying for world mission than the glory of God.

★ *How might you adapt Hezekiah's prayer to make it a prayer for today?*

WHAT GOD IS PASSIONATE ABOUT?

Thursday April 17: 2 Kings 19 v 20-37

The army of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, is threatening Jerusalem. Humanly speaking, Jerusalem has not got a hope. Yesterday we saw that Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance was all about a concern for God's reputation. Today we see that God, too, is passionate about His reputation.

Read v 20. God answers Hezekiah's prayer by sending a word of prophecy through Isaiah.

WHAT GOD IS PASSIONATE ABOUT? *Read v 20-31*

The key issue is the reputation of God. Sennacherib has insulted God. Sennacherib may boast of his achievements, but they happen because of God's plan. It is God who is in control. God promises that Judah will recover, albeit slowly. A remnant will survive. It is a sign for Hezekiah, but it is a sign, too, for the exiles in Babylon. A remnant will survive because God will keep His promise and be faithful to His people.



APPLY

The section ends: *'The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this'*. God is zealous. He has a passion for the honour of His name. That is why we pray: 'Hallowed be your name' (Matthew 6 v 9).

★ *How should a concern for God's glory shape what we pray for and how we pray for it?*

FOR MY SAKE: *read v 32-34*

The second section promises deliverance without a shot being fired. Why will God do this?

- ★ **For my sake**—to vindicate the honour of His name and His reputation.
- ★ **For the sake of David my servant**—to fulfil His promise that one of David's sons would always reign over God's people.

Why should God deliver Israel? Not because the Israelites deserved to be saved—they didn't. Not because the Israelites needed to be saved—although they did. No, deliverance would come for the sake of God's reputation.

PRAYER ANSWERED, PROPHECY FULFILLED: *read v 35-37*

Hezekiah's prayer is answered. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled. An angel of the Lord comes and kills 185,000 of the Assyrian army. Sennacherib withdraws and later his own sons murder him.

LET DOWN

Friday April 18: 2 Kings 20 v 1-21

★ *Have you ever been disappointed in someone you respected? We often put our hope in people who then let us down. Where can lasting hope be found?*

Read Isaiah 9 v 6-7. 2 Kings 18-20 is repeated in Isaiah 36-39. Isaiah said that God would triumph through the Son of David. God's anointed King would reign over the world. Stirring stuff, but there's a huge credibility gap when Judah is small fry on the political scene. But Hezekiah's deliverance from Sennacherib demonstrates God's power to intervene and establish the rule of the Son of David. Indeed we might be tempted to think Hezekiah is the promised Messiah of Isaiah 9.

THE FRAGILITY OF HEZEKIAH: *read v 1-11*

Isaiah tells Hezekiah he will die, but in response to his prayer Hezekiah is granted 15 more years of life. It is a hint of the coming king who will reign forever. But it is only a hint: 15 years is a long way short of forever.

THE FOLLY OF HEZEKIAH: *read v 12-21*

The seeds of defeat by the Babylonians are sown when Hezekiah foolishly shows off his treasures to Babylonian envoys. Making an alliance with Babylon—perhaps to counter the Assyrian threat—was an act of faithlessness towards God. Hezekiah's actions bring words of judgement from Isaiah. Just as Hezekiah showed 'everything' (v 15) to the envoys, so 'everything' (v 17) will be carried off into exile.



TIME OUT

★ *How do you respond to success? How do you respond to spiritual fruitfulness? Does it make you grateful for God's work in your life? Or does it make you proud and presumptuous?*

See 1 Corinthians 10 v 11-12 and 1 Peter 5 v 6.

Hezekiah's reprieve is a picture of the reprieve of the people. He is saved from death, but succumbs 15 years later. They are saved from Assyria, but will succumb to Babylon. Hezekiah can rejoice in peace in his lifetime (v 19), but that is all.



PRAY THRO'

The scene is set for Isaiah's prophecy of One who will end the exile and bring comfort to God's people (Isaiah 40 v 1-5).

★ *Praise God that Jesus, the promised King, has come. Praise God that He will defeat God's enemies, reign with wisdom, banish evil, and establish peace and life forever.*

THE POINT OF NO RETURN

Saturday April 19: 2 Kings 21 v 1-26

Sometimes we reach a point when we say: *'There's no going back now. This is the point of no return.'* We have reached just such a point in the history of Judah. Until now there has always been the possibility of turning away from the brink. But now irrevocable judgment is declared.

Read v 1-9. Hezekiah finally destroyed the high places—Manasseh reinstates them (v 3). He reintroduces Baal worship (v 3). He worships the stars (v 3-5). He even sacrifices his own son (v 6). His rule is one of violence and injustice (v 16).

★ **The ultimate scandal is that he commits idolatry in the temple—** the place on which God said: 'I will put my Name' (v 5, 7). The temple stood for the presence of God with His people. The Name of God was a reminder of God's character and deliverance. This is what Manasseh snubs and rejects.

★ **God destroyed the Canaanite nations to create a space in which His people could be a distinctive light to the nations.** But Manasseh not only follows their detestable ways (v 2), Israel has become worse than the nations (v 9, 11).

Read v 19-26. Manasseh's son continues the programme of 'un-reform'.

Read v 8. In describing the temple, the writer reminds us that God had promised His people would never experience exile if they remained faithful. It was a promise the people had ignored (v 9). The implication is that, if they were exiled—as the readers of 2 Kings had been—it was because they had been unfaithful.

Read v 10-18. God commits Himself to judgment. He will wipe out Jerusalem as you might wipe out a dish. **Read 23 v 26.** God has been provoked to anger (v 6). And His anger does not subside because it is based on His word.

Read v 14. In the Bible the remnant are the faithful few who survive God's judgment. Will God forsake even the remnant? Yes, He will. One day that remnant will be reduced to one faithful man—hanging on a cross and abandoned by God. God will judge sin. He must judge sin. But He has judged our sin by forsaking Christ. And in so doing He fulfils His promise to save a people.



APPLY

What does God think about sin? Look at how 2 Kings 21 describes God's response to sin. How seriously does God take sin? Seriously enough to give His own Son that we might be forgiven.

★ *How seriously do you take sin?*

PROVERBS FOR POLITICIANS

Sunday April 20: Proverbs 25 v 1-10

WISE RULERS: *read verses 1-3*

A new selection of Solomon's proverbs, collected in the days of Hezekiah, starts with some pithy sayings for us to chew over.

★ *What do you think makes a great and wise ruler?*

The thought in v 2 is not that God has something to hide, but rather that God is so great and wise, and humans minds so puny by comparison, that His ways are wonderfully mysterious to us. We cannot know His mind, or the intricacies of His dealings with mankind.



PRAY THRO'

God's ways are awesomely wise, and yet our minds cannot fathom them, or understand His purposes.

★ Use **Romans 11 v 33-36** to praise our glorious God.

By contrast, the responsibility of the godly king is to search out and to understand and discover how things work so that they rule wisely and justly. And in particular the King, as God's representation, must know, learn and love the Word of God (**Read Deuteronomy 17 v 18-20**). Being wise and knowing, however, doesn't mean that a leader should wear his heart upon his sleeve. There are many circumstances when it will be right for him to play his cards close to his chest (v 3).



TIME OUT

Hard work, and a desire to uncover the truth are what make a good leader, not just powerful oratory or winsome looks. The same applies for those who would lead the people of God: they should be prepared to put in the hard work of digging in the word for the truth...

EVIL IN HIGH PLACES: *read verses 4-5*

'A politician's ability to govern does not depend on his moral choices'. We often hear claims like these surrounding people in high places who are caught in some scandal and are desperately trying to hang on to their jobs. Proverbs would disagree... In fact not only are they not able to govern, but they also taint the rest of the government by their faithlessness and lies.



TIME OUT

As with the nation, so with God's people—only more so. The primary qualification for being a leader of the flock is a godly life.

Read Titus 1 v 5-9.

★ *Pray for the godliness of those who lead our country and our churches.*

A DREADFUL DISCOVERY

Monday April 21: 2 Kings 22 v 1-20

Manasseh was the worst king ever. Today we meet Josiah, who has a reasonable claim to be the best king ever (see 23 v 25). But he has come too late. With Manasseh we passed the point of no return.

A DREADFUL DISCOVERY: read v 1-10

Josiah starts to renew the temple. In the process, the Book of the Law is rediscovered. This is probably Deuteronomy which calls itself by this name (Deuteronomy 28 v 61; 29 v 21; 30 v 10; 31 v 26). It was supposed to sit by the ark of the covenant, where it was to 'remain as a witness against you' (Deuteronomy 31 v 26). But at some point it had been 'misplaced'—perhaps during Manasseh's terrible reign. But now it has been found. Surely this is good news?

Read v 11-13. When Josiah hears it read, he is distraught. What the writer has spelt out for us in chapter 21 hits home to Josiah in v 13. Deuteronomy describes the curses that will fall on God's people if they are not faithful to Him (Deuteronomy 28). And the people have not kept the covenant, so Josiah sees disaster looming. **Read v 14-20.** Huldah confirms what is written. Josiah himself will not see it, but disaster is coming.

HOPE BEYOND HOPELESSNESS

The situation is hopeless. Disaster cannot be averted. Josiah is the best possible king, but even the best possible king cannot prevent God's judgment.



TIME OUT

It is tempting to ask why God could not simply forget the past—forgive and forget. But suppose God was not angry about sin. What if God simply shrugged His shoulders and said, '*Forget it?*' The result would be:

- ★ our actions would have no ultimate significance
- ★ those who do evil would get away with it
- ★ human beings would have no value—the suffering we inflict on one another would be a matter of indifference to God
- ★ evil and violence would triumph.

If there must be judgment, then the only hope is hope *beyond* judgment. Our only hope is if someone takes our judgment instead of us. **See Galatians 3 v 10-14.**

★ Praise God that Jesus has born the curses written in the Book of the Law and so redeemed us from those curses.

AN IRRELEVANT REFORMATION

Tuesday April 22: 2 Kings 23 v 1-30

How are your new year's resolutions? Can you even remember them? Did they last more than a week or two? We want to be better, but it never quite works out.

A THOROUGH REFORMATION: *read v 1-24*

Josiah sets about a complete programme of reformation. He starts by ensuring the people hear God's word, and calls them to a renewed commitment to the covenant. He then systematically destroys all traces of idolatry going back through the generations, right back even to the ones built by Solomon (v 13). It is painstakingly recorded—this is a thorough job. It climaxes in a great Passover celebration, the like of which had not been seen since the days of the judges.

AN IRRELEVANT REFORMATION: *read v 25*

Josiah is faithful to Moses and walks in the ways of David. He out-reforms the other great reformer, Hezekiah. Yet ultimately the verdict is: 'irrelevant'. **Read v 26-28.** This great reformation is just an upbeat interlude. It does not alter the course of history. Josiah cannot undo what has been done. He cannot turn the clock back. That's the lesson of Josiah: we cannot put right what we have messed up. We have messed up our own lives. We have messed up life for other people. And we cannot put it right. Even the best-ever king could not do it. And so the story ends with tragi-comic anti-climax. **Read v 29-30.**



Christianity is not about moral reformation. It is not about getting ourselves sorted out. It is about what God has done for us. We cannot reform ourselves, but God gives us a new heart and a new life. It is sometimes said that evangelism is one hungry beggar telling another where there is free bread. We should never pretend to be anything more than hungry beggars.

Thomas Chalmers, a 19th-century Scots preacher, was converted while a minister in his first church. He wrote: 'Before I was converted, I preached to the drunk to give up drink. I told the blasphemer to give up using God's name wrongly. I told the idle to stop being lazy. But the drunk remained drunk, the blasphemer continued blaspheming and the idle remained idle. And then when I was converted, I preached the gospel, the free grace of God. I stopped telling people to sort themselves out and told them God had done it all. And a funny thing happened. The drunk become sober, the blasphemer stopped swearing and the idle got work.'

THE END OF THE LINE

23

Wednesday April 23: 2 Kings 23 v 31 – 25 v 26

What's God up to in my life? What's God up to in this messed-up world? Why doesn't God intervene? It's a question we might well ask at the end of 2 Kings. Why didn't God intervene to save His people?

THE END OF THE LINE: read 23 v 31 – 25 v 21

In these last chapters the writer highlights how far we have come. Once the nations marvelled at God's people: now God's people go in exile to the nations. Once Solomon ruled with great wisdom: now we get a series of stupid rebellions. Once Solomon built a wonderful palace and temple: now they are destroyed. Once the nations brought their best to the temple: now the treasures of the temple are robbed.

The story from Exodus to Kings is the story of God fulfilling His promises. In Exodus God gives freedom to His people. In Joshua He gives them the land. In 1-2 Samuel He gives them His king. In 1 Kings He gives them the temple. Now the temple is destroyed. The king is deposed. The people lose their freedom and are exiled from the land.

Israel's first battle was at Jericho—it was a great victory. Now it fights its last battle at Jericho—it is a horrible defeat (25 v 5-6).

Read 25 v 22-26. The story began with Israel rescued from Egypt. It ends with 'all the people' fleeing back to Egypt (25 v 26). These chapters are a tragic parody of God's great salvation.

GOD JUDGES JUSTLY

The book of Kings is written to answer this question: '*Why has the LORD done such a thing to this land and to this temple?*' (1 Kings 9 v 8). It could be because:

- ★ **God is impotent**—God cannot keep His promises or protect His people
- ★ **God does not care**—God is distant and uninterested in the plight of His people
- ★ **God is unfaithful**—God does not keep His promises—and who can make Him?

The book of Kings is not happy with any of these answers.

Read 24 v 2-4 and 24 v 20. The book of Kings is written to vindicate God. God is not to blame. The fault lies with Israel. Israel did not keep the covenant. God judges justly.



TIME OUT

Read Luke 13 v 1-5. Kings is not so much a history book as a confession of sin. And that is the proper response to suffering. We should not blame God. We are the ones who have messed up this world.

BEYOND THE END OF THE LINE

Thursday April 24: 2 Kings 25 v 27-30

★ *What has struck you about the story we have followed in 2 Kings?*

We have reached the end of the line. All that God promised and all that God has provided over the years—people, land, king and temple—is in ruins. The people are in captivity. They are exiled from the land. The king is deposed. The temple is destroyed. God is responsible, but He is not to blame. This is God's judgment on the people's sin.

GOD SAVES GRACIOUSLY

In 2 Samuel 7 God makes a promise to David that one of his descendants will always reign over God's people. This covenant with David has been a brooding presence in 1 and 2 Kings. It is rarely centre stage. Centre stage is the mess and the sin. But it is there none the less. Attention has repeatedly been drawn to the way the kings of Judah trace their line back to David. Despite all the mess and evil, the house of David continues—held together by the promise of God.

And so we get this strange anti-climax. **Read 2 Kings 25 v 27-30.** We get to the end of the long history from Joshua through to 2 Kings and we expect some gushing finale or some tragic closing word. But instead we get Jehoiachin receiving pocket money. Yet even at the end of the line, the covenant with David is still a brooding presence. It is not explicit, but it is there as a big hint. Maybe the line of David will continue. Maybe there is still hope. **Read Ezekiel 34 v 22-24.**

Jehoiachin's name pops up again in the Bible—this time in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1 v 11—see NIV footnote!). Jesus is the new King David. And Jesus reconstructs the ruins of God's kingdom and fulfils the promise to Abraham.

- ★ Jesus frees God's people from sin and death to worship and serve God.
- ★ Jesus gives us an inheritance in the new creation.
- ★ Jesus is God's king who rules in justice and peace.
- ★ Jesus is the temple—the place where God is present on earth.

CONCLUSION

★ *We ask: 'What on earth is God up to in this messed up world?'*
We want to blame God. But the blame lies with us. One day God is going to ask us: 'What on earth were you up to?'

★ *We ask: 'Why doesn't God do something?'*

The answer is: He has and He will. He has given us His Son. Jesus frees us from the power of sin and the fear of death. And He will come again to rule in justice and recreate this messed-up world.

2 PETER: STAND AND THINK

Friday April 25: 2 Peter 1 v 1-4

Going on in the Christian life is less about discovering new things, and more about remembering—and applying—the same old truths. The truths that we first learnt when we heard God’s gospel—the good news that Jesus saves us from the wrath to come. And because the Christians Peter wrote to then were, like us, experiencing confusion from false teachers, he stresses that we have *already* received the truth in Jesus. That’s Peter’s aim in writing this letter: he wants Christians then and now to *think straight* about what God has done, and where we are heading, and to *stand firm* now as we face opposition.

A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD: read v 1-2

- ★ *What is so startling about how Peter describes himself and how he describes those to whom he is writing (v1)?*



There are no ranks or orders or degrees of faith in Jesus Christ! The lowliest new convert has attained (by grace) the same faith that top apostle Peter had. We are *all* children... all servants of the same heavenly father and master.

- ★ *Do you think too highly of yourself—‘I am extra-special in God’s sight’... or maybe not enough—‘I’m a nothing in God’s kingdom’? Maybe some repentance is in order...*

- ★ *How can grace and peace be multiplied to us, according to v 2?*

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW: read v 3-4

- ★ *Where do we get this knowledge, according to v 3?*
- ★ *What kind of life has He called us to partake in (v 3, 4)?*
- ★ *What do you think he means by ‘sharing the divine nature’ (v 4)?*

God has given us ‘all things’ to get us through life and teach us how to be godly: and He has given it to us in Jesus. Notice that the gift of life is not without implications for us: He has called us to a new life of ‘excellence’ (v 3b, ESV); and it is a life which is focused on saying ‘no’ to the passionate corruption of this world and saying ‘yes’ to the things we look forward to sharing in—the eternal glory of God’s divine nature.



All we need to know, for living this life and getting into the next, is to be found in the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. There is no ‘moving on to the higher teaching,’ or a ‘second blessing’ to get to a higher stage. Just a need for us to think more deeply and clearly about the gospel we have already received.

KNOWING MEANS LIVING

Saturday April 26: 2 Peter 1 v 5-11

Peter has shown us that God has provided all things for us in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and that growing in the knowledge of Him is how we keep going as Christians. But there's more to knowledge than just knowledge...

A DRESS CODE FOR HEAVEN: *read v 5-7*

Like some parties, heaven has a dress code—not smart suits and hats—but a life lived in active holiness. And holiness is not just something private and personal: it is active—it's about how you relate to others.

Go over the list in v 5-7.

- ★ *Think of another Christian who exemplifies one of these qualities.*
- ★ *Choose one quality that you think you fail most at.*
- ★ *Think of one quality that your church especially needs right now.*



PRAY THRO'

Spend some time thanking God for those you know who are models of Christian godliness. And then pray for yourself and your church that God would give you both the *knowledge* of Jesus Christ, and the *response* that helps you grow in godliness.

... AND THE REASON THAT WE NEED IT: *read v 8-11*

Godliness is not just an 'optional extra' in the Christian life—it is absolutely vital. Peter lays out the reasons why:

- ★ **Without godliness, we are ineffective and unfruitful (v 8):** knowledge without action is a waste of time. We become useless Christians.
- ★ **If we are ungodly, we show that we are blind (v 9):** have we forgotten what we were saved from? Have we forgotten that it cost the Father the death of His Son to save us? How ungrateful!
- ★ **It confirms our election and call (v 10):** if we are growing in godliness, it is solid evidence that God has truly worked in us. But if we couldn't care less about how we live, were we ever really converted?
- ★ **It ensures our survival (v 10):** many Christians, even those who seem to be mature and knowledgeable, make a wreckage of their faith because they harbour sin, and refuse to let God deal with it. Like riding a bike, it's only when you stop going forward that you fall off.



PRAY THRO'

Do you need to make a new start in going on with God? You may have plenty of 'knowledge'—but is it changing the way you live? Have you stalled in your Christian growth and need to start again?

- ★ *Talk to Him about it now...*

Sunday April 27: Proverbs 25 v 11-28

Our translations of Proverbs obscure the fact that the original does not have the connecting words: 'as' and 'is like'. The originals are much more staccato. So verse 11 would read: 'A word fitly spoken; apples of gold in a setting of silver'. The reader is left to work out the connection between them and its implications for godly living. There is lots in this section about the words we speak. Stop after reading each proverb and let its meaning sink in. Feel free to stop if you feel your brain bursting: verse 16 clearly applies to this situation!

WORDS: read v 11-16

The words of the godly wise are apt or appropriate to the situation (v 11); you should be prepared to 'tell people off'— so long as they are prepared to listen to you (v 12); and to be refreshingly faithful in carrying messages (v 13); Not to boast about your abilities (v 14); and not to give up on the power of the patient, caring approach (v 15).



★ Which of these do you find hardest to do?

Spend some time in prayer now asking God to help you grow in godliness in the way you speak. Pray too for an opportunity *today* to practise what you've prayed for...

WORDS AND DEEDS: read v 17-28

Again, it's better to pick one that has particularly struck you.

★ Which one will you make your motto for the week?

Try to write a contemporary version of it, so that the thought sticks more effectively. Here's my try at verse 20: 'Singing 'I am H-A-P-P-Y' to a depressive is like nicking his coat in a snowstorm.' I'm sure you can do a lot better...



Wisdom for godly living is very different from the worldly wisdom, which, in the end, only looks out for itself. Godly wisdom knows that we must fear God the Judge, and leave the business of real justice to Him. For a worked-out reflection on the application of this section of proverbs, **read Romans 12 v 14-21.**

LISTEN UP

Monday April 28: 2 Peter 1 v 12-21

REMEMBER, REMEMBER: *read v 12-15*

Peter's big job now is to remind them (v 12, 13) of the truth, so that they will be able to recall it when he's gone (v 15).

★ *What do you think 'these things' are (v 12)?*



TIME OUT

Peter is conscious that his time is short. It may be that he had specific information from the Lord Jesus about when and how he would die (***see John 21 v 18-19***). It is a surprising priority that he has nonetheless. He doesn't spend his precious time establishing organisations, strategising about the future or building churches, but reminding people of the central core truths of the gospel.

★ *How are you going to spend the limited time God has given you?*

TRUST ME... I'M AN EYE WITNESS! *Read v 16-18*

But how do we know that Peter's gospel is the 'right' gospel? Why should we listen to him rather than to any of the other highly credible teachers that are floating around? The 'we' in v 16 and 18 refers to the apostles, not all Christians. Peter is talking about what we call 'the Transfiguration.' ***Read Mark 9 v 2-13.***

★ *What is the point that Peter is making by recounting this incident?*

Teaching derived from logic, or philosophy or stories (myths and traditions, v 16) can have a big 'believability' factor. They can seem to make sense. But they are not the gospel of God. Peter and the apostles were actually there and saw Jesus revealed in all His glory, and heard the Father's verdict on His life and teaching (v 17). ***Read Col 2 v 8-9.***

TRUST ME... IT'S IN THE SCRIPTURES! *Read v 19-21*

But there's something *even more trustworthy* than what we saw with our own eyes, says Peter. He's talking about the prophetic witness to Jesus in the Old Testament—the Bible. Notice that he says the Bible is:

★ **ESSENTIAL:** it's a shining lamp that reveals the truth to us. (v 19)

★ **RELIABLE:** although it came through humans (v 20), it is not merely their opinion, but something much, much more.

★ **DIVINE:** it is God speaking to us (v 21).



PRAY THRO'

Have you forgotten this amazing and marvellous truth: as you have read the Bible today, the living, eternal, glorious God has been speaking to you!

★ *Praise Him for His amazing provision for you in His word.*

THE FINE PRINT

Tuesday April 29: 2 Peter 2 v 1-3

Adverts for insurance cover or money-making schemes always promise the earth—but the devil is in the detail. Having made the case for the gospel delivered by him and the other apostles, Peter explains the ‘fine print’ that is hidden in the message of the false teachers. **Read 2 v 1-3.**

ATTRACTIVE... BUT DESTRUCTIVE: re-read v 1

Notice that the teachers are ‘among you’. It’s easy to spot those who come from a different organisation, but what if they are in our pulpits and writing in the books and magazines that we are recommended?

- ★ *What is the overall effect of these teachings on those who hear them?*
- ★ *And what will become of those who teach them?*



This is no small matter! Those who choose to follow such teaching (which may end up denying our Lord and Master Himself) are joining the ‘destruction party’.

- ★ *Is there any guidance from this verse about how we can tell the difference between ‘allowable’ Christian differences and heresy?*

False teaching inevitably leads away from Jesus, and the completeness of what He did on the cross to save us.

ATTRACTIVE... BUT INEFFECTIVE: re-read v 2

- ★ *What does v 2 say the essential character of their teaching is?*
- ★ *And what will be the effect of their teachings on non-Christians?*



TIME OUT

Heresies appeal to us at our weakest point. We want to live less sinful, more effective Christian lives. So they tell us that their ‘new way’ is the answer to our problems with evangelism; or the key to unlocking our stifled potential as believers. Quite the reverse says Peter. Their teachings are indulgent—they appeal to our (unhelpful) need for things we can experience, rather than the word of God. And they bring the gospel into disrepute among outsiders.

- ★ *Can you think of examples of these kinds of false teaching?*

ATTRACTIVE... BUT EXPLOITATIVE: re-read v 3

In the Bible there is always an unbreakable connection between what we believe and how we live. Knowledge without godly living is no knowledge at all (**see James 2 v 18-19**). And likewise, false teaching produces a harvest of unrighteousness in those who teach it, and, sadly, in those who receive it.

- ★ **Read Matthew 7 v 15-23** and ask God for discernment in this area.

COME-UPPANCE

Wednesday April 30: 2 Peter 2 v 3-10

The unanswered question so far is ‘Why?’ Why does God allow such false teaching to continue? It’s hard enough to follow Jesus and fight against the world, the flesh and the devil, without having to fight battles inside the church against false teachers. **Read v 3-10.**

FOUR ‘IF’S’: **read v 3-9**

★ *What is the awful promise that Peter gives about false teachers (v 3)?*



PRAY THRO’

False teachers seem to go unchecked in the churches of our land. It is a shocking and appalling thing that every Sunday, many, perhaps most, churches in our land are peopled by the lost and dying, who listen to sermons that offer no hope, no Saviour, no truth. God will not be slow in bringing judgment upon their leaders.

★ *Pray that God would raise up men and women to fill those churches with truth, not error; with hope of heaven, not lies that lead to hell.*

Peter gives four examples to show that God cares about false teachers, and His hard-pressed people.

★ *What are they (v 4, 5, 6, 7)?*

AN AWFUL ‘THEN’: **read v 9-10a**

Curiously, the test cases speak of a punishment that *precedes* the final judgment (v 9). It is not surprising that those who choose to follow the way of corruption (v 10) should start to experience its effects now.

Read Romans 1 v 18, 24-25.

★ *On whom does God’s punishment especially fall (v 10)?*

THE GREAT ESCAPE: **re-read verses 7-9**

Any parent will know the anger they feel towards anyone who threatens their children. God loves His children too. And this passage gives us a glimpse of how He runs to protect and rescue His people and to keep them safe from the threat that false teaching brings. But as with the case of Lot, it is often only after a period of intense suffering that God’s rescue arrives. We are preserved *through* trials. **Read John 17 v 14-15.**



PRAY THRO’

It may still feel awful if you are wrestling with false teaching in your church or denomination. Your friends may have fallen prey to it—but God’s judgment is not far away. We may be feeling the ‘soulful torment’ that Lot experienced, but God is an expert when it comes to rescues—trust Him!

★ *Pray that you would think straight and keep going.*

GUESS WHO'S COMING TO DINNER?

Thursday May 1: 2 Peter 2 v 10-16

In the second half of chapter 2, Peter's assault on the false teachers reaches its shocking climax. **Read verses 10b-16.** The end of verse 13 emphasizes that these people were part of the social circle of the Christians Peter was writing to: but they didn't realise who was sat across the dinner table from them...

THEIR MESSAGE: read v 10b-11

The details of precisely which spirits they were slandering are vague to us, although, presumably, Peter's readers would have been aware of the specifics. But the main point is clear: they were full of arrogance about their place in God's universe; and pronounced sentence on matters that it was not their place to. Even the angels wouldn't dare say the things they talk about with abandon, says Peter.



TIME OUT

Although, ultimately, we will reign with Christ in heaven (*see 2 Timothy 2 v 12*), now we are 'lower than the angels' (*Hebrews 2 v 7*). And judgment belongs firmly in the hands of the Living God. We need to maintain a humble 'don't know' about things that are beyond us, and trust the outcome to the one who judges justly.

THEIR LIFESTYLE: read v 12-14

★ *What are they really after, according to these verses?*

They may have been full of fascinating talk—expressing high-sounding opinions about exotic subjects—but their motives were of a much lower order: high living; money; sex; power over the weak.



TIME OUT

We need to learn to look beyond the fine words to the reality of the lifestyle. It is why there is an inherent danger for those who have itinerant ministries, like evangelists, or who have radio or TV ministries. Their lives are often not open to inspection and accountability as is the life of a local pastor, who is part of a fellowship.

THEIR 'WISDOM': read v 12, 15-16

Their stupidity is brought into focus by Peter's reference to the story of Balaam (*read Numbers 22 if you have the time*), where a 'wise' man was taught the truth by a talking donkey.



PRAY THRO'

Pray for those who minister in your church, and especially for those who travel around in their Christian work. Ask God to keep them clean, humble and faithful to His word.

★ *Not a bad prayer for you either...*

PIGS AND DOGS

Friday May 2: 2 Peter 2 v 17-22

Read v 17-22. Are you shocked by the language Peter uses? We ought not to be. When a doctor messes up a diagnosis, there is uproar. When politicians are discovered in double-dealing, there are cries for their resignation. And heaven is in an uproar when the Living God and the Saviour are dishonoured, and precious souls led astray. Read Jesus' equally shocking condemnation of false teachers in **Luke 17 v 1-2**.

THEIR TARGET: *read v 14, 18-19*

★ *Who especially are these false teachers targeting?*



TIME OUT

We need our steadiest hands to work with those who are new to the faith, or those who are weak and vulnerable in any way.

★ *How are new Christians nurtured in your church?*

THEIR TACTICS: *read v 18-19*

★ *What kind of things will the false teachers promise from these verses?*



TIME OUT

Freedom. A more 'spiritual' way of living. A fast track to God. The clothes of false teaching may have changed over the centuries, but the basic ideas have not. It is surprising how often the same heresies surface in new forms over the centuries—one of the reasons that we need to study church history more closely.

THEIR END: *read v 20-22*

★ *What happens to those who constantly disobey God without asking for forgiveness?*

★ *How has this been true in your experience?*

The proverbs quoted in v 22 make a powerful point. A pig is still a pig—even if you wash it, it will still 'revert to type' and go back to the mud. In the same way, true believers can be recognised—they don't return to wallow in a filthy lifestyle as the 'Christian' con-men do.

THE ANSWER: *read v 20*

★ *What is the implied answer to the ever present problem of false teaching in this verse?*



PRAY THRO'

It may sound boring and lacking in the excitement factor—though actually, it's not—but drinking in the knowledge of God through His word, and living it out, is the way to true freedom.

★ *Is there something you need to recommit yourself to today...?*

FAITHFUL...

Saturday May 3: 2 Peter 3 v 1-7

Peter now turns to a different, but related problem. **Read v 1-7.**

TOTAL RECALL: **read v 1-2**

- ★ *What is Peter's aim for his readers—including you (v 1)?*
- ★ *What is it that we constantly need reminding about (v 2)?*

SCOFFERS: **read v 3-4**

Peter wants to help sincere believers to withstand the mockery of those who deny that Jesus is coming back.

- ★ *What arguments do they use? Why are these so powerful?*



TIME OUT

'The world turns the way it has always turned.' 'He said He was coming soon, but it's 20 past *soon* already...' There is nothing more depressing or discouraging than a well-placed piece of mockery.

- ★ *Can you recall having been mocked for believing the Bible? How did it make you feel?*

WHAT'S REALLY REAL? **Read v 5-7**

- ★ *What is it that the scoffers deliberately overlooked?*



We live by faith in the word of God, not sight (2 Cor 5 v 7). How stupid of the mockers to conveniently 'forget' that everything we see, that seems so solid, actually came into being by God speaking. And just as God so easily destroyed the world by flood, so too, our present universe is here because He wills it to remain, waiting for the coming judgment.

- ★ *In what kinds of areas are we tempted to believe the evidence of our eyes, rather than the plain teaching of the Bible?*

God does what He says. He is faithful to His word. We have the evidence of thousands of years of biblical history to back that up—every page of the Bible screams that message to us. God is faithful. He will do what He has promised.

- ★ *Does that thought fill you with fear or hope for the future?*

IN A TIGHT SPOT

Sunday May 4: Psalm 31 v 1-8

David's in a tight spot. His enemies are looming large, and his friends have left him in the lurch. No prizes for guessing where he turns in his hour of crisis...

FIRM IN THE FORTRESS: *read verses 1-4*

David's enemies have laid a trap for him (v 4), but he seeks refuge, deliverance and safety in a fortress—the Lord (v 3). He knows he can stand firm in this fortress. All around him is fear and anguish, but he has the antidote to this crisis—prayerful refuge in the Lord.



TIME OUT

- ★ *What leaves you feeling surrounded, trapped, left in the lurch?*
- ★ *How do you react? In a flailing panic?*
- ★ *What is David's response to a desperate situation?*

COMMITMENT: *read verse 5*

David doesn't lash out at everything in sight. And he doesn't roll up into a tiny ball of self-pity. He commits this situation—in fact his whole life (spirit)—into God's hands. He shows his loyalty and his trust in the Lord.



APPLY

Does verse 5 ring any bells with you? Look up **Luke 23 v 44-46**. Then read **Acts 7 v 59-60** and **1 Peter 4 v 19**.

The Lord Jesus is the ultimate example to us of showing our faith in God by committing our lives to Him. Even literally.

WHO DO YOU TRUST? *Read verses 6-8*

Our trust should solely be in the Lord. Not in ourselves, not in others, not in superstitions or worthless idols (v 6). Our confidence is in God, for He alone knows our troubles and sees our anguish (v 7). Only He can lead us to safety (v 8).



PRAY THRO'

Feeling harassed? Trapped? Alone? Then follow David's example—you know where to turn. Will you commit your life into God's hands and trust in His promise of eternal refuge?

GOD OF MERCY

Monday May 5: 2 Peter 3 v 8-10

What Peter has said so far raises a question. If nothing is outside God's control, and He has promised that Jesus will return—what's the hold-up? Why the delay? **Read verses 8-10.**

SLOW TRAIN COMING: read v 8

★ *What do you think is Peter's main point in verse 8?*



TIME OUT

To us, 2,000 years seems like a long time. It's not to God. Peter has been trying to broaden our perspective throughout this letter—so that we see things from God's point of view. We are obsessed with time, and its use—God is more concerned about people and their eternal destiny. ★ *Is this something that you need to think about?*

MERCIFUL GOD: read v 9-10

★ *What reason does Peter give for Jesus not yet coming back?*

★ *Jesus' return will be like a thief (v 10). What does that mean?*

★ *What will happen when He does come back?*

God isn't interested in getting Jesus back as quickly as possible so as to punish as many people as possible. He takes no delight in the death of sinners—so the delay is actually a sign of His mercy. Every moment that He delays in bringing about the end, is another moment of opportunity for someone to turn and find His forgiveness in Christ. The very reason that we are not yet in heaven is so that the gospel may be preached.



APPLY

South African church leader Frank Retief tells his ministers: 'Organize your diaries around the fact that people without Christ are going to hell.'

★ *Make a short list below of people whom you want to tell about Jesus. Pray specifically for them, and ask for opportunities to share the gospel with them before Jesus comes back and it is too late.*

-
-
-
-
-

WHAT TO DO WHILE WAITING

Tuesday May 6: 2 Peter 3 v 11-13

Life is full of waiting: for the bus; for a telephone call; for the doctor to see you. Weddings are the worst, where you have to wait for everything: the bride to arrive; the photos to be taken; to meet and greet the line-up; and, of course, for the speeches to end. **Read v 11-13.**

★ *How does Peter say that we should use our time waiting for Jesus to return?*

HOLINESS: read v 11

★ *What do you think it means to live 'holy and godly lives'? Look up these verses and write down one key point from each...*

- 2 Corinthians 7 v 1
- 1 Peter 2 v 9-12
- 1 Thessalonians 4 v 1-7
- Luke 12 v 35-40



TIME OUT

Notice that Peter calls us to be 'holy' rather than 'busy'. You might be very busy doing many worthy things around church, but are you actually making the effort to have a holy character and motivation in all your activities?

HASTENING: read v 12

★ *How do you think we can 'hasten' His coming?*

Read Revelation 22 v 20; Matthew 24 v 9-14.

HEAVEN: read v 13

- ★ *What should be the true focus of the Christian life?*
- ★ *And—just to underline the point—how can we be sure of it?*



APPLY

Peter's point is obvious: the false teachers woo us by offers of 'spirituality' now, which are based in this world. Real Christians know that this tainted world is to be melted down and another put in its place—only there will true righteousness be found.

★ *So what does that say about our attitude towards possessions now?*



PRAY THRO'

- ★ *Pray that the Lord would return!*
- ★ *Pray that the gospel will be preached in all the world so that all of God's chosen ones will be gathered in.*
- ★ *Pray that you would strive for the righteousness that will be ours in heaven.*

WAIT WATCHERS

Wednesday May 7: 2 Peter 3 v 14-18

From the vast array of books and videos available on the subject of the second coming of Jesus, you might be forgiven for thinking that the main things we are called to do as we wait are to count earthquakes, and play a few rounds of 'Spot the antichrist'. Peter puts us straight...

WORKING AT HOLINESS: read v 14

Just as you would have a major tidy-up and Hoover round the house when you've got important guests coming, so Peter encourages us to work at keeping our moral and spiritual lives spick and span.



TIME OUT

Read Matthew 24 v 45-51.

WORKING AT THE WORD: read v 15-17

- ★ *Why do you think Peter suddenly starts talking about Paul here?*
- ★ *What is the main point of what he is saying in these verses?*
- ★ *Given what Peter has already said about Scripture (see 1 v 20-21), why is it significant that he also refers to Paul's writings as 'Scripture'?*



TIME OUT

Even Peter recognised that some things that Paul wrote were difficult to understand.

- ★ *Does 2 Peter give us any help in knowing how we can approach difficult Bible passages in such a way that we do not distort them?*

WORKING AT GROWING: read v 18

Peter commands us to 'grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ.' In other words, we should never think that we've 'arrived' as believers, either in our knowledge of God, or in appreciating the wonder of His forgiveness to us in the cross of Christ. We should always be striving to know Jesus more fully.



APPLY

A young Christian comes up to you at church and starts to talk about an exciting youth meeting she went to, where the speaker said some amazing things. As she talks, you start to realise that there's something not quite right about what she has taken on board. It seems to go beyond what the Bible teaches.

- ★ *From 2 Peter, which verses would you point her to that would set her on the right track again?*

OBADIAH: JUDGMENT REVEALED

Thursday May 8: Obadiah v 1-9

Obadiah may be the shortest book in the Old Testament—but he certainly packs a punch. If you're struggling to find him, look between Amos and Jonah, and then **read v 1-9**.

A BITTER FAMILY FEUD

Obadiah's vision (v 1) was most likely written during the exile of the southern kingdom of Judah in Babylon. It is God's promise of the destruction of the nation of Edom—the descendents of Esau—who lived to the east of Israel on the other side of the Jordan and Dead Sea.

Esau had sold his birthright to Jacob, who then received the blessing of their father, Isaac. And although an uneasy peace was made between the brothers, the two nations they gave rise to became implacable enemies.



TIME OUT

Trace the history of this bitter family dispute in **Genesis 25 v 19-34; Genesis 27; 32-33**. And to get a view on how much these two nations hated each other **read Numbers 20 v 14-21; Psalm 137**.



PRAY THRO'

There's nothing more bitter than a family feud, where a history of hurts, ugly words and betrayals leaves a gnawing pain in people's lives. There are almost certainly people in your congregation who are having to deal with long-term family strife—or maybe you are? ★ *Pray that Christians would be 'peacemakers' in these difficult situations, and be the first to offer genuine forgiveness.*

PRIDE COMES BEFORE...

- ★ *Why might the Edomites have felt confident and secure from v 1-9?*
- ★ *But what does God say will happen to them?*

Hidden away in their mountain cities (v 3)—Petra, carved into the rock, was a typical Edomite city—they felt secure in the strength of their wise men (v 8), warriors (v 9) and their alliances (v 7). But such feelings are worthless when it comes to God's holy, righteous anger against sin. The only sure thing is their destruction. Their end would be devastating, friendless, complete and final.



APPLY

One of our strongest human instincts is for security. We buy insurance, form friendships, establish families and homes, or gather learning, status and achievements, in order to 'feel secure'. But these are false hopes. There is only one thing, or rather one person, who can keep us secure and safe from the judgment of God. ★ *Are you trusting in Jesus Christ, or something else?*

JUDGMENT EXPLAINED

Friday May 9: Obadiah v 8-16

Edom means 'red', a name given to Esau—for his red hair, and the red stew he sold his birthright for—and to the nation to which he gave rise. But what had these people done that brought such devastating judgement on them? **Read v 8-16.**

BETRAYAL: read v 8-14

- ★ *How does Obadiah describe what Edom did when Israel was invaded by the Babylonians?*
- ★ *Why is this especially bad?*

Solomon says it all: *He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.* (Proverbs 17 v 5). Although they could defend themselves by saying 'we didn't do it', they are just as guilty, if not more so. They rubbed their hands in glee as their 'brothers' were torn apart by the invading army. They not only didn't help, but gave all the help they could to the Babylonians: blocking any escape (v 14) and profiting from the disaster in whatever way they could. Their indifference to their brothers was truly despicable.



APPLY

'He got what he deserved.' 'She had it coming to her!'

Are we sometimes guilty of the same callousness when disaster befalls others. In doing so, we fail not only Jesus' test of love (Luke 6 v 27-31), but also presume that we can speak for God, who alone has the knowledge and the right to judge. Beware if this is you.

★ *Verse 15 remains true today.*

JUDGMENT: read v 15-16

In the judgment of Edom, the prophet sees a greater judgment.

- ★ *Who is this judgment for, and what is it based on?*
- ★ *What will it be like?*

'The day of the Lord' is the phrase the Bible uses to describe the final reckoning when God will bring sin and injustice to an end, and right every wrong. Just as the enemies of God's people indulged in a massive 'victory' binge-drinking session in Jerusalem, so they will drink to the full a more bitter cup—the cup of God's wrath. And when the last drop has disappeared, so will they (v 16). This judgement will be complete, fair and utterly, utterly final.



PRAY THRO'

The Lord Jesus didn't shrink from speaking plainly about this hard truth—because He loved us. **Read Luke 12 v 4-7** and then talk to God about your life, your friends, your future.

JUDGMENT AND PROMISE

Saturday May 10: Obadiah 15-21

Edom's judgment has opened up for us the prospect of a judgment from God that will encompass the whole earth. But if we are judged according to what we have done (v 15), who can possibly hope to escape this final reckoning: the Day of the Lord? **Read v 15-21.**

TWO JUDGMENTS

★ *Where does Obadiah see hope for the future?*

Edom's judgment is final and irrevocable. There will be no survivors (v18). But for the people of God, in exile in Babylon, there remains hope. Israel's exile was a judgment from God too—but the judgement of a loving father on an unruly son. It was designed to bring them to their senses. And because God's gracious promises to the House of Jacob remain, Obadiah can speak with confident hope about the return of God's exiled people to once again possess the land promised to their forefathers. Two very different types of judgment, with two very different results.



APPLY

When we suffer a catastrophe in life—a devastating illness, a death in the family, a lost job—the devil may whisper to us that this is the destructive vengeance of an angry God on our guilty sinfulness. If you belong to Christ, don't believe a word of it! For those who belong to Jesus, God's purpose in these things is loving and positive. ★ **Read Hebrews 12 v 5-11** and pray about what you find there.

ONE KINGDOM

★ *What will be the end result of the coming 'Day of the Lord'?*

The Day of the Lord will see the God's people saved, and God's enemies destroyed. Obadiah's limited vision sees only an earthly kingdom with the promised land restored and ruled from Jerusalem. But the kingdom that Jesus brought in extends beyond any physical borders and into the very presence of God Himself. Those who are in Christ's Kingdom are the inheritors of the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and inherit eternal life. **Read Revelation 11 v 15-18.**



APPLY

There are some, like Esau, who say that this future inheritance is of no use to them. They would rather grab what they can now and surrender the inheritance that could be theirs in Christ. ★ *Is there anything which you want so much now that you might be tempted to give up your spiritual inheritance to have it?*

Talk to God about your answer...

LUKE: SAVIOUR'S STORY

Sunday May 11: Luke 9 v 51-62

What dominates your horizons? What's the big issue: the thing that really matters to you? Maybe that's a hard question to answer. Maybe you tend to live a day at a time. Maybe you don't have a big point in your life that nothing will stand in the way of...

JERUSALEM! Read v 51

Resolute, determined, Jesus was bound for Jerusalem and nothing was going to stop Him. He knew full well, of course, what awaited Him there. In His mind's eye He could see Himself stretched out on that cursed cross. Yet unflinchingly, He set His face for Jerusalem.



TIME OUT

How does that help us to set our course? If we are Jesus-people, will our life-ambition be so very different from that of Jesus?

WHY SO RESOLUTE? Read v 51-56

- ★ **It was time (v 51).** Jesus was always aware of His Father's plan for His life. And, although in a sense He had been Jerusalem-bound from birth, now He knew it was His Father's time to move towards the great climax. The next 10 chapters describe the teaching Jesus gives His disciples as He prepares them for Jerusalem.
- ★ **It was time to die to save sinners.** We know that well enough, but the disciples are struggling with it. See v 22, 31, 44, 45. And see how badly mistaken they are again in v 54, 55. Let's hope we never lose the plot; Jesus came to die for sinners. Let that be both the passion of our hearts and the focal point of our gospeling.
- ★ **It was time to be taken up (v 51)!** That comes pretty unexpectedly, but it shows Jesus' mindset. Jesus wasn't stopping at the cross; His life wasn't finishing there. Jerusalem was the route home to glory—for Him and for all His people.

GOING WITH HIM? Read v 57-62

Jesus wasn't going alone. He was taking with Him people who were learning the same priorities, heading for the same goal. It was not a journey for those who were not ready for hardships, v 57, 58, not for those who have more important business to see to first, v 59, 60, not for those who hesitate to commit themselves fully, 61, 62. And it still isn't.

- ★ *If your life is not about God's plan, not about the cross, not about saving sinners, not about heading home for glory—then can you really call yourself a Jesus-person?*

Go!

Monday May 12: Luke 10 v 1-24

Seventy (or 72) is an interesting number—just because it's big. **Read v 1.**

You shouldn't get this incident muddled with the sending out of the twelve disciples; this one's about ordinary people, not apostles! After all, Jesus didn't have a theological college full of ministers-in-waiting from which to choose. Those Jesus has just urged to follow Him now find themselves with a job to do, news to tell, a mission to take part in.

GREAT WORK! Read v 1-16

The details can't be transferred directly to us now, because they belong to a different setting—a different age even. But here are plenty of 'all-time' principles for Christian mission.

★ **Great need** (v 2). Vast numbers even in open, christianised countries such as Kenya or Brazil, have never heard the gospel. Not to mention those people you mix with every day who haven't a clue about why Jesus came. Do you care? So what will you do?

Warning: *the prayer in v 2 is a dangerous one to start praying...*

★ **Great weakness** (v 3). Are you ready to shed your wolf-outfit and appear as the fluffy lamb you really are? Only a fool would do that, of course—unless you are relying on the promised protection of your Saviour (v 19c)

★ **Great commitment** (v 4). Think what lies behind this verse—single-minded determination. Like Jesus, you will not be distracted from your mission. That mission prayer meeting goes down in your diary, that week of holiday is earmarked for gospel outreach...

★ **Great responsibility** (v 16). How prayerful we will be before we open our big mouths! It may be the only time that person gets to hear about Jesus Christ—and they may reject Him. But you can't duck the responsibility; what if you alone had the opportunity to tell them but you never did...?

GREAT JOY! Read v 17-24

So are we not to rejoice when Satan's kingdom is threatened, when his power comes crashing down (v 20)? Surely Jesus' point is that success is not to be the source of our joy. What a vital lesson for Jesus' workers; we can still rejoice when Satan seems to be laughing at us.

★ *Why?*

And notice who else was rejoicing (v 21). Not only in the success of the mission, but in the missionaries, those who had shown themselves to be children of His kingdom, willing to be doers of His word, not just hearers.

★ *Will Jesus be rejoicing today over you*

ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

Tuesday May 13: Luke 10 v 25-37

If this is your favourite story, I'm sorry but I'm about to wreck it—or should I say rescue it? If, like the lawyer, you're looking for Jesus to give you a pat on the back, then I'm sorry but the Lord just doesn't play ball.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION: read v 25-29, v 37b

- ★ *Notice the two questions in v 25, 29. What's wrong with the motives in both cases? And what's wonky with the questions themselves?*
(Hint: Think harder!)
- ★ *How does Jesus correct the man's wrong understanding in v 27, 28?*

Obviously Jesus' approach was designed to make the lawyer feel uncomfortable—because that's just what it achieved (v 29)! Jesus is saying in effect: 'So you want to earn an inheritance? Well then, you know perfectly well what to do—just go and keep the whole law perfectly from the heart. No problem.'

But there clearly was a problem in the man's mind. Otherwise he wouldn't have tried to limit the list of people he had to love with all his heart (v 29). The massive answer to his question is in v 37—in other words 'your most despised enemy'. But a story is required to make the point...

STORY TIME: read v 30-37

Be the audience for a moment. Try very hard and see the priest and the Levite as the goodies and the Samaritan as the baddie. Justify the priest and the Levite as they pass on their way—it's too risky to get involved, it's important not to defile themselves if the man's dead, and what if he's not even a Jew? You're nodding approvingly so far—then comes the shock (v 33). Would you dare tell a story to a bunch of volatile Turks in which a Kurd shows up the best of them? Imagine the atmosphere becoming very tense as they hear this Samaritan (spit!) not only stopping, but heaping love and compassion on the man. Sparing nothing, regardless of the fact that their countries were daggers drawn!

This was a *totally unacceptable* story to the Jews. It was outrageous to dream of a Samaritan wildly outdoing their best notions of 'loving neighbours'. And now the stunned lawyer has to suffer the indignity of answering his own question (v 36, 29, 37). 'Go on, then,' says Jesus! 'The Samaritan sets the standard.' You must be joking—if that's the standard of the law, then this proud lawyer knows he can't even begin to keep it.

- ★ *Do you know now how to love the needy? Or, rather, how to get on your knees begging forgiveness—and trusting the ultimate Good Samaritan to keep the law for you?*

ONE THING VERSUS MANY

Wednesday May 14: Luke 10 v 38-42

Only a few verses today, but they speak volumes. What is Jesus saying through a very ordinary domestic scene? Or, first, what are we saying to Him...?

I'VE GOT TO GET ALL THIS DONE! *Read v 38-40*

Martha had a point, surely? You probably know what it feels like to be up to your neck in a pile of things that need doing. You too would like to be spending more time with Jesus, but the hard reality is that the baby is crying, the dinner needs cooking, the house needs decorating, the homework needs doing... And what really annoys you, perhaps, is people lecturing you about quiet times or church, when they don't have nearly such busy lives.

To be fair on Mary, she very likely had helped beforehand; besides it would hardly have been polite to leave Jesus and disappear off into the kitchen. But Martha wasn't feeling terribly fair because she wanted to be with Jesus too. So the pots and pans start banging around, the stress levels rise—and the valve finally blows, v 40.



TIME OUT

'Work comes before play. Responsibility before religion. I've got to get all this done, and then perhaps I can listen to Jesus.'

★ *Is that your basic approach? Why do you feel like that?*

What would happen if all those things weren't done?

GET YOUR PRIORITIES RIGHT! *Read v 41, 42*

It sounds blunt and insensitive, but you can't get away from it. From whatever angle you look at it, that's Jesus' answer. So it must be right—and it can't be insensitive. In fact Jesus is releasing Martha from what's stressing her life out. He is putting His finger on the basic problem which is weighing her down. The 'many things', the responsibilities, were in the wrong place.

★ *Does that mean our responsibilities are unimportant?*

★ *Does that mean there is something more important than earning 'enough' money, giving guests proper hospitality, caring for our family's needs (v 42)?*

★ *Does that mean if you get the one thing right, other responsibilities will fall into their place?*

No, yes, yes. And that one thing is... listening to Jesus. If there's anything 'we've gotta get done', it's that. Which means we need to get thinking about how to make sure it really does come first, and what will just have to be shelved...

How much more?

Thursday May 15: Luke 11 v 1-13

Read v 1-4: Do you pray like you did your maths homework? As soon as it's finished it's out of the way and forgotten! Are we, in reality, not that bothered about getting answers to our prayers? Or do we just imagine that God won't take a lot of notice anyway...?

In His 'travelling Bible school' Jesus takes the opportunity to teach His disciples not only *what* to pray, but the *right attitude* to have. He doesn't want them to pray like the Pharisees, talking into a dud mobile just for show. Prayer is for real—and God is really there on the other end of the line, as if He were nodding, smiling, responding... To help us grasp that, He gets us to use our imagination, twice...

IMAGINE IT!

A friend who won't help you out in need! Read v 5-8.

'Sorry mate, it's too late, the kids are in bed, the burglar alarm set—can't help.' Would you do that to your neighbour who was in a hole? Of course not—even in our self-centred culture. Far less in theirs! It would be a shame on the whole village to leave a visitor without proper hospitality. This parable isn't about 'persistence' or 'boldness' (v 8); that word should probably be translated 'shamelessness'—the reason he gets up is clearly because it would be shameful not to.



APPLY

How much more impossible it is for God to be careless about your need, and 'roll over and go back to sleep'! It's a question of honour. If a rather sleepy friend will give us all we ask (v 8), how much more will our generous God heap His blessings upon us!

IMAGINE IT!

A father who won't give his son good food! Read v 11, 12.

Again, it's pretty hard to imagine. This isn't just some bad joke; it's a father who is cruel enough to enjoy seeing his hungry son suffer even more (eg: a curled-up scorpion could look like an egg, but would give a vicious bite). Humankind might be pretty depraved, but even dodgy double-dealing dads who are up to no good still give their kids food.



APPLY

- ★ How is Jesus building our confidence in prayer?
Think about the 'how much more' application again...
- ★ So if we have such a God, how should we pray to Him?

Find the answers from v 9, 10.

WHAT KIND OF SPIRIT?

46

Friday May 16: Luke 11 v 14-36

I don't know if you noticed the 'Holy Spirit' of v 13 (compare 'good gifts' of Matthew 7 v 11)? True prayer won't be after the outward 'good gifts' of a materialistic lifestyle, but the inward good gifts of a Spirit-transformed life. How can Theophilus, to whom Luke is writing, tell a true Christian? By the spirit he shows. And the difference between those who have Jesus' Spirit and those who do not is becoming increasingly obvious as Jesus makes His way to Jerusalem; **read v 23.**

THE SPIRIT IN JESUS: read v 14-26

It was a pretty bitter and blind spirit that led to the accusation of v 15. To a fair observer, it could not be plainer by whose Spirit ('finger') Jesus was driving out demons (v 20). If these critics wanted to be part of the kingdom of God, then they had better be very careful whose side they're on (v 23). There seems to be a warning that it's little use them driving out evil spirits if they don't have the Spirit of Jesus, the 'strong man' to fill their lives.

THE SPIRIT OF JESUS: read v 27-32

Jesus now answers the other objection to his miracle (v 16). This objection might not be as cutting as v 15, but it showed just the same evil spirit. It amounted to them demanding proof of Jesus' divine authority to heal like this!

- ★ *What does Jesus call those who demand more and more proof, but won't accept it when it stares them in the face (v 29)?*
- ★ *What spirit should they show to Jesus (v 31, 32)?*

Look at Jesus' point in v 28. The blessed ones are those who show they have Jesus' Spirit by heeding God's word. Remember this verse to help friends who are prone to focus too much on their inherited religious traditions.

THE SPIRIT IN US: read v 33-36

What a privilege for these people to have Jesus teaching them! What a privilege to have Him teaching us in His word! But we need to watch what we do with it!

The question is, are they, are we, receiving the light of Jesus? If we are, His Spirit will be within us. Our lives will be flooded by the light of His Spirit, shining out to all (v 33). If we are not, we will be like those Jews, imagining we are so enlightened, but in reality completely in the dark.

- ★ **Read v 35.** *In what ways will you 'see to it'?*

CLASH OF SPIRITS

Saturday May 17: Luke 11 v 37 – 12 v 12

Why didn't Jesus go in for peace talks with the Pharisees? After all, they surely had a lot in common. Or did they? Jesus certainly didn't think smoothing over the differences was the way forward...

WOE TO YOU! *Read v 37-54*

You can't smooth over the differences between those who have the Spirit of Jesus and those who don't. We're talking chasms, not cracks.

- ★ *What was the basic problem with the Pharisees (v 39)?*
- ★ *Why was Jesus particularly angry with them, and with the teachers of the law? (eg: v 46, 52)?*
- ★ *Why do you think Jesus spoke so bluntly with them. Matthew 23 records that He repeatedly called them 'hypocrites'? Is this for us to copy?*



PRAY THRO'

More concerned about externals... majoring on the minors... seeking the applause of others... The Pharisee spirit is sadly never far from us.

- ★ *Ask God to search your heart.*

Jesus hardly imagined His exposé would win them over. He knew their spirit must clash with His—and He was ready to face the music; v 53, 54. And so must all who have His Spirit...

LOW PROFILE? *Read 12 v 1-12*

Have you decided that you'll be a quiet kind of Christian? Not one to stir up any trouble by speaking out? Afraid of what others will say if you make a stand?

- ★ *How do v 2, 3, 8, 9 fit into that?*
- ★ *How does v 10 warn those whom God has taught to be different, but who knowingly go against it? Remember, there is always forgiveness for those who seek it, in response to the Spirit's leading.*
- ★ *How do v 4-7, 11, 12 greatly encourage any who are afraid to speak out?*



APPLY

Beware of the double life of the Pharisees (v 1). Don't be different on the outside from what God has made you on the inside. The truth has to come out. The clash is inevitable. If you have Jesus' Spirit, let it show, and trust God with the consequences.

FROM FEAR TO FAITH

Sunday May 18: Psalm 31 v 9-24

In the first part of Psalm 31, David turned to the Lord in a tight situation. He put his trust in God and committed his life to God. Now David continues to pour his heart out...

FEAR: read verses 9-13

David tells the Lord exactly how he feels. He is drained and distressed (v 9), weak and weary (v 10), forsaken (v 11), forgotten (v 12) and fearful (v 13). Affliction (v 10) can be translated guilt or iniquity. David was not innocent. In some way his own sin had been a contributory factor to his torment. But he can still turn to the Lord in trusting prayer.



TIME OUT

Verses 11-12: In the Bible, being abandoned, like a piece of broken pottery, by friends when times are tough seems quite common.

see Psalm 38 v 11, Job 19 v 13-19, Jeremiah 12 v 6

★ *Why do you think people act that way? Are you guilty of it sometimes?*

FAITH: read verses 14-18

Again, David's response to his trials is trust (v 15) and prayer (v 17). His only defence against his overwhelming enemies is dependence on God's faithfulness and judgement. David knows that 'my times are in your hands' (v 15), so he can confidently ask the Lord to deliver him from his enemies.

Verses 17-18: David prays for the defeat of his enemies. Acts of vengeful malice are out of order (Leviticus 19 v 18, Romans 12 v 19), but prayer for the downfall of ungodly persecutors (on a local or global scale) is what God wants of us (1 Samuel 26 v 10-11, Psalm 5 v 10).

THANKS: read verses 19-24

With hindsight, David looks back on his crisis and sees the Lord as faithful as ever. The Lord shelters those who trust Him (v 20) and answers those who cry out to Him (v 22). No matter how alone and cut off from God we feel, we are never out of reach of His loving, protecting arms (v 22).

★ *What should this knowledge spur us on to do (verses 23-24)?*



APPLY

★ *How should today's verses encourage you when:*

- you doubt if you'll ever be able to keep going with God*
- you doubt if He'll ever sort out those who oppose Him*
- you doubt if He'll answer your prayers*

GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING

Monday May 19: Luke 12 v 13-21

It's a pity the man hadn't been listening properly. Then he would have known Jesus would be more concerned about his own priorities in life than over the fortune he hoped to inherit. Jesus hasn't come to be the judge and divider of inheritances, but of hearts. I hope you're ready for that... **Read v 13, 14.**

GOVERNMENT HEALTH WARNING: read v 15

Anyone who smokes today knows the risks they are taking. But smoking pales into insignificance against the risk of materialism. If smoking clogs up our lungs, the love of things clogs up our souls—and the resulting death is infinitely more serious than anything lung cancer can do to us.



TIME OUT

A Chinese government poster pronounces 'To get rich is glorious'.

★ *How does that compare with posters (and TV, common values, etc) in the west?*

★ *How does it compare with Jesus' 'government health warning' in v 15?*

★ *What would your poster say?*

★ *What does your lifestyle say?*

EAT, DRINK AND BE MERRY: read v 16-21

The story is about a sad, sad man. Read it again if that startles you. See who he talks to, see who he shares with, see who he cares about. We reserved Brits might talk to ourselves about finances, but in their culture people would always discuss their affairs at great length. Not this misery of a man. He thinks himself so lucky, but in truth he is a self-centred wretch. I wonder if he had any friends apart from his money...



TIME OUT

'Greed' sounds a bit rude—none of us like to think we're greedy.

But the Greek word is simply to do with 'having'. How does Jesus' story expose the stupidity of the notion that 'having' is all important? **Read v 20, 21 again.**

Listen to Jesus' 'health warning'. He knows. **Having, having, having in the end kills.** The world is bombarding us with lies; the world is persuading us that what we have gives us value—that our possessions, our image, our looks, our sporting ability are what counts. But Jesus wants that man in v 13, and you and me today, to know that we can't take a single one of those things into eternity—that they have no value at all in heaven's currency.

ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE

Tuesday May 20: Luke 12 v 21-34

It's hard to believe that Miracle Max's Wondacure really will cure your bad back. After all, if it really is the wonder it claims to be, why on earth don't the doctors prescribe it, and why does nobody else you know take it? Jesus' 'alternative medicine' is similarly unpopular, and very few will prescribe it. If yesterday's diagnosis was correct, today's cure makes perfect sense...

GIVE IT AWAY...! Read v 21, 33

If collecting for ourselves more and more stuff is so dangerous, then get rid of it—simple. It's crazy when you think of it; here we are greedily gathering more and more stuff that could prove lethal to our souls, when a few hours' plane journey away millions are dying through lack of food or medicine. What would your Chinese brother and sister in Christ think if they could see you buying that 13th T-shirt to add to your collection, when they would gladly give a month's wages for the Bible your money could have purchased?

★ *Face verse 33 fair and square. At the very least, what is Jesus saying to Christians if we take Him seriously?*

... AND COLLECT REAL TREASURE! Read v 21-34

This has to go with the last section. Jesus, after all is most concerned with our hearts. Getting rid of all your possessions alone will cure nothing. It's only when we treasure real treasure that Jesus' alternative medicine kicks in.

★ *What do unbelievers 'run after' (v 30) or 'treasure'—see v 22-29?*

★ *Why will the same worries and preoccupations, not be the mark of Christians, v 30?*

★ *What will be the genuine treasure Christians are busy pursuing (v 33)?*

Do you see the wonderful irony? Here we are, fully occupied with God's kingdom, giving our lives to Him, giving away our earthly possessions to advance His cause—and, almost without realising it, we find we've accumulated a fortune for ourselves! And the kind of fortune that death itself can't rob us of, v 33. **Read Revelation 3 v 17-19.**



PRAY THRO'

Ask God to examine where your heart is (v 34).

★ *Will you gladly take Jesus' alternative medicine—or are things too precious to you?*

LIVING IT OUT

Wednesday May 21: Luke 12 v 35-59

Although most of us would agree with all Jesus has been saying, to be honest, we find it unrealistic in practice. We would like to seek first His kingdom, but the stresses and responsibilities of everyday life are such that it's hard enough to keep your head above water...

READY FOR JESUS: *read v 35-48*

If we're kingdom people, Jesus says we must live as those waiting for the King. If we're Jesus' servants, then we must be serving Him. That's the way to be ready. To be living today as if we knew Jesus was coming tomorrow, because why?... **see v 40.**



TIME OUT

- ★ *What does the imagery of v 35 mean in practice?*
- ★ *What exactly will we be doing if we are 'watching' (v 37)?*
(Hint: What are the people in v 38 called?)
- ★ *What is the warning for those who call themselves Christians, but in practice are not serving Jesus (v 46)?*
- ★ *What if we've been told many times and done nothing about it (v 47)?*

All very serious and challenging—but don't miss the almost unbelievable v 37. Take that in—those who having been serving their Lord and Master will find themselves being waited on by whom? But then again, that's not for the first time, is it? **See Mark 10 v 45.**

SIGNS OF THE TIMES: *read v 49-59*

Maybe you still imagine you have plenty of time to live in peace and plenty before thinking about Jesus coming again. But don't you see that in a very real sense the kingdom is here already? There is already a division between those who live for Jesus' kingdom and those who live for this world. Surely we are not like those who saw it all happening around them when Jesus came, but who remained unaffected—people who demanded more and more evidence, but flatly refused to read the signs they already had (v 56). People who today will be as sharp as a razor when it comes to reading the stock market, but protest that the coming and death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is hazy and inconclusive.



TIME OUT

So let's come back to those pressures of everyday living—do we simply abandon our responsibilities and roam the streets preaching Jesus? *No*, but we do our college work or run our business for the Lord, we care for our home and family consciously serving Christ. Whatever we do, it is with a passion for His glory, seeking to win others to Christ—and looking for Jesus to come again.

WHAT ABOUT YOU?

Thursday May 22: Luke 13 v 1-5

Imagine the *Jerusalem Star* headlines: **PILATE MASSACRES PEACEFUL WORSHIPPERS**. At least, that's how we would have put it—the victims are always innocent! Interestingly, for all the hostility towards Pilate, it's the worshippers who are assumed to be guilty. So maybe the headlines would have read: **GOD AXES RABBLE GALILEANS**. And the readers rather expect Jesus to agree... But He doesn't.

Read v 1-5 and see where the Lord wants them to point the accusing finger. Not exactly pleasantly conversational! But Jesus is concerned to explode some of our wrong thinking, so that we will be prepared to meet our God. Three lessons for His hearers:

1. JUDGMENT COMES LATER

You hear it all the time: 'Auntie Doris never did anything to harm anyone; why is it she that's been struck down with cancer?' But we mustn't assume that when something bad happens, God is judging. Jesus says we mustn't conclude that the Galileans deserved judgment more than anyone else. To be sure, disaster reminds us all of judgment—but that judgment is coming later.

2. JUDGMENT IS COMING TO ALL: *read v 3, 5*

We've all been conditioned to be shocked when sudden tragedy kills a number of people. But we need to remember that the really shocking thing is not dying suddenly, but dying unprepared to meet God. The judgment of an awesome holy God doesn't somehow escape those who fall asleep peacefully in their own beds.

3. YOU NEED TO REPENT

We may love talking about how terrible people are these days, that it's not safe to go out at night etc etc. But Jesus won't let any of us get away with it—it's not the Galileans or that child-abductor we need to be tut-tutting about, it's ourselves. Jesus' finger stabs into our consciences—you need to be right with God, *you* need to repent.



TIME OUT

Have you opened yourself up to the searchlight of God's holy eyes, and seen that you richly deserve far worse than a tower falling upon you? Have you turned in horror away from a self-serving life, and asked God to help you live for Him alone? Have you begged for a Saviour's forgiveness, knowing that you have done nothing at all to merit it? In short, have you repented?

★ Every time we hear of a 'disaster', we should listen to Jesus' probing voice —'what about you—are you ready?'

ONE MORE CHANCE

Friday May 23: Luke 13 v 6-17

Question: *What do you call someone who turns up at church each week feeling smug about themselves?*

Answer: v 15. Jesus isn't looking for full synagogues, or churches, but for fruit. And that ties the parable together with the synagogue incident; **read v 6-17.**

FRUIT?

Despite care, attention, fertiliser—and even prayer—the tree in my back garden has yet to produce apples. God doesn't like it either when He sees all leaves and no fruit. For three years that fig tree should have produced fruit—it's only right that the owner should be thinking about cutting it down (v 9)...

- ★ *What kind of fruit did Jesus find in that synagogue?*
- ★ *What kind of fruit should He have found, in view of their history? For example, what attitude should there have been towards that poor 'daughter of Abraham'?*



TIME OUT

What kind of fruit would Jesus find in your congregation? Joy and praise when someone is set free from Satan's grip? New life bursting out in love for the Lord and for others? Or a shrivelled-up, set-in-our-ways religion that only wants to carry on undisturbed—and lifeless?

MERCY!

That fig tree had had more than enough opportunity to produce fruit. It was useless—despite being tended carefully in a vineyard. It was time for the chop. But can you catch the marvel of God's mercy here? **Read v 8.**
Now compare with v 34, Jeremiah 7 v 25.

And now compare with your own life—have you discovered God's wonderful patience, that instead of giving you the axe for your shameful fruitlessness He heaps His 'manure' upon you, and keeps looking for that fruit? How such love makes us long to please Him!

REPENTANCE? Read v 9

The fig tree wasn't 'let off' from producing fruit. One more chance was just that—the axe would surely fall next year if there was still no 'repentance'. God is merciful but not soft. His longsuffering with us should lead not to complacency but repentance. **Read Romans 2 v 4-6.**

And repentance does not mean simply feeling convicted or ashamed. **See v 17.** It's no good being a droopy-leaved, looking-sorry-for-yourself kind of fig tree. The owner looks for one thing only—figs!

DOOR OPEN, DOOR CLOSED

Saturday May 24: Luke 13 v 18-35

Read v 18-30. I can really sympathise with the question in v 23, can't you? For all our labour to spread the gospel so few seem to respond. Presumably that's why Jesus tells the parables of v 18-21; He knows we need the reminder that, tiny minority though we feel, we're in the business of building His mighty, eternal empire! But Jesus seems worried by the questioner; is his interest in statistics too casual—like the window-shopper who won't actually go in and buy?

DOOR OPEN

The whole section has an air of intense urgency about it. Jesus isn't inviting us to a game of tiddlywinks; the open door is the door of salvation, the door that brings people through into harmony and life with God, for ever. That's why it's treacherous to be a passing observer—salvation can never be a 'take it or leave it' kind of thing.

- ★ *Why does Jesus describe the door as 'narrow'? What would you say to those who scorn it just because it is narrow?*
- ★ *Why does Jesus urge us to 'make every effort' to enter, when we know it is also gloriously free and open, and never a matter of our works?*



TIME OUT

Jesus doesn't advertise opening hours. All we know is that today it is open, and that it won't always be. *How should that truth affect us?*

DOOR CLOSED: **read v 24-27**

Being outside might seem pleasant enough now, but it won't always be. Those who have 'hung around' Jesus (v 26), but never entered will one day realise to their horror that it is simply too late (v 25).

- ★ *What does Jesus mean at the end of v 25? Doesn't He know them?*
- ★ *These are decent, church-going sorts, but what does Jesus call them (v 27)?*
- ★ *What will it be like to see all sorts of people streaming into the kingdom, but being locked out (v 28)? Pause to take in something of its horror.*

Jesus is resolute; He knows full well the value—and the cost—of opening that salvation door, and nothing will stop Him; **read v 31-35.**

And He also knows awful grief over those who simply will not enter (see v 34).

- ★ *Do you?*

TABLE TALK

Sunday May 25: Luke 14 v 1-14

The Pharisees think Jesus far too broad to fit through their narrow door, but when they invite Him to their dinner party, they discover the boot is on the other foot. Jesus turns to three groups in turn—and exposes their super-religiosity for the obnoxious self-centred affair it truly is...

LOOKING TO CONDEMN: *read v 1-6*

The Pharisees and lawyers were watching Him carefully (v 1). They wanted to nail Him. Let's see, would He dare to do 'work' on the Sabbath by healing this man? It never occurred to them that God might actually be more concerned about their jealous, murderous hatred...

- ★ *Is Jesus concerned to keep His Father's law (v 3, 4)?*
- ★ *How does Jesus show up their self-serving hypocrisy (v 5)?*
- ★ *What can they say against Jesus (v 4, 6)?*

Who ends up feeling condemned?



TIME OUT

A rule-keeping religion always produces Pharisees. *Why?* Search your heart for the kind of attitudes displayed here. But don't despair—the amazing thing is that Jesus was prepared to spend time with these guys!

LOOKING FOR HONOUR: *read v 7-11*

Jesus next turns His attention to the guests—time for another dose of medicine for obnoxious religious types! As He watches them 'subtly' positioning themselves for maximum honour, Jesus tells them a parable. And remember, as their rabbi/teacher, His hearers would be expecting more than a lesson in etiquette—v 11 goes far beyond seating arrangements. Again Jesus is exposing flagrant self-seeking.

LOOKING FOR REWARD: *read v 12-14*

Why doesn't Jesus even spare the host? Not out of bad manners, but because their back-slapping, 'old-boy-tie' kind of club is totally alien to the kingdom of God.

- ★ *Does Jesus mean us to take verse 12 literally? What's His point?*



PRAY THRO'

Do you secretly look for reward or congratulations when you serve the Lord, or are you just as glad to freely help those who can't possibly give back? As Jesus did.

You won't go unrewarded by the Person who matters... (v 14)

THE GREAT BANQUET

Monday May 26: Luke 14 v 15-24

I'm sure the man who sparked off this parable thought he was 'in', but Jesus makes it clear that he could be in for a nasty shock... Read the section, then follow the three scenes:

READY: read v 17

The double invitation was common practice for village feasts; these were all people who had sent back their RSVP's promising to come. A great illustration for the Jews; they'd had their invitations throughout the Old Testament—of course they wanted to be part of the kingdom so long promised. And now Jesus has arrived saying 'It's here at last! Come and welcome!'



TIME OUT

'It is finished' cried Jesus on the cross. There is nothing for us to make ready—He has done it all. So just come. Or, if you already have, get those invitations out to others!

EXCUSES: read v 18-20

These are paper-thin excuses. There's no attempt even to make them sound genuine. For example, no one would even buy oxen without test-driving them first! It's a deliberate snub to the host—and he is right to be angry.

- ★ *What kind of excuses were the Jews in Jesus' time coming up with?*
- ★ *What kind of excuses are common today?*
- ★ *What excuses do church-goers resort to?*

GO! Read v 21-23

You sense the urgency. There is no time to waste. If the servant is bitterly disappointed at the response, the master isn't put off—note the lesson! The feast would certainly be full, because others would gladly come.

- ★ *Who is invited now (v 21)?*

Picture them coming. This is just like Jesus! The people who don't matter to anyone else He is glad to have in His kingdom!

- ★ *And who else (v 23)?*

Not just the disadvantaged, but outsiders, those beyond the borders.

No wonder they have to be urged to come—they can't believe they are really welcome. Who would this represent to the Jews? And to us?



APPLY

'Go!' I've heard that before somewhere, haven't you? (see Matthew 28 v 19, 20). Who does that include? Who could you tell who you've never even dreamed of inviting to hear about Jesus?

100% JESUS PEOPLE

Tuesday May 27: Luke 14 v 25-35



This is such disturbing teaching that we need to begin at the end—**read v 35c**.

★ *Pray that God will deafen you to the shouting of the world and the flesh, so that you can hear His voice alone.*

100%—OR NOTHING: read v 25-27

Jesus wasn't celebrating the conversion of many hundreds (v 25). In fact He seems to be doing His best to put them off. He prefers a few people who are ready to give everything, to a church-full, a stadium-full, of plastic, half-hearted Christians. In fact, shockingly, He goes further. He forbids us to call ourselves His followers unless we follow Him the whole way ('cannot be' v 26, 27, 33).

★ *What does 'hate' mean if you compare v 26 and v 33?*

If you are a recent convert from Islam or Judaism you will understand—though you love your family dearly they make you feel as if you are rejecting them, hating them because Christ has to come first.

Notice that this isn't 'advanced' Christianity for spiritual high-fliers. This is *entry-level* Christianity. Jesus is teaching this to beginners, to seekers.

★ *What in your own life is 'up for grabs', available to Jesus Christ? Your time, your money, your career; how tightly do you cling to them?*

COUNTING THE COST: read v 28-33

The illustrations are obvious—but powerful. You don't start building till you know what you're letting yourself in for. So don't put your hand up for Jesus unless you're ready for major expense—a cross-life of rejection and pain and self-sacrifice.

And you don't pick a fight if you're going to have to wind up begging for mercy! So don't turn against this world, don't make the devil your enemy, if, after a month or two, you can't take any more.



What if you're the only one standing up for Jesus Christ? What if you feel lonely, defeated, foolish? Will you throw it all in—or, because you know Jesus has promised this and worse, will you trust His power to keep going?

100% Jesus-people, or not His disciples at all. Do you believe that? You are either the real thing, salt with bite and impact, or you're like a pile of washed-out insipid gunge... **read v 34, 35**.

SINNER CELEBRATION

Wednesday May 28: Luke 15 v 1-10

Jesus was a master at connecting with the people. His audience would be nodding and smiling in agreement—but then they'd turn to frowns as the stories unerringly found their target... **Read v 1-10.**

- ★ *Who was Jesus telling the stories for?*
- ★ *At which verse do you think the parables started to hurt the Pharisees/teachers of the law?*

THE STORIES

The stories are designed to answer v 2. Welcome sinners? I should say! After all, can you imagine a shepherd who couldn't care about the one sheep who went astray? Or a woman who shrugs her shoulders when she loses her treasured coin? Ridiculous! They all knew these crises mattered so much to these people that the whole village would join in the celebrations when the sheep or coin had been safely recovered. So what made them think that God should be so different? How could He be careless over those who have lost their way?

THE BITE: *read v 7*

The lessons are familiar to us, but how hard they were for the scribes and Pharisees—and what good news for the rough end of society...

- ★ **Sinners are valuable!** Hard to swallow, but impossible to miss. Contrary to what the Pharisees thought, sinners aren't riff-raff, best shipped off to Botany Bay—they're valuable sheep, silver coins. So Jesus eating with the sinful tax-collectors gave them exactly the right message.
- ★ **God seeks sinners till He finds them!** That's what happens when you lose something really valuable. A quick glance won't do, you turn the house upside down. Think about this Shepherd God who won't let His sheep go. And think about how He treats His wayward sheep when He does find them (v 5).
- ★ **God rejoices over sinners being found!** Why, of course! What else do you expect the Shepherd to do when He finds His sheep? Why, if even we get excited over finding ordinary things, how much more will God rejoice for those who Christ has given His life for! I can't imagine heaven is too bothered when England (at last) wins a football match—but when one sinner is found by God, you can almost hear the singing from down here!



TIME OUT

The question is, will we be joining in the party? Or looking down our noses in contempt, as those who are sure they have no need to repent themselves (v 7)?

SINNER SON

Thursday May 29: Luke 15 v 11-24

If the first two stories have made the point, the third drives it home—first for the ‘sinners’, and then the scribes and Pharisees.

Read v 1, 2, 11-24, then follow the three scenes.

ATTITUDE PROBLEM: read v 12

The problem wasn’t his wild living (v 13). The problem for all sinners isn’t their godless or immoral behaviour. There’s something far more deep-seated and far more outrageous than that (v 12).

You see, this time the audience were definitely not nodding along with Jesus’ story. It was designed to be utterly far-fetched, altogether unheard-of. Even in our culture, demanding the inheritance before our parents have died isn’t on! In theirs it more or less amounted to wishing the father dead. ‘Stuff you, give me the goods and let me do it my way’. And, equally amazingly, the father did just that!

★ *How is this such a graphic picture of the way mankind has treated God?*

EMPTY: read v 14-16

That’s where it always ends up. What a picture of the soul-poverty of a life lived without God. It wasn’t just that the son had run out of money; he had spent himself! Doing it his way had left him destitute in a harsh world. The pig-owner even cared more for his pigs than this lost son.



APPLY

Have you been there? Will you care for friends who may be financially secure, but whose faces and lives tell a story of deepest poverty?

★ *How can you help them?*

HOME: read v 20-22

Certainly there’s encouragement here for sinners to ‘come to their senses’ (v 17), to turn towards ‘home’ in repentance and faith. But what would have astonished Jesus’ listeners most is the extraordinary picture of the father. The head of the family never usually ran. Dignity was all-important. But the love of God for sinners far outstrips dignity.



PRAY THRO’

Praise God for this picture of a God who runs to us by sending His Son to earth. Who flings His arms around returning sinners in the form of a cursed cross. Who doesn’t stand there ticking off His wayward children, but robes our naked emptiness with His finery, and treats us as royalty—His very own family!

SLAVE SON

Friday May 30: Luke 15 v 25-32

Remember the setting; Jesus is answering the hostility of the Jews towards 'sinners'. Read v 1, 2, 7. But what is beautiful about today's section is that Jesus isn't content to simply expose those who feel they don't need to repent. For the father's heart is full of love for the two lost sons he is seeking... **Read v 25-32.**

'SLAVING': read v 29, 30

- ★ *How does v 29 remind you of the scribes and Pharisees? What is their attitude towards keeping God's laws?*
- ★ *How does the older son feel about the younger son?*
- ★ *How does the older son's attitude towards his father remind you of the younger son?*

It was a gross insult to refuse to come to his father's feast, a public slap in the face. Rather like many Jews, the older son may have stayed at home, but he is just as alienated from the father, just as rebellious, just as 'lost' as his brother. He lives at home, but feels like a slave. So how does the father feel about that?

MY SON! read v 28, 31

'How great the Father's love...' Look up the hymn if you have it, and marvel at this picture here of limitless love. Look at him pleading with a son who insults him; look at him reasoning with a son who throws unfair charges at him; look at his tender willingness to give everything to his son. If only he will indeed be his son. If only he will be reconciled to father and brother.

ANY JOY?

The conclusion is missing—left as a big question mark hanging over the Pharisees, and us. Strikingly, all the other parts to this chapter have ended with joy and celebration, but there is no joy here. How can there be with the son still a stranger? There is no joy at all over the 99 'righteous' people who do not need to repent—and yet are a million miles from God (v 7; Luke 13 v 34, 35).



APPLY

- ★ *What kind of relationship do you have with God? Are you rejoicing with Him as one who is receiving 'His glorious riches in Christ Jesus'? Or are you resentfully slaving away, feeling that God owes you a thing or two? However closely attached to God's family you may have been there's still a royal welcome awaiting sons and daughters who truly come home.*

THE WORLD AND THE WORD

Saturday May 31: Luke 16 v 1-9

Theophilus (1 v 3, 4) has had a treat so far. What joy to read of a Saviour who has come to freely save all sorts of people—'sinners' who have nothing to offer!

But Luke wants Theophilus to understand that it's a whole life thing. The acid test for those tax-collectors (15 v 1) is whether they would put their money where their mouth was! Theophilus was probably well off, as most of us are; our use of money must connect with our profession of faith (contrast the Pharisees, 16 v 14). It's a question of wisdom (today) and faithfulness (tomorrow).

UNFAITHFUL BUT WISE: read v 1-9

Don't be confused that the 'hero' is a rogue! Jesus is certainly not recommending his shady dealing—neither is He suggesting that a bit of worldly wisdom will bring Christians financial security! What Jesus wants us to notice is that unbelievers are shrewd when it comes to looking after their future interests. They'll use any means, fair or foul, to make sure there'll be funds in the coffers for future needs.

★ *How does this manager do this?*

★ *Who will find themselves financially indebted to him?*

The rich master might have been furious at the dirty trick his manager had played on him, but he can't help admiring the man's astuteness (v 8). He found himself snookered, because if he protested that the special offers were unauthorised, he'd suddenly find himself very unpopular.

So what is Jesus' point in v 9? **Be wise in providing for the future.** If unbelievers pursue their own financial security with such ruthlessness, how much more should Christians use their earthly, passing money to secure their own heavenly, eternal riches!

And you know how to do that, surely? Give the stuff away! Don't squander it on passing toys, but invest in things that will last for eternity. By 'friends' (v 9), Jesus is using the picture language of the parable—it's not some kind of heavenly bribery, it's simply using what God has given us now as those who are heading for glory. (The way Jesus continues shows this is what He is getting at—sneak a look at v 10-15 if you like.)



APPLY

1 Timothy 6 v 17-19 puts it in non-story form. If we are shrewd and clear-thinking, we will reckon that since we can't take money with us, we'd better invest it in eternal enterprise (eg: regular, prayerful support for Christian workers, or giving for Bibles in places such as China—think of the potential eternal fruit for a £3 investment!).

FROM DESPAIR TO WHERE?

Sunday June 1: Psalm 32

You may have read Psalm 32 many times. Or sung parts of it in church. Or learned verse 8 as a memory verse. It's a mind-blowing meditation on the experience of being forgiven.

FANTASTIC FORGIVENESS: *read verses 1-2*

David uses three words which describe different kinds of sin: **transgressions**—deliberate rebellion against God's will; **sins**—specific wrong thoughts, words or deeds; **sin/iniquity**—inner moral corruption. It's easy for us to lump all of our wrongs together under a general banner of sin, glossing over the fact that we've wronged God in so many ways.

Yet, says David, this thoroughly rotten creature is blessed! The Lord does not count his wrongs against him! Those who are honest with God (v 2) are forgiven!

CONSCIOUS CONFESSION: *read verses 3-5*

David vividly describes the pain of his guilt. It's a sadly familiar picture: we are silent before God, trying to ignore our wrongdoing (v 3), but the torture of guilt just grows and grows. Finally David owns up to his sin and confesses it to the Lord, who reaches into David's despair and freely forgives him.

PRAYER AND PROTECTION: *read verses 6-7*

David puts it to us straight: turn to God in honest prayer while He is near (v 6, Isaiah 55 v 6). Don't provoke His *withdrawal* or his *heavy hand* as David had done. Not only must we turn to the Lord to admit our wrongs, we must seek His protection when the going gets tough (v 7). David speaks wonderfully about being surrounded by people celebrating God's great acts of deliverance.

REJOICING RESPONSE: *read verses 8-11*

It just gets better! God promises to keep an eye out for His children (v 8). To teach us how best to live for Him. Our response shouldn't be the forced obedience of a dumb animal (v 9), but the loving obedience of a son or daughter. **Verses 10-11:** The wicked are punished, but those who trust in the Lord are surrounded by His unfailing love! They are right with God, and they want to joyfully sing His praises!



PRAY THRO'

- ★ How often do you hear your own voice celebrating God's faithfulness?
- ★ Read through the psalm again, verse by verse, identifying David's experience with your own, and praising the Lord for His faithfulness.

LOVERS OF LOLLY

Monday June 2: Luke 16 v 10-18

It's wise to invest our money for eternity, but what else controls how we use our money?

FAITHFUL AS WELL AS WISE: read v 10-13

Here Jesus draws a sharp contrast with the manager, or 'steward'. The man had been put in a position of trust, yet he treated his master's goods as if they were his to do with as he desired.

- ★ *In practice do you tend to see all that you possess as 'mine' or 'the Lord's'?*
- ★ *What is the truth?*
- ★ *How does your Master expect you to use His goods He has left in your charge?*
- ★ *What differences will that thinking make when you next consider buying a CD or a car (or putting money into savings)?*

We ought to find this dramatically challenging in a very materialistic church culture. **But cheer up, that's the easy bit!**

- ★ *What is Jesus saying in v 10-12 ?*

Money and possessions are of no lasting value anyway, so it's no big deal trusting us with them. But if we prove unfaithful with the plastic of earthly riches, how is God going to trust us with the gold of heaven's riches? If we can't bear to let go of our money, we clearly haven't begun to see the real value of the eternal life that Jesus brings.

GOD KNOWS THE HEART: read v 13-18

Verse 13 cuts very deep, but we dare not fudge Jesus' conclusion. If we can't bear to hand over all our money to the Lord, then how can we even say we belong to Him? The world, Pharisees (v 14), most other religions, all say you can love this world and God, but Jesus insists it is one or the other. The kingdom of God (v 16) is a different kingdom altogether, and it involves keeping God's law from the heart as a way of life.

Read 1 John 2 v 15-17.



Pray through v 15. How, in practice, can you show that you value the things that God values? If Christians all around you seem in love with the things of this world, are you willing to stand out from the crowd? How can you help them?

GOD + RICHES = HELL!

Tuesday June 3: Luke 16 v 19-31

How can Jesus get through to these mocking Pharisees (v 14, 15)? How can He show them that having God and their love of things in two watertight compartments is impossible, and lethal in the long run? By His favourite method—telling a story. **Read v 19-31.**

GATE: read v 19-21

Jesus doesn't present the rich man as an evil scrooge-like character. Rather, he is precisely the man Pharisees would idealise: wealthy, respectable and, of course, religious. It wasn't that he never gave anything to Lazarus (or else he would have soon found somewhere else to hang out)—it's just that, like the Pharisees, it never occurred to him to think there was anything inconsistent about turning up to church in his smart 4x4, while a beggar lay half-starving at his gate.



TIME OUT

We all have 'gates'—opportunities—in our lives which test whether what we learned in church changes how we live on a daily basis.

What are those 'gates' for you? Is your response different from that of the rich man? **Read James 2 v 14-17.**

CHASM: read v 26

- ★ *What is the connection between the gate and the chasm?*
- ★ *Why has the rich man ended up on the wrong side?*

Obviously it's not a question of being rich or poor. It's to do with where your treasure is. If God is 'kept' in a box marked religion, it's because there is something more important to you. Something that will soon go, leaving you with nothing but the empty, gnawing godlessness of a burning hell. It is totally fair (v 25)—and totally fixed (v 26), *for ever*.

GOD'S WORD: read v 31

The rich man clearly thought it wasn't enough to have God's clear word on it. He knew God's commands to love Him with all his heart and his neighbour (= Lazarus) as himself—but hadn't taken them seriously. Instead he had loved money and himself.



APPLY

- ★ *If we who believe God's word won't accept it in practice, what difference will miraculous signs make?*
- ★ *What then is the consequence of not taking v 13 seriously because it costs too much?*

THE SERVANT WAY

Wednesday June 4: Luke 17 v 1-10

Jesus certainly means to stretch the disciples' idea of what it means to be His 100% servants. It seems we must be on the lookout for everyone else as well as ourselves...

DON'T CAUSE SIN: read v 1, 2

Are you surprised at how strongly Jesus speaks? Better to be violently drowned than to cause young, vulnerable Christians to sin! If it is that serious to Jesus, then let's make sure we take it seriously too.



★ *In what way is it easy to lead others into sin?*
eg: bad example... wrong teaching...

DO FORGIVE SIN: read v 3, 4

When we have been wronged, it is easy to let resentment fester inside—maybe for days or even months. But we are not to do that. Jesus tells us to bring it out into the open and get it cleared up straightaway.

And that means being ready to forgive straight away—not just once either, but as many times as the offender is genuinely sorry...

Impossibly difficult? Yes, without God. Not surprising that the disciples exclaimed as they did in v 5. But notice how Jesus responds to their amazement...

THE TINIEST FAITH WOULD BE PLENTY! Read v 5, 6

It is not so much that we need greater faith—as if it depends on being super-spiritual to do these things. No, Jesus' teaching is within the grasp of the weakest believer—so long as they rely on Him alone for help.

Remember: doing great things depends not on great faith, but on a great God.

NO MORE THAN YOUR DUTY! Read v 7-10

Don't get confused with the details of the parable, because then the basic lesson should be clear. A servant does not expect to be made a fuss of after a standard day's work. And neither should Christians think they have done something really special by following their Master's commands. Forgiveness isn't impossible—it's *expected* as standard for all Christians!

Read Mark 11 v 25, 26.

GLORY TO GOD

Thursday June 5: Luke 17 v 11-19

'What's in it for me?' That, to put it crudely, is many people's approach to faith in Jesus Christ—maybe yours if you're frank. But is it real faith? One man's faith is going to test ours today; **read v 11-19**.

FAITH? Read v 11-14

All ten are certainly displaying faith of a kind. Hopeless outcasts are thinking there's something special about Jesus. Not only do they think He can help them, but they dare to imagine He won't reject the rejects. And notice their response when He calmly tells them to present themselves to the priests for a clean bill of health—not a murmur, they just trust and obey! That's some faith—but *is it the faith of v 19?*



TIME OUT

- ★ *What kinds of faith do people show in Jesus Christ?*
- ★ *There's nothing wrong with asking Jesus to do what you know you can't do, but what may be lacking?*

For all the faith of these ten, there's still a question mark hanging over it. Is is the kind of faith Jesus is looking for?

GRATEFUL FAITH: read v 15-19

Now we see the problem. All ten had known an incredible encounter with the power of Jesus Christ, but nine weren't at all interested in the 'Jesus Christ bit'—they had what they wanted, so they were off. It was a 'what's in it for me' faith.

- ★ *How would you describe the gratitude of the Samaritan?*
- ★ *What now was the greatest concern in his life? And yours?*



TIME OUT

It reminds me of a conversation I had recently with an older Christian—he and his wife are going through health problems. 'If we get over this,' he said with tears in his eyes, 'we'll want to live the rest of our days only for the glory of God.' He wasn't bargaining—he just knew how grateful they would be for answers to prayer.

This story isn't about simply remembering to say thank you—it's about real faith; grateful faith; faith that longs to live for the glory of God. Sadly, as Jesus journeys towards the cross (v 11), thousands of people who had trusted Jesus' power to heal them will be nowhere to be seen. But I fancy one outsider, a Samaritan ex-leper, never lost his faith...

READY?

Friday June 6: Luke 17 v 20-37

Are you ready for Jesus to return? We need to be, as the section makes clear...

SUDDEN AND DRAMATIC: read v 20-25

No chance of anyone missing it—but the point is whether it will catch us unawares.

- ★ *What kind of messianic kingdom had the Pharisees been looking for? Why had they so far missed it?*
- ★ *What kind of 'kingdom' phenomena does Jesus warn the disciples not to fall for? (Matthew 24 v 23, 24 helps.)*

The day for the spectacular hasn't arrived yet—when it does we won't be able to miss it. Meanwhile we live in the age of the first coming, the age of the cross; v 25. Only when that is our focus will we be ready for v 24.

LIFE AS NORMAL: read v 26-37

Jesus could have described the gross evils of Noah's or Lot's day, but that wasn't His point. To be unprepared for Jesus' coming all you need to do is busy yourself with everyday concerns. And one day you'll be eating your cornflakes or puzzling over your computer and suddenly it'll be all over. We will instantly know that the only thing left that matters is being ready for Jesus.

- ★ *Why were Noah and Lot not caught out by God's judgment?*
- ★ *What was their means of safety?*
- ★ *How can we be unafraid of God's judgment when Jesus comes again?*

REMEMBER LOT'S WIFE: read v 31-33

The thing about Lot's wife is that she seemed to be safe from God's judgment. She seemed to be going along with Lot. But not in her heart. Instead of being so grateful to God for His wonderful patience in rescuing them, she was mourning the loss of the life she loved. So she looked back—and turned into a block of salt (Genesis 19 v 12-26).



APPLY

'Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also,' says Jesus. You may look like a Christian, you may seem to have escaped from God's coming wrath, but are you looking forward to Jesus coming—or can't you bear to think of losing all that you hold dear on this earth (v 31, 33)? That's the true test.

NAHUM: JUDGMENT IS GOOD NEWS!

Saturday June 7: Nahum 1 v 1-15

How do you picture God? What do people around us think of God? Often we imagine God being like a benevolent grandfather. The Jesus our society knows is the infant Jesus, meek and mild. Nahum presents us with a very different picture of God.

Read v 1. Nahum prophesied against Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria. Assyria had defeated the ten northern tribes of Israel and made the life of Judah miserable for many years. Now Nahum predicts Nineveh's downfall under the judgment of God. And indeed Nineveh was destroyed in 612 BC.

1. GOD THE WARRIOR: *read v 2-6*

God is like an approaching army. And as He approaches, seas dry up, hills melt away, the earth trembles and no one can endure His anger. It is an awesome and terrible picture. God will be God. Verse 3 echoes Psalm 103 v 8-10, which reminds us of God's mercy. But here the idea is that, while He may be slow to anger, God will ultimately judge those who continue to reject Him. He gives us every chance to repent, but one day He will punish the guilty.

2. GOD THE REFUGE: *read v 7-8*

'Who can endure His fierce anger?' asks Nahum in verse 6. The answer is only those who find refuge in God. That is the gracious enemy that God is! He will come against mankind, but first He offers us a place of refuge. Most armies try to take the enemy by surprise, but God warns of His coming so that we might escape His wrath.

★ *What is the refuge that God offers us?*

3. THE GOOD NEWS OF JUDGMENT: *read v 9-15*

The message of Nahum is 'good news' (v 15). Nahum gives two reasons:

- ★ **freedom** (v 12-13)—the defeat of their enemies means that God's people will no longer endure their oppression
- ★ **peace** (v 15)—the defeat of their enemies means that God's people can live and praise God without the fear of invasion.



PRAY THRO'

Read 1 Corinthians 15 v 54-57; Galatians 5 v 1 and Colossians 1 v 19-23. What are the enemies that threaten us?
 ★ *Praise God for the victory Jesus has won for us, setting us free and giving us peace.*

WHEN GOD IS AGAINST YOU

Sunday June 8: Nahum 2 v 1-13

'If God is for us, who can be against us?' asks Paul in **Romans 8 v 31**. But God declares to Nineveh: 'I am against you' (v 13). If God is against us, who can be for us? The answer is: no one. **Read v 1**. Nahum warns Nineveh to prepare for attack. But the warning and all their preparation will be in vain...

THE FALL OF NINEVEH: *read v 2-12*

Nineveh will fall. Enemy soldiers will have free rein (v 2-5), the palace will collapse (v 6), the people will be exiled (v 7), the wealth will be plundered (v 9), the hearts of the people will melt and their knees give way (v 10). The power of Nineveh will be like water going down a plug-hole (v 8). What was once as mighty as a lion will be feared no more (v 11-12).

GOD IS AGAINST US: *read v 13*

In 612 BC Nineveh did fall to the Medes and Babylonians. But Nahum shows us that behind their victory was the judgment of God. Nineveh's downfall is an indication of God's judgment against us all. We have all turned our backs on God. We have rejected His loving reign. We have wanted to live our lives without Him. We have become God's enemies. And so God is against us. And if God is against you, who can be for you? What hope is there when God is against you? There was none for Nineveh.

GOD IS FOR US: *read Romans 8 v 31-34*

In Nahum 2 v 2 God promises to restore Judah. God is for His people. And in Christ God is for us. He has given His own Son, Jesus Christ, that we might be justified (made right with God) and so not be condemned.



TIME OUT

What was God's attitude to a previous generation of Ninevites? **Read Jonah 3 v 1-10**. Judgment has been announced against mankind. But first God gives people the chance to repent through the proclamation of the gospel.



PRAY THRO'

★ *What do you fear? What problems are you facing at the moment?*

Remember: 'If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all—how will He not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?'

Romans 8 v 31-32

THE FALL OF THE HARLOT

70

Monday June 9: Nahum 3 v 1-19

We have seen that judgment is coming against Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. God is against her. We have seen, too, that this judgment will mean liberation for God's people. Now we discover why God's anger burns so fiercely: the reasons for Nineveh's judgment.

1. ENSLAVING NATIONS: *read v 1-7*

Nineveh is a city full of lies, plunder and victims. Even in English, the rhythm of verses 2-3 seems to echo the sound of an advancing army. And the army comes because Nineveh is like a prostitute enslaving the nations. Nineveh has enslaved the nations through conquest (see v 10) and she has enslaved the nations through her corruption. And so Nineveh will receive the disgrace of a prostitute (v 5-6).

2. DESTROYING CITIES: *read v 8-13*

The comparison with Thebes, the ancient capital of Egypt, is no accident. The Assyrians had defeated Thebes in 663 AD. Its capture was the high-point of the power of Nineveh. Like Thebes (v 8-9), Nineveh thinks she is impregnable. But Thebes fell and Nineveh will fall too. Her fortresses are like fig-trees waiting to be harvested (v 12). The cruelties that Nineveh inflicted on Thebes have not been forgotten.

3. CORRUPTING TRADE AND GOVERNMENT: *read v 14-19*

Trade and government were intended by God to bring blessing to people. But the merchants and officials of Nineveh are like locusts. They strip the land and then fly on to other places.



TIME OUT

What parallels are there today? Where do we see commerce striping communities and then moving on? Where do we see corrupt government? ★ *What is God's view of such things?*



APPLY

The language of Nahum 3 is echoed in Revelation. John describes Rome as 'the great prostitute', who commits adultery with the nations (Revelation 17 v 1-2). He describes her merchants as those who have traded 'the bodies and souls of men'. Now they lament her downfall (Revelation 18 v 9-17). In Nahum 3 v 19 onlookers applaud Nineveh's downfall, while in Revelation 19 v 1-3 the choirs of heaven celebrate the downfall of 'the great prostitute'.

Read Revelation 18 v 1-5.

★ *What does it mean for God's people to 'come out of her'?*

JOSHUA: CONQUERING THE LAND

Tuesday June 10: Joshua 1 v 1-5

'But Lord, there's no way I can do that!' Do you sometimes feel, or say that? You wouldn't dare put it like this, perhaps, but it's almost as if you feel that the Lord has made a mistake. Surely He can't be calling you to do this—it's so far beyond you... there must be an easier way... or someone else far more able...

We forget that the Lord never asks us to do anything on our own. As soon as we begin to say, *'I can't'*, we are in danger of despising the almighty power of God. *'I can't'* can be another way of saying, *'I won't trust God to help me; I'm not willing to risk the consequences.'* The book of Joshua has great encouragement for us to put ourselves entirely at God's disposal and to go forward into an unknown but victorious future...

GO FOR IT... read v 1-5

If you think God is demanding too much of you, then spare a thought for Joshua! He had witnessed the terrible rebellion of the Israelites against Moses; he had seen how quickly and ferociously they had turned on Moses as soon as there were problems. Their children were the crew he must now lead against fierce, heavily-armed, experienced Canaanites —people they did not stand a chance against, if they left God out of the reckoning. So isn't God expecting far too much of poor Joshua? Not a bit of it. For one simple reason...

...WITH ME

'I will never leave you, nor forsake you.'

Suddenly the problems are not the issue any longer. They still have to be faced—but they are irrelevant to Joshua's decision to obey his Lord's command to go forward. With the Lord at his side, what need could there be to fear the future? **Read Psalm 118 v 6-16.**



'If I had that promise, I'd feel differently'

Read Hebrews 13 v 5, 6.

It was not made just to Joshua! That promise belongs just as specially, just as personally, to you—so long as you are resolved to follow the Lord. There is no need for hesitation—so we can say with confidence: *'The Lord is my helper'* **Read 2 Peter 1 v 4a** 'given us.'

BE STRONG! BE OBEDIENT!

Wednesday June 11: Joshua 1 v 6-9

'I will never leave you nor forsake you' (v 5). Do you breathe a huge sigh of relief, thinking that you can relax in His strength as He wins all the battles for you and sorts out all your problems? Then read on. The Lord continues His message in **v 6-9**.

BE STRONG!

You can't miss it! Three times it is urged upon Joshua. And it had not been long ago that Moses had stressed exactly the same thing—Deuteronomy 31 v 7, 8. *'Be strong and very courageous!'*

The enemies must be faced. The battles must be fought. By Joshua and the Israelites, not by leaving it to the Lord. And there was going to be nothing casual or easy about it—it was real fighting, against enemies who were stronger than they were. Yes, Joshua and all the Israelites needed enormous courage. Read Nehemiah 2 v 17-20.

BE OBEDIENT

There was another repeated message in today's verses. Strength and courage are not the only qualifications for success. It is no use going forward boldly 'for the Lord' unless we go in the way He has commanded. **Read v 6-9 again**, identifying the areas below.

God's law (the Bible for us).

- ★ Obey it all (not just what seems important to us).
- ★ Don't deviate from it (it's no use doing 'roughly' what God says).
- ★ Meditate on it day and night (we need to be saturated with God's word—if Joshua had time to meditate, then we certainly do. It is a must for Christians).
- ★ Speak it (all our words should be influenced by God's words to us).

Have you really taken that on board yet? If Christians want to experience victory against the enemies, then let the Lord's words ring in your ears and in your heart—*'Have I not commanded you?'* (v 9)

Read 1 Chronicles 22 v 13; 2 Chronicles 31 v 20, 21.



What will the parallels be for us as we look at the book of Joshua? How do Christians 'possess the land' or 'conquer the enemy'? What are the things for us personally that try to prevent us from living as 'God's people in God's land under God's rule'? What is the 'territory' that Jesus' church is commissioned to 'occupy'—and what kind of 'fighting' are we to engage in?

WHATEVER YOU SAY...

73

Thursday June 12: Joshua 1 v 10-18

'I'll go away and pray about it.' Sounds good! But it can be a cover-up for our sinful reluctance to obey the clear word of God. There is no need to pray about whether or not we should do as He says... Joshua did not delay a decision. Immediately he obeyed God and went forward.

ACTION STATIONS: read v 10-18

1. **Food to be prepared (v 10, 11).** Slightly puzzling, since they still were provided with manna from heaven. But in addition to the manna, the Israelites by now could find other food supplies in this fertile land. The manna, which God had given them for forty years, would stop as soon as they were over Jordan. God does not perform unnecessary miracles.
2. **Promises to be kept (v 12-15).** Numbers 32 gives the account. Moses had died, but that made no difference to the promise those two-and-a-half tribes had made. Promises are made in God's hearing. He sees if we keep them, even if no one else does.

Joshua was certainly willing to go forward. But what about the people? Would it be a repeat of the appalling rebellion at the border forty years ago? (Numbers 14). Their response must have been a tremendous relief and encouragement to Joshua...

WHATEVER, WHEREVER: read v 16-18 again

- ★ **Unqualified obedience (v 16, 17).** *Read John 14 v 21.*
Jesus Christ is the Christian's Master and Leader. Is v 16 your position? Unreserved commitment to do as the Lord says, whatever the cost?
- ★ **Prayerful support (v 17).** *Read 1 Kings 1 v 36, 37.*
God has given us human leaders and teachers to support. And it can be very lonely for them. Do you pray warmly and frequently for the Lord to be close to them?
- ★ **Intolerance of sin (v 18a).** *Read Colossians 3 v 5-8.*
Has a particular area of disobedience become 'acceptable' to you? Disobedience is rebellion... Or are you putting to death such sins because they have no place in your life?
- ★ **Warm encouragement (v 18b).** In effect they were saying: 'We're right behind you—we'll give all the support we can'. Is that the message that your pastor and leaders are getting? Perhaps you feel it, but do you show your support?

Read how way Paul encouraged Timothy—**2 Timothy 1 v 1-7.**

FAITH BUILDING

Friday June 13: Joshua 2 v 1-11

It's not clear what vital military info Joshua gained by sending out spies to snoop around Jericho. What is clear is that God had plans for this rather risky reconnoitre—plans to give His people not so much strategic information as strategic encouragement. Just the opposite to last time the spies returned... **Remember Numbers 14 v 31-33?**

A GREAT FEAR: read v 1-11, 24

So who's trembling in their boots now? No doubt the old stories had circulated among the Israelites about giants that were going to have them for breakfast, but God is making sure the fear is firmly where it belongs. The heathen nations had actually taken a lot more notice of the lessons God had been teaching these last 40 years than had His own people! The message had filtered through, and hit them between the eyes—v 10, 11. Too right they should be afraid—what defence can they possibly have against such a God? So guess how the Israelites felt on hearing v 24!



TIME OUT

Where does fear really belong? With Christians who have a risen, reigning, conquering Lord who is soon going to fetch them to glory for ever? Or with those God will judge in His fierce anger for rejecting His Son? Are you scared when the devil attacks you, accuses you? Are you scared of coming clean about being a Christian? Scared of standing up to your friends? Where does fear really belong?

A GREAT FATHER

The undercover agents made a complete hash of it, at least on the surface of things. You can be quite sure they were highly relieved to get home safe and sound after the heart-stopping suspense. But one lesson that would surely have stood out to the rest of the Israelites was that God was looking after them. He saw to it that they chose the one person who would look after them; He saw to it that the hit squad didn't get them; He got them home safely. And that's just the kind of loving care Israel could expect as they went into God's land. What a boost!



TIME OUT

Being a Christian can feel like being on a high-risk mission, at least, if we're willing to risk our lives for the gospel. But though we may lose our reputation, our prospects, our lives—in actual fact, there is nothing safer than being under the Father's loving care.

Matthew 10 v 21, 22, 26-31 may help you work that one out.

WOMAN OF FAITH

Saturday June 14: Joshua 2 v 12-24

The Bible sure is a puzzling book sometimes. Why did the spies go to a prostitute? Why does God use the woman's lies to let the two men off the hook? And why on earth does He choose to rescue Rahab of all people? But that's jumping ahead; **first read v 12-24.**

FAITH IN ACTION

This is surely more than shrewd self-interest. **Look again at v 11.** Rahab has cottoned on to the fact that the Lord is far more than just another local deity. Why, if the Lord really is Lord of the whole earth, then He can be her God. But faith is more than words—actions speak louder. She had better join His side. It is not treachery to leave the world's side and seek shelter from the God of the whole earth. So she shelters the men sent by her new-found God. Convinced? Or am I reading too much into it? **Check out Hebrews 11 v 31, James 2 v 25.**
★ *Why do you think Rahab of all people is picked out for these examples?*

FAITH TO ENCOURAGE

Think again of the impact all this would have on the Israelites. As they march round Jericho's walls a little later, what an encouragement they will receive each time they pass the scarlet thread. Why, if even this heathen, immoral woman—what a negative combination in their eyes—can trust the Lord on hearsay, how much more ought they! If the Lord saved even her, how much more will He look after His own people!

SO WHY?

Let's get back to those awkward questions again. I'm not sure I can answer them all, but I can point you in the right direction. *Why Rahab?* Because of the kind of God we have. And because He wants Israel—and us—to take careful note of the kind of people He is willing to save, the kind of character they—and we—are to attract among God's own people as others see reflected in us this wonderful God of grace. And let's not be unrealistic—of course she is going to lie, until she gets to know the God of truth. But God sees her faith—He can deal with the rest later.



TIME OUT

Now there's food for thought. We're happy enough working with God to reach respectable types, but does He really mean us to welcome Rahabs too?

RAISE THE PRAISE!

Sunday June 15: Psalm 33

Time for a psalm sandwich. The pieces of bread at the beginning and end are short sections praising God (v 1-3) and trusting God (v 20-22). David has included two 'fillings': sections on God the Ruler (v 4-11) and God the Judge (v 12-19). **Tuck in!**

PRAISING GOD: read verses 1-3

Psalms are meant to be lived and experienced, not just studied. So why not respond to the call of these verses to praise God for who He is. You could sing a favourite hymn or song if you like! Mine's *Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation...*

GOD THE RULER: read verses 4-11

This is the awesome, astounding God we serve! His Word (by which He rules all things) is right and true (v 4). Perfect, in fact. He is dependably faithful (as Psalms 31 and 32 have shown us). His unfailing love fills the earth (v 5, Psalm 36 v 5-9), which He so perfectly created (v 6-9), and over which He is sovereign (v 10-11).

★ *What should be our response to our Creator (v 8)?*

GOD THE JUDGE: read verses 12-19

God chose one people (Israel) to be His inheritance (v 12). Since Jesus died and rose again, all who trust in Him are included in this inheritance. God sees all of humankind. He sees beyond our appearance, right into our hearts (v 13-15). We are under review, and nothing anyone has (position, power, strength) can save them from death (v 16-17).

★ *So who can know God (v 18)? Who are His people?*

★ *What will God do for them (v 19)?*

TRUSTING GOD: read verses 20-22

As God's people we have a confident hope (expectation), not only of eternity with Him, but a hope that assures us that He is our help and our shield (v 20). So we can fully trust God because of what He has revealed about Himself (*His holy name*-v 21). And we can rejoice in Him (v 21) and praise Him for all that He is. Which brings us back to where we came in...



PRAY THRO'

Read slowly through Psalm 33 once more, joyfully praising the Lord for everything He is to us and everything He faithfully does for us, remembering our reverent response to Him (v 8).

FOLLOW THE LEADER

Monday June 16: Joshua 3 v 1-6

Who would lead Israel across Jordan into Canaan? Joshua, surely? No, Israel are given instructions to follow a different 'leader' altogether...

FOLLOW THE ARK: read v 1-6

The 'Ark of the Covenant' was what they were to look for and to follow (v 3). It was the Ark that was to lead the way for the people (v 6) into a new and unknown future (v 4). So what is the significance of the Ark? **Look back at Exodus 25 v 21, 22.**

- ★ **It was where the Lord met with Israel.** Really the Ark was a symbol of Jehovah—He Himself was leading the way into the promised land.
- ★ **It contained the testimony—the Ten Commandments.** The word of God was leading the way into the promised land.
- ★ **It was the Ark of the Covenant.** The sign of God's pledge to them as His own people. God's promise was leading the way into the promised land.

Remember Moses' plea when God was threatening to abandon His people: 'If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.' **Read Exodus 33 v 1-3, 12-17.**

GET READY

Before following the Lord, they had to prepare themselves: 'Consecrate yourselves!' (v 5)

It was the holy One who was leading them into His holy land. They must be a people separated to the Lord, set apart from the heathen practices of the Canaanites. Let them confess their sin and dedicate themselves to the Lord.



TIME OUT

Are you interested in living in a 'holy land'? Do you long for an eternity with the Holy One? Then what about the holy life He has called His people to? Are you really set apart from the world? Have you devoted yourself to the Lord? **Read 2 Timothy 2 v 19-22.**

Tuesday June 17: Joshua 3 v 7-17

God is so good to us! Not only does He give us His words to teach us His ways, but because He knows we are slow learners He often teaches us by unforgettable events too. After all, if you witnessed the Thames drying up overnight, you wouldn't forget it in a hurry—especially if you remembered that God had once done something uncannily similar for your forefathers...

A SIGN-MIRACLE: read v 7-10

This wasn't just for convenience, it wasn't just to make the people say wow—it was a teaching miracle, a sign. Apart from what we saw yesterday, what are the two things God specifically says they are going to learn (v 7, 10)?

1. GOD IS EXALTING HUMAN LEADERSHIP (v 7)

You may not think that is terribly interesting or important—but God knows it is a crucial key to their success. If they are not going to listen to God's man, they might as well not bother crossing the Jordan. Next time Joshua instructs them to do something crazy (like marching round Jericho for days), they are not to veto it—they are to remember the sign of the Jordan. Look ahead for the result; 4 v 14. It is interesting to compare with the last drying-up-of-water episode; **see Exodus 14 v 31**.



TIME OUT

God honours human leadership—so what should our attitude be?
★ *The world around us says: 'I'm not having anyone tell me what to do'—what should Christians say?*

2. GOD IS GOING TO BE FIGHTING THE ENEMY (v 10)

Not just any old god—how does He describe Himself? (v 10, 11, 13). If the Lord of the whole earth has decided to kick out the Canaanites and give His people the land, then who is going to argue? Rewind the tape, Israel. Think back to the Red Sea—who was fighting for you then, and what happened to the opposition? It's a re-run; as they step onto that dried up riverbed, they are to know for sure that the God who can do that for them can look after any number of '-ites'.



TIME OUT

Each of us who are Christians has a far more powerful event than Jordan to look back on, which should certainly have the same effect... An event which is not just history, but one whose power we have experienced for ourselves. Know what we mean?

See Romans 8 v 31-39.

SEVEN WORDS: JUDGMENT

Wednesday June 18: Joshua 4

Take me around an ancient monument and I'll be yawning within 30 seconds. But God likes monuments—not to bore kids rigid, but to make them ask their dads what on earth they are there for. God didn't want His miracle to be wasted on a rather forgetful Israel; the Jordan crossing wasn't meant to be one of those fascinating but irrelevant details—it was designed to have a lasting effect on Israel. And not just on Israel, but on the nations around too.

★ *So what do these stones mean?* **Read Joshua 4.**

COVENANT: read v7

The Ark is mentioned repeatedly. They must remember where the Ark stood—hence the pile of stones in Jordan as well as on the other side. And you know what the Ark stands for. Israel did. They knew it was their covenant God who held back the waters for them to pass through in safety. The God who had committed Himself to them, despite all their long rebellion—yet who was still determined to give them the land that they so richly **didn't** deserve.

★ *Is there an equivalent for us?*

SALVATION: read v 19-23

Notice the date. 40 years to the day since they killed the passover lamb, when the Lord started to bring them out of Egypt via a river crossing. Now exactly 40 years later, another river crossing on dry land brings them into the promised land. Saved! Saved out of slavery, saved into freedom and plenty. These are salvation stones! Again, that's precisely how the Lord's Supper works for Christians. Think it through.

WITNESS: read v 24

God is interested in the whole world, not just Israel. He always has been. Those stones are to keep teaching Israel (and us) of their responsibility to teach the world. The stones tell a story about the true God—and so must our lives. Instead of copying idols, we are here to show that the Lord is God, who is to be worshipped and obeyed.

FEAR: read v 23

Were they dancing and singing as they crossed the Jordan? I guess so—but it would have been a fear-filled kind of joy. Awe, reverence, wonder, that this God should be their God. Dad, what do these stones mean? Fear, my son. Our God is a mighty God who can dry up the Jordan in full flood—a God we should always trust and never take lightly.

Read Psalm 96.

A NEW COMMANDER

Thursday June 19: Joshua 5

Fresh into Canaan, Israel had a pressing job to do—kick out the inhabitants. But it would have to wait (let them sweat, v1!), because Israel wasn't ready. First things first. God wanted to draw a line under their desert wanderings and start their new life in Canaan properly.

NEW START

- ★ **Circumcision: read v 1-9.** Surely the last thing they needed before battle! No, it was just the job, because it 'rolled away' all the half-commitment of the desert years, and showed publicly that they were now all for God. It was the sign of His special relationship with them—of their belonging to Him.
- ★ **Passover: read v 10.** For the first time in 39 years they were able to celebrate salvation in this special way. What a way to start their life in God's salvation land! And what confidence it would give them as they remembered how the Lord had rescued them from the hands of the Egyptians. Canaanites next!
- ★ **Real food: read v 11, 12.** Manna was provisional food. Now they could enjoy the real thing, the milk and honey of the land, because it belonged to them. It was a sign of them reaching home; there was no more danger of going back to Egypt.
 - ★ *Are you feeding on the 'real thing'?* **Read John 6 v 32, 51.**

NEW COMMANDER: read v 13-15

Was Joshua feeling apprehensive? Feeling the weight of his responsibility? Psyched up for his first battle as commander of the Lord's army? But then he meets the real commander.

You can understand his alarm—and his question. But actually it was entirely inappropriate. The Lord is not going to 'help out' Joshua in His campaign—it was exactly the other way about. Joshua must learn simply to take the orders—and notice the very first one (v 15).



PRAY THRO'

What an encouragement for us who are keen to get on with the Lord's work. That's it—the Lord's work. We're under orders—only then are we going to win any battles. Time to take off our shoes and bow in awe before our Commander with drawn sword.

Read Revelation 1 v 12-18.

MIGHTY WEAKNESS

Friday June 20: Joshua 6 v 1-11

The people of Jericho were quaking with fear (chapter 5 v 1). They had simply locked themselves in behind the walls of the city, presumably hoping to be able to defend themselves. But they hadn't bargained for the Lord's rather unconventional means... **Read v 1-11.**

★ *So why did the Lord choose such an extraordinary method?*

TO TEST THEIR FAITH

Joshua knew he must just take orders from his Commander-in-chief; but what about the Israelites? Would they keep their promise to Joshua in 1 v 16? Surely they had not envisaged then having to do anything quite as bizarre? But notice their reaction (v 8-11). No questions, no arguments. Just obedience.



PRAY THRO'

★ *Have we really learnt the truth of **Isaiah 55 v 8, 9** yet?*

Do we bow willingly to the all-wise God, knowing that however strange His directions seem, they must be far better than the route we would have chosen?

TO SHOW HIS POWER

It could not have seemed very threatening; priests carrying the Ark ... silence apart from ram's horns... no attempt to attack. What a lesson to the Israelites as they faced many battles ahead; they needed no power of their own. Not so long as they trusted in the almighty power of God.

Others may laugh at the weakness of Christians—and we ourselves may feel so feeble at times... But remember **2 Corinthians 10 v 3-5.**



TIME OUT

The Israelites did not come home discouraged after the first day's march saying: 'What a waste of time that was—it achieved absolutely nothing.' It was only after they had made thirteen 'pointless' trips around the city that they would see results.

★ *Does your obedience depend on seeing results?*

WHOSE CITY?

Saturday June 21: Joshua 6 v 12-27

The Israelites were on the verge of capturing their first city in the conquest of Canaan. Their shout of victory on the seventh day would bring the walls crashing down; **read v 12-16**.

Then what? Joshua had told them: ‘Shout! For the Lord has given you the city’; so were they free to plunder Jericho, claiming all its treasure, its livestock, its housing for their own use? You would have thought so, but the Lord had some more lessons to drive home...

THE LORD’S PLUNDER: **read v 17-21**

They were not to keep a single item for themselves. Worse, they were to burn the booty, saving only the precious metals for the Lord’s treasury! ‘The city... to be devoted to the Lord!’ (v 17) After all, whose battle was it? Who did the plunder belong to? Of course, in future victories the Lord would kindly allow Israel to keep the plunder, but ‘first lessons first’. Besides, though it looks like terrible waste, it was really like an offering to the Lord. The word ‘devoted’ is a technical term meaning ‘set aside for destruction’—it was an act of worship not of carnage.



TIME OUT

God has the perfect right to claim back everything He has given us. But do you jealously guard what is ‘mine’, desperately hoping you won’t have to part with it? Or do you gladly abandon your life, your possessions, everything you have to the Lord? **Read 2 Cor 8 v 1-5**. God is not concerned for us to be comfortable. but consecrated.

THE LORD’S JUDGMENT

We may find it hard to stomach; all those ‘innocent’ people, children included, mercilessly slaughtered. Can this be right? That kind of thinking just goes to show that we haven’t properly got hold of God’s holy anger against sin. God was judging the nations for their appalling sin (Genesis 15 v 16). God was determined to rid His holy land of its corruption and idolatry, so His people would not be ensnared. Notice how God underlines His judgment by putting a curse on the person who dared rebuild Jericho; **read v 26** (compare 1 Kings 16 v 34).



TIME OUT

You may think this is bad, but the destruction of Jericho is only a feeble picture of the judgment to come...

Read 2 Thessalonians 1 v 7-9.

FACING A CRISIS

Sunday June 22: Psalm 34

David was on the run from Saul and sought refuge with Abimelech (*aka Achish, see 1 Samuel 21 v 10-14*), the Philistine king. Afraid of being recognised, David pretended to be a madman, and they released him. But David realised it wasn't his own guile that kept him safe...

HANDS AND LIPS: read verses 1-7

David recognises God's hand in his deliverance, and gives God the praise He is due. In fact, David commits himself to *continual* praise to the Lord (v 1). He acknowledges that it wasn't his own doing, but that God rescued him when he was at the bottom of life's heap (v 6).



TIME OUT

- ★ *Why is it that we're more likely to call out to God or give Him the glory when we're at our lowest?*
- ★ *When have you recognised God's hand in your life recently?*
- ★ *Have you given Him the praise He is due?*

THE SECRET OF A GOOD LIFE: read verses 8-14

Re-read (and savour!) verse 8. Want to see God's goodness? Then get to know Him! Next, David gives us the secret of a good life: give God the fear and reverence He deserves (v 9, 11) and you will find sufficiency in Him (v 9-10).

- ★ *What, practically, does it mean to show fear of the Lord (v 11-14)?*
- ★ *What will it mean for you to 'seek peace and pursue it' (v 14)?*

PRAYER IN CRISIS: read verses 15-22

David shows us how God treats those who fear Him (the righteous— v 15, 17, 19) and also those who do evil (v 16, 21). In fact, the wicked are so thoroughly dealt with that they become totally forgotten (v 16).

Tough times are to be met with prayer, crying out to the Lord (v 17) who looks after His people in times of trouble (v 17), broken-heartedness (v 18) and pain. The Lord is close to His suffering people. Not just nearby, but actively making our troubles His own, protecting (v 20), delivering (v 19), fighting for (v 21) and redeeming (v 22) His children!



PRAY THRU'

Psalm 34 is a brilliant lesson in how to react to a life crisis.

- ★ *How can you employ some of David's lessons?*

Pray for those you know who are 'going through the mill' at the moment. Pray specifically that the attitudes and responses of this psalm would be theirs as well.

THE COST OF DISOBEDIENCE

Monday June 23: Joshua 7 v 1-9

GOD'S ANGER: *read v 1*

Maybe Achan was tempted by similar thoughts to those that lure us today: *'No-one will know... just this little bit won't matter... it won't harm anyone else...'* **Wrong on all three accounts.** God knew... it made His anger burn... against all Israel.

'Was that fair?', you may ask; 'one man's sin souring God's relationship with everyone else?' Yes, of course it was fair—how could God be anything else? But have we grasped the fact that God's people are not independent of one another? God's church is a body; the sin of one member affects the whole body. And the whole body is responsible for dealing with that sin, so that God's favour can be restored to them again.

ISRAEL'S DEFEAT: *read v 2-5*

Israel was unaware that anything had changed. They thought Ai would be a walk-over. Maybe God had several lessons to teach Israel. Verse 3 suggests over-confidence, for these 'few' amounted to 12,000—and they were not slow to come out to fight either! And perhaps God was also showing them that there were fierce battles ahead of them. It was not going to be like Jericho all the time. But His main point was not lost on them. They returned home devastated, their faith shaken to the core—surely because they realised that God had deserted them. The lesson they needed to learn was not military but spiritual. But beware of jumping to the same conclusions as Joshua...

JOSHUA'S MISTAKE: *read v 6-9*

He was right, to a point. If God was going to let Israel be defeated, the whole enterprise was a disaster. But who do we blame when things go wrong in life...?

- ★ **He had forgotten what God is like.** Impossible that God should ever irrationally turn against His own people! Unthinkable that He should suddenly cancel His promises! Never, ever blame God for 'leaving' you. His love is unchangeable, His promises unbreakable.
- ★ **He had forgotten what Israel was like.** Far better to have cried: 'Lord, we must have sinned—show us what we have done!' Remember God's track record, then yours, then what God promises to those who have sinned: 'Return to Me, and I will return to you'. (Mal 3 v 7)

Read Psalm 38. There's only one answer to the pain that our sin causes...

PURGE THE CAMP

Tuesday June 24: Joshua 7 v 10-26

It was time for Joshua to stop complaining and to face the facts. The explanation of Israel's defeat was simple: 'Israel has sinned'.

STOLEN GOODS: read v 10-12

The Lord had made it quite clear beforehand: anyone who kept any of the booty from Jericho would bring a curse on Israel (6 v 18). And that is exactly what had happened. God would no longer be with them unless the stolen goods were devoted to the Lord (v 12).



TIME OUT

Is there some 'wedge of gold' in your life? Something forbidden, something getting between you and God? Something you 'looked at' and couldn't resist? Defeat is inevitable. You can never know God's presence until you have returned the stolen goods...

Read Isaiah 59 v 1, 2.

BE SURE YOUR SIN WILL FIND YOU OUT: read v 13-26

There's just no hiding. I don't know if Achan somehow imagined that he was going to escape being singled out by lot, or whether he was simply paralysed with terror. But there's little sign of repentance with someone who confesses, Clinton-style, after being found out. The sorrow is not the godly sorrow that leads to repentance, but the ungodly sorrow that wants to escape the consequences.



TIME OUT

Do you care about God's honour? Do you care about the damage done to God's cause, to God's people? Or do you only care about your own skin? Like Achan, everyone will have to 'give glory to the Lord' (v 19), but will you do it joyfully because you've known the sheer grace of Jesus' undeserved forgiveness?

Read Philippians 2 v 9-11.

JUDGMENT

There was no alternative. Achan had brought into the camp things devoted for destruction; now he along with them must be devoted for destruction. And his family must go with him (they must have known about it). The troubler of Israel (for that's what his name sounds like in Hebrew) must be troubled and left as a permanent reminder in the 'valley of trouble'. ***Read v 25, 26.***

Sin can't be tolerated by God. But judgment opens the door of blessing once again for His people...

BACK ON TRACK

Wednesday June 25: Joshua 8 v 1-9

Some people never forget your mistakes. They make sure that what you did years ago dogs you for the rest of your life. God is not like that. God wants us to be strengthened through our mistakes, not weakened. Just as sin leads certainly to defeat (chapter 7), so obedience leads certainly to victory—and blessing (chapter 8)

WORD FROM THE LORD: *read v 1, 2*

'Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged' Hadn't Joshua heard those words somewhere before? **Look back at 1 v 9** to find the rest of the great promise God had given Joshua at the beginning. Despite what Ai did to them last time, the Lord was still with Joshua! And, if that reassurance was not enough, He gave a direct promise that Ai would be conquered (8 v 2).



TIME OUT

Some Christians often seem to be seeking a 'word from the Lord' to encourage them. But they may have forgotten that the Bible is full of words from the Lord! God's promises are always true—and they always belong to those who trust in Jesus. Don't wait for a 'word' suddenly to drop into your mind; go to your Bible and take God's promises to heart. Eg: **Hebrews 13 v 5b, 6.**

LESSONS FROM THE LORD: *read v 3-9*

God had again promised them victory. But this time it was not going to be like Jericho, when the Lord brought the walls down. He knew they must learn to fight for themselves; they must use courage and skill and strategy to defeat these Ai-ites. Notice how Joshua developed the strategy God had told him to use (at the end of v 2), and the implications of this:

- ★ **God trains Christians to be mature.** We will always need to trust in the Lord's strength and help. But that does not mean sitting back and letting God do everything for us. God is concerned to train His people, to equip them, to make them strong—and He does that by exposing us to the harshness and reality of life, not by always making things easy. **See Hebrews 11 v 32-34.**
- ★ **God expects Christians to use their minds:** Thinking, planning, forming strategies... are these Christian activities? Of course. God gives us the guidelines in His word; and they must be studied and thought about carefully. But then we are to take those guidelines and prayerfully plan how best to tackle what needs doing.

Read Psalm 119 v 97-105.

JOINT VENTURE

Thursday June 26: Joshua 8 v 10-22

TWO TRUE THINGS

Two things were true about the battle Israel faced:

- ★ God had *promised* them victory.
- ★ They *must fight* to gain victory.

Those two things belonged together. Just because God had promised them victory, it did not mean they could be casual about it. The plan must be carried out with precision and care. To be successful, everyone must follow the instructions with courage and presence of mind. Jericho had really been the Lord's battle. Ai was a joint venture of God and Israel. And Israel must play its part. See how that turns out in Israel's battle against Ai; **read v 10-19.**

The same two things are true about the Christian life: God has *promised* to give His people His help, His presence, final victory and salvation. Christians must live out their faith, battle against sin and Satan, and the world, and persevere to the end. We must not separate the two. There used to be a slogan: '*Let go... let God!*' But that is not what God says. Christians must play their part in the joint venture. They must follow the instructions with meticulous care; they must be on their guard constantly against the enemy; they must flee from sin and yet be prepared to turn round and fight it...



TIME OUT

Are you playing your part; doing your 'bit'? Examine yourself with these verses: **Philippians 2 v 12, 13; 1 Peter 1 v 13-16; 5 v 8, 9.**

GOD GAVE THEM VICTORY

Exactly as planned. Perfect co-ordination left the Ai-ites stranded between the two Israelite armies. Israel turned on them with godly determination to leave no one alive, as the Lord had told them; **read v 20-22.** God kept His promise ... they played their part... victory won.



Christians too are to work together, under God, in local churches. A Christian should not be going it alone against the enemy forces. How in tune are you with the other members of your congregation? Is there a sense of purpose and determination to pull together for God's cause? **Read Philippians 1 v 27.**

OBEDIENCE PAYS

Friday June 27: Joshua 8 v 23-29

Resounding victory had been won by Israel—but they had not finished God’s work yet...

‘DEVOTED’ TO GOD: *read v 23-29*

As with Jericho, they must not rest until every single person has been put to death. Notice how Joshua stands with his javelin stretched out over the city; a reminder that this was God’s judgement they were bringing on Ai (v 26). The king is singled out for special disgrace—perhaps because he dared resist God’s judgment in fighting against Israel, perhaps simply to deter other Canaanite kings from being so bold. But there is a difference from the complete destruction of Jericho...

THIS TIME KEEP THE PLUNDER: *read v 27, 2*

That shows...

★ The kindness and generosity of God.

So recently Israel had been in disgrace for keeping back ‘devoted’ goods from Jericho. Wouldn’t you have thought God would test them again at Ai to see if this time they would not fail Him? But no—it is as if God is showing Israel how thoroughly He has forgiven them for that sin, and how ready He is for them to enjoy the rewards of courageous fighting.



TIME OUT

Have you discovered yet the wonderful truth of **Psalm 103 v 8-14**? If you are a sinner and a failure, you need to know more of this generous and forgiving God.

- ★ **Obedience pays.** Although Achan had brought a curse on all Israel, everyone else had in fact devoted all Jericho’s plunder to their God, as He had commanded. Achan had stolen the devoted goods and had been destroyed. The rest had devoted everything to God and now Ai’s plunder was theirs. What a contrast! How clearly it shows that it is not those who obey who suffer.



APPLY

Remember how Jesus commands any would-be disciple to *‘deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.’* (Mark 8 v 34)

That may seem very hard; for you know what sacrifices it will mean in practice. You hesitate... can I really face this... is it worth the loss ...? Answer that question after reading **Matthew 19 v 29.**

- ★ *Don’t dodge the issue, answer it now— isn’t it really worth obeying His call?*

BLESSING OR CURSE?

Saturday June 28: Joshua 8 v 30-35

Just notice the timing of this ‘time out’ for Israel. There would have been no stifled yawns during this ceremony in view of recent experiences... **read v 30-35.**

TIME OUT

The Israelites had tasted victory. They must have been itching to get on with conquering Canaan; but it was time for them to stop and think. In their recent battles they had seen rather dramatically that...

OBEDIENCE —————> **GOD’S BLESSING**

DISOBEDIENCE —————> **GOD’S CURSE**

Now God was calling them to remember His covenant with them and to rededicate themselves to obeying His law.

A RENEWED COVENANT: **read v 30-35 again**

Now read Deuteronomy 27 v 1-13.

Notice the three main things that were done:

- ★ Building an altar for making offerings
- ★ Writing the law on white-washed stones
- ★ Reading the whole law to the whole nation
- ★ *Why were these things done? What lessons do they have for you?*

The people could not miss the point. There they were, half of them standing at the mountain of blessing (Gerizim) and the other half at the mountain of curse (Ebal). In between them was the Ark of the Covenant, containing God’s law. Which would it be? Obedience and blessing—or disobedience and curse? Glance through the rest of Deuteronomy 27 and into 28 if you have time.



APPLY

The challenge for each of us is really very similar, although the terms of the covenant are wonderfully different:

- ★ The curse for disobeying God’s law remains on those who reject His gospel. Christ came to remove the curse of the law, which we cannot keep ourselves. But the curse remains if we do not trust in Christ. **Read Gal 3 v 10, 13 and John 3 v 18b.**
- ★ The blessing is on those who obey God’s law—not out of fear but from love and gratitude to Christ for having saved them from its curse. **Read Revelation 22 v 14.**
- ★ *Which will it be for you? Obedience and blessing—or disobedience and curse?*

DECEIVED

Sunday June 29: Joshua 9 v 1-15

There are two doors the devil uses to mess up Christian lives; front and back! If attacking us full frontal fails, then he'll try befriending us. If he can't get us to go back into the world, he'll try to get the world back into us...

TWO APPROACHES: read v 1-4

Of the devil's two ploys against Israel, which would prove most effective? All the '-ites' combining forces to mount a crushing offensive, or a harmless, humble bunch of friendly Gibeonites?

Of the devil's two ploys against Christians, which proves the most dangerous? Raging persecution or friendly infiltration? We need to spot the wolf in sheep's clothing and not fall for his winning crocodile smile. How? What are the giveaway signs?

CLEVER DEVIL: read v 5-15

You can't help feeling sympathetic, can you? Wasn't it better to make peace with God's people, than to join the rest in outright war? And you have to admire their nerve, their initiative. You can slaughter the enemy when they come firing missiles at you, but not when they're feeble and exhausted, begging for peace...

But that's just where the danger lies. **Compare v 7 with v 1.** These innocent travellers were Hivites too, hand in glove with the bunch assembling to annihilate Israel! It's true that they posed little military threat, but they were still God's enemies. Once Israel starts making peace with the enemies God has told them to destroy, the distinctions between God's people and the enemy are immediately blurred. In making a covenant with the enemy they have broken covenant with the Lord.



TIME OUT

To their credit, Israel was on its guard. But what did they fail to do (v 14)? So what did they end up doing (v 15)?

Take time to get hold of the lessons.

★ God has given us a whole Bible to hold up to the camouflage of the devil. Test everything, 'ask God', especially if it is attractive.

Proverbs 3 v 5, 6 are crucial.

★ What have you made peace with, that really you should be wiping out of your life?

★ Do you believe **James 4 v 4?** Really?

CONSEQUENCES

Monday June 30: Joshua 9 v 16-27

The damage was done; the pact was made. It was not long before the Israelites realised their mistake—but it was too late now. They could not go back on their word. They must let their enemies live.

LET THEM LIVE: *read v 16-20*

The Lord forgives His people's mistakes, but we still have to live with the consequences. Sometimes the effects of sins are irreversible; and that can be very painful and very long-term.



TIME OUT

Think of some examples of sins whose consequences stay with us. We may not be able to do anything about the consequences, except live with them, but what about the guilt?

*'When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see Him there
Who made an end of all my sin'*

The Gibeonites must live, but all is not lost! The vital question is how can they avoid the dangers of the enemy living among them?

DAMAGE LIMITATION: *read v 21-27*

The Gibeonites must live—but never be accepted as 'one of them'. Interestingly enough, though they could not now be 'accursed' (devoted to God by death), they were still to be counted as 'cursed'. They were always to be under submission to Israel, used as slaves—***read v 23.***

And notice how they were put to work—carrying water and chopping wood for the worship of the Lord. The best way to guard against Israel being polluted by their worship!

The shame of Israel's failure was still there. But at least they made the best use of their mistake. You may well be carrying the consequences of a sinful past. Have you allowed them to dominate, or are they 'under submission'? God is amazingly kind to us. He will not allow even our massive mistakes to damage us—even though they still hurt.



PRAY THRO'

Read Romans 8 v 28-30.

Give praise to God when you see that He has worked out even your worst mistakes and rebellion for your good.

★ *Can you see the good He is working through it?*

Time to re-order Explore?

Don't miss out on your daily Bible readings with *Explore*. Order now for a whole year. The price is just £12, including postage. You can get reductions for multiple orders—see box below.

You can pay by cheque (payable to The Good Book Company Ltd), postal order, or credit/debit card.

Just fill in your name and address, and send this page to us together with your payment for £12 per set. Tick the box to get more details of our church subscription scheme.

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

Please send me details of your church subscription scheme

CREDIT/DEBIT CARD DETAILS

Card type: Visa/Barclaycard Mastercard/Access Maestro

Main Number	3-digit security no. from card back
_____	_____

Expiry Date: ____ Issue No: ____ Name on Card: _____

Return this form to:

The Good Book Company, Elm House, 37 Elm Road, New Malden,
Surrey, KT3 3HB, UK or Tel: 0845 225 0880; Fax: 0845 225 0990;
e-mail: admin@thegoodbook.co.uk

SOUTH AFRICA: Christian Book Discounters tel: (021) 685 3663

NEW ZEALAND: Navpress NZ tel: (03) 343 1990

REDUCTIONS FOR QUANTITY:

Subtract £12 for each 10 subscriptions ordered. Single copies available at £3.00 each. £2.70 for 10 or more + P&P.

Overseas subscriptions cost £15 (includes p&p).

Single copies: Europe—£3.75; Rest of the world—£4.00



LEARN2LEAD

Learn2Lead is a resource for training leaders in the local church. It aims to equip members of the congregation with the skills they need to move into, and grow in their leadership roles.

Learn2Lead has five modules.

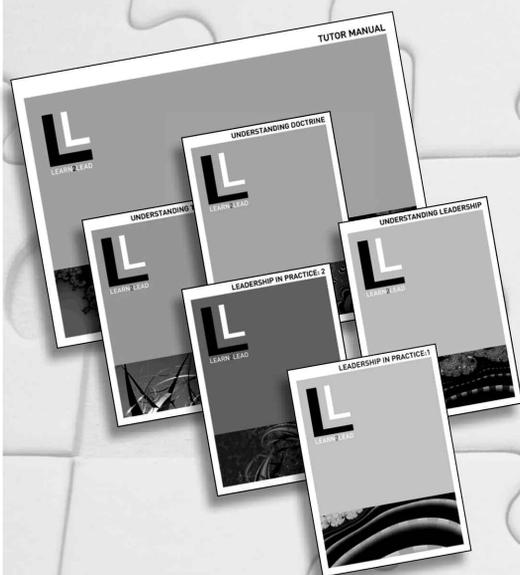
1. Understanding the Bible
2. Understanding Doctrine
3. Understanding Leadership
4. Leadership in Practice 1
5. Leadership in Practice 2

Each module has 10 units. Leader's notes for all 5 modules are contained within the comprehensive Tutor Manual.

Who is it for?

Any leader or potential leader, perhaps someone who will become a leader in the next five years. Examples could include:

- Home group leader
- Youth leader
- Sunday School teacher
- Elder
- Church warden
- Church secretary
- Deacon
- Specialist group leader: women's group, students, etc.



For more information and to order contact
The Good Book Company on 0845 225 0880
or visit www.thegoodbook.co.uk



THE OPEN BIBLE INSTITUTE

A Bible-centred distance-learning college offering a range of courses to equip Christians to serve God in the local congregation.

★ *Do you want to get to know the Bible better?*

★ *Be better equipped to serve God?*

Then why not take a course with the Open Bible Institute?

Short Courses

If you're short on time, or want to delve into just one subject, then why not dip a toe into one of OBI's short courses. Low cost and low commitment—but with high quality, biblical teaching. Subjects available from now include:

- ★ Administration
- ★ Christian Mission & Ministry
- ★ Pastoral Care
- ★ Preaching
- ★ Youth & Childrens' Work

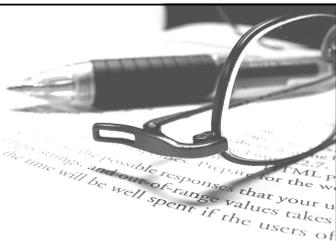
Moore College Courses

If you want a comprehensive grounding in biblical studies and theology, then why not enrol on the well-loved correspondence courses from Moore College, Sydney? Flexible study modules ranging from the Gospel of Mark and the Pentateuch to Reformation Church History.

Modules cost just £30 each.
Enrolments welcome at any time.

Certificate of Higher Education Courses

Those who are looking for a course with an internationally recognised qualification can apply for our two-year **Cert HE in Biblical Studies and Theology** or our **Cert HE in Biblical Studies & Ministry**. These courses are partly based on the Moore College material, but dig a little deeper, making them ideal for anyone training for leadership.



open bible institute



For more details visit our website: www.open-bible-institute.org

or contact the Open Bible Institute office at Elm House, 37 Elm Road, New Malden, Surrey KT3 3HB, UK • Tel: 0845 225 0885 admin@open-bible-institute.org

Building on the foundations... Ephesians 2 v 20

In the next issue:

- ★ More from 1 Samuel
- ★ Ephesians
- ★ Nahum
- ★ Psalms and Proverbs

Don't miss your copy. Contact your local Christian bookshop, church agent, or call The Good Book Company on 0845 225 0880 to get the next issue.

Just in case you haven't got your copy yet, here's the plan for the first week of the next issue!

July 1: Joshua 10 v 1-15

July 2: Joshua 10 v 15-27

July 3: Joshua 10 v 28– 12 v 24

July 4: Joshua 13 v 1 – 14 v 6

July 5: Joshua 14 v 6-15

July 6: Psalm 35

July 7: Joshua 20, 21

Introduce a friend to Explore!

If you're enjoying using *Explore* in your daily readings, why not introduce a friend? Sample copies can be ordered by contacting us:

The Good Book Company
Elm House, 37 Elm Road,
New Malden,
Surrey KT3 3HB, UK

Tel: 0845-225-0880
Tel (int): +44 208-942-0880

email: admin@thegoodbook.co.uk
web: www.thegoodbook.co.uk

Contributors in this issue

Tim Chester is part of The Crowded House – a church-planting initiative in Sheffield.

Phil Crowter pastors in rural Sussex.

Tim Thornborough and Martin Cole work at The Good Book Company.