**KINGDOM PROPHETS**

*Forty Daily Devotionals*

*From the Minor Prophets*

*(Based on the NKJV)*

*Seminole Baptist Church*

*3330 Mission Road*

*Tallahassee, FL 32303*

***Daily Reading Schedule***

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| **Day** | **Scripture Reading** | **Date** |  | **Day** | **Scripture Reading** | **Date** |
| 1 | Hosea 1:1-2:23 | 9/20 |  | 21 | Micah 4:9-6:5 | 10/10 |
| 2 | Hosea 3:1–5:7 | 9/21 |  | 22 | Micah 6:6-7:20 | 10/11 |
| 3 | Hosea 5:8-7:16 | 9/22 |  | 23 | Nahum 1:1-2:7 | 10/12 |
| 4 | Hosea 8:1-9:17 | 9/23 |  | 24 | Nahum 2:8-3:19 | 10/13 |
| 5 | Hosea 10:1-12:8 | 9/24 |  | 25 | Habakkuk 1:1-2:11 | 10/14 |
| 6 | Hosea 12:9-14:9 | 9/25 |  | 26 | Habakkuk 2:12-3:19 | 10/15 |
| 7 | Joel 1 | 9/26 |  | 27 | Zephaniah 1:1-2:9 | 10/16 |
| 8 | Joel 2 | 9/27 |  | 28 | Zephaniah 2:10-3:20 | 10/17 |
| 9 | Joel 3 | 9/28 |  | 29 | Haggai 1 | 10/18 |
| 10 | Amos 1:1-2:10 | 9/29 |  | 30 | Haggai 2 | 10/19 |
| 11 | Amos 2:11-3:15 | 9/30 |  | 31 | Zechariah 1:1-2:5 | 10/20 |
| 12 | Amos 4:1-5:9 | 10/01 |  | 32 | Zechariah 2:6-4:10 | 10/21 |
| 13 | Amos 5:10-6:8 | 10/02 |  | 33 | Zechariah 4:11-6:13 | 10/22 |
| 14 | Amos 6:9-7:17 | 10/03 |  | 34 | Zechariah 6:14-8:8 | 10/23 |
| 15 | Amos 8:1-9:15 | 10/04 |  | 35 | Zechariah 8:9-9:10 | 10/24 |
| 16 | Obadiah 1 | 10/05 |  | 36 | Zechariah 9:11-11:3 | 10/25 |
| 17 | Jonah 1 & 2 | 10/06 |  | 37 | Zechariah 11:4-12:14 | 10/26 |
| 18 | Jonah 3 & 4 | 10/07 |  | 38 | Zechariah 13:1-14:20 | 10/27 |
| 19 | Micah 1:1-2:9 | 10/08 |  | 39 | Malachi 1:1-2:12 | 10/28 |
| 20 | Micah 2:10-4:8 | 10/09 |  | 40 | Malachi 2:13-4:6 | 10/29 |

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| **Scripture Reading: Hosea 1:1-2:23** | **DAY 1** |
| **Focus Verses: Hosea 1:10-11 &2:1** |

***“Mercy is Shown”***

We should always be reminded of the difference between grace and mercy. *Grace* is when we receive good things that we *do not* deserve while *mercy* is when we do not receive the bad things which we *do* deserve. Hosea’s ministry began during the closing years of the reign of Judah’s King Uzziah and ended sometime in the early years of the reign of Hezekiah. With that in mind, we understand that it was somewhere around 750 BC “When the LORD began to speak by Hosea” (1:2) and that the LORD spoke through him until sometime around 710 BC. His ministry began during a time of great monetary and military success for the people of God. Hosea, like his fellow contemporary prophets (Amos, Isaiah, and Micah), was assigned the sad responsibility of announcing that God’s people had violated the covenant that was explained to them in Deuteronomy, so therefore, the blessings they had been experiencing were soon to be followed by the curses and judgment that God promised to His people when they were disobedient to Him. Hosea’s message boldly *exposed* the people’s disrespect of their covenant with God and announced their pending judgment at the same time that it also *expressed* God’s desire to ultimately restore His people if they would only repent of their sins and turn to Him. Through the sad imagery of his own unfaithful wife, Hosea’s message clearly revealed that “Mercy is shown” (2:1).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Kingdom Prophets** are always faithful “to declare…the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). They must give equal time to the blessings and judgments that follow obedience and disobedience. **Speak** God’s Word to someone at an appropriate time and in an appropriate way today. **Watch** for your opportunity to be a messenger.

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| **Scripture Reading: Hosea3:1-5:7** | **DAY 2** |
| **Focus Verses:Hosea3:1-2** |

***Rejection, Restoration, and Redemption***

The sad story of Hosea’s unfaithful wife portrayed Israel’s betrayal and rejection of their God. God’s chosen people had violated almost every vow of their covenant with God and had turned to pagan gods and idols. However, just as Israel’s *rejection* was pictured in this sad story, her *restoration* was pictured as well. The saddest part of her restoration was that her own husband (Hosea) purchased his own wife so that she could be restored back to him. From Exodus 21:32 we learn that the indicated value of a slave was 30 shekels. Between the “fifteen shekels of silver” and the value of the “one and one-half homers of barley” (3:2) we see that Hosea paid the price equivalent to that of a slave when he bought back something that already belonged to him. A careful reading of the remainder of chapter 3 clearly indicates that Hosea paid this redemption price before his unfaithful wife repented of her sins and returned to him. As such, verse five states that “afterward” God’s people “shall return (not *had* returned) and seek the LORD their God…and they shall (again, not *had*) fear the LORD and His good *in the latter days*.” We cannot read today’s verses without being reminded that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). Since He was “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” we must realize that He paid our redemption price long before we ever repented of our sins and returned to Him.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Share** something about Hosea’s story with someone you know and then **give** a personal testimony of how Christ paid the price for your sins long before you ever even knew Him.

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| **Scripture Reading: Hosea 5:8-7:16** | **DAY 3** |
| **Focus Verse: Hosea7:16** |

***A Treacherous Bow***

Yesterday’s closing verse (5:7) revealed that God’s people “dealt treacherously with the LORD” while today’s closing verse declares that, “They are like a treacherous bow” (7:16) that failed its owner in the time of need. Such a bow would be considered unreliable and, therefore, not useful to the archer. These words were used to describe how unreliable God’s people had been to Him even after He demonstrated His love and grace to them. Since Benjamin was the last son born to Israel, and, therefore, the “end of the line,” the phrase, “Look behind you, O Benjamin” may indicate that the specter of judgment was chasing after God’s people and that it was drawing nearer every day and with every act of their disobedience. Hosea 5:12 states that, in response to the people’s sins, God would be “like a moth” and “like rottenness” to them. Just as the moth silently destroyed the clothing that was *upon* an individual, rot (disease) silently destroyed that which was *within* them. But things would get worse before they got better. Instead of turning to God in their time of trouble, the people turned to Assyria and soon found that man could not “cure” them or “heal” them of their wound (5:13). As a result, the “moth” would be followed by the “lion” (5:14) and the people would experience even greater punishment for their unfaithful hearts and attitudes.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* The **Kingdom Prophets** never left God’s people without providing them with an opportunity to repent and return to God. **Deliver** the words of Hosea 6:1 to someone who needs them today. **Invite** someone to, “Come, and let us return to the LORD!”

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| **Scripture Reading: Hosea 8:1-9:17** | **DAY 4** |
| **Focus Verse: Hosea 8:1** |

***“Like an Eagle!”***

There are so many parallels between Hosea’s preaching and the teachings of Deuteronomy that it is obvious that Hosea and his contemporaries were calling God’s people to return to the covenant law that God had given them during the time and ministry of Moses. Today’s focus verse clearly reveals the influence that Moses and his teachings from Deuteronomy had on the message that Hosea was called to deliver to God’s people. Hosea told the people to “set the trumpet to (their) mouth” and thereby sound an alarm for all to hear. The alarm was followed by a sobering message. “He shall come *like an eagle* against the house of the LORD, because they have transgressed my covenant.” In Deuteronomy 28:49 God said, “The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, *as swift as the eagle flies*, a nation whose language you will not understand.” In Hosea’s prophecy the promise of swift destruction from an outside force is being announced as a reality. Even as Israel feigned loyalty to God by crying, “My God, we know you” (8:2) God read between the lines and knew their hearts had not really changed toward Him. As a result of their continued unfaithfulness, an enemy would “pursue” them (8:3). This statement provides yet another connection to Deuteronomy and its teachings about the blessings of obedience and the judgments that follow disobedience. There God had promised, “all these curses shall come upon you and *pursue* and overtake you…because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God” (Deuteronomy 28:45).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Notice** the messages of God’s **Kingdom Prophets** are always consistent and that they, together, help form the message of the Bible. **Seek to deliver** a personal message that is consistent with God’s Word as you communicate with your friends, family members, and work associates.

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| **Scripture Reading: Hosea 10:1-12:8** | **DAY 5** |
| **Focus Verse: Hosea 10:2** |

***The Last Thing to Go***

Today’s memory verse indicates that long after God’s people had forsaken a right relationship with Him, they still held on to some kind of formal worship and religious expression. Even though their hearts were “divided” and they were, therefore, “held guilty” before God, they still had their “altars” and their “sacred pillars.” Since God is interested in a *relationship* and not just *religion,* He stated He would “break down their altars” and “ruin their sacred pillars.” The same unfaithfulness that established Israel’s guilt was the same unfaithfulness that made her punishment necessary. The Hebrew word that is translated “divided” in the NKJV is translated “deceitful” in other translations. This word literally means “slippery” or “smooth.” It is translated “flatter” at least six times in the Bible. This same word is found in Psalm 5:9 where God said, “There is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is destruction; their throat is an open tomb; they *flatter* with their tongues.” Although Israel was showing no true respect for God in their *life* service, it appears that they still had the audacity to feign respect for Him through *lip* service. Sadly, the same thing can be true for those who declare themselves to be lovers and followers of God today. We can hold to our religious expressions long after we have moved away from a true and right relationship with God.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* The **Kingdom Prophets** did not pull their punches but delivered messages that were both powerful and unpopular at the same time. **Testify** to someone about the value of a *relationship* over mere *religion* today.

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| **Scripture Reading: Hosea 12:9-14:9** | **DAY 6** |
| **Focus Verses: Hosea 14:4-5** |

***I Will***

Make a note of the three “I will” promises of God that are included in today’s focus verses. As Hosea was closing out his message to God’s people, he stated that God promised Israel that He would “heal their backsliding” and “love them freely.” He went on to say that His anger had “turned away” from them. In verse 5, He continued to express His love and forgiveness to them by saying He would “be like dew to Israel” in order that Israel might “grow like the lily, and lengthen his roots.” Verse 6 adds to that by saying, “His (Israel’s) branches shall spread; his beauty shall be like an olive tree, and his fragrance like Lebanon.” In the day of Israel’s repentance and return to a right relationship with God, God was going to turn from His anger and demonstrate His wonderful love for His people by healing them spiritually and restoring their health and influence as a nation. As a result of the gracious love and mercy that God bestowed upon them, His people would be heard asking, “What have I to do with idols?” They would once again become productive and fruitful, and therefore, a blessing to the nations around them (14:8). Israel’s own words serve as a fitting conclusion to these devotionals on Hosea: “Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the LORD are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in their heart” (14:9).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* The **Kingdom Prophets** knew well that God was a loving God who was full of grace and mercy. As a result, men like Hosea could promise God’s forgiveness to a repentant people. **Speak** of God’s grace, love, and mercy to someone you encounter today.

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| **Scripture Reading: Joel 1:1-20** | **DAY 7** |
| **Focus Verse: Joel 1:14** |

***“Pest Control”***

The only biographical fact provided about the author of this prophetic book is found in verse 1 where we are told that Joel was “the son of Pethuel.” There is no conclusive evidence as to when Joel ministered or when his book was written. The book opens with the recording of a severe locust plague that was said to be without comparison to anything that had ever happened to God’s people before (verse 2). Verse 4 indicates that several different types of locusts invaded Israel’s land and devoured their crops. First there were the *chewing* locusts, followed by the *swarming* locusts, which were followed by the *crawling* locusts, which were ultimately followed by the *consuming* locusts! Verse 6 implies that these “locusts” might have actually been armies, but there is no mention of what “nation” or army might be referenced there. Whatever the case, the people of God were obviously in need of some pest control! In verse 14, God had Joel call His people to *consecrate a fast.* Fasting was often a sign of mourning and was always associated with prayer in the Bible. After the fasting began, the people were to *call a sacred assembly.* The assembly was for the gathering of “the elders and all the inhabitants of the land into the house of the LORD.” Once the fast had been consecrated and the assembly had been called, the people were to *cry out to the LORD.*

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Kingdom Prophets** were most often direct and to the point about the spiritual needs and problems of their people. Their messages always offered an answer, or cure, to whatever problem plagued their people at that time. **Believe** that God has an answer for the spiritual needs of America today and take some time to **pray** specifically for our country.

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| **Scripture Reading: Joel 2:1-32** | **DAY 8** |
| **Focus Verses: Joel 2:1 & 12-13** |

***The Day of the LORD***

In Joel 1:15, the people were told “the day of the LORD (was) at hand.” In today’s first focus verse (verse 1), Joel once again mentions “the day of the LORD” and adds that it was “coming” and “at hand.” However, in chapter 2, more details about this day are provided. One thing is for certain, Joel believed that the day of the LORD was good reason for God’s people to “blow the trumpet in Zion and sound an alarm.” He also considered the coming of this day to be good reason for God’s people to “tremble.” The next focus verses (verses 12-13) describe the way God’s people should respond to the day of the LORD. God told them to “turn to Me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.” He then told the people to “rend (their) heart, and not (their) garments.” This statement was a reference to the custom of the tearing of one’s undergarment at the neck by grabbing it with both hands and ripping it open to the point that the area of one’s heart was exposed. This action represented a breaking heart due to genuine repentance and sadness. Joel was led to tell God’s people that it was time for something more than the typical symbolic gestures and that their circumstances should lead them to be genuinely, and spiritually, distraught and heartbroken. God’s promise to the people was, if they would only “return to the LORD (their) God” they would find that He was “gracious and merciful.”

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Share** some good news about God’s grace, mercy, and kindness with someone you encounter along life’s way today. **Realize** that a heart that is truly seeking after God will lead us to times of “fasting” that are accompanied “with weeping and with mourning.”

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| **Scripture Reading: Joel 3:1-21** | **DAY 9** |
| **Focus Verse: Joel 3:14** |

***The Valley of Decision***

I have often heard both pastors and evangelists refer to the “valley of decision” as a place where we all stand when we have to make a decision to either deny or accept Christ or even, as a Christian, to obey or disobey the commands of God. However, the valley referred to here is by no means metaphorical, but literal. In keeping with his references to “the day of the LORD,” Joel is here referencing the valley in which the battle of Armageddon will ultimately be fought. Verses 15-16 describe some cosmic signs in the sun, moon, and stars that are often associated with God’s divine judgment. He states that “the LORD also will roar from Zion, and utter His voice from Jerusalem.” This “roar” will be a battle cry that will cause “the heavens and earth” to “shake.” However, the LORD’s people will be kept safe from harm as “the LORD will be a shelter to His people, and the strength of the children of Israel.” The word that is translated “strength” in the last part of verse 16 is translated “stronghold” in several translations of the Old Testament. That same Hebrew word is also translated “fortress” and “fort” in other places in the KJV and NKJV.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* Although God’s **Kingdom Prophets** often had to deliver some strong and sobering messages to God’s people, they seldom closed their messages without offering hope in the end. **Believe** that God is your “strength” or “stronghold” and flee to Him in your times of trial and despair. **Recall** a time that God protected you and **share** it with someone today.

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| **Scripture Reading: Amos 1:1-2:10** | **DAY 10** |
| **Focus Verse: Amos 1:1** |

***Meet Amos***

The prophet Amos is mentioned nowhere in the Bible outside of this book that bears his name. He is not to be confused with Amoz, the father of Isaiah the prophet (Isaiah 1:1) or the Amos that is mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus Christ (Luke 3:25). His name means “burden bearer” and, since most of his message was a prediction of coming judgment against Israel and her surrounding nations, it does not take long to learn that his name well suited his message and ministry. His message was a heavy one and his “burden” for the people of God was quite obvious. Amos was a successful business man that God called to the ministry “in the days of Uzziah king of Judah” and “Jeroboam…king of Israel.” Much like the New Testament disciples, Amos probably had no formal training for ministry because his personal testimony was that, “I was no prophet, nor was I the son of a prophet. But I was a sheep breeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the LORD took me as I followed the flock, and the LORD said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel’” (Amos 7:14-15). Since Tekoa was only about 10 miles from Jerusalem, Amos didn’t have to go far to find the “sheep” that God now wanted him to “shepherd” and “raise” for Him. As a “sheep breeder” or “sheep raiser”, Amos would have had much knowledge of the many dangers that might come against a flock – particularly lions. The first message that Amos has for his hearers was that, God, like a lion, “roars from Zion.”

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Kingdom Prophets** can come from all backgrounds. Amos is a perfect example that a person does not have to possess a lot of formal training to be used of God. **Believe** that God can use you to deliver His message to people in need and **speak** for Him at every opportunity that He affords you. **Realize** that every believer has been “called” to do some form of ministry for God.

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| **Scripture Reading: Amos 2:11-3:15** | **DAY 11** |
| **Focus Verses: Amos 3:1-6** |

***Some Burning Questions***

After first speaking against the sins of Damascus, Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, and Moab (1:3-2:3), Amos then brought things much closer to home by speaking a heavy message to both Judah (2:4) and Israel (2:6). And, just as God refused to “turn away” the “punishment” of the heathen nations, he also refused to “turn away” from punishing His own people when it was appropriate for Him to do so. Israel was accused of selling “the righteous for silver” and “the poor for a pair of sandals” (2:6). God’s Word to His sinning people was that He had “raised up some of (their) sons as prophets” (3:11) only to see the people try to corrupt them by leading them to break their vows to Him or saying to them, “Do not prophesy” (verse 12). But men like Amos were not easily discouraged from doing what they had been called to do, so Amos boldly said, “Hear this word that the LORD has spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt” (3:1). After promising judgment from God for their many sins, Amos asked the people of Israel a series of seven burning questions to which the answer to each one was, “No.” (Review them in verses 3-6 and see if you can find a single question that could be answered correctly with a “yes.”) When Amos once more referred to God and His message as “a lion (that) has roared” (verse 8) he was simply saying that God’s judgment was coming against Israel for good reason.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* Would God judge and punish His people without a good reason? Our question, just like the ones that Amos was commanded to ask Israel, must be answered with a resounding, “No!” **Ask** yourself some hard questions about your own personal walk with the Lord and **carefully** (and prayerfully) **review** your willingness to serve Him fully and faithfully.

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| **Scripture Reading: Amos 4:1-5:9** | **DAY 12** |
| **Focus Verse: Amos 4:1** |

***The “Cows of Bashan”***

If I haven’t mentioned it before, let me say now that the **Kingdom Prophets** were sometimes far from being politically correct. However, the reference to “cows” in our focus verse had nothing to do with size or shape and has only to do with gender. I found 24 translations that rendered the Hebrew word used here as “cows” while six others translated it “kine,” two others “heifer,” and three as “women.” The translations that use the word “kine” here also translate this same word as “heifer” in several other places in the Scripture. Since we know a “heifer” to be a female cow, then we get a pretty good idea that Amos had been directed by God to deliver a stinging message to the women of Israel. In the days of Amos, the women of Israel were said to be guilty of “oppressing the poor,” “crushing the needy,” and then saying to their husbands, “Let’s have a drink and forget about it!” (That quote is from my own “Git-R-Done Version!) Since the land of Bashan was a fertile one with plenty of grass for grazing and feeding cattle, the idea here is that the women of Israel were living in wealth, health, and luxury while the world around them was suffering from the heavy burdens of sin and poverty.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Note** that God did not have an issue with *what* the women of Israel had, but *how* they had gotten it. **Refuse** to take advantage of others by using “ministry” for your own, personal gain. **Pray** specifically for the women of your church and **ask** God to use them for His good and glory.

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| **Scripture Reading: Amos 5:10-6:8** | **DAY 13** |
| **Focus Verses: Amos 5:11-15** |

***Because***

We cannot read the word “because” (verse 11) without understanding that it is being used to refer to the “cause” of some action or circumstance. Speaking like a true prophet, the business-man-turned-preacher, Amos, let the people know that there were some specific *causes* as to why judgment was now coming against the people of Israel. We may not always understand *what* God is doing or, much less, *why* He is doing it, but we can rest assured that God seldom takes action without revealing His divine “cause” for doing so. After having Amos reveal the *cause* for His actions, God then directed Amos to describe the *curse* that selfishness and sin were to bring upon the people. Nothing that they did would prosper! They would build houses but not live in them. They would plant vineyards but never enjoy the fruit of their labors. To avoid any confusion, God clearly told them that all of these problems came as a result of their own “manifold transgressions” and their “mighty sins” (verse 12). But God’s grace would not allow Amos to end his message after just giving the people the *cause* and the *curse* “because” his message provided a *cure* in verses 14-15.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Remember** that God can use problems and perils to help teach us about the consequences of our selfish and sinful choices. **Pray** for God’s leadership in all that you to today and remain faithful to **read** the Bible on at least a daily basis.

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| **Scripture Reading: Amos 6:9-7:17** | **DAY 14** |
| **Focus Verses: Amos 7:14-16** |

***An Accusation and an Answer***

Any time that someone speaks for God in a land or to a people who are not living for God, you can be assured that there will be some conflict and persecution. We are told that Amaziah was “the priest of Bethel” (verse 10). That defining phrase indicates that he was a man of some standing in the religious world of his day because he was said to be “the” priest and not just “a” priest. During the reign of Jeroboam, who was not a godly king, Bethel had become one of the centers for idolatrous worship in the land. No doubt, the preaching and ministry of men like Amos was not good for “business” for men like Amaziah. He brought an accusation against Amos before the king saying that Amos had “conspired against” him. Amaziah also accused Amos of preaching sermons that the people “were not able to bear” (verse 10). After his visit with Jeroboam, Amaziah suggested to Amos that he might want to consider preaching elsewhere – specifically back in the land of Judah! It is clear that it really didn’t matter to Amaziah where Amos preached just as long as he “never again” prophesied “at Bethel” (verse 13). Our focus verses contain Amos’ response to Amaziah. Amos confessed that he was not a trained theologian or prophet, but merely a successful sheep breeder and farmer who God had moved from that business to the business of preaching God’s Word.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Understand** that God often rewards those who are faithful and diligent in other businesses by calling them to become a part of His business! **Be faithful** where you are now and **listen** for God’s command to, “Go, prophesy to My people!”

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| **Scripture Reading: Amos 8:1-9:15** | **DAY 15** |
| **Focus Verses: Amos 8:1-2** |

***“A Basket of Summer Fruit”***

The seventh and eighth chapters of Amos contain three visions and each one is introduced by the words similar to the, “Then the Lord God showed me” of 8:1 (see 7:1 and 7:7). The Hebrew word that is translated “showed” in those verses is the same word that is first used to say, “God *saw* the light, that it was good” in Genesis 1:4. It is clear that Amos, like others in the Old and New Testaments, actually *saw* something that revealed to him a greater understanding of what God’s Spirit was trying to say to the people through his preaching and teaching. The first vision was a swarm of locusts (7:1) while the second vision was of a wall and a plumb line (7:7). The third vision was of “a basket of summer fruit” (8:1). To understand more about this vision, we must first understand something about the “summer fruit” in the regions of the Bible lands. Summer fruit was short-lived because the growing season for such was short. As a result, one might see the beautiful fruits of summer available in the market places for only a very short time. The “summer fruit” was a direct message to Amos that he was to warn the people of Israel that “the end had come” (8:2). As such, their singing would soon be turned into “wailing.” While the majority of today’s reading describes the *causes* and *curses* of the judgments that are pronounced against Israel, the final words that God spoke through Amos were words of grace that included, as always, a *cure* for their sinful attitudes and actions.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Remember** that the same verse that speaks of the “pleasures of sin” also states that they are only “passing” moments (Hebrews 11:25). Since the fruit of sinful behavior is only “short-lived,” we should all **heed** God’s warning to make sure they are also “short-loved!”

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| **Scripture Reading: Obadiah 1:1-21** | **DAY 16** |
| **Focus Verse: Obadiah 1:15** |

***“As You Have Done”***

The little book of Obadiah teaches a very big and powerful truth. It clearly warns that God will judge those who refuse to be a blessing to His people, Israel. In Deuteronomy, we read about God’s warning to Israel to avoid pillaging and taking the land that He had assigned to Esau (Deuteronomy 2:4-6). But here, in Obadiah’s story, God told the people of Edom (Esau’s “descendants” that “violence” had come against “your brother Jacob” (Israel) and “shame shall cover you, and you shall be cut off forever” (verse 10) because “in that day” you “stood on the other side” and did nothing to help your brothers. Note carefully that verse 11 clearly indicates that Edom’s *neutrality* caused God to have Obadiah say that it was as if Edom was “as one of them.” After revealing the many wrong ways that the people of Edom had reacted to Israel’s days of trouble God delivered a very sobering message to them by saying, “As you have done, it shall be done to you” and that their “reprisal (reward) shall return upon your own head” (verse 15). Throughout the Bible there is a constant and consistent teaching about the law of sowing and reaping. In the Old Testament we are told “those who…sow trouble shall reap the same” (Job 4:8). In the New Testament we are told “whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Read** God’s Word daily and be careful to heed its warnings, one of which is that we will reap what we sow! Review Matthew 7:12 and see that Jesus taught that treating others as we would want to be treated is the foundational basis of the teachings of the Scriptures (“the Law and the Prophets”).

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| **Scripture Reading: Jonah 1 & 2** | **DAY 17** |
| **Focus Verses: Jonah 2:7-9** |

***The True Nature of Sin***

I have often said that, under better circumstances, the story of Jonah should read through Jonah 1:1-2 and then skip directly to the words found in 3:3. If you did that, Jonah’s story would read, “Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah…saying, ‘Arise, go to Ninevah, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness had come up before me (1:1-2). So Jonah arose and went up to Ninevah, according to the word of the LORD…” (3:3). However, that is not the way that the story reads at all because we know that Jonah did not obey the LORD at first and, in fact, went in the exact opposite direction that the LORD had commanded that he go! In the story of Jonah we see four basic instincts that can prove to be either a help or hindrance to every believer. First we see *the true nature of sin*. Jonah’s sin was not that he went to Tarshish (1:3) but that he did *not go* to Ninevah. The true nature of sin is not found in the bad things that we do but in the good things that we leave undone. In the New Testament, James made this point very clear to us when he said, “To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin” (James 4:17). But we also see *the true nature of surrender* in the story of Jonah as he prayed and cried out to God (2:1-2). You might say that surrender was a lesson learned the hard way for Jonah.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Realize** that even **Kingdom Prophets** can sometimes suffer from fear and faithlessness. **Build** your own faith by being a daily reader of the Word of God. **Obey** God’s commands at all times.

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| **Scripture Reading: Jonah 3 & 4** | **DAY 18** |
| **Focus Verses: Jonah 3:3-4** |

***The True Nature of Service***

After his release from the belly of the whale, we see Jonah boldly entering the city of Ninevah and obediently delivering the message just as God had earlier commanded him. So, in the same man that we see *the true nature of sin* and *the true nature of surrender*, we now see *the true nature of service*. Serving God, as it might be most simply defined, is doing whatever God asks or commands us to do. His commands might not match our own dreams or ambitions – and God might ask us to serve Him in a way that is entirely different than any others before us – but true service obeys God in spite of our lack of clarity or understanding of the how or why. It is sad to see that the story of Jonah does not end after the great revival recorded in chapter three. Chapter four teaches us a fourth great truth from the life and ministry of Jonah because in its reading we see *the true nature of self*. Since Jonah was a prophet in the truest sense of the word, and since his prophecy of Ninevah’s perishing was not fulfilled, then Jonah failed the Old Testament test of a true prophet and should have been condemned to die (Deuteronomy 18:20-22). So, Jonah got angry with God because things did not go as he had planned or come to the end that he had envisioned. In anger he argued with God and “went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city” (4:5). You might say that, as Jonah “sat on” the east side of the city that he staged what might have been the first “sit in” protest ever recorded in human history.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Trust** God enough to share His Word with others and then **trust** Him enough to do what needs to be done in their lives. **Realize** that the Holy Spirit does not need our judgment and condemnation to bring sinners under conviction and to repentance. **Refuse** to become angry with God when things do not work out exactly as you might have envisioned.

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| **Scripture Reading: Micah 1:1-2:9** | **DAY 19** |
| **Focus Verse: Micah 1:1**  |

***Meet Micah***

The first verse of this powerful book pretty much tells us all that we need to know about the prophet Micah. I identify this man as “the prophet” because there are seven different men named Micah mentioned in the Bible. The easiest way to help you to know when you are reading about Micah “the prophet” is to say that his name is only mentioned twice in the Bible – here in Micah 1:1 and then once more in Jeremiah 26:18. Micah ministered during the reigns of three kings of Judah – Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Because of this, you might say that Micah knew how to serve God in good times and in bad times. Jotham and Hezekiah were both considered to be “good” kings who sought to lead God’s people in godly ways while Ahaz might well be considered one of the worst of the “bad” kings of Judah. Micah’s message was primarily to Judah and most specifically to Jerusalem. However, God also gave Micah a message that he wanted delivered to the people of Samaria. As you outline the major points in this book, you might say that this first section deals with *the warnings of retribution*. Verse three declares that “the LORD” was going to come “out of His place” and “come down and tread on the high places of the earth.” Verse four then clearly indicates that this will be a time of judgment and retribution for those who have forsaken God and turned to idols.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Kingdom Prophets** are sometimes called to deliver difficult messages. **Avoid** the temptation to “make it all good” when people are really living ungodly lives that “make it all bad”! **Speak** the truth at all times but speak it, as commanded, “in love” (Ephesians 4:15).

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| **Scripture Reading: Micah 2:10-4:8** | **DAY 20** |
| **Focus Verse: Micah 2:10** |

***“Arise and Depart”***

One might describe Micah’s preaching as being very direct and “old fashioned.” Micah told his listeners to “arise and depart” from their sinful ways. In our day we might say that the people needed to “get up” and “get out” of their sinful situations. Micah knew no cultural or societal barriers when he preached. In chapter 2:1-13, Micah preached *to the people*. He did not exclude anyone from his message. Note the words “all of you” and “the remnant of Israel” in verse 12. Through Micah, God said that he was going to draw “them together like sheep” and deliver His message to them. But Micah was also commanded *to preach to the princes* (3:1-4). Note the phrases “heads of Jacob” and “rulers of the house of Israel” in 3:1. Micah was also commanded to preach to *the prophets* (3:5-10). It seems that the “prophets” were causing God’s people to “stray” by not feeding the people from the Word of God because they “put nothing in their mouths” (3:5). But Micah’s preaching ministry did not end with the people, the princes, and the prophets. God also commanded Micah to preach *to the priests* (3:11-12). It seems that while the princes (“heads”) were tempted to “judge for a bribe” and the prophets were tempted to “divine for money,” the “priests” were being tempted to “teach for pay” (3:11). Verse 12 states that it was because of the sins of those in leadership that “Zion would be plowed like a field” and Jerusalem would “become heaps of ruin” (3:12).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Kingdom Prophets** realize that God’s Word is for all people - whatever their rank or role in society. **Share** God’s Word *faithfully* and *in faith* **believing** that it can reach all people!

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| **Scripture Reading: Micah 4:9-6:5** | **DAY 21** |
| **Focus Verse: Micah 5:2** |

***Waiting for Restoration***

Our focus verse contains one of the Old Testament promises of the coming Messiah. God uses this “little book” to tell us that His Son would come to the world through a “little city.” In our first devotional from Micah we saw a *warning of retribution*. In today’s reading we will see God’s people *waiting for restoration*. I say the people are “waiting” because God’s people were first going to have to spend some time in Babylon before they were to be delivered. When we consider all of the evil that is associated with Babylon in the Bible, it is difficult to believe that “there” (in Babylon) God’s people would be “delivered” and ultimately “redeemed” (4:10). The restoration of the people is described as being like “dew from the LORD” and “showers on the grass” (5:7). In those days God’s people would rise up “like a lion among the beasts of the forest, like a young lion among flocks of sheep.” As such, they would surely “tread down and tear in pieces” all of their enemies (5:8). But, even though God’s people seemed to be thriving and successful, God continued to plead with them to remember that He had “brought (them) up from the land of Egypt” and “redeemed (them) from the house of bondage” (6:4). God was here reminding His people that, just as it was with their victories in the days of old, their current victories were a result of His grace and mercy. When any people’s relationship with God is fully restored they never forget that it was God who made it possible.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Reflect** on God’s grace and mercy today and **praise** Him for all He has brought you from and through! **Brag** on God to someone that you meet today!

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| **Scripture Reading: Micah 6:6-7:20** | **DAY 22** |
| **Focus Verse: Micah 7:19** |

***Repentance!***

Our focus verse contains one of the most beautiful promises in the Bible. In it we are told that God will “have compassion on us” and “subdue our enemies” and that He will “cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” How wonderful it is to see this story that began with a *warning of retribution* that was followed by a long period of *waiting for restoration* now ending in a time of *weeping and repentance* towards God. It is important for us to note that this time of *holy cleansing* for God’s people is followed by a time of *honest confession.* Note the “Woe is me” statement that indicates that the people considered themselves to be like “those who gather summer fruits” and those who “glean vintage grapes” and yet have “no cluster to eat” (7:1). The honest confession was that sin, as it always does, had left the people impoverished. “Summer fruits” were always short-lived and soon gone. When the pleasures of sinful living have passed, God’s people often discover that they came at a great price. When our relationship with God is damaged, then all of our relationships suffer. Verses 2-6 of chapter 7 describe a time when “the faithful man has perished from the earth, and there is no one upright among men” (7:2). As such, people could not even “trust in a friend” or put any “confidence in a companion” (7:5). Verses 5 and 6 teach us that even the closest relationships are damaged when our relationship with God suffers loss for there we see that a man can no longer trust even his own wife and children.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Ask** God to forgive your own sins and to cast them into the depths of the sea. **Avoid** “fishing” for information about the sins of others. **Allow** what God has *forgiven* to be *forgotten*.

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| **Scripture Reading: Nahum 1:1-2:7** | **DAY 23** |
| **Focus Verse: Nahum 1:1** |

***A Heavy Message***

Just one hundred years after Ninevah’s great revival under Jonah, God had to send another very heavy and sorrowful message to these same people through the prophet Nahum. The word that is translated “burden” in the NKJV, and other translations, is translated “oracle” in some versions. It comes from a word that means “load” or “burden”. The first time this word is found in the Bible is in Exodus 23:5 where it is used to describe a “burden” too heavy for even a donkey to bear. As we continue in our reading of the books of the prophets, we will see that only Habakkuk’s and Malachi’s messages (or oracles) are also “heavy” enough for God to refer to them as a “burden.” What made Nahum’s message so burdensome? God sent Nahum to one of the strongest, most protected cities in the world to say, “With an overflowing flood He (would) make an utter end of its place” (1:8). This message came to the people of Ninevah at a time when the city was at its peak in power, prominence, and prosperity. The city itself was fortified with walls and moats that made it virtually impregnable. The walls of the city were 100 feet tall and were wide enough for three chariots to race across them side by side. Yet, because of her sin, God said to this city, “Your name shall be perpetuated no longer…I will dig your grave” (1:14).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Kingdom Prophets** are sometimes given difficult assignments. **Realize** that the world needs to hear an *oracle* from God rather than an *opinion* from man. **Believe** that God’s Word is adequate for every situation and share it with others when opportunities arise.

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| **Scripture Reading: Nahum 2:8-3:19** | **DAY 24** |
| **Focus Verse: Nahum3:1** |

***“The Bloody City”***

In the first chapter of Nahum we saw Ninevah’s destruction *declared.* Then, in chapter two, we saw Ninevah’s destruction *described*. Now in chapter three we see that Ninevah’s destruction was *deserved.* Our focus verse indicates that this city was filled with violence (“bloody”) and immorality (“lies and robbery”). The fact that “the noise of a whip” might be heard over the “galloping horses” and “clattering chariots” (3:2) might help us to realize just how violent these people were. We see more immorality described in 3:4 where this city’s “multitude of harlotries” is mentioned and it is referred to as “the mistress of sorceries.” In 3:5, God said to the people of Ninevah, “I am against you!” This is the second time this phrase is found in Nahum’s message. We read it earlier in 2:13. God went on to tell the people He would “make (them) a spectacle” and that their city would be “laid waste” (3:6-7). He reminded them of other powerful strongholds that He had “carried away,” sent into “captivity,” and “dashed to pieces” (3:10). God then said that the taking of their city would be as easy as picking ripened figs from a tree (3:12). A great indicator as to the kind of people the Ninevites were is found in a few of Nahum’s closing comments where he told them that their people would be “scattered on the mountains” yet no one would come to “gather” (help) them (3:18). Perhaps the heaviest part of Nahum’s message to these people was that Ninevah’s neighboring cities would “clap their hands” at the news of its destruction (3:19).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* The closing verse of Nahum declares that Ninevah’s wickedness was “passed continually” to her neighboring peoples. **Seek** to be the kind of person that is continually passing love and kindness to others. **Determine** to be a blessing and not a burden to those around you.

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| **Scripture Reading: Habakkuk 1:1-2:11**  | **DAY 25** |
| **Focus Verse: Habakkuk 1:1** |

***What Habakkuk “Saw”***

Like Nahum’s message, Habakkuk’s message was described as a “burden.” However, there is another similarity to their messages that is described in the first verse of each. Nahum’s message was further described as a “vision” and here we are told Habakkuk “saw” the message that God wanted him to deliver to his hearers. However, there is also a glaring difference between the messages of these two prophets. While Nahum was sent to deliver a heavy message to the godless citizens of Ninevah, Habakkuk was sent to deliver his heavy message to God’s own people in Judah! What was going on among the people of Judah that would demand such a heavy message be delivered to them? God said, “Plundering and violence are before me, there is strife, and contention arises” (1:3). The Law before which these same people had once trembled was now declared to be “powerless” among them and they had become a people amongst whom “justice *never* goes forth” (3:4). Note that God did not say that justice *sometimes* went forth from His people or even that it *seldom* went forth. God clearly said that justice *never* went forth from them. Since His people had *sown* “violence” (1:1) God was now going to allow them to *reap* violence (1:9).

**Prayer Emphasis**

* **Ask** yourself a very difficult question: “What does God ‘see’ when He observes my daily life?” **Refuse** to live in such a way that God can see striking similarities between your actions and the actions of the world.

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| **Scripture Reading: Habakkuk 2:12-3:19** | **DAY 26** |
| **Focus Verses: Habakkuk 3:17-19** |

***Habakkuk’s “Closing Hymn”***

Most Bible scholars describe the closing verses of Habakkuk as a “Hymn of Faith.” Since it comes at the close of his book, I guess we might also call it a “Closing Hymn.” Habakkuk believed that some difficult times were coming for God’s people. He knew that the chastening hand of God was soon going to turn their *singing* into *sobbing*. He earlier tried to teach his Jewish brethren that “the just shall live by faith” (a statement that is quoted in three places in the New Testament) only to see his people rebel against God and live like faithless heathens. There is no doubt that Habakkuk lived and ministered during some very dark days in the life of Judah. However, like the singing of Paul and Silas that arose from the darkness of their dungeon, the song of Habakkuk found its way out of the darkness of his despair. Habakkuk’s hymn declared that, “Though the fig tree not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines” and even if “the labor of the olive may fail, and the fields yield no food” or “there be no herd in the stall” (3:17), “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (3:18). What could possibly have put a song in this man’s heart at such a dark and desperate time? The answer is found in the fact that “the LORD God” was “his strength” (3:19). In the opening verse of this book Habakkuk was said to be *seeing*. In his message we cannot help but to hear his *sighing*. But, in the end, we rejoice as we find Habakkuk *singing* praises to his God!

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Consider** the darkness of our times and **commit** to being a light in that darkness! **Kingdom Prophets** always know God is with them and that He, and His message, will win in the end. **Trust** God enough to be His witness by singing His praises even in the darkest times.

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| **Scripture Reading: Zephaniah 1:1-2:9** | **DAY 27** |
| **Focus Verse: Zephaniah 1:1** |

***The Royal Prophet***

Zephaniah is often referred to as the “royal prophet” because his opening words declare him to be the great-great-grandson of godly King Hezekiah. This would also make him a relative of Josiah, the king under whose reign he ministered. Nahum, Habakkuk, Jeremiah, and Zephaniah all ministered at the same time and all preached similar messages. Although Josiah was a good king who led God’s people into a great revival, he inherited the throne after 57 years of some poor spiritual leadership from Manasseh and Amon. Since Zephaniah’s prophecy found God saying, “I will stretch out my hand against Judah, and against all the inhabitants of Jerusalem” (1:4) we must assume that this man’s ministry came early in Josiah’s reign and that it probably contributed to the revival that took place under Josiah’s leadership. Verses 4 and 5 of the first chapter clearly indicate that the major problem among God’s people was the violation of the first and second commandments. They had become worshipers of Baal and their priests had become “idolatrous” and “pagan.” The people had resorted to worshipping the “host of heaven” (astrology) and at the same time that they would swear oaths to “the LORD” that would also pledge their allegiance to “Milcom” (Molech) who was a god of fire for the Canaanites and whose images should have been completely destroyed when God’s people conquered the land.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Determine** to live a life that if fully obedient to God and His commands. **Refuse** to allow things that should have been “put away” long ago to continue to haunt and plague your spiritual life. **Serve** no god but the true God that sent His only Son to die for you on the cross!

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| **Scripture Reading: Zephaniah 2:10-3:20** | **DAY 28** |
| **Focus Verse: Zephaniah 3:9** |

***A Promise of Deliverance***

Zephaniah’s little book is one with a happy ending and the words found in its final chapter are certainly evidence of that fact. The happy ending is partially found in the fact this story ends with words of *restoration*. Our focus verse speaks of God’s promise to “restore to the people a pure language (lifestyle) that they all may call on the name of the LORD.” Following those words of restoration we find some words of *repentance* (3:11-13). God’s message brought His people to a place where they would no longer “be ashamed for any of (their) deeds” in which they had once “transgressed against” Him. But the story gets even better! The words of restoration and repentance are then followed by words of rejoicing (3:14-15). Through repentance, God’s people were restored to a place where they could once again “Sing…shout” and “be glad and rejoice with all (their) heart” (3:14) because God had “taken away” their “judgments” and “cast out” their enemy” (3:15). Because of that, they were promised they would “see disaster no more” (3:15). It may seem that things could not get better than that, but they did! God went on to say to His people, “Do not fear” because He was once again “in (their) midst” (3:16-17). As they rejoiced in Him, He also said He would, “Rejoice over (them) with gladness and singing” (3:17b). I cannot imagine a happier ending than one that makes God happy!

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Consider** the closing words of this prophecy and **see** that the basis for the rejoicing for God’s people was His Word. When our lives are in harmony with God’s Word we can rest assured that they will also be in harmony with God.

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| **Scripture Reading: Haggai 1** | **DAY 29** |
| **Focus Verse: Haggai 1:2** |

***A Matter of Priorities***

The background for the times in which Haggai prophesied are best defined in Ezra 5 and 6. God’s people had been in exile and had now been back in the Promised Land for just a little over one year. Upon their return, they were to immediately begin the work of rebuilding the temple. However, for unknown reasons, the work on the temple had ceased and now the part that they had started to build, in God’s own words, remained “in ruins” (verse 4). The only explanation the people offered was that “the time (had) not come, the time that the LORD’s house should be built” (verse 2). However, it seems that the LORD was well aware of the fact that the people had found the time, and the materials, to build their own houses. This led God to ask the very important question found in verse 4. He asked, “Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?” Because of their decision to put their own needs before His, God asked them to “consider (their) ways” (verse 5). The word “ways” referred to the quality of life that they were then experiencing. Because they had made God’s house a secondary priority in their lives, God said He was going to bring their work and their crops to nothing and that, no matter what they did, or how hard they tried, they were going to live in a continual state of lack. God likened their financial situation to a person who put his money in “a bag with holes” (verse 6). This truth continues to all who follow God today. If we do not believe that we have enough to give to God then we will probably never come to the place where we will have enough for anything else.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Evaluate** your own priorities and **be careful** to make sure that you are keeping your own priorities in the proper order. **Avoid** the temptation to give God what is “left over” after you have taken care of all of your own needs. **Trust** God enough to put Him first in every area of your life.

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| **Scripture Reading: Haggai 2** | **DAY 30** |
| **Focus Verse: Haggai 2:5** |

***God is Good!***

The last part of yesterday’s reading found God’s people reacting in a positive way to God’s reprimands by obeying “the voice of the LORD their God, and the words of Haggai the prophet” (1:12). Because of their change of heart, God spoke reassuring words to them by saying, “I am with you” (1:13). The opening verse to this prophecy stated that the LORD began to speak to His people through Haggai on the first day of the sixth month. The second chapter begins by saying that “in the seventh month, on the twenty-first of the month, the Word of the LORD (once again) came to Haggai” (2:1) encouraging the people to “be strong…and work” with the repeated reminder that, “I am with you” (2:4). Verse five, our focus verse, finds God reassuring the people that He had every intention of honoring the covenant He had made with His people when they first came out of Egypt. He then reminded them that all of the wealth of the world, “the gold” and “the silver,” was His and He, therefore, had more than enough to supply them with what they needed to complete the work He had commanded them to do. The remainder of the book indicates that God’s people were still not perfect and that they needed to be continually reminded of *Who* God was and *whose* they were. However, this is another prophecy with a “happy ending” because it concludes with God, once again, reminding the people that they were His own (2:23).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Allow** God’s Spirit to continually remind you of *Who* He is and *whose* you are! **Believe** that God’s paramount and consuming desire is to bless His people. **Respond** to the fact that God has made us His first priority by making Him the first priority in your life.

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| **Scripture Reading: Zechariah 1:1-2:5** | **DAY 31** |
| **Focus Verse: Zechariah 1:1** |

***Meet Zechariah***

The name means “The LORD Remembers” and it was a very popular name among the Jewish people in Bible times. There are at least 27 men who bear this name in the Bible. The Zechariah who authored this important book of the Bible lived and prophesied during the same years as Haggai. You can find their names mentioned together in Ezra 5:1 where they are both identified as “prophets” who “prophesied to the Jews who were in Judah and Jerusalem, in the name of the God of Israel.” Like Haggai, Zechariah’s ministry took place during the times described in Ezra and Nehemiah. (Zechariah is specifically mentioned in Ezra 5:1 & 6:14.) After 70 years of Babylonian exile, a remnant of God’s people had been allowed to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple. While Haggai’s preaching focused on the present and the rebuilding of the temple, Zechariah’s preaching looked to the future and the coming of the Messiah. A tribute to this man’s preaching is found in the fact that there are at least 41 New Testament references to either Zechariah or his message. Since Zechariah was the grandson of a Levite priest (Nehemiah 12:4 & 16), he was both a prophet and a priest. His message contains a series of eight visions with the first three – the vision of the horses (1:7-11), the vision of the horns (1:18-21), and the vision of the measuring line (2:1-5) - being described in today’s reading.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* As you read the book of Zechariah, **consider** the fact that you are reading the same words that Jesus’ other New Testament preachers studied and taught in their sermons. **Look** for the references to the coming Messiah and **realize** that we have shared this hope with many others that have served before us.

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| **Scripture Reading: Zechariah 2:6-4:10** | **DAY 32** |
| **Focus Verse: Zechariah3:1** |

***Joshua the High Priest***

Zechariah 3:1 is just one of the verses in this book that ties it to the book and times of Haggai because both books reference “Joshua the high priest” (Haggai 1:1 and Zechariah 3:1). There are four men named Joshua mentioned in the Bible, but this Joshua, “the high priest,” is mentioned only in Haggai and Zechariah. This high priest is the same man that is called “Jeshua” in Nehemiah 7:7. I mentioned yesterday that both Haggai and Zechariah were called “prophets” in Ezra 5:1. Just one verse after that you find the name of “Jeshua” (Ezra 5:2) and learn that he helped “to build the house of God which is in Jerusalem.” While men like Jeshua built the temple, “the prophets of God (men like Haggai and Zechariah) were with them, helping them” (Ezra 5:2b). Joshua became the first high priest in the rebuilt Jerusalem and, as such, played a significant role in the history of God’s people. In Zechariah 6:11, God told the prophet Zechariah to “Take the silver and gold, make an elaborate crown, and set it on the head of Joshua…the high priest.” The “crowning” of this high priest was part of the Old Testament’s prophetic teachings regarding Christ, the coming Messiah, who would be a “High Priest” (Hebrews 6:20) and “King of the Jews” (Matthew 27:11). The crowning of Joshua the High Priest was the fourth vision God gave to Zechariah.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Note** that today’s reading included two more of the eight visions that are recorded in Zechariah. **Review** the vision of the High Priest (3:1-5) and the vision of the lamp stand and olive trees (4:1-10) and **ask** yourself the same question that was asked of Zechariah: “What do you see?” (4:2).

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| **Scripture Reading: Zechariah 4:11-6:13** | **DAY 33** |
| **Focus Verses: Zechariah 4:11-13** |

***Don’t Be Afraid to Ask!***

If you had some questions after reviewing the vision of the lamp stand and olive trees, you are not alone. Our focus verses reveal that Zechariah answered the Lord’s question, “What do you see?” (4:2) with a question of his own: “What are these two olive trees – at the right hand of the lampstand and at its left?” (4:11) His question had a second part, that being, “What are these two olive branches that drip into the receptacles of the two gold pipes from which the golden oil drains?” (4:12) A good question deserves a good answer. However, after Zechariah answered the LORD’s question with a question, the LORD answered Zechariah’s question with a question. (Is it getting confusing yet?) The LORD asked, “Do you not know what these are?” And then, finally, a question got an answer that was not another question when the humbled prophet replied, “No, my Lord.” Then God answered Zechariah’s question about the two “olive branches” by saying, “These are the two anointed ones, who stand beside the Lord of the whole earth.” If you read Revelation carefully, you might remember seeing something strangely similar to those words in Revelation 11:3-4 where God described His “two witnesses” as “the two olive trees and the two lampstands standing before the God of the earth.” But the Bible lessons for Zechariah were not over. Immediately following this question and answer session, God gave His prophet his final three visions: the vision of the flying scroll (5:1-4), the vision of the woman in a basket (5:5-11), and the vision of the four chariots (6:1-8).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Read** from your Bible daily. If you come to a story, verse, or even a phrase or word that you do not understand, do not be afraid to **ask** the Lord to explain it to you! **Believe** that Christ is the Great Teacher and that He wants to teach and disciple you on a very personal, one-on-one basis.

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| **Scripture Reading: Zechariah 6:14-8:8** | **DAY 34** |
| **Focus Verses: Zechariah 7:1-3** |

***Something Even Better than Fasting***

Although God, through Moses and the Law, only commanded the people to fast on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-34), the Jews later established several more national fast days. The fast day mentioned in the question about fasting in today’s focus verses was the one that had been established as a memorial to the burning of Jerusalem and the destruction of Solomon’s temple. The fast that was held in the “fifth” month coincided with the date of those two events (2 Kings 25:2-10). The question was, “With the rebuilding of the new temple, do we still need to fast and remember the destruction of the old?” God’s answer, through Zechariah, was quite powerful! In lieu of symbolic religious exhibitions and expressions, God preferred that they honor Him in the same way that His Word had been honored prior to Jerusalem’s backsliding and ultimate destruction (7:7). Although fasting made a statement, its statement could not compare with the statement that could be made to the world if only God’s people lived lives that exhibited “justice…mercy and compassion…to his brother” (7:9). Two examples of this kind of godly mentality and lifestyle were specifically noted when God said they were to “not oppress the widows or the fatherless, the alien or the poor” and they were not to “plan evil” in their hearts “against (their) brother” (7:10).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Remember** that the greatest evidence of the presence of Christ in our lives is our love for our fellow Christians (John 13:35). **Refuse** to be involved in conversations that become critical and contain gossip about others. Politely **excuse yourself** and move on to better things.

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| **Scripture Reading: Zechariah 8:9-9:10** | **DAY 35** |
| **Focus Verse: Zechariah8:9** |

***“Let Your Hands Be Strong”***

In yesterday’s verses we saw God reminding His people that He preferred *righteousness* over *ritual.* He promised His people that He would “save (His) people” and “bring them back” so that they could “dwell in the midst of Jerusalem (the “City of Peace”) and He would “be their God in truth and righteousness” (8:7-8). Because of that promise, God could rightfully encourage His people to “let (their) hands be strong”(8:9). His promise was that, even though they had “no wages” and “no peace from (their) enemy” (8:10) they would be honored “as in the former days” before they rebelled against God and His plan for their lives (8:11). When they returned to God they would again be “prosperous” and soon “possess” all of the blessings that He desired to bestow upon those who chose to be obedient to Him” (8:12). Verse 13 confirms God promise to “save” them and to make them a “blessing” to others. Because of that, God could exhort His people to “not fear” and then repeat His command that they “let (their) hands be strong.” Perhaps the greatest source for such strength was found in the promise that the coming Messiah would be “just” and bring their “salvation” even though He would eventually come to them as one “lowly and riding on a donkey” just as our Savior did when He entered Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9). Matthew 21:5 records the fulfillment of this divine prophecy.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Believe** that all of God’s promises to His people will be eventually and ultimately realized by those who are obedient to Him. **Read** Matthew 23:39 and you will see one of the important places where Zechariah’s prophecy was fulfilled in the New Testament and in the life of Christ.

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| **Scripture Reading: Zechariah 9:11-11:3** | **DAY 36** |
| **Focus Verse: Zechariah 9:12** |

***“Prisoners of Hope”***

The word translated “prisoners” in our focus verse means exactly that. The first time this word is found in the Bible is in Genesis 39:20 where we read that, “Joseph’s master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king’s *prisoners* were confined.” However, Zechariah’s message was not given to prisoners of any earthly “king” but to a people who had willingly declared themselves to be “prisoners” of the Heavenly King! When we think of a “prisoner” we think of someone who has come to a place where they surrender their daily lives to the power of another. Someone tells a prisoner *where* to go, *what* to do, and even *when* they are to do it! Our “hope” is to serve as a spiritual warden to us. When, in this life, we want to “give up” and “give in,” our “hope” demands something better from us. When we are spiritually exhausted, and when we are “give out,” our “hope” gives us the strength to carry on and fulfill the will of our divine Master. There is no circumstance or situation in life that our “hope” does not accompany us and provide guidance to us so that we are forever reminded that we do not walk alone or serve in our own strength! If a prisoner decides to run away from his earthly master, that master will come after him and return him to the place where he belongs. The same is true for the followers of God who have become “prisoners of hope.” We simply cannot escape from the hope that lives within us and motivates us to be everything that God has desired us to be.

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Surrender** your life to God on a daily basis. **Encourage** someone today that needs hope and **assure** them that they are never alone after they have placed their hope in God and His promises.

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| **Scripture Reading: Zechariah 11:4-12:14** | **DAY 37** |
| **Focus Verse: Zechariah 12:10** |

***“Look on Me”***

In Hebrews 12:2 we are exhorted to be, “looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.” In that same sense, the people of Zechariah’s time were encouraged by God to, “Look on me” (12:10). And what specifically were they commanded to see? They were commanded to see, through God and the preaching of Zechariah, and all of the **Kingdom Prophets**, the One “whom they pierced.” While this statement might have been somewhat difficult for Zechariah’s Old Testament saints to understand, we New Testament believers have the luxury of full knowledge to help us know and understand exactly what Zechariah was exhorting the believers of his day to do. When the supplies seemed low and the work of rebuilding the temple seemed burdensome, the people had only to “look” to God for the strength and encouragement that was necessary if they were to carry on and fulfill the will of God. When we remember the awful price that God paid for our sins through the suffering and death of his Son, we may very well be moved to “mourning” just as was the case with these Old Testament saints. However, their (and our) *mourning* can lead to a new *morning* in Christ and the hope that He brings to us each and every day we serve Him! How were the people of Zechariah’s time to “look” on God? In the same way that we “look” to Him today - through “the Spirit of grace and supplication” (12:10a).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Realize** that God empowers His believers and encourages His followers through the Holy Spirit and prayer today just as He did in times past. **Pray** to God daily and **seek** what you need from Him. **Be assured** that He will never fail nor forsake you.

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| **Scripture Reading: Zechariah 13:1-14:20** | **DAY 38** |
| **Focus Verse: Zechariah 13:1** |

***There Is “A Fountain”***

[Zechariah 12](https://www.blueletterbible.org/Bible.cfm?b=Zec&c=12&v=1-14#s=923001) ended with Israel's return to the LORD via the One whom they had once rejected and were now, through faith, embracing. “In that day” refers to the day that they turned their hearts back to the LORD. On “that day” they would enjoy “a fountain” that would provide full cleansing from “sin and…uncleanness.” There is no question that their cleansing came from the blood of the One “whom they pierced” (12:1o). That “fountain” was to “be opened” to all that would turn to God, in faith, for cleansing and spiritual healing. The idea that God is like a fountain to His people is found repeatedly in the Bible, but Zechariah found a way to express that wonderful moment in a way that few others ever did. Because of what God has done for us, through His great love and merciful sacrifice, we can sing, “There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Immanuel’s veins. And sinners, plunged beneath that flood, lose all their guilty stains.” Notice that God’s provision of grace comes to us in a “fountain” and not a well or reservoir. A fountain is never stagnant but continues to bubble up and flow unceasingly. Because of this one word, we can understand and believe that the flow of God’s great love and mercy is inexhaustible. And why was that fountain provided? The answer is, to wash away our “sin and…uncleanness!” There is only one place for the sinner to flee, and that is to God’s fountain!

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Thank God** for the fountain of grace and mercy He has provided us through the death of His only, begotten Son, Jesus, on the cross. **Speak** of God’s grace to someone you encounter today and **be a witness** of what He can do for those who turn to Him for salvation.

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| **Scripture Reading: Malachi 1:1-2:12** | **DAY 39** |
| **Focus Verses: Malachi 1:1-2** |

***“I Have Loved You”***

Notice that Malachi, like others we have heard from, carried a “burden” from the LORD to His people. However, one might conclude that Malachi’s burden (or message), at least at the beginning, was somewhat lighter than the “burdens” (or messages) of those that Habakkuk or Zechariah were demanded to carry and deliver. Malachi preached some 100 years after Haggai and Zechariah. The dating of his book is made most evident by the fact that the temple had been completely rebuilt and the sacrificial system had been completely restored by the time God called Malachi to speak to His people. However, it is clear from Malachi’s message that God’s people had already lapsed into a time of coldness and forgetfulness. Both of these things were evidenced through the attitudes of the priests and the people. They had offended God by offering “defiled food” on His altar (1:6). They were no longer offering the “best” of their flocks and herds to God but were now offering Him “the blind” and “the lame.” This sin that so offended God was based not just on the fact that they were not bringing their best to God but also in the fact that they were keeping their best for themselves and offering to God the undesirable animals that they did not want. You might say they were giving God their “leftovers!” Because of that, God was forced to say, “I have no pleasure in you” (1:10). But it was not merely the *actions* of the people that offended God. He was also offended by their *attitudes*. They had come to the place where they considered their sacrifices and service to God to be “a weariness” (1:13).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Seek** to give God your best every day of your life. **Refuse** to give Him your “leftover” time, talents, or treasures. **Remember** that God gave His very best for you and **commit** to doing the same for Him in return.

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| **Scripture Reading: Malachi 2:13-4:6** | **DAY 40** |
| **Focus Verse: Malachi 2:13** |

***“The Second Thing”***

Malachi began the second section of his message to God’s people by telling them “the second thing” they were doing that offended God. When they did bring an offering to God, even though it was not their best things (they were keeping those things for themselves), they brought their offerings with “tears” and “weeping and crying” (2:13). As a result of their remorse at having to give God even their “leftovers,” God told them that He no longer “regarded” their offerings at all! Soon, in Malachi 3:10, the burning question came from the mouth of God: “Will a man rob God?” The people acted as if they were confused by God’s question so He clarified it for them by telling them they had “robbed” Him “in tithes and offerings” (3:10). God encouraged His people to learn to *trust* Him by *trying* Him. He promised that, if they would be faithful in bringing “all the tithes” to Him, He would “open the windows of Heaven and pour out” blessings upon them to the point that they would not have “room enough to receive it!” His blessings would be so abundant to all that even “all nations” (including the non-believing nations) would call His people “blessed” (3:12).

**Prayer Emphasis:**

* **Thank God** for men like the **Kingdom Prophets**! **Pray** for God’s preachers and ask God to strengthen them in their work for Him. **Contact us** at seminolebc@centurylink.net or 850-562-8069 if we can pray for you or help you in any way.