E2E
Eternity to Eternity
BOOK 9 | LESSONS 91-105

Eternity to Eternity

NEW HOPE CHURCH
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Cover artwork depicts Namaan's healing in the Jordan river. (2 Kings 5)
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INTRODUCTION

Being one of the pastors at New Hope, people trust us with some of their deepest struggles. I have sat with parents, their hearts breaking for their wayward children. They tearfully confess their deepest longings for their son or daughter to experience life with God. They admit to becoming helpless spectators to a seemingly endless, tragic cycle of bad consequences due to their poor decisions. They relate stories of lovingly trying to break through to hard hearts only to be cruelly rejected. These parents have lived long enough and are wise enough to anticipate a catastrophic end to living life without God.

God, who has an infinite range of emotion, grieves over His children. Even after the impressive display of His power over Baal on Mt. Carmel, God's children continued to reject His sincere overtures of love and concern. The northern ten tribes went deeper and deeper into Baal worship and Judah (the two southern tribes) followed close behind.

God raised up voices of spiritual maturity, like Elijah, who faithfully represented the truth to Israel but these prophets were marginalized, often brutalized and some were killed for just speaking God's truth in love. E2E book 9 has very few bright spots in the spiritual life of the nation. God's people obstinately resisted His loving overtures and stubbornly chose self-rule. Conversely, God stubbornly loved on them while resisting their self-rule. It ends tragically in captivity with a few thousand Jewish survivors in Assyria and Babylon trying to reassemble the broken pieces of shattered dreams. Welcome to E2E book 9.

Jacob Iverson wrote lessons 91,94,95,96,98,100, and 101. Ric Bruce wrote lessons 93,97,102, and 103. Pastor Doug Bradshaw wrote lessons 92 and 99. I wrote lessons 104 and 105. Darla Prether prayerfully created the cover and painstakingly formatted each lesson. We pray sincerely that you enjoy these lessons as much as we enjoyed preparing them for you.

Blessings,

Richard K Bruce Jr.

LESSON 91
Elijah Passes the Torch

The Bible is full of imperfect people who often started their ministries with passion and excitement only to sin and fail to live up to God's high calling. We recently learned about how Solomon loved God, requested wisdom, and became a great ruler as a result. We then learned about how he followed false gods and led the people into idolatry. His father David started out as a man after God's own heart but because of his sin, brought death, political turmoil, and set the stage for the division of the nation. We could go on and on. Who could forget promising beginnings of Adam, Noah, Moses, Aaron, Gideon, Eli, or Saul before sin tarnished their legacies?

Our lives are often marked by sin and the guilt or consequences of poor decisions. But because of God's grace, it's never too late to finish well. Today's story follows the prophet Elijah as his earthly time and ministry drew to a close. As you read, pay careful attention to what his attitude and actions can teach us about ending well.

Key Scripture

1 Kings 19:19-21, 2 Kings 2:1-6, 9-12 (NASB) *19 So he departed from there and found Elisha the son of Shaphat while he was plowing, with twelve yoke of oxen in front of him, and he with the twelfth. And Elijah came over to him and threw his cloak on him. 20 Then he left the oxen behind and ran after Elijah, and said, "Please let me kiss my father and my mother, then I will follow you." And he said to him, "Go back, for what have I done to you?" 21 So he returned from following him, and took the pair of oxen and sacrificed them, and cooked their meat with the implements of the oxen, and gave it to the people and they ate. Then he got up and followed Elijah and served him.*

2 Kings 2 Now it came about, when the LORD was about to bring Elijah up by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah left Gilgal with Elisha. 2 And Elijah said to Elisha, "Stay here please, for the LORD has sent me as far as Bethel." But Elisha said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they went down to Bethel. 3 Then the sons of the prophets who were at Bethel went out to Elisha and said

to him, "Are you aware that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he said, "Yes, I am aware; say nothing about it."

4 And Elijah said to him, "Elisha, please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho." But he said, "As surely as the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So they came to Jericho. 5 Then the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho approached Elisha and said to him, "Do you know that the LORD will take away your master from over you today?" And he answered, "Yes, I know; say nothing about it." 6 And Elijah said to him, "Please stay here, for the LORD has sent me to the Jordan." But he said, "As surely as the LORD lives, and as you yourself live, I will not leave you." So the two of them went on…

9 When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask me what I should do for you before I am taken from you." And Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." 10 He said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." 11 And as they were walking along and talking, behold, a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and they separated the two of them. Then Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. 12 And Elisha was watching it and he was crying out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" And he did not see Elijah again.

Recommended Reading: 1 Kings 19: 19-21, 2 Kings 2

As God's faithful servant for nearly 20 years, Elijah experienced great victory and crushing defeats; periods when God felt close and times when He seemed distant; feelings of spiritual abundance and of spiritual drought. Though he often stumbled, he persevered and chose to keep following God despite his mistakes or outward circumstances.

While Elijah was alone and distraught in the wilderness, God told him He had appointed his successor (1 Kings 19:16). The repeated mention of Elijah's cloak invites us to consider its deeper meaning. In Hebrew, the author used the word "*addereth*" which has been translated as "mantle" or "glory," meaning that Elijah's cloak was a symbol of his office and authority as a prophet. So when Elijah laid his cloak across Elisha's shoulders, he was symbolically imparting his power and position—a clear sign that God was calling the young farmer to be Elijah's successor.

Elijah was one of two people in the Old Testament who was miraculously spared from death and taken directly to Heaven. We're

not told exactly why Elijah was given such an honor. Some speculate that because so much of his ministry reflected that of Jesus' future ministry, God chose to whisk Elijah to Heaven to mirror Christ's eventual ascension. What's also likely is that God is also hinting at a time when sinners who trust and serve God will have direct access to Heaven because of the sacrifice Jesus made on their behalf.

Consider the following:

1. Elisha was eager to start well. Elisha was clearly a wealthy farmer. He was plowing with 12 pairs of oxen and leading twelve teams of workers. However, he was willing to burn his equipment, leave potential profits of a good harvest, and slaughter his oxen in order to follow God's calling on his life. The name Elisha, meaning 'God saves,' illustrated God's promise to Israel if they listened to him. Following God's call cost Elisha, but like Elijah before him, he faithfully obeyed and served as God's instrument for salvation.

In Luke 14:26, Jesus told His followers: "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." Jesus wasn't calling us to hate but to prioritize following Him above our worldly relationships and ties. When Elijah asked Elisha what he wanted before he departed, Elisha responded by requesting "a double portion of your spirit." Elisha was asking to be Elijah's heir and the complete recipient of his powers, as an oldest son would receive his father's wealth and role when he died. Who among us is willing to leave our own wealth, family, and ties to follow God's calling and be His disciple with the same eagerness?

2. Elijah finished well. As Elijah's time on earth drew to a close, he didn't spend his last day checking off uncompleted items on a bucket list, apologizing to others, or trying to make peace with God. He didn't lament or fear what was to come next. Instead he chose to spend his last day connecting with those he cared about and had spent time pouring into. He visited groups of prophets that he likely mentored to say his goodbyes. He made sure Elisha was set up for success and equipped to take his place. Sometimes when we recognize or learn we have limited time left, we lament, busily try to right past wrongs, make peace with others and with God. Pastor Colin Smith observed, "What a marvelous thing that this man did not spend his last day on

earth making peace with God because he already ***had*** peace with God."[1] Elijah lived with an eternal mindset, recognizing that his time on earth was temporary but not the end. This freed him to live selflessly and without guilt during his remaining time.

Elijah trusted that God freed him to spend his remaining time on earth free from the guilt and fear that follow many of us. As flawed people, there is no way we will always make righteous choices. But good choices will always lead to the freedom from guilt and fear that Elijah experienced at the end.

As Elijah was whisked off to Heaven, his cloak fell to Elisha as God's confirmation that Elisha was Elijah's successor. The Bible records 16 of Elisha's miracles in contrast to Elija's eight to further affirm the "double portion" which Elisha so eagerly asked. This showed that the God of Elijah was also the God of Elisha and that his warnings to Israel should have been listened to with the same reverence owed Elijah.

Point to Ponder

"Let's run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking only at Jesus, the originator and perfecter of the faith…"- Hebrews 12:1b-2a

From Learning to Living

Luke 15:11-32 features the story of a son who left his family for a life of sin and pleasure. When his poor decisions left him alone and broken, he tried to return home as a servant. Read the story and reflect on the choices you've made, both good and bad. Celebrate that—like the son in the story—it's never too late to change paths and end with the faithfulness and grace of Elijah.

Prayer Point

God, help us live life in a way that is honoring and glorifying to You. Give us the strength to trust You and follow Your Word throughout our lives. Give us the wisdom to avoid the obstacles that have caused so many not to finish well. Thank You that Your mercies are new every morning and that even if we do stumble, You are always gracious and forgive us.

LESSON 92
Standing Firm

According to the Oxford dictionary an "echo chamber" is defined as "an environment in which a person encounters only beliefs or opinions that coincide with their own." Fueled by social media, the "echo chamber" effect was on full display during the last two presidential elections and the COVID pandemic. Those on both sides of the political aisle and the vaccine debate fell victim to hearing and reading only opinions that supported their own thinking. An article published in *Scientific Reports* entitled, "On the impossibility of breaking the echo chamber effect in social media using regulation,"we read,"the crucial problem with echo chambers is that they deprive people of a reality check, leaving them in a virtual reality."

In 1 Kings 22, King Ahab summoned 400 prophets to prophecy what he wanted to hear. In contrast King Jehoshaphat asked for a prophet who would speak only what God had said. In 2 Kings 3 we read again the importance of hearing the true voice of God. Read these two accounts and pay attention to the outcomes.

Key Scripture

1 Kings 22:5-18, 2 Kings 3:9-18 (NASB)

[Ahab the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat the king of Judah have been brought together by the marriage of their children. Ahab then asks Jehoshaphat to join him in conquering Ramoth-gilead. What transpires is a chilling example of an echo chamber.]

5 Moreover, Jehoshaphat said to the king of Israel, "Please inquire first for the word of the LORD." 6 Then the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and said to them, "Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle or shall I refrain?" And they said, "Go up, for the LORD will give it into the hand of the king." 7 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not yet a prophet of the LORD here that we may inquire of him?" 8 The king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him, because he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil. He is Micaiah son of Imlah." But Jehoshaphat said, "Let not the king say so." 9 Then the king of Israel

called an officer and said, "Bring quickly Micaiah son of Imlah." 10 Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting each on his throne, arrayed in their robes, at the threshing floor at the entrance of the gate of Samaria; and all the prophets were prophesying before them. 11 Then Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah made horns of iron for himself and said, "Thus says the LORD, 'With these you will gore the Arameans until they are consumed.'" 12 All the prophets were prophesying thus, saying, "Go up to Ramoth-gilead and prosper, for the LORD will give it into the hand of the king."

13 Then the messenger who went to summon Micaiah spoke to him saying, "Behold now, the words of the prophets are uniformly favorable to the king. Please let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably." 14 But Micaiah said, "As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I shall speak."

15 When he came to the king, the king said to him, "Micaiah, shall we go to Ramoth-gilead to battle, or shall we refrain?" And he answered him, "Go up and succeed, and the LORD will give it into the hand of the king." 16 Then the king said to him, "How many times must I adjure you to speak to me nothing but the truth in the name of the LORD?" 17 So he said,

"I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains,
like sheep which have no shepherd.
And the LORD said, 'These have no master.
Let each of them return to his house in peace.'"

18 Then the king of Israel said to Jehoshaphat, "Did I not tell you that he would not prophesy good concerning me, but evil?"

[Micaiah now reveals how God placed a deceiving spirit in the 400 prophets that Ahab summoned.]

[We read in the first part of 2 Kings 3 that Ahab's son Jehoram asked Jehoshaphat to join him in a military operation. The seeking of the voice of God is again the center of this story.]

2 Kings 3

9 So the king of Israel went with the king of Judah and the king of Edom; and they made a circuit of seven days' journey, and there was no water for the army or for the cattle that followed them. 10 Then the king of Israel said, "Alas! For the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab." 11 But Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not a prophet of the LORD here, that we may inquire of the LORD by him?" And one of the king of Israel's servants answered and said, "Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who used to pour water on the hands of Elijah." 12 Jehoshaphat

said, "The word of the LORD is with him." So the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down to him.

13 Now Elisha said to the king of Israel, "What do I have to do with you? Go to the prophets of your father and to the prophets of your mother." And the king of Israel said to him, "No, for the LORD has called these three kings together to give them into the hand of Moab." 14 Elisha said, "As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you.15 But now bring me a minstrel." And it came about, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him. 16 He said, "Thus says the LORD, 'Make this valley full of trenches.' 17 For thus says the LORD, 'You shall not see wind nor shall you see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, so that you shall drink, both you and your cattle and your beasts. 18 This is but a slight thing in the sight of the LORD; He will also give the Moabites into your hand.

Recommended Reading: 1 Kings 22 and 2 Kings 3

Ahab had created an echo chamber for himself. Surrounding himself with 400 prophets who only told him what he wanted to hear. Ultimately this led to his own demise. His son Jehoram followed his father's lead in not seeking God for direction. Jehoshaphat gives us a clear example of not being drawn into an echo chamber but instead standing firm in the pursuit of the true voice of God. Today the danger of living in an echo chamber is real and can be deadly and is passed easily from person to person. Will we follow the loudest voice or seek the true voice of God?

Consider the following:

1. Discerning the voice of God can be difficult. Popular music lyrics encourage us to follow our hearts. Co-workers recommend that if the path is difficult, avoid it. The most confusing option offered by our friends may be to follow the crowd. Consider the words of Scripture. "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me." (John 10:27) Not only does the Shepherd speak to His sheep but the sheep know His voice. (John 10:4,16) The apostle Paul instructs the followers of God to renew our minds with the things of God to know His will. (Romans 12:2) The writer of Proverbs affirms God's way for His followers to walk. "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps." (Proverbs 16:9)

2. Be careful of the company you keep. Menander was a Greek script writer who authored more than 100 comedies. In his play *Thais*, he used the words recorded in 1 Corinthians 15:33. "Do not be deceived. Bad company corrupts good morals". Bad company may not be bad people they may be people who are afraid of speaking the truth. Knowing the dangers of connecting to bad company, God gives us Christian community to echo His voice. The writer of Hebrews wrote in Hebrews 10:23-25, " Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near." Connecting to bad company leads to bad thinking and decisions. Conversely, the company of believers affirms the voice of God leading to obedience. The believer will do well if the voices he or she listens to point to the truth.

3. Have you ever been Micaiah? Speaking God's truth is not always popular and may be very costly. Micaiah's bravery in speaking the truth should inspire us. Do not fear standing alone as there is only One whom we need to fear. When the prophet Macaiah is brought to prophesy, he is brought from prison. After he spoke God's truth he was returned to prison. The Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary on the Whole Bible states, "But Michaiah, inflexibly faithful to his divine mission as a prophet, announced his purpose to proclaim honesty whatever God should bid him." Consider that Jesus paid the ultimate price to bring us salvation and to keep silent about that is in direct contradiction to His witness. Would we as recipients of the greatest gift ever keep silent because of the cost? Or like Micaiah would we gladly pay whatever price is required to proclaim the truth?

Point to Ponder

The voice of God may not come to us in the mighty wind, an earthquake, or in a roaring fire. Let us rely on the inspired Word of God and the guiding presence of the Holy Spirit to lead us to His truth.

From Learning to Living

Do you seek the voice of God when those around you offer only the majority opinion? Do you have any fellow followers of God whom you turn to, trusting them to offer Godly advice? These days, as the world around us gets farther and farther from God, consider your part in stemming the tide. God has strategically placed you in the world to proclaim His truth. Have confidence today that He has considered you worthy to proclaim His excellencies.

Prayer Point

God, help me to clearly hear Your voice. Direct my path and help me to walk Your chosen path for me. Please give me the courage to speak of You without fear and proclaim Your goodness to all.

LESSON 93
Elisha and the Shunammite Widow

During World War II, Corrie ten Boom and her sister Betsie were imprisoned in Ravensbrück concentration camp for hiding Jews. Horrific camp conditions like overcrowding, disease, and brutal guards were a daily reality for the sisters. One day they managed to smuggle in a small Bible, holding secret prayer meetings in their filthy, flea-infested barracks. Miraculously, the guards never searched their belongings, and they were able to share God's Word with countless women while imprisoned. Betsie even viewed the fleas as part of God's provision—later discovering that the guards avoided their barracks because of the infestation.

In 2 Kings 4, God's provision of oil for a widow (4:1-7) and the resurrection of the Shunammite woman's son (4:8-37) show that God cares about the struggles of ordinary women like Corrie and Betsie, not just about the issues facing a nation and its kings. These simple narratives overflow with theological and practical truths, demonstrating God's care for the details of our lives and His power over life and death. In this lesson we will explore what the faith of these ordinary women can teach us about service, obedience, and God's sovereignty. Like the miraculous story of Corrie and Betsie, 2 Kings chapter 4 reveals the character of a God who sees, provides, and restores, even in difficult circumstances.

Key Scripture

2 Kings 4:1-7, 18-25, 32-36 (NASB) *Now a woman of the wives of the sons of the prophets cried out to Elisha, saying, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that your servant feared the Lord; and the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves." 2 So Elisha said to her, "What shall I do for you? Tell me, what do you have in the house?" And she said, "Your servant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil." 3 Then he said, "Go, borrow containers elsewhere for yourself, empty containers from all your neighbors—do not get too few. 4 Then you shall come in and shut the door behind you and your sons, and pour into all these containers; and you shall set aside what is*

full." 5 So she left him and shut the door behind her and her sons; they began bringing the containers to her, and she poured the oil. 6 When the containers were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another container." But he said to her, "There are no more containers." Then the oil stopped. 7 So she came and told the man of God. And he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debt, and you and your sons can live on the rest."

[A prominent woman from Shunem regularly provided food and lodging for Elisha whenever he passed by. Recognizing him as a man of God, she and her husband prepared an upper room in their house for his use. In gratitude for her hospitality, Elisha sought to bless her. Upon learning that she had no children, he prophesied that she would have a son within a year. Though she initially doubted, she later conceived and gave birth to a son, just as Elisha had promised.]

18 When the child was grown, the day came that he went out to his father, to the reapers. 19 And he said to his father, "My head, my head!" And his father said to his servant, "Carry him to his mother." 20 When he had carried him and brought him to his mother, he sat on her lap until noon, and then he died. 21 And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door behind him and left. 22 Then she called to her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and one of the donkeys, so that I may run to the man of God and return." 23 But he said, "Why are you going to him today? It is neither new moon nor Sabbath." So she just said, "It will be fine." 24 Then she saddled the donkey and said to her servant, "Drive the donkey and go on; do not slow down the pace for me unless I tell you." 25 So she went on and came to the man of God at Mount Carmel.

[The Shunammite woman approached Elisha in distress after her son had died but initially told Gehazi that all was well. When she reached Elisha, she clung to his feet, expressing her deep sorrow and reminding him that she never asked for a son. Elisha sent Gehazi ahead with his staff to lay on the boy. The mother insisted on staying with Elisha, so he followed her back to the child.]

32 When Elisha entered the house, behold the boy was dead, laid on his bed. 33 So he entered and shut the door behind them both, and he prayed to the Lord. 34 Then he got up on the bed and lay on the child, and put his mouth on his mouth, his eyes on his eyes, his hands on his hands, and he bent down on him; and the flesh of the child became warm. 35 Then he returned and walked in the house back and forth once, and went up and bent down on him; and the boy sneezed seven times, then the boy opened his eyes. 36 And he called Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunammite." So he called her. And when she came to him, he said, "Pick up your son." 37 Then she came in and fell at his feet and bowed down to the ground, and she picked up her son and left.

Recommended Reading: 2 Kings 4

This section of Scripture features two seemingly unrelated stories that both confirm that God cares about the details of our lives.

- The Widow's Oil (4:1-7) – An unnamed widow, burdened with debt and facing the loss of her sons to forced slavery, cried out to Elisha. He instructed her to gather her neighbor's empty vessels and pour her last bit of oil into them. Miraculously, the oil continued flowing until all the jars were full, providing her with the means to pay her debts and sustain her family. This story should remind us of the widow of Zarephath whom Elijah provided oil for in 1 Kings 17:7-16, which we covered in Lesson 88 of book eight.

- The Shunammite's Son (4:8-37) – A wealthy but childless Shunammite woman provided hospitality for Elisha. He prophesied that she would bear a son, and God caused her to conceive and give birth just as Elisha said. Years later, the boy died suddenly. The woman, demonstrating unwavering faith, sought out Elisha to ask for the boy's life. He returned with her and, through fervent prayer, restored the child's life. This story should remind us of a parallel story in 1 Kings 17:17-24 in which Elijah raised the widow of Zarephath's son from the dead. The Spirit of God used these miracles to confirm that Elisha was God's prophet just like Elijah before him.

Consider the following:

1. God's Provision Requires Obedience. Miracles in Scripture often require an act of faith before God's provision flows. The widow's oil did not multiply instantly. She had to collect jars and pour the oil, and the oil flowed into the exact number of jars she and her sons gathered by faith. The Shunammite woman had to seek out Elisha before God raised her son from the dead. This pattern appears throughout the Bible. In John 2:1-11, Jesus' first miracle required the servants to fill jars with water before it turned to wine. Likewise, in Luke 5:4-7, Peter had to let his net down into the water before the nets filled with so many fish that his crew could not haul them in. As Thomas Constable notes in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, "The widow's faith can be 'measured' by the number of jars she collected in response to the prophet's instructions."[2] Where in your life is God

asking for the obedience of faith before provision? Are you hesitating because you can't see the outcome?

2. Simple Hospitality Leads to Unexpected Blessings. The Shunammite woman showed hospitality to Elisha not out of a desire for reward but as a sincere act of reverence toward God's servant. Her act of simple kindness unlocked a surprising reward—a son! This reflects Jesus' teaching in Matthew 10:41 that those who receive a prophet will share in a prophet's reward, implying that those who accept His message will share in His reward: eternal life. Jesus goes on to say, "… if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones who is my disciple, truly I tell you, that person will certainly not lose their reward." (Matt 10:42) As Chad Brand notes, "Service at its best is worship."[3] True service flows from a heart of love and faithfulness, not personal gain. Do you serve others with an open heart or only when you can expect something in return?

3. God's Triumph Over Death. Death is universally accepted as final and certain. Instead of mourning, however, the Shunamite woman responded with faith, seeking out Elisha right away. Following the pattern of Elijah in 1 Kings 17:17-24, Elisha stretched himself over the child and prayed fervently that God would restore his life. This miracle foreshadows Jesus' authority over death. Just as Elisha and Elijah raised the dead, Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead in Mark 5:35-42 and called Lazarus from the grave in John 11:43-44. Do you trust God's power even in hopeless situations? What "dead" areas in your life—relationships, dreams, spiritual life, etc.—need revival?

These two stories reveal a God who is deeply engaged in the lives of His people and tuned into the needs of women particularly. As Constable notes, "Whereas women were regarded as inferior to men in most ancient Near Eastern societies, God showed His concern for them here as well as in many other portions of Scripture."[4] God provided for these women when resources seemed depleted, He blessed their faithfulness beyond expectation, and He restored their futures and hopes. God still sees, provides, and restores those who faithfully follow Him. Just look at Corrie and Betsie ten Boom!

Point to Ponder

I will bless [Israel] with abundant provisions; her poor I will satisfy with food. Psalm 132:15

From Learning to Living

Just like the women in 2 Kings 4, God is calling us to step out in faith. This week, take a tangible step to act in faith—whether it's surrendering a fear, stepping into a new opportunity, or serving someone in need—by seeking God's heart and then taking bold action. Trust that He can do more than you can ask or imagine. No problem is too big or too small to ask Him about.

Prayer Point

Heavenly Father, my faith wavers, but I choose to trust You. Help me to serve selflessly, like the Shunammite woman and the ten Booms, expecting nothing in return. Teach me to rely on Your provision and believe in Your power to restore what is broken in my life. Just as You brought life where there was loss, revive my faith, my relationships, and my purpose. I surrender my fears and step forward in faith, knowing You are always working for my good. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

LESSON 94
Naaman is Healed

2 Peter 3:9 reminds us that God is "longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Often, when we read Old Testament stories we can get distracted by the drama, political turmoil, and seemingly endless cycles of sin and judgment. We forget that God promised to bless all the nations of the earth through Abraham's descendants (Gen 12:3) or that the temple was supposed to be a beacon for the nations to come to know God (1 Kings 8:41-43). God's heart has always been for all people—not just the nation of Israel—to know Him and come to salvation.

In 2 Kings 5, we meet Naaman, a high-ranking military official, an enemy of Israel, and a man stricken with a terrible ailment. His story reminds us that, despite the drama we read about, God's goal remains unchanged: that all people come to know Him.

Key Scripture

2 Kings 5:1-5, 9-19 (NASB) *Now Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Aram, was a great man in the view of his master, and eminent, because by him the LORD had given victory to Aram. The man was also a valiant warrior, but afflicted with leprosy. 2 Now the Arameans had gone out in bands and had taken captive a little girl from the land of Israel; and she waited on Naaman's wife. 3 And she said to her mistress, "If only my master were with the prophet who is in Samaria! Then he would cure him of his leprosy." 4 And Naaman went in and told his master, saying, "The girl who is from the land of Israel spoke such and such." 5 Then the king of Aram said, "Go now, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So he departed and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold, and ten changes of clothes.*

9 So Naaman came with his horses and his chariots, and stood at the doorway of Elisha's house. 10 And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, "Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh will be restored to you and you will be clean." 11 But Naaman was furious and went away, and he said, "Behold, I thought, 'He will certainly come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, and wave his hand over the site and cure the leprosy.' 12 Are Abanah and Pharpar,

the rivers of Damascus, not better than all the waters of Israel? Could I not wash in them and be clean?" So he turned and went away in a rage. 13 Then his servants approached and spoke to him, saying, "My father, had the prophet told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more then, when he says to you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" 14 So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, in accordance with the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

15 Then he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him. And he said, "Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, except in Israel; so please accept a gift from your servant now." 16 But he said, "As surely as the LORD lives, before whom I stand, I will accept nothing." And he urged him to accept it, but he refused. 17 Then Naaman said, "If not, please let your servant be given two mules' load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer a burnt offering nor a sacrifice to other gods, but to the LORD. 18 Regarding this matter may the LORD forgive your servant: when my master goes into the house of Rimmon to worship there, and he leans on my hand and I bow down in the house of Rimmon, when I bow down in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD please forgive your servant in this matter." 19 He said to him, "Go in peace." So he went some distance from him.

Recommended Reading: 2 Kings 5

Naaman was a captain in the army of the king of Aram, a feared enemy of Israel (1 Kings 20). He was diagnosed with leprosy, which in his day and age would have meant the end to his power, position, and social standing. The Bible groups a number of skin conditions together under the term "leprosy" (Lev. 13:1-44), and it's unclear if he had the disease we think of as leprosy today. Regardless, the condition was enough of a problem for him to seek help from amongst his enemies.

Upon the urging from one of his household slaves, and after envoys were sent between the king of Aram and Israel's king Jehoram, Naaman sought healing from the prophet Elisha. Naaman arrived at Elisha's door laden with expensive gifts, as if he believed healing could be purchased. But Elisha refused to see him, not wanting to take credit for a miracle only God could do, and instead sent instructions via his servant.

Reluctantly and with great frustration, Naaman followed Elisha's instructions and bathed seven times in the Jordan river and found healing from his physical and spiritual ailments. Pastor and scholar

Thomas Constable observed that in Aramaic, Naaman can be translated as "gracious," perhaps as a picture of the graciousness God extended to him in this story.[5]

Consider the following:

1. The captive girl's faith led to Naaman's healing. Without the faith of this nameless servant girl, this incredible story couldn't have happened. Thomas Holdcroft observed that "Jesus pointed out that Elisha healed no Israelites with leprosy (Luke 4:27), so that the young girl's faith resulted from her own understanding of God's miracle power rather than the observation of a miracle worker."[6] Naaman and the captive Israelite girl could not have been any more different. Naaman was a captor, she was a captive; she was an Israelite, he was an Syrian; he was known by the king, and she was a nobody. She had no power in contrast to Naaman's noticeable power, "yet she was the one God used to guide her master to discover the Sovereign of the universe."[7] Because of her faith, this young girl couldn't stay silent and eagerly shared the salvation that could only be found in God. Often we remain silent when we have an opportunity to share the Gospel with others. We're worried about the repercussions we could face, the loss of standing or the change in peoples' opinions of us. Naaman's response shows how God works behind the scenes to prepare hearts, reminding us that we may never know the impact of our faith unless we step out and share, like the servant girl.

2. God alone received credit for Naaman's healing. Naaman appeared at Elisha's house, laden with silver, gold, multiple changes of expensive clothing, and even orders from the king himself. It seemed that Naaman's expectations were that Elisha would act like the false prophets from his homeland, accepting bribes or sacrifices for the "miracles" they would perform. Elisha refused to greet Naaman and sent instructions for healing though his servant. By removing himself from the picture, Elisha was ensuring that God would get the credit for any miracles. Elisha provided Naaman with simple instructions—to bathe seven times in the Jordan River—a humbling act that Naaman thought below his station. Seven was a number commonly associated with acts of God (e.g. seven days of creation). Naaman's healing mimics our own salvation stories where we first have to humble ourselves by recognizing our need for a Savior and that only through God can we find salvation.

3. Naaman's healing led him to worship God alone. After his miraculous healing, Naaman acknowledged that God alone was to be worshiped confessing, "Now I know there is no God but the God of Israel." Even though Naaman was committed to following God, he still held some false beliefs, revealing the need for spiritual growth. He requested that Elisha allow him to take soil to his homeland in order to worship God. It was a common belief that a god could only be worshiped on the ground of the nation where he was worshiped. Namaan also asked if God would forgive him when he'd go and worship in the temple of the idol, Rimmon, since he knew his station wouldn't allow him to avoid it. This shows that spiritual growth doesn't happen overnight. Throughout time, people have always been saved through faith, but it's common for sanctification to take time. Thankfully, God doesn't expect change immediately but allows us to "go in peace" as we learn and grow closer to Him.

Namaan was not only healed from his physical ailments but healed spiritually, finding salvation in the God of Israel. Writing for the *Moody Bible Commentary,* Harry Shields observed that "the entire interaction with Naaman reflected back on the Abrahamic covenant and God's intentions to bless people from all nations, as well as the fulfillment of Solomon's prayer that 'all the peoples of the earth may know Your name.'"[8] Naaman's salvation was the direct result of God using His chosen people to bless all the nations of the earth. Jesus later made the point that Naaman's faith condemned most Israelites of His day, since they had rejected the true God and embraced gods that could not heal (Luke. 4:23-30).

Point to Ponder

Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Romans 10:13

From Learning to Living

Is there someone in your life who doesn't know God? Perhaps they're an antagonistic coworker who feels like an enemy, a wayward child, or the neighbor you see in passing. This week, take a few moments to pray for that person, that God would work in miraculous ways in their life and that He may use you to plant seeds of salvation.

Prayer Point

Gracious Heavenly Father, thank You that You so loved the world that You gave us Your son. Thank You for the salvation we have through faith and that we can now approach You not as enemies but as friends. Thank You that we can now "go in peace."

LESSON 95

Hosea / Summary of the Minor Prophets

If you asked someone which books of the Bible they were most likely to skip, which do you think they'd say? Some people may admit that they skip whole portions of poetic books like Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. Other people may get bogged down in the books of the law, like Leviticus. Others may skip a book like Revelation because of how confusing it can be. Although all of those may be contenders, the likely winners are the 12 minor prophets: Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. These books are called "minor" because they're short in length, not because of their content. They are often glossed over in sermons, devotional books, or by casual Bible readers because they can feel repetitive, and their mix of narrative and poetry can be confusing or frustrating.

Today we're going to treat Hosea, the first of the minor prophets as a case study for the rest of the twelve. It's a tragic story of love, loss, grief, and restoration that author John Goodrich noted contains "profound theological insights, exhibiting not only God's grief over the sin of His people but also His redemption of His beloved."[9] Hosea, like the other minor prophets, doesn't have to be confusing. Through it—as with the other twelve—we see God's steadfast character and His plan for redemption despite Israel's rejection of Him and His covenants.

Key Scripture

Hosea 1:2-9, 2:2-7, 3:2-5, and 14:14 (NASB) *2 When the LORD first spoke through Hosea, the LORD said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife inclined to infidelity, and children of infidelity; for the land commits flagrant infidelity, abandoning the LORD." 3 So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son. 4 And the LORD said to him, "Name him Jezreel; for in just a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel. 5 On that day I will break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel."6 Then she conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. And the LORD said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, for I will no longer take pity on the house of Israel, that I*

would ever forgive them. 7 But I will take pity on the house of Judah and save them by the LORD their God, and will not save them by bow, sword, battle, horses, or horsemen." 8 When she had weaned Lo-ruhamah, she conceived and gave birth to a son. 9 And the LORD said, "Name him Lo-ammi, because you are not My people, and I am not your God."

[In addition to the message Hosea conveyed with his physical actions, God also communicated His disgust and frustration with Israel through prophetic poetry like the example below.]

2:2 "Dispute with your mother, dispute, Because she is not my wife, and I am not her husband; But she must remove her infidelity from her face And her adultery from between her breasts, 3 Otherwise, I will strip her naked And expose her as on the day she was born. I will also make her like a wilderness, make her like desert land, And put her to death with thirst. 4 Also, I will take no pity on her children, because they are children of infidelity. 5 For their mother has committed prostitution; She who conceived them has acted shamefully. For she said, 'I will go after my lovers, Who give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.' 6 Therefore, behold, I will obstruct her way with thorns, and I will build a stone wall against her so that she cannot find her paths. 7 And she will pursue her lovers, but she will not reach them; And she will seek them, but will not find them.

[Despite Hosea's faithfulness, Gomer eventually left him for other men, prompting God to tell Hosea to go find, rescue, and take her back.]

3:2 So I purchased her for myself for fifteen shekels of silver, and a homer and a lethech of barley. 3 Then I said to her, "You shall live with me for many days. You shall not play the prostitute, nor shall you have another man; so I will also be toward you." 4 For the sons of Israel will live for many days without a king or leader, without sacrifice or memorial stone, and without ephod or household idols. 5 Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.

[Gomer repeatedly left Hosea like Israel repeatedly abandoned God. Despite their unfaithfulness, God promised a day when Israel would return, and He would welcome them back forever.]

14:14 I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, because My anger has turned away from them.

Recommended Reading: Hosea 1 - 14

Although it contains messages intended for both Israel and Judah, the book of Hosea primarily addressed the northern 10 tribes (referred

to as Ephriam). It's a tragic story that can be confusing to read; why would God instruct someone to go through the humiliating display of marrying a prostitute and fathering children only to be left heartbroken as that same wife left him time and time again? Hosea is an example of "sign prophecy," a visible way to communicate truth when words weren't enough. As scholar Thomas Constable explained, these "peculiar acts of the prophets were really acts of mercy—standing out as odd to draw the attention of those who had hardened themselves to God."[10] In other words, actions speak louder than words, and God was using Hosea's graphic actions to be heard by a people who refused to listen.

Little is known about Hosea personally, but most scholars seem to believe given the names listed in verse one that he lived about 200 years after Israel split into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. It was a time where "murder, idolatry, and immorality were rampant in the land, and nobody seemed to be interested in hearing the Word of the Lord!"[11] Using the powerful illustration of an unfaithful spouse, God was showing Israel how they were behaving. By worshiping false gods, they broke their covenant with Him and essentially committed adultery, a crime punishable by death. The theme of Israel's unfaithfulness is one repeated throughout the minor prophets. God repeatedly warned Israel that their actions would have consequences and, like a spurned husband, He would abandon them. However, because of His love and compassion, He would only ever leave them temporarily. Eventually, He would act like Hosea and pursue his unfaithful spouse, pay their debts, and lovingly enter a relationship with them again.

Consider the following:

1. Hosea shows God's emotional investment in His people. Sometimes when we read Scripture, we lose sight of God's character and personality. We see the sovereign, all-powerful and all-knowing creator and forget that God has so many more attributes. In the minor prophets and specifically Hosea, He displayed a range of emotions as He mourned the failures and celebrated the victories of His children. His grief is apparent in passages like Hosea 6:4 where He lamented how fleeting Israel's love for Him was: "*What shall I do with you, Ephraim? What shall I do with you, Judah? For your loyalty is like a morning cloud, And like the dew which goes away early.*" Or the anger and frustration that made Him feel like a scorned husband in

7:13: *"Woe to them, for they have strayed from Me! Destruction is theirs, for they have rebelled against Me! I would redeem them, but they have spoken lies against Me."* These emotions are important to note; they teach us a lot about the character of God. He's not impersonal, silently manipulating our lives like pieces on a chess board. He's involved and invested, warning us of potential mistakes and diligently working to bring us back to Him even when our sin pulls us away.

2. Hosea reveals God's judgment and enduring love. Throughout Hosea (and the other minor prophets) God promised to abandon Israel for their abandonment of their covenant with Him. One scholar pointed out that even the names of Hosea's children exemplified this saying, "Positive names were the rule in the ancient Near East, yet the last three of these names are bluntly negative. The collective impact of these four names is the message of this pericope (excerpt from the text): Israel's unfaithfulness had become so obnoxious to Yahweh that He would not tolerate her any longer."[12] Noticeably though, nearly every act of judgment is followed by a promise of future restoration. Like Hosea buying Gomer and purchasing her from her lover, God would eventually rescue His people and bring them back into fellowship with Him. *"I will heal their apostasy, I will love them freely, because My anger has turned away from them."* (Hosea 14:4)

We should find encouragement in the fact that God keeps His promises, and, despite our sins and failures, there's always a chance to come back into a relationship with Him.

3. Hosea warns that neglecting God's Word leads to downfall. Throughout Hosea, God mentions several reasons for why Israel has fallen away from Him including adultery, idolatry, hypocrisy, ingratitude, and even relying on political alliances instead of on Him for protection. One surprising reason is that God seems to reveal that a lack of knowledge is the source of all the other issues. In Hosea 4:6 God said, "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Since you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being My priest. Since you have forgotten the Law of your God, I also will forget your children."

2 Timothy 3:16 tells us that Scripture is inspired by God and a thorough

knowledge of it is essential to handling any of life's situations. As people of God, we need to be immersed in God's Word, turning to it daily for guidance and seeking the wisdom and knowledge God imparts through it. Without it, the same sins of ingratitude, idolatry, and hypocrisy will be our downfall.

Hosea is a tragic story of love, loss, and grief. Israel would face the consequences of abandoning God. However, it's also a story of restoration and a promise that despite the consequences for their sin, God's love and mercy are more powerful than sin. Our God seeks out sinners, even those who deserve His love the least. Nearly a century ago, commentator H. A. Ironsides commented on that fact saying: "Hosea had to bear the shame of having espoused one of so wretched a character, but he did not have to die for her. It was far otherwise with our blessed Lord Jesus. He not only came where we were in our sin and shame, but on Calvary's cross He was made sin for us that we might become God's righteousness in Him."[13]

Point to Ponder

Grace is not merely *un*merited favor, but it is favor in spite of *merited* judgement. — H. A. Ironsides

From Learning to Living

Like Israel, when we don't value God's Word, we end up looking elsewhere when trouble comes. These manmade solutions may help ease the symptoms of our problems but cannot cure the underlying spiritual issue: replacing God with manmade substitutes. In what areas of your life have you replaced God and His Word with something manmade. How might that be hindering your walk with Him?

Prayer Point

Heavenly Father, thank You that You have chosen to reveal Yourself to us and that through Your Word we can know You. Give us a hunger for the knowledge we can find in Your Word and a desire to grow closer to You.

LESSON 96
Jonah Part One

One day when the man we know as St. Patrick was sixteen, he was tending his family's flock when he was attacked and kidnapped by raiders. Trafficked to Ireland, he spent the next six years being horribly abused as a slave among the 5th century Irish people. Patrick's faith was strengthened during the years of hardship. Eventually, he escaped captivity and returned to his home where he decided to dedicate his life to ministry. After a few years of service, he felt a call on his life to return to Ireland and share the gospel with his captors. Patrick was hesitant to go and scared to minister to his enemies but ultimately decided to follow God's prompting, acknowledging that it wasn't up to him to decide who should and shouldn't receive salvation.

Throughout history, God chose to bring salvation to people in miraculous ways, often using broken people, some more reluctant than others. In the Book of Jonah, we read about one of the most reluctant missionaries of all time—going so far as to run from God's calling. Most of us are probably familiar with the story so as you read, pay less attention to the big fish and more to the big God. Notice how He worked through the disobedient prophet to relentlessly pursue sinful people because, despite what Jonah might believe, "salvation belongs to the Lord." (Jonah 2:9)

Key Scripture

Jonah 1:1-17 (NASB) *1 The word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and cry out against it, because their wickedness has come up before Me." 3 But Jonah got up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. So he went down to Joppa, found a ship that was going to Tarshish, paid the fare, and boarded it to go with them to Tarshish away from the presence of the LORD.*

4 However, the LORD hurled a great wind on the sea and there was a great storm on the sea, so that the ship was about to break up. 5 Then the sailors became afraid and every man cried out to his god, and they hurled the cargo which was in the ship into the sea to lighten it for them.

But Jonah had gone below into the stern of the ship, had lain down, and fallen sound asleep. 6 So the captain approached him and said, "How is it that you are sleeping? Get up, call on your god! Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not perish."

7 And each man said to his mate, "Come, let's cast lots so that we may find out on whose account this catastrophe has struck us." So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Tell us, now! On whose account has this catastrophe struck us? What is your occupation, and where do you come from? What is your country, and from what people are you?" 9 So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew, and I fear the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land."

10 Then the men became extremely afraid, and they said to him, "How could you do this?" For the men knew that he was fleeing from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. 11 So they said to him, "What should we do to you so that the sea will become calm for us?"— for the sea was becoming increasingly stormy. 12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and hurl me into the sea. Then the sea will become calm for you, because I know that on account of me this great storm has come upon you." 13 However, the men rowed desperately to return to land, but they could not, because the sea was becoming even stormier against them. 14 Then they cried out to the LORD and said, "We earnestly pray, O LORD, do not let us perish on account of this man's life, and do not put innocent blood on us; for You, LORD, have done as You pleased."

15 So they picked up Jonah and hurled him into the sea, and the sea stopped its raging. 16 Then the men became extremely afraid of the LORD, and they offered a sacrifice to the LORD and made vows.

17 And the LORD designated a great fish to swallow Jonah, and Jonah was in the stomach of the fish for three days and three nights.

Jonah was called to bring a warning of God's impending wrath to Nineveh, a key city to the Assyrians, a growing threat to Israel. Not wanting to see his enemies spared from judgment, Jonah disobeyed God, abandoned his calling and fled to Tarshish, as far from God's calling as he could go.

While Jonah was on the boat, God sent a storm so fierce that the seasoned sailors on board were terrified. After trying every way they could think of to navigate the storm, the men threw Jonah overboard, praying that Jonah's God would spare them. As Jonah floundered in the sea, God prepared a big fish to come and swallow the disobedient

prophet. From the belly of the fish, Jonah cried out in repentance to God and recognized that "salvation belonged to the Lord" and that He could save whomever He so chooses, whether it be the Ninevites or Jonah himself.

Consider the following:

1. No one is beyond God's grace. Jonah was a prophet during the reign of King Jeroboam II, meaning he likely would have been aware of the prophet Amos and his prophecies concerning Israel's coming destruction (Amos 5:27 and 6:14). Though not explicitly mentioned in Amos, from the context, it's likely that the people, Jonah included, would have known or assumed that it was the Assyrians who would destroy them. *The Holman Bible Dictionary* dedicates multiple paragraphs to the Assyrian's legendary brutality and cruelty and how they "were known to impale their enemies on stakes in front of their towns and hang their heads from trees in the king's gardens. They also tortured their captives—men, women, or children—by hacking off noses, ears, or fingers, gouging out their eyes or tearing off their lips and hands. They reportedly covered the city wall with the skins of their victims."[14]

With the knowledge that this was the likely fate of Israel, Jonah's stubborn refusal to warn them of God's judgment is a little more understandable. However, it's still unwarranted because no one deserves to be spared God's judgment. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 lists a myriad of sins to illustrate that point. The beautiful thing is that it ends with the encouraging line "such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." We should take comfort in knowing that no one—not you or me, not Jonah or the Ninevites who committed such heinous acts of violence—are ever too far gone to be saved by the grace God offers freely.

2. God can use anyone and anything to draw people to Himself. As Jonah slept in the hold, the ship's crew did everything in their power to survive the massive storm, including throwing the ship's valuable cargo overboard and crying out to all the gods they knew. They came pleading to the angry prophet for help. After a brief explanation that he was fleeing the presence of the "LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land," the sailors became increasingly afraid

and seemed to acknowledge that Jonah's God was the only true God. They quickly abandoned their idols and cried out to God for salvation, offering sacrifices and making vows. Sometimes we judge people based on their lifestyle, appearance, attitude, nationality, or occupation and assume that they wouldn't be interested in hearing the gospel. We fear that they may be antagonistic or that we might not be able to think of the right things to say. The sailors' miraculous change in attitude and belief after such a short explanation from Jonah is evidence of how little it takes because it's God—not us—who's responsible for saving people. God can use anything—a storm, a reluctant prophet, and a few short words—to bring people to himself. Who in your life is a "sailor" whom you may be reluctant to share your faith with?

3. God's faithfulness remains, even when we are disobedient. Jonah was so committed to fleeing God's presence that he was willing to go to Tarshish, the farthest known city from Nineveh that it was possible to go. One might assume that for his disobedience God would have been justified in abandoning him. Jonah could have died in the storm, drowned in the sea, or been digested by the big fish. But God never casts him aside. God is faithful even when His servants are faithless. God will punish the disobedient or intervene dramatically to get their attention, but He never abandons or leaves them because salvation belongs to Him.

Jonah hated the people of Nineveh and ran when God commanded him to warn them of His impending judgment. His actions cost him; he was thrown overboard and swallowed by a big fish. Messianic scholar Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum astutely pointed out that the Hebrew word for "prepared" means to assign, to count, to appoint, or to commission. He goes on to say "the fish was appointed to swallow Jonah. The paradox is that Jonah, a rational being, failed his commission, while the fish, an irrational creature, fulfilled its own."[15] Like Jonah, we can flee our commission but we serve a God who relentlessly pursues sinful people, offering salvation freely to all — whether a disobedient prophet or the people of a sinful city and who will accomplish his purpose one way or another.

Point to Ponder

"Anytime we run from God, down is the only way to go."[16] — Nancy Guthrie

From Learning to Living

Do you ever feel reluctant to share the gospel with someone? Sometimes we hesitate to share our faith because, like Jonah, we dislike the person. More often though, our reluctance comes from a lack of confidence because we feel unprepared or unsure what to say. 1 Peter 2:15 encourages us to always be ready to share about the hope that is within us. One way to gain confidence is to develop a 30-second testimony. Start by writing your salvation story. Then whittle it down to the key details: where you were before Him, how He saved you, and what that means for you now. As you prepare, you'll find your confidence increases and your personal story will become a tool for glorifying God and sharing the gospel!

Prayer Point

God, we are all sinful and broken creatures in need of Your salvation. Thank You for relentlessly pursuing us even when we flee from You, whether in ignorance or willful disobedience. Teach us to love others as You have loved us. Give us hearts to reflect that love to those around us, even those who don't deserve it—as You loved us when we didn't deserve it.

LESSON 97
Jonah Part Two

Imagine your worst enemy winning the lottery. In the past, this enemy has wronged you, mocked you, and hurt your friends. Then, after winning the lottery, imagine your enemy receiving total forgiveness, a fresh start, and a second chance from your friend group. To make matters worse, your best friend texts a picture on vacation with this enemy to celebrate their big win. You weren't invited. How would you feel? Furious? Confused? Hurt? That's exactly where we find Jonah in this story—watching Nineveh, Israel's brutal enemy, receive God's mercy instead of His judgment.

Most people remember Jonah because a great fish swallowed him. Jonah's reaction to God's mercy, though, forms the real climax of the story. When Nineveh repented, Jonah didn't celebrate. Instead, he sulked. Like Job, God directly challenged Jonah's perspective and cultural assumptions by speaking to him audibly. This story challenges us to examine our own hearts and whether we view our enemies and members of other cultures the way God does.

Key Scripture

Jonah 3-4 (NASB) *3 Now the word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, the great city, and proclaim to it the proclamation which I am going to tell you." 3 So Jonah got up and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord. Now Nineveh was [a] an exceedingly large city, a three days' walk. 4 Then Jonah began to go through the city one day's walk; and he cried out and said, "Forty more days, and Nineveh will be overthrown."*

5 Then the people of Nineveh believed in God; and they called a fast and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 When the word reached the king of Nineveh, he got up from his throne, removed his robe from himself, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the [b] dust. 7 And he issued a proclamation, and it said, "In Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles: No person, animal, herd, or flock is to taste anything. They are not to eat, or drink water. 8 But every person and animal must be covered with sackcloth; and people are to call on

God vehemently, and they are to turn, each one from his evil way, and from the violence which is in their hands. 9 Who knows, God may turn and relent, and turn from His burning anger so that we will not perish." 10 When God saw their deeds, that they turned from their evil way, then God relented of the disaster which He had declared He would [c]bring on them. So He did not do it.

4 But it greatly displeased Jonah, and he became angry. 2 Then he prayed to the Lord and said, "Please Lord, was this not [a]what I said when I was still in my own country? Therefore in anticipation of this I fled to Tarshish, since I knew that You are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in mercy, and One who relents of disaster. 3 So now, Lord, please take my [b]life from me, for death is better to me than life." 4 But the Lord said, "Do you have a good reason to be angry?"

5 Then Jonah left the city and sat down east of [c]it. There he made a shelter for himself and sat under it in the shade, until he could see what would happen in the city. 6 So the Lord God designated a [d]plant, and it grew up over Jonah to be a shade over his head, to [e]relieve him of his discomfort. And Jonah [f]was overjoyed about the plant. 7 But God designated a worm when dawn came the next day, and it attacked the plant and it withered. 8 And when the sun came up God designated a scorching east wind, and the sun beat down on Jonah's head so that he became faint, and he begged with all his soul to die, saying, "Death is better to me than life!"

9 But God said to Jonah, "Do you have a good reason to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "I have good reason to be angry, even to the point of death!" 10 Then the Lord said, "You had compassion on the plant, for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which [g]came up overnight and perished [h]overnight. 11 Should I not also have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 people, who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left, as well as many animals?"

Jonah learned the hard way that running from God is futile, and he begrudgingly obeyed God's command to preach judgment to Nineveh. Shockingly, the Ninevites repented. Instead of rejoicing, however, Jonah grew furious. He wanted Nineveh's destruction, not its salvation. God rebuked Jonah's lack of love in the last sentence of the book, "Should I not also have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 people, who do not know the difference between their right hand and their left, as well as many animals?" These chapters force us to wrestle with the depth of God's

compassion and our own struggles with amazing grace.

Consider the following:

1. God's Mercy is Boundless. Nineveh, the chief city of the Assyrian Empire, had a well-earned reputation for wickedness, brutality, violence, and cruelty toward Israel and other nations. Tim Keller notes, "The Assyrians have been called a 'terrorist state.'"[17] Yet Jonah delivered a brief sermon—only five words in Hebrew—and the entire city and its king respond with overwhelming repentance. Scholars debate why Nineveh turned so quickly to God. Some suggest natural disasters or astronomical signs prepared them for Jonah's message. Because Jonah doesn't provide us with those details, we may never know. We do know this story echoes in Jesus' parable of the Prodigal Son found in Luke 15:11-32. In that parable, a wayward son squandered his inheritance on reckless living but was welcomed back with open arms by his loving father. His older brother resented the father's act of mercy, believing his faithfulness should have earned him greater favor. While human nature creates tribalism and a desire for personal justice, God delights in saving even the worst sinners. Consider the thief on the cross next to Jesus or the sinners and tax collectors He called friends. Do you struggle to believe that God's grace could extend to those you dislike or even hate? Who in your life do you need to forgive?

2. Obedience Trumps Presentation. Although we're not told specifically, I imagine Jonah delivered his sermon halfheartedly, not expecting anything to change. Read his message again, "Forty more days, and Nineveh will be overthrown." (Jonah 3:4) Jonah must have been amazed that his brief sermon led to a revival in Nineveh! Jonah learned that the effectiveness of God's message doesn't rely on the messenger's eloquence or enthusiasm but on God's power to save. This principle can be seen in Acts 2:14-41 where Peter's straightforward, Spirit-empowered sermon resulted in about 3,000 people being saved in a single day. These Bible stories should encourage us that our role is to faithfully share God's message, trusting Him for the outcome. Have you ever hesitated to share your faith, fearing you might not have the right words? God works powerfully through simple obedience.

3. Jonah Struggles with God's Character. Jonah's extreme reaction to Nineveh's repentance—preferring death over their salvation—

reveals a profound human struggle with God. If we're honest, God sometimes disappoints us. Jonah certainly knew God was gracious. Jonah quoted Exodus 34:6, acknowledging God as "gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love," yet he resents this compassion when extended to Israel's enemies. Consider Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16). In the story, the laborers grew upset with the landowner's generosity toward latecomers. The landowner paid the workers that started later in the day the same wages as those who worked all day. Jesus used that parable to challenge human understandings of justice and grace. In *The Prodigal Prophet*, Tim Keller discusses Jonah's struggle with God's mercy toward the Ninevites. Keller notes that Jonah's anger ultimately stemmed from blindness to his own sinfulness and need for grace. Keller writes, "Unless Jonah can see his own sin, and see himself as living wholly by the mercy of God, he will never understand how God can be merciful to evil people and still be just and faithful."[18]

4. God's View Is Bigger Than Ours. In Jonah 4, God used a plant to teach Jonah about mercy and compassion. Jonah basked when a plant provided him with shade but grew angry when it withered. God then contrasted Jonah's concern for a plant with his cold, uncaring attitude toward the fate of Nineveh, a city of over 120,000 people. Jonah only cared about himself while God's view included the lost Ninevites. In Matthew 9:36, Jesus demonstrated God's deep compassion for people, seeing them as "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." Do we, like Jonah, ever prioritize personal comfort over the well-being of others?

Jonah's story ends with a cliffhanger. God asks Jonah a pointed question…but we never hear Jonah's answer. We don't know if he ever changed his attitude, but we can guess that he did. He likely wrote the book of Jonah, after all. The question remains for us: Will we embrace God's heart for the lost, or will we stay stuck in a loop of self-pity and fear?

Point to Ponder

God's grace is bigger than our grudges. —Jeremy Smith, Crosspoint Church

From Learning to Living

Jonah had a double standard. Jonah wanted mercy for himself and His people but judgment for Nineveh. Think about someone in your life who needs to experience God's mercy. Maybe it's a difficult coworker, a family member who has hurt you, or someone else you find hard to love. This week, take a step toward reflecting God's heart for this person. Pray for them—not just that they would change but that you would see them through God's eyes. Look for a practical way to show kindness by serving them, encouraging them, or just by spending time with them. Mercy isn't just something we receive. It's something we should extend to a world that "does not know the difference between their right hand and their left."

Prayer Point

Father, soften my heart to reflect Yours. When You show mercy, help me to rejoice rather than to resist. When You bless others—even those I struggle to love—help me to celebrate instead of criticize. Give me the courage to extend Your grace to those who persecute me. Change my heart, Lord, so that I see others the way You see them. Amen.

LESSON 98
The Fall of the Northern Kingdom

Have you ever tried to cook a meal with a child following you around? If you have, you may have spent more time warning them about things in the kitchen than actually cooking. "Don't touch the stove, it's hot." "Watch your fingers, this knife is sharp." You warn them over and over because you have their best interest in mind and know their carelessness could cause them harm. While there are some cautious kids who may instinctively listen to you, most will likely learn things the hard way.

Throughout Israel's history, God had been like a parent, patiently warning His children that their actions would have consequences if they didn't obey Him. When they refused to listen, He sent judges, prophets, priests, and kings to warn them of the danger. They may have repented a few times, but they ultimately remained stubbornly committed to the actions that would have hurt them. Now after centuries of warning, the Israelites would finally suffer the full consequence of their rebellion. Pay attention to how the passages below describe Israel's unfaithfulness and downfall.

Key Scripture

2 Kings 17:6-8, 18-20, 27-33 (NASB) *6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and led the people of Israel into exile to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.*

7 Now this came about because the sons of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God, who had brought them up from the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt; and they had feared other gods. 8 They also followed the customs of the nations whom the LORD had driven out from the sons of Israel, and in the customs of the kings of Israel which they had introduced.

[These customs primarily included the worship of false gods by erecting altars in every town, praying to idols, and sacrificing their sons and daughters. When God sent prophets to confront them and help them turn

back to God, they ignored them.]

18 So the LORD was very angry with Israel, and He removed them from His sight; no one was left except the tribe of Judah. 19 Judah did not keep the commandments of the LORD their God either, but they followed the customs which Israel had introduced. 20 So the LORD rejected all the descendants of Israel and afflicted them and handed them over to plunderers, until He had cast them out of His sight.

[Once the land was conquered, the king of Assyria removed most of the native Israelites and filled it with their enemies: people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and Sepharvaim. However, since the people did not know God or how to worship Him, He sent lions among them.]

27 Then the king of Assyria issued commands, saying, "Take one of the priests there whom you led into exile, and have him go and live there; and have him teach them the custom of the God of the land." 28 So one of the priests whom they had led into exile from Samaria came and lived in Bethel, and taught them how they were to fear the LORD.

29 But every nation was still making gods of its own, and they put them in the houses of the high places which the people of Samaria had made, every nation in their cities in which they lived. 30 The men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, the men of Cuth made Nergal, the men of Hamath made Ashima, 31 and the Avvites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites were burning their children in the fire to Adrammelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. 32 They also feared the LORD and appointed from their entire population priests of the high places, who acted for them in the houses of the high places. 33 They feared the LORD, yet they were serving their own gods in accordance with the custom of the nations from among whom they had been taken into exile.

Recommended reading: 2 Kings 17:1-23, 20:20 and 2 Chronicles 5:25-26

God spent years patiently warning Israel that their sin would lead to disastrous consequences. In 1 Kings 14:15 He warned: "For the LORD will strike Israel, just as a reed is shaken in the water; and He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the Euphrates River, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the Lord to anger." Yet, despite clear warnings like these and the pleading of prophets like Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and many others, Israel fell into the familiar pattern we've seen so many times. The people insisted on

chasing what was right in their own eyes.

Now, after 209 years under the leadership of 20 evil kings, Israel finally faced the consequences of their actions. In his commentary on 2 Kings, Bible teacher Thomas Constable noted: "For these sins the LORD was very angry with the Israelites and removed them from His sight. He did not abandon them completely, because of His promises to their forefathers (e.g., Gen. 12:1-3), but He drove them out of His land."[19]

Consider the following:

1. Sin empties; God's word fills. The Bible doesn't specify how many Israelites were taken into captivity, but the text makes it clear that it seemed to be the majority of those living in the Northern Kingdom. It seemed that Assyria's goal was to completely erase their identity as they took the Israelites from their homes and sent them to assimilate in cities across their empire or into slavery. Ancient Assyrian records indicate that from the city of Samaria alone, they forced 29,290 Israelites into forced labor.[20] Tragically, these efforts worked, and the northern ten tribes assimilated into the surrounding nations, having lost their national identity as God's chosen people.

The writer of 2 Kings listed 24 sins that the Israelites committed that caused such a harsh punishment, including worshiping false gods like stars, calves, Baals, and Asherim, defiling themselves by pursuing vanity, and selling themselves to further pursue their sins. The author further noted that all these sins caused them to become "*empty*." (2 Kings 17:15) In fact, this is the same word used in the opening of Ecclesiastes when Solomon lamented that everything was meaningless. Persistent sin causes us to become spiritually hollow, empty, completely devoid of meaning or purpose. Thankfully, the Bible provides a clear antidote by encouraging us to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect." (Rom 12:2) When we dwell on God's Word, we become full, and good and acceptable things flow out from us.

2. God refuses to compete. Once the Northern kingdom was conquered, the Assyrians filled the land with Israel's enemies which included people from Babylon, Cuthah, Avva, Hamath, and

Sepharvaim. These newcomers, along with a small remnant of Israelites, didn't know or understand the spiritual heritage of the land they were living in and continued to seek out false gods. In response, God sent lions to terrorize the inhabitants. The Assyrian leaders recognized the lions as divine judgment and sent Israelite priests back into the land in an attempt to teach the people how to worship the one true God. However, the people were too stubborn and instead of turning from their sinful practices, they simply added the worship of God into their other religious practices.

The Bible warns us on multiple occasions (Ex. 20:3, Deut. 16:14, 1 Cor. 10:20, Col. 2:18-23) that we can't serve both God and something else. Yet, like the Israelites that were left in the land, we often simply *add* God to the other things we worship. We add God plus our favorite political leader as the solution for economic or cultural success. We add God plus certain lifestyle choices for health and longevity. We add God plus works for assurance of our salvation. However, as He makes clear throughout Scripture, God doesn't want to compete with anything else. He is longing for us and calling us to follow Him with our whole selves. Are you answering His call?

God was patient with his people and sought every opportunity to extend them grace. Writing in his book *Kingdom of Priests*, Eugene Merrill noted: "it is a wonder that either nation [Israel or Judah] lasted as long as it did. One must conclude with the prophets that it was possible only because of the patient mercy of a loving God who remembered his covenant promises, though his people had forgotten theirs."[21]

Point to Ponder

"God is patient with the wicked so that He may show mercy to the repentant." - St. Augustine

From Learning to Living

Today, we may not have prophets to warn us about the consequences of our sin, but we do have something better—the indwelling Holy Spirit. However, like Israel, we can become callous to sin and harden our hearts until it becomes difficult or impossible to hear God's warnings. Make sure you're regularly asking God to soften your heart so you don't have to wait until discipline is the only way you can hear His voice.

Prayer Point

Lord, thank You for stories like this, where Your patience and grace are so evident. We know that without Your long-suffering, we would all be lost. Help us to rest in Your grace and walk in faithfulness. Amen.

LESSON 99

Isaiah Part 1: Chapters 1-39

Do you have room for a Bible that has verses that will scare you? I have always felt a shiver go through me when I read Matthew 7:21-23. In these verses Jesus warned that there will be those who looked, did, and said the things they hoped would make them "heaven worthy." To hear these words of Jesus is deeply frightening to me: "I never knew you; depart from me you workers of lawlessness." Am I someone who is trying to earn God's favor by looking and acting like a believer? Do I run the risk of Jesus' rejection? How many pretenders of the faith are there?

As you read the first 39 chapters of Isaiah you will encounter a people who at times followed God with their all and at other times did not. Isaiah has been chosen by God to warn the people of the judgment to come for those who think looking the part of a true follower is enough.

[Isaiah was born into a wealthy and influential family. Isaiah's prophetic ministry was one of the longest in the Old Testament. Isaiah translated means, "the Lord saves." Isaiah was commissioned by God to point out the coming Messiah and the waywardness of the people.]

Key Scripture

Judgment and Hope for Jerusalem (Isaiah 1-12)

"Come now, and let us reason together," says the LORD, "Though your sins are as scarlet, They will be as white as snow; Though they are like red crimson, They will be like wool." (Isaiah 1:18)

"What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done for it? Why when I expected it to produce good grapes did it produce worthless ones?" (Isaiah 5:4)

Then I said, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips; And I live among a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts." (Isaiah 6:5)

"Therefore the LORD Himself will give you a sign: Behold, a virgin will be with child and bear a son, and she will call His name Immanuel." (Isaiah 7:14)

[Starting with the plea to come and reason together, the prophet began to paint a picture of the current state of Judah. Judah had been given the very best by God as revealed in the parable of the vineyard in chapter 5. Despite the failure of the vineyard to produce a crop, the prophet revealed the loving heart of God as he prophesized about the coming Savior in chapter 7, chapter 9 and chapter 11. Concluding this section is a hymn of praise in chapter 12.]

Proclamation Against the Nations (Isaiah 13-23)

"This is the plan devised against the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out against all the nations. For the LORD of hosts has planned, and who can frustrate it? And as for His stretched-out hand, who can turn it back?" (Isaiah 14:27)

[Chapters 13-23 are a warning of the wrath of God to come against several nations. Each nation had its own sins, but the judgment of the Lord is consistent, and no kingdom or king can stop it.]

Coming Judgment and Tribulation (Isaiah 24-27)

"Behold, the LORD lays the earth waste, devastates it, distorts its surface, and scatters its inhabitants." (Isaiah 24:1)

"O LORD, Thou art my God; I will exalt Thee, I will give thanks to Thy name; For Thou has worked wonders, Plans formed long ago, with perfect faithfulness." (Isaiah 25:1)

"The steadfast of mind Thou will keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in Thee." (Isaiah 26:3)

[Chapters 24-27 speak of the coming tribulation. Although the imagery is devastating and severe, the promises of the Lord are greater. His plans will come to pass, and His mercy and wrath will be marvelous.]

Woes and Blessings (Isaiah 28-35)

Woe to Samaria (chapter 28)

Woe to Judah (chapter 29)

"Then the Lord said, 'Because this people draw near with their words and honor Me with their lip service, but they remove their hearts from Me, and their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,

therefore behold, I will once again deal marvelously with this people, wondrously marvelous; And the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the discernment of their discerning men shall be concealed." (Isaiah 29:13-14)

[In chapters 28-35, we see the laying of the cornerstone of our faith and the hypocrisy of the people of Judah.]

History Recalled (Isaiah 36-39)

"Then Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the LORD…". (Isaiah 38:2)

"Go and say to Hezekiah, 'Thus says the LORD, the God of your father David, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; behold, I will add fifteen years to your life." (Isaiah 38:5)

Recommended Reading: Isaiah 1-39

The people of Judah in our study experienced times of revival and times of rebellion. God showed his faithfulness as He called the people to Him and offered mercy. The people, however, remained far from Him and worshiped him only with their lips. (Is. 29:13-14) Isaiah was given the task of outlining for these people the trouble to come upon them because of their rebellion. God will not be fooled by empty religious practices intended to replace true worship.

Consider the following:

1. God expects fruit from our following of Him. God has given us all we need to be fruitful for His kingdom, and He expects us to be so. (Isaiah 5:1-7) I wonder in this time of extreme entitlement if you and I as followers of Jesus understand His expectation of fruit producing? The parable in Isaiah 5 speaks of a vineyard that only produced bitter, evil fruit. The description of the vineyard is one of being planted on a fertile hill, planted with the choicest vine, and supplied with a wine vat. When the vineyard only produces bad grapes, the question is asked, "What more was there to do for My vineyard that I have not done in it?" The parable is to put Judah on notice that by not producing good fruit God will now deal harshly with the people. My life verse is John 15:16. "You did not choose Me, but I chose you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain, that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give to you." Bearing

fruit is not an option for the believer but rather an expectation. Just as Isaiah called out the people in the parable of the vineyard for only producing bad grapes, so also will we, the followers of God today, be held to account for what we produce in and through our lives.

2. Isaiah teaches that despite our wayward ways God has called us to come and reason with Him. (Isaiah 1:18). How a sinless God can invite a sinner to receive forgiveness will always be a mystery to me. I know my sins and the way my heart strays, and yet He wants me to come to Him? A couple of my favorite hymns express this marvelous mystery. Charles Wesley wrote,

"And can it be that I should gain
An interest in the Savior's blood
Died He for me, who caused His pain?
For me, who Him to death pursued?
Amazing love! How can it be?
That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?"

Horatio G. Spafford wrote, "It Is Well with My Soul." The third verse goes like this:

"My sin – oh the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, praise the Lord!"

Like David in Psalm 51:3, "…my sin is ever before me." When Isaiah penned that God is calling a sinner like me to come and reason with Him, I know the amazing love of God. Like the hymn writer, I can't comprehend that the whole of my sin was nailed to the cross, and I'm free of the penalty of it because of His forgiveness.

3. Isaiah answered the call to go for Him. Uncle Sam may want you, but almighty God calls you. Isaiah is brought into the presence of God, and the account is soul stirring—ministering beings, worship, a booming voice, and the temple filling with smoke. My soul stirs at the description and my sinful self is afraid like Isaiah. And then the cleansing coal applied reminds me of God's love. Have I responded like Isaiah? "Here I am. Send me." (Isaiah 6:8).

Isaiah delivered the message of God's coming judgment to an unrepentant people. In pulpits today, many a preacher asks the listener to ready themselves for the return of Christ and the ensuing judgment. Will we the listener heed the warning, or will we like those who ignored Isaiah's words fall into the hands of a righteous God? Isaiah foretold the coming of the Savior, but I fear many still are trying to save themselves. I ask you to consider your readiness to face your creator.

Point to Ponder

Isaiah knew that to encounter the Holy God demanded a response, not only one of humbleness but one of willingness. God has chosen those he redeemed to spread the message of His love. Charles Spurgeon wrote in his commentary on Isaiah 6, "How shall the precious drops of blood be made available to redeem the souls of men, unless loving lips shall go for us to claim by right those who have been redeemed by the blood?" Will I go when He calls?

From Learning to Living

In order to grow anything, we need all the right ingredients and conditions. In Christ we have been given all we need to grow and produce a good crop. We would do well to remember that religion will never create the right conditions in our soul for the growth God requires. God's salvation, grace , mercy, and lovingkindness are the ingredients for a fruitful life. If a farmer has all the right ingredients and conditions to produce a good crop, he must plant the seed to see the harvest. Are we planting the seed of faith? What is stopping us? May I suggest that the answer is "fear." When fear is met with faith, faith always wins. What will you do to place your faith ahead of your fear? Remember, "without faith it is impossible to please God." (Heb. 11:6)

Prayer Point

God, let me always answer, "here I am, send me." Give me faith where today I have fear. Let me be quick to reason with You when I sin. And let me produce for You fruit that will stand the test of time.

LESSON 100

Isaiah Part 2: The Messiah Foretold

When we first pick up a book, most of us will immediately turn it over and look at the description on the back so we can learn what it's about. We may even read the table of contents, flip through the pages, or read the section headers as we try to find out what direction the author might take or what information they may try to convey. Some people even read the ending of books before they commit to the entire story. All books have clear chapters, beginnings, and endings that a reader can follow, and the Bible is no different.

In fact, authors often use literary tools like foreshadowing, symbolism, allegory, and more to hint at what will happen next in the story. And although the Bible is made up of 66 separate books, it is truly one complete story. God, the Author, uses those same tools to lead us to the ending.

Today, we're going to unpack some of the hints and headlines that God uses in the book of Isaiah—foreshadowing that plays a crucial role in the Bible's unfolding story: the coming of Jesus, God's promised Redeemer.

Key Scripture

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NASB) *For a Child will be born to us, a Son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace. 7 There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness From then on and forevermore.*

Isaiah 11:1-10 *Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, And a Branch from his roots will bear fruit. 2 The Spirit of the LORD will rest on Him, The spirit of wisdom and understanding, The spirit of counsel and strength, The spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. 3 And He will delight in the fear of the LORD, And He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make decisions by what His ears hear; 4 But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the humble of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His*

mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. 5 Also righteousness will be the belt around His hips, And faithfulness the belt around His waist. 6 And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, And the leopard will lie down with the young goat, And the calf and the young lion and the fattened steer will be together; And a little boy will lead them. 7 Also the cow and the bear will graze, Their young will lie down together, And the lion will eat straw like the ox. 8 The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. 9 They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea. 10 Then on that day The nations will resort to the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a signal flag for the peoples; And His resting place will be glorious.

Isaiah 53: 1-12 *He was crushed for our wrongdoings; The punishment for our well-being was laid upon Him, And by His wounds we are healed. 6 All of us, like sheep, have gone astray, Each of us has turned to his own way; But the LORD has caused the wrongdoing of us all To fall on Him. 7 He was oppressed and afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment He was taken away; And as for His generation, who considered That He was cut off from the land of the living For the wrongdoing of my people, to whom the blow was due? 9 And His grave was assigned with wicked men, Yet He was with a rich man in His death, Because He had done no violence, Nor was there any deceit in His mouth. 10 But the LORD desired To crush Him, causing Him grief; If He renders Himself as a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, And the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand. 11 As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, For He will bear their wrongdoings.12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the plunder with the strong, Because He poured out His life unto death, And was counted with wrongdoers; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the wrongdoers.*

Recommended Reading: Isaiah 7:14, 9:6-7, 11:1-10, 42:1-9, 50:4-9, 52:13- 53:12, and 61:1-3

You've likely heard these verses before or even included lines from them on your Christmas cards. Since we have the benefit of having the whole Bible, we recognize that these passages refer to something the original readers and even Isaiah himself could never have imagined: God Himself would take on flesh, be born, and die on our behalf.

As we read these verses, however, there does seem to be an important detail that we find missing in the Gospels—a coming future kingdom with Jesus on a literal throne. Many of these prophetic passages can be grouped into two categories. Some were fulfilled at Jesus' first coming, when He appeared as the "suffering servant" who was "pierced for our transgressions" and rose again in power. Others point ahead to what *will* happen when He returns to reign forever, just as God promised David in 2 Samuel 7.

Consider the following:

1. The suffering servant. Remember, Isaiah is writing before and during the fall of the kingdom of Judah. The people of God would be questioning their status as His chosen nation and wondering what comes next. That's when the reader is introduced to the character of God's servant, someone who would come, suffer, and take responsibility for the sins of His people. This servant will fulfill God's mission and accomplish what the nation of Israel was supposed to do—be a light for God to the other nations. *The Moody Handbook of Messianic Prophecy* points out that only God Himself could be the servant: "The name [servant] highlights the majesty of God in spite of the fallen human race and the darkened creation. All else seems to have been affected by evil but God. He remains sovereign over all creation and covenant partner with Israel. His word is true. His power is sufficient, to be trustworthy in spite of the evil world."[22] The Israelites in captivity would have seen this coming servant as a reminder of God's faithfulness despite their situation, and they would look towards a day where this servant would lead them out of captivity back into the promised land.

To those of us in the Church, the message is the same, we see Christ as our example of someone who is sufficient and worthy of our faith and trust. God is calling all of us to follow the servant, Jesus Christ, who came and died to save us all and miraculously rose again.

2. The Davidic King. As previously noted, many of these passages have not yet come to fruition because they talk about a time when a king will come to rule and reign forever. You may remember how, in 1 Samuel 7, God promised David that one day a king would come from his line to rule forever. The Jews in exile would also remember this promise and would be looking at their ruined kingdom and David's

destroyed dynasty doubting God's faithfulness to keep His promises. Isaiah 11:1-10 sought to answer their objections by saying, yes, the house of David has been cut down, but a shoot will rise from the stump and grow into a flourishing kingdom. The ruler of that kingdom will reign forever, and everyone will call him "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." Today, we see corruption in governments across the world. We may not be in literal exile, but like Israel we can look forward to a kingdom that doesn't come from the outworking of human hands and for a king who will rule with perfect peace, wisdom, and power.

From the very beginning of the Bible, God had promised a coming redeemer. He left signposts along the way, and the poems and prophecies in Isaiah are some of the clearest. They point to what Jesus has done, coming as a servant to suffer the consequences of our sin, and what He will do someday when He comes to rule and reign as King. Tim Mackie, founder of BibleProject, aptly summarized Isaiah by saying: "Jesus was that faithful king from the line of David. He was the one to whom this entire story had been pointing all along."[23]

Point to Ponder

"God is patient with the wicked so that He may show mercy to the repentant." - St. Augustine

From Learning to Living

Today, we may not have prophets to warn us about the consequences of our sin, but we do have something better—the indwelling Holy Spirit. However, like Israel, we can become callous to sin and harden our hearts until it becomes difficult or impossible to hear God's warnings. Make sure you're regularly asking God to soften your heart so you don't have to wait until discipline is the only way you can hear His voice.

Prayer Point

Lord, thank You for stories like this, where Your patience and grace are so evident. We know that without Your long-suffering, we would all be lost. Help us to rest in Your grace and walk in faithfulness. Amen.

LESSON 101
Hezekiah

An old Irish proverb says, "You need to do your own growing, no matter how tall your father was." This simple saying is more than a mantra encouraging you to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. On one hand, it's an encouragement that says change is possible, despite the poor hand you may have been dealt. And on the other hand, it's a warning that says your choices have consequences, and you may fail despite the opportunities you were given to succeed.

Life dealt King Hezekiah a terrible hand. Judah, his tiny nation, was about to be overrun by Assyria, the reigning superpower of the day. To make matters worse, the people God had called him to lead had broken their covenant with Him and were on the brink of divine punishment. Yet despite the odds, he became one of the most consequential kings in Judah's history—responsible for leading his people to stand up against their enemy and whose leadership inspired a spiritual revival.

Key Scripture

2 Kings 181:8; 19:14-15, 19; 20:1, 16-17, 19 (NASB) *18 Now it came about in the third year of Hoshea, the son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah became king. 2 He was twenty-five years old when he became king, and he reigned for twenty-nine years in Jerusalem (…) 3 He did what was right in the sight of the LORD, in accordance with everything that his father David had done. 4 He removed the high places and smashed the memorial stones to pieces, and cut down the Asherah. He also crushed to pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days the sons of Israel had been burning incense to it; and it was called Nehushtan. 5 He trusted in the LORD, the God of Israel; and after him there was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, nor among those who came before him. 6 For he clung to the LORD; he did not desist from following Him, but kept His commandments, which the LORD had commanded Moses.*

7 And the LORD was with him; wherever he went he was successful. And he revolted against the king of Assyria and did not serve him. 8 He

defeated the Philistines as far as Gaza and its territory, from watchtower to fortified city.

[Hezekiah's rebellion prompted the king of Assyria to attack Judah, seize key cities, and demand a ransom. He then sent messengers and a threatening letter, claiming God wouldn't save them. But Isaiah assured the people that God would miraculously deliver them.]

14 Then Hezekiah took the letter from the hand of the messengers and read it, and he went up to the house of the LORD and spread it out before the LORD. 15 Hezekiah prayed before the LORD and said, "LORD, God of Israel, enthroned above the cherubim, You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth … 19 But now, LORD our God, please, save us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You alone, LORD, are God."

[After Hezekiah prayed, the angel of the Lord slaughtered 185,000 Assyrians in one night, delivering Judah from certain destruction.]

20 In those days Hezekiah became mortally ill. And Isaiah the prophet, the son of Amoz, came to him and said to him, "This is what the LORD says: 'Set your house in order, for you are going to die and not live.'"

[Upon learning of his impending death, Hezekiah pleaded that God would extend his life. Graciously, God agreed to extend his life by 15 years. After his recovery, Hezekiah pridefully showed Babylonian officials all his wealth, prompting Isaiah to deliver this message.]

16 Then Isaiah said to Hezekiah, "Hear the word of the LORD: 17 'Behold, the days are coming when everything that is in your house, and what your fathers have stored up to this day, will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the LORD. 19 Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD which you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Is it not good, if there will be peace and security in my days?"

After Hezekiah's death, his son Manasseh succeeded him. Manasseh was the most wicked ruler Judah ever had—committing heinous acts and actively leading the people away from God. Miraculously, he eventually repented and was forgiven by God, but not before God declared that Judah would be destroyed for their sins.

Recommended Reading: 2 Kings 18–22, 2 Chronicles 29–33, Isaiah 36–39

When 25-year-old Hezekiah took the throne, he immediately set out to establish an identity separate from that of his evil father Ahaz.

Trusting God, Hezekiah instituted social and religious reforms. Twice we're told that Hezekiah "did right in the sight of the Lord" as he destroyed altars to false gods, established the Passover festival, restored worship in the temple, reformed the priesthood, and reinstated tithes, offerings, and sacrifices.

Because of his dedication and faithfulness, God blessed Hezekiah, miraculously saving his kingdom from annihilation by the Assyrians, sparing him from premature death, and granting him an immense fortune. Unfortunately, even great rulers fall short, and Hezekiah was no exception. When Babylonian officials visited, he pridefully showed off his vast wealth. The prophet Isaiah rebuked him, and God used it as a sobering reminder for why Judah would eventually be destroyed.

Consider the following:

1. God's Word can help you break the cycle of sin. Before Hezekiah, Judah had eleven other rulers, most of whom did "evil in the sight of the Lord." His father Ahaz was especially ungodly and walked in the ways of the evil kings of Israel (2 Kings 16:2–3). He promoted idolatry (2 Chr. 28:25), defiled and closed the temple (2 Chr. 28:24), and even sacrificed his own son, likely to the idol Molech (2 Kings 16:3). Yet, despite having been raised by this evil man, Hezekiah grew into one of the most Godly kings of Judah. How is this possible? Hezekiah prioritized God's Word and let it guide his decisions and expose his weaknesses. Hebrews 4:12 compares God's Word to a sword, and in the same way that a sword can cut and slice, the Word can cut and slice sin from our lives. God's Word was at work in Hezekiah's life and can work in yours too. It offers us the chance at a new life—one where we have freedom from the weight of our past traumas, poor upbringings, and social status.

2. Hezekiah prioritized himself in spite of his new life. In his biography on Walt Disney, author Bob Thomas recounted how a fortune teller once told Disney that he would die by the time he turned thirty-five, saying "the prediction had a profound effect on him…he seemed to be in a race against time to accomplish all the work he wanted to do." God had given Hezekiah a unique gift: knowledge of the exact day he was going to die. Fifteen years from when he was healed— no more, no less. Yet this countdown

didn't seem to spark any sort of urgency. He didn't spend his days preparing the people for the judgment he knew was coming. Instead he lived in luxury, pridefully showing off his wealth, relieved that he would escape God's judgment. As Dr. Micheal Rydelnik stated in *The Moody Bible Commentary*, "The peace and security that will characterize Hezekiah's lifetime seems to be Hezekiah's primary concern. His vision for God's ongoing activity amongst the people and the continuation of the Davidic dynasty is overshadowed by present concerns." While we haven't been given a countdown clock to our deaths, we too have been gifted an incredible new life. Are we spending our time wisely, sharing the freedom found in the gospel and calling others to repentance? Or are we simply content to ride out our remaining time focused solely on ourselves and our present concerns?

3. Hezekiah's comfort led to Manasseh's corruption. After Hezekiah's 15 years were up, his son Manasseh succeeded him. Manasseh would turn out to be the most wicked ruler in Judah's history, committing all the sins of his forefathers but with a disdain for God that included committing child sacrifices in the temple. Some extra-biblical sources claim that Manasseh even murdered the prophet Isaiah. As tradition goes, Manasseh hunted down God's prophets, the last of which to be found was Isaiah. As he fled Manasseh's soldiers, Isaiah sought shelter in a hollow tree. When Manasseh discovered where the prophet had hidden, he ordered the tree to be cut in half with the elderly prophet still inside.

We can speculate that perhaps Hezekiah's focus on his present circumstances or his relief of being spared judgement (2 Kings 20:19) led him to neglect his responsibilities as a parent. When we feel safe and comfortable, it's easy to become insular and neglect the needs of the people around us. Neglect today can easily turn into regret tomorrow. Who might be affected by the choices you're making—or avoiding—today?

Do you come from a background like King Hezekiah's where sin and bad decisions have beaten you down? Like Manasseh, have you made your own bad choices, even doing things that you feel are unforgivable? The amazing news is that no matter where you've come from, no matter your upbringing, no matter your past mistakes,

God is offering you a new life. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says that once you've placed your faith in Jesus, you are a "new creation," able to grow and move forward, free from your past.

Point to Ponder

"It is possible to be, basically, a faithful and fruitful servant of the living God in many areas and, yet, to fail miserably in some others." — D.A. Carson

From Learning to Living

Sometimes as Christians, we can become like Hezekiah—willing to trust and follow God but becoming complacent since we know how the story is going to end. We say true things like "This is my temporary home" or "I'm just passing through" but use them as a way to dismiss the direction we see the people in our families, city, or culture heading. 2 Corinthians 5:20 tells us that "we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us." As ambassadors, we should take every opportunity to be a light for Jesus and preach His death, burial, and resurrection despite our limited time on earth or the impending nature of Christ's return.

Prayer Point

Gracious Heavenly Father, thank You that You so freely forgive us and offer a new life! Help us not to squander that gift but to number our days. Let us not grow complacent but seek to take advantage of every opportunity to help others learn about the grace You extended to us.

LESSON 102
Josiah

In 1860 a young lawyer from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln, won the presidency of a deeply divided United States. At just 51 years old, he faced a nation on the brink of civil war, plagued by injustice and moral decay. Many doubted whether he had the experience or wisdom to lead, but Lincoln followed his convictions with unwavering determination. Bold decisions like the Emancipation Proclamation changed the course of American history. Though his life was cut short, his wise and ethical leadership has continued to inspire succeeding generations. Lincoln's story is incredible, but it pales in comparison to a boy who took the throne of a divided kingdom at just eight years old: Josiah, the young king of Judah.

Josiah's reign, recorded in 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35, restored the covenant relationship between God and His people, rebuilt the temple, and tore down the pagan worship sites that led God's people astray. Josiah's reign showed the impact a single person can have when fully committed to God. His leadership did not just result in outward religious reform. His godly governance transformed the hearts of the nation. Despite his righteousness, however, his life ended tragically early like Lincoln's. Ignoring a dire warning, he marched into battle against Pharaoh Neco and was fatally wounded. Though Josiah had ruled well, God had already declared Judah's fate: exile to Babylon. Even the most faithful leaders cannot undo the consequences of a nation's prolonged disobedience.

Key Scripture

Josiah's Early Reign (2 Kings 22:1-2, 2 Chronicles 34:1-3)

"Josiah was eight years old when he became king, and he reigned for thirty-one years in Jerusalem... He did what was right in the sight of the Lord and walked entirely in the way of his father David, and did not turn aside to the right or to the left." (2 Kings 22:1-2)

"For in the eighth year of his reign while he was still a youth, he began to seek the God of his father David; and in the twelfth year he began to

purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, the carved images, and the cast metal images." (2 Chronicles 34:3)

[Although the text doesn't say, most scholars believe the eight-year-old Josiah had the help of advisors or viziers that took care of the day-to-day affairs of state while the boy king grew under the tutelage of teachers such as Hilkiah the high priest.]

The Discovery of the Book of the Law (2 Kings 22:8-11, 2 Chronicles 34:14-19)

[During repairs on the temple, Hilkiah the high priest discovered the long-lost Book of the Law, likely the writings of Moses. When Josiah heard it read, he realized the depth of Judah's sin and responded with sorrow, tearing his clothes in grief.]

"Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, 'I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the Lord.' And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, who read it… Then Shaphan the secretary informed the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read from it in the presence of the king." (2 Kings 22:8,10)

"When the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes." (2 Chronicles 34:19)

[Josiah did not ignore God's Word but took it very seriously and sought guidance from the prophetess Huldah, who confirmed that God's judgment would come but assured Josiah that because of his humility the disaster would not occur in his lifetime. (See 2 Kings 22:11-20, 2 Chronicles 34:14-28)]

Covenant Renewal and National Reform (2 Kings 23:1-3, 2 Chronicles 34:29-33)

[Determined to lead his people back to God, Josiah gathered the entire nation and publicly read the Book of the Law. He made a solemn promise or covenant to follow the Lord, and the people joined him in this commitment.]

"And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments, His testimonies, and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people entered into the covenant." (2 Kings 23:3)

[Josiah immediately introduced thorough and uncompromising reforms. He removed every altar of pagan worship, destroyed shrines to false gods, and cleansed the land of spiritual corruption.]

The Greatest Passover Since Samuel's Time (2 Kings 23:21-23, 2 Chronicles 35:18-19)

[To restore true worship, Josiah reinstituted the Passover, ensuring it was observed exactly as prescribed in the Law. This Passover celebration was unparalleled in devotion and scale, surpassing even those held by David or Solomon.]

"There had not been celebrated a Passover like it in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; nor had any of the kings of Israel celebrated such a Passover as Josiah did." (2 Chronicles 35:18 NASB)

Josiah's Tragic End (2 Kings 23:28-30, 2 Chronicles 35:20-24)

[Despite his faithfulness, Josiah made a fatal mistake. When Pharaoh Neco of Egypt marched to battle at Carchemish, Josiah interfered despite Neco's warning that God had sent him. Disguising himself in battle, Josiah was fatally wounded by archers and died in Jerusalem. His death marked the beginning of Judah's final descent toward exile.]

"However, Josiah did not turn away from him, but disguised himself in order to fight against him; nor did he listen to the words of Neco from the mouth of God, but he came to engage him in battle on the plain of Megiddo. And the archers shot King Josiah, and the king said to his servants, 'Take me away, because I am severely wounded.' So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in the second chariot which he had, and brought him to Jerusalem where he died and was buried in the tombs of his fathers. All Judah and Jerusalem mourned for Josiah." (2 Chronicles 35:22-24)

Recommended reading: 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35

Josiah inherited a nation drowning in idolatry, plagued by injustice and spiritual apathy—a mess from the immoral kings before him. Instead of continuing their evil practices, Josiah followed God with an intensity that reshaped history. By the time he was 16 (the eighth year of his reign), he had pledged to pursue the Lord wholeheartedly. At 20 (the 12th year of his reign), he launched an aggressive campaign to rid the land of idols and false worship. But the true turning point came when he began repairing the temple at age 26 (the 18th year of his reign). During temple repairs, the high priest discovered a long-lost scroll, identified as "the Book of the Law", which many scholars believe was Deuteronomy. When Josiah heard it read aloud, he tore his robes in anguish, realizing just how far God's people had strayed from God's ideals. He acted decisively, leading Judah into a time of

repentance and reform. He restored true temple worship, renewed the covenant, and hosted a Passover celebration unmatched since the days of Samuel before his untimely death at the age of 39.

Consider the following:

1. Seeking God Wholeheartedly Leads to Revival. A man named Jeremiah began prophesying during the 13th year of Josiah's reign. Perhaps Josiah heard these words uttered firsthand, "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." (Jer 29:13) Josiah didn't wait for a crisis to turn to God. He started seeking God at a young age. His social and political reforms weren't knee-jerk reactions or impetuous outbursts but the wise outworkings of a heart fully committed to the Lord. Under Josiah, revival didn't start with government programs or policies; it started when Josiah himself sought God with his whole heart. In our lives today, that means prioritizing time with God, repenting of known sins, and actively removing distractions that pull our focus away from Him. Take a quick personal inventory of your life. Have wealth, status, or power subtly lured you into worshiping and seeking them instead of God? Like Josiah, we must intentionally seek Him first, and God will add the rest. (Matt 6:33) Attempts to revive a nation or to fix broken lives will never succeed if our hearts still pursue the world's pleasures and promises. Remember God's promise to Jeremiah: "You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."

2. God's Word Convicts. The defining moment of Josiah's reign came when the scroll of God's law was rediscovered in the temple. When he heard the words of the Law, his heart broke as he considered the gulf between Israel's covenant responsibilities and the spiritual state of the nation. His grief led to action, and all of Judah followed his lead. God's word often has that effect on the people who hear it. In Nehemiah 8:1-9, all Israel wept upon hearing the Law read aloud for the first time since before the Babylonian captivity. Hebrews 4:12 describes God's Word as "living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." This raises a convicting question: How seriously do we take God's Word? Have we grown numb to its convicting power? Scripture should shape our decisions, attitudes, and actions. If we

desire revival, both personally and corporately, we must return to the authority of God's Word.

3. Spiritual Leadership Requires Bold Action. Josiah didn't hesitate once he heard God's word. He tore down altars, smashed idols, removed corrupt priests, and turned Judah back to the Lord. He wasn't content with half-measures. Leadership in God's kingdom demands courage: the willingness to confront sin, make difficult decisions, and stand firm in truth. Josiah's reforms weren't popular with everyone, but he didn't let fear dictate his actions. As Thomas Constable notes, "Josiah was a strong influence for righteousness in his day and also a most capable ruler. The success of his sweeping reforms indicates that he had the ability to overcome strong popular opinion which undoubtedly opposed his convictions."[26] What about you? Are you willing to take bold steps in obedience to God, even when it's uncomfortable? Leadership isn't about holding a position, it's about influence. In our families, communities, and workplaces, every believer is called to be a spiritual leader who stands for truth. Bold action may mean lovingly confronting a friend about sin, choosing to confess a "little white lie," or standing firm in faith when pressured to compromise. True leadership is marked by unwavering obedience to God.

Josiah's life teaches us that revival starts with a personal commitment to seeking God, not external reforms that fail to change hearts. His response to discovering God's Word shows the power of Scripture to convict and transform hearts when taken seriously. Lastly, his story reminds us that obedience to God requires bold action, even when it is difficult or unpopular.

Point to Ponder

"Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" Psalm 85:6

From Learning to Living

Josiah didn't just hear God's Word. He responded. His life was marked by action, not complacency. We, too, are called to be bold doers of

the Word. (James 1:22) Are there areas in your life where you need to take a bold step of obedience? Maybe it's removing an idol, making a difficult decision, or admitting your mistakes. Whatever it is, don't delay—revival begins *within* you!

Prayer Point

Lord, give me a heart like Josiah's heart that seeks You fully, responds to Your Word, and takes bold action in obedience. Remove anything in my life that stands between me and You. Help me to lead by example and to be unafraid to stand for truth. Start a revival in me. Amen.

LESSON 103
Exiled to Babylon

Imagine standing at the edge of a hill overlooking the smoldering ruins of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Solomon's Temple, once gleaming limestone and gold, lies in ashes. The city walls are reduced to piles of rubble; the streets are littered with the wreckage of war and the bodies of those who couldn't escape. In the distance, Babylonian soldiers drag thousands of captives away in chains. You sense a seismic shift in the world order. A new era is beginning.

Jerusalem never woke from the living nightmare of ancient siege warfare. Desperate families held out for months against Nebuchadnezzar's final siege, but in the end, Babylon reduced Jerusalem to ruins. The fall didn't happen overnight, however. 2 Kings records Judah's slow political, spiritual, and moral erosion. For years, prophets like Jeremiah had warned of God's impending judgment, but Judah's kings refused to listen. But even after the city was reduced to ashes, a thread of hope remained, reminding us that God keeps His promises. Pay close attention to the details as you read these passages that chronicle the final days of Judah, the siege and destruction of Jerusalem, and the sorrow of the exiled Israelites. Through these scriptures, God teaches us about human nature, His amazing grace, and the scarlet thread of hope He wove through the scriptures.

Key Scripture

[After Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt and Assyria in the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C., the infamous Babylonian King laid siege to Jerusalem. The inhabitants of Jerusalem were cut off from their gardens, their livestock, and trade with other nations. Thousands of others from neighboring towns joined them only to be imprisoned behind Jerusalem's walls, forced to eke out a living in their own filth, awaiting destruction.]

2 Kings 24:1-17, 25:1-6 (NASB) *1 In his days, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant for three years; but then he turned and revolted against him. 2 And the Lord sent against him bands of Chaldeans, bands of Arameans, bands of Moabites, and bands*

of Ammonites. So He sent them against Judah to destroy it, in accordance with the word of the Lord which He had spoken through His servants the prophets. 3 It indeed came upon Judah at the command of the Lord, to remove them from His sight due to the sins of Manasseh, in accordance with everything that he had done, 4 and also for the innocent blood which he shed, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the Lord was unwilling to forgive. 5 Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and everything that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? 6 So Jehoiakim lay down with his fathers, and his son Jehoiachin became king in his place. 7 Now the king of Egypt did not come out of his land again, because the king of Babylon had taken everything that belonged to the king of Egypt from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates.

8 Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned for three months in Jerusalem. And his mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. 9 He did evil in the sight of the Lord, in accordance with all that his father had done. 10 At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon went up to Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. 11 And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it. 12 Then Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, his mother, his servants, his commanders, and his officials. So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign.

[Nebuchadnezzar collected a punishing tribute from Jehoiachin. Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon and left Jehoiachin on the throne of Judah. The uneasy truce was short-lived because Jehoiachin rebelled against Babylon by refusing to pay more tribute. Nebuchadnezzar returned in 597 B.C. and besieged and sacked Judah]

So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign. 13 He also brought out from there all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and he cut in pieces all the articles of gold which Solomon the king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, just as the Lord had said. 14 Then he led into exile all Jerusalem: all the commanders and all the valiant warriors, ten thousand exiles, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land.15 So he led Jehoiachin into exile to Babylon; also the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the leading men of the land, he led into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon.16 And all the men of courage, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, a thousand, all strong and fit for war, these the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon.17 Then the king of Babylon made his uncle Mattaniah king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah.

[Zedekiah mindlessly rebelled against the mighty king of Babylon in 586

B.C. so Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem and starved its inhabitants for two years.]

1 Now in the ninth year of his reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem; he camped against it and built a siege wall all around it.2 So the city was under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 3 On the ninth day of the fourth month the famine was so severe in the city that there was no food for the people of the land.4 Then the city was breached, and all the warriors fled by night by way of the gate between the two walls beside the king's garden, though the Chaldeans were all around the city. And they went by way of the Arabah. 5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued the king and overtook him in the desert plains of Jericho, and all his army was scattered from him. 6 Then they captured the king and brought him up to the king of Babylon at Riblah, and he passed sentence on him.

[Zedekiah watched in horror as Nebuchadnezzar ordered his men to kill his sons right in front of him. They blinded him and led him in shackles to Babylon. They burned Solomon's temple and razed the city to the ground. They carried craftsman, warriors, young nobles, and military officers into captivity, but left a group of downtrodden, impoverished Jews to care for the land. They murdered everyone else.]

21 (…)So Judah went into captivity, away from her land.

Recommended reading: 2 Chronicles 36, Jeremiah 52, Psalm 137

2 Kings 24–25 describes a series of invasions by Babylon, the capture of Jerusalem, and the successive deportations of its people. 2 Chronicles 36 and Jeremiah 52 provide parallel accounts, detailing the spiritual failures that led to Judah's downfall. Psalm 137 captures the raw emotion of the exiles mourning their lost homeland and grappling with their new reality in Babylon.

Consider the following:

1. The Consequences of Persistent Disobedience. Throughout their history, Judah had disobeyed God's commandments and turned to idolatry and injustice. In Jeremiah 25:4 the prophet expressed his frustration at the people's stubbornness, "These twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened." Contrary to popular perception, God's messengers like Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, and Jeremiah often prophesied God's grace, not his judgment. "Return to God," they pleaded. "End the injustice. Abandon your idols. Come

home." But God's people killed the prophets He sent. Obstinate kings burned their scrolls, imprisoned them, and worshipped foreign gods. Ultimately, Judah's persistent rebellion led to Babylon's conquest, the temple's destruction, and the people's exile. 2 Chronicles 36:16 painfully records, "They continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD rose against His people, until there was no remedy." God, slow to anger, finally judged the nation. Judgment came not because God delights in destruction but because His holiness would not allow rebellion to go unpunished forever. When grace is rejected, justice always follows. Today, any judgment or consequences for sin feels harsh and cruel to members of our culture. In fact, God's judgment has always indicated His faithfulness and love for His people.

2. God Judges Judah. The people and their kings blindly believed Jerusalem's formidable fortifications would protect them. Indeed, Judah had turned back Assyrian and Egyptian attempts to breach the walls in the past. Scholar William Lane writes, "Every Assyrian attempt to penetrate the defenses of Jerusalem, the Judean capital, failed. Its impregnability at that time gave the inhabitants a false sense of security that proved disastrous when the city was later subjected to prolonged siege by the Babylonians."[27]

God used Babylonian siege warfare as an instrument to execute His justice, fulfilling the warnings delivered by the prophets. When Nebuchadnezzar returned to finish what he started, Jerusalem was completely trapped and surrounded, without allies. The siege lasted at least two brutal years. Parents watched their children starve. Corpses littered the streets. Some may have even resorted to cannibalism to stay alive (see Lamentations 2:20). Eventually, Babylon breached the walls and King Zedekiah fled but was soon captured. And then, in one of the Bible's most graphic scenes, the Babylonians made him watch as they killed his sons, gouged his eyes out, and marched him in chains to Babylon. The death of his legacy would be the last image etched into his mind before he rotted in a dungeon. Nebuchadnezzar burned Solomon's golden temple—the pride of Jerusalem—to the ground. He reduced homes, palaces, and walls to ash and dust. He slaughtered or carried off the survivors to exile. He only left a small group of impoverished Jews behind to pick up the pieces of a shattered nation and to mourn in silence.

3. Hope Amidst Desolation. Psalm 137 captured the raw anguish of the exiles, torn from their homeland and temple, cut off from the heart of their identity and faith. Verse 3 laments, "Our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, 'Sing us one of the songs of Zion!'" But the exiles cried out, "How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?" The captivity left them disoriented and traumatized, questioning who they were and where God had gone. The psalmist ended his lament with bloodthirsty cries for vengeance, "Happy is the one who seizes [Babylonian] infants and dashes them against the rocks!" The Bible frequently records unfiltered grief and anguish expressed in desperate cries for vengeance. Psalm 137 shows that God doesn't ignore human pain and suffering. He invites us to bring even our darkest emotions and urges to Him. Even in the aftermath of God's judgment, hope remained. God preserved a remnant. The prophets had predicted Israel would be restored to the land after 70 years of captivity. The exile, though devastating, was a forge, refining God's broken people before restoring them to the land under future leaders like Zerubbabel and Ezra.

Judah's foolish rebellion, Jerusalem's gruesome fall, and the agonies of exile teach us about sin, judgment, and sorrow. But these stories also demonstrate the relentless mercy of God. God gave ample warning before His judgment. He grieved Judah's devastation. Even as His people sat weeping by foreign rivers, He was orchestrating their return to the land. Just as their story did not end in Babylon, your story won't end in failure and loss. God uses our darkest experiences to refine, restore, and remind us that our brokenness doesn't break His promises. We may weep, doubt, and wrestle, but God's grace will restore us. Will you turn to Him when He calls?

Point to Ponder

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion." – Psalm 137:1

From Learning to Living

Don't wait for a full-blown crisis to start obeying God. The Holy Spirit's conviction invites us; it calls us to return before devastating

consequences come. Ask God to search your heart. Are you resisting His Word? Are you ignoring His correction? God intends His patience to lead us to repentance, but He will not wait forever. When your world crashes down, grieve well. Like the exiles in Psalm 137, bring your pain, confusion, and sorrow to God. He can handle your unfiltered emotions. If God could rebuild Jerusalem, He can rebuild your life. If He preserved a remnant through the horrors of siege warfare, He can preserve you through your difficulties.

Prayer Point

Father, we know there have been times when we've ignored You and gone our own way. Thank You for being so patient and never giving up on us. Help us listen when You're trying to get our attention, run to You when things fall apart, and trust that You're not done with us. Even in our mess, remind us You're still there, ready to lead us back to the promised land.

LESSON 104
Jeremiah

When a society descends into an abyss of sin, national corruption begins to be reflected in its institutions. What should be normal consideration for others is replaced with greedy exploitation. Years ago, my wife and I decided to take out a second mortgage to pay for an addition on our house. The mortgage specialist at this particular bank was all smiles as we signed the mountain of paperwork and agreed to pay the 4% interest. As we finished up, they handed us a pack of checks to use at area stores when we bought supplies. It was like, "Oh great! I'm going to be the guy in line writing a check!"

A few weeks later, after writing several checks, we received a nice letter containing a debit/credit card we could use to access the approved funds. Grateful for the card, we conveniently racked up $300.00 in charges without holding up lines. However, when we received our monthly statement, our hearts sank when we discovered that the interest rate was 18% on the card that they sent us! I called the bank and asked to pay off the $300 right away. They said, "No, that $300 at the much higher interest rate has to be the last $300 you pay," and we had taken out a 30-year loan! If we would have charged thousands of dollars at the higher rate with the card, we could have lost our house.

Financial exploitation, like the situation just described, was widespread in Israel at the time of Jeremiah. Through Jeremiah's yielded life, God cried out for years to the children of Israel to repent and change their ways. Even when Nebuchadnezzar's armies gathered outside the gates of Jerusalem, Israel continued to choose indifferent indulgence over repentance.

The book of Jeremiah is a collection of his writings that were assembled after 20 years of ministry by a scribe named Baruch. The book is arranged in four major sections. The following are key verses from each section. Read them with Israel's willful disobedience and God's historic patience in mind.

Key Scripture

Israel Became God's Unfaithful "Spouse" (Jeremiah 1-24)

And the Lord said to me, "Proclaim all these words in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, saying, 'Hear the words of this covenant and do them. (Jer. 11:6)

Because of the lightness of her harlotry, she polluted the land and committed adultery with stones and trees. (Jer. 3:9)

For wicked men are found among My people, They watch like fowlers lying in wait; They set a trap, They catch men. 27 'Like a cage full of birds, So their houses are full of deceit; Therefore they have become great and rich. 28 'They are fat, they are sleek, They also excel in deeds of wickedness; They do not plead the cause, The cause of the orphan, that they may prosper; And they do not defend the rights of the poor. 29 'Shall I not punish these people?' declares the Lord, 'On a nation such as this Shall I not avenge Myself?" (Jer. 5:26-29)

[As God's people plunged into this abyss of spiritual adultery, faithful Jeremiah—like "a voice crying in the wilderness"—used every imaginable appeal to get through to the heart of God's people. Then, after many years, his message took on a very ominous tone.]

Destruction and 70 years of captivity

This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then it will be when seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation,' declares the Lord, 'for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans; and I will make it an everlasting desolation.' (Jer. 25:11-12)

[Jeremiah then chronicled the destruction of Jerusalem while offering a glimmer of hope for their future.]

Israel, Their Destruction and Future Hope (Jeremiah 26-45)

For I know the plans that I have for you,' declares the Lord, 'plans for welfare and not for calamity to give you a future and a hope.' (Jer. 29:11)

In the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month, the city wall was breached. (Jer. 39:2)

Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes at Riblah; the king of Babylon also slew all the nobles of Judah. 7 He then

blinded Zedekiah's eyes and bound him in fetters of bronze to bring him to Babylon. 8 The Chaldeans also burned with fire the king's palace and the houses of the people, and they broke down the walls of Jerusalem. 9 As for the rest of the people who were left in the city, the deserters who had gone over to him and the rest of the people who remained, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard carried them into exile in Babylon. 10 But some of the poorest people who had nothing, Nebuzaradan the captain of the bodyguard left behind in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at that time. (Jer. 39:6-10)

[Jeremiah also predicted a hauntingly similar demise for the nations that surrounded Israel. Israel was not unique in the way that Babylon ravaged them and took the best and the brightest back to Babylon. Several nations, including the Philistines, suffered a similar fate.]

Surrounding Nations and Babylon's Destruction (Jeremiah 46-51)

That which came as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the Philistines, before Pharaoh conquered Gaza. 2 Thus says the Lord: "Behold, waters are going to rise from the north and become an overflowing torrent, and overflow the land and all its fullness, The city and those who live in it; And the men will cry out, And every inhabitant of the land will wail. (Jer. 47:1-2)

The message which Jeremiah the prophet commanded Seraiah the son of Neriah, the grandson of Mahseiah, when he went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign. (Now Seraiah was quartermaster.) 60 So Jeremiah wrote in a single scroll all the calamity which would come upon Babylon, that is, all these words which have been written concerning Babylon. (Jer. 51:59-64)

Recommended reading: Lamentations

Jeremiah chronicles the closing days of the kingdom of Judah. The city that David worked so hard to build into a citadel for God became smoldering ruins. God used the Babylonian armies to punish God's people for being unfaithful to Him. Think about the sobering implications of the Davidic Dynasty being carried off into Babylon. No wonder Jeremiah was called the weeping prophet. His heart broke as he watched the collapse.

Consider the following:

1. God's people broke their "wedding vows."
Scholars refer to the covenant between God and Israel in Deuteronomy 29 and 30 as the 'Palestinian Covenant' . It gave Israel the privilege of living in the Promised Land. It did not give them the "right" to live there. (Deuteronomy 30:28-30) The Palestinian Covenant required that Israel obey the Law in exchange for the privilege of enjoying life with God in the land. Canaanite idol worship was so tempting because it required Las Vegas-style debauchery from "worshipers." Immoral acts earned them the favor of the gods who, in return, gave the assurance of good crops, health, and overall prosperity. What Israel saw as fun, natural, and even necessary, God declared spiritual adultery. Bible scholar Walter Elwell notes, "The ratification of the covenant closes with a call to radical decision. The people must decide between life and prosperity or death and destruction. Faith, love, and obedience are all instruments for receiving the blessings. Rejection and disobedience are tantamount to accepting a substitute suzerain [or master], which leads to death."[28] Israel believed that what happened in Vegas, stayed in Vegas, but they were wrong.

2. Israel was filled with chaotic corruption. In the years God was pronouncing certain judgment on Israel, King Jehoiachin was building a gorgeous palace. The workers slaved away for years but never received their pay! Jeremiah arrived with a message of doom for the stingy king (Jer. 36), but Jehoiachin responded by throwing the scroll into the fire. His successor, King Zedekiah, was even worse. Zedekiah brazenly disregarded the Year of Jubilee, the time when Jewish slaves are supposed to be set free. Zedekiah initially freed the slaves but then cruelly re-enslaved them. (Jeremiah 34:8) These men were both guilty of exploiting vulnerable people for their own gain. They dehumanized God's people and cruelly extracted gain from their suffering. As fallen humans, we see these corrupt tendencies in others much more quickly than we see these tendencies in ourselves. We need to be honest and ask ourselves if we use others for our own gain or if we have their best at heart.

3. Jeremiah's suffered unspeakable indignities. Godly Jeremiah became a laughingstock to Israel. Literally. After hearing Jeremiah preach against Israel, the priests locked him in stocks to be publicly

humiliated. (Jer. 20:1,2). Later, when Israel's leaders heard negative prophesies against Jerusalem, they threatened Jeremiah with death. (Jeremiah 26:11) In another cruel twist, King Jehoiachin heard that there was a scroll circulating with God's Word written on it. After hearing only a short section, he cut it into pieces and threw God's Word into a fire! (Jer. 36:23) In the ancient world, rainwater was diverted into cisterns. Trash and animal dung would also wash into these wells. The children of Israel became so desperate to silence Jeremiah that they threw him into one of these cisterns and left him for dead! As he sunk in the gross muck at the bottom, an Ethiopian man had compassion on him and saved him. (Jer. 38:1-13) Do not be surprised if your gentle message of hope in God is disturbing to hard hearts.

Jeremiah and others were being steamrolled by a corrupt monarchy. They were far from God and had settled on running a country without Him. The injustice and corruption were symptoms of a much greater sickness. God remembered the covenant that they forgot and brought total destruction to their communities. The few who didn't die in war were carried off to Babylon.

Point to Ponder

"The heart is deceitful above all things and it is extremely sick; Who can understand it fully and know its secret motives?" Jer. 17:9 AMP

From Learning to Living

We live in a world where exploitation is becoming the norm. This means that you and I can be guilty of using people who are at a disadvantage for our own unfair gain. The reverse is also true. You and I can be victims of the exploitative tendencies of others. Pray earnestly and ask the Spirit of God to show you if either of these is true and take appropriate action.

Prayer Point

God, Your heart is moved to anger by injustice. I pray that we will have the courage to admit when we are just using others. I pray we will advocate for exploited people and speak up for ourselves in situations where others may be using us for unfair advantage. Amen.

LESSON 105
Ezekiel

It's painful to watch people live in denial. We have all known people (or been those people) who have sat among the wreckage of their own poor decisions , blaming God and cluelessly marveling at their predicament. As onlookers, we sometimes just roll our eyes and silently hope that the person will just admit fault, learn the hard lessons, and move forward.

Hauled away in the second deportation, Ezekiel celebrated his 30th birthday in a refugee camp in Babylon. He expected to be installed as a priest in Jerusalem, but instead he was languishing in captivity with his countrymen in a foreign land. Astonishingly, some of his fellow captives refused to accept responsibility, and some even cluelessly mused that Jerusalem could never fall to the Babylonians. Others settled into Babylonian culture and took on a "business as usual" perspective.

God had a singular focus—engineering hurtful consequences to bring about Israel's repentance. He loved them too much to let them continue in degrading idol worship, far from His fellowship. Keep God's kind intentions and Israel's rebellion in mind as you read the following parable God gave Ezekiel to jolt Israel to admit fault and align their thinking with His.

Key Scripture

Ezekiel 16:1-63 (NASB) *Then the word of the LORD came to me, saying, 2 "Son of man, make known to Jerusalem her abominations.*

[God then likened Israel to an unwanted baby girl who had been cast away at birth. Struggling to breathe in a pool of her own blood, God reached down and tenderly cared for her. He nourished her until she was grown and provided for her every need. When she became a woman, God declared His love for her, gifted her beautiful clothes and adornments and married her. In spite of all God gave her, she became proud and insolent.]

15 "But you trusted in your beauty and played the harlot because of your

fame, and you poured out your harlotries on every passer-by who might be willing. 16 You took some of your clothes, made for yourself high places of various colors and played the harlot on them, which should never come about nor happen. 17 You also took your beautiful jewels made of My gold and of My silver, which I had given you, and made for yourself male images that you might play the harlot with them. 18 Then you took your embroidered cloth and covered them, and offered My oil and My incense before them. 19 Also My bread which I gave you, fine flour, oil and honey with which I fed you, you would offer before them for a soothing aroma; so it happened," declares the LORD GOD. 20 "Moreover, you took your sons and daughters whom you had borne to Me and sacrificed them to idols to be devoured. Were your harlotries so small a matter? 21 You slaughtered My children and offered them up to idols by causing them to pass through the fire. 22 Besides all your abominations and harlotries you did not remember the days of your youth, when you were naked and bare and squirming in your blood.

[God continued his indictment against Israel with very convicting language. He accused them of being so far gone in their prostitution that instead of charging money for services they were paying other nations to corrupt them.]

35 Therefore, O harlot, hear the word of the LORD. 36 Thus says the LORD GOD, "Because your lewdness was poured out and your nakedness uncovered through your harlotries with your lovers and with all your detestable idols, and because of the blood of your sons which you gave to [p]idols, 37 therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, even all those whom you loved and all those whom you hated. So I will gather them against you from every direction and expose your nakedness to them that they may see all your nakedness. 38 Thus I will judge you like women who commit adultery or shed blood are judged; and I will bring on you the blood of wrath and jealousy. 39 I will also give you into the hands of your lovers, and they will tear down your shrines, demolish your high places, strip you of your clothing, take away your jewels, and will leave you naked and bare. 40 They will incite a crowd against you and they will stone you and cut you to pieces with their swords. 41 They will burn your houses with fire and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women. Then I will stop you from playing the harlot, and you will also no longer pay your lovers. 42 So I will calm My fury against you and My jealousy will depart from you, and I will be pacified and angry no more. 43 Because you have not remembered the days of your youth but have enraged Me by all these things, behold, I in turn will bring your conduct down on your own head," declares the LORD GOD, "so that you will not commit this lewdness on top of all your other abominations 60 "Nevertheless, I will remember My covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish an everlasting covenant with you. 61 Then you will remember your ways and be ashamed when you receive your sisters, both your

older and your younger; and I will give them to you as daughters, but not because of your covenant. 62 Thus I will establish My covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, 63 so that you may remember and be ashamed and never open your mouth anymore because of your humiliation, when I have forgiven you for all that you have done," the LORD GOD declares.

Recommended reading: Ezekiel 16

This parable should have removed all doubts as to how God felt about Israel. He chose Israel as His metaphorical wife, lavished untold riches on her, and she responded by worshiping other gods. What Israel saw as necessary behavior to bring fertility to their land for survival, God saw as spiritual adultery. What a tragedy! God was heartbroken, but even in the midst of pronouncing painful judgments, He offered a glimmer of hope for the future by promising to establish an everlasting covenant with His people.

Consider the following:

1. Three themes emerge in the book of Ezekiel: (1) judgment on Israel (chapters 1–24); (2) judgment on the nations (chapters 25–32); and (3) future blessings for Israel (chapters 33–48). As Westerners, we have can have a difficult time processing God's divine right to judge and to arrange the death of thousands of Israelites. In Ezekiel chapter 37, he envisions a valley full of dry bones that spring back to life. For Ezekiel, it wasn't hard to imagine a valley of dry bones since the bodies of Israel's dead were left decaying by Nebuchadnezzar's armies. One of the most important biblical concepts we can learn as God's people is God's ownership over us. God created us, He owns us. God has the right to create standards and judge those who fall short of them. Ezekiel 18:4 says, "For every living soul belongs to me, the father as well as the son—both alike belong to me. The soul who sins is the one who will die." We need to remember this when we wonder about the eternal destiny of those who are far from God. God owns mankind, He makes the rules, and He will judge according to His thinking and not ours.

2. Israel was carried away by Babylon in three deportations for disobeying God. In 606 B.C. Babylon took Daniel and other key captives. In 597 Ezekiel and 10,000 others were taken. Finally, in 586 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar laid waste to Jerusalem and burned the temple

to the ground. This stark reminder of God's justice should move us to warn people who are denying guilt and stubbornly rejecting God's rule over their lives.

3. In addition to prophesying destruction against Israel, Ezekiel also indicted other nations who surrounded Israel. The king of Tyre, (modern day Lebanon), also received a dire warning of destruction from Babylon because of pride. *"You were the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God; every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold; on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones…Your heart was proud because of your beauty; you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of splendor. I cast you to the ground."* (Ezekiel 28:12b-14; 17)

This sobering account of the king of Tyre's sin of pride is hauntingly similar to the pride that filled Satan's heart that led to his fall. This has led many Bible interpreters and scholars to conclude that these verses describe the king of Tyre, but they allude to Satan's fall from Heaven. Bible Scholar Elmer Jantz wrote, "The sum total of wisdom and beauty could not rightfully be stated of any earthly monarch;… It appears that at least a number of statements in this passage have reference to the motivating power, Satan himself, behind the earthly king of Tyre."[29] We need to remember that systems dominated by egotism, despotism, and corruption are designed by Satan and not by God. The very fact that we live under this present world's system makes us vulnerable. We can live convinced we are walking in truth while blindly living lies.

God gave Ezekiel visions, parables, and humiliating charades to communicate His message of judgment and hope to captive Israelis. He even gave them a heartbreaking vision of His glory departing from the temple in Jerusalem! (Ezekiel 10:18) In spite of Ezekiel's heartfelt message of judgment, the people responded with a mix of disbelief, resignation, and resistance, but not repentance.

Point to Ponder

It's not denial, I'm just selective about the reality I accept. – Bill Patterson

From Learning to Living

Take stock of your current situation right now. Consider your relationships, financial struggles, attitudes about work, perspective of church, etc. Pray and ask God to reveal to you where you may be unwilling to admit fault and remain stubborn and unteachable. Then, instead of allowing a feeling of resignation to creep in, offer up genuine repentance before God and move forward with vulnerability and transparency.

Prayer Point

Father God, our human default is to deny personal responsibility and shift the blame to others. Help us to discern if our motivations are sourced in You, in our fallen thinking, or this broken world.

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The purpose of the Small Group Ministry is to be a vessel, through community, for discipleship. Small Groups are meant to reinforce the four scriptural principles set forth as the purpose of New Hope Church:

"The purpose of this church is to glorify God by producing maturing followers (disciples) of Jesus Christ through the four scriptural principles of Learning, Loving, Worship and Prayer."

Small Groups will seek to accomplish this through creating a safe and supportive atmosphere for people to wrestle with the truths of God as they mature in their faith.

As Pastor Mark says, "What you believe about *GOD* determines what you *DO* next." Based on this week's Scripture, sermon, and devotional reading, please consider the following questions placed within these two categories:

GOD

1. What do you believe about God? What do you learn about God's character from this week's Scripture passage, message, and devotional?

2. What stirs up praise, love, or thankfulness to God? During prayer time, PRAISE HIM for who He is, His character, His attributes, or THANK HIM for what He has done/is doing.

DO

1. What do you learn about humanity or yourself specifically from this week's Scripture passage, message, and devotional?

2. Is there something God is asking you to do? What do you believe you are to do next? How will you seek to be obedient to what you are learning?

3. What is the tension/challenge in obeying God? Can you identify what you are feeling or what's causing a reaction?

4. How can your small group support you in yielding to what God wants you to do?

5. How can you pray for yourself or others according to these verses?

PRAYER TIME

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