

Notes & Group Questions for August 1 - August 31 readings (*Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below*)

**2 KINGS 23:1 - EZEKIEL 32:16** (daily reading schedule at: [www.ChronologicalBibleBlog.com](http://www.ChronologicalBibleBlog.com))

8/1 - Today we start and finish the book of the prophet Nahum! Nahum prophesied against Nineveh, about 100 years after Jonah prophesied against Nineveh. Nahum was prophesying between 663 and 612 B.C., when Nineveh was at the height of its power. Nineveh was capital of the Assyrian empire and it had control of the Fertile Crescent area. Assyria had recently conquered Israel, the northern kingdom, and was threatening and causing much suffering to Judah. Nineveh was eventually conquered by Babylon in 612 B.C., as Nahum prophesied. Chapter 1 verse 7 stood out to me in today's reading: *"The LORD is good. When trouble comes, he is a strong refuge. And he knows everyone who trusts in him."*

This is a comforting verse. **Q: Do you seek God when trouble comes? Do you realize that he is a strong refuge - if you will seek him and let him be a strong refuge for you? Do you know that God is good? Do you trust in him?**

8/1 - Nahum Chapter 3 verse 18 jumped out at me for some reason today: *"O Assyrian king, your princes lie dead in the dust. Your people are scattered across the mountains. There is no longer a shepherd to gather them together."* For some reason this verse made me very thankful that we do indeed have a shepherd to gather us together today. The shepherd whose birth we will be celebrating in about a week. A shepherd who was born in a stable in a little town called Bethlehem. **Q: Will you allow Jesus be your shepherd this Christmas season? Will you allow Jesus to gather you together with others to celebrate his birth?**

8/2 - Today we start and finish the book of the prophet Habakkuk! This is a great book & there is a lot going on in it. In some ways it reminded me of the end of the book of Job, with the conversation going on between Habakkuk and God. Habakkuk was a prophet from Judah who prophesied between the fall of Nineveh in 612 B.C. and Babylon's invasion of Judah in 588 B.C. Assyria fell in 612-605 B.C. and Babylon was becoming the world's dominant nation. In the first 2 chapters of this book Habakkuk argues with God about God's ways, and then in the 3rd chapter Habakkuk responds with an incredible prayer to God. In the first 2 chapters the big questions are - 1. Why does evil seem to go unpunished? and 2. Why does God not seem to respond to prayers? Reminds me of the Psalms! :)

8/2 - Habakkuk chapter 3 verses 18 & 19 are powerful verses for us to consider in our own lives in the midst of challenging times: *"Yet I will rejoice in the LORD! I will be joyful in the God of my salvation. The Sovereign LORD is my strength! He will make me as surefooted as a deer and bring me safely over the mountains."* **Q: Do you rejoice in God? Are you joyful in God as your salvation? Even in the midst of challenging times in your life? Do you trust that God will bring you to safety?**

8/2 - Today we start the book of the prophet Zephaniah! Zephaniah was different from some of the recent prophets that we have read in that he came from royal lineage. He was the descendent of King Hezekiah. Thus, Zephaniah writes about the upper class, courts, and priests with quite a bit of authority and clarity. Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of King Josiah of Judah. He prophesied in approximately 640-620 B.C. The purpose of his prophecies were to announce God's coming judgment against Judah. But, as we see with the other prophets, Zephaniah also writes about God saving a remnant of people who love and honor God with their lives - thus preserving and carrying on the covenant promise to Abraham. A good overview of the book of Zephaniah is at bible.org [at this link](#). The link includes a funny opening line: "The Book of Zephaniah is probably best known for being the least known book of the entire Bible." :)

8/3 - Zephaniah chapter 3 verse 5 stood out to me in today's readings: *"But the LORD is still there in the city, and he does no wrong. Day by day his justice is more evident, but no one takes notice--the wicked know no shame."* As you read the 4 preceding verses, you'll note that God is calling the people and leaders of Jerusalem to the carpet for their sinful ways. And in the midst of all this, comes this beautiful verse 5. God is still there in the city. In the midst of all the chaos and shame. And even through all of this, God's justice actually becomes more and more evident. I think this verse really jumped out at me today because I read a horribly depressing story in the paper recently about just some awful things that were done to children in a nearby city. And this story reminded me that we indeed live in a fallen world. There is evil in our world that invades the hearts of men and women. And yet, even in the midst of all of this chaos and shame in our world today, *"The LORD is still there in the city, and he does no wrong. Day by day his justice is more evident, but no one takes notice--the wicked know no shame."* **Q: Do you take notice of God in our world today? Even in the midst of**

**everything else going on that may attempt to distract you from God? Is God's justice (and love and compassion and mercy and call to holiness) becoming more and more evident to you each day of your life? This very evening, do you believe that God is still there in the city? Will you take notice?**

8/3 - Chapter 3 verses 11 & 12 also stood out to me in today's readings: *"I will remove all the proud and arrogant people from among you. There will be no pride on my holy mountain. Those who are left will be the lowly and the humble, for it is they who trust in the name of the LORD."* We of course continue to see the sin of pride coming up over and over again in the Old Testament. Here God reminds us that pride and arrogance are not attributes of those who love him. It is indeed the lowly and the humble that better reflect the attributes of those who love and trust God. **Q: Is pride something that you struggle with? Do you realize that pride can be a hindrance to a fully loving and obedient relationship with God? Will you lay down your pride and seek humility? Will you seek to place your trust in God rather than your own abilities? When was the last time you bowed low before God?**

8/3 - Jeremiah chapter 48 is not a very happy chapter... at first glance it's tough to figure out what is going on in this chapter. Why is God so angry at Moab? I think verses 28 - 30 let us in on why: *"You people of Moab, flee from your cities and towns! Live in the caves like doves that nest in the clefts of the rocks. We have heard of the pride of Moab, for it is very great. We know of her loftiness, her arrogance, and her haughty heart. I know about her insolence," says the LORD, "but her boasts are false; they accomplish nothing."* It sounds like pride and boasting was a major factor here obviously. Along with idol worship as we see in verse 13: *"At last Moab will be ashamed of her idol Chemosh, as Israel was ashamed of her gold calf at Bethel."* I do think we see sadness from God in this judgment upon Moab in verse 31: *"Yes, I wail for Moab; my heart is broken for the men of Kir-hareseth."* And ultimate redemption comes in the last verse, 47, of this chapter: *"But in the latter days I will restore the fortunes of Moab," says the LORD."* **Q: This chapter may give us the opportunity to pause and reflect on if there are areas in our life where we are boasting? Boasting in prideful ways? Are we arrogant, lofty, displaying a haughty heart toward others?**

8/4 - Verses that stood out at me today included Jeremiah 22:15-16 - *"But a beautiful palace does not make a great king! Why did your father, Josiah, reign so long? Because he was just and right in all his dealings. That is why God blessed him. He made sure that justice and help were given to the poor and needy, and everything went well for him. Isn't that what it means to know me?"* "Isn't that what it means to know me?" Justice and help were given to the poor and needy, and everything went well for him! **Q: Is that what it means to know God? Do you know God in this way?**

8/4 - Today in Jeremiah 26 we are reminded again how tough it is to be a prophet - the people of Judah want to kill him! It is an interesting series of events with the courts and priests. It reminds me of some ways of Jesus and his last hours. Except that Jeremiah of course gets reprieved. However, at the end of the chapter we hear about the prophet Uriah and he was not so fortunate. He was chased into Egypt (interesting escape into Egypt parallel w/ Christ's early life), captured and killed. **Q: The lesson for us in this chapter 26 may be this - when we are confronted with a call to repent from sins, do we? Or do we rage back and accuse the accuser of sins? Do we repent or do we deny? Do we return to the Lord?**

8/4-5 - Jeremiah Chapter 25 is the bit of a tough read at first. I would certainly like to study more of the theology on the "cup of the Lord's anger." The best I can tell is that the land was so full of sin & rejection of God, that the cup of anger and the coming judgment was the only option for God. My thought is that God showed graciousness time and time and time again - and was ignored, and things got worse. So, keep in mind that God didn't just go ballistic here in Chapter 25 - it was a long time coming and I think a lot of grace & mercy & compassion was shown for a long time - but eventually this had to happen. Actually, this does remind me of a sermon I heard actually last year. The pastor was preaching from the "feast of the wedding banquet" in Matthew where a king (God) invites his townsfolk to attend the wedding feast for his son (Jesus). But people refuse the invitation - saying they have to work / they are too busy, etc. The 2nd time the king extends the invitation, the people even beat up his servants! Well, the pastor's point in preaching was that God does continue to show us grace and pursue us, but at some point we have to accept the invitation from God! We have to accept the invitation of faith in his son Jesus. We have to accept the invitation to repent of our sins. We have to accept the invitation... While God will extend his grace and the invitation time and time and time again - he won't do so forever for us if we keep rejecting him. Israel, leading up to chapter 25, did not accept the invitation from God to repent. **Q: In your life today, are you accepting the invitation from God to repent through faith in his son Jesus? Do you believe that you have been invited? Have you accepted the invitation?**

8/6 - I read Jeremiah chapter 19 today and am reminded again of how tough it can be to be a prophet! Wow. **Can you**

**imagine receiving these words from God to deliver to a nation?** It's tough duty - getting to the point of Jeremiah being whipped and put in stocks in chapter 20, verse 2. Jeremiah does get to complaining about his lifestyle as a prophet in chapter 20:7-18. In verse 9 he bursts out with: *"And I can't stop! If I say I'll never mention the Lord or speak in his name, his word burns in my heart like a fire. It's like a fire in my bones!"* I really like this! "His word burns in my heart like a fire!"  
**Q: Does God's word burn in your heart like a fire?? Should it? Could it? Will you let it?**

8/6 - Today we start the book of Daniel, which is an incredible book! The book of Daniel takes place in approximately 605 B.C. during the first captivity of Jerusalem by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon. Daniel is exiled to Babylon to Jerusalem in 605 B.C. - whereas Ezekiel, the prophet of the previous book, was exiled in 597 B.C. It is generally believed that Daniel himself wrote this entire book. Though some say that Daniel couldn't have written this book because his prophecies in the this book are spot-on. Thus, some think someone else must have written the book in retrospect. Let's forge ahead with the belief that Daniel indeed wrote this book. I do believe that God can indeed prophesy events through prophets like Daniel before they actually happen...

~ Daniel ~

Author: Daniel

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Content: Daniel was carried off into captivity in Babylon as a young boy where, although he was a captive, he received an education and ultimately rose to a high position in Babylonian, and later, Persian government. Because of his trust in God he was subjected to barbarous persecution, at one point being thrown to the lions. Three of his compatriots were thrown into a furnace, but they too survived by the power of God. The book deals with many historical events of Daniel's day, but it also contains prophecies concerning the future. Daniel saw the great world empires that were to come, but saw more than just that. He also saw the power of God and the Messiah, Jesus, who was to come and undo the evil of this world, ultimately to establish a kingdom of righteousness that would never fade away.

Theme: Daniel's major theme is the sovereignty of God. God rules over the affairs of men, directing the course of history toward his own ends, working in and through the acts of men. The kingdoms of men rise and fall but God remains forever. God's will remains forever as well, and it is God's determination to bring salvation to men by the Messiah whom he will send. Ultimately evil will be overcome and good will triumph because God has willed it so. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 14-15)*

8/6 - Daniel chapter 1 verse 7 is worth diving into to show how Nebuchadnezzar was trying to change the religious alliances of these 4 young men from Jerusalem - *"The chief official renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego."* Daniel's name in Hebrew means "God is my Judge" - his new name Belteshazzar meant "Bel, protect his life!" Bel, or Marduk was the main Babylonian god. (you can see where Nebuchadnezzar was going with this...) Hananiah's name in Hebrew is "the Lord shows grace" and Shadrach means "under the command of Aku" - the moon god.... Mishael's name in Hebrew is "who is like God?" and his new name Meshach is "who is like Aku?" And finally Azariah's name in Hebrew is "the Lord helps" and his new name Abednego is "servant of Nego/Nebo" - the god of learning and writing. **Q: Do you think that someone's name can be reflective of who they are? Are names important?**

8/6 - Verse 8 is worth exploring - *"But Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king."* Why do you think this was? Was Daniel just being picky? Snooty? Well, that was kind of my first thought. Further study shows that the food the Babylonians were going to feed Daniel and the 3 others were sacrificed to idols. Which is not a good thing in the Law... And furthermore, the wine was poured out on pagan altars. Again, not good. So, Daniel is making a very wise move here. **Q: Will we do things like this in our own lives? Things that appear to be "harmless" on the surface, will we refuse, if we know they will actually be damaging to us or our relationship with God? Even if our peers are pressuring us? Will we not defile ourselves?**

8/7 - Daniel chapter 2 verse 20 has a great start to a prayer from Daniel to God - *"Praise the name of God forever and ever, for he alone has all wisdom and power."* Check out the remainder of the verses in this chapter - this prayer. This praise. **Q: Do we pray to God in this manner? Do we open up our prayers with praise for God? Do we acknowledge that only God has all wisdom and power? Can we learn something from Daniel's prayer?**

8/7 - Today in Daniel chapter 2 we see Daniel conducting his affairs with Nebuchadnezzar with wonderful humility! In verses 27 & 28 Daniel says: *"There are no wise men, enchanters, magicians, or fortune-tellers who can tell the king such things. But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and he has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen in the future."* Here we see that Daniel is giving God the glory for the dream about to be revealed. Daniel was taking no

credit for this. **Q: Today, do you regularly give God the glory in your life? Or do you try to take the credit yourself?**

8/7 - The dream interpreted by Daniel is summed up in verses 44 & 45: *"During the reigns of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed; no one will ever conquer it. It will shatter all these kingdoms into nothingness, but it will stand forever. That is the meaning of the rock cut from the mountain by supernatural means, crushing to dust the statue of iron, bronze, clay, silver, and gold."* The dream & interpretation are prophesying the kingdom of Babylon (gold), followed by the Medo-Persian Kingdom (silver), then Greek kingdom (bronze), then the Roman empire with a mix of iron & clay - representing strong and weak states within the Roman empire. These are all B.C. kingdoms, taking us up to the time of Jesus the Messiah, when the rock cut from the mountain comes and becomes the everlasting Kingdom of God. Nebuchadnezzar is impressed with the dream interpretation and says to Daniel in verse 47: *"Truly, your God is the God of gods, the Lord over kings, a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this secret."* **Q: Think Nebuchadnezzar is sincere about this? Or, think he will be the next day?** Look how quickly he changes his mind in Chapter 3...

8/7 - In chapter 3 we read the incredible story of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. In verses 16-18 we read: *"Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."* Focus on the words in verse 18 – "But even if he does not". **Q: Do you have the faith of these three men in God? Even if God does not show up in your life as you hope he might, will you still have faith? Will you not serve other gods or worship false idols? Back to verse 16 - Do you realize that you do not have to defend your faith to others? Do you believe that God can rescue you from the direst of situations? Even a fiery furnace?**

8/7 - In verse 28 we hear Nebuchadnezzar giving praise to God again - similar to chapter 2 verse 47 above: *"Praise to the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego! He sent his angel to rescue his servants who trusted in him. They defied the king's command and were willing to die rather than serve or worship any god except their own God."* **Q: Are we willing to die rather than serve or worship any other "god"?** (big question I realize... but a fair one. This is happening to Christians around the world today. Please remember to pray for the persecuted church around the world.)

8/8 - Jeremiah chapter 9 verses 23 & 24 definitely stood out to me today: *"This is what the LORD says: "Let not the wise man gloat in his wisdom, or the mighty man in his might, or the rich man in his riches. Let them boast in this alone: that they truly know me and understand that I am the LORD who is just and righteous, whose love is unfailing, and that I delight in these things. I, the LORD, have spoken!"* **Q: Think God is serious when he follows something he says with "I, the LORD, have spoken!"? Do we ever gloat in our wisdom? Gloat in our might? Gloat in our riches? Instead, have you ever boasted that you truly know God and understand that God is just and righteous? Do you believe that God's love is unfailing?**

8/8 - Jeremiah chapter 10 today is a powerful look at "idols." Back in Jeremiah's days we're talking about little chiseled "gods" made out of wood & stone. But today? **Q: What are our idols? Perhaps our money, our jobs, our status, our relationships, our technology :, our lust - or perhaps even ourselves?** Jeremiah 10:10 reminds us: *"But the Lord is the true God; he is the living God, the eternal King."* All of our idols are not True, though we often hope they will be. Our idols will deliver us nothing. God and His Son will deliver life to the fullest!

8/8 - Jeremiah's Prayer is 10:23-24 is such a beautiful prayer :

*"I know, O Lord , that a man's life is not his own;*

*it is not for man to direct his steps.*

*Correct me, Lord , but only with justice-*

*not in your anger,*

*lest you reduce me to nothing."*

I like that Jeremiah says in this prayer, "Correct me, Lord". He knows there is correction to be made in his life - even a prophet of God knew his need of correction! This is a nice example of humility to say the least. **Q: How often do you pray to God "correct me"? Why might this be a good prayer? Do you need God to correct you? Will you allow God to direct your steps?**

8/9 - Today's readings are a bit unique in that the Jeremiah chapters relate to Psalm 79! Psalm 79 is about the post-destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar et. al. It's interesting to see pre- & post- destruction. The Jeremiah readings today may seem to you a bit tough to read. It is certainly sad to read about the coming destruction. As I read through these chapters I think about Jeremiah and how tough it must have been on him to know what was coming. In fact, Jeremiah gives a passionate prayer for the people of Jerusalem in today's readings in chapter 14 verses 7 through 9. The question that I think sometimes can come up for some as they read chapters like this in the Old Testament is: "Is this the same God we read about in the New Testament?" And I of course believe that absolutely yes this is the same God! The life of Jesus on Earth was obviously in between the time of Jeremiah and the time of you and me today. Jesus' life, ministry, suffering, death on the cross, and His resurrection saved us from our sins - and this graceful life of Jesus' had obviously not taken place in Jeremiah's time. However, I do also believe that God is very graceful throughout history including all of the Old Testament. Keep in mind that God is often saying in these chapters in Jeremiah: "come back to me", "repent", "abandon your idols" - and no one listens. God was giving chance after chance after chance of repentance... **Q: What about you in your life today? Is God saying to you in any way to "come back to me", "repent", "abandon your idols"? And are you listening? Will you repent? Will you return to the Lord?**

8/9 - We have powerful readings in Jeremiah today! I love the exchanges between God and Jeremiah. Today in Jeremiah 15:16, we read these words of Jeremiah's to God: *"When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty."* **Q: What does this verse mean to you? Can you eat God's words? Can they feed you? Spiritually? Are you being fed by God's Word through the One Year Bible daily readings? Are God's words your joy and your heart's delight? Are you making it a practice to memorize scripture? Would this practice help you in making God's words your joy and heart's delight? What does it mean to bear God's name? Is God's name written on your heart? How else are you being fed by God, in addition to his Word? Are you being fed by attending and investing in a church each week? Do you think that church, the bride of Christ, can spiritually feed you? Is there any reason to refuse this spiritual food?**

8/10 - There are a lot of great verses in Jeremiah's readings today! Jeremiah 17:5 stands out: *"Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans and turn their hearts away from the Lord."* I think oftentimes we put more trust in others than the Lord - our spouses, our pastors, our friends, our family, and even ourselves. The risk here is that people are human and are not perfect. They will eventually disappoint at some point. God is the only perfect option to place our ultimate trust in. I do think we can still "trust" others to a degree - marriage of course being a prime example of this trust in another human. But, marriage will really only ultimately work if God is the "third cord" in the marriage (see [Ecclesiastes 4:12](#)). Overall, this verse wisely cautions that our highest level of trust should be reserved for God! Who will not fail us. Ever. **Q: Who do you trust these days the most? Do you trust God above anything or anyone else? Do you trust God more than you trust yourself?**

8/10 - Jeremiah 17:7-8 has some great imagery! *"But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they go right on producing delicious fruit."* These verses remind me a lot of [Psalm 1, verses 1 through 3](#). **Q: Is God your hope and confidence? If so, do you feel like a tree planted along a riverbank with roots that reach deep into the water? How deep are your roots in God's living water these days?**

8/10 - Jeremiah 17:19-27 are some powerful verses on the Sabbath! I talk a lot with my friends about taking Sabbaths. I am really bad at it... and I know I need it. And I know my friends need it too. I'll have to remember verse 27 next time I'm having the Sabbath discussions with my friends... :) *"But if you do not listen to me and refuse to keep the Sabbath holy, and if on the Sabbath day you bring loads of merchandise through the gates of Jerusalem just as on other days, then I will set fire to these gates. The fire will spread to the palaces, and no one will be able to put out the roaring flames."* **Q: How are you doing on taking a Sabbath each week? What would your response be to a modern day Jeremiah standing at the gate and telling you to keep one day a week as a holy day unto the Lord?**

8/10 - Jeremiah chapter 35 today is a fantastic example of obedience from the Recabites! Interestingly, the Recabites are being obedient to a human's word... This stands in stark contrast to the Israelites disobedience to God's Word... **Q: Do we do this sometimes in our lives? Obey human words and disobey God's Word?**

8/11 - Chapter 49 does not bring good tidings to the Ammonites or Edomites. Verse 16 again gives us a good look into

why this judgment is coming upon Edom: *"You are proud that you inspire fear in others. And you are proud because you live in a rock fortress and hide high in the mountains. But don't fool yourselves!"* Pride. Again. Pride. **Q: Think Pride is something that has been a temptation of humans since the Fall? Think this temptation continues today?**

8/11 - Today in Jeremiah we read about one of the last Old Testament era kings to sit on the throne of David in Judah! This was King Jehoiachin and God makes it clear that this is one of Judah's last Davidic kings (with Zedekiah being governor/king of Judah briefly subsequently) in chapter 22 verse 30: *"This is what the Lord says: 'Let the record show that this man Jehoiachin was childless. He is a failure, for none of his children will succeed him on the throne of David to rule over Judah.'"* Immediately after reading about this king of Judah, Jeremiah 23:1-8 gives us a great Messianic foreshadowing of Jesus, the true and eternal Davidic king! Verses 5 & 6: *"For the time is coming," says the Lord, "when I will place a righteous Branch on King David's throne. He will be a King who rules with wisdom. He will do what is just and right throughout the land. And this is his name: 'The Lord Is Our Righteousness.' In that day Judah will be saved, and Israel will live in safety."* Great stuff! A righteous branch on King David's throne.... rules with wisdom... will do what is just and right throughout the land... **Q: Think this is Jesus??**

8/11 - Jeremiah 23 continues on from yesterday's readings with the problems of false prophets. Verses 21 & 22 really stood out to today: *"I have not sent these prophets, yet they claim to speak for me. I have given them no message, yet they prophesy. If they had listened to me, they would have spoken my words and turned my people from their evil ways."* I think the key word in these verses above is "listen". The false prophets' problems all started because they were not listening to God. **Q: How well do we listen to God today? Think we should slow down our lives a bit and create some time and space to listen? When we pray - are we speaking or listening more?** Let us have ears to listen! Verse 29 is a great one! *"Does not my word burn like fire?" asks the Lord. "Is it not like a mighty hammer that smashes rock to pieces?"* **In your life today does God's Word burn like fire? In your life today is God's Word like a mighty hammer that smashes rock to pieces?**

8/12 - Jeremiah 29:8-9 today tells us: *"The Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says, "Do not let the prophets and mediums who are there in Babylon trick you. Do not listen to their dreams because they prophesy lies in my name. I have not sent them," says the Lord."* My thought on these verses is that often times I think that we too are tricked by lies that the world is often selling us. "Money, Power, Status, Sex-Appeal, etc. etc. are things to be strived for above all else" are the type of things that I think we often hear. But, are these True? Or are they tricks - are they lies? Will you find emptiness or happiness in what the world is selling you? Where can you find True happiness and peace? I think these questions are answered for us today in verses 11-13: *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope. In those days when you pray, I will listen. If you look for me in earnest, you will find me when you seek me."* **Q: Are you looking for God in earnest? If you've found God, are you following Him alone and not the tricksters of this world? Do you believe that God has a beautiful plan for you and your life? A plan much better than any plan you could dream up on your own?**

8/12-13 - Wow. Jeremiah 30 & 31 are the most hopeful we've read yet in the book of Jeremiah! These chapters give so much joy to my heart to read them, as the promises of deliverance and hope of restoration are given by God! In Jeremiah chapter 31 verses 15 through 17 today we read - *"This is what the LORD says: "A cry of anguish is heard in Ramah--mourning and weeping unrestrained. Rachel weeps for her children, refusing to be comforted--for her children are dead." But now the LORD says, "Do not weep any longer, for I will reward you. Your children will come back to you from the distant land of the enemy. There is hope for your future," says the LORD. "Your children will come again to their own land."* **Q: Did you notice verse 15 above is also in the New Testament?** It is quoted in Matthew chapter 2 verse 18 based on Herod's orders to murder all of the male infants being a fulfillment of this verse. Here's verses 16 through 18 in Matthew chapter 2: *"When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more."* **Q: Think these verses could be applied to abortions in our world today? Do you think God is weeping for His children?**

8/13 - Jeremiah 31:18 gives a great example of the true relationship we can have with God - *"I have heard Israel saying, 'You disciplined me severely, but I deserved it. I was like a calf that needed to be trained for the yoke and plow. Turn me again to you and restore me, for you alone are the Lord my God."* Israel was finally beginning to repent and return to God. I know the word "discipline" can maybe be a tough one for us - we've probably all experienced some unjust discipline. I

pray that you can see that God's discipline for us is ultimately very loving - training us, turning us, restoring us. **Q: If you feel that God is disciplining you in your life right now, will you let him? So that he can train you, turn you, restore you?**

8/13 - I love the last verse in Jeremiah's readings today! 31:26 - *"At this, I woke up and looked around. My sleep had been very sweet."* Very sweet readings in Jeremiah today indeed! **Q: When is the last time you've had sweet sleep? Do you think sweet sleep is a gift from God?**

8/13 - Jeremiah chapter 31 today is encouraging reading! It seems we've rounded the corner from the coming destruction and captivity prophecies in the book of Jeremiah, and God is now speaking about rebuilding Jerusalem. We get a good Messianic foreshadowing today in verse 31: *"The day will come," says the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah."* The new covenant is coming!

8/13 - Today in Jeremiah 31:33 we read: *"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts."* This verse reminds me of the importance in memorizing scripture – not just reading scripture, but memorizing it and writing it upon our hearts. I have been amazed oftentimes how [Proverbs 3:5-6](#) comes to my mind and heart at some very needed and specific times. (if you can only memorize 2 scripture verses, please memorize these Proverbs verses) **Q: Do you memorize scripture? Do you not just memorize it, but internalize its teachings and meanings into your heart? Do you see the value in memorizing scripture and writing it upon your heart?**

8/13 - We have quite the readings in Jeremiah chapter 49 & 50 today! The prophecies have turned from Judah and Jerusalem and are now directed toward their neighbors and toward their captors, Babylon. Jeremiah 50 does not bode well for Babylon! It is interesting, in that King Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon have played a large role in sacking Jerusalem & Judah - to discipline them for their sins. And now the tide is coming back toward Babylon. Verse 28 really stood out to me today as a clear indication that destroying the Temple in Jerusalem was a really really bad idea for Babylon... *"Listen to the people who have escaped from Babylon, as they tell in Jerusalem how the Lord our God has taken vengeance against those who destroyed his Temple."* Chapter 50 does bode well for Israel & Judah - verses 4 & 5 tell us: *"Then the people of Israel and Judah will join together," says the LORD, "weeping and seeking the LORD their God. They will ask the way to Jerusalem and will start back home again. They will bind themselves to the LORD with an eternal covenant that will never again be broken."* **Q: How often do we weep and seek the Lord? Should we ever literally weep and seek God? Can we learn something about the power of weeping from the people of Israel and Judah on how we can bind ourselves to God with an eternal covenant that will never be broken?**

8/14 - Jeremiah Chapter 51 dives into Babylon's destruction! Lately we've been basically just looking at Babylon the city & empire and Nebuchadnezzar from the historical perspective - though, certainly seeing where and how God has been interacting with Babylon. I think it might be a good point here to consider the spiritual connotations of Babylon. A great place to begin this conversation is in [Revelation Chapters 17 & 18](#) where Babylon is discussed. I won't go into trying to interpret these two chapters of Revelation today... :) We have yet to get to Revelation later this year in the One Year Bible! But, these two chapters may give you some more insight into the spiritual meaning of the term Babylon. If you do want to read more about Babylon in context of these two Revelation chapters, check out [this link](#) for an interesting commentary. The other thing to note in this chapter is that earlier in Jeremiah we read about the coming destruction of Jerusalem - but always with the note of ultimate redemption. In this chapter with Babylon, and other chapters discussing Babylon, there is no redemption for Babylon. This city will not be restored... It is interesting in the middle of Jeremiah 51 we have a few verses of a hymn of praise to God - verses 15 through 19. Again, in verse 18, idols are mentioned and can be assumed as one of the prime reasons of Babylon's destruction: *"Idols are worthless; they are lies! The time is coming when they will all be destroyed."* **Q: Do you believe that idols are worthless? Are they lies? What are some of our modern day idols that are worthless and lies? Are you rejecting worshiping any and all of our modern day idols and focusing your worship and time and love toward God and Jesus?** Please, leave those worthless idols behind... and don't pick them up ever again!

8/15 - We read about some very interesting dynamics in Jeremiah chapters 37 & 38 today... Jeremiah goes from dungeon to prison to cistern to prison to being the king's confidant. Being a prophet is quite a life!! I continue to admire Jeremiah's boldness in speaking the truth in these chapters. 37:17 stood out: *"Later King Zedekiah secretly requested that Jeremiah come to the palace, where the king asked him, "Do you have any messages from the Lord?" "Yes, I do!" said Jeremiah. "You will be defeated by the king of Babylon."* Jeremiah goes right to the truth... no beating around the bush! And then 3 verses later he asks Zedekiah - *"Listen, my lord the king, I beg you. Don't send me back to the dungeon in the house of*

*Jonathan the secretary, for I will die there.*" He speaks a harsh truth to Zedekiah and then asks for a favor. I like that! **Q: Do we speak the truth in our lives? Even if we know we'll need to ask for a favor of someone later, will we still speak the truth? Or will we default to the un-truthful position of "hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil...."**

8/15 - Today we begin the book of the prophet Ezekiel! Ezekiel is a prophet whose name means "God strengthens" - which is clearly a good thing for those in the prophet business. We've recently wrapped up the book of Jeremiah and are well aware of the challenges facing a prophet. The interesting thing to note is that Jeremiah was prophesying in Judah, whereas Ezekiel was prophesying in Babylon to the exiles from Judah. These two were doing their work at about the same time, but in different geographies. Ezekiel gets his call to be a prophet in probably his 30th year of life - the age when most of the priestly line were called to be priests. Instead, Ezekiel was called to be a prophet - which, is probably a good thing because he is living in exile in Babylon - so wouldn't have been able to perform the priestly duties at the Temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel's call comes in 593 B.C., which is 7 years prior to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Ezekiel's ministry goes until 571 B.C., at the age of 52.

~ Ezekiel ~

Author: Ezekiel

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Content: Ezekiel, who grew up as a priest, was carried off to Babylon with the Jewish exiles deported in 597 B.C., and there he became a prophet of God. His message was one of coming judgment for those remaining in Jerusalem, but his preaching was not well received by the Jews who were with him in captivity. When his dire predictions came true in 586 B.C. with the destruction of Jerusalem, the people listened then on with great earnestness. His message changed at this point from being one of unbending judgment to one of comfort and hope for the future. The worst had come; it was now time to make plans for beginning again. Ezekiel saw himself as a shepherd and watchman over Israel. As a shepherd, he was to protect the people, but as a watchman, he was to warn of danger ahead.

Theme: The message of Ezekiel is based upon the unchangeable holiness of God. This is both a promise and a warning. It is a warning because God has promised to remain faithful to his people and this will not change. The book of Ezekiel shows God's unbreakable promise fulfilled in both respects: the city fell according to promise because of Judah's sin, and the city would be restored according to promise because of God's faithfulness. The lives of God's people determined how God would treat them. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 14)*

8/15 - In today's readings, chapter 1 is an incredible vision and call that Ezekiel receives! Obviously the flying creatures with 4 faces and wings are a highlight of this vision. What is up with these you ask? Good question. They are called "cherubim" later in the book of Ezekiel (chapter 10) and are also thought to be the creatures in Isaiah called seraphs - and they show up again in the book of Revelation. If you get a vision, and you see these creatures, you know something big is going on... :) The interesting thing about these creatures is that their four faces representing a human, lion, ox and an eagle have many interpretations, which all basically relate to the nature of God. An interesting interpretation I read was that these 4 represent the 4 Gospels - Matthew being the lion, Mark being the ox, Luke being the human and John being the eagle. You'll have to pick up a commentary to read more on why these analogies have been made.... Ezekiel Chapter 2 is God's Call and Commission of Ezekiel. **Q: Don't we all wish that God could be this clear with us about the purpose of our lives sometimes?** :) Ezekiel Chapter 3 has the great narrative of Ezekiel eating the scroll of God. And it tasting like honey - even though it had words of doom upon it. In Ezekiel 3:3 we read: *"Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it." So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth."* **Q: Can we eat of the Word of God? Does the Word nourish us? How does the Word nourish us? Is the Word nourishing you today? Is it as sweet as honey? Is the Word literally spiritual food? Will you eat of God's Holy Word, the Bible, today – and every day of your life?** Then, in Ezekiel 3 verse 15 ends with a very appropriate line I believe- *"I sat there among them for seven days, overwhelmed."* **Think you'd be overwhelmed if you experienced chapters 1 & 2???** Whew. I am looking forward to us starting the book of Ezekiel! Thanks for joining me on this journey!

8/16 - In Ezekiel chapter 3 today God appoints Ezekiel as a watchman for Israel! This might sound pretty good at first... but there are some serious ramifications for Ezekiel to follow through with what God asks Ezekiel to do. My thoughts based on this chapter - **Q: Are there times in our lives where God asks us to do something that may sound good at first, but then turns out to be harder than we initially thought it would be? With potential some serious ramifications? If so, do you quit? Or do you forge ahead with what God asks of you? Will you stay within God's will for your life - even when the going gets tough? If God calls you to be a watch-person, will you be obedient to the call?**

8/16 - Jeremiah Chapter 27 seems to be a chapter of "obedience" to me. Jeremiah is called once again to be obedient to

preach - and to wear an ox yoke this time! And the people of Judah are called to be obedient to the Babylonian conquest. Let it happen. Be exiled. And eventually you will return. Fight this call to obedience - and you will die. I know obedience is not a very popular term in our culture today. But, I do think it is still so relevant to our relationship with God. In what area of your life is God calling you to be obedient? Will you be obedient?

8/16 - In our Jeremiah readings today we get two different declarations of how long the exile to Babylon will last - 2 years versus 70 years! Just a slight difference... Of course we simply need to look at which of the declarations are coming from a false prophet (Hananiah, 2 yrs) versus a true prophet of God's (Jeremiah, 70 yrs). Biblical scholars debate the exact dates of when this 70 years of captivity in Babylon took place: 1) 605 to 538 B.C. would cover the first deportation until the arrival of the first exiles back in Jerusalem. 2) 586 to 516 B.C. would cover the time between the destruction of the temple and its rebuilding. 3) Some believe the number 70 was an approximate number meant to signify a lifetime.

8/16 - Jeremiah chapter 28 has a good lesson for us in the false prophet Hananiah. I think we need to be careful when we use words like, "God says", or "this is God's will", or "I know God will do x, y, and z." Hananiah was using words like this... and he may have really thought this to be true... but he was wrong big-time. And paid a big price. I'm thinking in our lives it might be better to say, "God-willing, this hopefully will happen..." or "I believe God is leading me this way. I pray I'm right" - and then be prepared to adjust if we realize it wasn't quite the right way. I'm sure most of us are seeking God's will for our lives. **Q: We maybe should be cautious on making declarative statements on precisely what God's will is for our lives?** Let us instead simply try to follow God's lead in our life each and every day and trust that his lead will take us where he wants us to go.

8/16-17 - Ezekiel chapters 4 and 5 get into God's signs of the coming siege and judgment of Jerusalem and Israel. The thing that went through my mind when reading all of this was the 3rd commandment from Exodus chapter 20, verses 4-6: *"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand {generations} of those who love me and keep my commandments."* The term in these verses "jealous God" did come to my mind when reading Ezekiel 4 and 5. And not in a bad way. But, just in the way it was. God commanded no idols. Israel/Jerusalem created idols and did not repent after repeated warnings. God was "jealous" of all of this, and the siege and judgment came. Ezekiel chapter 6 continues along the lines of chapters 4 & 5 - with judgment against the very land of Israel because of the pagan shrines. Verses 8 & 9 stood out to me in this chapter: *"But I will let a few of my people escape destruction, and they will be scattered among the nations of the world. Then when they are exiled among the nations, they will remember me. They will recognize how grieved I am by their unfaithful hearts and lustful eyes that long for other gods. Then at last they will hate themselves for all their wickedness."* Here we see that God will preserve the Davidic line - and that the Israelites will eventually repent, and the nation will eventually be restored (as we know in hindsight now). Verse 10 in this chapter also seems to sum up a lot of what's going on in God's mind in today's readings in Ezekiel: *"They will know that I alone am the LORD and that I was serious when I predicted that all this would happen to them."* **Q: Do we know that God is alone the Lord in our lives today? Do we trust his Word and his predictions without a doubt?**

8/17 - Ezekiel chapter 7 has a line that repeats twice in verses 4 & 27: *"Then you/they will know that I am the LORD!"* We are seeing here that God is not happy with Israel in large part because they do not realize that he is the Lord. They have sold out to other gods and idols and sin and don't really think God will do much about it. Well, God opens this chapter with strong words in verse 1: *"The end is here!"* God's patience has run out. But, keep in mind that God kept trying to get the Israelites to repent over and over and over again. They wouldn't. **Q: Do we sometimes test God's patience? If so, will we repent in the areas of our life where we test God's patience?**

8/17 - Ezekiel chapter 8 reminds me of a lawyer making a case in court! And God absolutely puts forth a strong case for why the end arrived for Jerusalem in the 5th/6th century B.C. It is so sad to see these sins take place in and around the Temple. In chapter 9 we see six angels of God appear from the north gates - where one of the major idols was located. In this vision, these 6 angels are carrying out God's judgment on Israel. Verse 7 gives us a hint that God is preparing to leave the Temple completely: *"Defile the Temple!" the LORD commanded.* We'll pick this up in tomorrow's readings...

8/18 - Ezekiel's vision of the Lord in Jerusalem continues today in chapters 10 and 11 as the glory of the Lord first leaves the Temple and then leaves Jerusalem completely! This is a big deal as the glory of the Lord had pretty much been in the Temple since it's construction. We are also visited by the cherubim again in these chapters. Chapter 11 verses 19 & 20

stood out to me today, with a message for the exiles in Babylon - *"I will give them singleness of heart and put a new spirit within them. I will take away their hearts of stone and give them tender hearts instead, so they will obey my laws and regulations. Then they will truly be my people, and I will be their God."* **How are our hearts today? Are they tender? Single in their focus on God? Do we have a new Spirit within us?**

8/18 - Ezekiel chapter 12 today reminds me that sometimes in my own life I believe God sends some signs and warnings and I, like the Israelites in exile in Babylon, can be a rebel. I ignore the signs and warnings or think - oh, that won't come to pass for a long time... **Q: Do you suppose this is wise? Is there a sign or a warning God may be sending your way in your life currently? Will you listen and obey? Will you pay attention to God's warning signs in your life?**

8/18 - I love the story of Ezekiel packing up his pack in broad daylight and leaving through a hole in his house during the evening in chapter 12 today! In verse 7 we read - *"So I did as I was told. In broad daylight I brought my pack outside, filled with the things I might carry into exile. Then in the evening while the people looked on, I dug through the wall with my hands and went out into the darkness with my pack on my shoulder."* It is interesting that in chapter 12 God says three times: *"Then you/they will know that I am the LORD!"* **Q: Why do you think he repeats this three times in this chapter? Should this be a statement we should consider in our own lives? Who is the Lord of your life - yourself or God? Do you know that God is the Lord? Is God consistently in the very center of your life?**

8/18 - Ezekiel chapter 13 verse 2 stood out to me today: *"Son of man, speak against the false prophets of Israel who are inventing their own prophecies. Tell them to listen to the word of the LORD."* **Q: Do we see this in our world today? People inventing their own prophecies? Inventing their own religions? Picking and choosing what philosophies they like the best? Do we do this? Should we be listening instead to the Word of the Lord? Are you actively involved in a church where the Word is clearly taught and Jesus is clearly the cornerstone?**

8/19 - Ezekiel 14 verse 3 I believe can definitely speak to us today: *"Son of man, these leaders have set up idols in their hearts. They have embraced things that lead them into sin."* This is scary to think about... **Q: Have we set up idols in our hearts? Have we embraced things that lead us into sin? Think this is a good idea... ? Can we turn these idols in our hearts over to the Lord? It is my hunch that an idol set up in our hearts is one of the toughest things to get rid of. We need Jesus in our lives to free us idols. Will you let Jesus remove any idol that is in your heart this very day? Please don't let that idol hang around in your heart any longer...**

8/19 - I am fascinated by God's words in Ezekiel chapter 14 verses 13 & 14 today: *"Son of man, suppose the people of a country were to sin against me, and I lifted my fist to crush them, cutting off their food supply and sending a famine to destroy both people and animals. Even if Noah, Daniel, and Job were there, their righteousness would save no one but themselves, says the Sovereign Lord."* The first thing these verses tell us is that God's judgment upon Jerusalem at this time was certain. Even the righteousness of Noah, Daniel, and Job couldn't change that - only these 3 men would have been saved. However, this got me thinking. Is it possible that sometimes today we try to build up our own righteousness to ensure our own salvation and basically do nothing to try to build up others righteousness and help them toward their salvation? Meaning, do we sometimes retreat into a "Christian bubble" and ignore the rest of "the world." Leave them to their own devices. It just made me think when reading about Noah, Daniel, and Job that my hunch is that these 3 would not just chill out and relax in the glory and certitude of their own righteousness. My hunch is that they would get out there on the streets and try to save others. **Q: So, what about you and me? Are we just cocooning in our own righteousness and salvation, or are we taking salvation to the streets? Are we retreating from the battle for others' salvation or are we engaged in it? What say you?**

8/19 - Ezekiel chapter 15 is an interesting one for me today, where God basically calls Jerusalem a useless grape vine. In reading this I am also reminded that Jesus in John 15 uses the grape vine analogy again saying *"I am the vine and you are the branches."* This tells me that Jesus redeems even useless grape vines! :) **Q: However, using this Ezekiel analogy, are we growing in our lives like trees or like vines? How thick are your roots? How solid is your core?**

8/19 - Ezekiel chapter 16 is a fascinating and sad look at the city of Jerusalem. This is the first time I have really spent a little bit of time with this chapter. The question I find for myself in reading this chapter is this: **Q: has God blessed us similarly in some ways that he blessed Jerusalem? Have we, perhaps, in some ways used the blessings that God has given us in improper ways?** Verse 6 in this chapter stood out to me: *"But I came by and saw you there, helplessly kicking about in your own blood. As you lay there, I said, 'Live!'"* Bible commentaries suggest that this one word - **Live!** - is God's basic desire for all humans. How powerful is that realization? How very beautiful... Live! Let us Live!

8/19 - Ezekiel chapter 16 compares the sins of Jerusalem to those of Sodom! These are bold comparisons, as you know the story of Sodom and the wipeout there. The Israelites were in relationship with God - they should have known better - hence the Sodom comparison. Verse 49 stood out to me in this chapter *"Sodom's sins were pride, laziness, and gluttony, while the poor and needy suffered outside her door."* The interesting thing to note is that Sodom's social injustice sins are highlighted here - rather than their sexual sins. Sodom was not taking care of the poor. And nor was Jerusalem at this time of the 6th century B.C. **Q: What about in our world today? Are there poor and needy suffering outside our door today? Are we not taking care of them because of our pride, laziness, or gluttony? Where is our "door"? Who is our neighbor? What will you do?**

8/20 - Ezekiel chapter 17 is a great story of the two eagles! This is basically a story of the city of Jerusalem's vacillating foreign policy between Babylon and Egypt. The first eagle is King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon and the treaty Jerusalem makes w/ Babylon is in the story. Then, the second eagle represents a pharaoh from Egypt, whom Jerusalem makes another treaty with subsequently, which goes against Babylon. The bad part of this is that the Babylon treaty was sworn to by the king of Jerusalem/Judah in the Lord's name - then broken. This is a very bad idea to swear something in the Lord's name and then not uphold it... The close of this chapter is phenomenal when it takes a Messianic turn, foreshadowing Jesus in verses 22 and 23: *"And the Sovereign LORD says: I will take a tender shoot from the top of a tall cedar, and I will plant it on the top of Israel's highest mountain. It will become a noble cedar, sending forth its branches and producing seed. Birds of every sort will nest in it, finding shelter beneath its branches."* **Q: Do these verses sound like Jesus to you?**

8/20 - Ezekiel chapter 18 is a powerful chapter! What we are seeing in this chapter is the Old Covenant - which I do believe was compassionate & "fair", but different from the New Covenant, which I believe is compassionate & graceful (which may not necessarily be "fair" - but which is good news - Gospel - for us sinners!). Verse 30 is a good look at the Old Covenant: *"Therefore, I will judge each of you, O people of Israel, according to your actions, says the Sovereign LORD. Turn from your sins! Don't let them destroy you!"* Verse 4 of course stands out too with: *"And this is my rule: The person who sins will be the one who dies."* You read this at a high level and you'll get a bit nervous, no? :) Indeed this is the Old Covenant: your actions will dictate your death or your life. It's up to your actions. It's up to you. You'll get what you deserve. And this is certainly "fair." However, this changes through Jesus Christ's atonement for our sins once and for all on the cross. Under the New Covenant, through God's gift of grace, we now simply need to have faith that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, died for our sins and rose from the dead. As we've been reading in Hebrews currently - we simply need to have faith in Christ as our High Priest. God's grace and our faith becomes the key (regeneration). Not our actions on their own. This being said, after our salvation (justification) through grace and faith, God is very interested in our actions and wants us to live a life of holiness (sanctification). This is a lot of theology here... and more than I can blog on without goofing it up - actually I probably already have. :) **Q: What are your thoughts on the person who sins will be the one who dies? How does this relate to Jesus' ministry?**

8/20 - Verse 32 can be argued to be the single most important point in all of the book of Ezekiel - *"I don't want you to die, says the Sovereign LORD. Turn back and live!"* This is a powerful verse. **Q: Think this verse shows us that God is compassionate? Think this might be the single most important point in the book of Ezekiel? Think this verse can apply to our lives today? Are there areas of sin in your life which God is calling you to turn back from? Calling you to turn toward true Life? And to be free from the slavery of sin? Will you turn back? Will you repent?**

8/20 - Ezekiel Chapter 19 is a funeral song and allegory about the land of Judah and Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the lioness and the lions are two of her sons, two kings - one who ended up trapped and deceived by Egypt and the other by Babylon. The last sentence of verse 14 is a sad one... *"This is a funeral song, and it is now time for the funeral."* As we know, it is now time for the funeral for Jerusalem in Ezekiel's time. However, of course, there is the redemption to come and the continuation of the house of David. The promise to Abraham won't die here! There is another Lion of Judah yet to come...

8/21 - Ezekiel chapter 20 verse 12 stands out to me today: *"And I gave them my Sabbath days of rest as a sign between them and me. It was to remind them that I, the LORD, had set them apart to be holy, making them my special people."* I like learning this - the Sabbath days of rest were given as a sign between God and his people. **Q: How are you doing on taking a day of rest each week? Would taking a day of rest each week - a Sabbath day - benefit your relationship with God? And with others? Would it benefit perhaps the other 6 days of your week?**

8/21 - After verse 12 above, we read this from God in verse 13: *"But the people of Israel rebelled against me, and they refused to obey my laws there in the wilderness. They wouldn't obey my instructions even though obedience would have given them life. And they also violated my Sabbath days. So I threatened to pour out my fury on them, and I made plans to utterly consume them in the desert."* The thing that stood out to me in this verse was "they also violated my Sabbath days." I don't get too caught up on which day of the week we take a Sabbath - as some may work weekends and have Mondays off, for example. **Q: Whatever the day is for you - do you have 1 day a week that you consider a Sabbath? Why might this be a smart thing to do? A healthy thing to do? A faithful thing to do?**

8/21 - In Ezekiel 20:40 we read: *"There I will require your offerings and your choice gifts, along with all your holy sacrifices."* **Q: What are your offerings, choice gifts and holy sacrifices to the Lord? Your life, your thoughts, your finances? Do you give a percentage of your income to your local church, ministries, and nonprofits? Would this perhaps be a "holy sacrifice" if you did so? Would this be a bold act of faith?**

8/21 - In Ezekiel chapter 21 today we read about the Lord's sword of judgment! Which, in this case is Babylon and King Nebuchadnezzar. I did not realize until today that there is actually a "sword song" in the Bible - a song that warriors may have sung and even danced to before going out to battle. Unfortunately, this sword song in verses 9 through 11 was being sung for Jerusalem because of her many sins... *"A sword, a sword is being sharpened and polished. It is sharpened for terrible slaughter and polished to flash like lightning! Now will you laugh? Those far stronger than you have fallen beneath its power! Yes, the sword is now being sharpened and polished; it is being prepared for the executioner."* Okay, so Ezekiel Chapters 21 & 22 are the types of chapters where you might think about stereotypes of the Old Testament - a "grouchy/mean" God perhaps one might say about these two chapters... However! - context of course is key to keep in mind. We must also know the book of Jeremiah or Ezekiel prior to these chapters. God has been slow to anger, compassionate, asking - no, begging - people to repent. And they have not. And things just keep getting worse and worse and worse. Check out chapter 22 verses 1 through 16 for how bad the sins of Jerusalem have gotten... *All of this reminds me that the consequences for sin are very real. Let us never forget the truth of Romans 6:23 - "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."* And, once again, in verse 30 of chapter 22 we see God's compassion and God seeking an opportunity to stop the coming judgment: *"I looked for someone who might rebuild the wall of righteousness that guards the land. I searched for someone to stand in the gap in the wall so I wouldn't have to destroy the land, but I found no one."* No one was found... **Q: This verse makes me think about this - sometimes I think we tell ourselves, "What difference does it make? What difference does it make if I'm good or bad? What difference does it make if I serve and love others in need?" Check out verse 30 above again. Think one person could have made a difference then? What about now? Will you make a difference today? Will you stand in the gap?**

8/22 - Ezekiel chapter 23 is interesting in its use of prostitution and lust as the metaphors for Israel's political alliances with neighboring lands. My thoughts here are that we live in a "sexualized" world in so many ways today - and perhaps things weren't so different back then. Sex is obviously something that was created as a good by God - but can so quickly and easily be twisted into something that is not good. Sex is good in the right context of marriage. Detrimental in the wrong. It seems to me that lust and the selling of sex was as prevalent back in Ezekiel's today as it is in ours. To which we may need to remember well Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 6:18 - *"Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body."* And of course James 4:7 - *"Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."* **Q: Is there an area of our lives related to sex that you must flee from? Will you flee?**

8/23 - An important note from our readings in Ezekiel chapter 24 today is that Ezekiel's wife dies on the exact same day the Temple in Jerusalem was burned! August 14, 586 B.C. As I read these verses about Ezekiel's wife and the Temple I am reminded of a verse in the book of Job - 13:15- *"Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him."* Though Ezekiel's wife dies and though the Temple burned, the Lord still instructs Judah in verse 23: *"You will not mourn or weep"*. The Job situation is of course different in that Job was righteous and Judah was not at this time. And there is not clear hope for Judah at this time - though there ultimately is redemption for Jerusalem. However, again, look at Job's faith in the midst of all he was going through: *"yet I will hope in him."* **Q: When times are bad - or times are good - do you hope in Him? No matter what, will you hope in Him?**

8/23 - Jeremiah chapter 34 is interesting with the freedom for the slaves - and then the reversal of that decision. **Q: Could this story remind us of our lives at times? Do we sometimes promise God that we'll do something he wants us to do? Maybe even start to do it? And then change our minds? Why are we not consistent with what we tell God we**

**will do?** Let us pray for consistency in our spiritual walk!

8/24 - Jeremiah Chapter 32 is intriguing. God asks Jeremiah to buy land - even though all of the land of Jerusalem will soon fall under captivity. Jeremiah is - once again - obedient. God goes on in this chapter to indeed confirm that Jerusalem will fall - but that God will eventually restore the Israelites back to Jerusalem and buying and selling of land will occur again. Interesting chapter. The call to Jeremiah to buy land was to set the stage for reminding the Israelites that they will soon lose this ability, but it will come back to them again eventually. I like this example. **Q: What about you in your life today - is there anything God is asking you to be obedient in? Even if you perhaps won't see an "immediate" return on your investment of your obedience, will you obey God? Is the eternal return on your investment of obedience worth it?**

8/24 - Today in our readings we get the famous Jeremiah 33:3 verse: *"Call to me and I will answer you and tell you great and unsearchable things you do not know."* (NIV) Verses 15 & 16 are powerful Messianic verses, harkening back to Jeremiah 23:6 (The Lord Our Righteousness): *"In those days and at that time I will make a righteous Branch sprout from David's line; he will do what is just and right in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and Jerusalem will live in safety. This is the name by which it will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness."* Verse 22 is a great verse echoing the covenant promises to Abraham: *"I will make the descendants of David my servant and the Levites who minister before me as countless as the stars of the sky and as measureless as the sand on the seashore."* Verse 18 threw me for a loop initially, trying to figure out how this could still be - *"nor will the priests, who are Levites, ever fail to have a man to stand before me continually to offer burnt offerings, to burn grain offerings and to present sacrifices."* I wondered - where are the Levites today? Fortunately, I read a commentary that set me straight - Jesus is fulfilling this ministry for us today! Jesus is our Levitical priest standing before God continually. **Q: Beautiful, eh? Do you consider Jesus to be your High Priest?**

8/25 - Ezekiel Chapter 27 indicates that Tyre was certainly good at business and trading! However chapter 28 tells us that there was also a lot of pride associated with these business skills & wealth. Verse 5 tells us: *"Yes, your wisdom has made you very rich, and your riches have made you very proud."* This verse definitely stands out to me. **Q: How often in our lives does something in our lives make us proud? Verse 2 in this chapter says this: "In your great pride you claim, 'I am a god!' If we get prideful enough, might we even consider ourselves a god?? Do you hear others in our culture today telling us that we are gods? Good idea or bad idea here....?**

8/26 - We reach the end of the book of Jeremiah today! This has been a fascinating book for me to read this year! I definitely learned a lot more about prophets, the fall of Jerusalem and Babylon. I hope this has been a good learning experience for you as well? Jeremiah chapter 51 closed out Jeremiah's prophecies, ending with his prophecies against Babylon. And actually, we're getting a good set up for Lamentations in Chapter 52 of Jeremiah today. I think as you read the end of chapter 51, you might think - okay, this should be the end of this book, correct, as verse 64 in chapter 51 tells us - *"This is the end of Jeremiah's messages."* But... chapter 52 is in here to remind readers of the fall of Jerusalem, and to segue way into the book of Lamentations. Chapter 52 is sad to read - particularly when you think back to all of the work of the Israelites in Solomon's day in creating the temple. Also I think back to the work of others earlier in the Old Testament who built up the walls of Jerusalem. All of this destroyed and burned. I read somewhere that it's speculated that the Ark of the Covenant was probably destroyed during this time period, in the fire at the Temple. It is so sad to think about this day in Jerusalem's history... At the very end of chapter 52 we see a few verses giving hope for Israel's line to continue. **Q: So, how has been reading the book of the prophet Jeremiah been for you this year? What have you learned from this book? How can you apply these learnings to your life today?** Whenever we reach the end of any book in the Bible, I like to take a few moments to sit back and think about what God taught me through each particular book. I hope you can find this time to do the same whenever you reach the end of reading or studying a book in the Bible.

8/26 - Today we begin the book of Lamentations! Lamentations is a short 5 chapter book. It's essentially a post-script to the book of Jeremiah, and was likely written by the prophet Jeremiah. It is a book that surveys and laments Jerusalem and the Temple after the destruction of both by the Babylonians in about 586 B.C.

~ **Lamentations** ~

Author: Jeremiah

Date: Sixth century B.C.

Content: The book of Lamentations is a funeral song, written for the fallen city of Jerusalem. It was composed by Jeremiah, who was an eye-witness of all he describes in such vivid detail. He shows the destruction in all its horror so that it could never again be asked, "Why did no one ever tell us the awful price we would have to pay for disobeying God?"

There is very little of comfort, but Jeremiah's prayer in chapter 5 does look beyond the desolate ashes of the once glorious Jerusalem to God whose throne endures forever. Only there can Jeremiah find any solace.

**Theme:** Lamentations is a declaration of the wrath of God. It portrays the bitter truth that God had promised judgment upon sin, and Judah had been foolish enough to put God to the test. Bad as that was, the deeper tragedy was that it did not have to be. God's faithfulness is great, being renewed every morning, and his compassion never fails. Had Judah only obeyed, it all could have been avoided. The warning and the promise found in this book should be emblazoned in the skies for all to see. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 13-14)*

8/26 - Lamentations chapter 1 verse 1 sets the tone & stage for this book - *"Jerusalem's streets, once bustling with people, are now silent. Like a widow broken with grief, she sits alone in her mourning. Once the queen of nations, she is now a slave."* Why is this so? Well, we just read the book of the prophet Jeremiah, so we know why... One thing to keep in mind when reading Lamentations - it provides a glimpse at the devastating affects of unchecked & unrepentant sin. **Q: Per this verse above, do you think our sin change our position in life from being a "queen" to a "slave"?**

8/26 - I think it is important to realize that God did provide so much grace and compassion toward Jerusalem and Judah in the book of Jeremiah before everything got to the devastating point that it is in the book of Lamentations. God sent the prophet Jeremiah to warn Judah over and over and over again.... However, there was no repentance of sin and things got worse and worse - until it got to the point that God had no choice but to discipline Judah through Babylon's taking Judah captive. We do need to know that unrepentant, unsorrowful, unchecked sin in our lives can lead to horrifically sorrowful things happening in our lives. And perhaps, by us hitting a rock bottom, like Jerusalem clearly is here in Lamentations, there will be an opportunity for discipline and ultimate redemption...

8/26 - Today in Lamentations 1:14 we read: *"My sins have been bound into a yoke; by his hands they were woven together. They have come upon my neck and the Lord has sapped my strength. He has handed me over to those I cannot withstand."* **Do you believe that sin can become a "yoke" around your neck? Can sin sap your strength? Can sin hand you over to those you cannot withstand? How can you be freed from this yoke of sin?** Perhaps these words from Jesus in Matthew 11:28-30 will give us some ideas - *"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* **Q: If there is a yoke of sin around your neck, will you allow Jesus to remove that yoke? Will you exchange the yoke of sin for the yoke of rest that Christ offers you today?**

8/27 - Perhaps Lamentations chapter 2, verses 18 & 19, give us a hint at what we should do if we realize we've hit a rock bottom place in our lives due to unchecked sin - *"Cry aloud before the Lord, O walls of Jerusalem! Let your tears flow like a river. Give yourselves no rest from weeping day or night. Rise during the night and cry out. Pour out your hearts like water to the Lord. Lift up your hands to him in prayer."* **Q: If you are at that place of rock bottom, or nearing it, will you cry to the Lord? Will you pour out your heart to the Lord letting him know that you need him - that you cannot do life without him? Will you pray?**

8/27 - Lamentations Chapter 3 today starts out quite sad and empty in verses 1-20. Of course, the reason for this sadness and emptiness in these opening verses is God's discipline toward the people of Jerusalem at this time. They had sinned greatly and thus this discipline had come upon them. I think the thing for us to remember in seasons like this in our lives is that it is typically only a season. This too shall pass - if we repent & learn & grow and return to the Lord. Indeed, we see the transition in chapter 21: *"Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this..."* I love this! "I still dare to hope" - even in the midst of so much sadness & emptiness. **Q: In the midst of our tough seasons in life, can we still dare to hope? Why should we still dare to hope? Will you still dare to hope?**

8/27 - Verses 22 to 66 in today's readings in Lamentations chapter 3 are just phenomenal. I could write on and on about probably each of these verses. There is so much here for us. I'd encourage you to read these verses at least twice and meditate on them and how they might apply to your life today. I'll jump through a couple of verses here that stood out to me. Verse 23 - *"Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each day."* **Q: Do you experience God's mercies afresh each day? Do you believe that you can?** Verse 25 - *"The LORD is wonderfully good to those who wait for him and seek him."* **If you are not experiencing God now, will you wait for him? Will you seek him?**

8/27-28 - Lamentations Chapters 4 and 5 are tough chapters to read. We know why everything that we read in these chapters has come to pass from our readings in the book of Jeremiah. I guess the thing personally that jumped out at me today when reading this chapter were these thoughts: **Q: Have I personally ever experienced anything like what we**

**read about in this chapter?** The answer is no. The second thought or question that came to me, however, was this: **Are there people in our world today that are experiencing similar things that we read about in this chapter?** And I believe the answer is obviously yes. Not for the same "reasons" that Jerusalem was experiencing all of this of course - but the same experiences of starvation and lack of hope are indeed happening in our world today. Then.... **the question becomes - is this fair? Is this right? Should we try to do something for people in our world that are experiencing starvation, lack of hope, and worse? What will we do?** I know there are thousands of organizations that we could support to help those in need in our world. One that I have personal experience with is [World Vision](#). If you have an extra dollar a day, you can sponsor a child and radically change that child's life - forever. Or, even if you have an extra dollar a month, World Vision can do incredible things with that dollar. **Which international relief organization do you invest in?**

8/28 - Today we start and finish the book of Obadiah - the shortest book in the Old Testament! Obadiah was a prophet from Judah, who prophesied against Edom, Israel's neighbor to the southeast of Jerusalem & the Salt Sea. Edom was a descendent of Esau - and Israel a descendent of Jacob. Esau & Jacob were the twin sons of Isaac and fought during their lifetimes, and the fighting of the nations of Israel & Edom continued throughout the Old Testament. A quick flashback of Jacob & Esau is here from Genesis 25:23 - *"Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."* There is some uncertainty over when Obadiah prophesied. It was either approximately 853-841 B.C. when Edom rebelled against Judah during the reign of Jehoram - in which case Obadiah would be a contemporary of Elisha. Or, more likely, it was approx 605-586 B.C. when Babylon was attacking Jerusalem - in which case Obadiah would be a contemporary of Jeremiah.

8/28 - Verse 15 stood out to me in Obadiah today: *"As you have done to Israel, so it will be done to you."* This is a good reminder to do unto others, as we would have done unto us... Or, what goes around, comes around? :) God was upset that Edom sat around and did nothing while their neighbor Israel was attacked. They could have done something, but did nothing. **Q: In our world today are our neighbors are being attacked - or hurt - or starving - or dying of AIDS? If so, should we be doing something about it? Should we be like the Good Samaritan, caring for our neighbor? Who is your neighbor?**

8/28 - Jeremiah chapter 40 continues with Gedaliah being appointed governor of Judah by Babylon. Gedaliah seems to be a good sort, as he invites the people living in the country side to: *"Settle in any town you wish, and live off the land. Harvest the grapes and summer fruits and olives, and store them away."* (v. 10). However, things don't go well too long for Gedaliah, which is sad... Ishmael enters the scene in chapter 40 and into chapter 41, and ultimately murders Gedaliah. This definitely made me sad! Things seemed to be getting a bit peaceful in Judah, and prosperous to a degree. And then evil enters the scene once again... **Q: How many times have we seen this scenario play out over history?**

8/29 - The three Jeremiah chapters today are quite eventful! It is intriguing that the Israelites ask Jeremiah for a message from God - and that whatever they hear back they will do and obey. But then they don't obey! **Q: Are we like this at times... ? We promise promise promise God that we'll listen & change... but then do we? If you are going through struggles in your life today will you call out to God? Do you trust that He will answer in His own unique and perfect way and timing? And then will you trust and obey?**

8/29 - Chapter 43 reminds me that when we are disobedient to God's will that our disobedience can affect not only ourselves, but others around us too. Mind you, Egypt was not a "house of the holy" - but the Israelites disobedience is going to bring destruction to themselves and Egypt. They're carrying their disobedience and curse on to others. Jeremiah 43's verses 9 & 10 stood out: *"While the people of Judah are watching, bury large rocks between the pavement stones at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace here in Tahpanhes. I will surely bring my servant Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, here to Egypt."* Interesting that God calls Nebuchadnezzar his "servant". **Q: Would God have said this about the Israelites at this time? Called them his servants?**

8/29 - Chapter 44 is a great reminder of why it's a bad idea to pursue idols in our life instead of God! Verse 7 asks *"Why are you destroying yourselves?"* I love this verse. **Why are we destroying ourselves?** We bring upon self-abuse, self-destruction, when we pursue things that are not of God. Think about it. **Q: They may bring a quick temporary pleasure, but in the long run are they building us up or destroying us? Why are we destroying ourselves?**

8/29 - Ezekiel chapter 33 verse 32 stands out to me today when God talks about how the exiles view Ezekiel's messages: *"You are very entertaining to them, like someone who sings love songs with a beautiful voice or plays fine music on an instrument. They hear what you say, but they don't do it!"* This makes me think even of ourselves - maybe even in our

churches... **Q: Do we sometimes go to church looking for a good "performance" from the church or musicians or pastors? And maybe miss the gospel message? Do we applaud the performance? Even hear what is said? But don't do anything about it...?**

8/30 - Ezekiel chapter 34 reminds me a lot of the famous and beautiful Psalm 23 - "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want..." However, before we get to God being the Good Shepherd - and hear about the Good Shepherd to come - there is some rebuking of the "shepherds" of Israel at that time, that may also have a message for us. In verses 3 & 4 we read: *"You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured."* **Q: Could this verse speak into our lives in some way? Is it possible that we eat fine food and wear fine clothes at the expense of others in need? Are we consistently strengthening the weak? Healing the sick? Binding up the injured? 1.2 billion people in the world live on less than \$1 a day. Are you doing something to care for these brothers and sisters on a consistent basis? What are you doing?**

8/30 - Ezekiel chapter 36 is an awesome chapter looking at the restoration of Israel, post-exile. I like that there are prophecies to the mountain and hills and valleys in this chapter! Great verses. Verses 8 & 9 stood out to me - *"But the mountains of Israel will produce heavy crops of fruit to prepare for my people's return--and they will be coming home again soon! See, I am concerned for you, and I will come to help you. Your ground will be tilled and your crops planted."* I like that God is concerned for the mountains and he wants them to be fruitful. If He is concerned for the mountains, think how much more He is concerned for each of our lives... **Q: Think He wants our lives to be fruitful as well? How so?** Verse 22 shows God's grace - *"I am bringing you back again but not because you deserve it. I am doing it to protect my holy name."* The first sentence shows grace in that God is bringing them back, even though they are undeserving. The second sentence you might not initially see the grace in it - but, God is protecting his holy name so that ultimately all people's in all nations will come to faith in him - and not idols, which deliver nothing and lead to the grave. If God did not bring the Israelites back and protect his name, the rest of the world would see no reason to turn from their idols. Verses 26 & 27 sound very New Testament / new covenant - *"And I will give you a new heart with new and right desires, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony heart of sin and give you a new, obedient heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so you will obey my laws and do whatever I command."* **Q: Do you have a new heart? With new and right desires? Do you have a new Spirit in you?**

8/31 - Ezekiel chapter 37 starts with a fascinating vision! This vision of the valley of dry bones is an allusion to the exiled Israelites. As God brings life and breath into the bones, he will do the same for the exiles, and bring them back to their home land. In a sense, bring them back to life! Verse 14 sums up the purpose of this vision nicely - *"I will put my Spirit in you, and you will live and return home to your own land. Then you will know that I am the LORD."* Again, we hear the words, as we have so often in Ezekiel - *"then you will know that I am the Lord."* **Q: Today in our lives, do we know that the Lord is the Lord? How so?** Verses 15-23 are great - discussing the reunification of the two kingdoms of Israel since the time of Solomon. Israel will become one kingdom again. And verses 24 through 28 point toward the coming Messiah, Jesus. Verse 26 stands out - *"And I will make a covenant of peace with them, an everlasting covenant."* **Have you entered into this covenant of peace with God? The everlasting covenant? Have you opened the door to Jesus in your heart? Do you hear him knocking? Maybe late at night, do you hear Jesus knocking? Offering you an everlasting covenant of peace? Will you open the door of your heart?**

8/31 - Ezekiel chapter 39 continues the destruction of Gog! See yesterday's posting below for more details on who and what Gog may be. Verse 25 stands out to me in today's readings: *"So now the Sovereign LORD says: I will end the captivity of my people; I will have mercy on Israel, for I am jealous for my holy reputation!"* We see that the exile is coming near to an end. Ezekiel and Jeremiah have been two pretty heavy books with prophecies against Israel. This chapter continues to show the redemption and return of the exiles from Babylon to Israel is soon coming. It is interesting that God is jealous for his holy reputation in the verse above... **Q: are we ourselves also jealous for God's holy reputation? Should we be?**

#### **Group discussions:**

- Introductions.
- What were some of your favorite verses or passages from the readings?
- What are some questions that were generated for you based on the readings?
- What is something new you learned about God or the Bible from the readings?
- How did God speak to you through the readings?

- What is something you want to change or grow in your life based on the readings?
- **Discuss the bold Questions in the Study Notes**
- Any prayer requests for the group?

**Each group is encouraged to close in prayer.**

**Daily questions for this next week's readings you may want to journal or pray through and discuss with your group:**

- My favorite verses or passages:
- What I learned from the readings:
- My questions for further study:
- How God spoke to me through the Word:
- Something I want to change or grow in my life based on the Word:
- My prayer points based on the Word:

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