

Notes & Group Questions for September 1 - 30 readings (*Questions (Q:) for groups are bolded below*)

EZEKIEL 32:17 - LUKE 5:39 (daily reading schedule at: www.ChronologicalBibleBlog.com)

9/1 - Ezekiel chapter 32 is a great study on pride... pride of a nation, and pride of individuals. And the dangers of pride - where pride will ultimately lead someone. In chapter 32 verse 19 God asks the rhetorical question (not a trick question this time) - "*O Egypt, are you lovelier than the other nations? No! So go down to the pit and lie there among the outcasts.*" **Q: Today in our lives, do we ever struggle with pride? Do we compare ourselves to others? Do we consider ourselves lovelier than others?** My hunch is that we too often do...

9/1 - In Ezekiel chapter 33 today we see Ezekiel appointed as the Watchman of Israel - once again. You'll recall this happened previously in chapter 3 of Ezekiel as well. The difference is that now we're in the post-destruction of Jerusalem & the Temple, so we'll quickly start to see more of a message of hope & redemption, in addition to continued calls for repentance. I think in verse 11 we start to see this shift in the Lord's wanting to restore Jerusalem & Israel again: "*As surely as I live, says the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of wicked people. I only want them to turn from their wicked ways so they can live. Turn! Turn from your wickedness, O people of Israel! Why should you die?*" The call for repentance... **Q: Are there areas in your life where God may be calling you to "Turn!"? Will you Turn?**

9/1 - Psalm 137 is a Psalm reflecting upon the Israelites exile in Babylon and about how much Jerusalem was missed. We also read about a call to punish Edom for their rejoicing in the fall of Jerusalem. Later this year we will read prophecies against Edom in the book of the prophet Obadiah. Verses 8 & 9 read: "*O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us. Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.*" I realize that verses 8 & 9 in this Psalm may be troubling. I found a couple of links with essays / thoughts on this verse. I'll need to reflect on these - and study further - to see if I agree or disagree w/ what these are saying:

http://www.learnthebible.org/q_a_dashing_little_ones_against_stones.htm

<http://www.jimmcguiggan.com/nonbelievers2.asp?id=6>

<http://www.brfwitness.org/Articles/1986v21n4.htm>

9/2 - Today in First Chronicles chapter 5 we read about the tribes east of the Jordan River. Today in First Chronicles chapter 6 we read a genealogy of the Levites, the priestly tribe. I love that the temple musicians were included in the genealogy today! Check out verse 32: "*They ministered with music before the tabernacle.*" Nice touch to include the artists. **Q: Think God likes music? And how true is this - that music ministers to us?** I pray this is true for you. I know music ministers to me in such a profound way. Particularly Christian and worship music. Secular music I used to love - and it can still be interesting to listen to. But the only music these days that truly seems to "minister" to me is Christian music or praise and worship music. Certainly the music I sing in church every week! **Is music ministering to you these days?**

9/2 - We read some interesting verses to consider today in First Chronicles 8 verses 8 through 10: "*After Shaharaim divorced his wives Hushim and Baara, he had children in the land of Moab. Hodesh, his new wife, gave birth to Jobab, Zibia, Mesha, Malcam, Jeuz, Sakia, and Mirmah. These sons all became the leaders of clans.*" These verses basically record polygamy & divorce by Shaharaim. However, just because these actions are recorded in the Bible, it does not mean they are condoned by God. Since the creation of Adam and Eve, God has meant for there to be one man with one wife. But, we humans don't always follow what God wants for us... (as we each well know) The Bible records both the good & the bad in human actions. If someone were to chronicle our lives today, would what the chronicle recorded be pleasing in God's sight? Don't worry so much about your past & past mistakes. God can forgive and redeem those, if you will turn to him in repentance. **Q: But right now - what would the chronicler capture in your life today? Would it be pleasing in God's sight? Would you want other people to read about your life today? Would you be comfortable with any aspect of your life showing up on the front page of tomorrow's news?**

9/3 - Daniel chapter 4 is an incredible chapter today! There is a lot going on in this one. We open up this chapter with King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon giving praise to God as verses 2 & 3 tell us: "*I want you all to know about the miraculous signs and wonders the Most High God has performed for me. How great are his signs, how powerful his*

wonders! His kingdom will last forever, his rule through all generations." **Q: Does this sound like the Nebuchadnezzar we've come to know?** We'll, we must read on as he tells us how he got to the point of praising God like this... Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the tree in this chapter is relatively straightforward, as is the interpretation that Daniel gives. One intriguing verse to me was verse 27 where Daniel pleads with Nebuchadnezzar to repent to avoid what will happen per the dream - *"O King Nebuchadnezzar, please listen to me. Stop sinning and do what is right. Break from your wicked past by being merciful to the poor. Perhaps then you will continue to prosper."* **Do you think Nebuchadnezzar listened to Daniel? What if Daniel was telling us to do this same thing this very day? Would we listen? Will we stop sinning and do what is right? Will we be merciful to the poor?**

9/3 - We see the sin of pride bring down Nebuchadnezzar in verse 30 as follows - *"Just look at this great city of Babylon! I, by my own mighty power, have built this beautiful city as my royal residence and as an expression of my royal splendor."* **Q: Are their times in our life where we boast of what we have "done" or "created" by our "own mighty power"?** **Good idea.... ?** In this chapter today Nebuchadnezzar becomes Gollum from the Lord of the Rings! :) Yes, I did hear someone teach on this chapter recently and he placed up on screen a picture of Gollum from Lord of the Rings and suggested this is what happened to Nebuchadnezzar essentially in verse 33 - *"That very same hour the prophecy was fulfilled, and Nebuchadnezzar was driven from human society. He ate grass like a cow, and he was drenched with the dew of heaven. He lived this way until his hair was as long as eagles' feathers and his nails were like birds' claws."* **Can you see how sin can drive us to basic animal instincts? Like Gollum? Do you see how godly wisdom can save us from becoming like animals? Like Gollum?** Pride seems to be a very tempting sin for all of us - and not a good one to pursue - as Nebuchadnezzar tells us himself in verse 37 - *"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise and glorify and honor the King of heaven. All his acts are just and true, and he is able to humble those who are proud."* **Do you believe this to be true?**

9/3 - Ezekiel chapter 40 is very interesting! It begins the vision and description of what many call "Ezekiel's Temple." Essentially, this temple has not been built. Some say that this temple will be built in the future - during Christ's millennial reign. Some say it's a heavenly temple. Some say it was the vision for the temple that should have been built during Ezra's days in 517 B.C., but was not. It is fascinating to look at various theories on the various temples.

9/4 - Ezekiel chapters 40 and 41 in today's readings include verses where we read a lot about measurements and cubits and such! I have to admit that I sometimes zone out a bit when reading these types of details in the Old Testament. However - something that popped into my mind once when reading through these types of verses that has benefited me greatly in my appreciation of measurements and such is this - God is a God of precision. God is a God of detail. God is an organized God. Which I think is great news! I mean, look at our own human bodies and all our internal organs. We are wonderfully made by a God who is a God of precision and detail. So, remembering this when I read these types of measurements verses helps. It helps me keep my focus and interest on what I'm reading. I hope this helps you in some way as you read through detailed chapters like these in the Bible. **Q: If God showed this much organization and care for Ezekiel's Temple, do you suppose he continues to show his organization and care for our local churches today?**

9/4 - Ezekiel chapter 41 verse 3 stands out today: *"Then he went into the inner room at the end of the Holy Place."* This is interesting in that the angelic being leading Ezekiel through this vision and the temple enters the Most Holy Place - Ezekiel does not. Even though it's a vision. And even though God's presence is not in the Most Holy Place at this time (we'll see the Presence coming next chapter). Yet Ezekiel does not enter. Why? Because the law was that only the High Priest could enter the Most Holy Place. This shows great obedience on Ezekiel's part! Even in a vision, he's obedient. **Q: Are there areas of our life where God is calling us to be obedient? Even if we think our obedience in a specific circumstance or situation won't matter (e.g. a vision or a dream or even a small circumstance in real life) - will we still be obedient?**

9/4 - Ezekiel chapter 42 continues the description of the temple in Ezekiel's vision and the dimensions. In this chapter we learn about the rooms for the priests of the temple. The interesting thing for me, as I was reading this chapter today, is that my mind wandered a bit and wondered if maybe somehow this was / is a heavenly temple that Ezekiel was describing? I'm not sure. I have so much more to learn about the temples. **Q: But, it's interesting to think if maybe somehow we might see something like this temple in heaven?** An interesting thought at least for me to ponder. However - the tricky thing is that in chapter 43 there are descriptions of sacrifices for the altar in this temple. And of course Christ was the final sacrifice for our sins - so there is no need for the old covenant sacrifices. So, this could certainly dash my imagination of this being a heavenly temple we'll see some day. Though - I did read somewhere that if

this is a heavenly temple, the sacrifices described in chapter 43 may be "memorials" or ceremonial - but not required, as they were in the old covenant. I don't know... fascinating stuff to ponder however!

9/4 - Back to how all this might apply to our lives today. Verse 20 in chapter 42 stood out to me: "*So the area was 875 feet on each side with a wall all around it to separate the holy places from the common.*" The last part of that verse stands out - to separate the holy places from the common. **Q: I wonder about that in our lives - do we do anything that separates the holy from the common in our own lives? Do we need to? My thought here is that if we don't allow for some "holy places" to appear in our lives, might we just settle for common places throughout our lives?** A Holy Place for us might be 5 minutes of prayer. Or 15 minutes of reading the Bible. Or going to a church service. Or listening to worship music. Or not scheduling anything one day a week, so we can take a Sabbath day of rest. **What are you doing to create some Holy Places in your life?**

9/4 - Chapter 43 is incredible with God's return to the temple. I love this verse - "*And this is the basic law of the Temple: absolute holiness!*" Absolute holiness. Okay - so this is not something we are going to see or "achieve" this side of heaven. It's impossible for us to be absolutely holy on this earth. Only Jesus was absolutely holy and sinless. However, I think the call for our eternal lives is absolute holiness. So, know that faith in Jesus will ultimately lead you in this direction - and I do believe we can grow in holiness in this life. God's grace gives ultimate absolute holiness in heaven. **Q: Do you want absolute holiness? Are you moving toward absolute holiness in your life today? Do you also realize you won't reach absolute holiness this side of heaven? But, yet, do you still desire absolute holiness someday?**

9/4 - Verse 21 in this chapter is a foreshadowing of Jesus' death on the Cross at Mt. Calvary: "*Then take the young bull for the sin offering and burn it at the appointed place outside the Temple area.*" How does this apply to Jesus' death on a hill outside of Jerusalem's city gates? This is best explained in Hebrews chapter 13 verses 11-13 as follows: "*The high priest carries the blood of animals into the Most Holy Place as a sin offering, but the bodies are burned outside the camp. And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore.*" Powerful... **Q: Will you walk with Jesus outside the city gates of Jerusalem? Up to Mt. Calvary? Will you follow Jesus all the way up that hill?**

9/5 - In Ezekiel chapters 44 and 45 today we see the priesthood restored to Israel! It's interesting that the Levites are taken down a notch in how they can serve in the temple and the Zadokites are elevated. Zadok was a priest during the time of David & Solomon and a descendent of Eleazar and ultimately Aaron. Chapter 44, verse 28 really stood out to me today: "*As to property, the priests will not have any, for I alone am their inheritance.*" I like that! God alone is the priests' inheritance. **Q: What is our inheritance? Is it property? Is it things of this earth? Or could our inheritance be God as well? Should God be our inheritance? How is God our inheritance? If the Lord is not our inheritance, what then do we inherit? The wind? It's an age old debate as you'll see in the image above. Where do you stand? Can we inherit eternal life through the grace of God and faith in Jesus? Or do we simply inherit the wind? (Nothingness) What does your heart tell you? Most importantly, what does the Bible tell you?**

9/5 - Ezekiel chapters 45 & 46 describe some new regulations on how offerings are to be done, when compared to the original Pentateuch regulations - primarily from Numbers chapter 28. Apparently these chapters in Ezekiel have created some reconciliation work for rabbis in the past to figure out the proper regulations. Verse 20 in chapter 46 did stand out at me in today's readings: "*He explained, "This is where the priests will cook the meat from the guilt offerings and sin offerings and bake the flour from the grain offerings into bread. They will do it here to avoid carrying the sacrifices through the outer courtyard and harming the people by transmitting holiness to them."* Per a previous chapter this goes along the lines of the priests needing to take off their clothes in a special room after being in the Temple, to avoid transmitting holiness. This is interesting to me because you would think that transmitting holiness would be a good thing. Apparently not in this case. This does remind me of when Moses was on the mountain receiving the Laws, he had to wear a veil over his face amongst the people when he came down from the mountain because his face was so radiant from being in the presence of God. I read a commentary that said this transmission of holiness, in this case in Ezekiel, was not something for the Israelites to concern themselves with, because this was a vision of a future temple. I read another commentary that made the interesting point that these passages in Ezekiel can help demonstrate the transmission of holiness from Jesus' robe to the woman who suffered from bleeding for 12 years - see [Mark 5:22-34](#). She was healed by reaching out and touching Jesus' robe. Of course Jesus says that it was the woman's faith that healed her - not her touching his robe. It is intriguing to think about the transmission of holiness via garments or sacrifices. I'll need to do more study on the problem of "transmitting holiness" in this case in Ezekiel. **Q: Please share your thoughts on this with your table group?**

9/6 - We finish the book of Ezekiel today! Ezekiel chapter 47's opening verses about the River of Healing are just beautiful. As I was reading these verses about the River of Healing I imagined myself jumping into the river and just being refreshed and renewed and restored! Great stuff... This river is very reminiscent of the river in the Garden of Eden - and the River of Life described in [Revelation chapter 22](#). Verse 9 in ch. 47 of Ezekiel sums it all up well - *"Everything that touches the water of this river will live. Fish will abound in the Dead Sea, for its waters will be healed. Wherever this water flows, everything will live."* **Q: Can you imagine this river of healing flowing from the temple? Can you imagine some rest & restoration & refreshment & healing through this river?**

9/7 - Okay, so Daniel chapter 7 with the vision of 4 beasts is not exactly an easy one for me to interpret here in a daily blog! :) But I'll give it a bit of a go. Actually, if you're looking for in-depth commentary on this chapter, [please check out this link on bible.org](#), titled "Daniel's Disturbing Dream." Overall, this is a very powerful chapter to read... I definitely was feeling drawn into this chapter and the description of the beasts. Basically here in chapter 7 we're seeing a parallel with the vision of these 4 beasts in this vision of Daniel's with the dream Nebuchadnezzar had of the statue in chapter 2 of Daniel. The lion with the eagle wings represents Babylonia, just as the head of gold in ch. 2 did. The bear represents Medo-Persia, as the silver did in ch. 2. The leopard represents Greece, as did the bronze/brass in ch. 2. And the terrifying and frightening beast represents the Roman empire, as the feet of clay & iron did in ch. 2. Roughly speaking of course... :)

9/7 - The best verses in this chapter are in my mind verse 13 & 14 where we get a Messianic vision of Jesus! *"As my vision continued that night, I saw someone who looked like a man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient One and was led into his presence. He was given authority, honor, and royal power over all the nations of the world, so that people of every race and nation and language would obey him. His rule is eternal—it will never end. His kingdom will never be destroyed."* Wow... very powerful stuff.. **Q: Do you believe that Jesus has been given authority, honor and royal power over all the world? Do you believe that his rule is eternal and his kingdom will never be destroyed? Do you know in your heart that Jesus is your eternal King?**

9/7 - Verse 8 & 20 are intriguing to me when they talk about: *"This little horn had eyes like human eyes and a mouth that was boasting arrogantly."* The thing that jumped out at me was the mouth that was boasting arrogantly. **Q: How did this read to you when you came across it? As a good or bad thing to have a mouth that boasts arrogantly?** Again, this reminds me of the sin of pride that we have been seeing over and over again here in the book of Daniel with the Babylonian kings & Darius the Mede. Essentially some commentaries suggest this little horn that boasts arrogantly represents the antichrist...

9/7 - Daniel chapter 8 is quite a chapter! I'm not 100% sure how to post up on this chapter - so I went over to bible.org to see what they had to say and I came across this paragraph over there - *"Daniel chapter 8 is a preacher's nightmare. Even noted scholars hesitate to be dogmatic in their interpretation of this chapter. Daniel himself has not the foggiest notion of the vision's meaning, even after the angel Gabriel has interpreted the vision for him."* [I think I better just link over to what bible.org has to say about this chapter today](#). This is in the blog world what one would call a punt! :) The closing verse 27 of chapter 8 certainly stands out to me today: *"Then I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for several days. Afterward I got up and performed my duties for the king, but I was greatly troubled by the vision and could not understand it."* **Q: Do you think you'd be physically exhausted & sick if you saw a vision like Daniel saw in this chapter?**

9/7 - Daniel chapter 5 is the famous "the writing is on the wall" chapter! It is not a good sign to see writing appear on the wall in this way... This chapter is of huge importance to the Babylonian dynasty - because this chapter is the very last day of Babylon the empire. The next day everything goes to the Persians & Medes and Cyrus will be taking over the roost. Daniel chapter 5 verse 1 starts us out today with: *"A number of years later..."* This chapter takes place in 539 B.C., whereas chapter 4 with Nebuchadnezzar took place before his death in 562 B.C. So, at least 23 years have past between chapter 4 & 5 - and several leaders of Babylon have passed by, leaving Belshazzar, who has 1 day more... Verses 1 through 4 in the chapter unfortunately describe an orgy taking place, utilizing gold and silver cups taken from the Temple in Jerusalem decades earlier by Nebuchadnezzar. Unwisely, Belshazzar and the crew toast false idols with these sacred cups of God - at which point immediately the hand begins writing on the wall, and verse 6 tells us this about Belshazzar - *"Such terror gripped him that his knees knocked together and his legs gave way beneath him."* **Q: Think he had reason to be scared like this? Why?**

9/7 - As Daniel is called in to interpret the writing, verse 17 stands out as Daniel tells Belshazzar: *"Keep your gifts or give*

them to someone else, but I will tell you what the writing means." Daniel is obviously quite bold and dismissive of Belshazzar here - he does not defer to Belshazzar being the king, and the seemingly right thing to do would be to immediately say you'd appreciate the gifts. Daniel simply says - keep 'em! (though, later he's still bestowed with them) Bold... A righteous boldness, yes? Plus, you've got to think that Daniel's seen a lot in Babylon in his time and he's ready to cut to the chase and just interpret the writing. He doesn't need earthly gifts or honor... **Q: What about us in our lives today? Do we seek earthly gifts and honor for ourselves? Should we? Can we learn from Daniel's boldness and focus on what truly matters in this life?**

9/7 - Before interpreting the dream Daniel gives Belshazzar an old fashioned lecture which culminates in verse 22 as he speaks of Nebuchadnezzar being humbled by God: *"You are his successor, O Belshazzar, and you knew all this, yet you have not humbled yourself."* Basically, Daniel is saying - you should have known better. You knew better. You saw Nebuchadnezzar's mistakes. You did not learn. **Q: Are we like this sometimes in our lives today? Shouldn't we know better...?**

9/7 - Verse 27 is worth reflecting upon! *"You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting."* (NIV). Very interesting to think about a godly scale. **Q: A scale that maybe looks at how we invest our time, money, love, life, worship? Are we investing in things that are eternal?** Obviously, through the opening verses Belshazzar was simply investing his life into himself, his lusts and his desires. And hence, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, PARSIN was written on the wall... Pretty amazing to think that the great kingdom of Babylon went down like this in one chapter... God clearly is a kingdom-maker and a kingdom-taker!

9/8 - Daniel chapter 6 today is probably more famous than chapter 5's writing on the wall! Today Daniel goes into the lion's den... Several things, as always, are going on in this chapter. One big note is that Daniel is about 80 years old at the time of this chapter. He's not a young man. And yet he is running laps around the other kingdom administrators with his work - and for this he is honored more and more by the king. And others are getting jealous of this old man Daniel. They realize the only way to trip him up is on his religion. And - by appealing to the king's pride with a law that makes people worship the king only. **Q: Interesting thing that pride... seems an easy sin for us humans to fall into..?** Well, then the old man Daniel gets tossed into the pit of lions - and comes out alive through the grace of God. And the king realizes he was duped by the admins and tosses them & their families into the pit of lions. But enough of my Cliff Notes here... let's check out a few verses...

9/8 - Verse 4 makes me reflect on my life and the way I live it: *"Then the other administrators and princes began searching for some fault in the way Daniel was handling his affairs, but they couldn't find anything to criticize. He was faithful and honest and always responsible."* **Q: How are we in handling our affairs? Our job, our tempers, our finances, our time? Are we faithful in all of these areas? Honest? Always responsible?**

9/8 - Verse 10 helps us look at how we should act when challenging circumstances come into our lives: *"But when Daniel learned that the law had been signed, he went home and knelt down as usual in his upstairs room, with its windows open toward Jerusalem. He prayed three times a day, just as he had always done, giving thanks to his God."* Daniel continued to worship God as he always had in the midst of bad news of the new law. He didn't blink. He didn't flinch. He didn't take a break from God. He kept worshipping. **Q: How do we act when bad news comes into our lives? Do we sulk? Do we decide to avoid God for a while? Or do we continue to worship God as we have always - giving thanks to God? Even in the midst of severe challenges, will we still give thanks to God for who He is?**

9/8 - Verse 20 is a wonderful verse from the mouth of the remorseful King Darius: *"When he got there, he called out in anguish, 'Daniel, servant of the living God! Was your God, whom you worship continually, able to rescue you from the lions?'"* First of all - I love the term "the living God". **Q: Do you believe that God is indeed a living God? Not a stoic God who just sets up the universe and then lets it run on its own - but a God who is in the midst of every single one of our experiences - good and bad? A living God? A God who is with us on the mountain tops - and in the lion's den? Do you believe God is indeed a living God? Do you worship the living God continually? Like Daniel, are you a servant of the Living God? Do you want to be a servant of the Living God? The Living God that will send His angels to protect you from even lions in their den?**

9/8 - Daniel chapter 9 today has an amazing prayer from Daniel! Confess your sins, be humble, praise God and petition for others. What a prayer. If you liked Daniel's prayer in today's readings as much as I did, here are two more that I think you'll appreciate - one from Ezra [at this link](#) - and one from Nehemiah [at this link](#). (okay, this is completely a geeky Bible

thing here - but I just noticed that all 3 of these amazing prayers are in chapter 9 of their respective books! :) So, if you are forgetting how to pray and feel like you need some inspiration, just remember: Daniel 9, Ezra 9, and Nehemiah 9!) I'll just highlight the opening verses of Daniel's prayer in verses 4 & 5: *"O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and keep your commands. But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations."* What a great way to open in prayer - praise God and then confess your sins. **Q: Do you believe that God is indeed a great and awesome God? That God always fulfills his promises of unfailing love to those who love him and keep his commands? Have we sinned? Have we rebelled? Have we scorned God's commands?**

9/8 - Today we begin the book of the priest & scribe Ezra!

Author: Ezra

Date: Fifth century B.C.

Content: The book of Ezra deals with the return of the Israelites to the land of Palestine after their captivity in Babylon. After describing first the return and how the work on the Temple was begun, the author tells us the problems that arose. After a great deal of trouble and early failure, the Temple was finally finished and rededicated to the glory of God. The ministry of Ezra is described in some detail, stressing the intercession that he made to God for the wayward people of the restored community.

Theme: When the people of Israel returned home they saw this as the fulfillment of the promise of God. God had said he would never abandon his people, and although they were judged for their sin, God never stopped loving them. That God should care for the world to this degree is the deepest of mysteries. God desires our worship in return for his love, however. This may be seen in that he sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to speed the rebuilding of the Temple after the people, in discouragement, had ceased to work upon it. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 8*)

9/9 - Today in Ezra chapter 3 we read about the Israelites rebuilding the Temple in Jerusalem. We read in verse 10 – *"When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel."* There are some powerful chapters in Ezra as we read about the start of the rebuilding of the Temple, the opposition to it, and then its final completion. I like that verse 10 above tells us that the priests and the Levites praised God after the foundation to the Temple was laid. And I wonder about this in our lives today. **Q: Is there perhaps a "Temple" of some sort in your life that needs rebuilding? Is there a good habit that you have lost? A bad habit that you have picked up? Have you lost some of your zeal for God that you had earlier in your life? Do you want things to change? Do you want to rebuild a "Temple" in your life? How will you do so? Will you perhaps follow the example of the Israelites in Ezra and begin with the Foundation? Will you take the very first, maybe seemingly small steps to begin to rebuild your Temple? And – when you get to even just the foundation of your Temple being rebuilt, will you praise God as the priests and Levites did in Ezra?** Many blessings to you as you begin your journey with God of rebuilding a Temple in your life!

9/10 - Daniel chapter 10 verses 12 & 13 are worth considering: *"Don't be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day you began to pray for understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your request has been heard in heaven. I have come in answer to your prayer. But for twenty-one days the spirit prince of the kingdom of Persia blocked my way."* This is encouraging to me that our prayers are heard in heaven. What is maybe discouraging is that our answers or help needed for our prayers can be blocked by fallen angels / demons, as we see in these verses. The spirit prince of Persia being a demon of some sort blocking the angel from getting to Daniel to answer his prayer. A good book that I would recommend to dive more into what this spiritual realm and the spiritual battles between angels might be like is ["This Present Darkness" by Frank Peretti](#). It is a powerful read.

9/10 - Daniel chapter 11 today is phenomenal when you realize that these prophecies were made in 537 B.C. and covered events for about 300 or so more years following that date. Essentially, we are getting a history lesson in this chapter - in advance of the history unfolding! This chapter really made me realize how "in control" God really is of everything. Which is actually very comforting for me, and hopefully is for you. I look at it this way - if God knows what is going to be transpiring hundreds of years in advance - if not thousands and millions of years in advance - **Q: why are we worrying about what's going to happen tomorrow? :) Or why are we fretting over what happened yesterday?** A quote I heard many years ago and occasionally bubbles back up into my mind is this: "Let go. And Let God." Let go, and let God. Meaning - let go of your worries and fears about yesterday or tomorrow and let God take the reins. He's got the reins anyway... **so why fret & fuss over our worries and fears?** Somehow the sweep of this prophecy seemed to make

me realize that we often worry too much about really insignificant stuff...

9/10 - There is a lot going on in this chapter - I'll point out a couple of highlights. Verse 3 & 4 discuss Alexander the Great (336 - 323 B.C.): *"Then a mighty king will rise to power who will rule a vast kingdom and accomplish everything he sets out to do. But at the height of his power, his kingdom will be broken apart and divided into four parts."* Many of the remaining verses then dive into kings of the line of Ptolemy in the south kingdom, or Egypt, and kings of the line of Seleucus/Antiochus in the north kingdom, or Syria. Verse 31 covers 168 B.C. when an altar to the pagan god Zeus Olympius is set up in the Temple in Jerusalem by Antiochus Epiphanes: *"His army will take over the Temple fortress, polluting the sanctuary, putting a stop to the daily sacrifices, and setting up the sacrilegious object that causes desecration."* Tell you what - there is so much going on in this chapter, [I recommend jumping over to bible.org at this link](#) to read up more on what's happening. It really is fascinating stuff.

9/10 - Today we finish the book of Daniel! What an amazing read this book has been for me this year. I have been blessed by it. I hope you have too. It is always interesting to dive into prophecies and angels and such. I have to admit that I don't think about these types of things too often in my day to day life. However, I know they are real. And as I read the book of Daniel I am reminded of God's amazing story and where it is ultimately leading.

9/10 - In Daniel chapter 11 verse 36 onwards we are looking at verses prophesying about the anti-christ and end times. The verses just prior to 36, in yesterday's readings, referred to Antiochus Epiphanes in 168 B.C., but we are looking at the future here in today's verses in chapter 11. To get some more context on these verses today, check out [2 Thessalonians 2:3-4](#) and [Revelation 13:5-8](#). A portion of verse 36 does stand out to me today: *"For what has been determined will surely take place."* **Q: Do you believe these prophecies in Daniel have been determined? Do you believe they will surely take place?**

9/10 - Daniel chapter 12 is called "The Time of the End" or "The End Times" in many Bible descriptors. However, over at bible.org Bob Deffinbaugh calls this chapter "The Hope of Heaven". I like that! Here's an excerpt from Bob's essay: "Daniel 12 is the crowning chapter of this prophecy, as well as its conclusion. It takes the believer to the high-water mark of Christian hope—the assurance of the resurrection of the dead. Let us listen and learn, and gain hope and comfort." Check out Mr. Deffinbaugh's full essay on Daniel chapter 12 [at this link](#).

9/10 - Verse 2 stands out in Daniel chapter 12: *"Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt."* This is one of the first clear mentions of a resurrection in the Old Testament. The phrase "everlasting life" appears only here in the Old Testament! Pretty fascinating. Seems like this chapter is in some ways bridging Old Testament / Old Covenant theology to New Testament / New Covenant. **Q: Do you believe that after death some will rise to everlasting life? And some to everlasting contempt?**

9/10 - Today we start and finish the book of the prophet Haggai! This is the second shortest book in the Old Testament, with Obadiah being the shortest. This short book does have a lot to offer! Haggai prophesied in 520 B.C. about 18 years after the Jews had returned from exile in Babylon in 538 B.C. When Cyrus, king of Persia, conquered Babylon, he issued a decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to rebuild the temple. About 50,000 Jews returned to Jerusalem and began building the temple's foundation in 538 B.C. under the leadership of Zerubbabel. However, neighboring nations were alarmed by the rebuilding of the temple and politically stopped the progress in 536 B.C. Here is where the story picks up with the prophet Haggai encouraging the process of the temple rebuilding to commence. A good overview of the book of the prophet Haggai is online at bible.org [at this link](#).

9/10 - Today in Haggai chapter 1 verse 3 we read: *"So the LORD sent this message through the prophet Haggai: "Why are you living in luxurious houses while my house lies in ruins?"* What stands out in my mind when reading this verse is the concept of tithing. Check out this amazing verse in Malachi 3:10 on tithing (which we'll read on December 31st) - *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."* It is very rare in the Bible that God says "test me" and follows it up with an incredible promise of a blessing. **Q: Will you test God with a tithe to your church, ministries, and nonprofits this next year?**

9/10 - Chapter 1 verse 8 is a strong one for us to consider as well: *"Now go up into the hills, bring down timber, and rebuild my house. Then I will take pleasure in it and be honored, says the LORD."* I think the key word in this verse is the very small but very powerful - **Go**. Go.... **Q: Where in your life is God calling you to go? Is there something God is**

calling you do to? If you are obedient in this calling, do you believe it will bring pleasure to God? Will you go?

9/11 - Today we start the book of the prophet Zechariah! You'll note that we are now at the 2nd to the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi is after Zechariah – and we'll be camped out in this book for quite a few days. Zechariah was a prophet during the post-exile (returned from Babylon) period at about the same time Haggai was a prophet. Both started their prophecies in 520 B.C. – however, Zechariah prophesied for many more years going forward – probably until about 480/475 B.C. Zechariah's name means, "The Lord remembers," which is fitting for this book. God is remembering his covenant promise to the Israelites in this post-exilic period. Zechariah's prophecies are similar to Haggai's in that he is encouraging the Israelites to rebuild the temple. Zechariah is a wonderful book, filled with 8 night visions, 4 messages, and 2 oracles.

9/11 - Chapter 1 verse 3 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD Almighty."* What a great calling and promise from God! Return to me – and I will return to you. **Q: Are there areas in your life where you need to change your ways and return to God? If you change our ways, or repent, and return to God, do you believe that God will also return blessings to you for this act of repentance? Will you return to God? Why would this be wise? Is it a risky waste of time to be apart from God? Will you no longer turn back?**

9/11 - In verse 8 we begin to read about Zechariah's night visions. It is interesting to note that all 8 of his visions in this book take place in 1 night. Visions are different from dreams in that Zechariah is in an awake state while these visions occur. You'll note that the four horsemen described here are very similar to the "four horsemen of the apocalypse" described by John in Revelation chapter 6, which we recently read. The four horns in verse 18 are thought to represent Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, and Persia and the four blacksmiths in verse 20 are thought to represent Egypt, Babylon, Persia, and Greece.

9/11 - Today in Zechariah we read about the future prosperity of Jerusalem, the Exiles being called home, and cleansing for the high priest. Chapter 2, verses 4 & 5 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Hurry, and say to that young man, 'Jerusalem will someday be so full of people that it won't have room enough for everyone! Many will live outside the city walls, with all their livestock--and yet they will be safe. For I, myself, will be a wall of fire around Jerusalem, says the LORD. And I will be the glory inside the city!'"* My mind took me to the thought of the holy heavenly Jerusalem being chocked full of people who love God! And a wall of fire - holy protection - surrounding everyone in a heavenly Jerusalem and providing safety. And God's glory reigning eternally... I don't think this is quite proper exegesis on this passage... :) but I like the thought!

9/11 - Chapter 1 verse 13 also jumped out at me during this Christmas season: *"Be silent before the LORD, all humanity, for he is springing into action from his holy dwelling."* **Q: I think sometimes we get so busy during the Christmas season that we forget to be silent and to be still. We can just go, go, go - rush, rush rush - and maybe miss the true meaning of Christmas? Don't forget the song, "Silent Night, Holy Night...." Can you find time and space to be silent before the Lord this Christmas? And time and space to reflect upon what the advent of Jesus as a baby in the manger means to you?**

9/11 - Chapter 3 verses 8 & 9 were also beautiful for me today in this Christmas season as we think about the birth of Jesus: *"Listen to me, O Jeshua the high priest, and all you other priests. You are symbols of the good things to come. Soon I am going to bring my servant, the Branch. Now look at the jewel I have set before Jeshua, a single stone with seven facets. I will engrave an inscription on it, says the LORD Almighty, and I will remove the sins of this land in a single day."* **Q: Are you looking forward to the coming of the Branch? What does the Branch symbolize to you? Verse 9 above also looks beyond Christmas and toward Good Friday - How were our sins removed in a single day? Do you believe that your sins were removed by Jesus on the cross on that single day?**

9/11 - And chapter 3 verse 10 also works well in this Christmas season! :) *"And on that day, says the LORD Almighty, each of you will invite your neighbor into your home to share your peace and prosperity."* **Q: Will you have an opportunity over this next couple of weeks to invite someone into your home to share in your peace and prosperity? Or, if not, can you find an opportunity to go out and share your peace and prosperity with others? Maybe volunteer at a place that has neighbors that really need your peace and prosperity this Christmas season?**

9/11 - Today in the book of the prophet Zechariah we read about Zechariah's visions of a Lampstand and Two Olive Trees, a Flying Scroll, and a Woman in a Basket. Chapter 4 is essentially a vision of encouragement for the Jews to

rebuild the temple in Jerusalem - not by their own might, but by relying on the Spirit of God. The rebuilding will be led by Zerubbabel, the political leader of Jerusalem at this post-exilic time, as well as by Joshua, the priest - and these two are represented by the 2 olive trees in the vision. The bowl of oil held by the lampstands in the vision represents God's power through his spirit. Chapter 4 verse 6 stood out to me in today's readings: *"It is not by force nor by strength, but by my Spirit, says the LORD Almighty."* **Q: How often in our own lives do we try to do things by our own force or our own strength? And not look to God? Would we ultimately lead more productive and peaceful and joyful and restful lives if we instead allowed God's Spirit to move in our lives? Or will we continue to try to do things by our own force and strength?**

9/11 - Verse 10 is a great reminder for each of us - *"Do not despise these small beginnings, for the LORD rejoices to see the work begin, to see the plumb line in Zerubbabel's hand."* **Q: If we do feel led by the Spirit of God to work on something - and it turns out to be maybe something bigger than ourselves - do we sometimes get discouraged by the task before us? Do we despise small beginnings?** Be encouraged to know that God rejoices in small beginnings! Take the first step! Take the plumb line in your hand! (I will be honest - it's not always easy to get motivated for typing in this blog each evening. Most days I am motivated - but not always. Sometimes I just have to "take the plumb line in my hand" - get started with the typing - and God shows up....)

9/11 - In chapter 5 we read about the vision of the flying scroll - which is a very large scroll with a purpose of encouraging repentance with a clear message of judgment. The second vision of the woman in the basket is essentially purging sin from the land of Jerusalem, and plopping it down in a more fitting place where they will build a temple for it! To worship the sin... Babylon... **Q: Are there areas in our life where we need to deposit some sin into a basket, close the lid, and let the basket be taken away to another place far from us? Is it possible that there are areas of sin in our life where we actually worship the sin somehow? Will we turn away from this false idol worship and return to loving God whole-heartedly?**

9/12 - We have great readings today in Ezra about the completion of the second Temple! Note that this second Temple, which was completed on March 12, 516 B.C., is the same Temple that existed during Jesus' ministry. This second Temple was then destroyed by Roman armies in 70 A.D. This second Temple was a lot smaller than the first Temple built by Solomon. And less ornate. And the big thing of course was that this second Temple did not have the Ark of the Covenant nor the tablets of the Law, as these were believed to have been destroyed when Nebuchadnezzar burned Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Nonetheless, the completion of the second Temple was a great cause of celebration for the Israelites who had returned from exile!

9/13 - I love it! In today's readings Zechariah prophesies 500 years in advance about Jesus entering Jerusalem riding on a donkey to a hail of Hosanna's (days before his death - popularly known as Palm Sunday) in chapter 9 verse 9: *"Rejoice, O people of Zion! Shout in triumph, O people of Jerusalem! Look, your king is coming to you. He is righteous and victorious, yet he is humble, riding on a donkey— riding on a donkey's colt."* **Q: This reminds me of a saying of one of my classmates in a Bible study class: "You can't understand the New Testament if you don't understand the Old Testament!" Q: How have the prophecies in the Old Testament this year strengthened your faith in the New Testament? How have they strengthened your faith in Jesus?**

9/13 - We continue to read some incredible prophecies from Zechariah today about Jesus, the Messiah, coming in 500 years! In chapter 10 verse 4 today Zechariah calls Jesus the "cornerstone": *"From Judah will come the cornerstone, the tent peg, the bow for battle, and all the rulers."* Why do you think Zechariah called Jesus the cornerstone? You'll recall that we read earlier in the year this passage in Matthew chapter 21 verse 42: *"Then Jesus asked them, 'Didn't you ever read this in the Scriptures? 'The stone that the builders rejected has now become the cornerstone. This is the Lord's doing, and it is wonderful to see.'"* **Q: Have you heard Jesus referred to as the cornerstone in our world today? Is Jesus the cornerstone of your church? Is Jesus the cornerstone of your life?**

9/13 - In Zechariah chapter 11 verses 12 & 13 we have a foreshadowing of Judas betraying Jesus for 30 pieces of silver - and Judas' money being used to buy the potters field: *"And I said to them, 'If you like, give me my wages, whatever I am worth; but only if you want to.' So they counted out for my wages thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, 'Throw it to the potter'—this magnificent sum at which they valued me! So I took the thirty coins and threw them to the potter in the Temple of the Lord."* (hopefully you caught Zechariah's sarcasm in "this magnificent sum"...). A couple things to note here - 30 pieces of silver was the price of a slave among the Israelites in ancient times. Paying this price to Zechariah was an insult. However, paying this price for the life of Jesus was an unfathomable insult. Our Lord's life was sold for 30 pieces

of silver... During this Christmas season this is really sad to think about - it's sad to think about this at any time, but somehow just celebrating our Lord's birth 2 days ago, and then now thinking about how his precious life was sold for 30 silver pieces is just incredibly sad for me today. Zechariah was rejected. Jesus was rejected. **Q: Think it's possible that if you and I really live our lives for God - really live our faith - that we too may be rejected some day? That perhaps someday our lives could be sold for just 30 pieces of silver?** (There are modern day martyrs whose lives were taken for much less than this amount...)

9/13 - Today in Zechariah chapter 12 we begin the second oracle in the book of Zechariah! It is interesting to note that the Hebrew term for "oracle" or "the word of the Lord" is only used 3 times in the Old Testament - here in 12:1, in Zechariah 9:1 and in Malachi 1:1. This indicates that Zechariah chapters 9 through 14 were likely written at about the same time as the book of Malachi - the last book of the Old Testament - which we'll be reading in a couple of days! :) This 2nd oracle in Zechariah consists of the final siege of Jerusalem and Jesus' return as Messiah to defeat Israel's enemies and establish his kingdom. Chapter 12 verse 10 is a powerful Messianic verse in today's readings: *"Then I will pour out a spirit of grace and prayer on the family of David and on all the people of Jerusalem. They will look on me whom they have pierced and mourn for him as for an only son. They will grieve bitterly for him as for a firstborn son who has died."* The first sentence indicates a pouring out of the Holy Spirit. In the second sentence it appears that Jesus is speaking in the first person - here in the Old Testament! The use of the word pierced here is similar to Psalm 22:16 - *"they have pierced my hands and my feet"* and John 19:34-37 - *"Instead, one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water. The man who saw it has given testimony, and his testimony is true. He knows that he tells the truth, and he testifies so that you also may believe. These things happened so that the scripture would be fulfilled: "Not one of his bones will be broken," and, as another scripture says, "They will look on the one they have pierced.""* Chapter 13 verse 7 is another powerful verse about Jesus: *"Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, the man who is my partner, says the LORD Almighty. Strike down the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered, and I will turn against the lambs."* This last sentence is quoted by Jesus just before his arrest in Matthew 26:31 and Mark 14:27. It is applied to the scattering of the apostles, but can also be considered for the dispersion of the Jews in A.D. 70 after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. **Q: And yet, even after the sheep were scattered, do you realize that Jesus is seeking after his lost sheep? Have you been found by Jesus? How are you helping other lost sheep find Jesus in your life?**

9/13 - Today we finish the book of the prophet Zechariah! Only one more book in the Bible to go with Malachi, which we'll read over the two remaining days of this year. In Zechariah chapter 14 today we read about the Lord's reign on earth - this reading fits in very nicely with the Revelation readings we have been going through recently. Verses 6 through 8 gave my imagination a great workout today: *"On that day the sources of light will no longer shine, yet there will be continuous day! Only the LORD knows how this could happen! There will be no normal day and night, for at evening time it will still be light. On that day life-giving waters will flow out from Jerusalem, half toward the Dead Sea and half toward the Mediterranean, flowing continuously both in summer and in winter."* How does this sound to you? Not bad, eh. The light and the life-giving waters sound wonderful to me! **Q: When it comes to the continuous Light mentioned in these verses, where do you suppose the continuous Light will be coming from? Or - rather than from where - perhaps I should ask from Whom do you suppose the continuous Light will be coming from... Are you looking forward to this Light? Are you looking forward to eternity with the Light?**

9/13 - Verse 16 is interesting: *"In the end, the enemies of Jerusalem who survive the plague will go up to Jerusalem each year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Festival of Shelters."* Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion has a great Question of "Why will there still be an Old Testament Feast during the Messiah's Kingdom?" And an answer that basically says the Feast of the Tabernacles (also called Shelters or Booths or simply Sukkot) will still be appropriate because it is a festival of thanksgiving, celebrating those who love God with all their soul. The other feasts of the Old Testament won't be celebrated as they were all fulfilled - The Passover in Jesus' death - Day of Atonement in Jesus' Salvation - Feast of Firstfruits in Jesus' resurrection - and Pentecost with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

9/14 - Today we begin reading about Queen Esther! Hold on tight because Esther is an amazing book.
~ Esther ~

Author: Unknown

Date: Fifth century B.C.

Content: The book of Esther deals with a momentous event that took place after the Persians had destroyed Babylon and while many Jews were still living in the land of their captivity. The story concerns a Jewess named Ester who had become the wife of the Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I). An evil advisor to the king, named Haman, sought the destruction of

the Jews in order to gain control of their wealth, but Esther tactfully intervened and saved her people from this fate. Haman was executed, and after some civil strife things quieted down once more. The remarkable deliverance of the Jews was celebrated by a feast named Purim and it remains to this day.

Theme: The providence and power of God are the central points of this book. God was protecting his people even in their captivity and was working all things together for their good. God's power is seen in the overthrow of Israel's enemies. It is important to note that God used human beings to accomplish his purpose here, rather than doing it directly himself. We must be ready at all times to do God's will when he so directs. (*Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 9*)

Q: How has the book of Esther stood out to you over time? Has this been a meaningful book to you over the years? How so?

9/14 - Today in Esther chapter 4 we read about Mordecai persuading Queen Esther to help save the Jews from Haman's evil plot. In verse 14 we read these amazing words of Mordecai's to Esther: *"And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"* For such a time as this. Powerful words to consider. You'll recall similar words were used in the narrative of Joseph in Genesis – Joseph was sent ahead to Egypt by God to save his family from famine "for such a time as this." Esther was married to the Persian King for such a time as this. And I believe that you and I have been placed on this earth this very day for such a time as this. **Q: Do you believe it is true that you really have been placed on this earth by God for such a time as this? Do you believe that there is a definite purpose for your life that God has called you to? Do you realize that you have the choice – as Esther had the choice – to move forward with God's vision and plan for your life or to say no to God?** Our time on this life is short. We can live our lives in accordance with God's will and purpose for us or we can waste away our life with useless distractions. Trust me - the devil wants nothing more than to distract you from what God has called you to for such a time as this. **So, what say you? Will you live your life wholly and purposefully for God for such a time as this? Will you leave the distractions behind?**

9/15 - We wrap up the book of Esther today! Okay, somehow I forgot that the book of Esther ended with the Jewish holiday of Purim being instituted. A good FAQ from a Jewish website about Purim is [at this link](#). In doing a google image search on Purim I quickly realized that folks dress up for this celebratory Jewish holiday! There is also a device called the Purim "gragger", which is a noisemaker. When the Purim story is read aloud from the book of Esther everyone boos and shakes their graggers whenever Haman's name is mentioned! (I'm not kidding - it sounds like fun to me! :) More on Purim graggers, including how you can make your own, is [online here](#). Below is a picture of a gragger, and below that is a picture of a woman shaking a gragger at the sound of Haman's name being read during Purim! **Q: Have you ever celebrated Purim or any other Jewish holidays?**

9/16 - We have great readings in Ezra today! It is very encouraging that King Artaxerxes wrote such a strong letter of endorsement for Ezra, the priest and scribe. It made me think that government and religion can work together for good. I found chapter 7 verses 9 & 10 intriguing: *"He had left Babylon on April 8 and came to Jerusalem on August 4, for the gracious hand of his God was on him. This was because Ezra had determined to study and obey the law of the LORD and to teach those laws and regulations to the people of Israel."* What I noticed here is that it says about Ezra - "the gracious hand of his God was on him." And why was this? "Because Ezra had determined to study and obey the law of the Lord AND to teach those laws and regulations to the people of Israel." Ezra was living his life not just for himself. He was committed to studying God's law and teaching it to those around him. And thus, the gracious hand of God was on him. And this just makes me wonder about our lives today. **Q: Are we committed to studying God's Word, the Bible, and then teaching it to those around us? Are we like Ezra in any way? Should we be?**

9/16 - Today in Ezra chapter 8 we read about Ezra & crew's return from the exile in Babylon to Jerusalem. I loved Ezra chapter 9 verses 1 through 3: *"But then the Jewish leaders came to me and said, "Many of the people of Israel, and even some of the priests and Levites, have not kept themselves separate from the other peoples living in the land. They have taken up the detestable practices of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. For the men of Israel have married women from these people and have taken them as wives for their sons... To make matters worse, the officials and leaders are some of the worst offenders." When I heard this, I tore my clothing, pulled hair from my head and beard, and sat down utterly shocked."* And then a wonderful prayer of repentance from Ezra on behalf of the Israelites comes forth in the remainder of chapter 9 today. **Q: When is the last time you prayed a prayer of repentance? Should we pray prayers of repentance regularly?**

9/17 - Powerful readings in Ezra chapter 10 today, as we read about people publicly confessing their sin! Verses 10 through 12 - *"Then Ezra the priest stood and said to them: "You have sinned, for you have married pagan women. Now*

we are even more deeply under condemnation than we were before. Confess your sin to the LORD, the God of your ancestors, and do what he demands. Separate yourselves from the people of the land and from these pagan women." Then the whole assembly raised their voices and answered, "Yes, you are right; we must do as you say!" **Q: Do you think there is value in corporate/church repentance of sin? Does your church pray for repentance of sins ever during your services? Think this is a good idea? Should we confess our sins corporately?**

9/17 - Today we begin the book of Nehemiah!

Author: Nehemiah

Date: Fifth century B.C.

Content: The book of Nehemiah continues the story begun by Ezra and deals with life in the restored community. The major point of Ezra is the rededication of the Temple. The major point of Nehemiah is the rebuilding of the city walls of Jerusalem. The book begins by explaining the need Jerusalem had for protection that walls would give. This is followed by a discussion of how the walls were built in spite of numerous problems both in the community and outside of it. A national day of repentance was called for and the project was completed.

Theme: The main theme of this book is the sad fact that people are slow to learn the lessons God wants to teach them. The Israelites had been carried into captivity because of their sin, but now the very same problems rose again. The people were neglecting worship, prayer, and Bible study, not to mention the fact that they were treating each other unjustly. But God in his patience continued to send his messengers to them to offer salvation and pardon. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 8-9)*

9/17 - Today in Nehemiah chapter 2 verse 17 we read *"Then I said to them, "You see the trouble we are in: Jerusalem lies in ruins and its gates have been burned with fire. Come, let us rebuild the wall of Jerusalem, and we will no longer be in disgrace."* I am fascinated by the rebuilding of the Temple that we read about in Ezra and now the rebuilding of the Walls of Jerusalem in Nehemiah. The thought of rebuilding is something that I think each of us needs to meditate upon at times. I believe that over time in our lives we unfortunately can tear things down. Things that need rebuilding. Perhaps we have torn down our faith in some way. Perhaps our love for God. Perhaps our connection to a church community. Perhaps our relationship with a family member. Perhaps our service to the poor. **Q: Is there an area of your life that is in need of rebuilding? Will you meditate upon your life and begin to rebuild in that area? Will you pray to God for strength in rebuilding in that area and will you allow his Spirit to lead you?** I pray you will be encouraged by our readings this week in Nehemiah as you read about the Israelites rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem. And I pray you will begin rebuilding the things in your life that have perhaps tumbled down over time!

9/18 - It is great to see Nehemiah's strong character in today's readings! As governor, he could have taken full advantage of collecting food allotments from the people. But he didn't, as he knew these allotments would have been a burden on them. Then, Nehemiah sticks to leading the people in the goal of rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem - which was an incredible feat that was pulled off in less than 2 months through God's grace. And this is a wall that was down for 150 years! **Q: Is there anything you can apply to your life through today's readings about Nehemiah? Are there areas of your life where perhaps you are taking advantage of a situation you shouldn't? Is there a goal in your life that you're not moving on that you should? Will you pray to God like Nehemiah did in 6:9 - "But I prayed, "Now strengthen my hands.""**

9/19 - We have powerful readings in Nehemiah today! Just to frame up for us the date of these readings, in chapter 8 verse 2 we are reading about October 8, 444 B.C. Verses 2 & 3 today tell us: *"So on October 8 Ezra the priest brought the scroll of the law before the assembly, which included the men and women and all the children old enough to understand. He faced the square just inside the Water Gate from early morning until noon and read aloud to everyone who could understand. All the people paid close attention to the Book of the Law."* You'll note in verse 2 that we read about Ezra for the first time in the book of Nehemiah. And of course we just recently read the book of Ezra. Ezra and Nehemiah were contemporaries. Ezra was a priest and scribe - a religious leader - whereas Nehemiah was the governor - not a member of the religious establishment nor a prophet. However, it's important to note that Nehemiah was a layman who was very devoted to God! Nehemiah pursued God's will in a secular world. **Do you suppose that you and I could learn something for our lives today from Nehemiah's devotion to God as a layperson? As a layperson, are you living your life fully devoted to God and pursuing God's will?** Let us live like Nehemiah encourages us to live in chapter 8 verse 10 today! *"Don't be dejected and sad, for the joy of the LORD is your strength!"* **Q: What do you think Nehemiah meant here by saying the joy of the Lord is your strength? Today, in your life, is the joy of the Lord your strength? If not, will you pray to know the joy of the Lord as your strength?**

9/20 - Today in Nehemiah chapter 9 we wrap up the wonderful prayer of the Levites that began in yesterday's readings! This prayer is a fantastic overview of God's grace and discipline to the Israelites. Today in Nehemiah chapter 10 we read the vows of the people, including these in verses 30 & 31: *"We promise not to let our daughters marry the pagan people of the land, nor to let our sons marry their daughters. We further promise that if the people of the land should bring any merchandise or grain to be sold on the Sabbath or on any other holy day, we will refuse to buy it. And we promise not to do any work every seventh year and to cancel the debts owed to us by other Jews."* Related to the concept of the Sabbath in our modern world today, I recently came across a nice review of Bruce Ray's book titled "[Celebrating the Sabbath: Finding Rest in a Restless World](#)" at [this link](#). **Q: Has anyone read this book? Reviews? Anyone have any other good books about the Sabbath you can recommend? How are you doing on taking a Sabbath day of rest?**

9/21 - Today in Nehemiah chapter 11 we read about the people of Israel occupying Jerusalem - and not necessarily by their own choice! Lots had to be thrown to determine which 1 out of every 10 people in rural areas would move to Jerusalem. Verses 1 & 2 tell us: *"Now the leaders of the people were living in Jerusalem, the holy city, at this time. A tenth of the people from the other towns of Judah and Benjamin were chosen by sacred lots to live there, too, while the rest stayed where they were. And the people commended everyone who volunteered to resettle in Jerusalem."* I read an interesting commentary that speculated that some people did not want to move to Jerusalem from the countryside because it would mean they would have to more stringently follow God with their lives. This would be due to social pressures of living in Jerusalem and proximity to the Temple. **Q: And this made me wonder - are we like this in our lives today too? Maybe we go through periods of time where we don't go to church because it means we might have to actually start living our lives like Christians due to the community that church provides?** I am always worried when I get to points in my life where I don't feel like going to church. It is in those moments that I realize how desperately I need church - and yet how I'm trying to avoid going. I don't want to change some behavior. I don't want people to see me for who I really am. I don't want to be too close to the "Temple"... How about you. **If you're called to "move to Jerusalem" by God, will you move?** In the words of a famous Switchfoot song, "I dare you to move."

9/21 - Chronicles chapter 9 recounts the return from exile in Babylon, which took place between 538 B.C. and 458 B.C. Then in chapter 10 we go back in time 500 years to some of our earlier readings in First Samuel when Saul was king and dies in approx. 1010 B.C. Why this dramatic shift in chronology of events? Well, the Chronicler basically wanted to take us through Israel's history from Creation to the return from exile in Babylon in chapters 1 through 9. In chapter 10 the Chronicler takes us back to the beginning of Israel's kingdom period when Saul was the first King. However... you will notice that the Chronicler spends all of only 1 chapter on Saul! (and just a 14 verse chapter at that...) And then, coming up in our readings, the Chronicler will spend the next 18 chapters on the life of David and his kingdom through the end of First Chronicles! Think this Chronicler had his favorite? Why do you suppose this is? Well, the Chronicler of course tells us very plainly why in verses 13 and 14 in chapter 10 today: *"So Saul died because he was unfaithful to the LORD. He failed to obey the LORD's command, and he even consulted a medium instead of asking the LORD for guidance. So the LORD killed him and turned his kingdom over to David son of Jesse."* This Chronicler wants to spend more time on obedience than on disobedience! **Q: How about you in your life today? Do you focus on being obedient to God? Do you seek and pray to God for guidance on what obedience to God would look like in your life? Are you like David - a person after God's own heart? Do you want to know God's heart and plan for your life? Will you remain faithful to God no matter what the world tries to tempt you with?**

9/22 - We finish up the book of Nehemiah today! Today in Nehemiah chapter 12 we read about the dedication of Jerusalem's Wall, which is awesome to read about. Verses 27 & 28 tell us - *"During the dedication of the new wall of Jerusalem, the Levites throughout the land were asked to come to Jerusalem to assist in the ceremonies. They were to take part in the joyous occasion with their songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, lyres, and harps. The singers were brought together from Jerusalem and its surrounding villages and from the villages of the Netophathites."* **Q: How does music enhance your worship experience these days?**

9/22 - Today we start the very last book of the Old Testament by the likely last prophet of the Old Testament era, Malachi! Some say Joel was the last prophet, but most commentaries suggest Malachi - though, our Chronological Bible readings do place Joel last. There is some great stuff in this short book... particularly when we get to tomorrow's readings. The name Malachi means "my messenger." Malachi was written in approximately 430 B.C. and he was likely a contemporary of Nehemiah. Malachi was written to the returned exiles in Jerusalem well after the temple had been rebuilt under governor Zerubbabel in 516 B.C. By 430 B.C. there was a spiritual malaise in the land. It is speculated that this is in part because Jerusalem was then just a small province in the large Persian empire. But, the big reason is probably because the glorious future of God sending his Messiah, Jesus - as pronounced by Isaiah, Haggai and

Zechariah and other prophets - had not yet come to fruition.

9/22 - Chapter 1 verse 2 stood out to me in today's readings: *"I have loved you deeply," says the LORD.* I guess this really resonated with me since we are now reading the last book of the Old Testament. As I look back on our readings earlier this year - all of the books of the Old Testament that we have read and all of the interaction between God and his covenant people, I have to absolutely nod my head in agreement with these words from God in verse 2. God loved deeply in the Old Testament. And God loved deeply the New Testament. And God loves us deeply today. **Q: Do you believe that God loves you deeply? And do you believe that he always will? Do you in turn love God deeply? Today will you reach out and jump in to the deep end of the pool of God's love?**

9/22 - Verse 7 also stood out to me: *"You have despised my name by offering defiled sacrifices on my altar."* The chapter goes on to describe how blind, crippled, and diseased animals were sacrificed to God - which were unacceptable holy sacrifices to God per his laws in Leviticus 1:3 and Deuteronomy 15:21. We are no longer under the law of these sacrifices, as Jesus was the final sacrifice once and for all on the cross. **Q: However - I wondered to myself as I read this verse, do we still offer "defiled sacrifices" to God in some ways today in our lives? Do we give God maybe the left-overs of our life? Our left-over time, finances, energy, prayers, love, etc.? Should we instead be giving God our best sacrifices - our firstfruits, our early morning energy, our constant prayers, our deepest love? Indeed, as Oswald Chambers puts it, are we giving God our very [Utmost for His Highest](#)? Are you giving God the very best of who you are? Every day? Or is God typically just getting your leftovers?**

9/23 - Did anyone else catch a couple of Delirious? (Christian worship band) lyrics from their song "Lead Me" in Malachi's readings today? :) How about chapter 2 verse 17: *"You have wearied the LORD with your words."* What a sad statement to think about - we can weary God with our words... do you suppose this is still possible today? Have we wearied God with our words? And then another Delirious lyric in verse 13: *"You cover the LORD's altar with tears."* What does it mean to flood God's altar with our tears? When would this be good? When would this be not so good...? As Delirious continues to sing in "Lead Me": "Great God, our promises we've broken. Oh Lord, forgive me..." Beautiful tune.

9/23 - Today we finish the book of the prophet Malachi, and it is awesome chapters we read today! The first half of Malachi chapter 3 verse 1 is prophesying 400 years in advance of the coming of John the Baptist, who will prepare people's hearts for Jesus by preaching repentance of sins: *"Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me."* This is a great thing to reflect on as we close out one year and begin anew. **Q: Do we need a messenger from God to encourage us to repent from our sins? Will we listen to that messenger and make way for the coming of Jesus into our hearts and lives?** The second half of verse 1 then prophesies that Jesus is indeed coming to usher in the new covenant, or the new testament: *"The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming," says the LORD Almighty.* The Good News for us today is that Jesus has come already for the forgiveness of sins and Jesus is coming again in glory!

9/23 - Verse 2 tells us this about Jesus: *"For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal or like a strong soap that whitens clothes."* **Q: Will you allow Jesus to refine you through his holy fire? And make you pure through his holy soap?** (Okay, I realize this is a bit cheesy wording here - has anyone ever called Jesus holy soap before?? :)

9/23 - Verses 6 & 7 are so powerful for us to reflect upon: *"I am the LORD, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already completely destroyed. Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my laws and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty.* As I reflect back upon our One Year Bible readings this year, it is so true that God does not change. He has shown so much compassion over and over again to the Israelites in the Old Testament. And he continues to show so much compassion to us today over and over again. **Q: In light of God's holy and unchanging love and compassion for us, will we return to Him? As you look back on our One Year Bible readings this year, do you agree with God's statement here that He does not change? Do you believe that all the way from the Old Testament's Genesis to the New Testament's Revelation God does not change?**

9/23 - Verse 10 is one of my favorites and one of the most challenging in the Bible: *"Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you!"* This verse has and will continue to be interpreted so many ways. Check out the NIV translation of Malachi 3:10 (slightly different than the NLT version above) - *"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in*

this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." It is very rare in the Bible that God says "test me" and follows it up with an incredible promise of a blessing. **Q: This next year, will you test God with a tithe? This next year, will you trust God with your tithe?**

9/23 - Chapter 4 verse 2 makes me smile with the metaphor of us being compared to a calf frolicking in a field: *"But for you who fear my name, the Sun of Righteousness will rise with healing in his wings. And you will go free, leaping with joy like calves let out to pasture."* **Q: Do you want to be set free? Truly free from your burdens and doing things that you do not want to do? Will you entrust your life to the Sun (Son?) of Righteousness, Jesus?** And then - are you looking forward to leaping with joy like a calf let out to pasture?? :) I love this metaphor... it will stick with me.

9/23 - Today we start and finish the book of Joel! The book is basically about locusts. :) Well, okay, more than that. This book was written by pretty much an unknown author. There are 12 other Joels mentioned in the Old Testament, and none are thought to be this book's author. Joel's name means "The Lord is God" or "Yahweh is God." Not a bad name eh! This name is actually the reverse of Elijah - "God is Lord/Yahweh". Different commentators estimate that this book was probably written between the 8th and 5th centuries B.C.

~ Joel ~

Author: Joel

Date: Ninth century B.C.

Content: This beautifully written book uses a plague of locusts to describe symbolically God's coming judgment on Jerusalem. Just as locusts devour the land, so will the enemy armies devour Jerusalem unless the nation repents of its sins. If the people do respond, there will be a time of prosperity and a return of God's favor. God's favor is seen as going beyond the immediate future to a time when God would pour out his Holy Spirit upon all flesh. The New Testament sees this as being fulfilled at Pentecost.

Theme: Joel's message is one of coming judgment if Jerusalem does not repent. Just as surely as the locusts strip the trees bare, so will God strip bare the land. Joel also speaks of coming prosperity, and final blessing, if the people respond in faith. (Above commentary is from "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 15-16)

9/23 - Joel chapter 2 verse 13 stood out to me in today's readings: *"Don't tear your clothing in your grief; instead, tear your hearts. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and merciful. He is not easily angered. He is filled with kindness and is eager not to punish you."* I like that - tear your hearts. One of my favorite musicians, David Wilcox, often talks and sings about hearts not working right - until they are broken. I think he's actually preaching the Gospel message with this thinking. When we finally get to the point of surrendering our lives to Jesus, we come with broken-open hearts. Hearts that have been torn. We've given up our pride. We're reading for God to fill our hearts instead. And as this verse tells us - God is gracious and merciful. **Q: Has your heart been torn for God?**

9/23 - Joel chapter 2 verses 28-32 are amazing! *"Then after I have poured out my rains again, I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy. Your old men will dream dreams. Your young men will see visions. In those days, I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, men and women alike. I will cause wonders in the heavens and on the earth--blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness, and the moon will turn bloodred before that great and terrible day of the LORD arrives. And anyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved. There will be people on Mount Zion in Jerusalem who escape, just as the LORD has said. These will be among the survivors whom the LORD has called."* I didn't realize until recently that these verses were quoted by Peter on the day of Pentecost - seven weeks after Jesus' resurrection - in the book of Acts. Check out the similarities at this link, [Acts Chapter 2 verses 16-21](#). Back to Joel chapter 2 verse 29: *"In those days, I will pour out my Spirit even on servants, men and women alike."* We are in those days... **Q: Has God's Spirit been poured out upon you? Into your heart?**

9/24 – We begin the book of Mark!

Author: Mark

Place: Rome

Date: A.D. 60-65

Content: John Mark was a companion of the apostle Paul. He finally settled in Rome where he wrote down the remembrances of the apostle Peter. Thus Mark's Gospel reflects the words of an eyewitness of the events he describes. Mark's purpose was to put together an expanded Gospel message. Hence it centers upon the acts of Jesus rather than his words and devotes a disproportionately large amount of material to the last week of Jesus' life. Mark's Gospel begins with Jesus' public ministry and preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Several explicit predictions of his coming

death are made (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34, 45) and then Jesus goes to the cross to die for the sins of the world.

Theme: Mark depicts Jesus as the Servant of God who came to do God's will. The miracles, healings, victory over demons, and personal power show the world that Jesus was no ordinary servant, but was truly the Son of God (Mark 15:39). Jesus' resurrection authenticated all that he did, and now we await his return in glory from heaven. Mark also wrote to encourage the Roman Christians in a time of persecution. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" pages 21-22) Excellent commentary on the Gospel of Mark is [at this link](#).

9/24 - You'll notice in Mark chapter 1 today that there is no nativity narrative - Mark and John's Gospels do not have the nativity narrative. Verse 1 starts off powerfully with: "*Here begins the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.*" (Good News = Gospel. Gospel comes from the Old English word godspel, which means "good story" or "good tidings" or "good news" and accurately translates the original Greek word: evangelion.) And what is the Good News? It is that God has provided salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is very Good News indeed!

9/24 - Today we begin the Gospel of Luke!

Author: Luke

Place: Perhaps Caesarea

Date: A.D. 60-65

Content: Luke was a physician and a traveling companion of the Apostle Paul. He wrote his Gospel for a cultured Greek named Theophilus in order to show the true humanity of Jesus and his place in history. For this reason Luke was careful to examine all the evidence very carefully and give precise dates for the events that took place. He begins with an account of Jesus' virgin birth, giving many details not found elsewhere. Jesus' Galilean ministry is described, followed by a lengthy account of Jesus' trip to Jerusalem. After Jesus' death and resurrection, the disciples are left rejoicing, waiting for the promised power of God from heaven to fill them.

Theme: Whereas Matthew shows Jesus to be the Jewish Messiah and Mark shows Jesus as the servant of God, Luke depicts Jesus as the perfect God-man whose genealogy may be traced back to Adam. Jesus is the greatest man in history and is placed within the flow of world events by Luke. He is the greatest man because of what he taught, what he did, why he died – and because he rose again from the dead. For this reason we ought to accept him as our Lord. (Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers "The One Year Bible Companion" p. 22) More commentary on the Gospel of Luke is at this link.

9/24 - I am so excited that we are starting the Gospel of John today!! I won't necessarily say that it is my favorite Gospel – because all 4 are amazing. But, I will say that John is different from the other 3. One thing I'll recommend to everyone, if you have a chance this next week, is to watch the movie "The Gospel of John". Have you seen it? It is incredibly well done. It was released in theaters on a limited basis a few years ago, and I was fortunate enough to have caught it in the theater. It is a 3 hour movie that goes word-for-word through the Gospel of John, based on the Good News Bible translation. Or, perhaps you'll want to read the Biblical text first and then watch the movie later. Either way, I definitely recommend this film. You can hopefully pick it up at a video rental store. A friend of mine was surprised to have found it at the local supermarket little video rental section recently. The movie's website [is at this link](#).

The Gospel of John

Author: John

Place: Ephesus

Date: A.D. 85-96

Content: The Gospel of John was written many years after Jesus' death and resurrection by the apostle John so that those who read it might believe in Christ and thus have life through his name. John begins with a prologue unique to this Gospel where Jesus' preexistent life with the Father is depicted to show that Jesus was not simply a great man, but God. Miracles of Jesus as well as many of Jesus' teachings not found elsewhere are then described. A long section in John chapters 14 through 17 describes Jesus' teaching to his apostles before his death. After Jesus' death and resurrection, special place is given to Jesus' appearance to his apostles.

Theme: The Gospel of John more than any other Gospel stresses the deity of Christ and provides us with an interpretation of his life. He is explained in figurative terms as light, truth, love, good shepherd, the door, the resurrection and the life, living water, true bread, and more. The beautiful material found in John chapters 14 through 17 shows the deep love of Jesus for the believer and the peace that comes from faith in Christ. (Above commentary is from "The One Year Bible Companion" pp. 22-23) **Great commentary on John by Bob Deffinbaugh at bible.org is at this link:**

http://bible.org/page.php?page_id=2348

9/24 - Today in John Chapter 1 verse 14 we read – "*The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have*

seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.” **Q: Do you believe that Jesus is the Word John is referring to? What does this mean to you that the Word became flesh? Do you believe that Jesus was born into this world both fully divine and fully human (yet sinless)? Why would God send Jesus, full of light, grace and truth into the world? Why was this necessary?**

9/24 - Today in John Chapter 1 verses 10 & 11 we read – “He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him.” **Q: Do you believe that the world was made through Jesus? Do you believe the world is Jesus’ own? Have you ever gone through periods in your life where you have not recognized Jesus for who he truly is? (I know that I have) Have you gone through periods of your life where Jesus has come to you and you did not receive him? (Again, I know that I have) As you read through the Gospel of John this year will you prayerfully read it? Will you ask God to reveal to you through John’s Gospel who Jesus really is? And will you ask God to make Jesus more known to you this year than ever before? Do you believe this is possible – for you to know Jesus more this year than in your prior years? Do you believe the Gospel of John and prayer can help you to truly know Jesus more?**

9/24 - **Overview of the book of Matthew:**

Author: Matthew

Place: Perhaps Antioch Date: A.D. 60-70

Content: Matthew was a tax collector, called by Jesus to follow him early in his public ministry; hence, he was an eyewitness of most of the events he describes. He begins with a detailed account of Jesus’ birth of the virgin Mary, his baptism, and temptation in the wilderness. Jesus came preaching the kingdom of God, entrance into which meant eternal life. One entered by repentance and faith. Matthew blocks the teaching of Jesus together into five discourses in which may be seen the ethics, the proclamation, the parables, the fellowship, and the consummation of the kingdom. Jesus’ death and resurrection end the Gospel with the command to go into all the world with the good news (gospel) of Jesus Christ.

Theme: Matthew’s main purpose in writing his Gospel is to show that Jesus fulfills the promise of God in the Old Testament. For this reason Jesus is introduced as a “descendant of King David and of Abraham,” and Matthew makes use of numerous Old Testament prophecies and quotations to explain Jesus’ life. Jesus came to be the Savior of the Jews, the Gentiles, and ultimately the world. The ethics required by members of God’s kingdom are found in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7) where the world’s values are rejected and the Kingdom of God and his righteousness become supreme. *(Above commentary is from Tyndale Publishers “The One Year Bible Companion” p. 21)*

9/24 - In today’s Matthew readings, we read the genealogy of Jesus. I know that genealogy’s can sometimes seem a bit boring to read, but this one in Matthew is phenomenal! If you just finished reading the One Year Bible this past year, you will recognize many of these names. Or - let me encourage you to come back and read this genealogy again on January 1st of next year, if you are going through the entire Bible for your first time this year. This genealogy will amaze you. One of the interesting things to note in this genealogy is the mention of 5 women - Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba, and Mary. It was not the norm in the 1st century to list women in genealogies - only men were typically listed. At least 3 of these women were Gentiles (not Jewish) - Tamara, Rahab, and Ruth. Matthew was potentially trying to indicate to his Jewish readers that God’s work in this world is not limited to the people of Israel - nor was God’s work limited to men. The genealogy in Matthew is sometimes illustrated by a “Jesse Tree” showing the lineage of Jesus from Jesse, father of King David.

9/24 - In today’s readings in Luke chapter 1 we read about the birth of John the Baptist being foretold by the angel Gabriel. Gabriel shares with Zechariah this powerful message about John in verses 16 & 17 - *“He will persuade many Israelites to turn to the Lord their God. He will be a man with the spirit and power of Elijah, the prophet of old. He will precede the coming of the Lord, preparing the people for his arrival. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and he will change disobedient minds to accept godly wisdom.”* This is a message for us to consider today – **Q: do we need to be persuaded to turn to God? Do we need our disobedient minds changed to accept godly wisdom? Can we open our ears to the message of John the Baptist some 2,000 years later? Will we prepare our hearts for the coming of the Lord?**

9/25 - In Luke chapter 1 verses 46 through 55 we read an amazing hymn known as Mary’s Song or the Magnificat, which means “glorifies” in the Latin Vulgate translation. This is indeed a song from the mother of Jesus that glorifies God in a beautiful way. As you read through this song, below, please meditate upon its words. **Q: And maybe ask yourself this – are there ways in your life that you “sing songs” like this to God? Maybe it’s not through literal song – but maybe**

you praise God through loving others, through serving others, through art, through prayer, through your church, and this list could go on... What is your unique way of glorifying God? Do you want to glorify God with all you do in your life?

9/25 - I love Zechariah's prophecy in today's readings in Luke chapter 1! In particular verses 76-79 when speaking about his son John the Baptist: *"And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, because you will prepare the way for the Lord. You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins. Because of God's tender mercy, the light from heaven is about to break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."* Amen! **Q: How has the ministry or life of John the Baptist spoken to you? Is there anything we can learn from John the Baptist about being zealous for God?**

9/25 - Chapter 1 verse 23 is certainly a huge prophecy from the Old Testament prophet Isaiah being fulfilled through the birth of Jesus: *"Look! The virgin will conceive a child! She will give birth to a son, and he will be called Immanuel (meaning, God is with us)."* Jesus is God and came to literally be with us. To experience our human sufferings and temptations - and joys and triumphs. The importance of this birth of Immanuel cannot be overstated. God came to be with us in flesh and blood.

9/25 - One thing that seems to be standing out to me quite a bit in reading Luke this year is how much Luke writes about Mary. I like how Luke gives us a little bit more of a glimpse of the mother of Jesus in his Gospel. We saw this obviously in our readings about the Magnificat. And then today we read about Mary listening to the shepherds' words in verse 19: *"Mary quietly treasured these things in her heart and thought about them often."* And then in chapter 2 verses 34 & 35 today we read: *"Then Simeon blessed them, and he said to Mary, 'This child will be rejected by many in Israel, and it will be their undoing. But he will be the greatest joy to many others. Thus, the deepest thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your very soul.'"* This last sentence of Simeon's seems to be the first glimpse of Jesus' suffering and death that will come later in his life.... **Q: How does reading about Mary stand out to you? What can we learn from Mary's life and obedience?**

9/25 - In Luke chapter 2 today we read about Jesus' wisdom at the young age of 12. How's this for a profound statement from Jesus to Mary & Joseph when they found him in the Temple in verse 49 - *"But why did you need to search?" he asked. "You should have known that I would be in my Father's house."* I like that! And I like that Jesus was paying such respect for the Temple as well - essentially calling it the house of God. I do believe this can be carried forward today to Jesus' love for his body, the church. I often think to myself, when I'm on my way to church, that "I'm going to the house of God." **Q: Do you believe that we can find Jesus today in his Father's house? Or are you searching elsewhere?** I do believe of course Jesus can be found outside of church... but I also know that I oftentimes experience his presence so profoundly at church - and Communion in church clearly being one such a time & place where I cannot help but find Jesus in a profound way. **Where do you find God these days?**

9/26 - Matthew Chapter 2 verse 6 is very powerful: *"O Bethlehem of Judah, you are not just a lowly village in Judah, for a ruler will come from you who will be the shepherd for my people Israel."* Here again you can see Matthew writing for his Jewish audience - quoting an Old Testament prophet and also focusing in on the town of "Bethlehem of Judah" - the City of David. This was to demonstrate again that Jesus was from the lineage of King David.

9/26 - Matthew chapter 2 Verse 10 is a brief verse showing us the reaction of the magi in being led to Jesus: *"When they saw the star, they were filled with joy!"* The magi were also Gentiles and likely astrologers - following a star might lead one to think this... :) But no matter where they were from and what they believed prior, they were filled with joy at being led to the Messiah, Jesus. And they gave him gifts and worshipped him. And for us today - are we filled with joy in reading about the birth of Jesus? Do we realize what this meant back then - and still means today? That Immanuel was born - that God came to be with us. (Note that some Biblical scholars say that contrary to popular tradition, it is believed that the magi did not visit Jesus at the manger on the night of his birth, as did the shepherds, but that the magi came months later and visited him as "child" in his "house" - see verse 11.)

9/26 - In Matthew today we read about The Escape to Egypt. Two things stood out to me in Joseph's behavior in today's readings. In Matthew chapter 2 verse 13 an angel tells Joseph to *"get up and flee to Egypt"* - and Joseph responds by leaving THAT NIGHT with the family, as we see in verse 14. That's beautiful obedience. Then, in verse 21 we see Joseph respond similarly when he is told by an angel to return to Israel - he leaves with the family "immediately." I like this - Joseph is acting obediently to God's will in his life - and he is acting pronto! He's not sitting around worrying or

fretting or thinking that he'll get to it tomorrow. He goes that night! He returns immediately! **Q: Can we learn from Joseph's amazing obedience in these readings? Is God calling you to do something in your life that you are hemming and hawing about? Is God calling you to forgive someone? To love someone? To serve someone? To encourage someone? Will you be like Joseph and obey God's call for your life immediately?**

9/26 - Today in Matthew chapter 3 we are introduced to John the Baptist! I don't know exactly what it is about John the Baptist - but I love reading about him and his life. He is just on fire for God and Jesus and he is encouraging others to get on fire too! I guess I like that in a person. :-) Another thing about John is that he is so focused on his mission to call others to repentance and to baptize them, that he really does not care about worldly things - like how he looks or what he wears or what he eats. None of that really matters to him. It is the message of the coming of Jesus that matters to him. Maybe it is verse 4 that really stands out to me about John: *"John's clothes were woven from camel hair, and he wore a leather belt; his food was locusts and wild honey."* I think this is really saying that John lived a simple life. He did not "major in minor things" - he "majored in the major thing" - Jesus! **Q: Is there something we can learn from John the Baptist in our lives today? Are you perhaps focusing too much on things of this world and not enough on God and Jesus? Are you truly loving God and loving people like John did? Or are you spending your life "majoring in minor things"? Will you instead "major on the major thing" that John is calling you to even today - complete passion and love for God: the Father, Jesus the Son, the Holy Spirit; and other people?**

9/26 - Today's Matthew readings are incredible on so many levels. We begin by reading about John the Baptist going off on the Pharisees and Sadducees! John is not joking around here... :) I think one verse that really stood out to me was chapter 3 verse 8: *"Prove by the way you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God."* and verse 10: *"Yes, every tree that does not produce good fruit will be chopped down and thrown into the fire."* I think what I hear John saying here is that we are called to truly repent and change our ways. Not just to say some nice words or just show up to church on Sundays - but to be transformed. Our lives should be visibly different from our past if we have really turned from our sins and turned to God. And this change will be evident by our lives producing "good fruit" - examples of which can certainly be seen in any of the Ten Commandments or loving our neighbor as ourselves and above all loving God with all our hearts, minds, soul and strength. Our lives should look very different from our past. **Q: Do they? Does yours?**

9/26 - Matthew chapter 3 Verses 16 & 17 are phenomenal as we see the three persons of the Trinity interacting with each other! God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit: *"After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my beloved Son, and I am fully pleased with him.'"* Jesus' baptism is very significant because it is the act that opens up the public ministry phase of Jesus' life. Now - I think what happens just after Jesus' baptism is something each of us should take heed of - the devil comes in full force after Jesus. I heard someone tell me just before I was baptized about 6 years ago that whenever we make a public declaration that we love God: the Father, Jesus the Son, & the Holy Spirit and that we want to follow Him, the devil and temptation very likely will appear. The devil isn't happy when we are moving forward in our love of Jesus and loving others - and he wants to derail it. And that's what we see here in chapter 4 - God: the Father, Jesus the Son, & the Holy Spirit have just declared "Game On!" with Jesus' public ministry via the baptism - and then who should show up coming after Jesus? **Q: If the devil showed up to tempt Jesus, don't you think he might try to show up in our lives when we are starting something big in our faith walk?** Fortunately, Jesus gives us all the answers we need in chapter 4 to thwart the devil's attacks.

9/27 - Chapter 4 verse 4 I believe is one of the most important verses for us to commit to memory in all of the Bible: *"But Jesus told him, 'No! The Scriptures say, 'People need more than bread for their life; they must feed on every word of God.'"* (NLT). Or, you might recognize this verse a bit better in NIV format: *"Jesus answered, 'It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* This is such a powerful spiritual truth that Jesus is conveying - we will not live full and true lives if we live simply on bread alone. We need spiritual nourishment - food - from every Word of God. Where do we get this Word of God? You got it - the Bible. And note that Jesus says "every" word of God. This means the whole Bible is spiritual food for us. All of it. Not just the parts we like the best. :) We can learn something and be nourished by even the long genealogies! Seriously. So - I want to applaud you for going through the One Year Bible - you will be getting nourishment from "every" Word of God this year!

9/27 - One other important point to make in Matthew 4:4 and the 2 other temptations in this chapter. We see the devil tempting Jesus with things that may look enticing to Jesus or to us. But they are lies. And note - this is important - how Jesus fends off the devil's temptations and lies - by quoting Scripture! Jesus knew Scripture (well, yes, technically He is

Scripture...:) The point is this. I do believe that we need to do more than just read the Bible. We need to memorize many portions of the Bible to protect us when the devil is attacking. If we have Scripture memorized, when we are tempted, we can quickly call to mind a verse or two that will bring us back into right state of mind - focusing back on God: the Father, Jesus the Son, & the Holy Spirit and their love and strength available through the Holy Spirit. If we don't have Scripture memorized, as Jesus clearly did in this chapter, we are at risk of falling prey to the deception and lies of the temptation. So - I am mostly preaching this to myself! :) But, I really want to do more memorization of Scripture this year. I have several verses down - but not enough. [Proverbs 3:5-6](#) certainly comes to mind for me often when I am worried or stressed and it transforms my state of mind immediately! **Q: What can you apply in your life today based on how Jesus rebuked the devil's temptations?** Very important to note is what happened when Jesus rebuked the devil's temptations with Scripture, the Word of God, in verse 11: *"Then the Devil went away."* Amen to that! :) **Are you memorizing Scripture on a regular basis? Are you bringing Scripture to mind when faced with temptation or sadness or whatever ails you? I would love to know which verses you have found useful in your life? Do you have advice on how to best go about memorizing Scripture? Will you join me in my plan to memorize more Scripture verses this year?**

9/27- I absolutely love John chapter 1 verse 29 - *"The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look! There is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* **Q: Do you believe Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world? Has Jesus taken away your sin? How?**

9/27 - John chapter 1 Verses 45 & 46 I find so truthful, along with Nathanael's reply being amusing - but mostly Nathanael's reply demonstrates how very humble of a background Jesus came from - *"Philip went off to look for Nathanael and told him, "We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth." "Nazareth!" exclaimed Nathanael. "Can anything good come from there?"* **Q: Are we ever like Nathanael - having preconceived notions about places or things or maybe even Jesus? Can we leave our preconceived notions about things behind us and move forward in the spirit of truth, particularly when it comes to Jesus and who He is?**

9/27 - John chapter 2 verse 11 is of note - *"This miraculous sign at Cana in Galilee was Jesus' first display of his glory. And his disciples believed in him."* It is interesting that John refers to Jesus' miracles as "signs." Signs seem to indicate the significance of Jesus' actions, rather than the marvel. **Q: What do you think Jesus' miracles might have been "signs" of? What do they mean to you today?**

9/27 - Tyndale's One Year Bible Companion has a very interesting commentary on John chapter 2 verse 14 - *"In the Temple area he saw merchants selling cattle, sheep, and doves for sacrifices; and he saw money changers behind their counters."* Tyndale answered the question of why there were merchants & money changers in the temple as follows: *"The temple tax had to be paid in local currency, so foreigners had to have their money changed. But the moneychangers would often charge exorbitant exchange rates. The people were also required to make sacrifices for sins. Because of the long journey, many could not bring their own animals. The price of sacrificial animals was much higher in the temple than elsewhere."* It is understandable why Jesus was upset with all of this. Thank goodness we do not have this system still in place for us today - with moneychangers & merchants for tax & animal sacrifices... thank you Jesus! **Q: What's your reaction to Jesus' "cleansing of the temple?" Was He justified in this? Have our churches today turned away from being a house of prayer and turned into being a market in any ways?**

9/28 - Today in John chapter 3 we will read about Jesus' interactions with Nicodemus, a member of the Pharisees. This is obviously a powerful chapter, as Jesus' words in this chapter include the famous John 3:16. In verse 3 we will read this from Jesus - *"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."* And to this Nicodemus asks in verse 4 - *"How can a man be born when he is old? Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born?"* **Q: What do these verses mean to you? Do you understand Jesus' statement in verse 3? Do you understand Nicodemus' confusion and why he asked the question like he did in verse 4?** Jesus later goes on in chapter 3 to say that he is referring to being born again in "the Spirit." It is not a physical rebirth Jesus is referring to in verse 3, but a Spiritual rebirth. I do think this is an appropriate time in our One Year Bible readings - the gospel of John and John chapter 3 in particular - **for each of us to ask ourselves if we have been born again in the Spirit? If not, do you want to be born again in the Spirit? Will you pray today to God and Jesus for this Spiritual rebirth?**

9/28 - Wow... I love John the Baptist's words about Jesus in John chapter 3 today! Great stuff. Please read these verses again and meditate upon them in your life today. The verse that really stood out to me today was verse 30 when John

said this about Jesus - *"He must become greater and greater, and I must become less and less."* How very true and how very applicable to our lives today. We must let Jesus become greater and greater in our lives, hearts, and actions, and our individualism / selfishness must become less and less. **Q: How are you doing on this? How are you allowing Jesus to become greater and greater in your life and are "you" becoming less and less?**

9/28 - Wow. The Jacob's Well story in John chapter 4 today is beautiful on so many levels. I definitely recommend you check out Bible.org's commentary on this chapter [at this link](#) if you aren't familiar with all of the meanings of this story. I love Jesus's words in verse 34 - *"My nourishment comes from doing the will of God, who sent me, and from finishing his work."* **Q: If this is true for Jesus - think this might be true for us too? Do you believe that our nourishment comes from doing the will of God?**

9/29 - Matthew chapter 4:12 begins Jesus' public ministry. Verse 17 is of note: *"From then on, Jesus began to preach, 'Turn from your sins and turn to God, because the Kingdom of Heaven is near.'"* You'll note that Jesus is echoing earlier words of John the Baptist - turn from your sins - repent. The message is obviously of utmost importance - then and now. And then you'll see several times in the gospel of Matthew the term "the Kingdom of Heaven." You'll later see in Mark and Luke's gospel's a similar term, "the Kingdom of God." They basically mean the same thing - but Matthew was using the term "Heaven" instead of "God" because he was writing for a Jewish audience, which did not like to verbalize God's name (out of respect). Per Zondervan's NIV Study Bible, the Kingdom of Heaven is essentially brought about through the ministry of Jesus and those that have faith in Him - the establishment of God's rule in the hearts of people, the overcoming of evil, the removal of the consequences of sin, and a new order of peace. The idea of God's kingdom is mentioned nearly 50 times in the gospel of Matthew. **Q: How have you seen God's Kingdom manifested in your life? How have you seen that the Kingdom of heaven is near? What does repent meant to you? Is repentance a one time thing or an ongoing thing our lives?**

9/29 - Matthew 4 verses 18 through 20 is something that I think all of us should reflect upon in our own lives: *"One day as Jesus was walking along the shore beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers--Simon, also called Peter, and Andrew--fishing with a net, for they were commercial fishermen. Jesus called out to them, 'Come, be my disciples, and I will show you how to fish for people!' And they left their nets at once and went with him."* What would you do if you were at work today or tomorrow and Jesus came to you and said - "Come, be my disciple, and I will show you how to fish for people!" Like Peter and Andrew, would you go at once with Jesus? This is not an easy question for us to answer. But I think it is worth asking. I have a great friend who indeed felt the call of Jesus to leave his very nicely paid architect job in the U.S. and to become a missionary architect in Asia - building primarily hospitals for communities that need them. The point of this passage I think is this - Jesus is indeed calling each one of us to follow Him. We may not need to leave our jobs. (But some of us may...) The call may entail leaving some of our luxurious ways or lazy behaviors behind to truly follow Him. The call to follow Jesus certainly entails leaving our sinful ways behind. **Q: Do you think Jesus still calls people today? Can you share with everyone a time in your life when felt that you were called by Jesus? Maybe it was a time when you were called to follow Jesus for the first time or maybe it was a call to love or serve others in a new way for you? Do you think that Jesus is calling you to something new in your life now in 2010? What do you think Jesus is calling you to do?**

9/29 - Matthew 4:23 nicely encapsulates Jesus' 3 main ministries that we will see over and over again in the gospels - 1. teaching, 2. preaching, and 3. healing. *"Jesus traveled throughout Galilee teaching in the synagogues, preaching everywhere the Good News about the Kingdom. And he healed people who had every kind of sickness and disease."* **Q: How will you allow Jesus to teach you this year? How will you even allow Jesus to preach to you this year? And, this may be the toughest to surrender answer – how will you allow Jesus to heal you this year?**

9/30 - Today we read Matthew chapter 8, which is an amazing look at Jesus' healing ministry. While we do read about someone with leprosy, and a paralyzed man, and others with sicknesses and demons - don't we all need some sort of healing in our lives today? Maybe we can learn something from the man with leprosy in verse 2: *"Suddenly, a man with leprosy approached Jesus. He knelt before him, worshipping. 'Lord,' the man said, 'if you want to, you can make me well again.'" I will give a caveat here - I do know people that have prayed for healing from various sicknesses and diseases - and it has not always been healed. Please don't see this as any shortcoming in your faith - or in Jesus' power. Oftentimes God's ways are much more of a mystery than we can comprehend on this side of heaven. "For now, we see in part. But, then - in heaven - we will see in full." (my paraphrase of Paul's words in [1 Corinthians 13:12](#)) Please don't give up on God or Jesus if the healing is not coming as you'd prayed for it to. Ultimately, all who have faith in the born, crucified, and risen Jesus will have perfected bodies in heaven. Please stay focused on this "hope of glory", as Paul also*

wrote about. **Q: Do you believe that Jesus still heals people today? What does he heal people of today? Does he heal sickness? Addictions? Laziness? Pride? All manner of sins? Has Jesus healed you of anything? Do you believe He can?**

9/30 - In Matthew chapter 9 we read about Jesus not only healing - but also forgiving sins. This is a power and an authority - forgiving sins - that only God could truly have. It is true that Jesus would be blaspheming, per the teachers of religious law in this passage, if Jesus was not God. **Q: So, this might be a good point for you to ask yourself: do you believe that Jesus is God? If this is your first go through the Bible or the gospel of Mathew, you may not feel ready to answer this question yet. But ask it of yourself now - and again as you continue to read this gospel: do you believe that Jesus is God? Do you believe that Jesus, as God, could not only heal the paralytic but forgive his sins as well?**

9/30 - In chapter 9, Jesus calls Matthew (or "Levi"), the author of this Gospel, and a Jewish tax collector at the time of his call. Note that while Jerusalem was under the authority of Rome at this time, Rome would hire Jews to collect taxes from other Jews that would be paid to Rome. The Jewish tax collectors were allowed to keep a commission or percentage of the taxes they collected - however, they were notorious for overcharging and making more than they should have in their collections. As such, Jewish tax collectors were typically not allowed to be in the temple - nor were they even trusted as witnesses in trials. And this is our Gospel writer! :) (yes, I still trust Matthews writings - he, like us, was forgiven & changed after meeting Jesus) In this chapter Jesus has a meal with "tax collectors and other notorious sinners." And the religious leaders ask Jesus why he eats with such "scum." I do hope that you see that this is such an amazing thing about Jesus - he will have a meal with anyone - the "scum of the earth" as one translation calls sinners who believe in Jesus in one of Paul's letters. Jesus loves the "scum". And he gets frustrated with the religious leaders who are righteous in their own eyes. Why the difference? I think verses 12 & 13 answer this well: *"When he heard this, Jesus replied, "Healthy people don't need a doctor--sick people do... For I have come to call sinners, not those who think they are already good enough."* **Q: So, this leads to some questions we may want to ask ourselves today. Are we spiritually healthy or are we sick? Do we need a spiritual doctor? Do we need Jesus? Are we sinners? Or, do we think we are already "good enough" on our own? Like Jesus, will we talk and dine with "sinners" in our lives today? Or, do we consider ourselves somehow "above" talking and dining with sinners? One thing that I have to be careful of - and maybe all of us do - is not getting myself stuck in the "Christian bubble" or the "Christian ghetto." Meaning, I think we can sometimes find ourselves just spending time, just talking with, just dining with our Christian friends. And then after a while find ourselves completely removed from the world that needs to experience Jesus' love and light and truth through us. I think we are called to minister in the world. Yes, there is a time and place for sure to fellowship with our Christian brothers and sisters. But, I think we do well to find some occasion to talk and dine with "sinners" (not so unlike ourselves, also sinners...) like Jesus did. **So, how and when do you find time to talk and dine with folks who perhaps do not yet know God or Jesus?****

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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