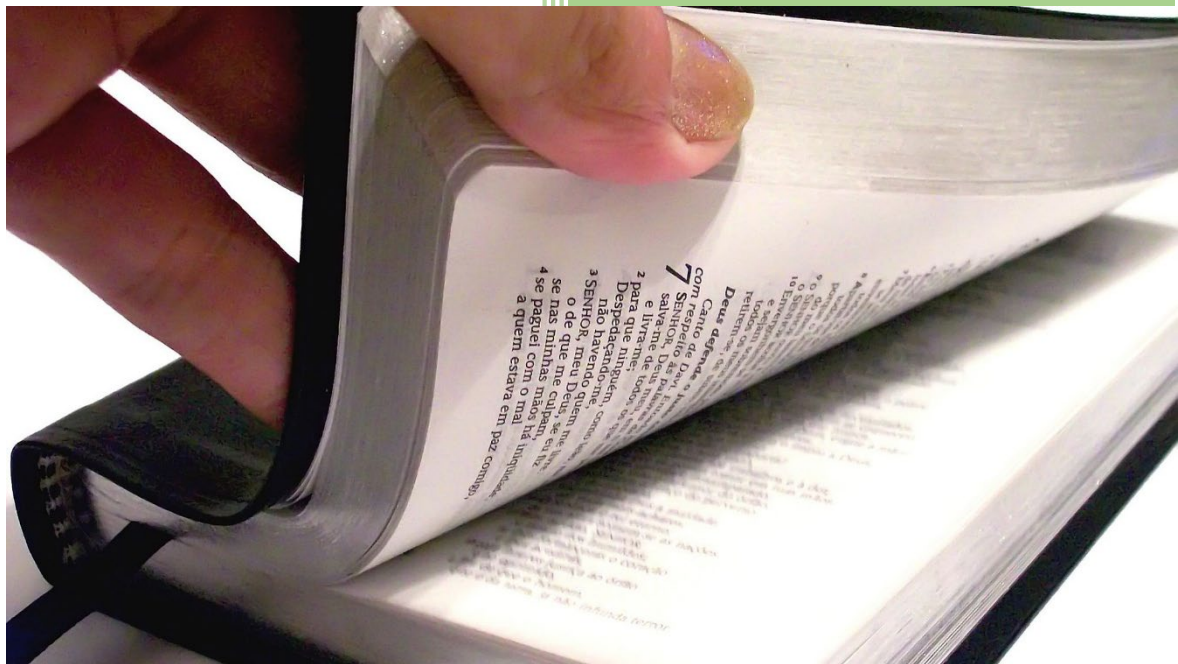


Second Steps In Bible Reading - Notes



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Introduction

This is the second part of a Bible Reading Plan for those who are new to reading the Bible. In the First Steps in Bible Reading, we concentrated on getting a person familiar with important parts of the Bible. We tried to make this easy by not reading too much, by not reading passages that were difficult, and by avoiding passages that might be considered tedious. In the Second Steps, we will still avoid the passages. Yet we will take a step towards reading these passages. Only by getting to the point of reading any passage in the Bible will you be able to understand the whole Bible. This is the aim - and we assume it is also your aim – to enable you to read the whole Bible. Only when you get to this point will you be able to learn fully what the Bible says.

In First Steps of Bible Reading, you read 15% of the Bible. In Second Steps, you will read a further 31%. Because Second Steps will not repeat what was read in First Steps, it means that together you will have read 46% of the Bible. You will then be in a position to read the whole of the Bible for yourself. Like First Steps, there is a bookmark that goes with this course and can go in your Bible.

One way to help you read the whole Bible is to know something about the historical order of the books of the Bible. In Second Steps we will go through the Bible in a rough chronological order to help you understand this. Another way to help is to introduce what each book of the Bible is about. We will do this in Second Steps.

Many Christadelphians read the whole of the Bible once a year. This is because it keeps them familiar with the whole of the Bible and allows the reader to base their life and understanding on it. The Bible is made of 1189 chapters. This means that a person must read 3.3 chapters a day if they are to read the Bible once a year. This is our target. In First Steps, you read one chapter a day. In Second Steps, this now increases to 2 chapters a day. This prepares you for the goal of approximately 3 chapters a day.

First Steps took 6 months. Second Steps also takes 6 months. Together, they take one year to read. Of course, you could read more than the planned chapters and complete the task sooner. It is your choice how much you read at a time.

In Second Steps, we will spend a more time speaking about the content of the chapter and point out things of interest. The Bible is so deep and complex that many things could be written. We will only pick out the main points and will only write one paragraph on each chapter. If there are other things in the chapter that you wish to know, then make notes of these questions, so you can ask someone who has greater understanding.

We would recommend that you start making notes in the Bible itself. We say this because the purpose of a Bible is for it to be read and understood. This is best done by underlining verses you like and writing down points that you want to remember. The purpose of a Bible is not to keep it clean and neat but to help understand its message and remember it.

The more we read and think about the Bible, the more beautiful we will find it. It can be understood in many ways and on many different levels. If you think you have understood a passage in one way, you may stop looking for other insights. It is best not to assume you have understood everything. We hope you will find the wisdom that it offers. It offers us the hope of eternal life in God's kingdom for those wise enough to seek and find it. May God be with your reading.

Further Notes on how the chapters were chosen for reading

This reading plan is in a rough chronological order. So we start with Genesis. We will not read chapters that have been covered in First Steps so we will pick up the events from chapter 10. Of course, you can reread these chapters again if that is your wish. There is every value in reminding yourself of what you previously read.

Second Steps is not a complete reading of the Bible, so we will not be reading every chapter. We will read 16 chapters of Genesis which includes much of the life of Abraham, the life of Isaac and part of the life of Jacob. We will not have time to read the remainder of Jacob's life or the life of Joseph. If you feel you want to read these parts, then please go ahead. We are not trying to restrict you but encourage you to read the Bible. The same goes for any other occasion where you wish to read chapters outside the plan.

After Genesis we go to the second book Exodus and read the early part of it. The later part contains the building of the tabernacle, where it gets technical. The Tabernacle is very important but now is not the time for such detail. We continue to make difficult choices on what to read and what not to read throughout this plan. If you do not agree with these choices, go ahead and read what you wish. We encourage it! The aim of this plan is to get you reading the Bible and to develop a love and appreciation for it. God wants you to do this and so do we.

When we read the Bible and think about its message, we will learn to appreciate that it is deeper than we first thought. After a while, we will start thinking about whether there are deeper meanings in certain passages and we will start to see them. It is only by searching for these other meanings that we will really appreciate that the Bible was written by a God of immense intelligence and wisdom. We should not think that the Bible is like any other human writing. It is not! We will sometimes point out these deeper meanings as a way to help you begin to look out for them.

Introduction to the Old Testament

The Bible has two main sections – the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament takes us from the Creation to the end of the time of the prophets. It is largely concerned with the family of Abraham. Abraham's grandson was a man called Israel and Israel's family became God's people. God revealed himself to Israel's family in Mount Sinai and gave them a covenant or agreement. God would be their God if the people of Israel made God their God and obeyed His laws. This is what is known as the Old Covenant or Old Testament. Much of the Old Testament is how the people of Israel poorly kept the laws of God and needed to be reminded to obey them.

The Old Testament was largely written in Hebrew, the language of the Israelites. There are small sections written in Aramaic, which occurred at a time when Israel was exiled. There are 39 books of the Old Testament divided into four sections. Firstly, the first 5 books are called the Pentateuch and contain the Law of Moses. Secondly there are the historical books describing when the people of Israel were in the land of Israel. Thirdly there are the poetic books including the Psalms. Many were given by the Jewish kings David and Solomon. Finally there are the prophets, whose job was to remind Israel to turn back to the laws of God. Among all these sections there is a message about the promise of a better age and the coming of a great king. This is for those who are truly God's people. Being a child of Israel of Israel was not enough for God to consider a person as His people. They had to make God their God and obey His commands.

Introduction to the Book of Genesis

Genesis is a Greek word meaning 'beginning' or 'origin.' The book describes how everything started. It is the foundation of the Bible. It explains how God created life and what it really is. God had expectations from man, which man did not meet. God punished Adam and Eve by sending them away. Genesis tells us how things then went wrong for mankind. God punished mankind with a flood but saved mankind and animals through Noah and a boat. By observing what happens in the lives of people, we learn what God expects from people. This will help us learn the lessons and become people of God. A good example is a man called Abraham. Abraham was faithful and believed in the invisible God even though others around him did not and invented other beliefs. God chose Abraham and his family to be His own special people. Abraham was originally called Abram, but God changed his name. Much of Genesis describes the lives of Abraham's son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, and Jacob's 12 sons. The final part of Genesis is about one of these 12 sons who was called Joseph. God saved Jacob's family through Joseph. The book ends with God's people, now called 'Israelites', welcomed into Egypt. Genesis introduces us to many important topics, such as angels, sin, and grace. The first usage of a topic is often helpful to understand the topic in the Bible as a whole, and there are many of these in Genesis.

Day 1: Genesis 10 and 11

Genesis 10 tells us how the family of Noah expanded into all the nations of the world after the flood. There were seventy nations. All modern-day nations were descended from these seventy. The chapter tells us that these nations had their own languages, despite coming from just one family. This sets the scene for Genesis 11, which explains the origin of these languages. We learn of the building of a city and a tower. This may look innocent to the reader, but a little thought makes us see other motives in this building work. The tower was to reach heaven and was actually an attempt by man to challenge the supremacy of God. God responded to the challenge and punished mankind with the origin of multiple languages. The remaining part of the chapter takes us from the 'rebellion' of Babel to the finding of a man called Abram. Here was a man who did not challenge God but was willing to obey Him. Abram believed in God so strongly that he was willing to leave His homeland in modern Iraq. He was called by God to go to the land of Canaan (modern day Israel and the neighbouring territories).

Day 2: Genesis 13 and 14

Genesis 13 tells us that Abram went to the Land of Canaan with his nephew Lot. They came to a place called Bethel. Names in the Bible are interesting and often significant. The name 'Bethel' means 'house of God.' It is here that Abram built an altar to God. Later in the Bible we learn that the temple, which is a house of God, also has an altar.

Abram and Lot had been blessed so much that their families were too big to stay together in one place. They had to separate. Lot chose to go to the plain of Sodom, even though Sodom was a wicked place. Abram stayed as a nomad among the hills. Now that Abram was alone, God explained that the country he was in would be given to him and his children. Abram had no children at this time because his wife Sarah was barren. God promised Abraham many children.

Genesis 14 is an unusual chapter. Five kings and their armies attacked Sodom and nearby cities where Lot lived and Lot and his family were captured. Abram and a few men were able to defeat

these larger armies and save Lot and his family. There is more to this event than meets the eye. Abraham could only have defeated such an army with the blessing of God and Abram must have gone in faith in God. The original attack came from the north. This is a pattern of a future northern invader invading a wicked people in God's land. This theme recurs several times in the Bible. Abram was then met by another king called Melchizedek. Melchizedek was a believer in God and a king of Jerusalem. Melchizedek blessed Abram and Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of his belongings. We are given an extensive explanation of the meaning of this incident in the book of Hebrews chapter 7.

Day 3: Genesis 16 and 17

By the time of Genesis 16, Abram still did not have any children. In an attempt to have a child, Sarah offered her slave girl to Abram. The attempt worked and Hagar became pregnant. However, Hagar started to despise Sarah, leading to family strife. In return, Sarah made Hagar's life hard, and Hagar ran away. In an amazing show of the way God works, God sent His angel to Hagar. We learn from this that God sees everything and that He cares about everyone – even a slave girl. Hagar went back to Sarah and bore Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old at this point.

Thirteen years later, when Abram was 99 years of age, God appeared to Abram and reiterated His promises to him. Abram would have a child with Sarah. Abram's name means 'exalted father.' It must have been difficult for him to have this name since he had only become a father in his old age and then only through a slave girl. God then changed his name to 'Abraham,' which means 'father of many.' In other words, Abram was to have other children. Genesis 17 is about how Isaac would be born. A sign of these promises was circumcision. Abram and the male members of his household were immediately circumcised. All Israelites, even today, circumcise because of these events.

Day 4: Genesis 18 and 20

In Genesis 18, Abraham offered refreshment to three strangers, who turn out to be angels. Here is an example (quoted in the New Testament) about the need to be hospitable to strangers. The angels reiterated the promise of a child to Abraham and Sarah. This surprised Sarah given how old she was. The angels also explained to Abraham about the coming destruction of Sodom. Abraham debated with them about whether it was right for God to destroy the city with righteous people in it. On his mind was the household of Lot which, apart from his wife and two daughters, must have included over 50 servants. Surely, Abraham must have thought, these people would be righteous, and the city would be saved. What Abraham had not expected was that some would have lapsed in their faith, when mixing with worldly people. In the event, there were not even 10 faithful people from Lot's household. And so Sodom was doomed. It turned out that only 3 were saved! Lot's wife was lost because her heart was still in Sodom. This shows the danger of mixing with the world where the people live in a godless way.

Genesis 20 describes an incident that occurred when Abraham moved south to Gerar (modern day Gaza). The king of Gerar took Sarah from Abraham because of her beauty. God rebuked the king and stopped his women having children. We see God's care for the righteous, which God does all through the Bible. We also see how easy it is for God to direct the lives of people and to hold people accountable for their behaviour. Even inadvertent crimes are still crimes and need to be repented of.

Day 5: Genesis 21 and 23

In Genesis 21 we read that Abraham finally had a son through his wife Sarah. Abraham was a 100 years old. The son was called Isaac, meaning 'laughter.' Everyone who heard of this birth would laugh! God had made the womb of Sarah young again for this to happen. The birth of Isaac brought further family problems between Hagar and her son Ishmael and Sarah and her son Isaac. Hagar and Ishmael were sent away, but God found them and looked after them. Again, we are shown that God cares for all, without prejudice. In the final section, we learn that the king of Gerar had realised that Abraham was blessed by God. Abimelech knew the power that God had. So Abimelech made a treaty with Abraham.

Genesis 23 records the death of Sarah. Abraham wished to bury her. But since he did not own any land himself, he had to buy land from the Hittites as a burial place. Abraham was respected by the Hittites and they offered to give him the land freely. But Abraham insisted on paying for it. We are caused to think about the promise that God made to Abraham. God would give Abraham the land of Canaan, but Abraham did not inherit this land in his lifetime. Like the birth of a son, Abraham had to wait for God to bring about what God had promised at the right time. God has a time for all things.

Day 6: Genesis 24 and 25

Genesis 24 highlights the importance of finding the right marriage partner. Abraham did not want Isaac to marry a woman of the land. These women would be worshippers of idols and would follow the ways of these people. Instead, Abraham wanted to find someone from his own family. That is, he wanted someone who was a believer in the same God. This principle runs through the Bible. Believers should marry believers. Abraham sent his chief servant to find a wife. This servant was faithful and prayed to God for help. It is a lovely story of the blessing of God. The servant met Rebekah who volunteered to water his ten camels. This was an answer to prayer, and the servant praised God for this. God does answer prayer and He work in the lives of believers.

After the death of Sarah, Abraham married again and had children. But the promises of God were passed on through his son Isaac. Abraham died when Isaac was 75. We are told about the children of Ishmael, which shows us that God had not forgotten them. Isaac was not able to have children through Rebekah, until he prayed to God. The promises to Abraham are only fulfilled because God brought them about, not man. Rebekah bore twins – Esau and Jacob. Esau was the firstborn and would gain the blessing of the birthright. However, Esau was foolish and sold his birthright for a meal! This is referred to in the New Testament (Hebrews 12:16). Esau did not have the right priorities in his life. He is a lesson to us all to put the right things first.

Day 7: Genesis 27 and 29

The struggle between Esau and Jacob continued in Genesis 27. Isaac wished to bless his children, starting with the eldest son Esau. In a startling turn of events, Jacob disguised himself as Esau, deceived his father and got the blessing! Esau was not happy and vowed to kill Jacob. Jacob had to leave the country as he ran for his life. What a mess! Rebekah was trying to promote her favourite son Jacob. She was part of the deception and ended up losing her favourite son for much of her life. You could say that this was justice for her deception. Jacob suffered for his deception. If you follow his life, he was deceived by his father-in-law and then by his sons. You could also say that this was

justice. Esau ended up being blessed by God anyway. This too could be called justice. It is interesting to see how events play out in people's lives and how what they do comes back on them. It is a warning to us!

Jacob went to the modern-day area of Syria in Genesis 29. Jacob had shown no recorded acts of faith in God at this point. This now changed with the vow he made in chapter 28. He made a vow to follow God, and God blessed his migration. In an event that reminds us of how a wife was found for his father Isaac, Jacob now meets his future wife at a well. But Jacob suffered the first of the deceptions in his life. His future father-in-law switched his daughters on the day of the marriage, and Jacob married the sister of the woman he loved. Jacob gets around this by marrying a second wife. Marrying more than one wife is not to be recommended and Jacob was an example of this. There was constant strife in Jacob's family from this point onwards. The first wife Leah was not loved as much by Jacob, so God ensured that she had sons.

Day 8: Genesis 30 and 31

The struggle between Jacob's two wives continued in Genesis 30. The names of the children, who became the 12 tribes of Israel, reflect that struggle. Leah highlights that Rachel had the heart of her husband and this had caused her constant misery. It seemed there was a battle between the wives to have as many sons as possible. Both wives had sons through their slave girls as well. Then we come to the second of the deceptions Jacob suffered, that of his wages. His father-in-law, Laban, changed his wages 10 times and tried to take ownership of Jacob's own family and wealth.

But God was with Jacob. As Jacob continued to rely on God, God continued to watch over Jacob's life. Life was not easy for Jacob, but God did bless Jacob. In a curious incident about the breeding of flocks (which is too technical to explain here), God blessed Jacob with flocks. After 20 years, Jacob returned home. He left at night without telling his father-in-law, which led to tension. Again, God intervened to help Jacob. In God's overall plan, it was important that Jacob's family were separated from Laban's. Laban's family were idol worshippers. Despite good reason to believe in the God of Jacob, Laban's family continued worshipping their own gods. God's people must always separate from people who worship other things.

We now must leave the story of Genesis, because of time. We have followed the life of Jacob because we needed to learn about the origin of his 12 sons, who became the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob's struggles continued throughout the remainder of Genesis. Famine caused the family to move down into Egypt. God brought this about through Joseph. Genesis recounts much of the life of Joseph and ends with his death. However, the promises of Abraham are still on his mind and Joseph gave orders for his bones to be taken to the land of promise when they returned there.

Introduction to the Book of Exodus

The book of Exodus is about the family of Jacob, now known as the children of Israel. They grew into a great people in Egypt. This made Pharaoh fear them and he made them slaves. Exodus is the account of how God miraculously took them out of Egypt and turned them into His own special people. The word 'Exodus' is Greek for 'departure' or 'going out.' They were turned into a new nation. God made a covenant with them and, as God's nation, they were given the law of God. They were given a leader, Moses.

The latter part of Exodus is about the Tabernacle, which was a portable house of God and became the centre of worship. When it was completed, God put some of His glory in the inner room of the Tabernacle, so that He lived with His people. This was the first time that this had happened. God set up a priesthood and a system of worship. These all teach how man was to approach God. We would not advise someone new to Bible reading to attempt to understand the details. As with all things in the Bible, they are important and have a deeper meaning.

Day 9: Exodus 1 and 2

Exodus 1 describes how Israel grew into a great nation in Egypt. The description of how the midwives helped to protect their babies makes us think about the birth of a nation, which is what Exodus is about. Chapter 2 describes the birth of Moses. Moses means 'drawn out' because he was drawn out of the river Nile. His birth seems to represent what would happen to Israel, who were also drawn out of the Nile. The Nile being a symbol of Egypt.

Moses was brought up in Pharaoh's palace, but never lost his Israelite origin. When he saw a case of injustice carried out by an Egyptian, he stood up for the Israelite. Since he killed the Egyptian, he fled the country and came to the land of Midian. We have another incident where a wife is found by surrounding watering animals at a well. This is the third time it had happened. In this case, Moses was the one to do the watering and behave like a shepherd. Someone who cares for animals is also likely to be someone who would care for a family. A shepherd or shepherdess would make a good spouse! The mention of wells of water is linked with living and spiritual water which gives life.

Day 10: Exodus 5 and 6

We have read Exodus chapters 3 and 4, so now pass onto 5 and 6. Moses had returned to Egypt and had to convince the Israelites that God was going to help them leave Egypt. However, he had yet to convince Pharaoh, who refused to lose his slave force. The initial approach led to Pharaoh to disappointment and their slavery was made harder. When Moses complained to God, God told Moses that He would free them from Egypt. God said 'I will' seven times. Seven is the recurring number throughout Scripture. 'Seven' is the same word in Hebrew meaning 'oath' or 'promise'. When we see a seven, we can be reminded that God is keeping His promises. God would ensure that the promise He made to Abraham would be fulfilled (Genesis 15:13-16). This promise said they would leave in the fourth generation. The text then gives the genealogy of Levi (a son of Jacob) who was the distant father of Moses. God always keeps His promises.

The passages end with Moses saying that he is not good at speaking. This means that God chose someone as His speaker who is not good at speaking. It will not be his speaking that will impress Pharaoh and Israel, but the words themselves. This is not the only time God has used someone who is poor at speaking. God does this so that the listeners must be drawn to the words of God rather than to impressive speakers. God works through weakness throughout the Bible.

Day 11: Exodus 7 and 8

Exodus 7 tells us that even though Moses was a poor speaker, God would make him appear like God to Pharaoh! God would do this through the miracles that God would do. The first sign was a snake. The snake was a symbol of the power of Pharaoh, so the first sign was against Pharaoh himself.

Moses staff turned into a snake. The magicians of Egypt were able to convince Pharaoh that they could do something similar, so Pharaoh was not convinced. However, Moses' snake ate the snakes of the magicians Pharaoh. Pharaoh had been warned and should have expected trouble!

Pharaoh was given another sign. In this sign, the staff of Moses was used to change the water of the river Nile into blood. The water of the Nile became blood. Given that the Nile was a symbol of Egypt, it was a warning to the nation itself. The record says that the magicians could do the same. We assume this means they could turn water into blood, but not a whole river into blood! Pharaoh continued to be stubborn. God wanted Pharaoh to release the Israelites from slavery, but Pharaoh refused. In chapter 8 God sent a plague of frogs, then gnats (possibly mosquitos), then flies (swarming insects). Pharaoh remained stubborn, but the magicians were not. After the plague of gnats, they declared that the plague was from the 'finger of God.' The Egyptian magicians were able to recognise true power when they saw it.

Day 12: Exodus 9 and 10

Exodus chapters 9 and 10 describe 5 more plagues on Egypt; a disease of livestock, boils, hail, locusts and darkness. At the end of these, Pharaoh was still unwilling to let the Israelites leave. There was one final plague, the tenth, which comes in the next chapter. One way to look at the '10 plagues' is as follows. The first three plagues were river to blood, frogs, and gnats (or mosquitos) and were all from water. The next three plagues were flies (or swarming insects), animal disease, and boils and were all based on land. The next three plagues were hail, locusts and darkness which were all from heaven. God sent three plagues on water, land, and heaven to show that He is the only God over water, land and sky and that the gods of Egypt were powerless. The final plague was against Pharaoh himself and showed the people that Pharaoh had no true power.

The plagues of Egypt showed everyone in Egypt that the God of the Israelites was the only true God. Anyone - Egyptian or any other nationality - could see this and decide to follow the God of Israel. Even Israel needed to be reminded about the greatness of their God, because many of them had slipped into worshipping the gods of Egypt. Those who left Egypt needed to believe in the one true God. When God told His people to leave Egypt, many non-Israelites were part of their number.

Day 13: Exodus 11 and 12

Exodus 11 and 12 describes the tenth and greatest plague. It was the selective death of all firstborn men and livestock. But people did not need to die. If they followed the instructions from God, they would be saved. Everyone had a choice. Now having seen God bring 9 plagues on Egypt, any reasonable person would make sure they followed the instructions. God was willing to save anyone, even Pharaoh's son.

The events of the Passover night changed Israel for ever. Israel kept the instructions from God so that their firstborn were saved, but much of Egypt did not. At midnight, the angels of God passed over the country and killed those firstborns who were not protected. The instructions of the Passover are very important for us. The key part of the preparations was a perfect young lamb, who was killed and the blood collected. The blood was then put on the door frame, so that the angel of death did not come in. The blood and the lamb were symbols of Jesus, which is explained in the New Testament. In fact, all the features used point to Jesus and his sacrifice on the cross. We cannot explain this here. Israel was saved by the lamb, just as a Christian is saved by Jesus. Israel

was commanded to remember keep the Passover feast, from this point onwards, just as the Christian is to remember Jesus in the breaking of bread.

Day 14: Exodus 13 and 14

God saved the firstborn in the events of the Passover. God tells us that this meant that the firstborn of Israel became God's in Exodus 13. Another important feature of these events is the use of unleavened bread instead of leavened bread. Israel was to eat only unleavened bread for the next 7 days. Again, these are symbols that are designed to teach Israel spiritual lessons. Leaven became a symbol of evil (1 Corinthians 5:6-8) which Israel was to avoid for 7 days. Of course, this did not mean they could do evil after the 7 days. It was a symbol of how those who kept the Passover were to live.

God led the Israelites out of Egypt and guided them with a pillar of cloud during the day and a pillar of fire at night. God led them to what seemed like a dead-end to Pharaoh. The worldly-wise Pharaoh had a change of mind and decided to recapture his slave force. But God cannot be defeated by Pharaoh, or anyone else, as the 10 plagues had shown them. God moved a cloud between the two groups, and then opened a path in the Red Sea. Israel went through on dry ground. When Pharaoh and his army pursued, God let the water flow back over them. Pharaoh and his army were gone, and Israel had left Egypt. These events were celebrated in the Song of Moses in Exodus 15 and every time Israel kept the Passover feast.

Introduction to the Book of Leviticus

The Book of Leviticus teaches an Israelite how to be God's holy people. It was critically important because God's people must be holy just as God is holy. Leviticus covers the deepest aspects of how to keep the Law of Moses. It includes the sacrifices, the priesthood, dietary laws, cleanliness laws, the Jewish feasts, and many of other laws. Like the Law of the Passover, all these laws have deeper meanings. Most of them cover aspects of the work of Jesus. Jesus knew this when he told his disciples that he had come 'to fulfil the Law'. This means that learning about the deeper things of the Law is learning about the work of Jesus.

Day 15: Leviticus 10 and 11

Leviticus 10 describes a time just after the Tabernacle had been set up. The Tabernacle was the portable house of God. It had two rooms which only the priests could go into. The outer part was the 'Holy Place' and the inner part was the 'Most Holy Place.' The outer part was visited at least twice daily. The inner part was only visited once a year by the High Priest. The chapter took place just after the priests had completed their initiation ceremony. Everything was new. But then a tragedy took place. Two of the priests, who were sons of the High Priest, were killed by God. The reason was given that they offered unauthorized fire before the Lord. They had made up a ceremony that God had not asked for. It teaches us that we cannot make up how we serve God. God decides how He wishes to be served. Later we are told that priests were not to go into the Most Holy Place any time they wished. It seems that the two priests had gone into the Most Holy Place to have a look. God was not pleased when they treated His holiness irreverently.

Leviticus 11 is an example of some of the more detailed laws in the Law of Moses. It describes what a Jew could and could not eat. The people of God had to make a difference between the 'holy'

which could be eaten and the 'unholy' which could not. There was a health benefit from keeping this law, because (for example) pigs, vultures, and shellfish were outlawed. But there is a spiritual lesson here as well. The difference between holy and unholy is picked up by the apostle Peter in Acts. God's people must always make a difference between what is holy and what is unholy. Even though a Christian does not need to keep these laws, the principle is still essential for God's people.

Day 16: Leviticus 16 and 19

Leviticus 16 is about the holiest day of the year. This is the 'Day of Atonement.' It was the day that the High Priest went into the Most Holy Place. The reason he was allowed to go into the presence of God is very interesting. It was for the forgiveness of the sins of the people. God worked with the High Priest to forgive the sins of the people. The High Priest had to splatter blood before the Most Holy objects. From a human point of view, this is very strange. But the activities are a pattern of the work of Jesus. Jesus is the great High Priest who worked with God to remove sin by his own blood. The Day of Atonement is a symbol of the work of Jesus.

Leviticus 19 was chosen as a reading because it has a number of 'minor' laws. Some of them are crucial. For example, verse 18 is the only place where the law says, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Another example is verse 34 which tells the Jew to love the foreigner 'as yourself.' This law went to the heart of what love really means. Love means loving everyone, not just your family and friends. All laws were important to God. As Jesus said, not the least of the laws can be broken.

Day 17: Leviticus 23 and 24

Leviticus 23 teaches us about the Sabbath and the seven annual feasts of the Jews. The seven feasts were Passover, Unleavened Bread, Firstfruits, Feast of Weeks, Feast of Trumpets, Day of Atonement and Tabernacles. It is a misnomer to call them 'feasts'. The Passover did have a meal, but it was eaten standing up and it had bitter food. The 'feast' of Unleavened Bread only spoke about the eating unleavened bread. The Day of Atonement was actually a fast! The other feast laws do not prescribe feasting. The feasts all have a deeper meaning about the work of Jesus which helps us understanding why things really happened in his life.

Leviticus 24 speaks about some of the rules concerning the Tabernacle. There is then the case of a blasphemer. It was one of the 10 Commandments not to blaspheme, but the law in the 10 Commandments did not say what should be done when it happened. Here they asked God, and the death penalty is assigned. It is not that human life is not precious with God. It is that a living man is accountable for his behaviour before God. God does care about people. For example, the next section teaches them that even if a slave is injured or killed, the person causing it must receive what they have done to the slave. This means that slave owners were not allowed to injure their slaves. Nor was anyone else allowed to either. God is concerned about doing what is right. This means doing what was right about the things of God and what was right about the things of man.

Day 18: Leviticus 25 and 26

Leviticus 25 describes some of the sabbath laws. There is the Sabbath day, which was mentioned in Chapter 23. Now we learn about the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee. The Sabbath Year was a whole year when the land had a rest. They were not allowed to sow or reap crops, although they were still

allowed to look after animals. They had a rest from hard labour on the land. Anyone could eat anything that grew on the land. It was a great year, particularly for the slave and the poor. The Jubilee was even more special for the poor. Every fiftieth year they were to have a complete rest. It was a once-in-a-lifetime time of national forgiveness where they were to forgive the debts of anyone and everyone. Anyone who had fallen into poverty would get their house and/or land back. Slaves were made free. This was a time where the poor rejoiced. There is no other law like this in any of the countries of the world. We can see that the Law of Moses had many good things inside it.

Leviticus 26 is a chapter where Israel is told that keeping the Law of Moses would lead to blessings and disobeying it would lead to cursing. Man may not see a direct link to what happens in their life, but God says there is. The chapter is clear. There are more curses than blessings. There was a purpose and benefit from keeping the Law of Moses. Throughout Israel's history, they were generally not so good at keeping the Law of Moses. This led to the curses and the suffering of Israel. The prophets of the Bible were to later pick up this message and remind Israel of the need to keep the Law and obtain the blessing. It was not God's wish that He had to punish them, but often that is what happened.

Introduction to the Book of Numbers

The Book of Numbers covers the period of Israel after it left Egypt and before it reached the Promised Land. It includes some practical matters of camp organisation. The journey should only have taken 2 years. However, Israel feared giants in the land and refused to attack. It was a sign of lack in faith in God, despite having seen what God did to the Egyptians! God turned the Israelites back to the wilderness and they were nomads for a further 38 years. The faithless generation died in the wilderness.

Numbers is concerned with the numbers of Israelites. We have the number of each of the 12 tribes at the beginning, and again towards the end. There was little change in the overall numbers, indicating that population growth stopped in the wilderness. The reason was from persistent rebellion by the people against God and the subsequent punishment by God. The exact numbers are an indication that God knows every single member of His people and they are all important to Him. But they need to have faith in God if they are to be God's people.

Day 19: Numbers 6 and 10

Numbers 6 describes the Law of the Nazarite. This is a vow that any Israelite could take because they wanted to do more to serve God and be close to Him. At the time of the Judges, Samson was a Nazarite. The length of service as a Nazarite was measured by the length of hair. The Nazarite was committed to not eating or drinking anything from the grape and to not touch a dead body. The Nazarite was associated with life (not death) and with staying holy. These are the blessings of being close to God. The chapter ends with the famous priestly blessing on the people. The priestly blessing is relevant if the people are faithful, but not if they rebel.

Numbers 10 records the two silver trumpets at the tabernacle blown by the priests. It records when and why they were blown. These were different from the more common ram's horn (shofar). Trumpet blasts became an important part of worship. One of the reasons for blowing them was when the camp of Israel moved. They had lived at the foot of Mount Sinai since Exodus 19. Now they were to leave. The order of the march that the 12 tribes and priests were to move in was

prescribed. It was important that they moved in the right way so that the glory of God would move on ahead of them and with them.

Day 20: Numbers 11 and 12

The first movement of Israel from Mount Sinai was a journey of 3 days (Numbers 10:33). That sounds like they travelled for 3 days non-stop. This would explain why the people complained of their hardships in Numbers 11:1. When they complained, God punished them, in this case with fire. This set the pattern of the wilderness journey. When there were any hardships the people complained to God and were then punished. It happened again when they complained about the food. They had been receiving the miraculous provision of manna from the time of Exodus 16, but this miraculous food was not good enough for them. Their complaining was so bad that Moses wanted to die! God did take some of the burden off Moses by giving His spirit to 70 elders. He also gave them the meat they craved, but then also a plague. The lesson is the need for God's people to be content and to trust in God, even though they are going through hardships for their faith.

Numbers 12 describes another complaint that Moses faced. This time it was from his own brother and sister. They challenged the leadership of Moses, saying that God has also talked to them in the past and they were therefore as important. God's intervention tells us something important about His relationship with Moses. God had a direct relationship with Moses. This is different from other prophets where God spoke indirectly to them in dreams and visions. Miriam was punished with leprosy. Aaron was not punished, presumably because he was the High Priest. He then had to do the work of a High Priest and plead for mercy for Miriam. And the merciful God forgave her. God had designed His people to have certain leaders and the people needed to accept this.

Day 21: Numbers 13 and 14

By Numbers 13, Israel reached the borders of the land promised to Abraham. It was time to prepare to enter it. Twelve spies were sent out to explore the land. What they saw was a land of great plenty. Compared to their time in the desert, this must have seen fantastic. However, they also discovered the land had giants living in it. Ten spies doubted their ability to defeat them, even with the God who defeated Egypt. Caleb did not doubt and tried to encourage the people.

We know from Numbers 14 that the people listened to the 10 spies who doubted they could enter the promised land. They talked of finding a leader to take them back to Egypt! Two spies, Caleb and Joshua, tried to talk the people out of it, but failed. As with previous complaints, God was not happy. Moses had to intervene and convince God to forgive the people. God agreed to forgive the people but not the spies. He explained that the rebellious people would not be allowed to enter the promised land. They would spend the rest of their lives wandering in the desert. When the people understood their errors, they tried to invade the land. But God was not with them, and they were defeated. The lesson is that God's people need to do what God says and trust in Him.

Day 22: Numbers 16 and 20

Israel faced the rest of their lives wandering in the desert. This led to a new challenge to the leadership of Moses in Numbers 16. There were 4 main rebels together with 250 other leaders. It was Korah, Dathan and Abiram who led the challenge and stood against Moses. They and their

families fell into a hole in the ground that appeared, and the ground closed again over them. The 250 rebel elders were destroyed by fire. The people, of course, complained against God, and a further 14,700 died in a plague. Three sets of rebels were destroyed. God's people should not challenge God's directions and should not complain. Rebels cannot be part of God's people.

Numbers 20 describes a further hardship of Israel. With little water, they complained severely to Moses. Despite the complaint, God was willing to give them water in a miraculous way from a rock. Moses was to speak to the rock. But Moses struck the rock twice and used the word 'we' in describing how the water was produced. He took some of the honour of God on himself rather than giving it all to God. As a result, Moses was not allowed to enter the promised land. A rock had previously been struck to produce water (Exodus 17:6). The striking of the rock was later explained as a symbol of striking Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:4) and Jesus was not to be struck twice.

The remainder of Numbers covers the events up until the people reached the border of the promised land for the second time. The events of chapters 17-19 cover the 38 years they wandered in the desert, and we know little about them. As they reach the border, the local nations started to get worried. And with good reason.

Introduction to the Book of Deuteronomy

Deuteronomy means 'second law.' Much of it is about retelling the events of the law for the new generation about to enter the promised land. For example, there is a chapter retelling the giving of the 10 commandments. There are also many new laws given that were not given previously. These are those that are particularly relevant to living in a rural culture of the promised land. It included laws about a future prophet like Moses who would come. There are also laws about kingship when Israel did not have a king. This suggested a time would come when they would be needed. The book ends with the death of Moses. He was allowed to see the land of promise, but he was not allowed to enter the land. The people mourned, but they did have the promise of another Moses-like person coming.

Day 23: Deuteronomy 1 and 2

Deuteronomy 1 starts from the Mount Sinai. Here the place is called 'Horeb' which means 'desert' and refers to the general area which contained Mount Sinai. Israel had spent 40 years in the desert and were now to enter the land promised to Abraham. The land is described as reaching to the river Euphrates. All this land did not become Israel's except for periods during the kings David, Solomon, and Jeroboam II. A key part of being ready to enter the promised land was to have wise leaders. They and the people needed to keep God's laws if they were to be God's people and God was to be with them. Israel was reminded of the problem of what happened last time when they got to this point. They needed to avoid making the same mistake again.

Deuteronomy 2 explains that it is God who gives different peoples their lands, whether Israelites or other nations. It mentions the Anakites, who were giants. There were people in the Promised Land who were giants like the Anakites (Numbers 13:31-33). But it is not size that matters - it is what is in God's plan. God replaced the other nations when He chose. God helped Israel defeat Sihon the king of Heshbon. God continues to decide who lives where.

Day 24: Deuteronomy 3 and 4

Next Israel faces the army of Og king of Bashan in Deuteronomy 3. Og was a giant. The defeats of Og and Sihon would have encouraged Israel not to be afraid of giants so that they could take the land. Two and a half of the tribes of Israel had chosen to take the land of Og and Bashan as their own territory. These were the tribes of Reuben, Gad and half of the tribe of Manasseh. Moses was not to be the one to lead the people into the land. That was to be a man called Joshua. Joshua had assisted Moses throughout the desert years. He was one of the original good spies. Joshua means 'saviour' and is the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name 'Jesus.' Joshua has a number of similarities with Jesus, which you can look out for.

Deuteronomy 4 makes a strong point that Israel must obey God's laws. It is only by obeying God's laws that Israel would be able to take the land and also to stay in it. This meant they had to teach the laws to their children. They were not to add to the law or take away from it because it was God's laws. They were to follow it fully. If they did this, then their wisdom would be admired by other nations. They were not to have idols like the other nations. God was not to be represented by anything that is seen. They saw Him as an intense fire which has no form. They heard His voice from heaven. No other nation has done this. God was not to be represented by created things or idols.

Day 25: Deuteronomy 8 and 9

Deuteronomy 8 explained why things happened to the Israelites. The hardships of the wilderness journey were a test to see whether they would obey God or not. The test was so that God would know what was in their heart. God described his relationship with His people as like a father with a son. Like a father, He disciplined them. Like a father, He provided food and clothing for them. He provided food and clothing miraculously. He also was taking them to a lovely land that was better than Egypt and giving them an inheritance in the land. Just as there was a spiritual danger of faithlessness in the wilderness, there was a similar danger when they reached the promised land. In the land, they may forget the blessing of God, and think that they had done everything themselves by their own cleverness. All believers have the same dangers to their faith from both hardship or plenty.

Deuteronomy 9 continues with the explanations. Israel was not being given the promised land because they were righteous. They were being given the land because the current occupiers were so wicked. There were people like Melchizedek who used to live in the land, but now there were no more. The wicked people in God's holy land had to be removed. This was a warning to Israel too if they became wicked once they had settled in the land. Israel's own poor behaviour was seen in the incident of the golden calf. Deuteronomy reminds Israel of the events of this time and how the original stone tablets of the 10 commandments were broken.

Day 26: Deuteronomy 10 and 11

Deuteronomy 10 reminds Israel of how the stone tablets of the 10 commandments were remade after the first set had been broken. The tablets were put in a wooden box called an ark. These were the only commands written in stone and placed in the ark. Overall there are about 600 commands in the Law of Moses. About half of these are repeats of ones given previously so that there were just over 300 commands. God wants His people to know and obey His laws. This is like any human government wants its people to obey its own laws. Only by submitting to the laws can people show

that they really belong to God. God chose their ancestors out of love, and that is why Israel belongs to God.

Deuteronomy 11 reminds Israel of the wonders God did in Egypt and in the wilderness. They needed to remember this and make sure the memory was not forgotten. The words of God needed to be on their hearts and always before their eyes. They needed to think about them in everything they do and whenever they entered or left their property. They needed to talk about them with their families. By keeping the commands of God, they will show their love for God. In that way, God will bless them with rain and harvests in the promised land. But just as God can bless for obedience, He can also curse for disobedience. They had had experience of this during the wilderness journey.

Day 27: Deuteronomy 17 and 34

Deuteronomy 17 is brought to our attention because it teaches about the rules of a king. The nation of Israel was set up without a king. But here the law speaks of a time when there is a king. The law is carefully worded. It says that when 'you' (the people) ask for one. This is what happened later in their history. They did ask for a king. At that time, God chose to give them one. There are laws that a king must keep. We note that the king had to write out the Law of God and then read it every day. This means that if we read the Bible daily, then we are living like a king of Israel! The chapter also describes the legal system. The king would become the head of the legal system because of his position. There was the potential of a clash between the king and the High Priest over matters of justice.

We now read the last chapter of Deuteronomy, chapter 34, because we need to learn what happened to Moses. Moses had led the people for the 40 years in the desert. Now he passed over the leadership to Joshua. Moses climbed a mountain and saw the promised land, and then he died. He had completed the work God had given him to do. Joshua was a prophet, but he did not have a face-to-face relationship with God like Moses. God blessed Joshua so that Joshua could do the job God wanted him to do. We will learn more about Joshua in the Book of Joshua. Before then we will learn about a man called Job, who lived in early times.

Introduction to the Book of Job

The Book of Job deals with some uncomfortable and challenging issues for man. It is the story of a righteous man who endures incredible suffering. He remains righteous despite all. His wife and friends fail him in these dark times. His 'friends' came to comfort him but ended up concluding that Job was a bad sinner. Job deeply disagrees with this conclusion.

Job hated his suffering and he debated with man and God about the justice of God. He asked questions that any righteous person would ask. Why should the righteous suffer? The book of Job does not give a clear answer. It leads the reader to learn that God has the ultimate good of the person in mind. Job is judged to be a righteous person, although Job was too outspoken in his criticism of God. God leads Job to understand that His own wisdom is above what Job could see and that Job was wrong to criticise God. Job apologised and God accepted Job this. God blessed Job so that he had more at the end than at the start. Job, righteous man that he is, prayed for the 'friends' for their forgiveness. If we are suffering as a righteous person, then we should understand that God has our ultimate good in mind. The righteous may go through times of hardship, but God has a plan to do good to the righteous.

Day 28: Job 1 and 2

The events of the book of Job probably take place in the area of Edom, which was owned by Esau. We do not have a clear time for when it was written, but it was thought to be early, possibly during the time of the Pentateuch. We are introduced to Job as a righteous and wealthy man. In the presence of God, an onlooker questioned whether Job was truly righteous. He proposed that Job only loved God because God gave him his wealth. If Job did not have his wealth, would he be righteous? God allowed this adversary to take away Job's wealth to see what would happen. The word 'satan' means adversary, and it is more helpful to translate it as adversary. Job remained righteous even though his wealth was taken away. His righteousness was not because God made his life easy. He was truly righteous.

In Job 2, we find that the adversary still believed that the righteousness of Job was dependent on how God has blessed him. He wanted to find out if Job remained righteous even when his health was taken away. He wanted to know whether Job was a false righteous person. God allowed the adversary to take away his health, and Job suffered from head to foot with boils or something like leprosy. When Job's friends see him, they are shocked and silent for 7 days. Job had been reduced to something that was hardly recognisable. Everyone saw his agony. Job still did not give up on God. Job was truly righteous.

Day 29: Job 3 and 4

In Job 3, Job cursed his own life. He was now living a cursed life and he cursed the day of his birth. He wanted death rather than this cursed life. He cried out and questioned why he was allowed to live and suffer. Job asks the 'why' question in his suffering, like most people do. Much of the rest of the book of Job debates the point.

After Job has finished his complaint, one of his 3 friends spoke. Job 4 is the first part of the speeches of his friends. His friend attempts to answer Job's question of 'why?' But his friend does not provide comforting words. The key part of his reasoning is that people do not suffer if they are innocent. This reasoning becomes the foundation of every argument made by the 3 friends. Eliphaz claims he has the insights of God, because he claimed to have a vision of God. It is like he has said that Job must listen to him because he knows what God thinks. We know from what happens that this reasoning was false human reasoning.

Day 30: Job 5 and 29

Job 5 continues the first speech of Eliphaz. His comments continue to assume that Job has done something wrong. Eliphaz also says a number of things that are true. The sufferer should always appeal to God for help, because God does many wonderful things. God disciplines people and when He does God can rescue them from all their difficulties. Eliphaz has no evidence that Job has done anything wrong, and just assumes it. This is the key problem in their argument. The 3 friends had come to Job to help him, but now they were accusing him of crimes they could not prove. As Job and friends offer answers to each other, the friends become harder and harder. Job despairs more and more of their help.

As the speeches continue, Job feels compelled to describe how he lived and why he is confident in his righteousness. Job 29 is a lovely description of a godly man living with a care and concern for those who are poor or suffering or dying. If only his friends had treated him like Job treated other people! This chapter is a model of how godly people should live. You cannot help loving Job!

Day 31: Job 31 and 38

In Job 31, Job again describes how he lived. He controlled the lust of his eyes. He did not lust after other women. He avoided falsehood. He acted with justice. He helped the poor and widow and orphan. He helped the hungry and cold. He trusted in God and not in money. He was not glad when his enemy fell. He controlled his tongue. He gave the traveller a bed. He did not hide any sin of his own. In all this, Job wishes a curse on himself if he had not done as he described. This was a risky approach, but Job was confident in his righteousness. And at that Job ends his speeches.

We move on to Job 38, where God addressed Job directly. In the previous debate, a storm had blown up. Based on what God now has to say, we can see that the storm was from God to make a point. The storm illustrated the power of God. When God spoke God noted that someone had questioned His wisdom. The context indicates that this was Job. God describes His wisdom by looking at creation. In what God says, God goes through His work of all the days of creation. It is as if God is saying, 'I made all this by my wisdom, so why do you question my wisdom?' It is a point humans would be wise to think about.

Day 32: Job 39 and 40

God continued His description of His works of creation in Job 39. In Job 38 we read mainly about the physical world that God had made. In chapter 39, God describes the natural world He had made. God does not concentrate on the physical design he had made of the animals. He concentrates on the way that animals think and act. In other words, God concentrated on the wisdom He had given the animals. From the silly ostrich to the brave horse, God gave all life wisdom. The implication is that if God is wise enough to do all this, surely God is wise enough to direct the affairs of man! Man needs to think about this.

In chapter 40, God paused. He asked the one who is questioning Him to speak up. Job spoke up. Job reacted to God's speech correctly. He was unworthy to talk to the Creator. God then addressed Job with a question of justice. Does Job challenge God's justice so as to justify himself? God describes aspects of His greatness. God brings down the proud. Job 40 moves onto the description of a beast called a 'behemoth.' This Hebrew word is the usual name for a beast. Regardless of what the animal is, God asks Job if he can control it. It is implied that God can. This is another example of the limitations of man and the greatness of God.

Day 33: Job 41 and 42

Job 41 is a description of the Leviathan. Leviathan is mentioned elsewhere and it is clear that it is a large sea creature. The description is strange. The beast can speak and breath fire. There is nothing like this animal in creation, past or present. A better way to look at this creature is to see it as a symbol of something else. We are told at the end that the creature is 'king of the proud'. This takes us to man. It is the tongue of man that is like a fire (James 3:6). The beast speaks like men speak.

The beast is hard hearted and stiff necked like the pride of man. This means we can understand the beast as a representation of the community of proud men. God can control the proud community of men, just as He can control the rest of creation.

Job replied to the speech of God about the proud. In Job 42 Job admitted that he did not understand things properly and he repented. That is enough for Job to be right with God. But God accuses the '3 friends' of false speaking and foolishness. They must offer sacrifices for their sins. It was appropriate that they were also made to rely on Job to pray for them. The prayer of the righteous achieves a lot, whereas the prayer of the fool does not. Job did pray for them. And Job is blessed with more at the end than at the beginning. When we look back on the whole story, we see that God wanted to bless the righteous Job. And God wanted the 3 friends to be restored despite their foolishness. God wanted, and wants, the best for everyone, including us. What man must do is trust in God in all circumstances. God knows what He is doing!

Introduction to the Book of Joshua

The Book of Deuteronomy ends with Israel on the edge of the land of Canaan. This was the land promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Moses led them out of Egypt, but it was not the purpose of God for him to lead them into the land of promise. Joshua was the appointed leader to do that. The Book of Joshua covers the preparations to cross into the land and the conquering of the land. The land was divided between the 12 tribes of Israel and the tribes settled in their own territories. At the end of Joshua's life, there was no appointed leader to take over from Joshua. The nation of Israel had no king. The High Priest was the most important person. The nation was really a theocracy – that is, God was their overall leader. The elders of the tribes and cities dealt with local matters of justice, supported by the priesthood. At the end of the Book of Joshua, Joshua summoned the leaders and warned them to be faithful. They replied faithfully and took a covenant before God to do this. The book finishes with the death of Joshua and the death of the current High Priest.

Day 34: Joshua 1 and 3

Joshua 1 continued where Deuteronomy ended. God told Joshua to take Israel across the river Jordan and enter the promised land from the east. He assured Joshua that He would be with Joshua all the time and He encouraged Joshua. The advice God gave Joshua was not military advice to assure victory, but spiritual advice to assure victory. They needed to keep God's laws so that God would be with them. They could do this by reading God's word every day and thinking about it. We can take this advice ourselves, so we can gain a spiritual victory. The people encouraged Joshua as well. The two and a half tribes who had land on the west bank of the Jordan river made their support clear. We can work out that the chapter took place at the time of the Jewish religious new year, just before Passover.

Joshua sent two spies into the land who met a prostitute called Rahab. We read this story previously in chapter 2. Now we go onto the crossing of the river Jordan in chapter 3. The people were to prepare themselves for 3 days. Then the ark of the covenant, the golden box containing the 10 commandments, was to be carried by the priests into the river Jordan. At that point, the flow of the river would stop, and this would allow them to cross the riverbed on dry ground. These events

remind us of the crossing of the Red Sea when Israel left Egypt. It was a reminder to the Canaanites living in the land of Canaan that the God who destroyed the armies of Egypt was still with this people. The words of Rahab told us that the Canaanites did understand this.

Day 35: Joshua 4 and 5

Joshua 4 describes the miraculous crossing of the river Jordan at a time of year when the river level would have been high. The event was to be remembered by Israel. Twelve stones from the Jordan were taken out and put in the camp. They were a permanent reminder of this event, so that no future generation could say that it did not occur. Israel needed to remember its past, and the other nations needed to remember what God did with Israel. The Passover feast was a reminder of the events of the coming out of Egypt, and this was a reminder of them coming into the promised land. On the tenth day of the first month, Israel entered the land. This was the same day as they had to select the Passover lamb for the Passover. This time of year was also the first of the grain harvest, the barley harvest. By going into the promised land at this time, God had planned for them to be able to eat the harvest.

Israel was now on the land occupied by the Canaanites. The Canaanites could have attacked Israel. But Joshua 4 tells us that they were afraid. What is strange is that Israel had now circumcised the men. This meant that their fighting men would not be able to fight for 3 days. Circumcision was an important law for the people to keep. It was given to Abraham as a symbol of the promises God made to him. Israel could only have God's help if they followed God's laws and had the sign of the covenant in their flesh. The chapter ends with a warning for Joshua and the people of God. Joshua saw the captain of God's army, who was a special angel. Joshua asked him if he was on their side? This was not the right question. It is not for us to question God. It is for God to question us. The question for God's people is always, 'Are you holy?' If we want God's help, then we need to be right with God.

Day 36: Joshua 6 and 7

Joshua 6 describes the famous incident of the fall of the city of Jericho. Joshua did not defeat the city with force. God allowed Joshua to defeat the city with the shouting of people and trumpets. The spoil of war was to be God's. This was the first spoil to be received from the victories. Like other firsts in the Bible, the first was to be God's. No man was to take anything of what was God's. The spoil was placed in the treasury of the Lord's house, the Tabernacle. Jericho itself was not to be rebuilt, and Joshua put a curse on the one who did.

After a miraculous victory over Jericho, Israel expected an easy victory over the second smaller target. But it was not to be. Unlike the first battle, where Israel was spiritually holy, this was no longer the case. Joshua 7 describes the sad case of Achan and his family. He was tempted by riches and stole what was God's. For his sin, they were stoned. It was a hard lesson. But it was a necessary that the people keep themselves holy if God was to continue helping them defeat the many enemies. God was not unreasonable. He gave all the people many of the spoils from the future victories. It was just the first one that God wanted for Himself. If Achan had waited, he and his family would have had plenty. But greed removed one family from Israel.

Introduction to the Book of Judges

The book of Judges starts with the words “After the death of Joshua”. The book of Judges follows the book of Joshua, which ends with Joshua’s death. We read again of the death of Joshua in the early chapters of Judges (2:8-9). Joshua’s death is clearly important. Joshua had taken Israel into the land of Canaan and established them in the Promised Land.

Judges describes a time when Israel repeated lost part of the land due to their own wickedness. God sent enemy nations as punishment, and they took part of the land. However, God raised up judges to teach them God’s laws and to enable them to reclaim what was lost. Samson and Gideon were examples. The judges were called ‘saviours’ (eg 3:15) which is from the same root word as ‘Joshua’. In effect, God raised up ‘Joshua’s’ to do the work of Joshua and take back ownership of parts of the land for Israel. Joshua may have been dead, but the spirit of Joshua lived on in Joshua-like figures who carried on his work. Always there was the principle that Israel could stay in the land if they were faithful. If they were unfaithful, then they would lose it.

The judges that God raised up were unusual people. None of them can be considered great in the opinion of man. This is how God works. He works through the weak, so that no one can claim that they have brought victory by their own strength and skill. The book sets the scene for the time of the kings by use of the words, “In those days there Israel had no king” (last verse of the book).

Day 37: Judges 1 and 2

At the beginning of Judges, Israel had occupied the Promised Land under Joshua. Much of the land had been occupied, but not all of it. There were still large parts promised to Abraham that had not been occupied. The work of capturing the land needed to carry on, even though there was no longer a leader of the people after the death of Joshua. Israel was now managed at a tribal level. The tribes of Judah and Simeon managed to capture Jerusalem. It did not stay in Israelite hands, because later it had to be captured again. The same was true for other parts of the land, such as the Philistine cities. The tribe of Joseph was able to capture Bethel. But then there were problems. Many of the other tribes were not able to remove the Canaanites living in their territory.

In Judges 2 we read the reason why many tribes were not able to remove the Canaanites from their land. They did not remove the objects of false worship from the land as God had commanded. And Israel started to worship these false gods themselves. Clearly the God of Israel was not going to help people who no longer worshipped Him. They would be destroyed just like they had destroyed the Canaanites. In this we can see God is fair. It does not matter whether it was Canaanite or Israelite. Whoever worshipped false gods in God’s holy land had to be removed. God did not abandon His people the Israelites suddenly as if He had given up on them. He punish them to make them turn back to Him. Then when they turned back, He saved them with a judge. When the judge died, they returned to their false worship. The cycle repeated itself many times in the book of Judges.

Day 38: Judges 3 and 14

Judges 3 tells us that God left other nations in the land of Israel as a test for the Israelites. God was using them to see if Israel would follow God or the gods of other nations. God did this because all God’s people have to choose to follow God. Unfortunately, Israel was not faithful to God. They

mixed with the nations and intermarried with them. When this happened, there was a danger that God's people would no longer be holy and different from other people. God had to act. God sent a foreign army to punish them. When they cried for help, God sent a saviour. In this chapter it happened twice. Othniel the brother of Caleb was the first judge, and Ehud the second.

Judges 14 is a description of the judge Samson. We will follow the events of his adult life. God gave Samson great strength. He was sent to save Israel from the foreign army, which this time was the Philistines. Samson's strength came from the power of God. Samson was shown how God would help him when God allowed him to kill a lion with his hands. Samson was attracted to marry a Philistine woman. We are told that God planned this. The marriage celebrations did not go well. His wife was not on his side. God again gave Samson power to defeat 30 men. This was the start of Samson's power and his time as a judge.

Day 39: Judges 15 and 16

In Judges 15 we learn that the father of Samson's wife gave Samson's wife away to another person. Samson had now been wronged. He judged the Philistines for this wrong. In a strange incident, Samson caught 300 foxes and set them on fire. They burnt down the wheat, vine and olive harvests of the Philistines. Whenever an incident seems strange, one needs to look harder for the meaning behind it. The fox is a sly animal, and the Philistines had behaved as sly animals. The Philistines had then burnt up Samson's wife and father. Samson used fire to punish them. The Philistines then tried to punish Samson, but God saved Samson again. Samson was given the power to kill a thousand men with the jaw of a donkey. This gave Samson power over the Philistines. He became a judge for Israel for 20 years.

Judges 16 starts with an incident of Samson at Gaza. Samson stayed with a prostitute. We do not know if this meant that Samson had a weakness for women, because Joshua and Caleb also went and stayed with a prostitute. In the latter case, they stayed there so they were not seen by the people. In the night Samson took the posts of the gate and took them with him to the top of a mountain. Again these events seem strange to us, so we again look for a deeper meaning. In this case, we can find many links between the life of Samson and the life of Jesus. This is easier to see in the events of Delilah. Like Jesus, Samson was injured to save his people from their sins and from their enemy. Like Jesus, he was sold for silver and betrayed. Like Jesus, he was handed over to the Gentiles. Like Jesus, his hands were stretched out as he was dying. When Samson took the posts of the gate to the top of a mountain, it reminds us of Jesus on posts on top of a mountain winning victory for his people. There are many others, but this is enough to see that Samson is a pattern of Jesus.

Introduction to the Book of Ruth

Ruth is a short book about the faith of three people during the time of the Judges; Naomi, a faithful mother; Ruth, a Moabite; and Boaz, an aging landowner. The family of Naomi had emigrated to Moab due to famine. However, tragedy struck and over a 10-year period her husband and two sons died. She was left with two Moabite daughters-in-law. Naomi decided to return back to her hometown, but Ruth insisted on returning with her. Naomi returned in poverty at the start of the harvest. The Law of Moses allowed for the poor to pick up corn from the edges of fields. This is what Ruth did. But God was in control. Ruth went to the field of Boaz, who was a close relative.

Boaz assisted Ruth. The Law of Moses required people to look after the poor. Naomi encouraged marriage between the two using another law from the Law of Moses, known as the Law of Levirate marriage. This required the nearest of kin, usually a brother, to marry the widow and bring up a son for the deceased husband. Through this law, Boaz married Ruth, and the family of Naomi continued. Naomi was provided with food and family by Ruth and Boaz in her old age. The book of Ruth is an example of how the faithful are blessed. It showed how the Law of Moses was to work in looking after the poor. This was the intention of God in giving these laws.

Day 40: Ruth 1 and 2

Ruth 1 introduces us to Naomi, a mother of two sons, who emigrated to Moab because of famine. When the men of her family died, she was left with two daughters-in-law. We can see her faith in the way she spoke. She had not given up on the God of Israel. She understood that her circumstances had been guided by God. She also understood that the good harvest in Israel that year was also provided by God. It was natural for her to return to the land of her God. What she had not expected was that Ruth would come with her and follow her God. Life would be hard because they were returning in poverty. The return to Israel was an act of faith by both women.

And their faith was rewarded. In chapter 2, we read how they survived by harvesting from the edges of fields. The Law of Moses required landowners to not harvest the edges of the field and leave any dropped harvest for the poor (Leviticus 19:9-10). Boaz was a faithful landowner and he kept the law. He kept the principle of the law which was to care for the poor and foreigner. Through Ruth, Boaz made sure that he provided for the widow Naomi. Ruth was able to gather 10 times what was gathered by the Israelites in the wilderness when they gathered manna! Ruth continued to visit the fields of Boaz through the barley harvest and then the wheat harvest.

Day 41: Ruth 3 and 4

Although Ruth and Naomi had food to eat, a problem was coming. During the winter there would be no harvest to gather, and they could go hungry. Ruth chapter 3 describes what could be done. Naomi, wise woman that she was, thought about their future and the future of Ruth. She knew the Law of Moses and about the law about widows who do not have a son (Deuteronomy 25:5-10). This required the brother of the deceased to marry the widow and have a son by her. In the case of Ruth, there were no brothers left, so the duty fell to the nearest of kin. Naomi sent Ruth to Boaz with the intention of requesting Boaz to do his duty of marrying Ruth. Boaz understood clearly what was being asked of him and he agreed to it. However, there was a relative who was closer who should have done that duty first.

The continued actions of Boaz are described in Ruth chapter 4. He took the matter of land ownership and widow ownership to the town elders. The nearest of kin was willing to buy the family land off Naomi but he was not willing to marry the widow. The nearest of kin failed to keep the requirement of the Levirate law, which Boaz did it instead. The elders blessed Boaz, and so did God. They had a son, which is called 'Naomi's son'. It was as if the dead son had been restored, which is what the law of Levirate marriage was all about. What was particularly interesting is that this son became an ancestor of the great king David.

Introduction to the Book of 1 Samuel

There are two books of Samuel covering the end of the period of the judges and the start of the period of the kings. Samuel was the last judge and he was also the kingmaker. The book of 1 Samuel takes us from the birth of Samuel through to the end of the first king of Israel. It starts with the spiritual disaster of priesthood of Eli, which occurred at the same time as Samuel was born. The disaster included the loss of the most important part of Israel's worship – the ark of the covenant. God intervened and the ark was returned to Israel.

Samuel became the judge of Israel. Although Israel did well under the leadership of Samuel, Israel demanded that God give them a king. God was displeased although did grant them their request. Saul was chosen to be king by God. Saul started well, but this did not last. He gradually stopped listening to God and made up his own rules. He became more and more evil and even killed the priests of God. Saul was eventually removed. Another king had been anointed in readiness for this event. He was a shepherd named David. 1 Samuel ends with the death of Saul and his sons in readiness for the time of David.

Day 42: 1 Samuel 1 and 3

1 Samuel 1 introduces us to Hannah, the wife of Elkanah. Hannah was barren. Elkanah had another wife who was able to produce children. Perhaps this was why Elkanah had taken a second wife? The other wife made Hannah's life miserable. So Hannah made a vow to God. If she had a son, she would give him to the Lord. This is what happened. God did give her a son, and she did give him to the Lord. The son was called Samuel, which means 'heard of God.' God had heard her prayer. She gave her child to Eli the High Priest.

The sons of Eli were priests but were wicked. Eli had not stopped his sons doing evil in the temple of God. In 1 Samuel 3 we learn how God sent a message to Eli through the boy Samuel. Eli and his family were judged for the wickedness through the words of Samuel. The start of the chapter makes it clear that God did not communicate very much with His people in those days. The chapter ends with God speaking to the people through Samuel who is now called a 'prophet.' This was the work of a prophet – to speak the words of God to the people. God spoke through the young Samuel rather than through the old High Priest Eli.

Day 43: 1 Samuel 4 and 5

1 Samuel 4 gives us another example of the wickedness of the sons of Eli. They went into the Most Holy Place which was forbidden for them to do. Previously sons of a High Priest had been killed by fire from God for doing the same thing (Leviticus 16:1-2). This time God waited. The sons of Eli took the ark of the covenant out of the Tabernacle and took it into battle. They thought that they could force God to give them victory by doing this. An action like this is really testing God. Man must not test God. God will decide what He does, not man. In this case, God decided that the sons of Eli should die for their wickedness. He also decided that Israel would lose to the enemy army. The Philistines captured the ark of the covenant. When Eli heard that this had happened, he fell and died.

The Philistines took the ark of the covenant to their city and put it in the temple of their god in 1 Samuel 5. They considered that their victory had been because their god was greater than the God

of Israel. God taught the Philistines that they needed to respect and honour Him. Initially, this was when the Philistine idol of their god fell down in front of the ark. When this happened a second time the idol was broken. Then God brought a series of plagues on the Philistines. The Philistines learnt that wherever the ark was, there was a plague. We are reminded of the plagues on Egypt which resulted in the Egyptians learning who was the true God. Now it was the turn of the Philistines. They learnt that the God of Israel had power over them and their gods.

Day 44: 1 Samuel 6 and 8

The Philistines knew they had to return the ark of the covenant to Israel. They also knew that if they did so, then they needed to offer the God of Israel something to stop the plagues. In 1 Samuel 6 we read that they made a plan which included giving gold to the God of Israel. Their plan was clever because it also tested the source of the power they were facing. From their plan they would know whether the God of Israel was responsible or not. What they did was to take two cows that were still suckling young. These cows were taken away from their calves and used to pull a cart with the ark of the covenant on it. The cows were allowed to go free. If they went straight to the Israelite town of Beth Shemesh, then it indicated that the God of Israel was guiding them. This is what happened. But at Beth Shemesh, the Israelites did not show respect for the God of Israel and they looked inside the ark. They were killed by God. This showed that God must be respected by all nations, especially His own people. The people of Israel were now scared of the ark. The ark was taken to a city that was not of an Israelite origin. Kiriath Jearim was a city belonging to the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:17). Israel seemed not to be concerned if Gibeonites were killed!

By the time of 1 Samuel 8, Samuel was old. Israel wanted a leader to help them against their enemies after the death of Samuel. They appealed for a king. The problem with this was that God was already their king and they were really rejecting God as king. God had ruled them, but He had also punished them for their sin by sending foreign armies. The nation of Israel remained as they always had been – without their own army. They wanted a king and a standing army so they knew who was to fight their battles. Of course, this was not the real answer to the problem. The real problem was their faithlessness and sin. Still, God allowed them a king because He had long-term plan to provide a king to save them from their enemy. There were even laws in the Law of Moses ready for this situation!

Day 45: 1 Samuel 9 and 10

Saul was presented as the first king of Israel in 1 Samuel 9. From his size, he looked like a king. From his care of animals, he cared for others in a way a king should. He trusted in God in the way God's king should. From his humility, he was the right man to lead the people. Saul was God's choice. Saul was to save the Israelites from the Philistines. Samuel made the preparations for his appointment as king.

Saul was anointed as king in 1 Samuel 10. Anointing was the way of selecting a person for a special work, as had happened previously when the High Priest was chosen. We note that Saul was given a number of signs from God, so that he would understand that God had really chosen him and would be with him. God even gave Saul some of His holy spirit to help him with rulership. The holy spirit is the abilities and wisdom of God. God did all He could to help Saul succeed. Saul was revealed to the people by Samuel, who accepted the choice of Saul.

Day 46: 1 Samuel 15 and 16

Saul started well as king of Israel. He did save Israel from their enemies because God was with him. But Saul became proud and started to do things his own way rather than God's way. After a series of errors, God finally made the position clear to Saul. Saul could not be God's king if he did not follow God's commands. God's king needed to lead the people to obey God. Saul was setting the opposite example and encouraging the people to disobey. In the incident in 1 Samuel 15, Saul went against the command of God and decided not to kill all the Amalekites. Even though Samuel explained the problem, Saul insisted he was in the right. Samuel had to rebuke him. Because Saul had rejected the commands of God, Saul was rejected by God. Samuel had to kill the king of Amalek because Saul did not. Saul continued his reign without Samuel's or God's help. God was about to choose a new king.

1 Samuel 16 describes how Samuel became the kingmaker for the second time. He was sent to a family in Bethlehem to anoint the next king. Samuel was expecting the new king to be a tall warrior like Saul. Instead, he saw the youngest of a family who was looking after sheep. Once again, God's king was one who cared for animals. The one who cared for animals would be able to care for people. David was a shepherd. His selection by God was shown by the spirit of God coming on David. God took His spirit away from Saul. In fact, God gave Saul an evil spirit, by which we understand he had a disturbed mind. In an unusual turn of events, Saul sent for David to play music to calm Saul. Since God is in control, we understand that this was not chance.

Day 47: 1 Samuel 18 and 24

The next event in the life of Saul is the story of David and Goliath. We read this previously. David's victory over Goliath led to jealousy from Saul. 1 Samuel 18 has the start of this. The jealousy grew so much that Saul planned to get rid of David. God can see inside the human heart and Saul's motives were recorded. Saul's attempts to kill David became clearer with time. Saul justified his action by falsely saying that David was trying to kill him. Saul pursued David with his army like an animal hunt.

On a couple of occasions, David had the opportunity to kill Saul. One of these is recorded in 1 Samuel 24. Saul had gone into a cave to 'uncover his feet' as the original Hebrew says. This really means he went to sleep. David was able to creep up and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. He could have killed Saul but he did not. When Saul left the cave, David called after him and explained how he could have killed him. David was able to silence those who said he was trying to kill Saul. David said something simple but very deep, 'From evildoers come evil deeds.' Everyone needs to learn from this. If we do evil, then we are evildoers. Saul concluded that David was not an evildoer. This was a rare moment of honesty from Saul. Unfortunately his honesty did not last and Saul ended up being the evildoer that God had to remove. Saul died in battle along with his sons.

Introduction to the Book of 2 Samuel

The second book of Samuel is a continuation from the first book of Samuel. At the end of the first book, King Saul had been killed in battle. The second book of Samuel is about the second king of

Israel, King David. David's route to kingship was a long one, having been anointed in 1 Samuel 16. David's priorities were different from Saul's. David's thinking was God-centred. He was concerned about the things of God and brought up the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem. In response to such faithfulness, God made a special covenant with David and his family. This spoke of eternal things and about a future son who would be king.

David was not perfect. He had a major failing over an attractive woman called Bathsheba. David repented of this sin and was forgiven. However, there were consequences for his sin. The result of this was continual problems with his family for the rest of his life. But David did not turn away from doing God's commands as Saul did. He did not get proud like Saul did. David inspired the people around him to follow God and commit great deeds. He wrote many songs of praise to God, including chapter 22 which is the same as Psalm 18. His last words recorded in chapter 23 are a great testimony to his attitude and his peace with God.

Day 48: 2 Samuel 1 and 5

News of the death of King Saul came to David in 2 Samuel 1. David's response tells us much about David himself. He did not celebrate, like most people would. He mourned. In fact, he wrote a lamentation. The lamentation says nothing about the faults of Saul. It praised him and honoured him as a king. David continued to give the king the honour that was due to the ruler of God's people. We learn that David had a deep love for Jonathan, the son of Saul. David's response is an example of how to be righteous with God. Righteous people do not celebrate the fall of the wicked. They mourn with others over the loss of the people. They honour those in position of power, even if those in power do evil. When someone came to David claiming that he had killed the king, David had him killed for this. In fact, we know from 1 Samuel 31 that Saul took his own life. The man who claimed the head of Saul was lying. It was right that he died.

In 2 Samuel 5 we learn of the time when David became king over all Israel. Up to this point, he had only been king over the tribe of Judah. Even before this point, we know that David led all of Israel. The people pointed out that God had caused David to be king. He was to 'shepherd' the people. Just as David saved the sheep from enemies, so he would save the people of Israel from their enemies. We read about the important event of David capturing Jerusalem. This was to become the capital city of David. More importantly, it was to become the city of the temple of God and therefore God's special city. The Philistine enemies did not want Israel to have a king to fight them, and they tried to capture David. But God was with David His King and Jerusalem His city, and the Philistines were defeated.

Day 49: 2 Samuel 6 and 7

The first thing on David's mind, after taking the city of Jerusalem, was to move the ark of the covenant to it. 2 Samuel 6 tells us that the presence of God lived on top of the ark, between the two cherubim. The significance of the top of the ark is that it represented the place where man can find the presence of God. What is unusual is that David did not take the ark to reunite it with the Tabernacle. Instead he took it to Jerusalem. This was the future place of the temple of God, which was not generally known at this time. David must have been directed by God to do this. As the ark was being moved, a man died for touching the ark. This displeased David and made him angry. Eventually his anger subsided and he realised that he had not obeyed God's method of transporting

the ark. Once he understood this and followed it, there was no problem. David humbled himself by dancing before the ark. His wife, who was the daughter of Saul, misunderstood this. The ruler of God's people must be humble. He is much lower than God and the king must recognise this.

David's humility led to God exalting him. In 2 Samuel 7, we read what this led to. God promised to exalt David. This is a Scriptural principle. Those who exalt themselves will be humbled – like Saul. Those who humble themselves will be exalted – like David. God's promise to David was a great step in God revealing His future plan with the earth. David was to have a son who would be king and would build the temple of God. At first sight, it looked like it was talking about Solomon. However, a closer look shows that it does not. This kingdom was to last for ever, which Solomon's did not. The son would also be the son of God. This leads us to think of only one person – the Lord Jesus Christ who was the son of David. David did not know the name of the person, but he knew about him. David thanked God for this promise and His love.

Day 50: 2 Samuel 11 and 12

2 Samuel 11 was the low point of David's life. He committed adultery with someone else's wife. When the woman was pregnant, he arranged the death of the husband. He tried to cover up the latter as a war casualty. The husband was a man called Uriah, who behaved honourably and faithfully. The wife was called Bathsheba. After the death of Uriah, David married Bathsheba. The chapter ends with God's reaction. God saw everything. He was not pleased.

In 2 Samuel 12, God confronted David with his crime. God sent a prophet to make David realise what he had done. The prophet presented David with a story about a poor man and a rich man. The poor man had very little, but what he had was taken by the rich man. The example of theft and killing was an example that David the shepherd would appreciate – it was a lamb that was like a member of the family. David judged the case correctly, and in doing so condemned himself. His sin was described by God as despising God and His commands. Although David deserved death according to the Law given through Moses, David did not die. He faced his sin and repented fully. But David would face his punishment. Sin has consequences, and David faced them. In his life, he was to suffer from severe family problems throughout the rest of his life. To show that God had really forgiven him, Bathsheba gave birth to Solomon, who was to become king after David.

The story of David is continued in the First book of Kings. However, before then, we will look at the Psalms. Many of the Psalms were written by David.

Introduction to the Book of Psalms

Psalms is the hymnbook of the Israelites. It is made up of 5 books, as if they were collected as collections one by one and then put together. About half were definitely written by David and probably others were as well. But it was not all David. Asaph and the sons of Korah wrote a number of them. Moses wrote one, as did Solomon and a number of others.

The Psalms contain praise, prayer, complaint, laments, joy, teaching, descriptions of the future and a variety of other contents. They express the depths of emotion and the yearnings of the human spirit. For many readers it is their favourite book of the Bible. It does not pretend that life is always

good. It accepts that God's people can even be depressed and suicidal. It shares the highs and lows of living. God stands by His people in whatever position they are in.

There is a Psalm for most moods and occasions, for different times of the day or for different times of life. Whether one is happy or in despair, there is a Psalm for it. God wants people in any situation to reflect on life and keep their trust in God. If they are happy, then praise God. If they are in despair, pray about it and trust in God. If they are in a state of sin, then there are Psalms for this. If they are righteous, there are Psalms for this.

It is difficult to see an order in the Psalms, apart from the first two introductory Psalms and the last 6 being a summary of praise. The purpose of songs elsewhere in Scripture is to remember events and teaching. The same is also true of the Psalms. It does give advice and teaching. It speaks about the future. It contains God's attitude to the affairs of mankind.

Day 51: Psalms 2 and 18

Psalm 2 describes the time of a king who is the son of God. David would have understood this to be a fulfilment of the promise God made to him. This was when God promised him a son who would be king and would be the son of God. We know this king to be Jesus. The Psalm therefore describes a future time with Jesus. The early chapters of Acts (4:25-26 and 13:33) apply this Psalm to Jesus. However, the Psalm seems to describe a time when Jesus is king in Jerusalem and the nations would rather not serve him. This is a vision into the future so that believers can see God has a plan. The believers can then look forward to the time when God's king is installed in Jerusalem.

Psalm 18 tells us that it was written by David when he had peace from his enemies. The writing at the beginning of each Psalm is in the original Hebrew text and must be considered as part of the Psalm. Psalm 18 is the same as 2 Samuel 22. It is the Psalm that David wrote towards the end of his life when he looks back on his life. He had many troubles, but God saved him out of them all. He concludes that God has looked after him because he followed the ways of God. God saves the humble and brings down the proud (verse 27). In this we can see how God saved the humble David and brought down the proud Saul. David observed that God treated people according to how they are, whether they are faithful, blameless, pure or crooked. David attributes God with the reason that he had safety in life and victory over the nations. David loves God for all He has done, and so can we.

Day 52: Psalm 20, 21 and 26

Psalms 20 and 21 are important Psalms because they tell us about the attitude of King David. Psalm 20 is an appeal to God to help the king. The king is clear that victory does not come from his own skill or power, but from God's. David did not trust in the size of his army or in his weapons. He trusted in God. It is because of this that he made sure he was right with God before he went into battle. He offered his sacrifices. He prayed. Psalm 21 is a Psalm for after a battle. The victory was from God. God had saved his life and answered his prayer. The enemy had plotted evil but he was destroyed. We are reminded of that future time described in Psalm 2 when the enemies plot against God's king. There is only one outcome. God gives the victory.

In Psalm 26, David invited God to examine his inside – his heart and mind. He was confident that he was blameless and that he had truly trusted in God. The Psalm tells us how David was careful to

choose the right people to be with. He avoided deceit, hypocrisy, evil, wickedness and those who carried them out. We may think it was easy for David to be good because that is how he was. Here we learn how careful he was in the choice of his friends. A righteous person must choose their friends carefully. But David chose to be with God. It was like David had chosen God to be his friend. David loved being in God's house. We need to be careful choosing our friends. We need to choose God as our friend.

Day 53: Psalm 41 and 45

There are several Psalms which tell us that David was very sick. Psalm 41 tells us that people thought David would die from his sickness. We do not come across this incident in the historical records. David records the reason for his sickness – his sin. From this we are led to conclude that the sin of David with Bathsheba led David to experience a near fatal sickness. Those around him were making preparations for his death and even a close friend had turned against him. David turned to God as he fought the battle to stay alive. David had helped the weak when they were in trouble. Now it was his turn. He was weak and he was in trouble. It would be fair for God to save him if God chose to be merciful. We know from history that David did recover from this sickness, but his close friend, Ahithophel, did not recover from the situation and killed himself.

Psalm 45 is one of the most beautiful Psalms. It is about the wedding of a king and his beautiful bride. It is a time of joy and gladness. The king is righteous and true. God had made him king above all others. The words of verses 6 and 7 are quoted in Hebrews 1:8-9 and applied to Jesus. The king is Jesus. In a spiritual sense, Jesus will be married to his bride, which is represented by the believers (Revelation 21:2). This is a marriage that will last for ever. The Psalm gives us a taste of the joy and happiness in the future that will come when the Lord Jesus Christ is united with the true believers.

Day 54: Psalm 48 and 50

Psalm 48 praises the city of God, which is called Zion. Zion is the other name for Jerusalem. The presence of God was in this city during the time of Solomon. But the tone of the Psalm suggests that it will only fully be complete at a future time. God's presence results in joy, righteousness, justice and security for the believers who are in Jerusalem. Non-believing kings may attack the city, but they will not succeed. There is no power against God that can defeat Him. The new Jerusalem will stand for ever as a residence for God and believers, bringing joy and peace from their mutual fellowship.

Psalm 50 is also about Zion, which is another name for Jerusalem. This time it applies to the time from Solomon onwards when the temple was built and sacrifices were offered to God on the altar. The presence of God can be found in Zion and God is all powerful. God's people should offer sacrifices to God as God has requested in the Law of Moses. However, the purpose of sacrifices is not because God is hungry or needs animals or sacrifices. It is because He wants to know what is in the heart of His people. Do they obey Him and are they thankful? God wants His people to trust in Him when they are in trouble, to make vows and pay what they vow. If they do that, then God will save them, and they in turn will honour God more. But the wicked cannot expect God to listen and help them. They had not listened to the words of God, so God will not listen to their words.

Day 55: Psalm 51 and 68

Psalm 51 was written by David after his sin with Bathsheba. It was a full public declaration of guilt. When David hid his sin, he was found out. Now he admitted sin, he found forgiveness. He had sinned against Uriah, but he had also sinned against God. Sin is a breaking of the commands of God and so sin is always against God. David cannot escape his sin. It was with him all the time. If he needed to offer God a sacrifice for sin then he was willing to do it. But sacrifices under the law did not remove deliberate sin. For forgiveness he had to appeal directly to God in prayer. He was crushed by the foolishness of his sin. Now he appealed for healing, restoration and the full elimination of his sin. If he was forgiven, then he would be able to teach others that forgiveness is possible with God. This is important, otherwise sinners would give up on God. Instead, sinners know from David's forgiveness that their own forgiveness is possible. This fact is repeated many times in Scripture. Forgiveness is possible if the sinner is truly sorry, shows the sorrow by appropriate behaviour, and turns from the way of sin.

Psalm 68 describes God coming to the temple on His mountain. We know from other Psalms that this mountain is Mount Zion which is Jerusalem. God chose Jerusalem as the place for His temple. In this Psalm we have the history of Israel portrayed as like a single journey. It is the journey from Mount Sinai where Moses received the Law of God. Now they end up in Jerusalem. The glory of God has gone from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion. It is described as like a single procession to the mountain of God. It is like God foresaw this journey as a single event, which He did. The first verse is a quotation from Numbers 10:35, which are the words used when God moved from one place to another. In the case of Numbers, it was the first movement of the presence of God from Mount Sinai. Now God was coming to Zion. It is good for God's people to have God with them. As it says in verse 20, God is a God who saves His people from death. Therefore the God of Zion is to be praised.

Day 56: Psalm 69 and 71

Psalm 69 was written by David when he was in deadly danger. It was like he was sinking in mud. It was up to his neck and about to cover his head. He was actually surrounded by enemies who falsely accused him of crimes. He suffered for the name of God. Even his family avoided him. He was mocked and humiliated. He was on his own and about to die. He appealed to God for mercy and was confident of God's help. But there is more. A number of the verses are quoted in the New Testament as applying to Jesus. Verse 4 is quoted in John 15:25, verse 9 in John 2:17, and verse 21 was what happened to Jesus. The experiences of David were also those of Jesus. Just like God was with David, so God was with Jesus. When we look at the Psalms, we can look out for similarities with the life of Jesus. They help us understand features of the life of Jesus that are not found in the New Testament.

Psalm 71 is the old person's Psalm. The writer is old and looks back on life. They have had a difficult life. They have trusted in God all their life, and God has been with them. Now, when they are old, they still need God to be with them. There are deadly enemies around and as an elderly person, they are not able to defend themselves. In this state, they will continue to trust in God as they always have. They know God will not fail them. So they continue to praise God and speak of His great works and righteousness. There is even a reference to being restored from the dead. This is the hope of the elderly – that they will continue to live before God and praise God's name.

Day 57: Psalm 73 and 78

Psalm 73 is a partner to Psalm 37. Both Psalms complain about the seeming unfairness of life. When they look at the wicked, they see that the wicked seem to have an easy life. The writer even dares to question the value of keeping the commands of God! But the situation is a temporary one. The writer is only seeing life at one point in time. If he understood what would happen in the end, he would not be saying this. He would then be satisfied. The writer only understood the future when he went to the temple of God and thought about the destiny of the wicked. Then he understood that a time would come when the wicked will get what they deserve. But while a wicked person lives, it will seem that the wicked get away with wickedness. The writer is then content. He is happy to be near God and serve God righteously. We do not need to be jealous of the wealth and life of the wicked. They will be rewarded for their wickedness. And the righteous will be rewarded for their righteousness.

Psalm 78 covers the history of God with His people. It is more than a history of Israel. It is a history of God working with His people. It was important for God's people to remember these things. They are told to teach these things to their children, their grandchildren and their great grandchildren. The point is that the memory of these events must not die out from the people. They needed to know the past and learn the lessons from history. If they did not pass on the memory of God's wonders and behaviours, then the truth would die out from Israel. They would no longer be God's people except as children of their parents. Psalm 78 goes through the wonderful things God did, and the far from wonderful things that Israel did. Despite all the evil that Israel had done, God chose Mount Zion as a place for His presence, and David as His king. The children of Israel needed to praise God for all His wonderful deeds.

Day 58: Psalm 81 and 83

Psalm 81 is interesting because it was about the day of the new moon. The calendar of Israel was based on the movements of the moon. It marked out the yearly seasons. The month was one cycle of the moon, and the year was 12 or 13 cycles, depending on whether an extra month was needed to keep the seasons right. The Law of Moses spoke about the sacrifices to be offered at the temple on this day, but there is little else apart from this Psalm. The Psalm was a monthly reminder for Israel to put away their idols and worship God. If they did that then God would provide them with a harvest in the right season.

Psalm 83 teaches about a disturbing situation in the future. There would be a plot among the nations to destroy Israel, so that the nation of Israel no longer existed. Ten nations would take this position. We do not know of an occasion where this has happened in the past, so our understanding is that this is still future. The nations are those around Israel today. The attitude of at least some of the peoples around them is to remove the name of Israel from the map. The writer appeals to God to save them in the way that the judges Deborah and Barak and Gideon saved them. In both cases, Israel was greatly outnumbered, and God gave them the victory. The victory would teach the nations that God is the true God of all the earth.

Day 59: Psalm 84 and 89

Living near the presence of God is the theme of Psalm 84. It is where God's blessings come from. It is where there is God's protection. It is worth going on a pilgrimage to God's temple, just to spend

one day there. In fact, Israelite men were required to go to the temple three times a year on certain of the feasts. Better than an occasional visit is to stay there permanently. The sparrow and swallow built their nests on the temple and they were wise to do so. Those who were gatekeepers of the temple had the privilege of staying at the temple. Those who live with God are blessed. We cannot live in God's temple today, but we can live with God in our hearts.

Psalms 89 reminds us of God's covenant with David. God is praised for all His works, but it is God's righteousness, justice, faithfulness and love that are at the centre of how God works. We see how God works in His work with David. God chose David and made him a strong warrior. He gave him victory in battles and made his name great. This is what David described about himself in Psalm 18. God made a promise with David and He will not forget it. Just as the moon is witness to the light coming from the sun, so the moon is a witness to the promise of God to David. When we look at the moon, we can think of this aspect of its witness. The final section of the Psalm is a reference to the sons of David who did not keep the covenant. It ends with an appeal for God to keep the covenant Himself.

Day 60: Psalm 91 and 92

The theme of Psalm 91 is the protection of God that comes from trusting in Him. It is like living under the shadow of His wings. God will protect the believer day and night, from armies or disease. Even if an army of 10,000 is coming, it will not reach the believer. They do not need to fear, but they do need to trust. God sees those who love Him and trust in Him, and He will help. They will be saved from death. These words came into the mind of Jesus as he was tempted in the wilderness. Yes, God will protect His people with His angels. But it is not for man to test God's saving power. God decides when He saves and how He saves. This shows the danger of misusing Scripture and coming to the wrong decision. It is not for us to force God to do anything for us. God is the one who is in control of our lives, not us.

Psalm 92 is the Psalm for the Sabbath day. It was meant to be read on the sabbath. But it is also a Psalm for old people, like Psalm 71. The Psalm helps us understand what the righteous do on the sabbath day. They sing of God's love and faithfulness. They rejoice in the things of God. They think about what God has said. They take rest in the things of God. They are like a palm tree planted in the temple of God. Even if they are old, they will still be producing spiritual fruit in their old age. They will be like flourishing old palm trees. They will be witnessing to the greatness and righteousness of God. This is what the elderly and the young should do. They should do it on the sabbath, but of course they should do it on any other day too.

Day 61: Psalm 97 and 104

Psalm 97 is in praise of the righteousness and justice of God. Righteousness is the quality of doing what is right. It means avoiding the wrong way. Justice means that people are receive back for their behaviour whether right or wrong. The righteousness and justice of God mean that the righteous are rewarded and the wicked are punished. These qualities are fundamental to God and they are the basis on which He runs the world. Those who love God must have a similar sense of right and wrong. They must love right and hate wrong. Like God, they must not love everything. They must hate evil and avoid doing it. If they do that, then God will be their protector and guide in life.

Psalm 104 is a meditation on the world around us. The writer sings about everything God created and goes through the days of creation. It is good to do the same thing and think about the designs of God. Everything is amazing in its own way and is evidence of the vast creative mind behind it. God has made many things good in this world for man to enjoy. God feeds and sustains the world. The things we see are a witness to the greatness of its designer. We should rejoice in God and the things He has made. It will make us happy and have confidence in God. It will make us fear Him and be humble.

Day 62: Psalm 105 and 106

While Psalm 104 speaks about the wonderful things God has made, Psalm 105 speaks about the wonderful acts of God with His people. They are different aspects of the same great God. It should cause us to rejoice in God and seek His favour. We are reminded about the fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the covenant God made with them. He looked after them and protected them. He provided Joseph to save the family from famine. He provided Moses and Aaron and sent the miraculous signs on Egypt. When they came out of Egypt, God gave them silver and gold. He made them mobile so that they could all leave Egypt. We assume this means that He made them healthy so they could leave. He led them with a beacon of cloud or fire. He gave the bread and meat and water in the desert. And He gave them the land He had promised to Abraham. He did all this so that His people would keep His commands. It is an impressive list of God's care for a family and a nation. God continues to look after those who keep His commands.

Psalm 106 reminds us of what God's people did during the events of Psalm 105. While God was guiding His people to the promised land, the people were resisting and rebelling. Through all this, God did not abandon His people. The Psalm starts by declaring the love of God, which endures for ever. One of the key problems was that the people kept forgetting what God had done. This is why there is a need for songs and books to help the people remember what God has done in the past, and what God's people have done in the past too. God was righteous throughout, which meant that he did reward people for righteousness and punish people for sin. The punishment took a variety of forms, each appropriate to the sin. The lowest point came when they sacrificed their children to idols. Idols are known as demons in both Old and New Testaments. It is right that God punished them for their behaviour. Yet for all this, God has not abandoned His people. He has made a covenant and will not abandon that. He does all this because of His love.

Day 63: Psalm 107 and 110

Psalm 107 is another example of the love of God. God never stops being a loving God. He is a redeemer, that is, He saves people. The Psalm gives four examples of this. There are those without food on a journey, those in prison, those dying of sickness and those in a storm at sea. All these people were dying. When they cried to God, they were saved. When they were saved, they thanked and honoured God and told others of the goodness of God. God is a God who saves those who trust in Him. He will save us if we trust in Him. God is a God who exalts the low and abases the high. The righteous rejoice at all the things God does, but the wicked have nothing to say. Let the wise consider the great love of God.

Psalm 110 is not an easy Psalm to understand. Yet it is quoted many times in the New Testament, possibly more than any other chapter of the Old Testament. Verse 1 is quoted by Jesus in three of

the gospels and also by Peter in the first Christian speech in Acts 2:34. It describes how God would put Jesus at His own right hand until God had overcome the enemies of Jesus. Jesus used it as a warning against his enemies in his day. The Psalm is about how God would exalt Jesus. The mention of sceptre indicates that Jesus would be king. But it also mentions that Jesus would be a priest. He would not be a Levitical priest as in the Law of Moses. He would be a special priest like Melchizedek. Jesus would be both a king and a priest. This is a very unusual combination, but Melchizedek was both a priest and king. Only God can assign both roles to a single person. Jesus would come as king and priest to judge the nations and his people. The mention of dew occurs elsewhere where it indicates the resurrection from the dead (Isaiah 26:19). This is what Jesus will do for the dead believers. Altogether the Psalm describes the work of Jesus, which God has set him to do.

Day 64: Psalm 111, 112 and 116

Both Psalm 111 and 112 are acrostics. This means that every line of each Psalm starts with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet in alphabetical order. It indicates the hidden beauty which is there. This feature is thought to help someone to remember the lines of the Psalm by remembering the alphabetic order. Psalm 111 describes the glorious character of God. He is righteous, gracious, compassionate, faithful, just, true, upright, holy, awesome. We meet God in this Psalm and come into His presence. We see these qualities of God when we think about what He does. We should fear Him because this is the first wise thing we must do.

Psalm 112 describes the blessings of those who are godly. It seems to continue the thoughts from Psalm 111, where the meditation on God leads the writer to be godly. It starts off with the fear of the Lord, which is where Psalm 112 left off. Then we have righteousness, graciousness, compassion and other aspects of godly behaviour. He and his family are blessed by God. They trust in God so much that they have no fear of bad news in their life. This is a great position of peace that comes from trusting in God. The wicked are far from this position of peace.

Psalm 116 is about the distress of someone who was saved from death. As they were dying, they called on God to save them. And God did. The Psalm highlights what God has done, and the qualities God has. Therefore the writer loves God. The Psalm is a comfort for all believers, especially those nearing the end of life. Verse 15 says that the death of the righteous is precious to God. That is, God is deeply concerned about them. Believers must maintain their faith until the end because God cares about them. It is clear that the one saved from death had made a vow to God. It would be something like, if God saves me, then I will do something. This could be giving something to God or changing one's lifestyle. This would include thanks to God.

Day 65: Psalm 132, 133 and 134

Psalms 120 to 134 are known as the songs of degrees or song of ascents. They are a bit like a pilgrim's hymnbook, with Psalm 120 being away from Jerusalem and the Psalms going up to the city. Psalm 132 is a superb Psalm about Jerusalem, having arrived in the city of God. It is a time and a place of joy. It takes us back to the time when God first told David about the city. It was to be a place for the temple of God. It was also to be the place of the King David's throne. It was to be the place of the throne of God which was above the ark of the covenant in the temple. God has said that He will live there forever. While many of Israel might have thought that this was now going to

happen, it did not happen then because of Israel's sin. However, God does not lie. It will occur in the future.

Psalms 133 is a simple Psalm about the importance of brotherly fellowship. Believers must stand united. Unity gives God and man much pleasure. Whenever there are differences of opinions between believers, they should read this Psalm and consider. God describes unity as being like the introduction of the priesthood as the first priest Aaron was selected. The priesthood was there to help people and God become close. Unity is also like cool dew on a hot mount Zion. It is refreshing and pleasurable. And mount Zion is where God will bless the righteous with the gift of eternal life. If believers want the blessing of eternal life, then they should live together in unity.

The final Psalm of the pilgrim's hymnbook is Psalm 134. The people of God are now close to God because they are in the temple. What is unusual is that it is night. The Psalm describes how the service of singing praise in the temple continues even at night. Here is intimacy and devotion to God. The people have gone out of their way to ensure God is praised in the night hours, because God does not sleep. God is to be praised day and night for all He does and is. The one who made heaven and earth will bless His people from the place of His presence.

Day 66: Psalm 145 and 147

Psalm 145 is a celebration of the things about God. All His creation should praise Him. That is the right thing to do. His creation needs to think about God and what He has done and never forget it. They should praise God and think about the things they need to praise God for. He is the source of goodness and life. We need to keep reminding ourselves of these facts and teach the song to the next generation, so they can learn it. We can also think about the future that has been promised. We can think about the glory of God's eternal kingdom, and we can thank God for that promise. Let the righteous continue to be righteous and never forget what God has done for them and will do for them. Praise God!

The last six Psalms in the book of Psalms are full of praise. This is a fitting end to all that has been said and sung in the Psalms. Psalm 147 says it is good to praise God in song. We can praise God for His work and knowledge, even knowing the names of all the stars. We can praise Him for the way He helps the exiles, the broken, the sick and the weak. But the Psalm also tells us what God thinks about those who fear Him, trust in Him and keep His laws. God is delighted with them. This is not a mild attitude; it is extreme pleasure. Praise to God is good, but it alone will not save us. We must obey the laws and praise God. We praise God in song and deed. So let us praise the Lord!

Introduction to the Book of Proverbs

The book of Proverbs contains the wisdom of Solomon. Solomon was the wisest man in the world in his day. Kings and queens visited him to ask him questions and hear his wisdom. The wisdom he had came from God. We do not need to cross seas and deserts to hear him because we have the book of Proverbs. Proverbs is not about head knowledge - it is about how you live. If we take its advice, we can live in the right way with God. It will bless us. It will keep us from harm.

There are always two voices in the world. There is the voice of the world and there is the voice of God. They are two different paths we can take. The two voices are there because we must choose to take the right path. If there was only the voice of God, then it would not be praiseworthy to take

the only path there is. Even people who are foolish would walk in that way. But if there are two or many voices, we must make a choice. We are known by the choices we make. By reading the advice in the Proverbs we can follow the right path.

When Solomon prayed for wisdom, God gave him wisdom. We too can pray for wisdom. God also gave Solomon long life, riches and honour as well. Wisdom can do this for us too. If we seek wisdom, we will find more than just wisdom. It will more than repay our efforts. A day will come, perhaps not for a long time, when the wise will have long life, riches and honour.

Day 67: Proverbs 6 and 8

There is great advice in Proverbs 6. We must not get involved in the debts of others, because it will trap us. We must not be lazy, because it will make us poor. We must not be deceitful because it will lead to disaster, and the deceiver is the one who is really deceived. There are 7 things that God hates. These all result from a body that is misused. Whether eyes are proud, tongue is used for lying and trouble, hands and feet are used for evil, and a heart is set on evil. Our bodies are needed for noble purposes not deceitful ones. It is good if a person learns from their parents. If they do, they will avoid the pitfalls of life, such as an uncontrolled woman. The path of wisdom is like a person walking in light not darkness.

Proverbs 8 tells us that wisdom was there from the beginning. Before God made the things of our world, God had wisdom. Everything God made, He made with wisdom. Wisdom led to joy and delight and everything good. So we should listen to that same wisdom from the same God in Proverbs. Kings rule by wisdom, and they administer justice by wisdom. Wisdom produces life, riches and honour. The voice of wisdom is crying out. The voice of wisdom is needed at every junction in life and every time a decision is needed. We need to listen to the voice of wisdom so we make the right choices and go in the right direction. Those who avoid wisdom like trouble and death.

Day 68: Proverbs 9 and 12

Proverbs 9 explains that there are two types of houses in this world. One is the house of wisdom and one is the house of foolishness. The people outside are invited into both houses. Both houses cry out their invitations from the highest point in the city. Both invitations are attractive to outsiders. The question is which house will they go into? One house has real food and a table of bread and wine and the way to life. The other house has stolen food and has the way to death. Presented with the consequences of the choice, the choice is simple. However, at the time of the invitation, the consequences are not clear. We need to choose wisely, because only the right way leads to a right reward. We need to add wisdom to the wisdom we already have and become wiser still. Proverbs continues a theme of houses in the following chapters.

Proverbs 12 continues the section on the Proverbs of Solomon that began at the beginning of chapter 10. This section has single verse phrases of the wise which cover all aspects of living. Verse 12 tells us that the house of the righteous will stand firm. This reminds us of Proverbs 9 as well as the parable of the house on the sand and the rock. Only one type of house will continue to exist and that is the house of the wise. The wise practice self-control, restraining their tongue and restraining their emotions. Many verses speak of the need to control the tongue which is described as like a sword causing harm. In contrast the wise use their tongue for honesty and healing. A wise man is

carefully in choosing the right friends. He chooses a noble wife. He cares for animals. The one who cares for animals also cares for people, like the shepherd David.

Day 69: Proverbs 13 and 14

The need to choose friends wisely is said again in Proverbs 13. Those who walk with the wise grow wise, but a companion of fools suffers. We are influenced by those we choose to live with because we will learn their habits. The fool lives without restraint, speaking lies if it helps them, and proudly follows his own ways. The fool continues along his own path and listens to no one. In contrast the wise listens to instruction and discipline so they can stay in the right way. The teachings of the wise lead to life, which is what Proverbs is about. If we listen to its advice then it will lead to light and life.

Proverbs 14 says that the natural way of man leads to death, even though man thinks his way is right. Only God can show us the way to life and the way of the wise. Fearing God can lead to life, because it causes man to obey the commands of God and avoid evil. Fearing God is a theme throughout Proverbs. It leads to security and protection for the person and their family. Even in death, the righteous have a refuge in God, which means that death is not the end. A heart at peace leads to life and health, whereas envy causes ill health. It is therefore better to be content with what we have and be at peace with our situation. It is important to help the poor because God considers this work as giving Him honour.

Day 70: Proverbs 15 and 16

Proverbs 15 continues with aspects of contentment. Better to have a little with God than to have a lot and strife with it. Better to have vegetables and love than to have meat and hatred. Patience and control of the tongue are needed to avoid arguments and anger. But the one who cannot control their tongue will cause much strife. Wisdom causes a son to listen to his father and to correction. It will guide him to the right path. If the wicked go to the Lord to offer prayer and sacrifice, God will not hear it. God is far from the wicked and He detests their pretend religion. God's eyes are everywhere, so He knows who is wicked and who is good.

In Proverbs 16 we learn that God is in control. Man may choose his own path, but God determines what will happen. Therefore, man should commit his ways to God in order for them to succeed. Man should walk with God and not walk alone doing his own thing. When God considers man, he considers the motives of the heart. The action of man is put in context when the heart is known. A man can do a good thing for wrong motives and a bad thing for good motives. Only God is able to determine which it is by looking at the heart. If there is pride, then a fall is coming. Humility is better than pride. And one who can control his temper is better than a mighty warrior.

Day 71: Proverbs 17 and 31

The issue of arguments is addressed in Proverbs 17. If one starts an argument, it is like breaching a dam. It will be very hard to stop it. Better to avoid the argument entirely. In fact, there is a time when covering over an offence is necessary because it prevents division and promotes love. A number of the sayings in this chapter affect justice. God hates injustice, whether it is by punishing the innocent or releasing the guilty. God hates bribery which blinds the eyes of the judge. Whatever happens in the courtroom, it is God who will test the heart and judge the actions. If man does not

bring justice, then God will. We also have the definition of a friend. A true friend is one who loves at all times, even when our life is hard and we are in the wrong. Those who are not true friends will leave in these times.

The book of Proverbs ends in chapter 31 with some advice for kings and the portrait of a good woman. The king must not spend his energies on women and wine. He must look after those citizens who need looking after, particularly the poor. He must do this because no one else will look after them. Then we have a description of a good wife. She is industrious and thoughtful. She cares for her husband, her family, her servants and the poor. We notice that both a good king and a good wife care for the poor. The good wife does not think of herself. She works all hours for the benefit of those around her. She shows her wisdom by her words and her actions. Everyone praises her. It is not beauty that is important or her words. She is wise because she fears God and because of what she does.

Introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes

The Book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon like the Book of Proverbs. In it Solomon searches for the purpose of life. His starting position is that everything is of no real value. Man comes and goes as part of the cycle of life. Whatever man spends his life doing, it seems there are problems. Even if one pursued wisdom, it leads to sadness. The pursuit of happiness was considered as another way to live. Yet another way was to construct great building projects so that he could leave a legacy behind when he went. Even these things we considered of no real value. So Solomon hated life because it was all hard work and of no real value.

Solomon surveyed life around him. In the justice system, there was injustice. In the social system, there was oppression. In the business system, the pursuit of money led to nothing really valuable. So what should man do in life? Solomon then came to the issue of contentment. Man should be content with what he has.

Finally Solomon addressed the subject of death. Even here, he did not like what he saw. A sinner and a righteous man both die in the same way. More than that, man dies in the same way as the animals. And then man is no more. So how should man live his life? He gives his conclusion in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, "Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

Day 72: Ecclesiastes 1 and 2

Ecclesiastes starts abruptly with disturbing thoughts. What is the point of life? Everything is meaningless. He says 'meaningless' four times in the second verse. Then King Solomon commences his reasoning. Life is made of continual cycles. Whether it is the wind, water, sun, everything goes around. Nothing new happens. So Solomon explored the meaning of wisdom in life. What should a man do in life? He did what he advised in the book of Proverbs. He pursued wisdom. But even then it made him sad.

In Ecclesiastes 2, Solomon moves onto the pursuit of pleasure. Does pleasure give man satisfaction in life? And what if man pursued projects as hard as he could? Does this give man satisfaction? Solomon was probably the richest man in the world at this time and he could do anything he

wanted. He looked at everything he had done and declared that it was meaningless. Even when he thought about wisdom, he saw that its benefits did not last. Man should be content with what God gives him in life. It is God that can give a man, wisdom, knowledge and happiness.

Day 73: Ecclesiastes 7 and 8

In Ecclesiastes 7, Solomon returns to giving words of wisdom on how to live life. He considers what is good in life. It is good to have a good name. It is good to consider our destiny with death. He then surprises us. As someone who has pursued happiness, he tells us that sadness is better! There is a section on what is better for man in life. Solomon still considers wisdom to be of great importance because it is a preserver of a person. Even then, one must be careful not to be 'overwise'.

Ecclesiastes 8 tells us several truths. We do not know the day of our death. Punishment for crimes does not happen quickly, so people think they can get away with it. Some wicked people seem to get what the righteous deserve, and some righteous people get what the wicked deserve. All these things can be considered under the hand of God. But man cannot understand how God works in the lives of people. We have to accept our limitations. We do not know what we want to know because we are not God.

Introduction to the Book of Song of Songs

The Song of Songs is a song of love. Its theme is relatively straight forward, but the details are hard to understand. There is a shepherdess who is in love with a king. The king is also a shepherd. This is not a conflict of roles. King David was a shepherd, and the king of Israel was known as a shepherd of the people. The king notices the shepherdess and grows in his love for her. He gives three detailed descriptions of the woman, using agricultural and other terms. She describes him once, but it is a superlative description. It is not a typical romance, because the king keeps going off.

The romance is based around Jerusalem, so we are caused to think that this is about Solomon and his love. There are a number of things that also fit in with the king being Solomon. The problem is that Solomon did not have love for one woman, but many. He also made some serious errors towards the end of his life. We are caused to think that the story is more a parable of love between two people, but who?

The Bible speaks of the love of God for Israel as like a love of a man for a woman. Using this idea, the pattern of Song of Songs works quite well. Where it does not work so well is in the physical description of the man such as the reference to nursing him at his mother's breast. This leaves only one other Bible reference to love – that between Christ and the believers. It is this romance that works very well on the spiritual level. It is still not easy to understand the detail, but it does work very well. We will take the first two chapters as examples of this.

Day 74: Song of Songs 1 and 2

In Song 1 we meet a shepherdess who has heard of the king. The shepherdess really represents believers and the king represents Jesus. She does not know where he lives, which is surprising. She is in love with him because of his loves (his acts), his oil (his anointing) and his name (who he is).

This is like believers who have heard of Jesus but do not know where he lives. The woman describes herself as a shepherdess who works for others but not herself. She also works in a vineyard. In the same way disciples of Jesus are described as workers in a vineyard and workers among God's flock. Both are descriptions of how believers work among the people of God. She wanted to find the king and be with him. When she goes to him, she finds herself among others who also follow him. The king is impressed with her and describes her as a horse fit for a king. They both admire the beauty of the other. They are in love.

Song 2 describes the shepherdess as types of flowers (a crocus and a lily). And he is like an apple tree that she delights in. She is brought to his house and supplied with fruit and wine and love. It is a position of closeness. Then the king comes in as a gazelle. Both King David and King Saul were described as gazelles, that is, gracious beings at home in high places. This is a description of kings doing the work of God. The king calls the shepherdess to action. It is the right time for this. She is given the work of protecting the vineyard (the community of believers) from fruit-eating foxes (enemies). Meanwhile, the king goes off like a gazelle among the mountains, among lilies (other believers). Both the king and the woman have work to do. This is like Jesus and the disciples who have God's work to do.

Introduction to the Book of 1 Kings

The First Book of Kings describes the earlier part of the time of the kings of Israel, while the second book of Kings describes the latter part. Together they go from the death of King David to the end of the last king of Israel and Judah. The books of the Kings start where the Book of 2 Samuel finished. From the start of 1 Samuel to the end of 2 Kings there is a continuous history of Israel from Samuel the king maker to the last king.

1 Kings describes how one son of David, Solomon, became king. He became the greatest king of Israel. The account of his wisdom and riches comes in the first part of the book. Solomon built the temple of God in Jerusalem, which replaced the mobile Tabernacle. But Solomon did not remain faithful to the end of his life. His failings led to the division of the nation into two parts. The northern part consisted of 10 tribes and was called Israel. The southern part consisted of 2 tribes and was called Judah. The sons of David ruled over Judah. This went through phases of good and bad kings. The northern kingdom of Israel was ruled by a number of separate dynasties. It went through phases of bad and worse kings. There were no good kings of the northern kingdom of Israel. 1 Kings take us to the time of Jehoshaphat in the southern kingdom and the dynasty that included Ahab in the northern kingdom.

After the Book 1 Kings we will go to 1 Chronicles, which covers similar times to the Book of 1 Kings. They are parallel records. Only after completing 1 Chronicles will we go to 2 Kings.

Day 75: 1 Kings 2 and 11

1 Kings 2 describes the last advice king David gave to the new king Solomon. The advice is similar to the advice Moses gave Joshua – keep the commands of God and then things will be all right. In other words put God first. The same advice can be given to any young person at the start of their lives of service. David had some unfinished business that he had with individuals. He asked Solomon to complete this work, which Solomon did. We note that Solomon was already known as a man of wisdom, even before he was given extra wisdom from God. Solomon's request for God to

give him wisdom was another example of his wisdom. Another example was his ability to see treachery in the request of his brother Adonijah. Adonijah asked to marry the girl who had laid with the old king David to keep him warm. Sleeping with the consort of a king was a sign that the person was also kingly, since he was taking over a role of the previous king. Solomon had the wisdom to understand what Adonijah was doing and remove the rebel.

We read about the greatness of Solomon previously, so we now pass on to the next phase – the decline of Solomon. 1 Kings 11 describes Solomon’s love of women. In breach of the Law of Moses concerning kings, Solomon married many foreign wives. The wives turned the heart of the old Solomon so that he started building places of worship for foreign gods. God was angry with Solomon and sent enemies against him, so that he no longer had peace. As further punishment, God told him that his kingdom would be divided into two and the greater part would not go to his son. The end of Solomon’s reign was not as glorious as it could have been. It is a sad lesson that faithful people must keep faith to the end and not turn away in their old age.

Day 76: 1 Kings 12 and 13

1 Kings 12 introduces us to the son of Solomon, Rehoboam. We might have expected Rehoboam to be a man of wisdom, but this was not so. Rehoboam wanted to raise the taxes to become greater than his father. In his attempt to be greater than his father, he became much less. As prophesied, 10 tribes rebelled and were led by a man called Jeroboam, son of Nebat. Jeroboam knew that God had set him up as king, but he still rebelled against God. He established the false religion of worshipping two golden calves in order to take people away from God. This idolatry continued throughout the time of the northern kingdom of Israel. We are reminded of the rebellion of Israel at Mount Sinai where they made a golden calf.

God was angry with what Jeroboam had done when he built the golden calves. In 1 Kings 13, we read of God’s attempt to stop it. God sent a prophet from Judah to confront Jeroboam while he was worshipping one of his golden calves. Jeroboam was at an altar offering a sacrifice when the prophet interrupted him. You can imagine the king’s reaction. The prophet spoke against the altar and gave a sign that the words were true. The king ordered the arrest of the prophet, but as he did so his arm wilted. Imagine the embarrassed king now. He had to plead with the prophet of God to heal his arm, which happened. And then another sign from the altar came true. Jeroboam had every reason to believe in the true God and follow Him, but he did not. Even when signs are given, many people still do not believe. The chapter continues with the strange events of the prophet being killed by a lion. Whenever it seems particularly strange, we should look for a deeper meaning. In this case, the prophet is a pattern of Jesus. Jesus was the prophet of God from Judah, who performed signs to turn the people to God. There are other parallels that can be worked out.

Day 77: 1 Kings 14 and 15

Jeroboam remembered that a prophet of Israel had predicted his kingship. In 1 Kings 14, his son had become ill, so he sent his wife to the prophet to find out whether his son would get better. It seems that Jeroboam did not want people to know that he was going to the prophet of God, so he sent his wife in disguise. Of course, God saw through this. The prophet told the mother that her son would die while the rest of the family would suffer. The dynasty would be destroyed. Jeroboam had been

given many good reasons to believe in the true God and he had rejected them. He had led the entire northern kingdom of Israel into idolatry and now he had to face his punishment.

The southern kingdom of Judah did better, but not by much. Rehoboam son of Solomon did evil. He promoted idolatry and prostitution. So God sent Egypt to take away his wealth. He was now much less than his father Solomon, even though he had wanted to be greater. We are given a likely reason why Rehoboam was so bad. His mother was not an Israelite but an Ammonite. Typically, Ammonites would worship a different god (1 Kings 11:5).

King Rehoboam of Judah was succeeded by his son Abijah. In the Books of the Kings God gives His assessment of whether kings were good or bad. Abijah was a bad one. But his son Asa was good. Asa removed the spiritual damage that Abijah had done. Asa was not perfect, but God still assessed Asa positively. Meanwhile, in the northern kingdom of Israel, the evil dynasty of Jeroboam was replaced by the evil dynasty of Baasha. This set the pattern of the rest of the kings. The northern kingdom of Israel had only bad kings. The southern kingdom of Judah had both good and bad kings.

Introduction to the Book of 1 Chronicles

The two Books of Chronicles form a second history of Israel. They go right back to the time of Adam and cover the names of people through to the time of David. Following the names, they then describe the history of the kingdom of Judah from David to the exile into Babylon. The two books of Chronicles are a parallel record of history to the two books of Kings.

The history of the Books of Chronicles differ from history of the Books of Kings in three main ways. Firstly, it covers the genealogies of God's people going back to Adam from the time before the Kings. Secondly, it has a much greater emphasis on the temple at Jerusalem and things to do with it. Thirdly, it is concerned primarily with the kings of Judah and not with the kings of Israel. Chronicles is therefore a Chronicle of how God's lived with His people in Jerusalem. The key event in the books of Chronicles is the building and organisation of the temple in Jerusalem. This was how God lived with His people and interacted with them.

The first nine chapters of the first book of Chronicles cover the genealogies from Adam to David. There is a brief mention of King Saul, but only the events of his death. The remaining chapters are about King David, the people around him and the preparation for the building of the Temple of God in Jerusalem. There is a detailed description of the procession of the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem and the praise from David because of it. There is a description of the promises of God to David and a description of the people organised for the services of the temple.

Day 78: 1 Chronicles 1 and 16

1 Chronicles 1 is the first of nine chapters on the genealogies of man. There is a brief list from Adam to the time of Noah, and then detail of the immediate descendants of Noah's sons. These were to become the nations that were listed in Genesis 10. The genealogies then lead to Abraham and his descendants. 1 Chronicles 1 is a reminder of many of the characters we have read about. Chapters 2-9 cover the descendants of the sons of Israel, the 12 tribes. More information is given on the descendants of the tribe of Judah than the other tribes. This section takes us to King David.

1 Chronicles 16 describes the first part of an important event. In it the ark of the covenant of God reached the city of Jerusalem. In other words, the symbol of the presence of God reached the city of

God. It went into a special tent that King David had made for it, where it was to stay until it went into the temple that Solomon built. The arrival of the presence of God is associated with blessing, praise and thanks. The chapter contains a Psalm of praise, which is really a collection of part of Psalm 105, all of Psalm 96 and part of Psalm 106. All these refer to the nations. The temple of God at Jerusalem was to be a witness to all nations. Singers and gatekeepers were set up with the ark of the covenant. Sacrifices, however, were offered at the Tabernacle which was still at Gibeon. The Tabernacle was to continue being used until the temple of God had been built.

Day 79: 1 Chronicles 21 and 22

In 1 Chronicles 21 David was caused to count the number of his army. This was considered a sin by God and resulted in a choice of 3 punishments. David chose the one that was brought directly by God because God is merciful. This turned out to be true because God mercifully stopped His angel destroying the people. The place of mercy was a threshing floor. In the first verse of the next chapter, David learnt that this exact place was to become the place of the altar of God and the house of God. In all Israel's history, they had been told that a place would be revealed to them. Now, for the first time, they knew where God would place His house and His name. It was a place of mercy and was a place where God will choose to be merciful in the future. It was where the ark of the covenant would be placed, which had the 'mercy-seat.' God wants to be merciful to man, but man must come to God in the way God requires. One way is sacrifice as explained in the Law of Moses. An important principle of sacrifice is that the person offering must make a personal sacrifice of materials to God.

Now that the place of the house of God was known, the preparations for the building began. 1 Chronicles 22 described the extent of these. The number of precious metals provided was enormous, and the cedar came from the forest of Lebanon. It had to be a house fit for God. David recognised that what was happening was a fulfilment of the promise that God made to him. He would have a son who would build the house of God. David did all he could to prepare the materials, the people and his son Solomon for this work.

Day 80: 1 Chronicles 28 and 29

The preparations for the building of the house of God continued in 1 Chronicles 28. David called in the leaders of the people and explained the reasons for the building. God had told him that Solomon was to build the house. David had received the plan for the building from God. He knew exactly what was needed and who was to do what. This included the chariot of God, which was the cherubim. These were winged creatures made of gold that were to carry the presence of God. By this we understand it to mean the glory or brightness of God's presence. Those who were to build the house of God were to be careful to build in the right way, because God understood the motives of the heart.

The treasure used for the temple of God included the spoils of war which God gave David. It also included a lot of personal wealth from David and the people, as we read in 1 Chronicles 29. The people gave willingly and happily. There are lessons on how believers can give because God loves a cheerful giver. There are also lessons on where our wealth comes from. Everything we have comes from God in the first place, as David says. The chapter and 1 Chronicles end with the coronation of Solomon and the death of David. We note that they sat on the 'throne of the Lord.' This means they

sat as representative of God on the throne of God. They were to reign for God as His earthly representative.

Introduction to the Book of 2 Kings

2 Kings takes us from the time of King Ahaziah of Israel and covers when the northern kingdom of Israel was taken over by the Assyrians. There were no good kings over Israel in the north and the kingdom went spiritually downwards until it was removed. God sent Elijah and Elisha to bring the people back to the God of Israel. The nation did not listen, although individuals did trust in God. There was a removal of forms of idolatry in the time of king Jehu, but there was no clear national return to the God of Israel. God blessed Israel with a revival of territory at the time of Jeroboam II, but then the kingdom slowly was taken over by foreign countries until the Assyrians ended it entirely. The southern kingdom of Judah barely survived themselves. It was also overrun by the Assyrians. The king of that time, King Hezekiah, trusted in God and His trust was rewarded. God intervened to destroy the Assyrian army that surrounded the besieged city of Jerusalem.

The southern kingdom of Judah in the Book of 2 Kings started under the good King Jehoshaphat. But his son Jehoram and grandson Ahaziah were more like sons of the evil king Ahab than the good Jehoshaphat. There were some later good kings, most notably Hezekiah and Josiah. Once they had died, the evil returned. Things in the kingdom got so bad spiritually that they could not be cured. First Egypt, then finally Babylon invaded. And both kingdoms of Israel and Judah were gone. No longer would they have independent sovereignty in Bible times. God did not destroy the people completely. Some were preserved in exile and dispersed among the nations waiting the future purpose of God to come about.

Day 81: 2 Kings 2 and 4

2 Kings 2 has the record of the end of the ministry of the prophet Elijah and its transfer to the prophet Elisha. This was symbolised by the transfer of the cloak of Elijah to Elisha. Elijah was taken away in a whirlwind leaving Elisha alone. Just like Elijah, the prophet Elisha was able to perform miracles. This was seen when Elisha was able to make the flow of the river Jordan stop. The second miracle was seen when Elisha healed the waters of Jericho. Evidently, some of the people did not recognise the power of God and made fun of it. This was despite benefiting from the waters themselves. They were punished for making fun of the power of God. It was a lesson to others too.

In 2 Kings 4 the power of God was used to benefit others. Firstly, it allowed a widow to pay off her debts. This prevented the sale of her sons to pay the debt. It is the work of God to help widows. This widow was from a rare family in the northern kingdom of Israel that served God. Secondly, we have the story another woman who respected God. She provided accommodation for Elisha whenever he passed by. In thanks, she was blessed by God and was given a son. When the son had grown, he died. Elisha successfully appealed to God to raise the son from the dead. The chapter also has the healing of the food in a pot and the dividing of the barley to feed a hundred people. We are reminded to the miracles of Jesus, such as the feeding of the 5000 and the raising of the dead. Jesus was a greater prophet than Elijah or Elisha and could do many more miracles.

Day 82: 2 Kings 17 and 18

The end of the northern kingdom of Israel is described in 2 Kings 17. We are told what happened and why. Israel had become as bad as the nations that Israel had got rid of at the time of Joshua. God was being fair and consistent in getting rid of them. Israel was taken to Assyria which was in modern-day Iraq. In their place in Israel, Assyria settled foreigners. These people worshipped both the God of Israel and their own gods. They became the people who were known as the Samaritans at the time of Jesus. Israelites looked down on them because they did not worship God fully.

When the Assyrians came down on the northern kingdom of Israel, they continued their invasion southwards into the kingdom of Judah. King Hezekiah was king at this time. He was a good king and reformed the spiritual worship of the country. We are told in 2 Kings 18 that he trusted in God very much. However, even Hezekiah gave away some of God's treasures to pay off the Assyrians. This did not work, and the Assyrians came against Jerusalem. In this chapter we have the Assyrian message to attract the people of Israel over to them. They knew the thinking of the Israelites and were able to quote from their prophets. The situation was humanly hopeless.

Day 83: 2 Kings 19 and 20

Hezekiah learnt of the message of the Assyrians in 2 Kings 19. He did what believers should do in a crisis – he humbly took the matter to God in prayer and trusted in the Lord. He did not assume that God would help him. God replied to Hezekiah through the prophet Isaiah. In the reply, Jerusalem (Zion) is likened to a woman who tosses her hair at the arrogance of Assyria. God sent His angel and killed 185,000 Assyrian men from around Jerusalem. Jerusalem was again the place of God's mercy for God's people. The king of Assyria returned to his own land and was later killed in the temple of his false god. This was such a dramatic victory that the surrounding nations heard about it. They realised the greatness of the God of Israel.

Life did not get any easier for Hezekiah. In 2 Kings 20 we learn that he had a fatal illness. In his anguish, he pleaded with God to be able to live longer. He appealed based on his faithful life. Once again, God answered him through the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah told him that in 3 days, he would be healed and go up to the temple of the Lord. God gave Hezekiah a sign that he would be healed, and that God would give him 15 more years of life. Hezekiah received a delegation from the land of Babylon. Babylon had been a rival to Assyria, and they were grateful that the Assyrian army had been destroyed. Hezekiah displayed his wealth to them which the Babylonians would return later to take.

Day 84: 2 Kings 22 and 25

After the reign of king Hezekiah, Israel turned away from God. They forgot the victory that God had given them over the Assyrians. This was in the reigns of king Manasseh and king Amon. Then the young king Josiah came to the throne. He was only 8 when he took the throne. When he was 18, he began to repair the temple following the neglect of the previous kings. At this time, they found a copy of the law, which was read to Josiah. Josiah reacted in the right way. He admits the faults of the people and set about a national reform of seeking God. A prophetess called Huldah gave him the reply. God was angry with the people, but Josiah was doing the right thing. Despite Josiah's best efforts, disaster was predicted against the kingdom.

This disaster took place in 2 Kings 25. The Babylonians invaded the land and captured Jerusalem. The king at that time, Zedekiah, was not faithful and did not trust in God. There was no spiritual

remedy. God allowed His temple at Jerusalem to be destroyed and the precious metals were taken to Babylon. By the end of the chapter, the city of Jerusalem was burnt, the temple gone, and the king killed. There was nothing left of the kingdom, except that we learn that there was a previous king of Judah, Jehoiachin, still living in Babylon. After many years later this king was taken out of prison and ate at the king's table. It is as if we are to understand that the death of the kingdom was not the end. It is a hint that in the future there would be a king who is a son of David who will restore the kingdom. Jehoiachin is linked to Jesus in Matthew 1:12-16. This final section of the book of 2 Kings looks forward to Jesus, who will be the king that is the son of David and who will restore the kingdom.

Introduction to the Book of 2 Chronicles

The second book of Chronicles starts where the first book of Chronicles ends. 1 Chronicles ended with the death of King David. 2 Chronicles starts with the next king, Solomon, asking for wisdom. With this wisdom, and with the information from his father, Solomon built the temple of God in Jerusalem. The symbol of God's presence, the ark of the covenant, was taken into the temple. And God's glory filled the temple. Solomon gave a prayer of dedication for the temple, to which God replied. At the height of Solomon's greatness, we read how the kings and queens of the world came to hear of Solomon's wisdom. There is no mention of the faults of Solomon which we get in 1 Kings. The greatness of the kingdom of Solomon soon disappears after Solomon's death. No other king approached this greatness of this golden age.

The northern tribes of Israel rebelled in the time of Solomon's son and set up a separate kingdom in the north. But the book of Chronicles concentrates on the southern kingdom of Judah and the kings who were from the line of king David. The history is an honest account of the highs and lows of the kings that followed. The good kings of Asa, Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah get more mention than the bad kings. The book ends with the fall of Jerusalem and the exile of a small number of the people. Like the books of the Kings, the books of Chronicles do not end on that sad note. In Kings it focused on the fact that there was still a king who was a son of David who was keeping the hope alive. In Chronicles it focuses on the restoration of the temple that God had planned under King Cyrus of Persia. The focus on Chronicles on the temple is maintained right to the end.

Day 85: 2 Chronicles 12 and 13

The king who succeeded Solomon was his son Rehoboam. We read about Rehoboam in 2 Chronicles 12. Rehoboam was not like his father. He turned away from God soon and completely. In punishment, God sent the king of Egypt to invade the land and capture many of the cities of the land. God sent a prophet to tell Rehoboam the reasons for the invasion. Rehoboam and the leaders reacted in the right way. Even so, they had to serve the king of Egypt and they lost much of the wealth that Solomon had collected. The overall view of Rehoboam was that he was an evil king.

Rehoboam was replaced by his son Abijah. His most notable achievement is described in 2 Chronicles 13. When they faced with an army from king Jeroboam of Israel, we are given an insight into the different ways of worship between the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Judah had the temple worship and priesthood, while Israel relied on golden

calves. In this battle, Abijah trusted in God and so God gave them the victory. The record does not tell us God's overall view of Abijah, although 1 Kings 15 tells us he was evil.

Day 86: 2 Chronicles 14 and 15

The reigns of evil kings ended in 2 Chronicles 14 with the coming of good king Asa. There was a revival of the worship of God and the keeping of God's laws. There was a parallel removal of items of false worship. God rewarded Asa with 10 years of peace. Then there was an invasion of a vast army from Ethiopia. Like Abijah before him, Asa trusted in God and his trust was rewarded. They had a victory and received a large quantity of spoil.

In 2 Chronicles 15 we are given a principle that operated throughout the time of the kings. It comes in the second verse – "The Lord is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you." If a king tried to do what God wanted, then God was with him. But if the king did not do what God wanted, then God was not with him. In Asa we see this principle clearly. Asa was encouraged to do what God wanted. He even went into the northern kingdom of Israel and reformed parts of it. Because Asa and the people sought God, God was with them and gave them peace. This principle works in the lives of individuals too.

Day 87: 2 Chronicles 16 and 17

King Asa is described as a good king. However, 2 Chronicles 16 tells us that he was not perfect. Despite his reliance on God when facing the Ethiopian enemy, he did not do this later when he faced the lesser enemy of the king of Israel. Instead, he took God's gold from the temple and bought the help of the king of Aram. God sent a prophet to tell him the problem of his lack of faith. As a result, Asa was told he would be at war from now on. Asa did not react well to this information and turned against the prophet. Even in a sickness in his old age, Asa did not turn to God. Asa is a lesson on the need to keep trusting in God throughout one's life with all our problems.

The son of Asa was king Jehoshaphat. 2 Chronicles 17 tells us that God thought Jehoshaphat was good. He reformed his kingdom further and removed some of the places of false worship that still existed. The unusual thing about Jehoshaphat was his commitment to teaching the people the laws of God. He sent teaching parties throughout his kingdom so that the people themselves would know the law of God. This made sure that the kingdom was based on the law. As a result, Jehoshaphat had peace and honour with the nations around him. Even the Arabs gave him gifts!

Day 88: 2 Chronicles 19 and 20

King Jehoshaphat was good, although he did make a key error of judgment. 2 Chronicles 19 tells us what God thought of his friendship with the evil king Ahab of Israel. Verse 2 says, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord?" Jehoshaphat had chosen to be a friend of Ahab, but Ahab was a worshipper of Baal and a destroyer of the worship of God. Jehoshaphat's friendship with such a person was inappropriate. It is a lesson to believers not to be a friend of those who hate God. Jehoshaphat made a good choice in choosing to teach the people about the law of God. His advice on how to judge the people follows the advice given at the time of Moses about judges. They must avoid bribery, bias and injustice. This can only be done with courage, because judgment will involve upsetting people including friends and relatives.

2 Chronicles 20 describes a unique event in the Bible. It was a battle where the army was led by the choir! Judah had been invaded by a vast army of 3 nations. Jehoshaphat did have a large army, but it was no match for this one. Jehoshaphat and the people chose to rely on God. They proclaimed a fast and prayed for help. The prayer was to the temple and its content was based on the original prayer of Solomon at the temple. This was that God would help those who prayed to the temple. God responded to Jehoshaphat and said that they would not need to fight the battle. Jehoshaphat believed this and sent a choir ahead of the army to praise God. Here was a great example of how to put oneself and the people right before God, and then to trust in Him to fight our battles.

Day 89: 2 Chronicles 34 and 35

We now pass over many of the other Kings of Judah to read about another good king. King Josiah is introduced in 2 Chronicles 34. He was only 16 years old when he made the decision to follow God rather than idols. This led to the repairing of the temple of God in Jerusalem. One feature of good kings is that they build the house of God. A feature of bad kings is that they neglect it. During the building of the temple, they found a copy of the law of God. When it was read, Josiah realised what God would think of them. He humbled himself and got the people to enter into a covenant to follow the commands of God. The response of God through the prophet was that things were so bad that disaster was coming. But it was because of the good behaviour of Josiah that the disaster was delayed.

An example of the reforms of king Josiah was the Passover they kept in his 18th year. There was no other Passover like this during the times of the kings. Even Solomon did not keep one like this. The animals were provided by Josiah himself. The quantity sacrificed caused logistic problems for the priesthood. The end of Josiah's life seems unnecessary. He interfered with someone else's fight and was killed. Righteous people mourned his death, including the prophet Jeremiah. So ended the last good king of Judah. From then on Judah had a series of bad kings, ending in the disaster that God had predicted in this chapter.

Introduction to the Prophets of the Old Testament

The prophets are a significant part of the Old Testament. These were people chosen by God to speak God's words to the leaders and people at different times. The prophets told the people what God thought of them and gave them some relevant advice. Usually, the words were words of warning and correction. This was because it was usual for the people to turn away from God's laws and do evil. The prophets were often sent to the king.

Sometimes the prophets were sent to foreign nations. Foreign nations were accountable to God for how they treated God people. This follows on from God's words to Abraham where God said He would bless those who blessed Israel and curse those who cursed Israel. The nations who interacted with Israel and Israel themselves were accountable to God. God did not send prophets to nations who had nothing to do with Israel.

There were prophets which spoke a lot to God's people. These are called the 'major' prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. There were also prophets who spoke only a few things. There are the minor prophets like Joel, Amos and Jonah. Jonah was the earliest of these prophets, who we read in Part A of the Bible reading course. Some of the minor only have single chapters. In the selection of what to read here, we will read examples from all the prophets.

Most of the books of the prophets come from the times of the kings of Israel and Judah. We will take them in an approximate chronological order. Following the time of the kings, there was a time of exile and a time of returning to Israel. There were prophets of God during these times too. This shows that God was with His people wherever they were, whether they were in exile or not.

Introduction to the Book of Jonah

The Book of Jonah describes the events of the prophet Jonah. He was sent on a mission to speak to a Gentile nation and bring them to repentance. This mission displeased Jonah and Jonah sailed off in a boat in the opposite direction. Jonah did not want to save Gentiles! He was a fool thinking that he could hide from God. God intervened by sending a storm so that the boat was nearly destroyed. At this point Jonah admitted that he was the problem and told the ship crew to throw him overboard. What we learn from this is that Jonah was now willing to die to spare the life of the other Gentiles in the boat. This changed everything. Jonah was rescued by a large fish, and he did go to preach to the Gentile nation of Assyria.

The Book of Jonah is an unusual story, not just because it was a prophet sent to a Gentile nation. It was unusual because the people repented when they heard the message. As a result, God saved the city of Nineveh. Jonah was not pleased. He had still not learnt the lesson. God is gracious and compassionate, as Jonah knew. But Jonah did not want God to be gracious and compassionate to a nation that was not Israel. In the final event of the story, God raised up a plant to protect Jonah from the heat and then God destroyed it. Jonah was displeased with this act of God as well. But God made His point well. God can raise and destroy nations just like He could a plant. But why should He destroy a nation who was willing to repent? God can and will work with Gentiles. He does not only work with the Jews.

Introduction to the Book of Joel

The name of Joel was a name of foreboding. The prophet Joel spoke of a great invasion and great suffering. He spoke of a time of great problems. Joel's name means 'The Lord is God' and it was God who would bring this time on Israel, so that Israel would know God. The time of trouble was not guaranteed. Israel could avoid the trouble if they listened to the word of Joel. The question is, would they?

We do not know when Joel lived. This means we can look at several periods of Israel and suggest it was applicable. One of these times was the time of Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20. In Joel God was telling His people how they could avoid disaster – by being humble, by repenting and by trust in God.

The final chapter of Joel describes another time of trouble in the future. What is interesting is that Joel is referred to in Acts 2:16. The leaders of Israel at this time should then have feared the troubles spoken about by Joel. Israel did suffer at the hand of the Romans within a generation of these words. However, the circumstances do have differences, so we conclude that the time of chapter 3 is still future.

Day 90: Joel 1, 2 and 3

Joel starts by describing a foreign invasion as like an invasion of locusts. We understand what this means. The locusts take everything of value and leave nothing. This is what would happen to Israel if they did not repent. Israel needed to humble themselves, which is indicated by the mention of sackcloth. They needed to fast and make genuine efforts to appeal to God. God is a God who does listen to the prayers of genuine believers.

Joel 2 described the coming invasion. It was like an earthquake and eclipse together. What is unusual is that God describes the invading force as His army (verse 11). God was using a foreign army to punish His people. He warned them of this in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. Those who persistently disobey God will be punished. Here we read that those who truly repent can be saved because God is gracious and compassionate and loving. God is willing to bless His people if they truly turn to Him. He is even prepared to give His people His Holy Spirit. These words were fulfilled in the time of Acts 2.

Joel 3 describes a future battle. All nations have come against Israel to make Israel afraid. Now it is the turn of the nations to fear the God of Israel. God would judge them in the valley of Jehoshaphat. Although we do not know when and where this is, it is a reference to God coming from Jerusalem. This suggests it is nations coming to fight against Jerusalem. In this battle, the nations will not win. God will punish the nations for what they have done to His people. And God will give blessings to His people from Jerusalem.

Introduction to the Book of Amos

The prophet Amos spoke to Israel at the time of Jeroboam II king of Israel. The prophet was not from Israel but from Judah. The time of Jeroboam II was a time of plenty when the borders of Israel were expanded by God's blessing. But the time was not associated with a spiritual revival. The kingdom of Israel had become complacent with its plenty. They went through the pretence of following God, but God was not fooled. Israel continued to worship the golden calves they had built. They broke all the laws of God in a dramatic fashion. The words of Amos were a call to repentance. They could avoid the predicted disasters if they changed their ways. While most of the book explained the gloomy prospect and the reason why, the book ends with the promise of a future time of blessing. Whether Israel repented or not, God would bring about a great future. But it was not with a king from northern Israel, it would be with a son of David. The sons of David had ruled over the southern kingdom of Judah.

Amos has similarities with the prophet of Judah who spoke to Jeroboam I king of Israel (1 Kings 13). Both were from Judah, and both confronted the evil in Israel at Bethel where they worshipped a golden calf. Both prophets spoke against its altar. Both mention a lion, which Israel should be afraid of. Ultimately, both prophets remind us of another prophet of Judah, Jesus, who is the lion of the tribe of Judah. It is he who will bring the future time of blessing.

Day 91: Amos 1 and 2

The first two chapters of Amos are a series of judgments. There are seven against seven different nations. They are against 6 nations around Israel, and then the seventh is against Israel itself. The judgments against Israel make up most of the book of Amos. Amos predicted fire against the 6 nations. But against Israel there is planned a whole series of plagues. God explained why He has made these judgments. Most of the reasons given are the way the nation has treated God's people

Israel. There is one exception which is Moab (2:1-3). This nation destroyed any trace of the king of Edom, by destroying the bones. Edom was the same as Esau who was the brother of Israel. God held Moab accountable for its crime against a brother nation of Israel.

The prophet Amos makes it clear that the danger he predicted comes from Zion, that is, Jerusalem. It will come from the south, where Amos came from. It comes from the presence of God which was based there. God will hold all nations accountable from this place. God will roar like a lion, and people should fear. The aim of this fear was to bring about change. An earthquake would come and bring the start of the judgments.

Introduction to the Book of Hosea

The prophet Hosea spoke to the northern kingdom of Israel at about the same time as Amos, in the reign of Jeroboam II. While Amos spoke in the first part of the reign, during the time of King Uzziah of Judah, Hosea covered a period of 4 kings of Judah from Uzziah to Hezekiah. Hosea spoke primarily against Israel. Like Amos, God is portrayed as a lion to be feared (5:14, 13:7). From the message of Hosea, we understand that Israel did not listen to the earlier words of God through the prophet Amos.

Israel was like a prostitute who was unfaithful to her husband. God was her husband, and she was unfaithful to Him. She turned to false gods and idols, and continually worshipped them instead of their God. The golden calf idols continued to be a problem. God had to act against Israel. In Hosea we learn the other reasons why. Israel had gone to Egypt and Assyria for help instead of relying on God. God remembered the good times of the past when Israel did trust in Him. He wished for these again. It will only happen if He punished Israel for her bad behaviour and brought about better times. Hosea ends with God saying that He will do this. There will be a better time, but not for those listening to the message.

Day 92: Hosea 1, 2 and 3

The prophecy of Hosea started with a parable which Hosea had to act out. He must show Israel what their faithfulness looked like. It looked like a prostitute who could not stop being unfaithful to her husband. Hosea had to marry a prostitute and have children by her. This he does, calling the names of their children as a witness to Israel. Firstly, there was Jezreel. This told Israel that God had not forgotten the sins of Jeroboam II's great grandfather Jehu, who had gone beyond the instructions of God. Instead of only destroying the evil dynasty of Ahab, Jehu went further and killed the king of Judah (2 Kings 9:27) and his family (2 Kings 10:12-14). Secondly there was Lo-Ruhamah which means 'not loved'. It was a sign to Israel that they were no longer loved. Thirdly, there was Lo-Ammi, meaning 'not my people.' It was a sign that God did not consider them His people any longer.

The unfaithful prostitute Israel left God and went after other lovers. She lived in that state distant from God. God said that He would bring her back. And God got Hosea to act this out too. Hosea had to buy back his wife and love her. In between the times of being with his wife, there was a period of separation. God says that this would occur with Israel too. There would be no king or true worship until a future time when there would be. This time of no king or high priest or place of worship was the time between the Old and New Testament.

Day 93: Hosea 4 and 5

Having given Israel the parable of the prostitute, God now told Israel the problem plainly. In the beginning of chapter 4 we read that Israel had no faith, no love and no knowledge of God. Instead, they cursed, lied, murdered, stole and committed adultery. They were lawless. They loved being like that. They were spiritually dead because of lack of knowledge. They worshipped false gods on the hills and under the trees. In summary, Israel was like a stubborn cow that refused to do what it should. It is like the golden calves they worshipped.

Chapter 5 again told Israel that they were like prostitutes. They had gone away from the true God. The priests and the royal house were the leaders in this. They pretended to want to seek God. But God will not be found by those whose heart was so committed to evil. Israel was so sick that there was no cure. And Judah was also sick. There is no cure. What needed to happen is for God to punish them so severely that they had no hope. Only then, possibly, would they come back to God. Only when there is no one else to help them.

Introduction to the Book of Isaiah

The prophet Isaiah spoke at the same time as Hosea, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. While Hosea spoke in the northern kingdom of Israel, Isaiah spoke to the southern kingdom of Judah. Judah was in a spiritually bad way in the time of Uzziah and beyond. They followed idols and injustice. In the reign of Ahaz, God offered Ahaz a sign so that he might believe. Ahaz refused. Prophecies were also given against Jerusalem and the nations. There would be punishment and reward as appropriate. Nevertheless, God gave prophecies of a prosperous future time of the kingdom of God which we know would be fulfilled by Jesus. The prophecies of Isaiah switch from a warning of dramatic punishment to visions of great times of blessing.

The centre of Isaiah, chapters 36-39, provide historical narrative of what happened to king Hezekiah when the Assyrians invaded. God delivered Jerusalem in a dramatic way by directly intervening and destroying the Assyrian army. The remaining chapters of Isaiah provide inspiring information about God, His supremacy and His attitude to what His people were doing. These chapters are as comforting as any of the Psalms. Woven into this message is additional information about the future age of God's kingdom and Jesus. Isaiah's message and description of the future age of God's kingdom is more inspiring than any other book of the Bible. A time of peace, joy and knowledge of God is coming. Man cannot bring about this time. It is God who will bring about this great time for His people.

Day 94: Isaiah 1, 3 and 4

Isaiah begins by confronting the kingdom of Judah with the problem. The children of Israel no longer behaving like children of God. They are so spiritually sick that they have open sores from top to bottom, like a man full of leprosy. They were so evil they were described as being like Sodom and Gomorrah. Even though they still offer the sacrifices as required by the law, it was their heart that is a problem. They were so bad that God had stopped accepting their sacrifices and their prayers. Even though their king at this time was Uzziah, a good king, the people were in a bad state. We read elsewhere (2 Kings 15:5 where he is called Azariah) that Uzziah ended his life as a leper, like the state

of his people. In order to improve the situation, the sin of the people had to be removed. If the sinners are not willing to repent, then the sinners would have to be removed. Either way the sin had to stop. God has a plan to turn Jerusalem into a city of righteousness and true faith.

We read Isaiah 2 previously which spoke of a good future but the immediate problem of pride. In Isaiah 3, God says that they were proud of their sin. This was as bad as Sodom and we know what happened to Sodom - God saved the righteous and destroyed the wicked. He will do the same with this city. The whole society was upside down. They were ruled by the young and the women. And the women are proud. God would change their beauty into ugliness. In chapter 4, we read that the real beauty in Jerusalem will be the branch of the Lord. By reviewing other Scriptures, we understand this as a reference to Jesus. He is the one who will purify the city and cleanse the people.

Day 95: Isaiah 5 and 6

Isaiah 5 described Israel as a vineyard made by God. God had done all He could to make it able to produce good grapes. He even built a wall around it and a watchtower in it. This was so that He could watch over it and protect it from animals who might steal the fruit. Instead, God got mainly bad grapes. There was nothing more God could have done. After waiting years for a good harvest, God decided to end it. God gives them 6 woes, reminding us of the 7 woes Jesus gave Israel in Matthew 23. God speaks of injustice, exploitation and drunkenness. This was not why God had planted His vineyard. God would now punish them with foreign invaders.

There is an unusual vision of God at the beginning of Isaiah 6. Uzziah the king had died, and the people were sad. However, God the king had not died and He continued reigning. God was seated and robed in His temple. God was surrounded by His ministers, in this case described as fiery beings. God was able to cleanse His people, like the prophet Isaiah was cleansed. God was willing to speak to His people and instruct them with what is true. Isaiah was willing to do this. He was to tell the people their stubbornness and their punishment to try and bring the people to repentance. Jesus was to quote these words to the people of Israel in His day too. History was to repeat itself.

Day 96: Isaiah 7 and 8

Between Isaiah 7 and 14, we have the words of Isaiah given in the reign of the wicked king Ahaz. Ahaz was facing a large invasion from the northern armies of Israel and Aram. Yet God, in His mercy, was prepared to save Israel. God offered Ahaz a sign that God would save Him, so that Ahaz would believe in Him. However, Ahaz refused. Ahaz did not want a reason to believe in God, because he had chosen to follow other gods. Despite the wicked reply, God was going to give Israel a sign and a reason to believe in Him. He gave them a prophecy of Jesus, who would be called Immanuel. This name means 'God with us.' God was going to be with His people through Jesus. Jesus would be the reason that any Israelite would be able to believe in God. But the wicked kingdom of Ahaz would be punished in their day.

Isaiah and his children were to be signs to Israel, just in the way that Hosea and his children were. All their names expressed aspects of God's relationship with His own children of Israel. In this case, God was going to save His people from the northern armies through Assyria. What is unusual is how God now calls the Assyrians 'God with us,' or Immanuel. They would be able to see God working through the Assyrians. As a result of such work, God is the one they should fear, not the northern

armies. Unfortunately, the spiritual habits had got so bad. Instead of listening to the prophets like Isaiah, they listened to mediums who contacted the dead! What could God do with such people?

Day 97: Isaiah 9 and 14

Despite the wickedness of Israel at the time of Ahaz, Isaiah gave Israel a message of future hope. Isaiah 9 predicted the times of Jesus. Verse 2 is quoted in Matthew 4:15-16 about the work of Jesus, and verses 6-8 describe the future work of Jesus. On behalf of God, Jesus would reign as king from the throne of David in Jerusalem for ever. He could be described as 'God with us.' The second part of the chapter returns to the problems of Ahaz. They had not listened to God when times were good or when times were bad. They had all done evil from the leader to the follower. So God would punish them with foreign armies.

One of the armies that God would bring against His people was Babylon. Isaiah 13 described this. But all those who destroy the people of God are also accountable to God. Since Babylon was evil, it too would also be eventually punished. Isaiah 14 is a prophecy of the time when Babylon, the head of the nations, would itself be totally destroyed. It starts speaking of a time when Israel would be helped by other nations and rule them. Then there is a graphic description of how Babylon's fall would be total and complete. There would not be enough remaining of Babylon to give it a good burial. The words are given in the form of a parable. Here dead nations are described as dead people in the grave welcoming what is left of the dead Babylon. The chapter ends with warnings against the Assyrians and Philistines which were given in the year king Ahaz died. From now on, Isaiah spoke in the days of King Hezekiah.

Day 98: Isaiah 25 and 26

Isaiah 24-27 is known as the 'Little Apocalypse' because some of the language reminds us of the Book of Revelation. Like Revelation, there is punishment and salvation. We have selected the more positive chapters to read. Chapter 25 tells us that God always operates faithfully. This means that He needs to remove the cities of the proud. And it means that God stands with the poor to help them. God will provide a feast of good things for His people. He will remove their ignorance. He will remove tears. And He will swallow up death, which means He will remove death. This is the ultimate picture of happiness which we see in the Book of Revelation too. The people of God will say at that time, "This is our God. We trusted in Him and He saved us."

Isaiah 26 continues with God's people singing about the good things they will enjoy. God helps those who trust in Him. He permits them to walk into the city of the righteous and to find peace and security. These are the people who have done what is right by keeping God's laws. On the other hand, there are the wicked who continue to be wicked whether they are shown grace or not. We think of King Ahaz here, who was given victories by God yet refused to change from his evil. The destiny of the wicked and the righteous are made clear. Both will die, but both will not be raised from the dead. Only the righteous will be raised from the dead and given new life. The righteous can take comfort in this and wait patiently even though a storm is coming on the earth.

Day 99: Isaiah 42 and 43

Isaiah 42:9 tells us about how God acts. God acts by telling His people what will happen before it happens. Isaiah 42 is an example of this. The first four verses speak of a servant of God who would come. This sounds like Jesus and this is confirmed in Matthew 12:18-21. Jesus would bring justice and hope to the peoples of the earth. He would be the one to open the eyes of the blind and free those in spiritual darkness. Yet there are other blind people who could not be helped. These are spoken about at the end of the chapter who are the spiritually blind and who do not want to see.

One of the way that God acts is by making the people of Israel. Isaiah 43 describes some of the things that God did to make them. Having made them, God loves them and looks after them. He brought them out of Egypt, through the water of the Red Sea and gave them water in the desert. The presence of the people of Israel is a witness to the presence of God. They exist because God exists and made them. The predictions God made about them is evidence that God exists. Even though Israel does not always honour God, they are still His witnesses. God can forgive their sins against Him, as He has done throughout their history. God wants Israel to honour Him, because He made them for His glory.

Day 100: Isaiah 44 and 52

Isaiah 44 continues the theme that the people of Israel are God's witnesses. It says this for the third time in two chapters. The Jews are witnesses that God exists. He is the only God that exists. All other gods and idols are nothing and it is foolishness to believe in them. God chose and blessed His people, so that they would follow Him and be His witness. God made the people of Israel just like God made a child. God also predicted a time when there would be a king called Cyrus. This Cyrus would announce the decision to rebuild Jerusalem. This prophecy means, of course, that Jerusalem would at some stage be destroyed prior to this. These events did occur. King Cyrus was a Persian king who initiated the rebuilding of Jerusalem at the time of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Isaiah 52 prophecies about the future of Jerusalem. Like Isaiah 44 it spoke of a time when the city would be rebuilt from ruins. This prophecy means, of course, that the city would be ruined. Although God had to punish the disobedient city, it was not what God wanted. He wanted it to be faithful so that He could reward it. He wanted to treat it as a faithful queen and give her fine clothes and jewellery. The chapter tells us how this change would happen. God would send messengers to take good news of salvation. This takes us to the time of Jesus. The chapter ends with the suffering of God's servant, who is Jesus. The end of Isaiah 52 runs into the dramatic and revealing Isaiah 53, which is about the sufferings of Jesus. This is how Jerusalem will be come to its time of future glory.

Day 101: Isaiah 56 and 58

Isaiah 56 is a call to do what is right. The chapter targets two groups of people, who will be blessed. The two groups were foreigners and eunuchs. Foreigners were not allowed into the temple of God and so were far away from God's temple. To these foreigners, God promises joy in His house. Eunuchs were not allowed to be priests (if they were Levites) and they had to endure the shame of not having children. To these eunuchs, God promises them a good name in His temple which would be better than having children. Those who keep His commands are special in God's eyes, even if they are not special in the eyes of men. God's house was not just made for Israelites. It was to be a house of prayer for all nations.

Israel went through the actions of worshipping God. They even fasted! But Isaiah 58 is about what God expects from someone who fasts. Someone who fasts must also live in the right way with God. If they do not, then their fasting is a waste of time. God explained to them that they fought and quarrelled when they fasted so that their fasting was not with humility. And even if they were humble on the day of the fast, that did not make them humble people. We are given the characteristics of what a godly person must be like. This advice is like the words of Jesus in the parable of the sheep and goats at the end of Matthew 25. They must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, give the traveller shelter, free the captives and do what is right. If a follower of God were to do this, then it is spiritually like the light of the sun rising at dawn. Then God would listen to their prayers and help.

Day 102: Isaiah 59 and 61

Israel was far from God because of their sins. It is the sin that separates man from God. Isaiah 59 makes this clear. Those who bring evil are described as like one who hatches snakes. Snakes are a symbol of sin (Numbers 21:4-9). Jesus used the same description of the evil hatched by the Pharisees in his day. Another symbol of evil is darkness. Israel was so dark that they fell over even in midday. It is like they were blind. Justice and righteousness were a long way away from Israel in these days. God saw all this and was disappointed. So, God did what was necessary. God provided salvation for man. It was like God was a warrior who put on His clothes for action. Verse 20 is a key verse. Those who repent of their sins and change will find salvation. This is the message of the prophets.

The opening words of Isaiah 61 are quoted by Jesus about himself in Luke 4:18-19. Jesus is the way in which God will bring about the fulfilment of the words of the prophets. Jesus gave good news to the poor and gave freedom to those who were spiritually in prison with their sins. Jesus was the one who provided comfort and hope. Yet he also spoke of a day of judgment when the wicked would be judged. Isaiah describes a time of joy and righteousness and blessing. It is God who will make this happen through the man God choose for this work. The prophet Isaiah spoke of spiritual darkness in Israel during his life, but he also spoke more clearly of the work of Jesus. This is the good news of Jesus that was spoken in the prophets long before the days of Jesus.

Introduction to the Book of Micah

The prophet Micah spoke at the same time as Isaiah and Hosea but covered only the last three kings of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He was not active in the time of king Uzziah when Amos and Isaiah were active. Together the prophets covered the time of the decline and end of the northern kingdom of Israel. Micah spoke against both Israel and Judah. The message came from the presence of God in the temple at Jerusalem.

Micah warned of a time when the capitals of both Israel and Judah, Samaria and Jerusalem, would become ruins. He confronted them with their sin. Their prophets, priests and leaders had all left the laws of God. They enriched themselves by injustice and evil. So disaster would come on them. But it would not be the end of the people. Micah changes repeatedly from warning to announcing a better future. The disaster would become before the greatness. Chapter 4 describes a future where even the nations come to Jerusalem to learn the law of God. Even now the disaster could be averted

by repentance. Micah ends by saying there is no one like God who forgives sin (Micah 7:18). The name Micah means 'who is like God'. Micah was a living witness of God's ability to forgive.

Day 103: Micah 4 and 5

God gave Micah a vision of the future so that they could look forward to better times. Chapter 4 describes a time when Jerusalem will be the centre of God messages to the world. Nations will come to the city to learn the law of God. They will come to have their disputes resolved. This will result in peace and prosperity for all. Jerusalem will be the throne of God's king. However, it is not world peace for ever at this stage. The picture includes rebellion of the nations who come against Jerusalem. Anyone who chooses to fight against the God of Israel will not succeed.

Micah 5 speaks about the ruler of God's people. Verse 2 contains the famous words about Bethlehem as the hometown of the future ruler. This is a prophecy of the birthplace of Jesus. This is why the Roman leader knew where to go and tried to kill Jesus as a baby. Verse 4 describes this ruler as being a shepherd. Jesus was known as the good shepherd. God gave Israel glimpses of different aspects of the future, so that they know that God has an overall plan. But it is not a clear picture. The prophecy switches between different times. There are times of exile, times of victory and times of punishment mixed in together. This is why it is difficult to put a clear sequence of events together.

Introduction to the Book of Zephaniah

Zephaniah prophesied in the time of King Josiah. Josiah was a good king, although he was only 8 years old when he came to the throne. His father and grandfather were wicked kings, so Josiah inherited a bad spiritual culture. It is likely that Zephaniah spoke in this early period of Josiah's reign, because there is nothing good said about the kingdom. When the book of the Law of Moses was rediscovered, Josiah realised that God would be angry with the kingdom (2 Chronicles 34:21). The words of Zephaniah fit with this time. Zephaniah prophesied of the complete removal of the kingdom of Judah. He counselled the people to be humble, to seek God and to do what was right.

Although a short book, Zephaniah also prophesied against the nations around Israel. He spoke of the Philistines in the west, Moab and Ammon in the east, Assyria in the north and Cush in the south. All come under the adverse judgment of God. Zephaniah spoke of a time when all peoples, not just Israel, would honour God, and worshippers will come from beyond Cush (Ethiopia). In the end God will save Jerusalem and establish His people there.

Day 104: Zephaniah 1 and 3

Zephaniah starts with a dramatic warning. The kingdom would be swept away and left with only ruins. Even the wildlife would disappear. God would particularly act against those who worshipped the gods Baal and Molech. It includes those who worshipped both the God of Israel and the false gods at the same time. The people thought it was ok to worship both and that God would do nothing about it. Zephaniah's message is that this is not true. God holds people accountable, and God will act. They will be offered like a sacrifice that is made to remove sins.

Zephaniah 3 speaks about the evil culture of Judah. Anyone who had responsibilities had misused their position. Rulers, prophets and priests were all corrupt. The contrast is with God who never does anything wrong. God's justice will prevail, including the punishment of evil doers both Gentile and Jewish. Both Israel and the nations will be punished for their pride. But God will save the humble. The humble of Israel would do what was right and God would take delight in His people.

Introduction to the Book of Jeremiah

Jeremiah prophesied from the early days of Josiah through to the destruction of Jerusalem and beyond. He began speaking 5 years before Josiah discovered the scroll of the Law of Moses. His message was like that of Zephaniah's and the other prophets. Judah was full of idolatry and injustice. It was a culture of evil from those who were the least to those who were the greatest. Those who should know better, the prophets and priests, did not. They worked for money and told the people what they wanted to hear. That was the way the people liked it.

Jeremiah's message was not liked. He was particularly targeted by the false prophets. There were many false prophets. Jeremiah was disliked by his family and hometown. They tried to kill him. The priests and kings did not like his message and fought against him. But God protected Jeremiah, just as He said He would. The sufferings of Jeremiah remind us of the sufferings of Jesus. Many other aspects of his life match that of Jesus, including being known by God before his birth. At times Jeremiah stood alone, telling the people the truth. At times, only God stood by him. Jeremiah was to live long enough to see His words be fulfilled and Jerusalem destroyed. He witnessed the disobedience of the people and the righteous punishment from God. He witnessed the burning of the temple of God. As a priest, this would have been tragic to him. He was then violently taken down to Egypt against his will.

Jeremiah was chosen as a prophet to not just Israel but to the nations. God's message of accountability and warning of punishment went to them as well. Much of Jeremiah is warning and descriptions of punishments over the approximately 40 years that Jeremiah prophesied. This makes the Book of Jeremiah appeal less to readers than other prophecies. Yet Jeremiah also has a positive message about the longer-term future. It ends in the same way as 2 Kings, with a king who is a son of David in exile. The blood line of David continued, with the prospect of a future fulfilment of God's promise to David about a great king.

Day 105: Jeremiah 1 and 2

Jeremiah prophesied from early in the reign of Josiah, before the good king started his reforms. But the spiritual situation was already too bad. The key message of Jeremiah was made clear from the start - the kingdom of Judah would fall to foreign armies because of their idolatry. The reforms of Josiah would not undo the damage of idolatry that had already spread through the kingdom. Jeremiah was given two signs to confirm this. The first with an almond rod, telling him it is time. The second with a boiling pot linked to the north. This told him the boiling of the nation would come from the north.

God sent the young lad Jeremiah with this message of disaster. The people were not going to like it. Anticipating the negative reaction, God vowed to protect Jeremiah from everyone. Jeremiah needed to fear God and not the men around him. Jeremiah did not feel able to take the message, but God said He would give him the words. Jeremiah had been chosen and born for this task. He

was not just a prophet against Israel, he was a prophet against the nations. Whatever nation Jeremiah said would be uprooted, would be. And whatever nation God said through Jeremiah would be planted, would be.

Jeremiah 2 has the first message to the people. He spoke to Jerusalem about the good times, but these had long gone. Now the people had gone away from God, and they were ignoring Him. Instead of finding out God's opinion, they sought advice from their idols and the false prophets of the idols. God's view of this was clear – Israel has changed their God and had gone after other gods. They had left God who was the source of living water (that is, life) and had sought water from other places (unreliable sources). God presented His case of grievance to Jerusalem through Jeremiah.

Day 106: Jeremiah 4 and 7

Jeremiah appealed for Judah to repent in Jeremiah 4. God wants them to follow truth, justice and righteousness. He wanted them to change their hearts and cut off the evil from their hearts as if it were a moral circumcision. Otherwise, there would be only disaster. In fact, they could consider it as good as if the army was already on its way. Jeremiah must warn the people to try and prevent the disaster. But Judah was already a long way down the path of evil. God looked at the people from heaven and described them as being spiritually primeval. God had made His people to be a light to the nations, but they were in darkness. It was like there were no righteous people left in the land. This is why God would remove it. They were so bad.

In Jeremiah 7, God told Jeremiah to go to the gate of the temple of God and speak to the worshippers. He had the same message of repentance. But these people were trusting that God would never destroy His own temple. This assumption was wrong. Psalm 74 and 79 both warn that it could happen. And Jeremiah reminded them of the events of Shiloh, where the Tabernacle was in the days of Eli (1 Samuel 4). The Tabernacle, God's mobile house, was overrun by the Philistines because of their wickedness. Now God would remove His own temple if necessary. Temple worship had become a show. The people were actors who pretended to be godly inside the temple but were really ungodly. God called His temple a 'den of robbers.' The people even worshipped idols in the valley of Hinnon where they offered their children as sacrifice. This place was called 'gehenna' in the New Testament. It was a literal place of burning that is often mistranslated as 'hell.' God was so upset with His people that He told Jeremiah not to pray for them.

Day 107: Jeremiah 17 and 18

In Jeremiah 17 we have the contrast between those who trust in the Lord and those who trust in man. Those who trust in the Lord are like trees beside water that never fail to bear fruit. Those who trust in man are like bushes in a wilderness. This comparison is like the one given in Psalm 1. God tells us that He can read the human heart and see what is in it. God will reward people according to what is in their heart. But there is a general observation of the human heart. It is the most deceitful thing in creation! God could see how evil it was in the time of Jeremiah. They had turned away from the source of living water – God. Jeremiah had not turned away. The chapter ends with a plea for Judah not to break the Sabbath by doing work. Work was for the other days, but not for the Lord's Day. Jeremiah gave this message to those carrying goods in all the gates of Jerusalem.

Jeremiah 18 helps us understand the relationship between God and the nations. It is described as like a potter with the clay. God is like a potter that can do anything with the clay. A nation is like a

piece of clay. If the clay does what he wants, then he will keep it. But if it does not do what he wants He can remould it and start again. God does this when there is good reason. God had good reason to remould Judah and start again. Another sign of how bad things are in Judah is that the prophets and priests were planning to kill Jeremiah. Jeremiah trusted in God to save him.

Day 108: Jeremiah 20 and 22

Jeremiah's problems with the priests and temple management continue in chapter 20. Jeremiah is beaten and put in stocks for telling the truth. The one who did it was Pashhur, whose name means 'Prosperity round about.' God warns Pashhur that he will have a name change and be called 'Magor-Missabib' which means 'terror on every side.' Pashhur claimed to be good to his friends, but he would prove to be the opposite. After getting out of the stocks, Jeremiah complained to God. When God's word was on Jeremiah then he had to speak. He could not stop himself. This made it people hate him. He was so down from the situation that he wanted to die, and he wished he had never been born. You have to feel sorry for Jeremiah. He did the right thing, but it has brought him problems. Of course, it will work out for him in the end because God rewards the righteous.

Jeremiah had spoken in the temple to the priests. He had spoken in the gates to the people. Now he speaks to the king in their palace. In Jeremiah 22 we read of three kings who were all found to be inadequate. They might have looked like a king and lived in a cedar palace like a king, but they did not behave like God's king. Jeremiah gave them a clear message – do what is right and just. If they did this according to the commands of God, then everything would have been ok for them. Instead, they were all worthless. They chased wealth in selfish ambition and became worthless. They did not even deserve a normal burial.

Day 109: Jeremiah 23 and 24

Jeremiah 23 continues the discussion on kings from chapter 22. They were the shepherds of Israel, along with other leaders of the people. The king of Israel was meant to be a shepherd of the people meaning that he was meant to care for them. But Judah's last kings did not care for the flock. Instead, they scattered them. God declared that there would be a time where He would set up good shepherds. In particular there would be a good king who would do what was right. This king is here called a 'Branch' from the line of David, and he would be known after the righteousness of God. It is speaking of the future time of Jesus. The remainder of the chapter is God's special message and warning to the false prophets. Verse 24 tells us that God fills the heaven and earth, which is why He sees everything.

We have read how God spoke to His people through the use of images and parables. The potter was one example of this. In Jeremiah 24, we have another. This time Jeremiah is shown two baskets of figs, one very good and one very bad. The good figs represented the good people of God who would be taken to Babylon for their protection. They would stay there until God brought them back to Israel. On the other hand the bad figs represented the bad people who were in Israel or Egypt. The bad figs would not find peace. These words came true.

Day 110: Jeremiah 25 and 30

Jeremiah 25 is a key moment. Jeremiah had been giving Israel God's message for 23 years, but it had done no good. Israel had not changed. Now God told Israel their punishment. The king of Babylon would come and destroy them. Jeremiah gave them notice of how long this would be for. It would be for 70 years. This is the age of a man. It meant that those who went into Babylon would not survive long enough to be the ones returning from there. The nations around Israel would also suffer from the armies of Babylon. At the right time Babylon itself would receive its own punishment. To the nations, it may look like Babylon is the cause of their problems. But the real problem was their behaviour. God was working through Babylon to punish them. God would be like a lion to them, as we also learnt from the prophets Amos and Joel.

The end of the kingdom of Judah was coming. But that would not be the end of the people or the nation. Jeremiah 30 foretold of a future time when the people of Israel would be returned to their own land under a king. This time was not when the people returned with Ezra because there was no king and there was no real peace. Jeremiah 30 refers to a time when there would be a king like king David. In this case, the king like David is Jesus. This king was promised to David and was his son. In English literature it is strange to use the name of a person to mean someone else who is like them, but it is not so strange in the Bible. At this future time of king Jesus, the people and God would be united.

Day 111: Jeremiah 31 and 36

Jeremiah 31 continues the theme from chapter 30 in speaking of a great future time. The words of verse 15 apply to the birth of Jesus in Matthew 2:17-18. The words of Jeremiah 31 verses 31-34 are quoted in Hebrews 8 and 10 as referring to the future time brought about by Jesus. It is to be a time of gathering the exiles because God has always loved His people. It is a time when people will go to the presence of God, which will be found on Zion (Jerusalem). This will be a time of peace and plenty. It will be a time of gladness and joy. The people will follow God and make a covenant with Him. It will be the opposite of the conditions in which the kingdom of Judah was in.

God's purpose in sending Jeremiah was to get the people to turn away from wickedness. Jeremiah 36 tells us that God was prepared to forgive their sin if they did just that. God sent Jeremiah to the people on a day of fasting. The only day of fasting at this time was the Day of Atonement, which was a national day where Israel confessed their sins. This was an ideal opportunity for Israel to realise their sins and confess them. Jeremiah had all the words of God written down and read to the people. It did not work. The middle management took notice, but higher management did not. The king burnt the words of God as they were read out to him. If this is how the king Jehoiakim reacted to the word of God, then it was no wonder that God predicted the destruction of Israel in the days of this king.

Day 112: Jeremiah 37 and 38

Jeremiah 37 describes the time as the days of the last king of Judah. Like the previous kings, king Zedekiah did not listen to the words of Jeremiah. The time of the end was near because Babylon had invaded the land and besieged Jerusalem. However, there was a temporary reprieve when Egypt distracted the army of Babylon. It appeared that Egypt had come to support Israel. Jeremiah warned Zedekiah that Babylon would come back. Jeremiah was imprisoned for suspected desertion and was there for a long time. Finally the king asked Jeremiah for a message from God. Jeremiah

bluntly told him what would happen. He also explained that his ministry had been proved right because the Babylonians had come to Jerusalem as he had said. Jeremiah was released from prison but confined to the courtyard of the guard.

Jeremiah spoke God's words to the soldiers in the courtyard of the guard. In Jeremiah 38 this upset some of the leaders. They had Jeremiah put into a cistern where he sunk in the mud. In this state, his life was in danger. It took an Ethiopian, not an Israelite, to rescue him. King Zedekiah requested Jeremiah to give him personal information from God, which Jeremiah gave him. He had the opportunity to save his life if he believed Jeremiah and followed his advice. Otherwise he was doomed. Unfortunately, Zedekiah believed man rather than God. His end would come.

Introduction to the Lamentations of Jeremiah

The life and message of Jeremiah did not prevent the destruction of Jerusalem. In the Lamentations of Jeremiah, Jeremiah looked at the city and described the final state of the city he saw. The Lamentations of Jeremiah are a heart-felt description of his sadness at the fallen city. He had tried to save it, but it was not to be. He looked at the city and wept. He wept over the same city that Jesus was to weep over centuries later.

Jerusalem had fallen from a great height. She had been like a queen, but now she was like a widowed slave. She was ruined and empty. She was unclean and isolated. She was sick and naked and shameful. Everything good had been taken away. There was no food and no comfort. Even mothers had cooked their children for food! The city that was the 'perfection of beauty' was now an object of mockery. Its enemies were jubilant.

It was God who had done this because Jerusalem had been a city of sin. It had to suffer the consequences. The anointed king had been killed, and so were his sons. Their dynasty was over. Yet there was still some life left. It was because of God's great love and compassion that some people still lived. The people would wait for this. But Jeremiah knew that a period of 70 years had to pass by. He would not live to see this renewal.

Day 113: Lamentations 1 and 3

Lamentations described Jerusalem as like a woman. The original city was like a virgin queen. She was respected and rich. But now she was despised and unclean. Like a dirty, naked and sick woman. Lamentations 1 does not use the word 'prostitute', but that is what she was. She chased after her lovers rather than God. She was thoroughly wicked and deserving of her punishment. Now her children had been exiled. She was alone like a widow. There was nothing of value left. Jerusalem was in distress, crying out without any comforter. God was righteous in doing this.

In Lamentations 3 Jeremiah describes his own suffering. He was like a besieged city. He was sick and broken. He was full of bitterness. He was isolated and an object of mockery. He realised that he still had a life and that this was a blessing from God. God is faithful, compassionate and slow to anger. Therefore Jeremiah would wait for God and trust in Him. He knew that God brings good things as well as punishments for sin. His troubles were an opportunity to examine himself. He would look and see if there was any sin within him and repent if that were the case. Having done that, he would pray through his tears to God and plead for relief.

Introduction to the Book of Ezekiel

Ezekiel is concerned with the relationship between God and His people. It starts with the description of the removal of God's presence from the temple. In the body of the book the temple was destroyed. At the end it describes the return of God's presence to a new temple. The first 11 chapters describe the events leading to the departure of God's glory. The glory was the sign of God's presence among His people which He withdrew. The final 8 chapters describe the future temple of God to which the glory of God would return. Ezekiel describes the reason why God left His people and why He was to return.

Ezekiel was an appropriate person to describe these events. He was a priest, like Jeremiah. Whereas Jeremiah spoke to the people in Israel (until he was forcibly taken to Egypt), Ezekiel spoke to God's people in the land of Babylon. It was from Babylon that God's people would survive the troubles and the exiles would eventually return to Israel from there. These events were necessary for a future revival of the fortunes of Israel.

Ezekiel spoke to the Israelites in Babylon to explain why God had to leave Jerusalem. He did this through many parables which Ezekiel acted out. The nation of Israel was condemned for her wickedness. So too were the nations around Israel condemned for their wickedness. The difference between Israel and the nations was that Israel was God's people and God would ultimately restore them. The majority of the nations around Israel would disappear.

Day 114: Ezekiel 2, 3 and 4

We have missed out Ezekiel chapter one because of the complexity in explaining the events. We join Ezekiel with his mission in chapter 2. Ezekiel was to speak to the evil and stubborn Israelites around him, but he was not to be afraid of them. This is the same advice that God's prophets were given when delivering God's messages. God would be with the prophet and protect them from harm. Ezekiel's message was to be one of sadness and warning. He was symbolically given this message by eating a scroll with the words of the message on it. It tasted of honey, because we are told that the word of God is sweet like honey. Ezekiel was greatly moved by the visions he had seen and had been stunned for 7 days.

After 7 days, in chapter 3 Ezekiel was told that he was a watchman to Israel. He was like one who watched on the city walls for enemies, whose job was to warn the city of impending troubles. Ezekiel was to speak God's words and warn them of impending trouble. In that way, anyone who listened could repent and turn to God. Ezekiel would be unable to speak except when he spoke God's words. He was in this state for many years until Ezekiel 33:21-21 when the news of the fall of Jerusalem was given! Ezekiel's speech was a sign to Israel to listen to God. Every time Ezekiel spoke it was like a miraculous message to the people.

Ezekiel 4 is an example of the type of sign that Ezekiel gave Israel. He was to lie on one side, bound by ropes, for 390 days and then on the other side for 40 days. He was to draw the picture of Jerusalem under siege and face the city during this period. But there was to be an iron barrier between him and the city. Ezekiel had to act out the siege of Jerusalem and eat rations all this period. Jerusalem would have to bear its siege because of its sins. Ezekiel was to give many similar signs, but the message was the same.

Day 115: Ezekiel 8 and 9

When the elders of Judah visited Ezekiel in chapter 8, Ezekiel was given a vision of what was happening in the temple in Jerusalem. The temple was God's house where God had put the glory of His presence. At the north gate, there was an idol. The second of the 10 Commandments was to not make an idol. At the entrance to the court, there were drawings of unclean animals and idols. God had commanded His people not to make images of anything. At the north gate there were women weeping to a false god. In the inner court, there were 25 men with their backs to the temple worshipping the sun. God's temple had been turned into a place where they worshipped idols and false gods. Was God to stay in His own house while the people did this in His house?

Ezekiel 8 explained why God had to leave His temple. Ezekiel 9 was the beginning of the departure of God. The glory of God – probably a bright cloud - moved from the cherubim that were above the ark of the covenant in the Most Holy Place. Then it moved to the threshold or entrance. At this point, a scribe of God is ordered to put a mark on the forehead of those who grieve over the evil done in the city. Those with the mark would be spared. The remaining people would be slaughtered, starting with the sun-worshipping elders in front of the temple. This was a symbolic vision of what was to happen when the Babylonians armies were to capture Jerusalem and the temple.

Day 116: Ezekiel 11 and 12

In Ezekiel 11 Ezekiel saw a vision of God. He was shown two leaders of the people at the temple of God. They were leading the people away from the ways of God. As Ezekiel watched, one of them died. Ezekiel was overcome. In the middle of his distress, God promised a time of regathering and revival for Israel. This revival would see God's people fully committed to following God's ways, unlike that current generation. This knowledge was some consolation as Ezekiel watched the glory of God depart from the temple and the city. God had left the city and it was now unprotected by Him.

Ezekiel 12 described how Ezekiel had to act out going away in exile. He had to pack his belongings in front of the people. Then in the evening, he had to dig a hole in the wall of his house, as if he were not coming back. Then he had to cover his face and leave. The people were left wondering what it meant. In the morning Ezekiel was sent back to explain. The king of Israel would leave Jerusalem in this way. He would be caught and die in Babylon. The people watching concluded that this prophecy was for the distant future. Ezekiel explained that it was not.

Day 117: Ezekiel 24 and 28

Ezekiel was told to give Israel another sign in chapter 24. He was to cook meat and bones and then overcook it. The deposit was cooked onto the pot. This is like Jerusalem. No matter how much God tried, He could not get rid of the badness. While this was happening, Jerusalem had been surrounded by the armies of Babylon and the end was coming. Ezekiel was told to prepare for a second sign. His wife was to die and he was not to mourn. It represented the loss of the delight of his eyes. In the same way, Israel would lose its temple, which was the delight of their eyes. When this happened, the speech of Ezekiel would be restored as a sign to them.

Ezekiel 28 is a prophecy against one of Israel's neighbours. Tyre was the main city of what is known as the Phoenicians. They were a maritime trading nation who controlled the trade routes and became very rich. It was very powerful and proud. In fact, it thought of itself as a god. So God would bring it down. It was called an 'anointed cherub.' This is symbolic language describing it as a chosen gatekeeper to the land of Israel. They were described as being in the mountain of God, which is symbolic language to say it was next to the land of Israel. The next place that Ezekiel spoke against was Sidon, the sister city of the Phoenicians. Both Tyre and Sidon were malicious neighbours of Israel. There would be a future time when Israel would not have such bad neighbours.

Day 118: Ezekiel 33 and 34

Ezekiel 33 reminded Ezekiel of several things that were mentioned in chapter 3. He was a watchman and had the responsibility to sound the alarm of coming invaders. In this way he had to help the people change and get ready. He was also reminded of what God thought about attitude changes in the people. We learn that it is the final outcome of a person that is important to God. If someone was evil, God cannot have them in His kingdom, even if they were once righteous. And if someone is righteous, God will have them in His kingdom, even if they were once evil. These reminders proceed the news that Jerusalem has fallen. In readiness for this, another sign is given to the people. The ability of Ezekiel to speak freely is given back to him. He had not been able to speak his own thoughts since chapter 3:26. Despite his voice being the word of God for all these years, the people only considered his voice as like a beautiful song! That is, they enjoyed it but did nothing about it.

It is the role of leaders that is described in Ezekiel 34. The leaders were shepherds, and the people were the sheep. However, the shepherds of Israel had not looked after the sheep in the way that a shepherd should. Instead of caring for them, they had cared more for themselves. They had exploited the sheep and even ate the sheep! Instead of being their protector, they were the predator. God was outraged! He would intervene and punish the shepherds. Then He would care for the sheep Himself, just like the good shepherd. He would also set over His people a new shepherd like David. Like Jeremiah 30, the mention of David means someone like David and is a reference to Jesus. Only then would the people be protected from predators, be safe and be provided for. This will be the time of a new covenant for Israel.

Day 119: Ezekiel 36 and 37

The prophecy of Ezekiel 36 is unusual because it is given to the mountains and land of Israel. This is similar to chapter 35 which was given to the mountain of Edom. Unlike Edom, Israel would have a great future. God would regather His people from among the nations. He would cleanse them and give them a new heart and a new spirit. They would realise their sins of the past and be embarrassed. They would no longer be the subject to ridicule by the other nations. When God revives Israel, this would be a witness to the nations. God's people would be back in God's land. The land would be like the Garden of Eden. The people would be as many as sheep, because their shepherd has watched over them for good.

The revival of the people of Israel is dramatically portrayed in the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel 37. At their lowest point, the people are like dry bones with no hope. But then God makes them live. A national revival takes place, and the nation is recreated. Even the historical division of Israel into the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah is ended. The people become fully

united by one king. This is like king David. As in chapter 34, the mention of David means someone like David and is a reference to Jesus. There will be a new covenant of peace. God would live among them, like He had when there was the temple. God would be their God and they would be His people. These are references to the fulfilment of the covenant that God made to David, which will be fulfilled.

Day 120: Ezekiel 38 and 39

The future blessings of Ezekiel 37 are in contrast with time spoken of in Ezekiel 38. Ezekiel 38 speaks of a time when Israel was inhabited by its people gathered from the nations and lived in safety. In this state, they are invaded by a group of nations from the north headed by Gog. These nations will come to take away the wealth of the land. They think that they can take it easily, but they had not taken account of God. God will make them fight among themselves. He will rain hail and sulphur on them. In that way, God will show the nations that He is the God of Israel.

The prophecy of Ezekiel 38 continues in chapter 39. The carcasses of the dead enemy army would be plundered by God's people, and the bodies buried. It would take 7 months to clean the land. In these events, God would prove to the nations that He is the one who punishes both Jew and Gentile for their sin. But that He is also a God of compassion, and He is the one who saves His people. We are given the reason why the events of chapters 38 and 39 took place – Israel lived in safety but were faithless. The invasion of Israel was a punishment for their sin. Whatever the behaviour of God's people in God's land, God would ultimately be honoured by His people and the nations.

Introduction to the Book of Nahum

The Book of Nahum was written for the nation of the Assyrians. This is not the first time that God spoke to them. Previously God had sent Jonah to the capital of the Assyrians, Nineveh. Jonah's life and message was unusual and it did cause the Assyrians to repent. Many years later, the message to the Assyrians was no longer a message of repentance, but one of judgment. Repentance was not an option. Nineveh was being judged for her sins. She was like a vile prostitute. She had been used by God to punish Israel, but now her punishment was coming. The name 'Nahum' means comfort, and the prophecy of Nahum would be a comfort to Israel. Assyria would not find comfort.

Day 121: Nahum 1 and Obadiah

The books of Nahum and Obadiah are both written for Gentile nations. In Nahum 1 God reminds us of His character. He is a jealous God and He will punish the guilty. In this case, it is the Assyrians who are punished for its wickedness. Assyria would be destroyed. God is good and those who trust in Him will be spared from the troubles. Israel would no longer suffer at the hands of the Assyrians. For Israel, the words of Nahum will be a message of good news and peace. If they kept their vows and feasts, then they could celebrate the good news.

Introduction to the Book of Obadiah

The Book of Obadiah was written against the nation of Edom. Edom was also known as Esau, who was the brother of Jacob. They lived next to each other but were generally bad neighbours. The

rivalry was particularly bad on Edom's side. They did not allow their brother to pass through their land when they came out of Egypt, and they greeted them with hostility. This is not what God expected of brother nations. Brothers have an obligation to show brotherly love, and God expected Jacob to not hate his brother (Deuteronomy 23:7). The reverse was also true. Edom was not to hate Jacob, although it did. The prophet Obadiah was sent to Edom to explain this and why Edom would be punished. God uses the brotherly names of Jacob and Esau to bring out the fact that they were brothers.

Obadiah explained that Edom laughed over the fall of Israel when Israel was overrun by Babylon. Edom also invaded the land and stole its wealth. Those Israelites fleeing the land were captured and either killed or returned to the invaders. This was brotherly hatred. They were accountable to the God of Israel for their behaviour. As they had done, would be done to them. But there would be a difference. Israel would survive but Esau would not. And Israel would take over the land of Esau. This was how the pride of Esau would be brought down. Today Edom does not exist as a nation.

Introduction to the Book of Habakkuk

The book of Habakkuk starts with Habakkuk complaining to God. The people were evil and unjust and what was God doing about it? God chose to answer Habakkuk's question - Israel would be punished for its evil by the Babylonians. But Habakkuk is not happy with the answer and asks another question. Why would God use people who are even more evil than Israel to punish Israel? The answer that God gives does answer Habakkuk's question. God has seen all the evil that Babylon was doing, and they would have to pay for it. Those who were righteous would continue live by faith. No one can speak against what God is doing. They should be silent before Him. The great works of God in the past are a testimony to how God works among the nations. When Habakkuk considers this, he is lifted up from his depression. He ends the letter rejoicing in the works of God. It is like He is in a high place thinking of high things, just like a deer in the crags of the mountains. We too can move from complaint to trust when we think of the works of God.

Day 122: Habakkuk 2 and 3

Habakkuk 2 starts with Habakkuk waiting for God's answer to his question. Why does God use a wicked nation like Babylon to punish Israel? God's answer is that He sees Babylon's wickedness and they will also be punished. Babylon steals from other nations and builds its city on the blood of others. Babylon gets drunks and makes idols. For these things, Babylon will suffer. Their punishment is coming. Even though these things will happen, God has a greater purpose which everyone should know. The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord. This is the long-term purpose of God with the earth and world events are moving towards this. The earth should respect the God of Israel who is in His temple and the righteous should live by faith.

Habakkuk 3 is a prayer to God. No longer is Habakkuk complaining about aspects of God's justice. He understands the greatness of God and prayed that God would bring about His great works just as He had in the past. He remembered the time when God went with His people from Mount Sinai with Moses. He remembered the time when God went with His people into the land of Canaan with Joshua. These were great victories which God gave His people. When he thought of such great things, he trembled at what God can do. Now he is prepared to wait for God to act. Now he is prepared to endure hardship while he waits. Now he is even prepared to rejoice in God. He is in a

high state of spiritual awareness and trust in God. He is in a high place. We can be in this place if we remember God's great works and wait patiently for the next part of God's plan.

Introduction to the Book of Daniel

The prophets of Israel spoke about how the godly people left in the land of Israel would be taken to Babylon. Daniel and his 3 friends were some of these. Their faith was severely tested, but they remained faithful even when facing death. They chose to follow the ways of the God of Israel and not the ways of Babylon. Daniel was tested by being put in with the lions, and the 3 friends were tested by a fiery furnace. Their wisdom was appreciated and they were given important roles in government.

Daniel was given prophecies of the future history of the Middle East in chapters 2 and 7. The first king of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, was given dreams from God. But he became proud and had to be humbled by living like an animal. The last king of Babylon, Belshazzar, was removed for his wickedness. The kingdom was given to the Medes and Persians. Even with the change of empires, Daniel continued to have an important administrative role in government. Daniel was given further visions of the future empires, including some in extraordinary detail. The book ends with a reference to the resurrection of the dead and judgment. Just as the short-term predictions of Daniel have come true, so it is reasonable to expect the long term predictions will too.

Day 123: Daniel 3 and 5

Daniel 3 starts with a large statue of a man, which reminds us of the vision of empires in Daniel 2. In Daniel 2, the image only had a head of gold, which represented Babylon. Now the whole image is gold, as if Babylon thought it would rule for ever. In its pride, everyone is commanded to worship this image of Babylon or be destroyed by fire. Daniel's 3 friends refuse to worship it because they only worshipped the God of Israel. They did not know if God would save them, but they prayed and trusted in God. This is a good example of how to pray – to make a request and then leave it up to God whether He carries it out or not. They were thrown into the fire and God saved them. When they came out they did not even smell of fire! The king was amazed and gave honour to the God of Israel.

The last king of Babylon was Belshazzar. In Daniel 5 he has what is to be his last feast. In the middle of it, he ordered cups from the temple in Jerusalem to be brought to him. They drank from them as if they were proud of their victory over Israel. This caused God to send fingers of a hand to write a message to the king on a wall. Overcome with fear, Belshazzar asked his wise men to interpret it. When they failed, they called for Daniel. Daniel explained that the end of Babylon had come. Just as had been said in the visions of Daniel, the kingdom of Babylon would be replaced by another kingdom. This kingdom was now revealed as the kingdom of the Medes and Persians. It happened later that night.

Day 124: Daniel 6 and Ezra 1

Daniel 6 takes place in the time of the Medes and Persian empire. Daniel was given a high office, which led to jealousy and a devious plan to remove him. They had a law made that prayer was only offered to the king. Daniel prayed 3 times a day to the God of Israel. Daniel continued praying even

though it had been banned. The new king did not want to kill Daniel, but he had been trapped by his own pride. As punishment, Daniel was thrown into a den of lions. Because of his trust in God, God sent his angel to protect him. This reminds us of God's protection of the 3 friends in the fire. God uses His angels to protect those who trust in Him. The king was impressed. He honoured the God of Daniel and told his kingdom about the God of Israel. Daniel's trust was rewarded, and Daniel continued serving kings until Cyrus. If Daniel was 17 when he was taken to Babylon, he would have been about 90 when he received his last vision.

Introduction to the Book of Ezra

The first three verses of the Book of Ezra are the same as the last two verses of 2 Chronicles. We are to conclude that Ezra is a continuation of the events of the Chronicles. Since Chronicles was particularly about the building of the temple and its worship, it is appropriate that Ezra is the same. Ezra is about the regathering of a small group of exiles back to the land of Israel and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. The building is not as grand as the one of King Solomon's day, but it was a revival of temple worship nevertheless. The continuation of the history of Israel also comes from the Book of Daniel. Daniel spanned the time of exile up until the time of King Cyrus. Ezra started with the decree of King Cyrus where he ordered the rebuilding of God's temple in Jerusalem.

Ezra listed all the people and temple vessels which returned to Israel. The rebuilding started first with the altar which allowed sacrifices to commence immediately. The rebuilding met great opposition and the enemies achieved cessation when Cyrus was no longer king. God sent two prophets to encourage the people with the building – Haggai and Zechariah. This resulted in the completion of the temple and the reestablishment of keeping of the Law of Moses. Ezra was a teacher in the Law who came to Jerusalem. He discovered the threat to Israel from intermarriage. This was mixing God's holy people with the ways of the world. Ezra helped the people understand the problem and this led to its resolution.

The events of the book of Ezra began when God caused king Cyrus of Persia to order the building of the temple of God in Jerusalem. God had planned this with Cyrus which we read about in Isaiah 44. Cyrus was willing to lose manpower and silver and gold and give them to this project. Not only did God move the heart of Cyrus, but He also moved the hearts of Israelite exiles to go to Jerusalem. The rebuilding of the temple happened at the same time as the rebuilding of His people. Cyrus returned the vessels of the temple that Babylon had stolen. These were all accounted for and listed.

Day 125: Ezra 3 and 4

Ezra 3 describes how the returned exiles built the altar of burnt offering as a first priority. This allowed the daily sacrifices to the Lord to be made. It was important to start offering these to God so that God would look on them with favour. They were able to keep the sacrifices of the Feast of Tabernacles. This was a feast of joy for the annual harvest. Although the exiles would not have had much of a harvest, they could keep the feast with joy because they were back in the land of their fathers. It took many months before the people were ready to build the temple foundation. They needed to get cedar wood from Lebanon. Zerubbabel and Jeshua (also called Joshua) were the leaders. When the foundation was built they praised God.

The people of the land wanted to help in the rebuilding of the temple. In Ezra 4 we read that their offer of help was refused. The people of the land were Samaritans who were not fully committed to

following the Law of Moses. Those who build the house of God must be fully committed to keeping the commands. The refusal to share the work led to opposition. The opposition continued until they finally managed to stop the rebuilding work completely. This situation lasted 10 years until the words of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah in the second year of Darius.

Introduction to the Book of Esther

The empire of the Medes and Persians had been kind to the Israelites. The exception was a man called Haman. He wanted to destroy all Jews and remove them from the world. The Book of Esther describes how this disaster was avoided, through the work of Esther and Mordecai. Even the Jews who had returned to the land of Israel were under this threat.

The Book of Esther explains how Esther became queen of the empire and how she saved her people. She did this by risking her life. She went into the king's presence without being asked, an action potentially worthy of death. God worked through the events so that Haman was killed and Mordecai exalted. God saved His people in their exile, so that they were not lost. The continued existence of the Jews continues to be a witness that God exists. The saving of the Jews is celebrated today in the feast of Purim.

Day 126: Esther 1 and 2

Esther 1 is about how King Ahasuerus showed off the greatness of his kingdom to his leaders. He was a new king and he wanted to impress them. This was not an easy event to organise, because there were 127 provinces spread from India to Ethiopia. It took place in third year of his reign and lasted 6 months. At the end of the celebration, he wanted to display the greatest jewel in his kingdom – the queen. The original Hebrew of verse 6 tells us that he requested this when his 'heart was good' with wine. But the queen refused to come. In the debate about what to do, the consequences for marriages throughout the kingdom were considered. The queen had to be replaced by someone who respected her husband.

Esther 2 is about how they set about finding a replacement for queen Vashti. The queen had not only to be beautiful, but also had to be one who pleased the king. This would have included showing respect. Esther was selected as one of the candidates and was chosen as queen. Esther was an Israelite, also known as a Jew, but she had withheld her background from the king. The chapter ends with how Esther's guardian Mordecai had uncovered an assassination attempt on the king. This would be remembered by the king at an important point in the future events.

Day 127: Esther 3 and 4

Esther 3 introduces us to Haman, who became the highest official in the land after the king. He wanted everyone to kneel before him, which Mordecai was not prepared to do. Haman became very angry and decided to kill not just Mordecai but his entire race. Haman persuaded the king to support this. The execution date was set. But Haman was not just picking a fight with Mordecai, but with God.

Mordecai was certain that God would save His people. In chapter 4 he changed his clothes to sackcloth, fasted and wept. This behaviour caught the attention of Esther. Mordecai explained the

situation and what Esther must do. She had to risk her life to save the people or perish anyway. Mordecai understood that God would save His people because they were witnesses of God's existence. If He did not save them through Esther, then He would save them through someone else. In the event, God did save His people through Esther. The rest of the book described how this happened.

Introduction to the Book of Haggai

The words of Haggai were a challenge to the exiles who had returned to build the house of God. They had been forced to stop by royal decree. Now a greater authority than the king requested them to continue - God. The message was a strong one. The people were spending all their focus in improving their own houses, while God's house lay in ruins. God had shown His displeasure by giving them poor harvests. Haggai's message would have been a surprise to them. His message is mentioned in Ezra 5:1. It was time for them to change their priorities and build God's house. Only then would God bless them.

Haggai means 'My Feasts' or 'My appointed times.' Now it was God's appointed time to build the temple. Haggai (1:13) also tells us that Haggai was God's messenger. The word messenger is the same Hebrew word used of God's divine messengers the angels. Haggai was a message bearer of God. The prophets of the Old Testament carried out this role.

Day 128: Haggai 1 and 2

Haggai spoke to the returned exiles in Jerusalem that it was time to build the house of God. The people had misinterpreted the time as a time not to build. But Haggai asks them to think about the poor harvests they had been having. These were signs that God was not blessing them. The reason was that they should have been building God's house. It was a matter of priorities. Do we spend our time and energy on the things of God or the things of our own? The leaders of the people, Zerubbabel and Joshua, believed the message and obeyed it. Haggai told them that God would be with them in this work.

The people of Israel had been building the temple for nearly a month when Haggai received the second message from God to the people. In Haggai 2 he told them not to worry about the temple not being as grand as the first temple. He told them that the glory of the future house would be greater than the temple of Solomon's day. This was a prophecy of a future temple because the temple they built was not as grand as the first one. Haggai's third message would therefore be a surprise to them. He told them that their service was defiled. They needed to think about this and how they can improve their service. Despite this, God was still going to bless them because they were obeying His words. Haggai's fourth message was a special encouragement to Zerubbabel the leader in the building work.

Introduction to the Book of Zechariah

Zechariah means 'God remembers.' God had remembered His people. Like Haggai, the first message of Zechariah was of spiritual reformation. Then, if they listened, there would be God's blessing. God did not want to build up His people if they were as bad as before. They needed to change their ways first and then God would bless them. They did change.

Zechariah's message was one of encouraging the restoration of Jerusalem and the temple. Israel was going to be blessed and the nations against Israel were going to be restrained. The language was building language with mention of measuring lines and craftsmen and a corner stone. But it was not just about building buildings. It was about building a nation and a people fit for God. The High Priest Joshua was to be cleansed by God for this purpose. Zerubbabel the governor would start and complete the building. The wickedness of the people would be removed.

The first six chapters of Zechariah hold 7 visions to encourage the building. The last is a picture of the High Priest with a crown. In this vision the roles of High Priest and King are combined in one person. This is a vision of the future work of Jesus. His work gets a mention in several other places. He would ride into Jerusalem as king on a donkey. He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver. He would be pierced. It is through the work of Jesus that the great future of Jerusalem would be achieved. But this is not before it has been attacked by the nations and been through further troubles. Only at the end of Zechariah is the temple service restored in the temple and peace established. Like many prophecies, the exact sequence of events is unclear, but the ultimate goal is clear.

Day 129: Zechariah 7 and 8

Zechariah 7 occurred midway through the building of the temple. Israel approached God with a question about fasting. They had fasted at set milestones because of the destruction of the original temple and Jerusalem. The question was whether they needed to continue this now that the temple was being rebuilt. God's answer was that whatever they did, whether fasting or feasting, they did it for themselves and not for God. He then told them His expectations that they would follow justice, mercy and compassion. Fasting is of no value unless the people kept the commands of God. God told them something simple but profound and just. If the people did not listen to the commands of God, then why should God listen to their prayers. The same is true today.

God's love of Jerusalem is clear from Zechariah 8. God intends to return to it and live there. This will be a time of blessing when the people would be regathered and old and young would live there. The feasts and fasts would be times of true gladness. People would go to Jerusalem to hear the advice of God. The nations of the world would want to do the same but would go with a Jew because the Jews had God's favour. This is a great vision of the future, but it was still a long way off. Israel needed to reform. Truth and justice must be established in Jerusalem for this future to be achieved.

Day 130: Zechariah 9 and 14

Zechariah 9 begins with a prophecy against the nations around Israel. These were the ones that usually made war with Israel. They were to be defeated. Instead, the nation of Israel would have a new king. This was not like it was in their day. This future king would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey. This is a reference to Jesus and the kingdom of peace he would set up. No wonder the people seeing Jesus enter Jerusalem on a donkey thought that the kingdom was about to be set up! A time is still coming when Jesus will establish peace and prosperity. God would bless His people and be their God. This future is still to come.

There are many good things promised in Zechariah. But there are also times of trouble. Zechariah 14 describes an attack by the nations on Jerusalem. It will capture half of the city, but then God will intervene. There will be a major earthquake and major changes in the landscape. There would be a

day like no other day. Living water would come from Jerusalem. God will be king. He would punish flesh because it is flesh that has caused the evil on the earth. Then there will be a time when temple worship is re-established. No longer would this be a time of imperfect time. It would be a time of true holiness.

Introduction to the Book of Nehemiah

The temple had been rebuilt in the time of Ezra. But this did not mean life was easy. Nehemiah learnt about the great trouble the Jews were in from far away in Persia. What they needed was a wall to protect them from their enemies. It is the building of the wall of Jerusalem that is the goal of the Book of Nehemiah. Nehemiah was a man of prayer, and his first prayer was for the blessing of the king of Persia on this project. The king agreed and Nehemiah led the effort to rebuild the walls.

Nehemiah came across great opposition just as had occurred when the temple was rebuilt. But Nehemiah was not just a builder. He was a spiritual leader – a spiritual builder. He set the example of how to look after his fellow Jews and how to pray and trust in God. His work was rewarded and the wall was completed. This work was an act of faith and gave honour to God. The people had sacrificed themselves and God noted all the names of the faithful. The arrival of Ezra was an important point. The reading of the Law made them realise their faults and they dedicated themselves to following God's commands. Nehemiah had to lead some final reforms to ensure that the people maintained faithful service to God.

Day 131: Nehemiah 1 and 2

Nehemiah was the king of Persia's cupbearer. This was a position of great responsibility. He was trusted to ensure that none of his drinks were poisoned. The king trusted Nehemiah with his life. Nehemiah was willing to lay down his life for the king. In Nehemiah 1 we learn that Nehemiah heard of the problems of the Jews back in Jerusalem. The temple might have been built, but the people were under great distress. Nehemiah responded to this news by weeping and fasting. This showed the depth of his love for the work of God. He prayed to God for His people. He also prayed that he would have success before the king of Persia.

Nehemiah 2 tells us what Nehemiah was planning to do. He did not disguise his sadness before the king, which invited a question from the king. Nehemiah said another quick prayer in his head before giving the reply. The king responded encouragingly. Nehemiah had planned his next answer. He wanted to travel to Jerusalem and build the wall with its gates. It says a lot for the king's view of Nehemiah that the king agreed to all the terms and supplied an escort as well. At Jerusalem, Nehemiah inspected the city wall at night, and then explained the plan to the Jews. As previously, this was met with opposition from the Gentiles.

Day 132: Nehemiah 4 and 6

Nehemiah 4 describes some of the opposition the Jews received from rebuilding the wall. There was an army of Samaritans ready to disrupt and intimidate the builders. However, Nehemiah prayed to God and they continued building. The threat of attack was always present, so they had to build with their weapons ready. They prayed for help, but they also did what they could to help the situation.

Then they trusted in God. This is the way to commit our ways to God - to do what we can as well as trust. Nehemiah's practical service in following God and helping his fellows is given in chapter 5.

The opposition to the building of the wall from the Gentiles took the form of distractions and false accusations. They accused Nehemiah of wanting to be king and made-up death threats against his life. Nehemiah ignored these tactics and continued to pray to God for help. Eventually the wall was completed in only 52 days. The speed in which the work was done was a witness to the fact that the work had been blessed by God.

Introduction to the Book of Malachi

Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament. In his time, the temple had been already built and worship was taking place. The problem was, as found by Ezra and Nehemiah, that the people kept moving away from God's law. Intermarriage was a continual problem. His message was that the priests, sacrifices and temple service were not as God wanted them. The priests were particularly at fault in this. They allowed second-rate animals to be offered and this dishonoured God. They would be dishonoured because of this. And they permitted divorce and injustice.

Malachi means 'My messenger.' Malachi was the last messenger from God for several centuries. Malachi gave them warning of a future messenger who would come suddenly to the temple. The priests and the people needed to be ready for this. This is a reference to Jesus. The book ends, as does the Old Testament, with the warning that God would send His servants to put things right. They needed to be ready for this. The Old Covenant was still in existence and they needed to keep its Laws. The priests particularly needed to make sure that these were kept.

Day 133: Malachi 3 and 4

Malachi 3 warns the people and the priests that God will send another messenger, apart from Malachi. This messenger would not just be a message deliverer, but he would also purify them. The wicked would be judged and the righteous refined. God would make a distinction between the righteous and the wicked, according to their behaviour. Malachi repeated the message of the prophets – repent and return to me! If they put the right things first - the things of God - then they would be blessed.

Malachi 4 ends the Old Testament with a warning. Judgment is coming and everyone must get ready. The wicked will be removed, and the righteous will be blessed with the sun of righteousness. Everyone needs to remember and keep the commands of God's law. The prophet Elijah will be sent to help the people get ready. God sends His messengers to warn people and also to implement His judgment. The New Testament ends in a similar way! m

Introduction to the New Testament

The New Testament contains the events around the life of Jesus and his followers. The first verse tells us that the New Testament is based on the Old Testament. Jesus is the promised Messiah, promised to be the son of both Abraham and David. The life of Jesus fulfils many of the prophecies made about him in the Old Testament. There remain many other prophecies yet to be fulfilled. The

New Testament contains the good news of how God wanted all peoples to be saved, not just the children of Israel.

The New Testament contains 27 books that were written in Greek. In this way, the New Testament was made easier for people in other countries to read it. It begins with four accounts of the life of Jesus, known as the gospels. Then there is one book of the history of the early Christians, the book of the Acts of the Apostles. There are many letters to groups of Christians and to individuals. The New Testament ends with the Book of Revelation, which is a prophecy of the future. The New Testament is about the coming of Jesus. It ends with the promise and warning of his second coming.

Introduction to the Book of Matthew

The Book of Matthew is an account of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The account is what is necessary for a Jew to become a believer in Jesus. It shows that the genealogy and events of Jesus life were predicted in the Old Testament. It describes the signs and miracles of Jesus as a witness to his divine support. The Jews were looking for a prophet like Moses who did signs based on Deuteronomy 18:18-19. They came to investigate Jesus to see if he was the one. Some, like the disciples of John, were convinced. Many, like the Pharisees, were not.

The Book of Matthew starts off stating clearly that Jesus is the Messiah and that he was the son of Abraham and David. This is significant because the two great promises made by God were to these two people. Both were fulfilled by Jesus. Matthew speaks about the Law of Moses in the Sermon on the Mount and shows how the Law should really have been kept. It describes the teaching of the kingdom of God through the parables. And it explains why the Jews did not believe in him and eventually killed him. But the life of Jesus does not end with his crucifixion. He was raised from the dead and given all power from God. He now works to save his disciples.

Day 134: Matthew 14 and 16

Matthew 14 records the details of how John the Baptist died. He died because he had rightly spoken out about against divorce. The death of John was a deep sadness for Jesus. John had been associated with Jesus from their birth and John had been the only one who truly understood the mission of Jesus. In his grief Jesus wanted peace but had to make time for the needs of the people. He taught, healed and even fed the thousands that followed him. Finally, he sent the people away and then the disciples. Alone, he found comfort in prayer with his God. He was in prayer most of the night. Towards the end of the night, in a storm, he walked on water to reach the disciples boat. Jesus calmed the storm and saved Peter. He had the power to control the water and the wind. This power could only have come from God and it was a power to save.

Matthew 16 records one of the times where Jews came to him to see whether he was the promised prophet like Moses. They would expect a miraculous sign to be given, like Moses gave. We may be surprised that Jesus refused. However, we need to remember that these people had from early times concluded that Jesus was working with forces of evil (Matthew 9:34). They were not going to believe because their minds were closed. Jesus warned his disciples about people like this – the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees ran the synagogues and the Sadducees ran the temple.

Caesarea Philippi was a turning point. Peter realised that Jesus was the Messiah, which is another way of saying he was the expected one of all the Old Testament prophecies and promises. Those who confess like this have a blessed understanding. It was from this point that Jesus taught his disciples of his future death at the hands of leaders. Peter, the man who had just confessed Jesus, had to be rebuked for his poor understanding of the things of God. Jesus had to die to save mankind.

Day 135: Matthew 17 and 18

Matthew 17 follows the words at the end of the previous chapter which speak about Jesus coming in his kingdom. These words did not refer to the literal set up of his kingdom but an event that had many similarities with it. This was the transfiguration of Jesus. Jesus appeared in glory with previously dead believers. It was on a high mountain and a cloud and the voice of God was heard, just like happened to Moses. After coming down the mountain there is another unusual feature in this chapter. John the Baptist was spoken of as if he were Elijah. We learn elsewhere that John came with the same mission as Elijah and so he was an Elijah-like person. We also learn in this chapter that the generation of Jesus' day were unbelieving, despite Jesus giving them many signs and miracles.

Matthew 18 is known as the chapter on how to resolve disputes. The key way to resolve this was for humility like a little child. Little children avoid such disputes. Believers must avoid causing other believers to lose their faith and they must help the lost be found. If we do have a dispute with another, then we should speak to the person directly. We should not gossip. If that fails, we should get help from another. If that fails, we should get help from the ecclesia. And we must show mercy. Just think how merciful God has been to us! Jesus gave us a parable to help us understand this.

Day 136: Matthew 20 and 22

By Matthew 20 Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem for his final stay before his death. Jesus gave a parable of the vineyard workers. Each received the same wage for working in the vineyard no matter how long they worked. In the same way, all who work among God's people, no matter how long they work, will receive the same reward. We understand this to be eternal life in God's kingdom which faithful disciples will receive. Jesus was telling his disciples to make sure they were working faithfully. Yet the disciples misunderstood what they should do. Some wanted to make sure they got the most important places in the Kingdom and they started to request this. Jesus had to reinforce his message of humility. The chapter ends with two blind men. They had faith to see that Jesus as the true son of David and therefore the future king. They were rewarded for their faith and spiritual sight with the blessing of real sight.

When Jesus was in Jerusalem, he continued teaching in parables. Matthew 22 has the last of a set of three parables that began in the previous chapter. The parable of the wedding banquet taught how everyone had been invited to the wedding of the king's son (which represents Jesus). However, most declined. The invitation then went to the poor and they came. After the three parables there were three questions asked of Jesus. Most if not all were adversarial and were trying to trap Jesus with his answers. Jesus answered so wisely that he silenced each group one by one. Finally, he asked them a question, which they could not answer. Jesus asked them about the meaning of Psalm 110. This is a Psalm about how the Lord (meaning Jesus) would have victory over his enemies (such

as those asking the questions). It was an appropriate warning to the enemies that they would not succeed because God was on the side of Jesus.

Day 137: Matthew 23 and 24

The response of the Jews to the work of Jesus became worse and worse. In Matthew 23, in the final week of his mortal life, Jesus told the leaders of the Jews exactly what God thought of them. He gave them seven woes. Each of them is an extreme exposure of how bad they were. Jesus condemned them using language found in the Law of Moses and the prophets. Four times he calls them blind. They were not just like snakes (a symbol of sin) but they were breeding snakes (a breeding place for sin). They were not just unclean they were like human bones. They were actors at looking righteous but being revolting inside. It was a warning to religious leaders to consider their ways. Despite all that was going on around him, Jesus ended with a display of compassion for Jerusalem. The contrast between Jesus and the leaders was complete.

Matthew 24 has the Mount Olivet prophecy. It follows on from the evil described in the previous chapter. There was nothing more that God could do after sending his son. Jerusalem was not prepared to change and repent. It did not want to listen to Jesus. It had to be punished. Matthew 24 describes that punishment. The prime fulfilment of these words were the events leading up to AD 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. However, the prophecy also speaks about the return of the son of man (Jesus) to the earth. The coming judgments on the world mean that believers must be ready always by being wise and faithful, otherwise they would be unprepared for the return of Jesus.

We have now completed the whole gospel of Matthew. We will only take two chapters from the gospel of Mark, because much of Mark covers the same events as Matthew.

Introduction to the Book of Mark

The gospel of Mark is the shortest of the four gospels detailing the life of Jesus. Its content overlaps considerably with Matthew and to a lesser extent with Luke. The events occur particularly around the area of Galilee suggesting that Galilee was a prime audience.

The gospel of Mark does not contain the origin of Jesus or much of his teaching. It has fewer references to the life of Jesus fulfilling Old Testament predictions. There is little mention of Jewish feasts or aspects of the Law of Moses. This suggests that the intended audience already knew these. There is a strong theme of belief. Altogether, this suggests that the audience were already believers and that the gospel was written to strengthen their belief. The final commission to believers is largest of all the gospels, which also suggests this. The beginning of the gospel can also be understood in this way to strengthen belief. Mark 1 verse 1 says that Jesus was the Son of God. The gospel of Mark confirms this. The gospel of Mark was written to strengthen an informed audience in their belief that Jesus was the son of God.

Day 138: Mark 15 and 16

Mark 15 describes the trial of Jesus before the Roman leader Pilate and his death and burial. The Roman trial showed the worst of civilised justice. He was not found guilty of any crime and yet he

was flogged and condemned. When he was given to the soldiers, they mocked him, beaten in the head and spat on. Jesus had confessed to being the king of the Jews and so they mocked this. Then they crucified him. The Jews and the Gentiles combined in their mockery and pleasure at the humiliation of the saviour of the world. God made the land go dark for three hours and thereby showed the world that it was the world's darkest hours. A centurion understood from the events that Jesus was the Son of God. The centurion was also witnessed to the dead body of Jesus, which was allowed to be placed in a tomb.

None of the gospels end with the death of Jesus. There is always another chapter on the resurrection of Jesus. For Mark, it is chapter 16. The women encounter the empty tomb first. Mary Magdalene was the most unlikely person to be the first to encounter Jesus. She had had previously had seven demons (types of sicknesses). Later Jesus appeared to two disciples, and then the eleven disciples. No one expected the resurrection, but they were witnesses to it. The disciples had to carry this witness to the world and teach the good news of the kingdom of God to the world. The readers of Mark's gospel were included in this.

Introduction to the Book of Luke

The gospel of Luke contains the greatest amount of detail about the life of Jesus starting from the events leading to the birth of John the Baptist. It is introduced by words for a believer called Theophilus, so that he had a full account of what had happened. Theophilus is a Gentile name meaning 'lover of God.' Much of Luke's gospel was written in a way that helps a Gentile understand the events of Jesus' life from beginning to end. A Gentile would want to know all the details of how it started from the beginning. Luke was a Gentile. The gospel of Luke was written by a Gentile for a Gentile. It was the gospel for Gentiles to help them believe. It is a contrast with the gospel of Matthew which was written for Jews. Together, the gospels of Matthew and Luke were written so that both Jews and Gentiles could come to believe in Jesus. God wants all people to be saved by Jesus, whether Jews or Gentiles.

The gospel of Luke explains to the Gentile readers about things that they would need to know. These would not be necessary for a Jewish audience. Luke explains about sinners, forgiveness, prayer, joy in the gospel and the cost of discipleship. Luke mentions the Samaritans (neither fully Jews or fully Gentiles). There are mentions of Gentile leaders and Jewish outcasts. Teaching the Gentile readers was necessary and there are more parables in Luke than the other gospels.

Day 139: Luke 6 and 11

Luke 6 describes one of the areas where the Jews disagreed with Jesus. This was over the keeping of the Sabbath. The Jews had created their own additional laws for the sabbath and held that these should be kept alongside what the Law of Moses taught. Jesus did not agree. He followed the Law of Moses and not the traditions of the Jews. Jesus then chose 12 disciples as his apostles. The word 'apostle' means 'person sent.' Jesus would later send them to teach others about the gospel. Then we come to teachings which are largely found in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5 and 7. However, this was a different event because it took place on a plain not on a mountain. We are led to understand that Jesus repeated aspects of his teaching in different places at different times.

Luke 11 teaches about how and when to pray. A model prayer is given, and then a parable to show that one should be bold in prayer and not stop praying. One aspect of Jesus's teaching was the

witness of the miracles. The miraculous healing proved that his message was true and from God. This was especially true of diseases that they called 'demons.' Some people falsely claimed Jesus used power from evil gods. In reply, Jesus gave a parable of a man with an evil sickness. This man was healed, but then ended up taking seven worse evil sicknesses. This strange parable was really against the people of Israel. Jesus came teaching and healing their diseases so that they were healed. Later, however, they would become much more wicked than they were at the beginning. The people became far worse as time passed until they killed the Messiah.

Day 140: Luke 12 and 15

In Luke 12 Jesus taught his disciples to be careful about the many things that could corrupt them. Firstly, he told them to beware of the teaching of people like the Pharisees. These people pretended to be godly but were evil. Secondly, he told them to beware of the problem of greed. Greed can lead people to think about themselves all the time and not about God. Thirdly, he told them not to worry. Believers should not worry about getting food and clothing because God will provide these things. Instead, they should seek the kingdom of God first. Fourthly, the disciple must be ready all the time for the coming kingdom. Disciples must do what his master wants otherwise they will be punished. Finally, they should not worry about families being divided because of the gospel. That is the way it will be at times, because not everyone will believe.

Luke 15 contains three parables which teach about things that are lost. There is the lost sheep, the lost coin and the lost son. All three teach us that finding the lost is a source of great happiness on earth as well as in heaven. In the same way, God is pleased when sinners who were lost repent and become found. Jesus came to save the lost and to save the sinner. We can rejoice in this work and join him in it.

Day 141: Luke 16 and 19

Luke 16 contains two unusual parables. The first can be misunderstood as saying that it is ok to make money and misuse it. In reality, it teaches that one must use what one is given wisely. One must use the opportunities of today to make prepare for tomorrow. It also teaches that if we cannot use the small things of this life wisely, then how can we use the great things of the future life wisely? The parable was said against the Pharisees who loved money. The second parable is of a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. Lazarus was not helped by the rich man in even the smallest way. In the future life, they received what they deserved. Lazarus joined the faithful in peace, and the rich man had agony. The parable teaches the same message as the first one – use today wisely so that we can find peace tomorrow.

Zacchaeus the tax collector was one of the lost sinners of the type spoken about in Luke 15. In Luke 19 he changed and repented. Jesus then gave another parable about money. It makes good sense to use the money to make even more money, rather than not using it. This parable teaches the disciples to use what they have for their master. If they are lazy, they will not please the master and they will lose their place in his kingdom. This parable is relevant to what happened next. Jesus went to Jerusalem to the temple and found the priests running the temple like a corrupt business. They were not using what they had been given for God their master. So Jesus removed them. Jesus was welcomed into Jerusalem as their king. It seemed like the people finally understood his mission.

It made Jesus cry because he knew that their welcome was for a worldly king. He knew they would shortly kill their king and miss the opportunity they had had.

Introduction to the Book of John

The gospel of John was written so that the readers would believe that Jesus was the son of God (John 20:31). Belief is a strong theme, and every incident proves that Jesus was the son of God. In this respect, it is like the other gospels promoting belief in Jesus. It gives fewer events than the other gospels but each of those events is in detail and leads the reader to believe. John seems to be written for non-believers to help them believe. It seems different from Mark's gospel which was particularly written for believers to maintain their belief. Whereas Mark was based around Galilee, most of the events of John's gospel are based around Jerusalem.

John is selective in what it records. It does not cover the birth, baptism or temptation of Jesus. It has fewer Old Testament quotations. There are no parables. There are eight miracles called signs. It uses a different style of teaching. Rather than being just a story told, many of the discussions use spiritual language. The language is deeper and needs more thought to understand. It is easier to misunderstand what it says.

Day 142: John 2 and 3

John 2 contains the miraculous sign of the turning water into wine. At one level, this could be seen as a strange miracle. Is making wine a good use of the holy spirit? It is the spiritual meaning that helps us understand this event. The mention of three days reminds us of the three days that Jesus was to be dead. The wedding reminds us of the wedding between Jesus and believers at the end of Revelation. The wine reminds us of the blood of Jesus. On a spiritual level, this event is about the blood of Jesus being used to bring about the marriage between Jesus the bridegroom and the believers as the bride. This is a good use of the holy spirit. The second incident is easier to understand. The house of God had been turned into a money-making business and this needed to be stopped. This happened at the Feast of Passover in Jerusalem. This Feast taught about the future death of Jesus as the Passover Lamb. Both incidents lead us to the death of Jesus.

In John 3 we meet Nicodemus, an important teacher of the Pharisees. He came to Jesus at night, which suggests he was afraid of what others might think. He had concluded that Jesus was from God because of the miracles. Jesus told him something which he did not know, even though he was a teacher. He had to be born again to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus was speaking about baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus, which believers must do. These are part of the 'heavenly things' or spiritual things that Jesus taught in John's gospel. Nicodemus did not know about them. Part of these spiritual things was that God so loved the world that He sent Jesus to save it. Several other spiritual points are made that are also important.

Day 143: John 4 and 6

John 4 is largely about an encounter between a Samaritan woman and Jesus. This would not normally happen, because Jews and Samaritans do not get mix. Jews hold Samaritans as a nation of half-truths and half-Jews. Samaritans hold Jews as exclusive and arrogant. The discussion was about water. Jesus was able to give living water to the woman, which will enable her to never thirst. By

this he meant that his teaching and blessing could give her eternal life independent of normal water. The woman did not understand this spiritual language, but she learnt to believe in Jesus. Through her many others believed in Jesus. There is another miraculous sign at the end of this chapter. A royal official showed his faith in Jesus and that resulted in healing.

John 6 starts with the miraculous feeding of the 5000, which occurs in all four gospels. This led into a discussion about bread. The people spoke about normal bread. They had had a free meal and they wanted another. But Jesus was speaking about spiritual bread, by which he meant his body. At the end of his life, he taught his disciples to eat bread as a reminder of the sacrifice of his body. In John 6, Jesus and the others talk on different levels. Jesus spoke on the spiritual level whereas the people spoke on the natural level. The spiritual teaching was hard for the people and many turned away from Jesus. These are the ones who were following Jesus for free meals rather than for the words and teaching of life. Those who believe Jesus was doing God's work remained. It is clear from chapters like this that the teaching of John's gospel cannot be only understood as literal. It must be understood on the spiritual level.

Day 144: John 9 and 10

John 9 covers a Jewish investigation into one of the miracles of Jesus. Jesus had healed a man who was blind from birth. The investigation confirmed that Jesus had healed the man and that the man had been born blind. But the Pharisees refused to believe in this miraculous sign. This was not because it had not been proven, but because Jesus broke their own sabbath traditions. In the investigation, it becomes clear that the Pharisees were the ones who were blind to the truth. Jesus could heal natural blindness, but he could not heal spiritual blindness.

John 10 is about shepherds. The leaders of Israel were often called shepherds. The question is, who is a good shepherd? Jesus explains that he is the good shepherd. He will protect the sheep even if it meant giving his own life for the sheep. His sheep were his disciples who believed in him. Some of the Jews believed in Jesus because of the healing of the blind man, but some did not. This debate continued throughout the chapter. Jesus did not speak plainly to them because they needed to have faith first in order to be his disciple. The miracles he did were a sufficient reason for them to have faith. His plain speaking of truth was hated by the Jews, and we have one of many attempts to kill Jesus before his appointed time.

Day 145: John 12 and 14

Following the raising of Lazarus from the dead, John 12 records Jesus going back to the town of Lazarus close to Jerusalem. Mary the sister of Lazarus humbled herself so much that she wiped expensive perfume on his feet with her own hair. The raising of Lazarus from the dead had become so well known that many people wanted to see Lazarus for themselves. They went to the entrance to Jerusalem to welcome Jesus as their king. Even Greeks wanted to see Jesus. Jesus spoke again about his coming death, using the language of the seed. A plant must die before more plants are produced. And we have the third and final voice of God from heaven to help them all keep their faith in this coming time of trouble. If they stayed following the Pharisees in the synagogues, then they could not really follow God's son. Judas was one of those.

John 14 begins a long section only found in John's gospel. It is the intimate words Jesus had for his close disciples. Judas had already left them. Jesus taught them that he would leave them. But his

leaving was necessary if he was to return. It was also necessary if he was to send them the gift of the holy spirit to comfort them. This gift would teach them truth and give them peace. In the conversation, we again have Jesus speaking on a spiritual level but the disciples speaking on the natural level. They wanted to know the way to follow Jesus. Using spiritual language Jesus told them that he was the way. By this Jesus meant that they must follow his way of life. They would not be physically able to follow him.

Day 146: John 15 and 16

The spiritual language continues in John 15. Jesus is the vine and the disciples are the branches. They must continue in their faith in Jesus and they must produce fruit. Fruit represents the spiritual deeds they must do. Being a follower and a friend of Jesus meant showing love. Being a follower of Jesus meant that they would be hated by the world. Just as the world hated Jesus, so those like Jesus will be hated by the world.

In John 16, Jesus prepared his disciples for rejection by the people. Key among their enemies would be the synagogue rulers. Again Jesus told them that he had to leave them if they were to receive the holy spirit. This gift of God would allow them to speak the truth of God, understand what was sin and what was not and to help them judge right from wrong. Almost all versions call the holy spirit 'he.' This is inappropriate, because the holy spirit is not a person, but a power and ability given from God. It should have been translated as 'it.' Jesus wanted to say more, but at this time the disciples did not even understand that Jesus had to die and be raised.

Day 147: John 17 and 18

John 17 continues the final intimate discussion Jesus had with his disciples. It is made up of three prayers. It is an example to us of how to commit our lives to God in prayer. The first and shortest prayer is for himself. Jesus does not pray for God to remove his pain and suffering. He only prays for God to be glorified through His son, so that he could also be glorified. The second prayer includes a prayer for God's protection on his disciples when he would not be with them at his death. The third prayer is for future believers that they may be one with Jesus, God and the disciples. This oneness means that they would be united in all aspects of their faith.

By John 18, the intimate discussion between Jesus and his disciples had finished and the prayer was over. They had moved across the Kidron valley, where they were met by the betrayer and his party. God had shown Jesus everything that was to happen. Jesus did not evade arrest but offered himself. He was taken to Annas, then to Caiaphas, then Pilate. During this time, Peter denied knowing Jesus. In front of Pilate, the Jews changed their charges against Jesus from blasphemy to charges against the state. Pilate questioned Jesus about whether he was a king. Jesus explained that he was, but that his kingdom was not a kingdom won by fighting. Jesus continued speaking in spiritual language even while on trial.

Day 148: John 19 and 20

The trial of Jesus before Pilate continued in John 19. Pilate had Jesus flogged and mocked as king in the hope of appeasing the Jews. But it did not. The Jews wanted him crucified, even though Pilate could not find a reason. When Pilate asked further, he was told that Jesus claimed to be the son of

God, which made Pilate worried. His further conversations with Jesus made him more afraid. Against his will, Pilate agreed to the demands of the Jews. Jesus was killed among common criminals. Pilate insisted on the sign on the cross remained saying that Jesus was king of the Jews. So Jesus submitted to the death on the cross to glorify God and so that God would glorify him. Nicodemus reappeared and buried the body of Jesus in his own tomb.

John 20 describes the events around the discovery of the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus appeared first to Mary Magdalene. He told her not to hold him because he was going to God. He then appeared to ten of his disciples and gave them the Holy Spirit. Then he appeared to the eleven disciples including Thomas (not 12 because Judas was dead). They all needed to believe in his resurrection so they could be witnesses of it. The last verse confirms the purpose of the gospel of John. It was so that the reader could believe that Jesus was the son of God and so that the reader can have life in the name of Jesus.

Why Four Gospels?

There are four gospels describing the life of Jesus. These are like four witnesses bearing witness to the truth. The four accounts give different information and support each other. They describe the person of Jesus from four different points of view, allowing us to get a fuller picture of Jesus. There are four gospels because there are different audiences. Different audiences need different information and have different needs and sensitivities. There are four gospels so that all can find Jesus, whether Jew or Gentile, believer or non-believer. God wants all men to be saved (1 Timothy 2:3-4).

Introduction to the Book of the Acts of the Apostles

The Acts of the Apostles contains the early history of Christianity from the time Jesus left the earth and went to heaven to the time that the apostle Paul preached the gospel in Rome. It takes the story of Christianity on from the time of Jesus to the time of the apostles. No other book of the New Testament does this and for that reason the book is critical. It may seem that Jesus is no longer active in the earth and has handed over the task to his apostles. But this is not true. Jesus was now working through his disciples even though he was in heaven. The disciples had received the gift of the Holy Spirit from Jesus and were now operating in the name of Jesus.

The name apostle means 'person sent.' In chapter one we learn that the apostles were sent to preach the good news first in Jerusalem, then in Judea, then in Samaria and then to the ends of the earth. And this is what happened. The early chapters have the preaching in Jerusalem. Then the gospel went to Judea and Samaria in Acts 8. By the end of the book of Acts, the gospel had gone to the capital of the Roman empire. The gospel went from the capital of the Jews to the capital of the Gentiles.

From the point of view of race, the gospel went from being exclusively Jewish to one where the Gentiles were welcome. This transition was traumatic for the Jews and many Jews became the worst enemies of Christianity. It meant that the first Christians had to confess their faith in a time of persecution. There were also obstacles from pagan believers and dangers from the love of money. A key part of this time was the need for the Holy Spirit to teach them truth and right from wrong. The New Testament had not been written in these days, so that guidance of God through this means was essential.

Day 149: Acts 15 and 16

In Acts 10 we read how the gospel went to the Gentiles. This led to the question of whether the Gentiles had to keep the Law of Moses and be circumcised. It is this question that is dealt with in Acts 15. Its outcome affects Christians today. The apostles met to discuss the issue and concluded that it was by grace Gentiles were saved in Jesus. They did not need to keep the Law of Moses or be circumcised. They were asked to avoid four things that would make it difficult for Jews to eat with Gentiles. Eating together is necessary if there is to be fellowship between them. The decision was not just the decision made by men. The apostles had the Holy Spirit guidance which guided them to this decision and it was a decision from God.

In Acts 16 we learn about Timothy. Despite what Acts 15 decided, Paul decided to have Timothy circumcised so there would be less Jewish opposition to his preaching. Paul was then guided by Jesus not to go into a certain area but to go to Macedonia, which he did. At Philippi we have the start of the Philippian ecclesia. It contained a foreign businesswoman, a healed fortune teller, and a prison officer and his family. These were the first people that Jesus wanted them to preach to and save. From this we realise that God chooses ordinary people to hear his message.

Day 150: Acts 17 and 18

After Philippi, Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica in Acts 17. They started their preaching in the Jewish synagogue and had good success. However, this resulted in jealousy from the Jews. The opposition got so strong that some of the new converts were imprisoned. Paul and Silas left at night and preached at Berea. At Berea the Jews checked what they were saying against the Old Testament Scriptures. Many believed. However, Jewish opposition came from Thessalonica and Paul had to leave quickly. At Athens, we have the meeting of Christianity with Greek culture. Paul explained the difference between the real God and idols. Unfortunately, the response was not as good as in other cities. Perhaps they were too stuck in their philosophy to listen to anyone else.

In contrast to Athens, we read in Acts 18 that the response from Corinth was very good. Paul was guided by Jesus to stay there a long time. As usual Paul started preaching in the Jewish synagogue. Also as usual, the opposition grew. In this case, Paul moved his preaching to a nearby location. After Corinth, Paul returned to Antioch his starting point, and so ended the second missionary journey of Paul. We are introduced to Apollos, who had been taught by John the Baptist. Apollos had to be helped to understand the full teaching of Jesus. Apollos had a good knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures and was good at preaching.

Day 151: Acts 19 and 20

Acts 19 starts the apostle Paul's third missionary journey. It contains Paul's first visit to Ephesus. Priscilla and Aquila had already been there (Acts 18:18). Paul found other disciples of John the Baptist that needed further teaching, as Apollos had been. It shows how successful the preaching of John had been. Like at Corinth, they started preaching in the Jewish synagogue but had to leave after opposition. Like Corinth, they stayed a long time. Like Corinth, the Roman rulers did not support the opposition. At Ephesus the main opposition was from idol makers who objected to the

loss of business that resulted from Paul's teaching. A riot resulted and this was a great challenge to Paul, which he refers to later in his letters.

Acts 20 tells us that Paul visited many of the previous places on his third missionary journey, but we have few details about them. He went across to Macedonia there was Philippi, Thessalonica and Berea. He went down to Greece and presumably visited Corinth. On his return trip home he stopped at Troas. Here he taught late into the night and Eutychus fell out of a window. It seems that Eutychus had died and that Paul raised him. Paul then met the Ephesians elders and warned them to be good shepherds. False teachers were going to come and the shepherds needed to protect the flock. Paul had taught them how to be a good shepherd. With that, Paul left them, knowing that he would not see them again.

Day 152: Acts 21 and 22

Paul's third missionary journey was different from the other two because Paul did not go back to his starting point Antioch. He went to Jerusalem. Acts 21 describes this journey. On his way there, several disciples warned him about the troubles that would come on him at Jerusalem. Paul already knew this (Acts 20:23). He arrived at Jerusalem and met the elders. Paul told them about the success of the mission with the Gentiles. In turn, they told him about the success of the mission with the Jews. In order to not disturb the preaching work, they asked Paul to help those who had taken a vow under the Law of Moses. Paul was recognised by Asian Jews who misunderstood what Paul had done. A riot ensued and they tried to kill Paul. He was rescued by the Romans and bound, as had been predicted. At the entrance to the Roman barracks Paul requested the opportunity to talk to the Jews.

Paul spoke to the Jews in Acts 22. He gave a personal testimony of what happened to him from the time when he was a Pharisee like them. He described the miraculous events of his conversion to following Christ. They listened up until the point where his mission to the Gentiles was mentioned. This is one thing that they were not willing to listen to. In the trouble that followed, Paul was again rescued from certain death. The Lord had previously warned him right at the beginning of his ministry that the Jews would not listen to him. That was why he was sent to the Gentiles.

Day 153: Acts 23 and 24

The riot of the Jews cause the Romans to investigate the cause of the riot. In Acts 23, the apostle Paul was put in front of the Sanhedrin, which was the leading Jewish council. The investigation did not start well, as the High Priest ordered the accused be beaten before the investigation. Paul appealed to the issue of the resurrection from the dead as the means to prevent injustice from the priesthood. The resurrection of Jesus was actually the issue at stake. For the third time, Paul was saved from the violence of the Jews by the Romans. In the night Jesus appeared to Paul and told him that he must also witness in Rome. This did happen, but not for a number of years.

In Acts 24, the priests spoke to the Romans against Paul. They brought a lawyer to present their case and accused Paul of several false claims. Paul presented his own case, refuting the charges and explaining that the issue was the resurrection of the dead. The Roman governor Felix took no action, but kept him in prison for 2 years. Paul was allowed freedom to meet his friends and write. His missionary work had now taken a different form. Paul witnessed to the governor and his wife.

Day 154: Acts 25 and 26

The Roman governor Felix was replaced by Festus, and still Paul was in prison. Festus put Paul on trial in Acts 25 but got no further than Festus. He planned to send Paul to Jerusalem, at which point Paul appealed to Rome for justice. He could not expect justice from the Jews. However, to send Paul to Rome Festus needed to identify the crime. He asked for help from King Agrippa and the trial started.

In Acts 26, we have Paul on trial before Agrippa. This was now his fourth trial and his third one in front of Roman authorities. Paul repeated how he was converted from being a Pharisee to a Christian. The words Jesus originally used in Paul's conversion, included a quote from Greek writers (verse 14). Now we understand why - the words were to be repeated multiple times before Gentile rulers. Agrippa, like those before him, did not free Paul. They continued sent Paul to Rome in fulfilment of the words of Jesus in chapter 23.

Day 155: Acts 27 and Romans 5

Acts 27 describes Paul's journey to Rome. Paul travelled as one of a number of prisoners under the authority of a Roman centurion. There is great detail given of the sea voyage. Included is a description of their shipwreck on the island of Malta. The people in the ship were saved, which reminds us of how the Gentiles in Jonah's ship were saved. Here was another example of God's message of salvation going to Gentiles and His commitment to salvation by the saving of those in a boat at sea. This was the purpose of God in the book of Acts. It was to bring salvation to the Gentiles and to take the gospel to the ends of the earth – in this case Rome.

Introduction to the Book of Romans

The book of Romans was written by the apostle Paul to the believers in Rome. Paul had not been there but he knew many of them. His main concern was for the unity of believers at Rome. The Roman believers were made up of both Jews and Gentiles and there was potential for division between them. Paul writes for them to value each other and to live in harmony. It was God's choice that they had all become believers, whether Jew or Gentile.

All the believers had faith in God. It was faith that made them acceptable to God. This was shown in the example of Abraham. Abraham had faith and was right with God even before the Law of Moses was given. In the same way, it was faith that still made believers right with God. This came first to the Jews but now also to the Gentiles. It is a righteousness by faith in Jesus. This is shown by baptism into Jesus and living like Jesus. All believers should be united in faith. An example given is of a single olive tree in which both Jew and Gentile are branches.

Day 155 Continued: Romans 5

Romans 5 describes the conclusion of a previous discussion. Believers are made right with God through faith. This results in the blessings of peace and hope for the believers. Even if they suffered, there was a way that they could rejoice in these sufferings. It is because we know the purpose of suffering. It produces perseverance, it proves their faith and it gave them hope. All this

is possible to any believer through the work of Jesus. Man dies because of sin. But his sin can be forgiven through the work of Jesus, and then he can be given the gift of eternal life.

Day 156: Romans 11 and 12

Romans 11 describes the way God works with His people Israel to bring people to Him. They were chosen by grace throughout the ages. It is now the same with the Gentiles. The addition of the Gentiles to God's people is likened to an olive tree. The olive tree was originally Jewish. However, some of the Jews were removed because they were unfaithful. And branches of faithful Gentiles were added because of their faith, like a graft added to the olive tree. The olive tree of God's people now includes both Jews and Gentiles. We see in God's treatment of His people both goodness and severity depending on whether they have faith or not. But God is clear – He wants to be merciful.

Jews and Gentiles can both be removed from the olive tree that represents God's people. So, Romans 12 explains, we all need to be careful and respond to the mercy of God. We have to be different from people in the world and committed to following God's will. We do this by doing what we can for the Lord to the best of our ability. We must be committed to loving each other. The chapter highlights one of the hardest ways to show love. We must even love our enemies. When they are evil to us, we must respond with kindness. It is not for a believer to fight back, because it is God's role to reward them appropriately for the way they have behaved.

Introduction to the Book of 1 Corinthians

The apostle Paul had helped set up the ecclesia in Corinth. They had come from a city of idolatry and sexual immorality to know the gospel. Paul writes to make sure they stay separate from these ways. Their freedom in Christ did not allow them to do anything that they wanted.

The ecclesia had become divided but they needed to stand together in Christ. Paul gave them the analogy of the body of which they were all parts. Just like a body is united and works together for the good, so should they.

Their ecclesia had become disorganised, so that the true meaning of even the breaking of bread service was becoming lost. Their meetings had become a confusion of voices. In particular, the use of the Holy Spirit gift of tongues and prophecy had got out of control. Paul had to give them clear guidance on how to have orderly worship. The gift of tongues and prophecy was important but it was little compared to the need for love between each other. Paul wrote the greatest chapter on Christian love. These gifts did not stop some of them doubting the resurrection of the dead. Paul had to write the greatest chapter of the resurrection. He ended the letter with an appeal to them to stand firm in the faith and to do everything out of love.

Day 157: 1 Corinthians 1 and 5

The beginning of 1 Corinthians 1 says that the ecclesia had been enriched with spiritual gifts. They had many who could prophesy and speak in tongues. However, all was not well. They were divided and quarrelling. Instead they should be united in Christ. Their thinking was not right. Being a Christian is all about Christ and his death on the cross. Non-believing Jews and Greeks do not understand Christ. They do not understand his victory despite being weak and despised. But for

Christians, Christ is everything. Through Christ they are made right with God, they are made holy and they are saved. There was a lot for them to be united in.

One of the biggest problems at Corinth was a case of gross sexual immorality. In chapter 5, Paul confronts them with the problem. Not only was the case bad enough, but their response to it was just as bad. They were proud of it! Such an attitude would result in the spread of sexual immorality through the ecclesia. It would be like leaven spreading through a lump of dough. Paul made it clear that they could not expect to be in the kingdom of God if they behaved like that. In the same way, many bad behaviours will exclude from the kingdom of God and must be discouraged. In the case of the sexually immoral person, they needed to stop fellowshiping him. In that way, it would make him rethink and change his ways.

Day 158: 1 Corinthians 7 and 12

The problem of sexual immorality is also covered in 1 Corinthians 7. It starts off with the advice that men should not touch women. Many translations use the word 'marry' in verse 1 but the Greek word is the word 'touch' and the context is sexual immorality. Men must avoid sexual immorality and avoid touching women. Marriage is advised if men cannot control themselves. However, Paul says it is better not to marry at all and devote oneself fully to the Lord. As a general rule, people should remain in the state in which Christ called them. The chapter gives advice about different situations.

In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul makes it clear that the ecclesia should be united. They may have different gifts of the Holy Spirit, but it is all the same spirit from God. There is no justification for disunity. Paul gave them the example of the human body to explain how it works. The body is made up of many different organs and features, but it works together as a single unit. The body needs all its parts to work properly for the body to work properly. If any one part does not work, then the whole body suffers. So it is with the Corinthian ecclesia blessed with the Holy Spirit gifts. God has given them all the different gifts so that the ecclesia may be united and healthy.

Introduction to the Book of 2 Corinthians

The second letter of Paul to the Corinthians has less to do with ecclesial problems. It seems that the first letter, and any visits by Paul, had resolved them. Instead the second letter is more personal. It is more instructive and less critical. Paul is pleased to give a more positive tone. This balances out the harsh criticism of the first letter. There is still the need for separation from the ways of the world. There is still the need to avoid false teachers. They need to make the right judgments. Paul writes to keep them in the right way and so that they do not slip into the wrong way.

2 Corinthians addresses the problems of suffering for their faith and seeks to provide comfort. Paul had been through great trials, which he lists at one point. Many of these were life threatening. He spoke from personal experience and as one setting an example to them. Like the first letter, Paul works hard to explain his position as being an apostle from God so that he could give the advice he gives. In particular, Paul speaks about the need for Christian giving and how to go about it. Paul's advice had gone from beyond the need for correction in his first letter, to the need for the ecclesia to show Christian love in a practical way in the second.

Day 159: 2 Corinthians 2 and 6

2 Corinthians 2 tells us that Paul's last visit was painful just as was his previous letter was painful to write. Now he wishes to change his tone. One of the biggest problems was sexual immorality in the ecclesia. The particular case was addressed in 1 Corinthians 5. We assume that this is what the chapter is now speaking about. The sinner was removed from the ecclesia for his behaviour, but they are told to forgive him and welcome him back. This is what the removal from the ecclesia was aimed at in the first place – restoration with God. Paul described his work as an apostle as one that will produce a reaction in people. It is either like a nice aroma or a nasty smell. To those who are being saved by the gospel, it is a good aroma – this includes the repentant sinner spoken about in the chapter.

2 Corinthians 6 makes the point that we should not think our salvation is a long way off. It is today! What we receive depends on how we live today, not tomorrow. This was how Paul lived, even when he had to face hardships. Key to how we live is to be different from people in the world. The righteous should not be associated with wickedness of the wicked. We are to see ourselves as the temple of God where God lives. Would God like living with us? Would He live with us if we allowed wickedness to be in our temple? No! We must be separate from the wickedness in the world.

Day 160: 2 Corinthians 8 and 9

2 Corinthians 8 and 9 tell us that Christians must be givers. Christ was the example in this. Christ gave everything and died in poverty. When we give, it must be voluntary and not reluctantly. We must give cheerfully. When Christ died, he did so voluntarily and willingly. He set the example for us to follow. Paul was now following this example, by encouraging the Corinthian ecclesia to give for poor saints. The Macedonian ecclesias such as Philippi (Philippians 4:14-17) had already been involved in helping the poor saints by helping Paul. Now Paul was looking for the Corinthian ecclesia to help the poor saints in other places.

We must give to the service of the Lord because that is God's expectation. There is an important principle in giving. We will reap what we sow. Our giving is like sowing. If we sow little, we will reap little. If we sow a lot, then we will reap a lot. God will ensure that this comes about in our lives. Our riches are from God so that we can be generous to other people. When we do this, they will thank God for us.

Introduction to the Book of Galatians

The Book of Galatians is unusual in that it was written to the area of Galatia rather than to a single ecclesia. The problem facing them was a problem facing all the ecclesias in the area. They were being converted back to the Law of Moses from Christ by Jews. Paul was astonished at this behaviour. He first explained his role as chosen by God to deliver God's message to the Gentiles. In this role, he even had to oppose the apostle Peter for his attitude to Gentiles. Paul argued strongly in this letter that life in Christ does not require them to keep the Law of Moses or be circumcised. The Law of Moses had its place in its time, but something better has come. Now they had freedom in Christ.

Being free in Christ does not mean that they can do anything they want. They must live by the spirit and not in the flesh. They were expected to produce fruits of the spirit – love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness and self-control. They were not expected to live by the evil desire of their human nature. Everyone will receive the reward for their deeds. If anyone is in a state of sin, then they should be restored to Christ gently.

Day 161: Galatians 2 and 6

In Galatians 2 Paul described his second visit to Jerusalem after a gap of 14 years. He was able to describe what God had done among the Gentiles through his preaching. The apostles at Jerusalem accepted him and his ministry as of God. They did this by giving him their right hand, which was a sign that they were supporting his ministry and gave him their blessing. In this visit, they confirmed the previous agreement of the Jerusalem council – Gentiles did not need to be circumcised as required by the Law of Moses. Later at Antioch, Peter was found not to be following the agreement of the Council and Paul had to rebuke Peter.

The final chapter of Galatians starts with the need to help anyone who sins. They need to be restored gently and repent of their sin. Other believers need to facilitate this, remembering that all can be tempted to sin and fall. Paul concluded the letter by making it clear that believers will receive the reward for their deeds. They reap what they sow. In other words, if they sow the works of their evil human nature then they will end up being destroyed. But if they sow spiritual fruits, then they will end up receiving eternal life. The believer must behave like they are part of God's new creation now.

Introduction to the Book of Ephesians

The Book of Ephesians is about unity in Christ. Unity in the ecclesia. Unity between Jews and Gentiles. Unity in marriage. There is only one faith, one Lord and one baptism and so they should be united. They should be as one body and as one temple. They must make every effort to do this. Key to achieving this are the Christian behaviours of humility and patience with one another. God had given the Ephesian ecclesia many Holy Spirit gifts to build them up and help them stand together united. They must stand together with the whole spiritual armour of God.

There is spiritual language in the book of Ephesians. The believers are spiritually 'in heaven' now. This is a state of spiritual blessing which means they are destined to salvation through the forgiveness of sins. Whereas non-believers are spiritually dead. Non-believers were not physically dead, but they were spiritual and death is their only destiny unless they believe. Believers need to live holy and godly lives if they want to enjoy the spiritual blessings of the future.

Day 162: Ephesians 2 and 4

Ephesians 2 describes how God sees believers using spiritual language. Before they believed, they were spiritually dead. In this state they did the things of the world. When they were in this state, it was like they were serving a different ruler. But when they believed the gospel, they became spiritually alive. It is like they had been spiritually raised up and were with Christ. This dramatic spiritual change was emphasized again in a different way. The Ephesians were once strangers from God's people and were excluded from the citizenship of God's people. But now Christ had brought them close and destroyed the barrier that previously existed between them. Now Gentiles believers are fellow citizens with the Jewish and are one with God's people.

Ephesians 4 makes it clear that they must make every effort to be united. They must do this by being humble, patient, longsuffering and loving. This was why God gave the ecclesia a variety of different Holy Spirit gifts. It was so they could be built up in unity and become like Christ. And it was so that they did not listen to false teachings. They might have been Gentiles in the past, but they were not to live like Gentiles now. They had to change their way of thinking and think like Christ. They needed to follow godliness, holiness, and righteousness.

Introduction to the Book of Philippians

The letter of Paul to the Philippians was written to encourage the ecclesia through its difficulties. They needed to learn to rejoice in the Lord. This means seeing life from God's point of view, then seeing what there is to rejoice about and then rejoicing! One can even rejoice in suffering because Christians who suffer are in the process of being saved. And being saved is the goal. Paul suffered and rejoiced and set the example on how to do this.

They could rejoice in the Lord if they did a number of things. Firstly, if they were united and not arguing. They needed to be humble and caring like Jesus. Secondly, they should commit everything to God in prayer. Thirdly, they should think about the right things. Fourthly, they should be content. And finally, they should rely on God. A Christian may have many troubles, but they can still live a life of joy. The letter gives many examples of what they can rejoice about.

Day 163: Philippians 1 and 2

Paul wrote in Philippians 1 that his relationship with the Philippian ecclesia is more of a partnership. With them Paul did not have to work alone. He prayed that they would increase in their love and knowledge so that they would be ready for the return of Jesus. Paul was in prison at this point and yet everyone in the prison guard knew about Christ. So Paul rejoiced that the gospel had been preached. But Paul's position is not secure. It was possible that he might be executed. Even in this Paul can find reason to rejoice. He has found reasons to rejoice in either of the two outcomes. This was really positive living! The ecclesia should listen to the advice of someone happy to die for his faith. His letter could have been the last thing they read from him.

Philippians 2 explained to the Philippian ecclesia how to stand together in the faith. They must have one key quality: humility. Selfishness would lead to disunity, complaints and arguments. But humility leads to love and care. Just think about the superb example of the Lord Jesus Christ. He could have been proud, but instead took the lowest place. He died as a humiliated criminal for them. Humility is how we should live so we can be saved. If we do this, we will shine as stars in a dark world. The chapter ends with two examples of humble and caring people. Firstly, Timothy who would carry on Paul's work with them. And secondly, Epaphroditus, who almost died in his service for them and for Paul.

Day 164: Philippians 3 and Colossians 1

The life of the Philippian ecclesia should be focused on the prize of eternal life. Nothing else should get in this way. Philippians 3 tells us that believers are not guaranteed this prize, but that must keep on seeking it. They needed to watch out for the teaching of those Jews who say they must go back to the Law of Moses and be circumcised. There were many who are enemies of the faith and

believers needed to keep focused on the right things. Paul himself had done this. He had left his past behind him and was living so that he obtained the resurrection of the dead. Here is a man who was in prison not knowing if he would be executed. What an example he is!

Introduction to the Book of Colossians

The Apostle Paul wrote the ecclesia at Colosse about being 'in Christ'. That is, they must have faith and live in Christ. Being in Christ means that they have forgiveness of sins and an entrance into the Kingdom of Christ. It is a position of great blessing. All this is achieved through Christ. The importance and greatness of Christ is explained. But being in Christ is not a secure position. It is possible to leave that position by following other people and their rules.

Believers must rise above the things of this world. They must think about the things above, like Christ who is at the right hand of God. They must think about the behaviours of Christ and live like him. They must think about the words of Jesus and speak like him. This is what it means to be in Christ. Being in Christ is being in the hope of glory.

Day 164 Continued: Colossians 1

The letter to Colossians was written to those who were 'in Christ.' They had faith, hope, and love in Christ. They had first learned about Christ from a believer named Epaphras. Epaphras had told Paul about them, and Paul now wrote to them to build them up. They had been rescued from the world of darkness and had come to the kingdom of light. Although they were not yet physically in this kingdom, they were in this spiritual state. The key blessing of this was the forgiveness of sins, which means that believers are holy and without accusation of sin. Chapter one praises the position of Christ in God's plan. Christ is the image of the invisible God. We cannot see God, but we can see someone behaving like God when we look at Christ. The new spiritual creation is created in Christ (not 'by' Christ as many versions say). Nothing can be part of this new spiritual creation unless it is 'in Christ.'

Day 165: Colossians 2 and 3

Being in Christ means following the faith of Christ. It does not mean following the faith of others. In Colossians 2, reference is made to a number of false teachings that do not come from Christ. There are those who try and take them back to the Law of Moses and there are those who teach their own ideas. These ideas include hurting the body, worshipping angels and other false teachings. These come from human reasoning and not from Christ. They must follow Christ and not other people. They must live a life based on Christ and not on man's thinking.

Colossians 3 tells us that our thinking must be based on Christ who is in heaven. Our thinking must come from him and not from people in this world. This means that all worldly behaviour which is evil must be avoided. There is a list given of examples of this. On the other hand, people of God must choose to behave differently. There is a list of examples of godly behaviour. If we follow the words and deeds of Christ, then this is like Christ living in us. There are expectations of how someone in Christ should behave as a wife, husband, child, father, slave and master.

Day 166: Colossians 4 and 1 Thessalonians 1

Colossians 4 emphasises the importance of prayer if a believer is to be in Christ. Prayer was something that Christ did a lot. They should pray with thanks and pray for help to say and do the right things. They should pray for the spread of the gospel. Epaphras their teacher was praying for them. They should live wisely and speak graciously. Much of the chapter is about believers who were in Christ. Tychicus is specifically mentioned as being in the Lord, which means being in Christ. And Paul was in Christ, for which he was also in chains.

Introduction to the Book of 1 Thessalonians

The Thessalonian ecclesia was formed after Paul's visit there in Acts 17. In Acts 17 verse 4 we read that there were many Greeks converted. The first letter to the Thessalonians refers to this and how they were converted from idols. Both Acts and 1 Thessalonians speak about the persecutions that came from the people of Thessalonica. Paul suffered at the hand of violent Jews there, and the ecclesia had suffered at the hand of violent Greeks. They had both suffered from their own countryman. Paul wrote his letter because he was concerned that the persecution would upset the faith of the Thessalonian believers. He wanted to make them stand strong in faith.

A key message of 1 Thessalonians is that Jesus is coming. They needed to be ready for the return of Jesus, so that they could receive the blessings of true believers and avoid the wrath coming on the wicked. The coming of Jesus would bring God's wrath on their persecutors. Their salvation is coming and they should look forward to that. They needed to avoid the sexual immorality and the unholy practices of the world. They already had faith, hope and love, but they needed to keep doing them and do even more than they were doing.

Day 166 Continued: 1 Thessalonians 1

The first letter to the Thessalonians chapter 1 tells us that the believers at Thessalonica came from pagan idol worship. They had heard the words of the gospel and saw the miracles and believed. Unfortunately many of the town were harsh and persecuted those who believed. In spite of certain persecution, the believers at Thessalonica chose to become believers. They lived with a good faith, hope and love. Such faith in the presence of such persecution was admirable. It was no surprise that their faith was spoken of by believers around the whole area of modern-day Greece. The Thessalonians were great examples of true faith.

Day 167: 1 Thessalonians 2 and 3

1 Thessalonians 2 is largely about the attitude of the authors for the believers at Thessalonica. They were loved so much by them. In fact, they loved them like both a mother and a father. They cared for them as parents cared for children. These references explain the roles of mothers and fathers. Mothers were to care particularly for small children. Fathers were to encourage, comfort and urge the children to be spiritual. The Thessalonians received instruction from them as if they were words from God Himself, which it was.

1 Thessalonians 3 describes the cause and result of a visit made to them by Timothy. They were worried about the trials that they were undergoing because of their faith. They were concerned that

they may be tempted to avoid the trials by giving up on their faith. Timothy's visit showed them that this was not the case. They were strong in faith and love. So the authors were delighted with this report. Now they wrote for God to continue to be with them. We note that Timothy did not commend them for their hope, which was previously there and mentioned in chapter 1:3. This seems to be the reason for the teaching given in chapters 4 and 5.

Introduction to the Book of 2 Thessalonians

The second book of Thessalonians continues the message of the first letter. They needed to continue strong in faith despite all their troubles. They needed to remember that Jesus is coming to reward them for their faith and to punish the troublemakers. But two problems have occurred since the first letter. One problem was to do with teaching. There were some who were saying that Jesus has already returned and therefore the time of reward and punishment was already completed. This was not true. The return of Jesus would not happen until there was a rebellion against God.

The second problem was that some believers had stopped working. They had become idle and gossips. Possibly this was because they thought Jesus would soon come or because they thought he would not come at all. The authors refute this attitude in the strongest terms. They made it clear that those who do not work should not eat. Someone who does not work should not be associated with. Believers cannot be ready for the return of Jesus if they are lazy. If the Thessalonians had the correct teaching on the return of Jesus, and on the need to work, then they would receive the reward of Jesus on his return.

Day 168: 2 Thessalonians 1 and 2

2 Thessalonians 1 is a good summary of what was said in the first letter to the Thessalonians. Their faith in the face of persecution was admirable, and their love was growing. Their faith was well known among other ecclesias and among the preachers. It would result in a good reward on the day of Christ's coming. At this time their persecutors will be punished. The righteous will witness the majesty of Christ and will glorify him. Paul, Silas and Timothy were all praying for this.

The Thessalonians had thought about Paul's message of the coming of Jesus which was in his first letter. In 2 Thessalonians 2 this day was being questioned by the believers. Some were saying that the day of the coming of Jesus had already happened, and therefore their hope for the future was not valid. This is refuted. In particular, chapter 2 speaks of a time of rebellion against God, which will come before the return of Jesus. People will set themselves up above even God and will teach a culture of lawlessness. This time of rebellion will deceive many because there are counterfeit miracles. This rebellion is like the rebellion of Babylon in the past (Isaiah 14:13-14 and Genesis 11:4). It is like the culture of the world today. In the face of such godlessness and wickedness, believers must stand firm.

Day 169: 2 Thessalonians 3 and 1 Timothy 2

2 Thessalonians 3 repeats a request made in the first letter to the Thessalonians. The Thessalonians should continue to pray for the missionary preachers because they have many enemies as do the Thessalonians. The final message is to an issue that started in the first letter but has now become a significant problem. Believers were deliberately not working and had become gossips. Possibly this

was because they thought the return of Jesus was imminent or because they thought he would not come. Such behaviour is condemned in the strongest terms. Those who choose to do this should not be permitted to meet in the ecclesia until they change their behaviour. The final greeting is a wish for God's peace to be with them and for the Lord to be with them.

Introduction to the Book of 1 Timothy

Timothy was one of the apostle Paul's helpers on his missionary journeys. In the letters of Timothy and Titus, Paul passes on advice on how ecclesias should be set up and how missionary helpers should behave. 1 Timothy starts with a clear statement about how they should be living. The goal of their faith is genuine love for one another. 1 Timothy tells how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household (3:15). It is evident that this includes matters of both teaching and practice. Teaching includes how people behave as well as how they think. The letter contains many references to people who have not kept the right teaching and have gone away. There were many false teachers.

God wants all people to be saved and this is done by guiding the ecclesias in the right way. There are instructions on the role of men and women in the ecclesia. Elders have a key role in guiding the ecclesia, so there is advice on how to choose them carefully. A similar thing is true for the role of deacons (servants of the ecclesia) and there is advice on how to choose them. There is advice on the responsibility of the ecclesia to widows. There is advice on riches and rich people. There is advice for Timothy personally and how he should behave. He must be an example in all he does. The same is true for anyone who takes on a similar role.

Day 169 Continued: 1 Timothy 2

1 Timothy 2 commences the advice on how to help ecclesias. It starts with a prayer to God that the authorities would give them a peaceful life in which to live holy and godly lives. God wants them to have holiness and godliness because this is what will result in them being saved from death. God wants everyone to be saved. He then speaks about communal prayer. This should be done by men and not women. Women have a role to concentrate on good works rather than good dress. They should concentrate on learning in the faith and do this with a submissive attitude. They have important roles, but it is not one of leadership and teaching in the ecclesia. The justification for this comes from the beginning of Genesis, which is when men and women were made and the roles for men and women were defined.

Day 170: 1 Timothy 3 and 5

1 Timothy 3 is about two important roles within the ecclesia. The overseer (elder) and the deacon (servant). Overseers or elders are brothers who are shepherds of the ecclesia and who work together for the care of the flock. It is an important role and the elder must be an example to the flock. The chapter gives the characteristics of good shepherds. Deacons were servants who serve the ecclesia. They too must have the service of the ecclesia as their priority. They serve the ecclesia in many ways but they are not teachers. The ecclesia only functions if people give of themselves for the service of the ecclesia. Nowhere in the New Testament are these spoken of being paid roles. The household of God operated based on these roles serving the ecclesia freely.

The central part of 1 Timothy 5 is about the handling of widows. Back in Acts 6 we read that the first committee in the New Testament was one that looked after widows. The care of widows is a key part of godly practice in the Old Testament. Paul explains how it should be in the New Testament. Care for the ecclesial widows is expected if the widow is old, if they have no other carers and if they have a history of helping others in the ecclesia. Care of elderly widows in one's own family is expected as an essential part of Christian service. Paul explains that the ecclesial family should be like our natural family – one where there is care of our spiritual brothers and sisters. Elders should be respected and there should be no partiality.

Introduction to the Book of 2 Timothy

The apostle Paul wrote a second letter to Timothy. This was not like the first letter. The first letter was about how to organise the ecclesia. The second letter was more of a personal encouragement to Timothy. He had been through many difficulties since the first letter and had suffered many tears. Timothy needed encouragement to keep on serving the Lord as he had been doing. He must continue to work hard like a soldier, like an athlete and like a farmer. He had to keep on warning brothers about what was right but he did need to avoid quarrelling.

Timothy is warned about the behaviours of believers in the last days, which will become worse and worse. Paul had warned Timothy about this in his first letter. Timothy needed to keep focused on the word of God which can make one wise and righteous. Timothy must continue preaching the words of Scripture at all times, even if people follow false teaching and even if there is persecution. This is what Paul had faced, and Timothy could expect the same.

Day 171: 2 Timothy 1 and 4

Paul started his second letter to Timothy with some personal words for Timothy. He constantly thinks of Timothy and remembers his tears. Paul saw in him a sincere faith which he saw in his mother and grandmother. He encouraged Timothy to keep strong in faith and use the Holy Spirit which he had passed onto Timothy. Timothy needed to continue proclaiming the gospel, even if meant he was to suffer for it like Paul. He needed to follow Paul's example of faith and love. Preachers will experience disappointments in their preaching when people leave the faith. That is what happens. Paul mentions three examples. Not everyone will keep the faith when faced with persecution or temptations.

2 Timothy 4 really follows on from the end of chapter 3. It is the word of God that can teach, rebuke and correct people so they grow into godly people. Now Paul insisted that Timothy used the word of God to do just that. This is necessary because many people will follow their own wishes rather than God's wishes. They will turn from the truth and follow myths. Paul talks as if he knows his end is near. He has run his race and he has fought his fight. Now Timothy must run his own race and fight his own fight. Paul ended with a memory from his time at Ephesus, which is recorded in Acts 19. The city rioted against him. He described this as like being in the lion's mouth. The letter to Timothy sounded like Timothy was in Ephesus at this time because of the warning about Alexander the metalworker. We know Timothy had been there when Paul wrote the first letter (1 Timothy 1:3). Timothy needed to take care.

Introduction to the Book of Titus

Like Timothy, Titus was one of the apostle Paul's helpers. Like Timothy, Paul wrote to give him advice on how to help the believers in the ecclesias. Some of the content is similar, but there is less detail here than there is in 1 Timothy. A key part of helping believers is the establishment of elders in every ecclesia. These are the people who would guide and care for the ecclesias. If the elders were strong then the ecclesia would also be strong. The advice about the selection of elders is similar to the list given in 1 Timothy.

Titus must take on a teaching role. He must teach older men, older women and younger men. The younger women needed to be taught by the older women. Like Timothy, Titus must not just teach but he must also set the right example. Like Timothy, there is advice on relationship between believers and the authorities and there is advice for slaves. Like Timothy, there is warning about people who will rebel and turn away from the truth. Titus must do what he can to stop this by teaching the truth. He must particularly deal with divisive people who divide the ecclesia.

Day 172: Titus 1 and 2

A missionary worker is one who encourages people to have faith in God and come to a knowledge of the truth. This is what the apostle Paul taught Titus in Titus 1. It is the faith and knowledge which leads people to develop holiness and it is holiness that leads to eternal life. This is what Titus and Paul taught. The elders must also do this. The elders were shepherds of the flock, not rulers. It was a caring role - not a role of self-importance and privilege. Just as they care for their family well, so they should care for the ecclesia. The elders are those who must protect the flock from the danger of selfish false teachers. This includes the circumcision group which were Jewish believers trying to take Christians back to the Law of Moses. The use of a clear rebuke is recommended because of the culture of the people of the land.

Titus 2 continued with the need to follow sound teaching. As always, this means teaching and practice. Titus has the role of teaching to different groups. He is to teach older men to be worthy of respect. He is to teach the older women to live in the right way and teach the right thing. And he is to teach the young men to be self-controlled. We note that the teaching of the younger women is to be done by the older women. Titus is also to teach them by his personal example. All of them are to refuse the behaviours of the world and live godly lives. There is additional advice for slaves to be practice self-control in particular ways.

Day 173: Titus 3 and Philemon

Believers must submit to rulers and authorities willingly. So Titus 3 teaches. They must not speak falsely about them and they must live peaceably. In the past, they were in exactly that position. But the great mercy of God was shown to them and they believed and were baptised. Now they were in a position of grace with the hope of eternal life. Because of this they needed to be devoted to doing the right things. They needed to avoid foolish arguments and divisions. In fact, they needed to stop divisive people dividing the ecclesia by warning them and then removing them. The ecclesia needed to be a place of goodness and peace.

Day 173 Continued: Introduction to the Book of Philemon

The book of Philemon is a letter from Paul to Philemon. Philemon was a slave owner, who had lost his slave Onesimus. We are not sure why Onesimus had gone. While Onesimus was away, he was converted to Christ. He came across Paul in prison and they became very close. Paul now chose to send Onesimus back to his former master. His hope was that Philemon would receive Onesimus back as a brother in Christ rather than just as a slave. Paul argues skilfully giving a number of excellent reasons why Philemon should do this.

The relationship between slave and master is not something we fully understand today. We know of the abuses of slave owners. Paul's letter to Philemon crossed the great social barriers of the day. Paul made it clear that in Christ that they are not slave and master but brothers in Christ. Their relationship had greatly changed. The wise Paul gave Philemon a final reason why Philemon should do what he asked. Paul intended to visit himself, and then he would see whether Philemon had done what he asked.

Introduction to the Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews was written for Hebrews. That is, it was written for Jews, the people of God. God made a covenant with them and gave them the law, the priesthood, and the Tabernacle. Hebrews speaks a lot about these and the Old Testament. The Book of Hebrews has an important message for Jews – think about Jesus! It starts off speaking about the greatness of Jesus. Then it highlights how Jesus is greater than the angels, who were the ones who delivered the Law of Moses. It was true that Jesus was made lower than the angels, but he had to be if he was to help the removal of man's sins.

Jesus was a better High Priest than the High Priest under the Law of Moses. He was a priest after the order of Melchizedek, which is a priest specially chosen by God. Hebrews gives many reasons why the priesthood of Jesus is better than the one under the Law. It did remove sins, whereas the blood of animals under the Law could not. The Law was a shadow of the things to come, whereas Jesus was the reality. The Hebrews needed to fix their eyes on Jesus. They needed to leave the Law and stay with Jesus. In that way God can bring about the blessings of the work of Jesus and the kingdom of God.

Day 174: Hebrews 2 and 13

Hebrews 2 tells us about the word of angels. God gave them the task of giving the Law of Moses to the Hebrews (Acts 7:53). This law was binding on the people. However, God sent His son to teach salvation and gave proofs of His message through the miracles Jesus did. Given that Jesus is greater than the angels, then his message must be listened to even more than the Law of Moses. Jesus was made lower than the angels. He had to be lower than the angels and human if he was to take away the sins of humans. An angel could not do this. The humans Jesus helps are those of his spiritual family.

Hebrews 13 contains the final message of the book of Hebrews. Having spoken about how much better Jesus is than the Law of Moses, it tells the Hebrews some of the Christian behaviours they should have. They should love each other as family. They should avoid sexual immorality and the love of money. They should be content and trust in God to be with them. They should follow their Christian leaders and they should even be prepared to suffer shame for the sake of Jesus. It ends with a request for God to bless them through Jesus.

There now follows summaries of the books of James and 1 Peter which were both fully read in Part A of the bible reading for new readers.

Introduction to the Book of James

James is the Greek version of the name 'Jacob.' The letter was written to the scattered twelve tribes, that is, the people of Israel. Unlike Hebrews, it is not an explanation of the Law of Moses. James is a very practical book that makes clear practical points. Believers need to persevere under trials so that they will receive the blessing of life. Believers must not just be good at listening and claim they have faith. Their religion means nothing unless they put it into practice. This includes controlling the tongue, avoiding the things in the world and looking after the widows and orphans. It is easy to show favouritism especially to the rich, but favouritism is called sin in this letter.

The centre of the letter describes two types of wisdom. There is the wisdom of the world, which is proud and selfish. And there is the wisdom from God, which is humble and submissive and everything good. When there were quarrels among them then this is the worldly wisdom taking over. Instead they should submit themselves to God and His ways. The letter returns to the topic of trials and suffering at the end. They must be patient in their suffering because believers are rewarded for their perseverance in these situations. When in these difficulties they should pray. God makes it clear that He listens to these prayers, because He said that the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.

Introduction to the Book of 1 Peter

The apostle Peter wrote in his first letter that Christians may have to suffer for their faith. He wrote to comfort them and explain the benefits of faithful suffering. Suffering proves that the faith of believers is genuine. This faith is more important than the most valuable thing that the world has – gold. It is more important because it will result in praise, glory and honour for the believer when Jesus appears and it will result in their salvation. Suffering for Christ leads to glory. The two things are linked in many places. God will test believers to check that they are genuine.

The faith of believers makes them different from the people around them. They have been born of the word of God. They are like different people. They are like foreigners in the country they live in. They have different views and behaviours from the people of the world around them. They are God's specially chosen holy people. They will receive mercy, after they have suffered a little while. So they must remain strong and firm in their faith.

Introduction to the Book of 2 Peter

1 Peter described the problem of suffering for one's faith. Now Peter moves on to the need for godliness in addition to faith in 2 Peter. Godly people will be saved from the destruction that will come on the world. Peter describes the specific things that must be added to faith – goodness, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, mutual affection and love. People should make every effort to develop these characteristics.

One of the dangers to true faith is false teachers. Chapter 2 gives examples from the past of false prophets and shows how God intervened to punish them. Chapter 3 gives a warning about the punishments that are to come in the future. Believers must make sure they are living godly lives so that they are not punished with the wicked. Peter explains what is true teaching, which is the Scriptures. Peter himself had heard the voice of God when he was on a mountain with Jesus. Believers must follow these things so that they are ready for the return of Jesus.

Day 175: 2 Peter 2 and 3

2 Peter 2 addresses the problem of false teachers. These people are greedy for money and power. They teach freedom even when it is against the advice of the Bible. Many people follow them. What is clear is that God will punish these false teachers. The chapter gives 4 examples of such people. In each case, they suffered an unusual punishment, showing God's special displeasure. In each case, God saved the righteous. This shows that God knows how to punish the wicked and save the righteous on the day of judgment.

The wicked do not believe that a judgment is coming. 2 Peter 3 describes those who mock God and say that there has been no change over time and God will not act in the future. Peter answers this by reminding them of the flood in the time of Noah. It came suddenly and unexpectedly. In the same way the world will suffer a future judgment. Peter also tells us God's perspective of time. Even 1000 years is a short time for God. The supposed long time is not long for God. Jesus will come like a thief. The only reasonable way to live is to be ready all the time. The book ends with a final reminder to follow Scriptures even if some of the teaching seems hard. They must not fall from their position of grace.

Introduction to the Book of 1 John

The first letter of John addresses the question of who is in fellowship with God. The message is simple yet also very deep. The simple message is clear but the deeper message is easy to misunderstand. Fellowship with God is because of Jesus Christ. It is not because we have no sin, because all have sinned except Jesus. It is because in Jesus sin is removed. Fellowship with God occurs if we walk and behave like Jesus. We are not in fellowship with God because we claim to be. Our behaviour will decide whether we are with God or not. We must love like God does. We must help our brother in need and our love must be shown practically. If we do, then in one sense God lives in us. We must also believe in Jesus Christ and keep the commands.

There are many dangers which can prevent us being in fellowship with God. If we hate our brother, we are not in fellowship with God. If we love the world and its desires then we are not in fellowship with God. If we deny Jesus is the Christ and deny that he came in the flesh, then we are not in fellowship with God. If we continue sinning, we are not in fellowship with God. The purpose of the first letter of John is so that the believers are in fellowship with God and remain in fellowship. And if believers are in this state, then their joy is complete.

Day 176: 1 John 4 and 5

1 John 4 starts with a warning for believers to check the spirit or teaching of prophets to see if they are true or false. They may claim that Jesus did not come in the flesh. That is, they may claim that

Jesus did not have human flesh like other men. There are many who claim that Jesus is more than human. These claims are not to be believed. John then continued with the teaching about love. God is love and so are those who are godly. If we love others, then people can see God working in us. But if we hate others, then we are not godly.

1 John 5 speaks about those who are children of God. It is those who believe in Jesus and obey the commands of God. The definition of love for God includes keeping the commands. This means that God sees love as more than an emotion. It is a decision to obey God. Jesus did this. He came with water baptism and then gave his blood in obedience to God. God witnessed to the truth of Jesus by raising him from the dead and giving him His spirit. Anyone who does not believe God's witness of Jesus is making God out to be a liar. This means there is no neutral position of not knowing whether one believes God or not. Anyone who does not believe is demonstrating that they believe God is a liar. But we must believe, we must love our brother and we must avoid sin. In this way we are children of God.

Day 177: Introduction to the Book of 2 John

2 John is written to a sister and her children in the faith. John picked out certain points from the first letter of John to present to her. She is to love God by keeping the commands and by loving one another. And there is a warning which was also given in the first letter. She must watch out for those who teach that Jesus did not come in the flesh. These are people who say that Jesus was not human. John is concerned about this false teaching and its effect on them. John warns her not to associate with people who have this false teaching. If she welcomes them into her house then she is also participating in the false teaching. She is warned to be separate from such false teaching. Like other sensitive issues, John wishes to visit and explain them face to face. His goal is the same as the first letter. He wants her to be in fellowship with God and for her to have joy.

Day 177 Continued: Introduction to the Book of 3 John

3 John is similar to 2 John but with important differences. It was similar in that it was written to an individual who was good at welcoming brothers and sisters into his house. He did this even if they were strangers to him. This was the right thing to do. Unlike 2 John, he was right to do what he was doing. The contrast to 2 John is that there was an issue about not fellowshiping people he should do. There was a strong individual called Diotrephes who was preventing fellowship, even with the apostle John. On the other hand, Demetrius was setting a good example.

Overall the three letters of John are about fellowship. The first letter sets the principles of fellowship. The second letter has an example of fellowship going too far and being offered to those who should not be fellowshiped. The third letter is an example of fellowship not going far enough and fellowship not being offered to those it should be offered to. Brothers and sisters need to find the right balance of fellowship so that they remain in fellowship with God.

Day 178: Introduction to the Book of Jude

Jude is a version of the Greek name Judas and the Hebrew name Judah. The purpose of the letter is to prepare readers for the problem of false teachers. This was a big problem for Christians and the problem was already great at the time of the apostles. His warning echoes the words of Peter in 2

Peter. He even quotes the words of 2 Peter 3 verse 3 in Jude 1 verse 18. Jude uses similar examples of false teachers as Peter does and some differences. Jude quotes from Enoch who spoke before the flood in Noah's time. God will judge the wicked just like God judged the world at the time of Noah. Peter refers to this judgment in 2 Peter 3, although he does not quote from Enoch. The message is clear for believers. Be very careful who you listen to and try to help those who do. We must remember that it is God who saves and He is able to prevent us falling in this way. We can thank God for this.

Introduction to the Book of Revelation

The book of Revelation is the last book in the Bible. It has a clear message. Jesus is coming soon. This means he will come quickly. He will reward everyone according to what they have done. For the righteous, this is a cause for rejoicing. For the wicked it is a cause for fear. But even the righteous need to make sure they are ready. There are many surprises as to the spiritual state of ecclesias, so this must also be true of individuals.

The book of Revelation gives us information about the distant future and God's plan with the earth. The centre of this plan is Jesus. The future is described in symbolic language so it is not clear when and what the visions are specifically about. The future could have happened immediately but did not. The extra time is an opportunity for others to turn to God and be saved.

The people of God are represented by a woman, who ultimately is the bride of Christ. The people of the world are represented by beasts. There is a man who represents Jesus, the bridegroom. Ultimately the beast-like people are removed from the earth. Ultimately the righteous marry Jesus and have fellowship with God. The final chapters remind us of the Garden of Eden, which is re-established but is even better than before. The book ends with a reminder that Jesus is coming quickly and that everyone should be ready.

Day 178 Continued: Revelation 1

God gave Jesus the book of Revelation which was then passed on to us. It is the word of God and people need to listen to its message. Chapter 1 tells us that it was written to seven ecclesias who were to be part of God's kingdom. It starts with the clear message of the book – Jesus is coming, and you must get ready for him. John then describes a symbolic picture of Jesus. It brings out features of glory, righteousness and judgment that Jesus possesses. This picture of Jesus should make all believers want to get ready to meet him. The symbolic Jesus also had the key of death and the grave, which means he has the ability to give eternal life to believers.

Day 179: Revelation 2 and 3

Revelation 2 and 3 are specific letters to the seven ecclesias. The messages to the ecclesias contain many surprises. Firstly, the ecclesias were not all ready to meet Jesus. One was even described as being 'dead'! Secondly, what the ecclesia thought of itself was rarely correct. Those who thought they were weak were strong and those who thought they were strong were weak. We can expect surprises at the judgment because of differences between our own opinion and those of Jesus.

What Jesus is looking for is an active faith. He is looking for a faith that stands the test of suffering and one that produces Christian love. This was found in some ecclesias but not all. What Jesus saw in many ecclesias were dangers from worldliness. He saw ecclesias too concerned about the riches and pleasures of this world. Part of this problem was caused by false teachers who encouraged sexually immorality and compromise with the world. The ecclesias needed to overcome these problems if they are to be rewarded with eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Day 180: Revelation 4 and 5

Revelation 4 and 5 contain a vision of God. Following the messages to the ecclesias, John is invited up to heaven. This is not literal because we are told John is 'in the spirit'. He saw a throne with someone sitting on it. This was a representation of God. Around him were four living creatures and 24 elders. The elders worshipped God. The words take us back to the original creation and the reason that God made man. God wants to live with man, as He did in the Garden of Eden. But God cannot live with wicked people, which is what happened to Adam. For God to live with man, God has to remove wickedness, which is what we learn about in Revelation.

The centre of God's plan is Jesus. He is the lamb who appears before the throne of God. The work of Jesus enables believers to enter the kingdom of God. It also opened the seals which are the events that bring about the kingdom of God. Much of Revelation is about what is in these seven seals. The kingdom does not come immediately. There is a series of troubles that come on the earth first. These are described in the seven seals of Chapter 6, the seven trumpets of chapter 8 and 9 and the seven bowls of chapter 14. The troubles get progressively worse.

God could have made the kingdom of God come immediately. But if He had, there would not have been the opportunity for the wicked to repent and be saved. God always works by giving people an opportunity to repent. Often this requires the conditions of trouble to make people think and repent. God wants repentance because He has no pleasure in the death of the wicked. So all readers of the Bible need to make sure they are ready for the return of Jesus to the earth. He will come whether they are ready or not.

Review of 6 months of Second Steps in Bible Reading

You have completed a 6-month journey through the Bible. You have read all or part of every book of the Bible. There are 66 books and you have now fully read 22 books. You have read 46% of the Bible. The journey has been historical and chronological. You have principally followed the story of Abraham's children through to Jesus and beyond. The Bible is essentially a story of God and His relationship with His people. God has been working with His people throughout, hoping to be loved and obeyed. But man has struggled to have faith in God and has usually done his own thing. Adam set the pattern from the beginning.

But the Bible is not just about the failure of man. It is about the saving of man. God did this because He had a plan to save. He did not make man and creation just to destroy it. Abraham and David saw glimpses of this plan when God made promises to them. The prophets saw greater detail of this plan but struggled to put all the detail together. Then God revealed Jesus, the centre of His plan and the means of saving mankind. Now God's plan with Jesus is clear. We have a saviour who can remove our sins. We have a shepherd we can follow. We have a hope we can look forward to.

But salvation is not guaranteed for God's people unless they live faithfully to the end. Life will throw up many challenges that will test our faith. We need the comfort of the Bible to keep us going when there are difficulties. We need the guidance of the Bible to keep us on the right path. We need the encouragement of the Bible to see us through our failings and those of others. This is why we need to keep reminding ourselves of the advice of the Bible. We need to grow on its wisdom to become more like Jesus. This is why we need to read and meditate on the Bible daily.

In Second Steps of Bible Reading, you have learnt about the whole story of the Bible and have visited every book. Now you are ready to join the many daily Bible readers who read the Bible once a year. They use a Bible reading plan called the 'Bible Companion.' It allows one to read the whole Bible every year. By reading the New Testament twice a year this allows there to be a chapter from the New Testament every day. This is based on the reason that Christians ought to be reading about Christ and Christians daily.

There are thousands who follow this daily reading plan. They use it to structure their systematic reading of the whole Bible every year. They use it as the basis to read together when they are together.

It is important to follow a structured reading plan so that we do not just read the parts we like. The whole of the Bible has been preserved for us to read and learn from. Following the Bible Companion will help you do this. Reading the Bible and thinking about its message is a way of life that will help us be right with God. We should humbly listen to the voice of God and keep learning from it so we gain wisdom to live by. We leave you with some words which my father picked out for me as I started my spiritual journey. We can follow this advice by continuing to read and learn from the word of God:

"Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning."
Proverbs 9:9