

March 2024 Daily Devotional



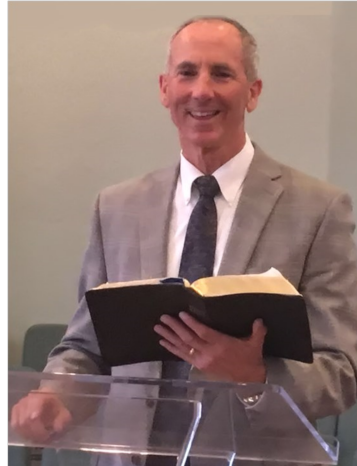
“... for this
I came into the
world, to testify
to the truth.
Everyone on the
side of truth
listens to Me.”

John 18:37

Vistoso Community Church

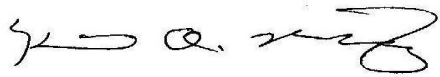
Foreword

We have an interesting month of Scripture readings and devotions. We start with the early Church in Acts, move to Reading Ahead to the future and the coming eternal kingdom, and then back to the Old Testament and the feast days of the Mosaic Law—all of which point to Christ. Next we return to the Book of Matthew to focus on repentance then, most appropriately, we finish the month leading up to our celebration of Easter on the last day of the month.



I trust God will continue to bless as you spend time in His Word and thereby have the opportunity to share His thoughts, affections, and purposes.

In His grace,



Kevin Redig

All Scripture quotes have been taken from either the NKJV (1992 edition) or the NIV (1984 edition).

The Early Church

Friday, March 1: Read Ephesians Chapter 3

The next New Testament book we are going to investigate is the Book of Acts. It will give us an in-depth look at the start and early history of the Church. You will be surprised to note that many of the challenges and attacks upon the Church really have not changed much over the course of the past 2000 years. Bear with me as we lay some ground work during our first few days of reading, prior to beginning our readings in the Book of Acts.

In working our way through the Book of Acts, our focus will be upon the Church—in particular its establishment and spread. However, before we start reading in Acts, we have to lay quite a bit of groundwork. For example, today's reading in the Book of Ephesians teaches us a number of things:

For this reason, I Paul ... if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of grace which was given to me for you ... and to make all see the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God ... that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church ...

Ephesians 3:1-10

Consider the word *mystery*. Its Greek counterpart means: something that was hidden but is now revealed. In other words, you will not find prophecy about the Church in the Old Testament. Rather, as we will see in our reading of the Book of Acts, the Church is going to spring into existence suddenly in Acts Chapter 2. Then men like Paul and the other Apostles are going to have to teach the principles by which the Church is to function, for the Church is not Israel, nor is it to operate under the Mosaic Law.

The Early Church

Friday, March 1:

Read Ephesians Chapter 3 (Continued)

Note from our reading today that the Church is not somehow God's *Plan B*. It has been in the mind of God *from the beginning of the ages*, and is now being revealed.

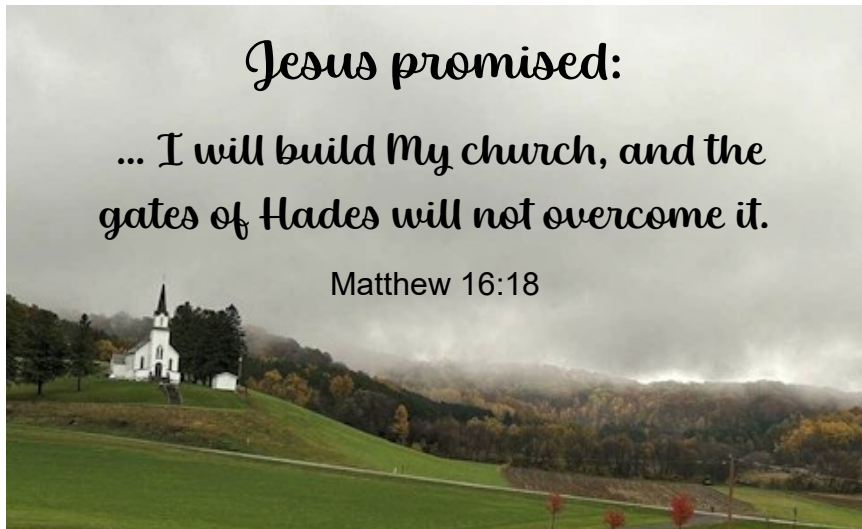
Several closing thoughts for you:

- The Church is God's chosen instrument to accomplish His purposes during our particular time in history.
- Israel's rejection of their Messiah led to the insertion of the Church into God's plan of redemption.
- God is not done with Israel, just temporarily set His chosen people aside.
- The Church began suddenly at Pentecost, and I believe Scripture teaches it is going to end just as suddenly—but that is a lesson for another day!

Jesus promised:

*... I will build My church, and the
gates of Hades will not overcome it.*

Matthew 16:18



The Early Church

Monday, March 4:

Read I Corinthians 3:1-12

As you recall from our study of the Book of Matthew, Jesus asked His disciples point-blank:

"... Who do you say I am?" Simon Peter answered
(for the group), **"You are the Christ, the Son of the**
living God." Matthew 16:15-16

Peter's answer made it clear that he understood Jesus to be both divine (Son of the living God) and the One anointed by God as Savior (the Christ). I would suggest to you that Peter had just borne witness to the fact that he is a saved individual—one with eternal life. He is saved by virtue of having placed his faith in who Jesus is and why He came (although the details of the latter are still very murky in Peter's mind, if you read ahead to Matthew 16:21-23).

Now consider Jesus' response to Peter's firm testimony:

"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah (of course he is—salvation will do that for you), **for this was not revealed to you by man, but by My Father in heaven** (through the ministry of the Spirit—for God is always the initiator in our coming to Him). **And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it."** Matthew 16:17-18

Study this dialogue carefully, and you will see that the rock upon which Christ will build His Church is none other than an accurate testimony about who He is and why He came—Son of God and Messiah!

Continued on the next page.

The Early Church

Monday, March 4:

Read I Corinthians 3:1-12 (Continued)

Furthermore, the Church will fail to make an impact in this lost world when it deviates from this one foundation! When the church holds fast, as Jesus promised, nothing can stand against it!

Let me reinforce this concept from today's reading. In I Corinthians, Chapter 3, Paul is talking about the Church being a building—a building with a singular foundation:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. I Corinthians 3:11

May this always be both our testimony and our foundation.



The Early Church

Tuesday, March 5:

Read Matthew Chapter 28

The Church is God's mystery (and masterpiece) that has now been revealed and she has one foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ. Today we have read about the Church's commission.

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you ..."

Matthew 28:19-20

Consider these observations as today's devotional:

- Do not miss the import of the word *therefore*. It follows on the heels of a very clear statement by Jesus:

"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore ..."

Matthew 28:18

This commissioning has come straight from the Lord of glory, the Creator of our material universe and the Savior of mankind. It comes right after He has declared all authority is His! With this emphasis, whatever follows must be of great import! It is! It is the commission given to the Church by its Head. It is neither optional nor a suggestion.

- There is one imperative verb in Verses 19-20. There is one main action, given in the form of a command, and that is to *make disciples!* We should see every other action as subordinate to this main verb.

Continued on the next page.

The Early Church

Tuesday, March 5:

Read Matthew Chapter 28 (Continued)

- In other words, if we are going to make disciples, we are going to have to *go* everywhere—from across the street to across the globe. We are going to have to teach and we are going to need a specific curriculum—the Word of God!
- Then let's not forget the verse that follows our Commission. For sometimes we feel as if God has sent us out to make disciples all by our lonesome. On the contrary:
"And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:20b

God has promised to go with us. Oh, that we would learn to embrace and love our commission.



The Early Church

Wednesday, March 6:

Read Acts 1:1-11

Finally, we get into the Book of Acts! There should have been a great sense of excitement among the disciples about what God was going to do next. There has been the concentrated teaching of the upper room discourse, the cross and resurrection, and talk of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Instead, what do they ask in Verse 6?

"Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom of Israel?"

They are looking *backwards* while God is in the midst of unfolding something new! Let's be ready for our great God to unfold His eternal plan of redemption as He sees fit! This is how Jesus redirects this question by His disciples. In essence He says, *"Don't worry about it— that is in the Father's hand! Instead, here are my instructions."*

- **Be My witnesses.** We will see lots of this in the Book of Acts.
- **Throughout the earth!** This fits perfectly with the Great Commission. Not surprisingly, we will see the Gospel spread from Israel to the surrounding Gentile nations as part of the narrative of the Book of Acts.
- **I am with you!** Thankfully, the Spirit will be the enabling power for this work of the Church to which we have been called. For it is just as Jesus promised:

"I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth."

John 14:16

I love this promise that the Father will replace one member of the Trinity (Jesus) with another (the Holy Spirit). Jesus has not left us on our own to complete His Great Commission, He will be with us to the end of the age!

The Early Church

Thursday, March 7:

Read II Timothy Chapter 3

There is one more thing we must glean from the first verses of Acts. There is a teaching within today's churches that it is the Church's role to make the earth a *better place*, but Jesus said:

"You will receive power ... and you will be My witnesses ... make disciples." Acts 1:8

Jesus said nothing about an improved environment. In fact, John's Gospel taught us we can expect persecution. Understanding this, I think we can identify a principle right here in Acts 1:11. Jesus has ascended into heaven, and suddenly two angels appear and challenge the disciples:

"Men of Galilee ... why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go ..." Acts 1:11

As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ with a commission from our Lord to make disciples, we are not to get caught *staring into space!* For the role of the universal Church is not to make the world a better place or to turn bad people into good people! The Church's role is to be used by God to help spiritually dead people become born again as new creatures in Christ with a change of destiny from hell to heaven! Far from things getting better, in today's reading the Scriptures are quite firm about the short-term future:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy ... without self-control, brutal ... having a form of godliness but denying its power ... II Timothy 3:1-5

It is not the Church that is going to turn things around, but the Lord Jesus Christ at His certain coming!

The Early Church

**Friday, March 8:
Read Acts 1:12-26**

The disciples have a very specific promise from their Lord:

"... wait for the gift My Father promised ... in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit."

Acts 1:4-5

The disciples are now faced with the very same problem that you and I are faced with when it comes to the promises found in the Word of God—the struggle between faith and doing! They started out well in Verse 14:

They all joined together constantly in prayer ...

This kept them God-centered, focused on the promise, and dependent. But in Verse 15 the need to *do something* took over. Those following Jesus, led by Peter, decided that there was a pressing need to replace Judas by choosing another. As you read, candidates were brought forward. They prayed to God in Verse 25:

Show us which of these two You have chosen ...

Then they cast lots to select the candidate. The lesson here is clear. If the disciples had prayed the same prayer, and then waited upon the Lord to answer, in a few months Paul would have been the obvious answer. But they would have had to wait and rest upon the Lord for Him to reveal His answer in His timing.

As an alternative, they prayed and then cast lots. I know that was done as part of Old Testament ritual, but does that sound like a spiritual practice to you? Were they forced to decide right then? No, and what they got was a believer named Matthias who is never mentioned in Scripture again. You see I am suggesting God did answer their prayer, just not through the casting of lots. How much better to wait in dependent trust, and then rejoice in the answer the Lord provides.

Reading Ahead

Monday, March 11:

Read Daniel Chapter 4

We are now back to our series seeking to understand what is yet to come—the subject of Biblical prophecy. We are studying prophecy so that we might be both encouraged and motivated in our day. We are calling this investigation, *Reading Ahead*, simply because with the Word of God we have the ability of confidently knowing ahead of time how things are going to turn out.

Thus far the most significant event on the horizon is the certain and sure return of the Lord Jesus Christ. During the course of the next few days, we are going to look at something else that is closely related to the return of Jesus—the close of Gentile-dominated world history. Before we get into the details, I want to reinforce the fact that the history of mankind does not happen in a vacuum. There is much strife and evil because man is fallen. But, even in our fallen condition, the history that is unfolding is bounded by our Sovereign God. Let me show you, first, from today's reading:

"... the Most High God is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone He wishes ..."

Daniel 4:17

Then from the Book of Job:

"He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations and disperses them."

Job 12:23

Ultimately, who allows a nation to rise to prominence? God does! Who can humble any nation He so chooses, even to the point it vanishes from history? Once again, God can, and that is the plain language of these passages. This means, God is not an uninterested observer, but active in the affairs of men.

Reading Ahead

Monday, March 11:

Read Daniel Chapter 4 (Continued)

Let me give you one such example which will be a lead-in to tomorrow's reading. The southern kingdom of Israel had forsaken the Lord and become so sinful that God responded as follows:

Then the Lord said to me: "Even if Moses and Samuel were to stand before Me, My heart would not go out to this people. Send them away from My presence! Let them go! And if they ask you, 'Where shall we go?' tell them, This is what the Lord says: 'Those destined for death to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity.' ..."

Jeremiah 15:1-2

How did this work out? The people of Israel went into exile in Babylon at the hand of King Nebuchadnezzar. God can disperse a nation at any time He so chooses to do so, and He has proved it. Let me close with a few questions for you to ponder: Could God tear down America? Have we given Him cause to do so? Is it already happening?



The next few days should be very enlightening regarding these questions!

Reading Ahead

Tuesday, March 12: Read Isaiah Chapter 9

Can God really bring down a nation or raise one up? If we look back, the answer is pretty clear. God, who declares the end from the beginning, said:

"Because you have not listened to My words, I will summon all the people of the north and My servant Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon ... This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years."

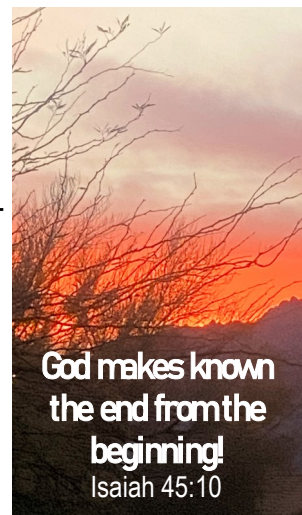
Jeremiah 25:8-11

What happened? The Babylonians under King Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem and deported its people. Then just to make His sovereignty over the affairs of men perfectly clear, God also said,

"But when the seventy years are fulfilled, I will punish the king of Babylon and his nation, the land of the Babylonians, for their guilt," declares the Lord, "and will make it desolate forever."

Jeremiah 25:12

Then, the Medes and Persians conquered the Babylonians and destroyed them as a nation. That's the past, what about the present? Are the destinies of nations still in God's hands? Would you agree that America has steadily turned from the Lord over the course of the past 30 to 40 years? Were we humbled as a nation on September 11, 2001? I want you to notice something in the Senate's response to the terrorist attacks, given one day after, by the Senate Majority Leader.



Reading Ahead

Tuesday, March 12:

Read Isaiah Chapter 9 (Continued)

During his speech, Senator Daschle quoted the following from the Bible (I have given you the entire citation, but he quoted just the portion in red):

All the people will know it—Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria—who say with pride and arrogance of heart, “The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stone; the fig trees have been felled, but we will replace them with cedars.” But the Lord has strengthened Rezin’s foes against them and has spurred their enemies on.

Isaiah 9:9-11

These were certainly meant to be words of encouragement, but he apparently unknowingly lifted them out of a larger context in which Israel is arrogantly responding to God’s prophetic word of judgment! How did the Lord respond? He strengthened Israel’s foes. So here you have one of our highest elected officials quoting the hubris of Israel in thinking they could defy God’s control over nations—as our response! How has that worked out for us? Since 9/11 are our borders more secure, the world a safer place, the future of our nation more or less certain? Let me suggest that right before our very eyes, our nation is being dismantled, because our God is that capable:

“He makes nations great, and destroys them; He enlarges nations and disperses them.”

Job 12:23

We might not like to consider that as a possibility, but when you consider our headlong flight from that which is righteous in God’s sight, it would seem to be the most appropriate explanation. We have looked at the past and the present, now what about the future?

Reading Ahead

Wednesday, March 13: Read Daniel Chapter 2

In Daniel Chapter 2, we have King Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation. The dream is one of the unfolding of what we refer to as Gentile history, or *The Times of the Gentiles*. It is called this because Israel has been removed as the central focus following their exile.

In fact from 586 BC forward, Israel was not an independent nation until 1948. Even today, Israel occupies far short of the land that God has given them as an everlasting position, and Israel is not even fully in control of its capital city.

So there is much by way of promises to Israel that must still be fulfilled in keeping with the Scriptures. But for today, our focus is not as much upon Israel as it is the prophetic promise found in Daniel Chapter 2:

"In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."

Daniel 2:44

This is what is coming from the One who is able to tear down nations and build them up! In the future, the time of Gentile rule over this earth is going to come to an end. That is going to happen when God Himself sets up a kingdom that will never be destroyed.

That nation will have power over all other nations, while that nation itself endures forever. And, who do you suppose might be the King ruling over this nation that God

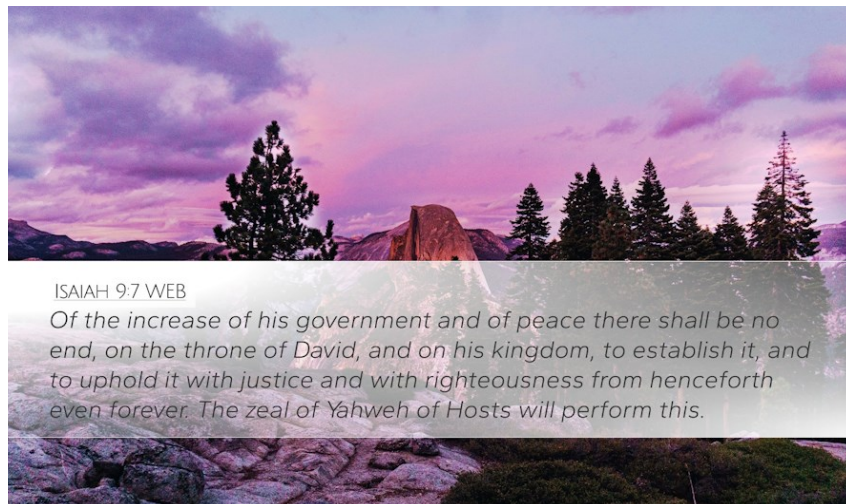
Reading Ahead

Wednesday, March 13: Read Daniel Chapter 2 (Continued)

establishes? How about the *Prince of Peace*?

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on His shoulders. And He will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. Isaiah 9:6-7

In short, an eternal kingdom is coming with the Lord Jesus as King. Am I sure? There are hundreds of Scriptures in support of such an understanding. And, there is much more to follow!



Reading Ahead

Thursday, March 14:

Read Matthew Chapter 24

In our effort to understand what is coming from the standpoint of prophecy, Daniel 2:36-45 has given us one very clear statement regarding the future:

"... the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed ..." Daniel 2:44

God is going to replace Gentile rule of this earth with a kingdom that He establishes. Furthermore, as we have seen, it is a kingdom over which He is going to reign:

Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. Isaiah 9:7

This kingdom will start on this earth and ultimately move right on into eternity, or what is commonly referred to as the *eternal state*. Has this happened yet? Clearly it has not, so that makes this a matter of pending prophecy waiting to be fulfilled.

Let's add a bit more to our understanding of this kingdom from today's reading. When is it going to happen? Jesus tells us not to worry about when:

"But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only." Matthew 24:36

Instead, Jesus draws our attention to the faithful servant who is found faithfully carrying out his duties when the master returns! (Matthew 24:45-47) Well if we do not know when, what will it be like when Jesus returns?

Reading Ahead

Thursday, March 14:

Read Matthew Chapter 24 (Continued)

We see at least the early stages of His return in today's reading as well:

"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory ..."

Matthew 24:30

The Son of Man, the Lord Jesus Christ as the coming King, is going to be seen coming through the clouds of the air because that is how He left, and the angels foretold that was exactly the way He is going to return! (Acts 1:9-11) As you can see, the nations were not ready, they did not anticipate His coming.

Let me suggest they are in a state of mourning simply because they are not prepared for the return of the One who this time is not coming as the *suffering servant* to save the world. Instead, He is coming as the One who is going to rule and reign and to whom all judgment has been entrusted.

(John 5:22) Woe to those who are not ready for the coming Judge and King!



Reading Ahead

Friday, March 15:

Read Revelation 19:11-20:6

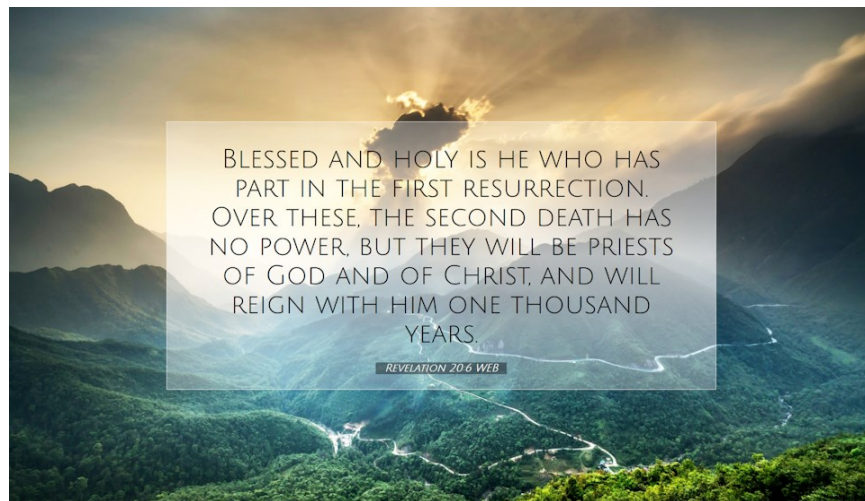
In yesterday's reading we saw the coming of the King who is going to establish a kingdom that is going to replace Gentile rule and move right on into an eternal heavenly kingdom. Today's reading speaks of His arrival here on planet earth:

Out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." ... On his robe and on His thigh He has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.

Revelation 19:15-16

This, of course, is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. I trust you have read the entire text selected today very carefully. As you can see, the nations resist the coming of Jesus Christ as King, but no matter, for none can stand against the coming King of kings!

Now some want to dismiss the Book of Revelation as fantastic imaginings. On the contrary, Revelation



Reading Ahead

Friday, March 15:

Read Revelation 19:11-20:6

(Continued)

Chapter 19 is not the prophecy about what is to come, it is simply its fulfillment. The prophecy is long-standing all the way back to the Book of Daniel. Then how about this from Zechariah:

On that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley; ... The Lord will be king over the whole earth.. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.

Zechariah 14:4,9

So the King has come, what about the kingdom? That is the content of the first part of Revelation Chapter 20. Satan is bound, so as not to interfere with the earthly Kingdom, and Christ reigns for a thousand years!

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. ... they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:6

What will this kingdom be like? Scripture has much to say about that as well—and you will not be at all surprised to learn that when Christ reigns, things will be dramatically different than they are now. Again, there are those who will dismiss the thousand-year reign of Christ as fantasy. But when it references the duration of the kingdom to come six times in seven verses, I have to ask: *"By what authority do you dismiss the plain statements of the Word of God?"* I can understand that you may have never seen anything like it, but then we have never had a ruler on the throne like the Almighty God, Prince of peace—the Lord Jesus Christ!

Return to Leviticus

Monday, March 18:

Read Leviticus Chapter 4

Thus far in our reading in the Book of Leviticus, we have covered the three voluntary offerings: the burnt offering, grain offering, and peace offering. As we return to our reading, we now come to the first of two required offerings—the *Sin Offering*! For a portion of the Bible that is rarely read, we are going to see some startling connections.

First, did you note the categories of people that are covered by this chapter? We have the priest, the congregation of Israel, a leader in Israel, and one of the rank and file. In short, everyone is included when it comes to the issue of sin. Why is that the case? We can not help but be reminded of Romans 3:10 and 3:23:

“There is no one righteous, not even one;” ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Second, did you note this chapter is dealing with the concept of *unintentional sin*? You might expect God to start with intentional sin—which we must acknowledge we have all committed. Why does He start with unintentional? In fact, some might even be tempted to think, “Hey, it was accidental, I didn’t mean to do it. So, surely I should be cut some slack on this unintentional sin!”

Let me suggest a reason God starts here. He is holy! All sin is an affront to a holy God, all sin defiles man. All sin, even unintentional sin, needs to be addressed if we are going to be able to stand before, and have fellowship with, a holy God! God takes the matter of our sin seriously, and, no doubt, He wants us to do so as well.

We will be taking our sin seriously as we understand, from our study of Leviticus, that all have sinned and all stand in judgment before a holy God.

Return to Leviticus

Tuesday, March 19: Read Hebrews Chapter 9

All have sinned and stand in judgment before a holy God. That is how we closed Monday's devotional. This sounds like a hopeless situation. It is certainly not a situation that we can do anything about. But God has done something about it and that is what the sin offering is all about.

I trust you are asking yourself, "How so? What has God done?" Three things for your consideration as you work through today's devotional:

1. Did you notice how *bloody* is this whole chapter? The blood of the animal sacrifice is collected, it is sprinkled, wiped, and poured out in the Tabernacle. This is a vivid portrayal of the truth of Hebrews 9:22

In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

2. The unblemished (innocent) animal is brought to the Tabernacle, hands are laid on the innocent sacrifice, symbolizing the transfer of sin from the guilty to the innocent. The innocent animal dies in judgment for all the transferred sin.



Return to Leviticus

Tuesday, March 19:

Read Hebrews Chapter 9 (Continued)

3. Friday we read in Leviticus Chapter 4 this phrase that was repeated over and over:

So the priest shall make atonement for him concerning his sin, and it shall be forgiven him.

Leviticus 4:26

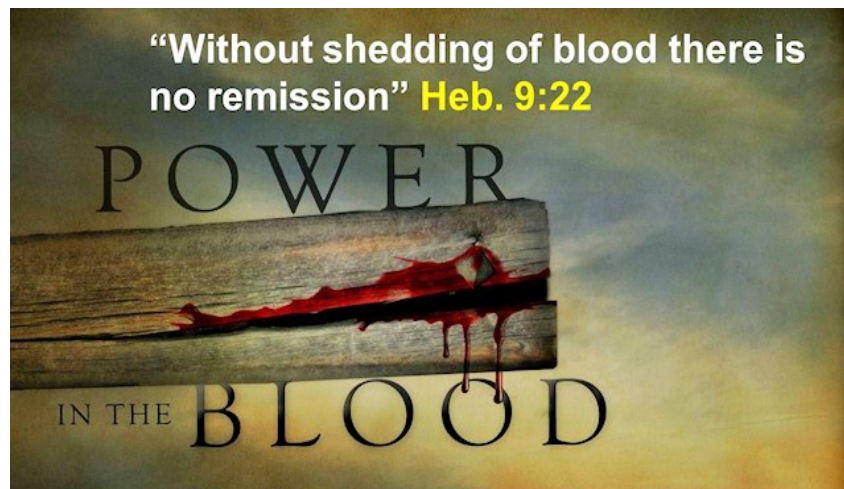
So the shedding of blood atones, or covers, the sin of the guilty and there is forgiveness.

Are you seeing the connection to New Testament truth? Sin after sin, year after year, the Jews would have offered the *Sin Offering* to cover their sins and receive forgiveness. Thus, year after year they would have been pointing towards and preparing their hearts for the coming Messiah. How do I know this? It was in today's reading:

But now He (Jesus Christ) has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Hebrews 9:26

Once for all ... to do away with sin!



Return to Leviticus

Wednesday, March 20:

Read Hebrews Chapter 10

I want you to see a marvelous connection between the Old Testament sacrificial system and the coming of our Lord and Savior. Notice Hebrews 10:11:

Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins.

Doesn't this sound exactly like the picture we saw in Leviticus Chapter 4? The Tabernacle, later the Temple, would have been a very busy place. The priests would have been on their feet offering one sacrifice after another to atone for the sins of a nation of sinful people. Two things to consider concerning the phrase *which can never take away sins*:

1. The word atonement means to cover—so the sins were covered. But in the plan of God, animal sacrifices were not a permanent solution to either committed sins or man's sinful condition.
2. Although the sins were covered, the sacrifices for sin did nothing to deal with the source of sin—the fallen nature of man! Now look at Verses 12 and 14:

But when this priest (Jesus) had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, He sat down at the right of God ... because by one sacrifice He made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

Have you noted the distinctions? First, the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross dealt with all sin for all time. Second, Christ now sits where the Old Testament priests were always on their feet—for His work is finished! Third, those who trust in Him, even though a work in progress, are said to be perfect! That's because He has completely dealt with the sin issue. For in the Lord Jesus Christ there is remission of sins. Hallelujah, what a Savior!

Return to Leviticus

Thursday, March 21:

Read Leviticus 5:1-6:7

Starting in the middle of Leviticus Chapter 5 and on into Chapter 6, we come to the fifth of the major offerings—the required *Trespass Offering*. Like the *Sin Offering*, there is the death of an innocent animal for the sin of the individual, and there is the promise of atonement (covering) for the individual as the result of the sacrifice appropriately made.

However there is a new component to this sacrifice, and that is the need to make reparations in an amount equal to 120% of the damage done. Whereas the *Sin Offering* addresses the guilt associated with one's sin, the *Trespass Offering* addresses the damage that sin does to others.

The concept of the *Trespass Offering* directly confronts and contradicts the idea that is so prevalent in our day of so-called *victimless crimes*. This is an erroneous concept for two reasons:

1. We are always the victim of the sin we commit, for sin in the life of the Christian breaks fellowship with God and compromises the ministry of the Holy Spirit within.
2. Then there is the damage done to others who are either involved directly with the sin or share in its consequences.

Let me suggest a point of application from what we have learned about the *Trespass Offering*. Of course, all sin is against God and damages our relationship with Him. This is the vertical aspect of our spiritual lives, and requires

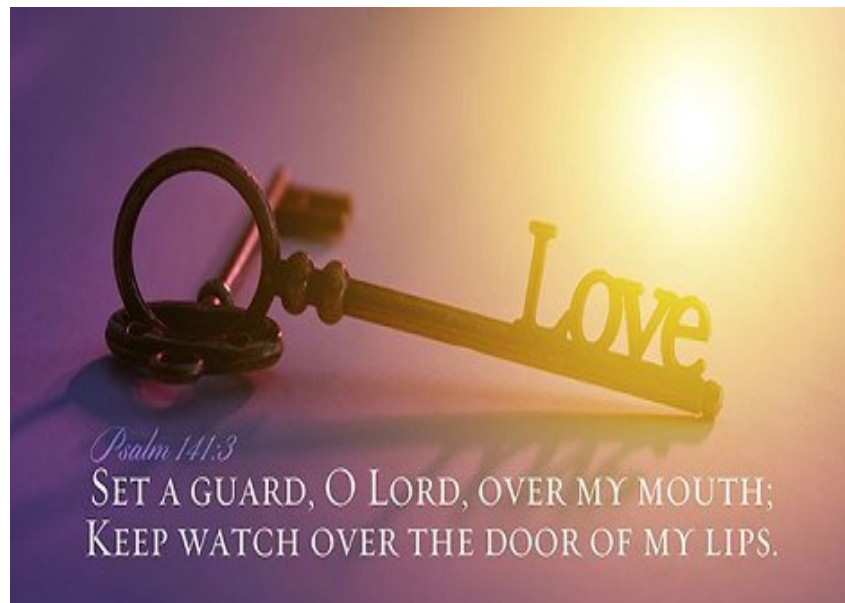
Return to Leviticus

Thursday, March 21:

Read Leviticus 5:1-6:7 (Continued)

confession of sin, wherein we trust in the work of the cross to have adequately paid for our sin. (I John 1:9) But then there is also the horizontal aspect of our spiritual lives—our relationships with one another. What do we do in these cases? Although we are no longer under the Mosaic Law, we do well to consider an apology for a harsh or unkind word or whatever other kind of restitution that might be appropriate in order to restore that which has been damaged horizontally.

Apparently, God wants us to pay attention to both the vertical and the horizontal.



Book of Matthew—Repentance

Friday, March 22:

Read Hebrews Chapter 7

As we return to our reading in the Book of Matthew, we are ready to pick up in Chapter 23 where we are going to find a scathing denunciation of the Jewish religious leadership.

Before we do, we are perfectly positioned to take up the important Biblical topic of *repentance* with some background found in today's reading in the Book of Hebrews. First John the Baptist, and then Jesus, have been calling the people to repentance.

Even now, during the week between the Triumphal Entry of Jesus, and His crucifixion, Jesus has been ministering to the people with the hope that they will repent and place their faith in Him. We explicitly see the goal of repentance in Matthew 21:32:

"For John came to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

Note carefully the pairing of *repent* and *believe*. We will come back to that—it is very important! This verse is telling us, in context, that the religious leadership is hard of heart, and even after seeing the down and out turning to the Lord, they still refused to repent (change their minds about Jesus) and believe!

Unfortunately, there is a lot of confusion regarding the concept of repentance. It is often erroneously equated to the cessation of bad behavior. In other words, it is

Book of Matthew—Repentance

Friday, March 22:

Read Hebrews Chapter 7 (Continued)

treated as if it means—stop sinning! Of course, it is always good to stop sinning, but the problem with telling a lost person they need to stop sinning in order to get saved is that it is impossible because:

- A lost person cannot possibly know the extent of their sin before a holy God.
- A lost person doesn't have the power (means) to stop sinning.
- Adding any action on our part to our salvation would be adding works—which are clearly excluded from the salvation that God provides. (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Let me leave you with one more thought for today. If repentance were to mean *stop sinning*, how can we explain the following found in today's reading:



... The Lord swore and will not repent, Thou are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 7:21 KJV

We have just been told God will not repent—and that cannot possibly

mean He will not stop sinning! We'll pick up here tomorrow.

Book of Matthew—Repentance

**Monday, March 25:
Read Acts Chapter 9**

Let's look at Hebrews 7:21 once more:

... "The Lord swore and will not repent, 'Thou are a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek.'"

This passage is telling us that God is not going to repent. Obviously, the word repent does not mean to *stop sinning* because God is without sin! But what does it mean? The Greek word translated *repent* is a compound word consisting of two parts that refer to a *change of mind*. This clears up any confusion in the above passage, for it is simply telling us that the Father is not going to change His mind—Jesus will forever be a priest in the order of Melchizedek!

As an example of repentance, I want you to think about what happened to Saul on his way to Damascus. Of course he talked with Jesus, but I am talking about something that happened in Saul's mind. You see he was on his way to Damascus to continue his persecution of Christians. He was quite sure they were worshipping someone who claimed to be God, but was not. What happened? He changed his mind about who Jesus was!

What caused that to happen? God's revelation to him caused him to change his mind! Now, for an important point of application. Look at Galatians 1:23-24 and tell me what comes first: repentance (a change of mind) or a change in behavior?

They (Churches in Judea) only heard the report: "The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." And they praised God because of me.

Galatians 1:23-24

Book of Matthew—Repentance

Monday, March 25:

Read Acts Chapter 9 (Continued)

Note how clearly in both today's reading and Paul's testimony in Galatians Chapter 1 that his repentance, outside of Damascus, preceded his new ministry of preaching Christ. That is the pattern—changed behavior follows repentance rather than defining it. Let me close today by reminding you that every single one of us, if we are saved children of God, have had to repent.

Let me use myself as an example. I grew up in a good religious home—and was taught to keep the Ten Commandments and love my neighbor as myself. Now I did not do either one perfectly, but I was better than most and thought I had a better than average shot at getting into heaven. I had to change my mind (repent) about quite a few things starting with understanding the desperate nature of my situation. For God is perfectly holy, and I was not.

There was no way I was ever going to come before Him and receive anything but judgment, for all my righteousness was as filthy rags before Him. (Isaiah 64:6) In my hopeless condition, I needed a Savior. My good works could not help me, I needed to change my mind about that too. Only the finished work of Jesus Christ at the cross could satisfy the justice of the Father and provide me with forgiveness of sins.

In short, it was not until I repented—and that meant changed my mind about my chances of getting into Heaven on my own—that I was ready to put my faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and thereby receive the gift of eternal life!

Book of Matthew—Repentance

Tuesday, March 26:

Read Acts 16:16-40

Let me show you today that repentance and belief are really two sides of the same coin. Let's begin with Luke 13:3:

"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Luke 13:3

Jesus has made it pretty clear that some sort of repentance is necessary for all of us! In Acts Chapter 16, when the Philippian jailor throws himself at the feet of Paul and Silas, he asks,

"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Acts 16:30

Paul and Silas, when they answer his plea, do not say a word about repentance. Instead, they reply:

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved—you and your household." Acts 16:31

As the text unfolds we learn that he did put his faith in Christ unto eternal life, as did his family. So what are we to make of this? Are there two ways to be saved? One more passage will clear this up:

I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus. Acts 20:21

Do you see what we just learned? Repentance and belief go together! You see, if you are trusting your good works to get you into heaven, you are not going to be that interested in a Savior who died for your sins. But once our souls are illuminated by the light of Gospel truth and we



Book of Matthew—Repentance

Tuesday, March 26:

Read Acts 16:16-40 (Continued)

see ourselves as God does—sinners in need of a Savior like Jesus—then repentance has occurred and we are ready to put our faith in the only one who can save!

So, first we change our mind about our need, and then we put our faith in God's one and only answer to meet our need—the person and work of Jesus Christ! This is exactly what happened with the Philippian jailor—the dramatic events of Acts Chapter 16 had already caused him to change his mind about his condition, and so now he was interested in hearing how to get saved!

This will bring us back to where we left off in the Book of Matthew—for the Pharisees wanted nothing to do with repentance! They

choose instead power, prominence, and wealth. That might sound good in the short term, but a poor exchange for life that goes on in God's Heaven for ever and ever!



Preparing for Easter

Wednesday, March 27:

Read Exodus Chapter 6

For the remainder of the week, we will do selected readings in anticipation of the celebration of Easter this coming Sunday.

I find Exodus 6:6 to be a wonderfully compelling verse, for it tells us something about the nature and plans of God:

"... I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. ..."

In context, this is God promising to reach into Egypt and redeem His people from their plight of slavery. Furthermore, He is going to do so by means of mighty acts of judgment—a reference to the ten plagues that are about to fall upon the Egyptians.

Jews found it hard to believe that God could reach in and liberate them from the most powerful nation on earth, but that is exactly what He did. For God is more than capable enough to accomplish all that He wills, and it has always been His way to redeem the enslaved.

You see this passage is perfectly descriptive of the First Coming of Jesus Christ. And why not, for it is the nature of God to work salvation with His own arm, (Isaiah 59:16) through works of judgment, that the lost might be redeemed! Do you see it? The Father sent His Son born of a virgin in Bethlehem, and that is the outstretched arm of God.

There is no mightier act of judgment than the Father's judgment of sin as Christ received unto Himself the sin

Preparing for Easter

Wednesday, March 27:

Read Exodus Chapter 6

of the entire human race. There is no greater work of redemption than God redeeming lost mankind from that dominion of darkness when those who chose to turn to Christ and trust Him for eternal life are brought into:

... the kingdom of the Son ... in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:13-14



Preparing for Easter

Thursday, March 28:

Read Isaiah Chapter 1

Those who teach that God has predestined some to be saved and some to eternal damnation have missed a good part of the Biblical storyline. There is a lot of sin and rebellion in the first chapter of Isaiah, but there is a remarkable short section right in the middle to which I would like to draw your attention:

**"Come now, let us reason together," says the Lord.
"Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as
white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they
shall be like wool. If you are willing and obedient,
you will eat the best from the land but if you resist
and rebel, you will be devoured by the sword. For
the mouth of the Lord has spoken."** Isaiah 1:18-20

Note the following regarding this Scripture:

- Does this sound like the outcome is predetermined by God? Or is it much more like God is offering the people a choice? God is making the options clear and calling the people to choose!
- Furthermore, it looks as if blessing or judgment is dependent upon the choice made by those to whom the Word of the Lord is addressed. That's the way the Bible storyline always seems to unfold.
- Then I am struck by the sheer magnitude of the graciousness of God—even in the Old Testament. As I mentioned, the whole chapter is full of the sin and rebellion of the Jewish people,

**... They have forsaken the Lord; they have spurned
the Holy One of Israel and turned their backs on
Him.** Isaiah 1:4

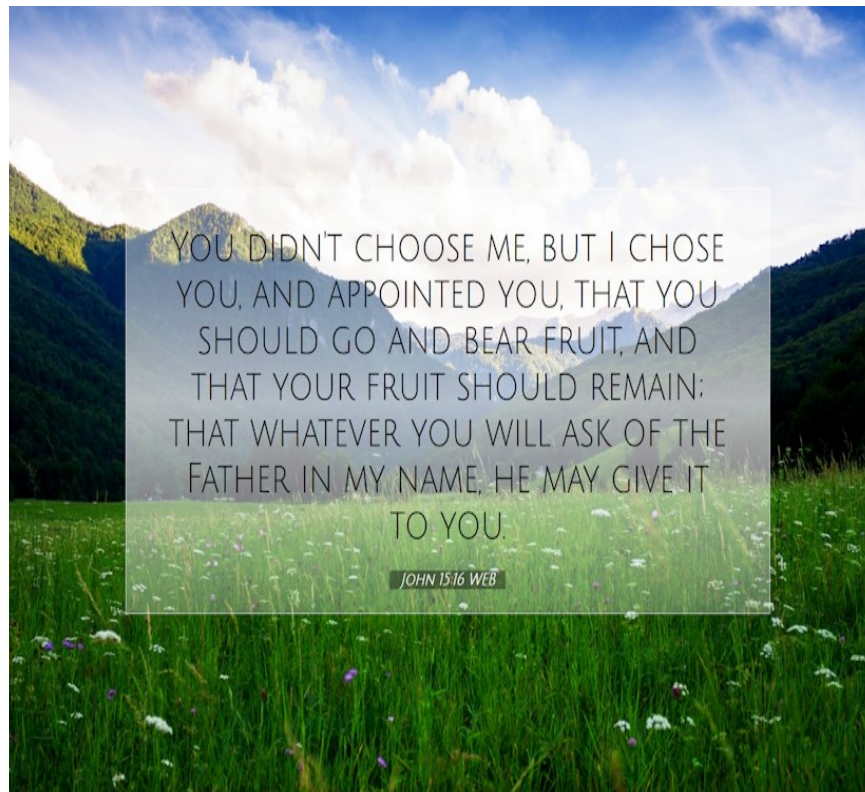
Preparing for Easter

Thursday, March 28:

Read Isaiah Chapter 1 (Continued)

And yet God calls to His people to come, and *let us reason together*; He promises to cleanse them from sin; He promises they will eat the best of the Land—if they will just choose to come and obey the Lord Almighty.

You know God still calls us to come—to come in faith through the person and work of Christ. And, though we come stained crimson, through the Blood of the Lamb we too are washed as white as snow!



YOU DIDN'T CHOOSE ME, BUT I CHOSE
YOU, AND APPOINTED YOU, THAT YOU
SHOULD GO AND BEAR FRUIT, AND
THAT YOUR FRUIT SHOULD REMAIN;
THAT WHATEVER YOU WILL ASK OF THE
FATHER IN MY NAME, HE MAY GIVE IT
TO YOU.

JOHN 15:16 WEB

Preparing for Easter

Friday, March 29: Read John Chapter 19

If you have heard me preach for any length of time, you have undoubtedly heard me refer to John 19:30. For this verse, which documents Jesus' last words on the cross, documents a powerful truth on which our Christian walk must be anchored:

When He had received the drink, Jesus said, "It is finished." With that, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit. John 19:30

Notice the simple statement of fact! When Jesus' work on the cross was completed, He dismissed His spirit. When the spirit (and the soul) leave the body, physical death has just occurred.

While bearing our sins upon Himself, Jesus had already suffered another kind of death—separation from the Father. For God is light and in Him is no darkness at all and so, when the sins of the human race were poured out on Christ, the Father and Holy Spirit turned their backs on Him—figuratively speaking.

Jesus received the judgment of God upon Himself and His fellowship was broken with the other two members of the Trinity for the one and only time. Thus, Jesus received unto Himself the judgment we deserved. But was it enough? Did His work at Calvary take care of the sins of all people of all time? That is the point at which the last words of Jesus carry so much weight.

It is finished is translated from one Greek word. That Greek word has a range of meanings, which includes: to

Preparing for Easter

Friday, March 29:

Read John Chapter 19 (Continued)

bring to an end (finish), to complete a work, to pay a debt. All of these explain some aspect of the finished work of the cross.

The grammar associated with this verb adds still more. For it is a perfect tense verb, which is used when the action of the verb was completed in the past and the results continue to the present. This is how we know our sins have been *paid in full*. The verb is also in the indicative mood—this is the mood you use to state a fact! The solemn reality of the universe is that *Jesus paid it all!*



Was it enough? Does the work of the cross cover the sins of all men across all time? Jesus left no doubt, so that we would have no doubts either. What a Savior!

May the sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross as payment for our sin, and the glorious nature of His resurrection from the dead, thrill your soul this Easter season.

VISTOSO Community Church



He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit...*John 15:5*

1200 E. Rancho Vistoso Blvd., Oro Valley, AZ 85755 ☎ 520-825-0652