

MeadowBrook Church | Summer 2021

# life GROUP

*Life together for the Kingdom of God*

## II KINGS

Glimmers of Hope in the Fall of a Nation





# MeadowBrook CHURCH

*MeadowBrook seeks to **CONNECT** people to Christ and His church, **GROW** them as disciples to be disciplers, and equip them to **SERVE** through missions, ministry, and worship, all to **GLORIFY** God.*



# II KINGS

After the death of Elisha, things fall into a state of chaos in both the Northern Kingdom of Israel and the Southern Kingdom of Judah. Both by the end of the book will be taken into exile: Israel by the Assyrians and Judah by the Babylonians. God was just in the death of the nation in which his people resided. They abandoned him for idols. They committed spiritual adultery. But God did not abandon his people. We see God's goodness in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah in Judah, and we see God preserve a faithful remnant who, although they would be taken into exile, would experience the goodness of fellowship with God.



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\*All lessons are generally edited for content by H. Hindsman.

# Pride

2 Kings 14:1-22, 15:1-7, 15:32-16:20 | May 02<sup>nd</sup>, 2021

What is a good definition of sinful pride?

Read 2 Kings 14:1-22; 15:1-7; 15:32-16:20

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

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*He has told you, O man, what is good;  
and what does the LORD require of you  
but to do justice, and to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8 ESV)*

These words, written by the prophet Micah during this period of Judah's history, have served as a guide for the people of God ever since. As we look at this period in Judah's history, we see three kings who receive positive ratings and one, Ahaz, who as Tony Merida put it, "the only good note about Ahaz is the last sentence: 'Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.'"

What can we learn as we study these four kings in Judah?

Pride comes before the fall.

*Pride goes before destruction,  
and a haughty spirit before a fall. (Proverbs 16:18 ESV)*

This proverb is lived out time and time again in the book of Kings. Each of the kings in this section, with the possible exception of Jotham, struggled with pride. Pride, in all its forms, is destructive and bears ugly fruit—sometimes over the span of generations. The pride of Ahaz did not result from a vacuum, but was the result, in part, of the insidious seeds of pride that were planted in the generations before him.

## ***The Pride of Amaziah: Overestimation and Discontentment***

Amaziah demonstrates the relational pride that brings great conflict into families, churches, and workplaces. First, he pridefully overestimated his own abilities. Then Amaziah grew discontent with what he had and sought for more—to the potential harm of his brothers in the northern kingdom. God did not bless his arrogant crusade—one that also likely involved idolatry and vengeance—but opposed it. Amaziah was embarrassed and captured, leading to an utter rejection of his reign by the people who put his son, Uzziah, into power.

This expression of pride destroys relationships and will bring down companies. We must seek to put to death any arrogant spirit in us. In our salvation, we have been given the mind of Christ "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." (Philippians 2:6-7 ESV) Let's lay hold of what is ours freely in Christ, and walk humbly with our God and toward others.

## Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

## Apply

## Respond

### Additional Passages:

2 Chronicles 25–28

Micah 6:1-8

Isaiah 7:1-14

1 Peter 5:5-11

### Pause and Discuss:

*Discontentment not only reveals pride, but is a thief of joy. Where are you most susceptible to discontentment?*

## **The Pride of Azariah/Uzziah: Self-Righteous**

In this short section, we see that God struck Azariah—more often referred to as Uzziah—with leprosy. The corollary passage in 2 Chronicles fills us in on why: he grew proud because of his military strength and burned incense on the altar—a job specifically reserved for priests (Exo. 30; Num. 16). In doing this, Uzziah cast aside God’s system given in the law that set up priests as mediators between God and man. God knew mankind needed help. They needed a mediator. They needed a priest to atone for their sins and go before God on behalf of the people. The altar of incense was where the morning and evening intercessions were made by the priests on behalf of the people. Now, these priests and these intercessions were shadows of the true mediator, our great high priest, Jesus Christ, but they still served as pictures as mankind’s need for someone to reconcile man to God. In his pride, Uzziah did not think he needed help and self-righteously became his own mediator. God humbled him and struck him with leprosy—a reminder of his uncleanness before a holy God and his need for a mediator.

While today it may present differently, Uzziah’s pride, though he was a genuine worshiper of God, was simply a matter of self-righteousness. Oftentimes even as Christians, we think we our righteousness is impressive to God, when in fact it is not. We have no righteousness of our own accord, but are desperate for the righteousness of God that can only be received as a free gift through faith in Jesus Christ and can only be revealed in our lives by the power and working of the Holy Spirit in us.

### **Pause and Discuss:**

*In what ways does self-righteousness present itself today in our lives?  
Is it easy to spot in ourselves? How can we better discover and repent of our self-righteousness?*

## **The Pride of Jotham: Lone Ranger?**

In 2 Chronicles 27:2, it says this of Jotham:

*And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD according to all that his father Uzziah had done, except he did not enter the temple of the LORD. But the people still followed corrupt practices.*

The most positive interpretation of this passage indicates that Jotham learned from his father’s mistakes—which of course he did. Jotham did not burn incense as Uzziah did. However, having seen what had happened to his father, he might have over-corrected and simply avoided the temple entirely. David longed to be in the house of the Lord continually, Jotham seems to have thought he could do without the communal worship that took place in the temple.

Today, people face the same danger. Individually, we are the temple of the Lord for God’s Spirit dwells in us. But the full expression of God’s spiritual temple on earth occurs when the church gathers together. For in the gathering, we see a fuller representation of the Spirit’s indwelling ministry than we do even as individuals filled with the Spirit. Many think they can live the Christian life alone, but that is not the case. That is pride speaking. In addition to personal worship, we need the community of worship.

### **Pause and Discuss:**

*In our American culture that celebrates individualism, how do we create a culture that recognizes we cannot do this life on our own and in fact, should not even try to do so? What does that look like?  
What is the balance between individual responsibility and the importance of community?*

## **The Pride of Ahaz: Mocking God**

Ahaz's pride manifested itself by utterly mocking God. He offered his son to Molech, the god of the cursed Canaanites. He looked to the king of Assyria for deliverance, instead of looking to God for salvation as counseled by the prophet Isaiah (see Isaiah 7). Lastly, Ahaz completely reshaped the temple of God, bringing in altars of the false gods of the Assyrians, while presumptuously thinking he could keep God's altar for himself when he needed it (17:15). Ahaz mocked God.

This is the pride of the lost—particularly those in the church who think they can live both for the gods and pleasures of this world and for the Lord. Such people mock God and are deceived children of wrath who follow their father, the devil.

“Ahaz looked to Assyria for salvation and Damascus for his liturgy.” – Tony Merida

How are we to respond to these kings' lives? I believe looking at Isaiah's address to Ahaz during the events of chapter 16, we see that our response should be twofold:

### **1. Be firm in faith, not yourself.**

*If you are not firm in faith, you will not be firm at all. (Isaiah 7:9b ESV)*

Each of these kings' problems stemmed from an overconfidence in themselves—some of which was backed up by their successes. Ultimately, this overconfidence revealed a lack of faith in the Lord, even for the good kings. The firmness they thought they had was a mirage. They were firm only in the areas where their faith was in the Lord and his word.

Today, we would be good to remember this. No matter how things appear to be going: we are only as firm inasmuch as our faith is in Jesus Christ. When we put our confidence in the flesh, any resulting security is not genuine and will crumble—either in this life or in the next.

### **2. Put your hope in Immanuel, the king the others were not.**

Amaziah means “the Lord is strong.” Uzziah means “the Lord has helped.” Jotham means “The Lord is perfect.” Ahaz is the shortened form of Jehoahaz, which means “the Lord has seized.” However, none of these kings lived up to their names. Amaziah trusted in his own strength. Uzziah rejected the Lord's help. Jotham did not reflect perfection, and Ahaz seized for himself that which belonged only to the Lord.

But Isaiah told Ahaz of another who would come. He would be born of a virgin. He would be the son of David, the king who would crush the serpent's head and fulfill the law of Moses and whose throne would never end. He is the mighty one. He is the one who helped those living in darkness. He is the perfect Son of God who saved and took hold of his people that no one would take them from his hand. His name is Jesus and he is the Lord. Put your hope in him and nothing else.

### **Pause and Discuss:**

*In what ways do the above applications become evident in our lives?*

## **Family Application: The Power of Godly Mothers**

<sup>8</sup> Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching, <sup>9</sup> for they are a graceful garland for your head and pendants for your neck. (Proverbs 1:8-9 ESV)

For each of the good kings in this chapter, we see the mothers mentioned. Interestingly enough, Ahaz's mother is omitted. Perhaps that had something to do with his rejection of God and his ways. Either way, the Bible makes it clear that mothers play a vital role in teaching the children the ways of the Lord. The fathers are to lead out in the practice and are held accountable to God, but mothers play an equally important role as well. Make the most of the time you have with your children and help bring them up in the instruction of the Lord.

# Chaos

2 Kings 14:23-29, 15:8-31, 17:1-23 | May 09<sup>th</sup>, 2021

How do you respond to chaos?

Read 2 Kings 14:23-29, 15:8-31, 17:1-23

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

During this time in Israel's history, wickedness abounds. The people have continued to reject their Lord and have fully embraced the false gods of the surrounding nations. While Jeroboam II brings about a stability according to the temporary perspective of the world, this quickly fades when his son is assassinated a mere six months into his reign. From there, social and political upheaval occurs until another false respite is somewhat brought about during the reign of Pekah—until he was murdered by Hoshea. During Hoshea's reign, the long-foretold exile comes about. God judges his people and enacts the covenant curse for disobedience upon them. The people of God, sons of Abraham who God delivered from Egypt and brought into the promised land are abruptly removed from their land—and it was their fault. God was not to blame. They were.

At this point it is helpful to remember some key facts about the book of Kings or 1-2 Kings. It traditionally affirmed that Jeremiah is the author/compiler of the book of Kings. Unlike Chronicles which tells much of the same stories from a post-exile perspective—a period of hope—Jeremiah was writing from a dark point in Israel/Judah's history. Both had rejected God and both had the curse of exile enacted upon them. Part of his purpose in writing was to help future generations see what went wrong and at the same time show that God was just in allowing both Israel and Judah to be taken into exile. However, Jeremiah still holds onto hope as he highlights magnificent truths about God and his character—specifically his faithfulness to his promises.

When we read about wicked kings like this, it might be difficult to discern what the Spirit is teaching us, but upon closer examination that looks at the details and the big picture, one can learn much about the nature of sin, God, as well as worship. So, what is Jeremiah seeking to teach us in these accounts?

Sin is boring.

Jeremiah spends next to no time writing about these kings—nearly 80 years' worth of history. Why? I believe it is because sin is boring. Their sinful regimes simply were not worth writing about. Sure, Jeroboam II had political success and a 41-year reign, but the most exciting thing about his story is seeing how God delivered him and his people according to the word of the prophet Jonah. So often sin gets promoted as exciting and fulfilling, but in the end sin proves to be empty, lackluster, and uninteresting. The true joy belongs to holiness. God—and his image in humanity—is the most exciting thing about this world. Sin only distorts and dampens the joys of God's purposes in creation.

## Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

## Apply

## Respond

### Additional Passages:

Exodus 34:1-8

1 John 5:21

2 Timothy 2:1-13

Deuteronomy 32:1-47

<sup>22</sup> The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; <sup>23</sup> they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. (Lamentations 3:22-23 ESV)



## God is merciful to the undeserving.

When God saw the affliction of Israel, he did not mock them, but rather in faithfulness to his previous promises he moved toward them in mercy. They did not deserve his mercy, but he, being a God rich in mercy, showed them grace anyway. What good news for us today! Like the Israelites, we too are undeserving of God's mercy, but he freely bestows it upon us through our faith in Jesus Christ our Savior!

*The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.*

*(Exodus 34:6 ESV)*

## God is faithful in the midst of faithlessness.

Though Jehu nor any of his descendants were ever faithful to God, God remained faithful to his word that four generations would sit on the throne. The people were faithless, but God was faithful, for he could not deny himself. This should encourage all of us who are in Christ Jesus, for all the promises of God find their "yes" in him. He is the beloved Son with whom God is well pleased, and through faith, we are united with Christ. We can rest in God's faithfulness to the promises he has made toward us in Christ Jesus. He will not deceive us. The coming to fruition of his glorious promises do not depend on us, but on God who is faithful. Rest in his faithfulness.

*<sup>11</sup> The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup> if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; <sup>13</sup> if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.*

*(2 Timothy 2:11-13 ESV)*

## God is patient toward the wicked.

Looking back to kings like Jeroboam I and Ahab as well as the seven kings mentioned in these chapters, one sees clearly the long-suffering nature of God towards wicked sinners. This is good news for all of us, because we are all born children of wrath, sons of the devil, bent on sinning. We should rejoice at God's patience toward us even now as we struggle against the sin that still resides in our flesh. Our God is slow to anger, and his patient kindness toward us moves us to greater degrees of righteousness and joy in Christ Jesus.

## God is just in all his actions.

Chapter 17 is Jeremiah's theological justification for the exile. The exile was not a failure of God to live up to his word and protect his people. The exile occurred because "the people of Israel sinned against the Lord, their God." In fact, God was keeping his word as outlined in Deuteronomy 28, which warned that the result of covenant unfaithfulness would be exile. He was pouring out his just punishment upon the people who had not only rejected Him, his Word, and his Spirit but upon those who had committed grave injustices against the righteous and vulnerable. God was just in his condemnation, just as he will be in the coming day of judgment.

At that time, all those who have rejected his Son, Jesus, and the Spirit's testimony will receive their just punishment and spend eternity in hell. Thankfully, Jesus bore the just punishment of God for sinners in his body on the cross so that all who turn and believe in him should not perish but have eternal life. If you have not surrendered in faith to Jesus, know that a condemnation far worse than exile rests upon you. Do not wait until it's too late. Learn from the Israelites. Leave the idols of this world and the fleeting pleasures of sin, and give your life to Jesus.

*"The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. (Deuteronomy 32:4 ESV)*

## Pause and Write out a Praise to God for his Glorious Nature

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## Your life reflects who you worship.

One of the most eye-opening sentences in this section is Jeremiah's condemnation of the Israelites as those who "went after false idols and became false." Instead of reflecting God's mercy, patience, faithfulness, and justice, they reflected the wickedness of the demonic idols they worshiped and ripped open pregnant women, burned their children in idol worship, oppressed the poor, committed sexual immorality, and abandoned all of what God had called them to do. They reflected who they worshiped, and it was not the God who brought them out of Egypt.

The corollary, however, is also true. Those who worship the living God in spirit and in truth reflect his image. Our faith in Jesus Christ produces an adoring love for God that is revealed in his righteousness being increasingly displayed in our lives. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in us. As the Spirit empowers us to follow after Jesus, the Spirit conforms us his image from one degree of glory to another.

*Little children, keep yourselves from idols. (1 John 5:21 ESV)*

Let's discuss how the attributes of God highlighted in this passage are applied to our lives. God is merciful, faithful, patient, and just.

### Pause and Discuss:

*Which is most difficult for you to reflect?*

*When is it hardest for you to show mercy? Be faithful to your word? Demonstrate patience toward others? Reflect God's justice for the marginalized and oppressed?*

*Are there common threads that might reveal a hidden idol?*

*If worship is the key, how can we develop hearts that are given to God in worship? How can we work to rid our hearts of idolatrous affections?*

### Pray

Prayer is vital to reflecting the character of God in our lives. For through prayer, God conforms our hearts and wills to God's heart and will. So take a moment to take a few of the highlighted passages or attributes and write out a prayer asking God for his wisdom and help that you might reflect his character.

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# Restoration

## Hosea Ch. 1-3 | May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2021

What is the most hopeless situation you've ever encountered that still ended well?

Read Hosea Ch. 1-3

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

Hosea's prophetic ministry took place during a dark time in Israel and Judah's history. He has been referred to as the "death-bed prophet" for the house of Israel. He announced the end of the nation of Israel as it would be taken into exile by the Assyrians. Hosea is most known, however, for the story about his marriage. He takes a wife who proves to be unfaithful and names his children names that highlight the coming destruction. Only Jezreel is thought to be his child. Hosea's relationship with his wife, though at times pictures God's judgment, primarily demonstrates God's faithfulness to his people in the midst of the horror of exile and the hope of a regathering to himself in the future as his beloved bride through the ministry of the Messianic King from the house of David—whom we know to be Jesus Christ.

So, what does Hosea 1-3 teach us about God, the hope of Israel, and our hope today?

God's discipline of his people does not nullify his faithfulness. Rather, his discipline demonstrates it. (1:1-11)

Chapter 1 at times seems harsh, but it ends with a reflection upon the faithfulness of God. It demonstrates God's faithfulness to the Abrahamic Covenant, where he promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their offspring would be as the sand of the sea. The curse of the Mosaic Covenant—exile—would be placed upon Israel as discipline, but God was still faithful. He was working to bring about the peaceful fruit of righteousness in their lives and the redemption that would come through Jesus Christ. Those who were not his people would become children of the Living God. God was disciplining his children, and the result would be glorious and peaceful.

Hebrews 12 reminds us that as a father disciplines a son, so the Lord disciplines his people. At the time, it is painful, but the fruit that results is both glorious and life-giving to the one who has been disciplined. In these moments of hardship where the Lord is disciplining his children, we might be tempted to question the Lord's faithfulness toward us. However, God's faithfulness is on display through the discipline. This was true then, and it is true today. For in his discipline, he is revealing sin and working to conform us into the image of Christ.

### Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

### Apply

### Respond

#### Additional Passages:

Joshua 7

Hebrews 9:11-28

Hebrews 12:1-17

Colossians 1:13-14

#### Pause and Discuss:

*Why is it difficult for us to receive the Lord's discipline?*

*What role does faith play in these moments of hardship?*

“It is better to take the phrase “house of Jehu” as parallel to house of Israel, and thus another name for Israel. By this reading, “the blood of Jezreel” refers to 1 Kings 21: Ahab, who promoted Baalism as the national religion of Israel, permitted the murder of Naboth, a man loyal to the Lord, in order to seize his vineyard in Jezreel. Appropriately, this verse sets the tenor of the rest of the book: the ongoing confrontation between Baal and the God of Israel.

The promise to break the bow of Israel in the Valley of Jezreel signified the defeat of Baalism at the same place where Baal had seemingly triumphed over the Lord (cf. v. 4). (To break a soldier’s bow is a symbol for defeating him.) Israel will be judged at the place where she sinned. That the blood of Ahab was licked up by dogs there should have served as an ominous sign of the Lord’s future judgment on followers of Baal (1 Kings 21:19). The judgment at Jezreel joined poetic justice with divine justice.”

## The people were deceived in their fruitless pursuit of the empty promises of idolatry. (2:1-13)

Much has been written on this throughout the study of kings, but it important to remember: The enemy’s great deception is that you can have a more fulfilled life in sin than in God. It deceived Adam and Eve, Achan, Judas, and we are all susceptible to it—indeed we all have bought the lie at one time or another. Israel pursued her lovers—idols and their promises of fulfillment, deliverance, prosperity, etc.—but she never overtook them. The joy that was promised eluded her. She was left naked, ashamed, and empty-handed. She bought the lie and paid for it. Let’s learn from her mistakes, and worship the Lord and him alone.

## Israel’s hope (as well as our hope) is in the New Covenant. (2:14-23)

In this section of Scripture, Hosea begins to highlight the hope of the New Covenant that would be inaugurated by Jesus Christ—the guarantor of a better covenant.

### 1. God will turn their shame into glory.

The exile was Israel’s great shame, their biggest failure. Saved by God and delivered from the bondage of slavery, they abandoned their God and lost their promised land. It was their valley of Achor (see sidebar), but the Lord promised to turn it into a door of hope. He can do the same for you.

Sin brings shame, and all have sinned, thus all know the shame of sin in their lives. God, through Jesus Christ, removes the shame of sin through the forgiveness and cleansing in the gospel. That which was our greatest shame and failure becomes a door of hope, a testimony of the grace and mercy of our glorious God.

#### Reflect

*Are you living in shame of past failures that God has forgiven and cleansed?  
How can our story be used to testify of God’s goodness and grace?*

## The Valley of Achor

After defeating Jericho, one man, Achan, took some of what was commanded by God to be devoted to destruction. As a result, the Israelites were embarrassed by the men of Ai. After seeking God, Joshua was given divine guidance to discerning the issue. This is the account of what took place next:

*<sup>19</sup> So Joshua said to Achan, “My son, give glory to the LORD, the God of Israel, and make a confession to him. I urge you, tell me what you have done. Don’t hide anything from me.” <sup>20</sup> Achan replied to Joshua, “It is true. I have sinned against the LORD, the God of Israel. This is what I did: <sup>21</sup> “When I saw among the spoils a beautiful cloak from Babylon, five pounds of silver, and a bar of gold weighing a pound and a quarter, I coveted them and took them. You can see for yourself. They are concealed in the ground inside my tent, with the silver under the cloak.” <sup>22</sup> So Joshua sent messengers who ran to the tent, and there was the cloak, concealed in his tent, with the silver underneath. <sup>23</sup> They took the things from inside the tent, brought them to Joshua and all the Israelites, and spread them out in the LORD’s presence. <sup>24</sup> Then Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan son of Zerah, the silver, the cloak, and the bar of gold, his sons and daughters, his ox, donkey, and sheep, his tent, and all that he had, and brought them up to the Valley of Achor. <sup>25</sup> Joshua said, “Why have you brought us trouble? Today the LORD will bring you trouble! “ So all Israel stoned them to death. They burned their bodies, threw stones on them, <sup>26</sup> and raised over him a large pile of rocks that remains still today. Then the LORD turned from his burning anger. Therefore that place is called the Valley of Achor still today. (Joshua 7:19-26 CSB)*

## 2. The Lord will betroth his people to himself forever.

As we might be tempted to think, the relationship we have with God is not one where he keeps us at arm's length and holds his nose. He does not begrudgingly love us. He views his people as a husband views his bride. It's really too glorious to comprehend.

## 3. The Lord will bring his people into his kingdom.

This is our hope. As the Lord brought the people of Israel into their promised land, he will bring us into the fullness of his kingdom in the new earth. We live in this reality today spiritually, but it will be physical in the future. We will live in God's land, and we shall know the joy of his presence and new creation as glorified individuals unhindered by sin.

### Pause and Discuss:

*How does this hope help us order our lives?*

*We all fail at living with an eternal perspective. How can we better develop an eternal perspective that lives for the Kingdom of Christ rather than the kingdoms of this world?*

The blessings of the New Covenant are made possible through the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ, the Son of David. (3:1-5)

The narrative of Hosea and his wife concludes with an amazing picture of grace. His wife, who was unfaithful and bore children by other men, is now a prostitute. Hosea, in an act of unflinching and sacrificial love, searches for his wife and buys her back from the pimp who was exploiting her. Why? As a picture of what God would do for his people through "David their King" which the New Testament makes clear is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God made flesh.

All of the blessings of the New Covenant—the cleansing, the intimacy with God, the hope of the kingdom—are only possible through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. He paid the price for our sin with his blood and was vindicated in his resurrection. Jesus redeemed his people. Come to him. Seek after him. Only then will you know the goodness of our Lord in these latter days.

### Pause and Discuss:

*Where do we run the danger of trying to lay hold of the blessings of the New Covenant without laying hold of Christ?*

## Pray

*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:9 ESV)*

Take a moment to write out a prayer of confession and repentance, asking the Lord to forgive and cleanse you of all unrighteousness.

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# Playing Both Sides

## 2 Kings 17:24-31 | May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2021

What is something that most everyone around you enjoys that you simply find to be “blah”?

Read 2 Kings 17:24-41

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

After Assyria exiled Israel from their land, they resettled the Northern Kingdom with other nations they had conquered. In this resettling, we see the beginnings of the people who would be the Samaritans of the New Testament as the left-behind Israelites began to marry the nations who were brought into the land. In these new families, it becomes clear Israel had not learned her lesson. A “new” religion is formed that blends the worship of the true God with the idols of the land. However, this is nothing new for Israel. Both Jeroboam and Ahab started similar syncretic religions that, as we’ve seen, led to the judgment of Israel in exile.

As we look into this story, we see many parallels with American Christendom and find that this narrative speaks well to the phenomenon of “Cultural Christianity” seen in many places in our country today, especially the south. The Israelites embraced a cultural “faith” that had no vitality, no meaning, no transforming effect, no power, no life. Many today have embraced such a “faith” in the name of Christianity. What does this cultural faith look like, and how does this passage point toward authentic faith in God?

Cultural “Christianity” is marked by the desire for the deliverance of Christ without fidelity to him and by the blending of Christian worship with the idols of the land.

### 1. Mark One: A desire for deliverance without devotion

Upon their resettlement in the land, the nations continued in their idolatrous practices they knew from their homelands. This resulted in the judgment of God, as idolatry always does. Lions began to ravage and kill the people there. In response, they send word to the king of Assyria who sends back a priest to teach them “the law of the god of the land.” After being taught how to fear the Lord—the text does not tell us how accurately they were taught—they continue to worship their own gods. They wanted deliverance from the lions, but had no desire to devote themselves to the only God who had the power to save. They wanted the salvation of God, but they did not want him.

The same is true for many who call themselves Christians today. They have heard enough about hell that they do not want to go there, and perhaps they have heard a watered-down gospel presenting what I refer to as a “Santa Claus faith” that only requires one to believe facts about God’s existence. “Sure, I believe in God,” “of course, I believe in Jesus,” they might say. But their faith is the faith of demons—familiar with the facts of the events of the gospel without understanding their significance personally and without treasuring Christ above all else. This kind of faith is not a saving faith. It desires deliverance but not Christ—but ends up with neither.

## Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

## Apply

## Respond

### Additional Passages:

James 2:14-26, 4:1-10

John 15

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3

1 Corinthians 13

## 2. Mark Two: Blended worship

The second mark of the cultural faith of the Samaritans was the blending of the worship of God with idols. Many of these idols are forgotten to history—which should tell us of the futility of idols—but here are some ideas of what these idols might have represented:

- **Succoth-benoth, “Tent of daughters”:** Likely a form of idolatry whose “worship” was engaging in sexual immorality with cult prostitutes (MacArthur).
- **Nergal:** Potentially a god of war/power (Cambridge).
- **Ashima:** Potentially a god of fate (Obermann).
- **Nibhaz and Tartak:** Nibhaz might be a variation of the Babylonian god Nebo, the god of literacy and wisdom, and Tartak means “hero of darkness.” These two are the most obscure. (Klein)
- **Adrammelech and Anammelech:** These two are variations of the god Moloch (MacArthur). “When a couple sacrificed their firstborn to Moloch, they believed that Moloch would ensure financial prosperity for the family and future children.” (Gotquestions.org)

While it’s hard for us to imagine going into a pagan temple to worship an idol, it’s not as difficult to imagine one seeking pleasure through sexual sin rather than the superior pleasure offered in Christ and his holy ways. It’s not difficult to see people idolize power, the future, worldly intelligence, or some obscure departure from God’s will. While child sacrifice seems outlandish to us, the lie of Moloch is the primary lie that drives the abortion industry. Apart from that aspect of the worship of Moloch, it’s definitely easy to see how we might be tempted to worship at the idol of financial prosperity—no matter who it hurt. All this to say: the more things change, the more they stay the same. America, like Samaria, is a land riddled with idols.

Cultural Christianity seeks to worship both God and the idols of the land. They would never admit it to be the case, but the gods of travel ball, money, power, sex, travel, knowledge, etc. command as much of their time, energy, and devotion as Christ does. Cultural Christianity seeks to be a friend of the world and a friend of God at the same time. This is not possible.

It would be easy to have a lesson like this and rail against “those other people.” But in one way or another, this pervades all of us in ways we might not be aware, for we too live in this culture.

### Pause and Discuss:

*With the above discussion in mind, how are the residuals of Cultural Christianity still hanging around in your flesh revealing themselves?*

## Cultural “Christianity” damns people to hell.

This is the end result of a cultural “faith”—rejection by God. These people thought they were fearing the Lord, but the author makes it clear: these people “do not fear the Lord.” In the end, those who do not fear God face his judgment.

***If you were to be 100% honest with yourself, are you a cultural Christian who is playing both sides?***

If that is you but you desire to be a genuine Christian who denies themselves, picks up their cross, and follows after Jesus, then talk to your Life Group Leader today or email [hunter@mbchurch.com](mailto:hunter@mbchurch.com) to start a conversation about what it means to truly believe in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.



## Authentic faith fears the Lord and is far superior to Cultural “Christianity.”

In his condemnation of the syncretic practices of the Samaritans, the author highlights what genuine faith in God looks like. It’s the same pattern for genuine faith today. He highlights four marks of authentic faith:

### 1. Being grounded in God’s salvation (Faith)

The Exodus was the salvation moment of the Old Testament. It pictures a better salvation offered in Christ, but it was an act of grace that inaugurated the nation of Israel. This salvation from the bondage of slavery in Egypt was the grounding for the commands given to the people in the law. Their obedience to the law flowed from their faith in the God who brought them out of the land of Egypt. Unfortunately, from the very beginning, the people attributed this salvation to idols and not God (Exodus 32).

Authentic faith in the New Testament finds its grounding in the salvation offered in Jesus Christ—the lamb of God who is leading his people from the dominion of darkness and the bondage of sin to his glorious kingdom. Authentic Christianity trusts completely in the free gift of salvation through Christ Jesus.

### 2. A devotion to God alone (Love God)

The first two commandments condemn idolatry, and Jesus himself condemns those who try to ride the fence. This faith in God and the resulting salvation is meant to produce a devotion to God alone. Those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ strive to love him with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

“[God], you stir man to take pleasure in praising you because you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you.”

– Augustine

### 3. Walking in obedience to his Word (Love Others)

This devotion to God—both in the Old Testament and the New Testament—was meant to change the way we live and produce people who obey God’s commands by loving their neighbor and executing God’s justice. Jesus reiterated this when he said to his disciples that “if you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). A love for God reveals itself in a love for others.

### 4. Hoping in the Lord (Hope)

Lastly, those who have authentic faith do not fear the power of dead idols, but hope in the coming deliverance of the Lord. In addition to false promises of joy and satisfaction, idols also offer false promises of judgment and lack of satisfaction. Genuine believers do not fear the ramifications for rejecting the idols of the land, but hope in God alone for deliverance—which we know comes in the resurrection of the dead that is to come.

### Pause and Discuss:

*Which aspect of authentic Christianity comes most difficult to you?*

*How can you grow in that area?*

### Pray

*Heavenly Father through your most precious Son,*

*Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether. You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it. Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting! Amen*



# A King Like David

## 2 Kings 18:1-19:7 | May 30<sup>th</sup>, 2021

What is your opinion of snakes? What is the best story you have involving a snake?

Read 2 Kings 18:1-19:7

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

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Hezekiah forms one of the highest peaks in the landscape of the mountains and valleys of Israel. In his commentary, Tony Merida describes Hezekiah as a second David who overcomes another Goliath both in purifying the worship of the Lord by removing the high places—something none of the good kings before him had done—and in defeating Sennacherib through his faith in the Lord. Though he was not a perfect king, he is one of the best kings in the history of Judah. Jeremiah takes a significant portion of the book of Kings to highlight Hezekiah and his reign, which is a breath of fresh air from the wickedness that we had previously seen.

In Hezekiah who foreshadows Jesus Christ, the promised Davidic King whose reign would never end (see 2 Sam. 7), we see the blessing that comes to God's people when a son of David roots out the influence of the ancient serpent and reigns according to God's law. In Hezekiah, who prefigures Christ, we see an example to be followed and avoided as we seek to live lives of faith that reveal the character and nature of Christ who lives in us (see Gal. 2:20).

This week's lesson will examine both lines of thought as we begin the narrative of Hezekiah's reign. A note that might help you to understand the chronology of the narrative and the growth of Hezekiah as a king is that vv.1-8 give a summation of Hezekiah's life that segues into the narrative of his rebellion against Assyria, which begins with a moment of crisis not triumph.

### Your Mistakes Do Not Define You

Hezekiah made a mistake in his earlier days that made it look like he would not actually rebel against Assyria. But, what did the summation of his reign highlight? "He rebelled against the king of Assyria." This communicates a powerful point: your past mistakes do not define you.

There is always the prospect of growth and transformation. The consequences of your past mistakes might persist, but your mistakes by no means have to define you. There is forgiveness, cleansing, and transformation available in Christ Jesus. You are not your mistakes. In Christ, your mistakes are nailed to the cross, and the righteousness of Christ defines you. Live in that freedom.

## Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

## Apply

## Respond

### Additional Passages:

Genesis 3:14-15

Matthew 4

Revelation 12:7-11

1 Peter 5:5-11

### Hezekiah, A Type of Christ: Crushing the Serpent's Head

**As Hezekiah broke into pieces the bronze serpent being worshiped by the people, so Jesus breaks into pieces Satan's idolatrous influence and restores proper worship in his people.**

All idolatry is the work of Satan. Unlike the living God who created the universe and is deserving of our worship, Satan creates nothing. He only corrupts the good things in God's creation, deceiving mankind into idolatry. This idolatry, like it had with all mankind, had gripped the people of God. We have seen this extensively in the book of Kings.

Satan had gained a stronghold, that is until a son of David who loved God came and removed his influence from the land, breaking the bronze serpent into pieces. Hezekiah labored to restore the proper worship of God in the hearts of his people.

Ultimately, the gospel is about the glory of God. Jesus came to glorify God (John 17:4) and make it possible that he might be glorified by those he created to manifest his glory. In the gospel, we see Jesus who worshiped God perfectly. He rejected the idolatrous offer of the enemy and defeated Satan in his death and resurrection. He made the payment for the sins in the place of humanity, providing a path to salvation through repentance and faith. Those who surrender in faith to the Lord Jesus now become Spirit-indwelt worshipers of God who no longer suppress the truth. Rather, they believe it and rejoice in it.

### Pause and Discuss:

*One of the implications of the above truths is that the Scriptures promote a God-centered existence, not a man-centered one. How does this change the way we think, live, and read the Bible?*

### **Like Hezekiah promoted truth among the people in the midst of the serpent-like lies of Rabshakeh, Jesus is the truth who shows the emptiness of Satan's lies.**

Satan's chief lie is that his corruptions of God's reality offer greater satisfaction and fulfillment. God creates food for the satisfaction and provision for his people; Satan corrupts food and offers gluttony and anorexia in its place. God creates sex for the pleasure and fulfillment of one man and one woman in lifelong marriage; Satan corrupts every aspect of God's design for sex and marriage and offers countless ways to pursue pleasure and fulfillment outside of God's design. Ultimately this is the lie of Rabshakeh. Instead of trusting the Lord and his anointed, he is inviting the people to trust in the King of Assyria. This was just another example of Satan's lie. His lie, though it has many presentations, is always the same and ends in the same place. No matter the path you take as you depart from God's truth, you always end up in emptiness and shame. Every time.

The people equipped with the truth elevated by Hezekiah recognized the emptiness of Rabshakeh's lies and did not answer him a word. Jesus, in his life, revealed the truth in both his teaching and existence and displayed true humanity. Now by his Spirit, he has opened our eyes to the emptiness of Satan's lies, and empowered us to live in the joy of holiness.

### Pause and Discuss:

*Are holiness and happiness enemies? Why or why not?*

### **Turning Good Things into God Things**

One of the idols Hezekiah had to destroy was the bronze serpent Moses fashioned. This serpent was a means of God's grace to his people who had sinned and pointed forward to the grace that would be revealed when Jesus would be lifted up on the cross (see Numbers 21:4-9 and John 3).

It was a good thing, but the people took this good thing from God and twisted it into an idol.

When we think of idolatry, we typically think "bad." And that is correct. However, idolatry occurs when we take something good in God's creation and corrupt it. Good things like family, God's provision in money, sports, work, sex, food, nature, etc. can easily become an idol if we are not careful. We must always be careful to ensure the good things do not turn into "god things."

## Hezekiah, An Example to Avoid

Early in his rebellion against Assyria, Hezekiah has a low point. He seeks to bargain with the enemy. Ultimately, this gets him nowhere and he still finds himself in a position where he is having to fight for the survival of the kingdom—where the heroism of Hezekiah—particularly his trust in the Lord—shines.

This highlights an aspect of Hezekiah’s example that we want to avoid, and that is: do not seek to bargain with the enemy. Our enemy is unappeasable. We think a little compromise here or there is no big deal, or one more time will not be too bad. No, in the end, Satan is seeking to utterly destroy you. You can compromise and bargain with him a little, but he will not stop until he has killed your witness, stolen your joy, and destroyed all that means the most to you. Do not bargain with him by sinning a little. You will not come out on top.

## Hezekiah, An Example to Follow: Trusting God and Responding Well in the Day of Crisis

Despite the early faltering, in this narrative Hezekiah largely proves to be an example worth emulating today as we seek to live a life of faith in the power of the Holy Spirit—especially in times of trouble. Hezekiah trusted the Lord and responded well in a time of deep distress. What can we learn from his example?

### 1. Humble yourself before God.

Hezekiah did not have any false presumptions of what he deserved. He did not blame God for the trial that was at hand. He humbled himself before God. The sackcloth that adorned this king reflected the inward attitude of his heart—humility.

### 2. Draw near to God.

In his humility, Hezekiah recognized his need and drew near to his Lord. Hezekiah’s chief example is one of trusting the Lord. He walked with God and trusted him regardless the circumstance. Whether he found himself in prosperity or grief, he drew near to his God in faith. He drew near to God in three ways:

#### a. Draw near to God’s people.

Hezekiah went to the house of the Lord and surrounded himself with God’s people who served as a source of strength. He did not engage in the battle of faith alone. He enlisted others to go to war with him. Community in God’s church is vital for the individual disciple—in good times and bad. Press into the life of MeadowBrook. Do not hold back, but be an active participant who both gives and receives the ministry of the Holy Spirit through the giftedness of his church.

#### Pause and Discuss:

*Why is it difficult to draw near to God in good times? Why is it difficult to draw near to God in bad times? How does community help us to draw near to God in all seasons?*

#### b. Draw near to God’s Word.

Hezekiah sought out Isaiah the prophet who spoke God’s Word. He knew he needed divine wisdom not worldly practical advice. We do not need more wisdom from the world, but the living active word of our God. Develop the habit of drawing near to the fount of God’s Word. It will refresh your soul and strengthen you with the wisdom you need as you navigate this life.

#### c. Draw near in prayer.

Lastly, Hezekiah drew near in prayer. One of the grandest provisions of the gospel is that we now can draw near to the very throne room of grace in prayer. Prayer does not mean we will get what we ask for, but God will use prayer to bring about his will on earth and direct the hearts of his people to be further conformed to that same will. As Millard Erickson says so well, “The believer can pray confidently, knowing that our wise and good God will give us, not necessarily what we ask for, but what is best.”

#### Pause and Discuss:

*How do we make prayer more about our will than God’s will?  
How can we further align our prayers with the will of God?*

# Praying to a Faithful God

## 2 Kings 19:8-37 | June 06<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Name a time where God provided for you. How did God answer your prayer? Was it in the way you thought it would be or wanted?

Read 2 Kings 19:8-37

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

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After Hezekiah's ascendance to the throne of David and his reforms in combating idolatry, it would seem that an inevitable clash was going to take place between the marauding Assyrians and God's people in the southern kingdom. In this chapter of 2 Kings, we get a more comprehensive profile of Hezekiah's personality as a ruler that remained faithful to God during times of trials. The looming threat of Assyrian conquest made it apparent to Hezekiah that it was only by means of supplication before the Lord that Judah could have any hope of being spared from the might of their foes outside the walls. It was Hezekiah's faithfulness and piety that preserved Judah from the Assyrian threat and this section of Scripture presents an excellent example of how the Lord came through for His people when they sought Him honestly and contritely.

Seek the Lord's help.

After Isaiah in the beginning of the chapter delivered word from the Lord that the Assyrians would not take Jerusalem nor be successful in their campaign, the messenger of Assyria, Rabshakeh, returns to his king Sennacherib for new orders. Already in a warlike mood because of a conflict with the Ethiopians, Sennacherib sent new messengers to Hezekiah in an effort to sustain his antagonistic ultimatums to Judah and its king. Sennacherib is confident in his abilities to conquer Judah and determines to reiterate his threats against the Hebrews with doubled vehemence, however this time the Assyrian king does not merely attempt to discount Hezekiah's credibility, but also the Lord's Himself in verse 10. Because of Sennacherib's inordinate exaltation of himself, he made a blasphemous error in casting aspersions on the one true God by comparing Him to the false idols of other kingdoms that had succumbed to Assyrian assault.

Sennacherib's threats come down to this: the Hebrews were to forsake their trust in the Lord, just like all the other gods of the nations before them, because none can withstand the might of the Assyrian empire. The good news is that the God of the Hebrews is different than the dead idols of the nations.

### Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

### Apply Respond

#### Additional Passages:

Colossians 3:1-17

Romans 6:1-14

Joshua 7

Psalms 65

#### Pause and Discuss:

*What are voices that seek to dissuade our trust in God?*

*How does this passage direct us to respond to them?*

After receiving these new threats from the messengers, Hezekiah went directly to Solomon's Temple in order to beseech the Lord for aid in the renewed conflict between Judah and Assyria. His supplication to God serves as an immense testament to the character of Hezekiah as one dedicated to God. Hezekiah was confident in God's ability to safeguard his people.

It is significant to note that Hezekiah determines to go and seek the Lord with true zeal in this matter after Isaiah had already delivered word that God would not allow Judah to fall to the Assyrians. Hezekiah's reverence for God was not happenstantial, it was vibrant and real to such a degree that he accurately assessed that any hope of prosperity and deliverance for Judah hinged directly on the Lord making it come to pass. And his requests were in line with the revealed will of God, not opposed to them.

This is important regarding prayer today. One of the purposes of our prayers is to bring about God's will on earth as it is in heaven. So, if our prayers are not in line with the revealed will of God in the Scriptures, then we need to adjust our approach. We need to be ever-seeking the alignment of our prayers to God's will, submitting our desires to his perfect and sovereign design.

### Pause and Discuss:

*What do we learn about prayer from Hezekiah?*

*Have you ever thought action of prayers to be easier when times are bad? Why is that?*

*On the other hand, have you found it easier to pray as Jesus did, "not my will but yours be done," when times are bad? Why is that?*

## The Lord makes good on his promises.

In these latter verses the Lord speaks through His prophet Isaiah to declare what will befall Assyria for their many threats, insolences, and blasphemies. In verse 21, Jerusalem is depicted as a virgin woman, innocent and threatened by a would-be assailant, but is protected and vindicated because of the Lord's intervention. It is the Assyrian's vain confidence in their military might, noted in verses 23-24, that ultimately led to them blaspheming God's sovereignty and inciting him to anger against them. Due to the insolence of Sennacherib and the Assyrians continuing persecution of God's people, the Lord promises to deal harshly with them and banish them back from whence they came. In further response to the Assyrian's threats, the Lord promises to sustain Judah through a two-year period of ravaging by Sennacherib and then a remnant is to go out and begin sowing and harvesting on the land again. The end result of this will be the routing of Assyria along with the preservation of Judah, Hezekiah, and God's people. Within that time the promised deliverance occurs, and an angel of the Lord strikes down one hundred and eighty-five thousand of the Assyrian army, which forces Sennacherib to retreat back to Nineveh. Sennacherib eventually received his own due penalty for his blasphemies when in verse 37 he was betrayed and assassinated by his own sons Adrammelech and Sharezer.

God's faithfulness to his promises ground us in our prayers. In praying, we trust that God is good, that he hears us, and that his a good Father, the giver of every good gift from above. We approach his throne of grace in our time of need through the blood of Christ by the indwelling of his Holy Spirit.

His faithfulness prompts our prayerfulness, regardless of the answer God gives.

## Conclusion

The overarching implications of this text are clear: God is faithful to deliver his people through trials, either in life or in death, and does so especially when they seek Him fervently, self-aware of their total reliance on the Lord. King Hezekiah was exemplary of a man that made no bones about coming to the Lord in all seasons, and the account of him here is yet another testament to the power of prayer for us as a Church body that seek Christ for strength in the midst of trials. Whether in seasons of plenty or scarcity, rest or discomfort, joy or despair, at all times we should follow the example of Hezekiah, humble ourselves before the Lord, and seek His perfect will by which we find life eternal.

**In this shorter lesson, take extended time to seek the Lord's face in prayer as a Life Group.**



# Faith and Pride

## 2 Kings 20:1-21 | June 13<sup>th</sup>, 2021

How easy is it to spot self-promotion in others? Why is it more difficult to spot it in ourselves?

### Read 2 Kings 20:1-21

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

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Having spent a few weeks looking at the life of Hezekiah, we are now studying the last section featuring Hezekiah. Here is an overview of the events that we are going to study:

1. The king is deathly ill, and Isaiah announces that he will die (v. 1).
2. The king calls to the Lord in prayer, as he laments the news (v. 2-3).
3. Isaiah announces God has heard the king's prayer, and will prolong his days (v. 4-7).
4. God provides a special sign that he will heal the king (v. 8-11).
5. The king is healed, and visitors from Babylon arrive to see him recovered (v. 12).
6. The king gives the visitors a tour, showing off all he had acquired (v. 13-15).
7. Isaiah announces Babylon will later plunder him, taking away some of his sons (v. 16-19).
8. The king passes away after 15 extra years of life, and is succeeded by Manasseh (v. 21).

### The Blessedness of Faith

As this passage opens, we find Hezekiah in the worst shape of his life. But the king's illness isn't necessarily a judgment upon him, as he had done remarkably well: 2 Chronicles states "he did what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. And every work that he undertook in the service of the house of God and in accordance with the law and the commandments, seeking his God, he did with all his heart, and prospered." (31:20-21) Hezekiah had done much to restore proper worship in the land, and it must have saddened many to hear he was in such critical condition.

But God isn't through with him yet! Hezekiah knows the right thing to do is pray, and his faith is blessed. The Lord shows His sovereignty and healing power for all to see, after hearing Hezekiah's prayer. Of course, that is a pattern throughout Scripture: the godly seek God's help in prayer and receive the right help, right on time (examples: Ps. 30, 31:21-24, 116:1-4). As it says in Proverbs, "the LORD is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayer of the righteous" (15:29). Is prayer our first response, whenever trouble comes our way? It ought to be!

According to the text, Isaiah orders a fig poultice (a medicinal compress) to be applied to King Hezekiah's boil. At the time, "figs were eaten fresh, pressed into cakes, and used as a poultice. Jeremiah used the fig tree as a symbol of desolation. It also signified security and hope for Adam and Eve, the twelve spies, and the poets and prophets" (F.F. Bruce). The Lord of hope is merciful and faithful, adding fifteen years to Hezekiah's life and reign.

## Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

## Apply

## Respond

### Additional Passages:

2 Chronicles 32:24-31

Psalms 20:6-9

Isaiah 38:9-20

Jeremiah 9:23-24

Since the poultice plays at least some role in treating him, Hezekiah's healing could have been more providential than miraculous. However, the sign God gives him is no doubt miraculous. The Lord gives the king a sign he will recover and return to the house of the LORD to worship after three days: turning back the shadow ten steps up the staircase of Ahaz! (This "turning back the shadow" almost seems to symbolize "turning back the clock," doesn't it?)

God's church has members walking around today that will testify of His ability to grant extra years when they thought they had reached the end. Whether they call those events miracles, they see God's sovereignty in their lives, as He watches over His saints and provides for their needs.

### Pause and Discuss:

*As we reflect upon this passage, shouldn't we view all our years as a gift from God, and not just the "extra" ones? What prevents us from this attitude of thanksgiving?*

*And on the other hand, is it right for us to be angry with God when He gives fewer years to other saints we want to keep? What attitudes contribute to this disposition toward God?*

## The Costliness of Pride

Although the king has practically been revived from death, there are still dire threats awaiting him, as Assyria has established a vast empire and is demanding Judah's compliance. In the middle of that situation, Babylonian representatives enter bearing gifts (and no weapons), hoping to form an alliance against the Assyrian presence. They are curious to see whether the king of Judah had truly been healed, as they had heard.

However, as wonderful as Hezekiah's recovery must have been, his life still follows the same pattern as many other Old Testament leaders. In the online sermon "Failures of Old Testament Leaders," Nathan Rages reviews a list including Gideon, Samuel, David, Solomon, Jehoshaphat, Asa, Uzziah and Hezekiah and asks what they all have in common. The answer: a solid start, followed by a more disappointing end. Rages goes on to name four primary reasons: pride; friendship with the world; indulging the flesh; and prioritizing family in a way that challenges the priority of God.

## Jonathan Edwards

### Seven Symptoms of Undetected Pride

Pride is much more difficult to be discerned than any other corruption because of its very nature. That is, pride is a person having too high an opinion of himself. Is it any surprise, then, that a person who has too high an opinion of himself is unaware of it? ...

Spiritual pride takes many forms and shapes, one under another, and encompasses the heart like the layers of an onion: when you pull off one, there is another underneath. Therefore, we have need to have the greatest watch imaginable over our hearts with respect to this matter and to cry most earnestly to the great Searcher of hearts for His help. He that trusts his own heart is a fool.

Since spiritual pride in its own nature is so secret, it cannot be so well discerned by immediate intuition on the thing itself. It is best identified by its fruits and effects, some of which I will make mention of below together with the contrary fruits of Christian humility.

1. Pride is the great fault-finder.
2. Pride ministers in a harsh spirit.
3. Pride puts on pretenses.
4. Pride takes offense easily.
5. Pride is presumptuous before God and man.
6. Pride hungers for attention.
7. Pride neglects others.

***Reflect: Which are you most given to?***



So what is it that causes the king to stumble, after so many good years? 2 Chronicles tells us that “in the matter of the envoys of the princes of Babylon, who had been sent to him to inquire about the sign that had been done in the land, God left him to himself, in order to test him and to know all that was in his heart” (32:31). After experiencing a true miracle from God and emerging from his deathbed, Hezekiah has every reason to trust God and quite the platform to glorify God.

Instead, he invests in a foreign alliance and doesn’t resist the temptation to show off his possessions. This turns out to be a very costly move in the long term, and his life well illustrates that “one’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor” (Prov. 29:23).

As we read all of Scripture, it’s plain that pride is an intrinsic characteristic of the unrighteous. But the righteous are capable of retaining pride, too! While those that become proud in life feel they have a right to be arrogant, pride still doesn’t look good on anybody. Moreover, God’s word is clear that no one will be exempt from answering for their pride. King Hezekiah answered for his just like King Nebuchadnezzar does (Dan. 4:30-33). Isaiah tells of a future day, the ‘Day of the LORD,’ on which “the haughty looks of man shall be brought low, and the lofty pride of men shall be humbled” (Is. 2:11).

### Pause and Reflect:

*Have your own years of gaining knowledge and experience tempted you to become proud?*

*Have your achievements and successes tempted you to become proud?*

*Is it better to fight that temptation in spiritual warfare, or wait until the Lord has to break us of our pride?*

Hezekiah should not have sought outside help, as he appears to have forgotten what the Lord said through Isaiah: “I will deliver you and this city out of the hand of the king of Assyria, and I will defend this city for my own sake and for my servant David’s sake” (v. 6, emphasis mine). Keep in mind, this was the same king that was reassuring his people, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him, for there are more with us than with him. With him is an arm of flesh, but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” (2 Chron. 32:7-8) It appears Hezekiah was believing one thing, yet publicly stating another.

While we may go around saying how much we believe God is going to make things right, do we faithfully believe it in our hearts on a daily basis? And though we trust Him to make everything work for the good of those who love him, do we ever start trying to control situations ourselves? Is it ever tempting to believe that though God may not pull through? Why is that?

Did Hezekiah forget God’s power? One would think the ancient Israelites could never forget the marvels the Lord had done before their very eyes, but we know they did (see Ps. 78:11, 21-22). In this period of Israel’s history, God’s judgment falls very heavily on Assyria. But God’s discipline on His covenant people is also heavy, “for God shows no partiality” (Rom. 2:11). Today, we must remember that although we are God’s people, we are still accountable and God is a righteous judge.

# The Worst of the Worst

## 2 Kings 21:1-26 | June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2021

What is the most unlikely turnaround story you've ever heard?

Read 2 Kings 21:1-26

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

The worst of the worst.

When it comes to kings in these books, we've seen bad kings. In this chapter, we see the worst of the worst—Manasseh. The description of Manasseh's reign resembles a hall of villains for the people of God in God's story of redemption. Manasseh seeks to effectively undo all that God had done through those who had come before him.

Joshua was used by God to execute his judgment on the wicked people who lived in his promised land. Through Joshua, God brought about a cleansing, limited as it was, to the land he had set apart for Abraham and his people. In this land, God's people were to reflect his character of justice. Manasseh led the people back to the practices of the Canaanites.

Hezekiah led a worship reform in the land of Judah to recapture the hearts of the Israelites for God alone. Manasseh leads the people back into the idolatry of Ahab and Jezebel.

### Manasseh and Isaiah

"Isaiah, whose name means 'the Lord is salvation,' is the masterful author of the book of Isaiah. His 55-to-60-year prophetic ministry presented the hope of salvation to the people of Judah in the reigns of the kings Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Ancient Jewish-Christian tradition suggests that Isaiah was martyred by King Manasseh, son of Hezekiah. According to the tradition, Isaiah was tied inside a sack, placed within the hollow of a tree trunk, and then sawed in two. This story traces back to a first-century, non-canonical book called the Ascension of Isaiah, which claims to tell the story of Isaiah's death." – GotQuestions.org

This story is potentially in mind when the author of Hebrews writes in Chapter 11 that:

*<sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated—<sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Hebrews 11:37-38 ESV)*

## Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

## Apply

## Respond

### Additional Passages:

Amos 7:7-9

Exodus 20:1-21

James 2:8-13

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Solomon built a Temple and consecrated it unto the Lord. Manasseh defiled it with idols, offering up his son like Ahaz. Instead of seeking the Word of the Lord as David did, Manasseh sought the divinations of fortune-tellers and necromancers as Saul did.

Manasseh was a murderer of prophets—well attested tradition identifies him as the murderer of Isaiah who he sawed in half. He filled Jerusalem with the blood of the innocent. He was the worst of the worst and led the people of God to be worse than the Canaanites who lived in the promised land beforehand.

God will measure people by the plumb line of the law.

God would not be mocked. He spoke to Manasseh through his prophets. His message: God was bringing about judgment. He would measure the people by the plumb line of his law. They would be found desperately deficient and disaster would be the result.

The plumb line of God's law can be simply summed up in the commands to love God with all one's heart, soul, mind, and strength and to love their neighbor as themselves. Manasseh failed miserably on all accounts. He abused his position of power and his role as one anointed by God.

God measures not just kings but all people by the plumb line of his law, revealing all people to be desperately wicked. What are the implications of this?

### 1. God will not let sin go unpunished.

While it may appear that wickedness goes unpunished at times, it is only an illusion that deceives and hardens the wicked. Justice will be upheld. Every sin punished. Whether in Christ or in hell, God's justice will be revealed against all ungodliness. He will not be mocked and there is no escaping his wrath.

This is how this passage functions in the book of Kings. In his narrative, Jeremiah has effectively made his case against both houses of Israel, showing God to be just in bringing judgment through the exile brought about by Babylon. God has not overlooked the sins of his people. He's heard the pleas for justice from the oppressed. He knows the persecution his faithful remnant experienced, and he is on the move. He is moving toward the wicked in justice.

### 2. All of us have fallen short of God's glorious standard and are deserving of his wrath.

In the end, while the horizontal effects of our sins might be different than Manasseh's, vertically our sin separates us from God just the same. In our nature, we are all born children of wrath and in our practice, we all have sinfully rejected Christ and his ways, falling short of the glory of God. The wages of this sin is death, eternal death under the condemnation of God. This would be the end for us all but for the grace of the God who saves sinners like you and me.

#### Pause and Discuss:

*What is it about humanity that makes us think God will not bring about his justice?*

*Why is it so easy for us to justify our own sin and condemn harshly the sins of others?*

*What does the Bible teach about our own sinfulness?*

#### Parents, Disciple Your Children

How did Hezekiah's son go so off the rails? I believe we can see how in his attitude toward the coming generation. See his response to Isaiah's announcement of judgment:

*<sup>18</sup> And some of your own sons, who will come from you, whom you will father, shall be taken away, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon." <sup>19</sup> Then Hezekiah said to Isaiah, "The word of the LORD that you have spoken is good." For he thought, "Why not, if there will be peace and security in my days?" (2 Kings 20:18-19 ESV)*

He was not concerned with the days of his children and grandchildren. Only his own.

Parents, your faith will not magically be transferred to your children and grandchildren. It will require active and repetitive effort to train the coming generation in the instruction of the Lord. If you do not know where to begin, start with these 4 steps:

1. Pray with and for your children.
2. Read the Bible with your children.
3. Worship with your children both at home and at church. If church is not a priority, then your kids will logically and correctly deduce that God is not a priority either.
4. Explicitly share the gospel with your children and invite them to repent and believe. Your kids need to hear the gospel from your lips, not just from the ministers at the church or their teachers at school.

## God redeems the worst of the worst (2 Chron. 33).

If we look to the parallel passage in Chronicles regarding Manasseh, written after the return from exile and lifting up God's faithfulness and mercy even in his judgment, we learn more about the end of his life and God's redemption:

*<sup>10</sup> The LORD spoke to Manasseh and to his people, but they paid no attention. <sup>11</sup> Therefore the LORD brought upon them the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria, who captured Manasseh with hooks and bound him with chains of bronze and brought him to Babylon. <sup>12</sup> And when he was in distress, he entreated the favor of the LORD his God and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. <sup>13</sup> He prayed to him, and God was moved by his entreaty and heard his plea and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD was God. <sup>14</sup> Afterward he built an outer wall for the city of David west of Gihon, in the valley, and for the entrance into the Fish Gate, and carried it around Ophel, and raised it to a very great height. He also put commanders of the army in all the fortified cities in Judah. <sup>15</sup> And he took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the LORD, and all the altars that he had built on the mountain of the house of the LORD and in Jerusalem, and he threw them outside of the city. <sup>16</sup> He also restored the altar of the LORD and offered on it sacrifices of peace offerings and of thanksgiving, and he commanded Judah to serve the LORD, the God of Israel. <sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the people still sacrificed at the high places, but only to the LORD their God. (2 Chronicles 33:10-17 ESV)*

After a life of disobedience and disregard for the Word of the Lord, God disciplined Manasseh. Through this discipline, the Lord opened the eyes of his heart and Manasseh saw the error of his ways and repented. He who walked in faithlessness embraced faith in the Lord and God redeemed him. Manasseh, though unable to undo the consequences of his sin—the exile was still going to happen—he was able to lead the kingdom back to the genuine worship of the Lord, preparing the way for his grandson, Josiah to make the reforms that led to a faithful remnant of Israelites such as Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, Ezekiel, and Jeremiah.

### God redeemed the worst of the worst.

If he redeemed and transformed Manasseh, he can do the same for you. God sent his Son to die in the place of sinners and rise again that all who repent and believe in the gospel might have peace with God and eternal life. Christ came to glorify his Father in the way only he could, and he came in love for people like you and me. Jesus will redeem you. He will transform you. He will give you eternal and abundant life. Come to him!

#### Pause and Discuss:

*Why is it difficult to believe the full extent of the cleansing and redemption offered in Christ?*

*How does this type of redemption shape the way we live and view ourselves?*

#### Sing

*Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound  
That saved a wretch like me  
I once was lost, but now am found  
Was blind but now I see*

#### 5 Marks of Genuine Repentance

##### 1. Godly grief over sin

Manasseh's distress was not limited to his circumstance.

##### 2. Calling out to the Lord

The repentant know they cannot save themselves.

##### 3. Humility

There's no saving face in repentance.

##### 4. Faith in the Lord

Without faith, repentance is worthless. It's just turning from one sinful lifestyle to another, perhaps more respectful, sinful lifestyle.

##### 5. Transformed living

This type of living pursues righteousness, makes amends for wrongs, and builds up the people of God.

***Have you genuinely repented of your sin? If not, will you do so today and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?***

# Awakening

## 2 Kings 22:1-20 | June 27<sup>th</sup>, 2021

Take a moment and pray Psalm 119:18 with your class before you dive into this week's Scripture passage.

*Open my eyes, that I may behold*

*wondrous things out of your law.* (Psalm 119:18 ESV)

### Read 2 Kings 22:1-20

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

### God's Word transforms.

While the repairs to the temple were taking place, the priest found “the Book of the Law”. Once read by Josiah, the Lord used him to purge Israel of its idolatry. Josiah recognized the holy nature of God, God's holy requirement of his people, and just how utterly far they were from reaching his standard. This moved him to mourn his sin, display his penitent heart by tearing his clothes, and act in accordance to God's Word. Reading God's Word resulted in a transformation, not only in Josiah's life, but also in the kingdom of Israel.

God's Word was not given to us to be a burden or simply an obligation to be read, but was given that we might know the God of the Universe, be filled with hope, and transformed to look more and more like our glorious Savior. The Lord uses his Word to reveal his perfect, holy and gracious ways, our rebellion, and the hope we have in God sending his Son, that we might have new and eternal life in him. How incredible is it that God has not left us to guess what he's like, but has given us explicit insight into his heart and nature through the written Word? Praise God for the Bible!

## Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

## Apply

## Respond

### Additional Passages:

James 4:6-10

Colossians 1:16-17

Romans 10:8-13

1 Corinthians 2:1-5

### Pause and Discuss:

*How have you seen the Bible transform your life?*

*How is God using his Word to shape you in this season?*

### The Book of the Law

“The phrase “Book of the Law” is used in the Pentateuch only in reference to Deuteronomy (e.g. Deut. 28:61; 29:21), which was read to the king and provided the basis for his actions. Available to the kings of Israel and Judah in previous years (cf. 1 Kings 2:3; 2 Kings 10:31; 14:6; 18:6), it was evidently lost or concealed during the long reign of the apostate Manasseh, who systematically infringed its laws. (ESV Study Bible Notes)”

Take time to praise the Lord for revealing himself in a clear and understandable way through the Bible, then ask him to open your eyes that you might behold wondrous things out of his Word. Write out your prayer to him.

## Nothing can thwart the will of God – it is sure.

Neither the will or negligence of man can thwart the will of God. It is his will for mankind to know him primarily through his written Word; therefore, the decision of a king to hide God's Word or the abandonment of a people resulting in the Scriptures to be lost cannot overtake God's power or plan.

In times of uncertainty, or living under the rule of men who are opposed to the things of God, it is our hope that God's will is sure and unwavering. No man is more powerful than our Creator God. No ruler has more authority than the One who spoke all things into existence. No power, whether on earthly or spiritually, can overtake or change that which God has intended to be.

### Pause and Discuss:

*How does truth encourage you in the trials?*

*How does truth give us hope for the days ahead?*

*What prevents us from experiencing the hope found in the truth?*

## The Lord hears... the humble.

It was because of the king's humility before God and his penitent heart that the Lord heard his prayer and, in his mercy, spared Josiah the wrath coming for Israel. All throughout Scripture we read how God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (Jn. 4:6-10; Ps. 138:6; Matt. 5:5, 11:28-30; etc.). It is only those who recognize their insufficiency to meet God's perfect standard – and therefore their need for salvation – that believe in Christ for salvation and experience the free gift of eternal life. It is only those who are humble before God that will call on his name and draw near to him, because it is they who know where hope lies – with God. Dane Ortlund writes in his book, *Gentle and Lowly*, about the need for humility for salvation:

The minimum bar to be enfolded into the embrace of Jesus is simply: open yourself up to him. It is all he needs. Indeed, it is all he works with. Verse 28 of our passage in Matthew 11 tells us explicitly who qualifies for fellowship with Jesus: "all who labor and are heavy laden." You don't need to unburden yourself and then come to Jesus. Your very burden is what qualifies you to come. (*Gentle and Lowly* by Dane Ortlund; p. 20)

It is the humble that see the weight of their burdens and know it cannot be overcome or removed by their own strength or any other means this world has to offer. The prideful seek to work their way to heaven, the humble recognize they never could. The prideful seek their own glory, the humble seek Jesus.

### Pause and Discuss:

*What does humility look like? What is a good definition of humility?*

*What is false humility and how is it simply another synonym for pride?*



## the penitent.

Unlike previous kings who feigned humility, Josiah's genuine humility was demonstrated by his repentance – his turning away from that which is against God and pursuing God's Word, will, and ways. Jesus began his preaching ministry saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 4:17). Genuine repentance is displayed in our lives through the new, transformed heart Christ gives us. Before Christ's transformative work we desired, above all else, for ourselves to be seen, praised, and served. Now that Christ has opened our eyes, given us grace to repent, and given us a new heart, we now desire these same things, but for Christ's name instead of our own.

### Working With Integrity

Do everything unto the Lord – with integrity and excellence; work in a way that gains the trust and respect of those in your workplace, home, classroom, etc. Christ was righteous in everything he did throughout his life on earth; seek to live out the righteousness of Christ given to you.

### Pause and Discuss:

*What does repenting from pride look like? How do you walk differently?*

### Apply

#### **Develop a love for God's Word.**

Pray for a love for his Word and simply begin or continue reading it daily. Just as in anything, our love for something or someone can only deepen with our knowledge and understanding of it. Ask the Lord for help, have a systematic way of reading through Scripture, and read it with others.

#### **Pray in times of trouble.**

When going through trials it can be easy to let our minds run 100 mph. But when we stop to reflect on the sovereignty and goodness of God and praise him for these attributes, we can begin to perceive our circumstances in a grounded and peaceful way.

#### **Humble yourself and repent.**

The Lord is faithful to forgive us and powerful enough to grow us into Christ's image. Trust him.

### Pray

*Write out a prayer of confession and repentance, asking the Lord to sanctify you completely.*

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# Pursuing God

## 2 Kings 23:1-30 | July 04<sup>th</sup>, 2021

How have you dealt with obstacles that impede your pursuit of a goal?

Read 2 Kings 23:1-30

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

Faith is...

an individual commitment.

Josiah's commitment to the Lord was first individual. He heard God's Word, recognized his own sin, turned from it, and committed his life to God with all his heart and soul. In order for a person to be saved, he or she needs to believe Galatians 2:20; I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me. We believe that all of our own personal sin was paid for – in full - by Christ on the cross of Calvary, by his love and sacrifice for us. Christ came for us individually, but also collectively.

shared commitment with others in community.

As a believer in Christ as both Lord of our life and Savior of it, we are now in Christ, joined together with others in Christ. Just as we read that others who believed in God's Word joined in the covenant, we too, who believe in Jesus, are joined together in covenant, fellowship, and faith. This is most beautifully expressed in the local church – individuals, connected by their faith in Christ, coming together for worship and building one another up through service, encouragement, and prayer.

### Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

### Apply Respond

#### Additional Passages:

Zephaniah 1-3

Galatians 2:20

Revelation 22:12-21

#### Pause and Discuss:

*How does our individual faith affect the community of our Life Group and MeadowBrook at large?*

*How does our Life Group and church family affect our individual faith?*

#### Reinstitution of the Passover

"23:22 A Passover like this had not been observed since the days of the judges who judged Israel (see Josh. 5:10-12 for the last mention of Passover in the narrative, also Deut. 16:1-8 for the stipulations, esp. v. 6). In celebrating the festival Josiah outstrips not only Hezekiah in faithfulness to God, but even David" (ESV Study Bible Notes). Re-instituting the Passover reminded him and his people the reality and price of their sin and look forward to the provision of God in the Messiah.

## Pursue God wholeheartedly.

Josiah forsook the idolatry of his people and pursued the righteousness of God. In this chapter we read how Josiah utterly destroyed idolatrous temples along with their priests so that he, and his people, might follow after God wholeheartedly. As we look at our life, may we be honest when idolatry pulls at our hearts, reminding ourselves that Jesus' righteousness, his glory, is not only what saves us, but is also where our chief satisfaction and joy are found. John Piper, in his book *Seeing and Savoring Jesus Christ*, puts it well:

Christ is not glorious so that we get wealthy or healthy. Christ is glorious so that rich or poor, sick or sound, we might be satisfied in him... Seeing and savoring this glory is the goal of our salvation. "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me" (John 17:24). To feast on this forever is the aim of our being created and our being saved.

Nothing can satisfy our deepest longings like the glory of Christ. No administration, relationship, child, promotion, or salary can even compare to the fulfillment of Christ. May we not be fooled into the futile pursuit of finding satisfaction with good things or things of this world, but instead follow after Him who we were created to worship. When we practice what we were created to do, therein lies our greatest satisfaction, fulfillment and joy.

Verse 24 gives us Josiah's reasoning for destroying the idols in his kingdom: that he might establish the words of the law that were written in the book. Remove the idols in your life, put the good things in your life in their rightful place - under God, his word, his will and his ways – that you might establish God's word in your heart. This is what leads to the transformation of your life and your family's life. This is what grows you from one degree of glory to the next. May we follow in the example of Josiah as he turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might (v.25).

### Reflect and Plan

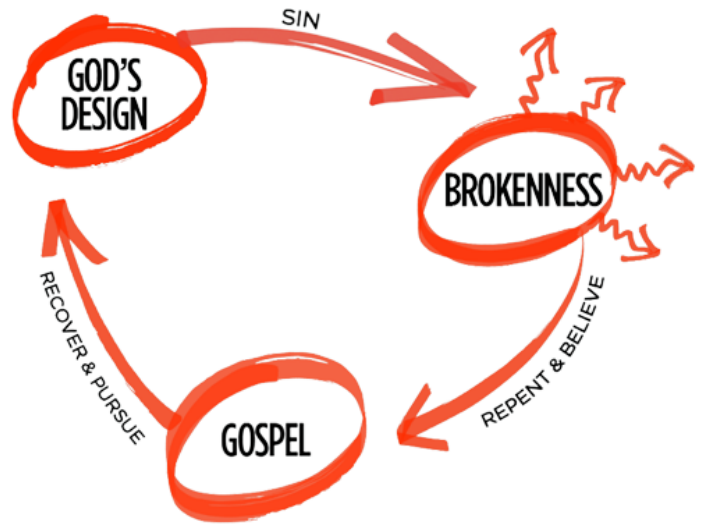
A life lived in pursuit of God does not occur by accident. Take time to write out a plan for how you will pursue God in the rhythms of your life.

*How and when will you pursue God individually?*

*How and when will you pursue God in community? What is your plan to build deep relationships with those in your Life Group?*

## King Jesus is greater.

The Lord showed mercy to Josiah by forgiving him of his sin and allowing him to die in peace before the judgment of Israel came. However, Josiah's righteousness was not enough to satisfy the wrath of God for his entire nation. Jesus is the greater King. His righteousness was enough to satisfy the perfect standard of God for all people for all of time. His righteousness is so pure, so complete, that for those of us who repent and believe in him, the righteousness that is imputed to us by Christ allows us to be perfectly complete and holy before a perfect and holy God. Christ was tempted in every way Josiah was – and in every way we are – yet he alone was without sin.



### Plan to Share the Good News

Who in your life needs the good news of Jesus Christ? Write their names down and commit to praying for them this upcoming year.

### The Message of Zephaniah

The book of Zephaniah gives us a fuller understanding of the people of Judah. Zephaniah prophesied of the coming judgment for Judah's idolatry and rebellion against God as well as the hope of salvation from God's wrath if only they would humble themselves and turn to him. As you read his short book, you will see that the Judeans struggled with much the same things as we do today: materialism, finding hope and fulfillment in our bank accounts, possessions, or title. This is futile and only results in destruction and God's wrath. However, like Micah Fries says in his commentary on Zephaniah, "It is against the backdrop of God's appropriate wrath that the grace of God is so powerfully displayed" (Christ-Centered Exposition, pg. 5). The fact that Christ took on himself the full wrath of God that all of our rebellious and wicked sin deserved so we might become the righteousness of God is all the more astounding! Praise God that he made a way for us to be with him, in peace, forever.

### Pray

*Take time to write out a praise God for the perfection of Christ as he lived on earth. Marvel at his holiness and his willingness to lay down his life for people utterly unholy. Ask the Lord to open the eyes of those in your life who do not see Jesus for who he truly is – holy, righteous, and good.*

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# Exile

## 2 Kings 23:31-25:30 | July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2021

As we wrap up our time in Kings, what is the major takeaway you think the author is trying to communicate throughout the book?

Read 2 Kings 23:31-25:30

What stands out to you in the narrative?

What context—setting, character background, progression in the narrative—is important to understanding the meaning of the text?

Rebellion is Boring and an Unexpected Hope: An Overview of the Closing Chapters of 2 Kings

\*Yawn\* The book of Kings closes with yet another section where a bunch of kings—whose names are hard to pronounce—are mentioned in quick succession and all wicked. Ralph Davis writes regarding this section,

“Drip... drip: four times we read, ‘He did evil in the Lord’s eyes.’ Nothing bracing or refreshing here, just the same stale stuff. None of the trembling of Hezekiah or enthusiastic obedience of Josiah that give spice and flavor and drama to kingdom life... Actually, only holiness stirs and only godliness fascinates.”

If this section seems difficult or boring, it’s meant to be that way! As Tony Merida puts it, “rebellion is boring.” Sin does not satisfy. It does not stir the heart or the imagination to wonder. It bores. Every pleasure gained is lost just as quickly. This section concludes the book of Kings and details the fall of the nation of Israel. It is excruciatingly boring. No exciting climax. No underdog victories. Just the same old sinful rebellion that ends in destruction and the same old impotent kings unable to lead and deliver their people.

God stays true to his word and brings about judgment on his people. Nebuchadnezzar exiles the people from the land and burns down the city, leaving behind the weakest and poorest—who despite the admonition of Jeremiah, flee to Egypt. It was the death of a nation. The people who had been brought out of Egypt and given the promised land saw that same land destroyed and returned to the land of slavery.

The story, however, does not end in total desolation. There is a faint whisper of hope. The son of David, Jehoiachin, survived and was dining at the king’s table in Babylon. The Davidic line, which was the line through the true Son of David whose Kingdom would never end would come, remained intact. The people in exile still had hope that God was not through with them—and indeed he was not! For the gospel of Matthew opens with “the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of Abraham, the son of David.” God kept his promise of judgment, but he also kept his promise of redemption.

Throughout the book of Kings, the author gives judgments on how each king’s rule was to be viewed, always centering on their heart. Were they faithful to the Lord? Many kings had success in building an economy, expanding borders, and developing great infrastructure, but Jeremiah did not seem to care about those things. He was concerned with the heart.

There’s a lesson in this. It’s not that those things are unimportant. They are. We glorify God in our work, stewardship, and artisanship. But if our hearts are not faithful to the Lord, then in the end none of it matters. It’s the Lord that gives our work meaning. If our hearts are given to him, then we will live out our purpose in our work that will not only have significance in this life but will echo throughout eternity.

### Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

### Apply

### Respond

### Additional Passages:

Jeremiah 42-43

2 Peter 3

Hebrews 11-12:3

Revelation 19

What does this final section in the book of Kings teach us about God and how we are to respond to him with lives of faith?

First, God is graciously patient and just in his judgment.

The book of Kings details the tragic decline and fall of Israel, the nation of God. Time and time again, God offers chance after chance for the people to repent of their ways and walk in the peace of his righteousness. Time and time again, the people reject him. It's a miracle, that the exile did not happen sooner! But God, in his long-suffering patience, offered mercy to the very end—even through the final pre-exilic prophet, Jeremiah.

God is extending this same patience today, as 2 Peter 3 teaches us. There is coming a day when Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead, and humanity should not recklessly presume upon the kindness of God. The people in Jeremiah's day thought they were good. Many in the church who may have walked an aisle and been baptized think they are good as well, but like the people of Jeremiah's day, they are given to sin and bound for judgment. You cannot be a friend of the world and a friend of God simultaneously. Today is the day of grace, repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you are following Christ, do not play games with sin. Submit to and learn from the Lord's discipline in your life. Some of the generational ills of the people of God resulted from the faithful playing games with their sin and not fully submitting to the discipline of the Lord. Rebellion is boring. Sin is lame. Walk in holiness by the power of the Spirit and know the abundant joy of life in Christ.

They needed a better king; we know that King by name—Jesus.

The book of Kings cries out, like the rest of the Old Testament, for something better. Adam cries out for the second Adam. Isaac cries out for the better offspring of Abraham. Judah cries out for the better lion of Judah. Moses cries out for the better prophet. Gideon, Samson, and Samuel cry out for the better judge. And David, Solomon, and all the kings detailed in this tragic tracing of Israel's history cry out for a better King.

Jeremiah closes his work with what Tony Merida calls, "a whisper of hope." Jeremiah prophesied of the return from Babylon, but he was kidnapped and taken to Egypt. He did not see Cyrus' decree. He prophesied of the New Covenant, but did not see the Messiah come to rescue and redeem his people during his life. He hoped in the one who would come through the line of David, Jesus Christ, the King of kings.

Jeremiah saw as through a dim mirror the king who was to come, but we know the rest of the story. Read Tony Merida's concluding thoughts on this section:

"Our King has come, living the life we could not live, dying the death we should have died, rising from the dead, defeating our ultimate enemies. And our King is coming again, and we will be with him forever. Right now, we are in between the times. Let's not lose heart as we wait for the day in which King Jesus returns to establish his shalom-filled kingdom. We need a better King, and praise God, we have One! 'Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen'"

### Godly Leadership

The book of Kings highlights many things. The most important being the highlighting of God's covenant faithfulness, mercy, patience, and justice, all coupled with the anticipation for the true Son of David. However, on a lesser degree of importance, it also highlights the need for godly leadership.

Leadership matters. Whether it be in the home, church, workforce, or community, godly leadership can make or break an organization—or a country as we have seen so clearly demonstrated in Kings.

Read what Oswald Chambers identifies as three marks of godly leadership the world desperately needs to see today in God's people:

"If the world is to hear the church's voice today, leaders are needed who are authoritative, spiritual, and sacrificial. Authoritative, because people desire reliable leaders who know where they are going and confident of getting there. Spiritual, because without a strong relationship with God, even the most attractive and competent person cannot lead people to God. Sacrificial, because this trait follows the model of Jesus, who gave himself for the whole world and who calls us to follow in his steps."

May the Lord raise up such leaders among the men and women of MeadowBrook.

## We look forward to the city whose designer and builder is God—the New Jerusalem.

Israel's capital Jerusalem was never meant to be the end. The promised land always pointed to a greater promised land: the new heavens and the new earth. Read what the author of Hebrews wrote about Abraham:

<sup>8</sup> By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. <sup>9</sup> By faith he went to live in the land of promise, as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise. <sup>10</sup> For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.... <sup>13</sup> These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. <sup>14</sup> For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. <sup>15</sup> If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. <sup>16</sup> But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

(Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16 ESV)

This is our hope. Our King has come and he is coming again. Let us as God's people live for the coming Kingdom, where...

*the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, [will flow] from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup> through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. <sup>3</sup> No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. <sup>4</sup> They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. <sup>5</sup> And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1-5 ESV)*

### Pause and Discuss

*Discuss each of the three points of this week's lesson and how they affect the way we live our lives in response to God's truth revealed in the Book of Kings.*

### Pray

Father,

*You are good. Your Son is good. Your Spirit is good. May you transform our hearts that we might be conformed to your good nature. Help us to walk differently in response to your gracious patience toward us. Order our lives under the Kingship of Christ and fix the eyes of our hearts on your coming kingdom. Lord, we cannot do this apart from you working in our lives.*

*In Jesus Christ,*

*By your Holy Spirit,*

*I pray,*

*Amen*



# Lamenting Loss

## Lamentations 2:21-3:33 | July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2021

What is your knee-jerk reaction to hard times?

Read Lamentations 2:21-3:33

What stands out to you in this poetic reflection?

What context and literary devices are important to understanding the meaning of the text?

When the faithful suffer: An Overview of the Life of Jeremiah.

Jeremiah started his ministry during the reign of Josiah—a last ditch reform effort that God used to build a faithful remnant who would endure the exile. His ministry ended after years of being ignored by multiple kings of Judah as he watched his capital city and Temple burn to the ground. As his people yet again refused to listen to him and fled to Egypt—where tradition claims he was stoned to death by his countrymen. He was faithful unto the Lord, yet endured unspeakable horrors and afflictions, which he reflects upon in this painstakingly honest section of Scripture.

In this chapter, we see the real pain Jeremiah was experiencing. He was beaten down physically. He was lonely and depressed emotionally and spiritually. Unfortunately, his circumstances did not get much better, in this world that is. Though Jeremiah underwent real pain, he possessed a real hope that encouraged him in the trial.

His trial was not the result of his unfaithfulness, but God used the trial to form greater degrees of faithfulness in Jeremiah. You might be undergoing a trial, perhaps as a result of some particular sin in your life, or perhaps, like Jeremiah, your trial is completely unrelated to any action of yours. How are we to respond in these moments? It is in these times of darkness, when our faith is shaken, where God oftentimes most clearly reveals his goodness to us. We want to endure the trial in faith and come out on the other side—even if that be death—with a deeper intimacy with our Creator and Father. So, what can we learn from Jeremiah?

*“God will walk with us through deep pain, so that He can show us greater depths of His character that we would never see or experience on the surface of life.”*  
Jack Raymond

God’s sovereign purpose in the trial does not diminish its difficulty.

God’s sovereignty in the midst of the trial—when properly understood—can be a most-comforting truth for the suffering disciple. Faith in God’s sovereignty believes with Joseph that “What [the enemy] meant for evil; God meant for good,” and believes with Paul that “All things work together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose,” and that “this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.”

However, as this passage so clearly attests to, faith in God’s sovereign purpose in the trial does not mean it is easy nor does it minimize the pain or the emotions that come with it. Things may not get better in this life. The cancer might not stay in remission, the pain might not go away, your loved one might not recover. The trials of this life are hard. The pain is hard. The moments of grief, depression, and confusion are hard. The lingering effects of trauma are hard. But in Christ, none of it is meaningless, and in this hope, we can find rest.

### Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

### Apply Respond

#### Additional Passages:

Romans 8:18-39

2 Corinthians 1:3-8; 4:16-18

1 Peter 2:19-25

James 1:12-18

## Call out to the Lord in the midst of the pain.

In the midst of Jeremiah's depth of despair, he calls out to the Lord to remember him in his affliction. Like a call to a Judge to remember the injustice and pain experienced by the plaintiff, Jeremiah called out to his God. He did not shrink from him in bitter anger. He did not run from God. He pressed toward him in prayer.

In the trial and in the aftermath, we might be tempted to grow bitter to the Lord or run from him in prayer. "After all," we might think, "he did not answer [\_\_fill-in-the-blank\_\_] why would he care about me?" Such thinking is not of the Lord. The Lord is our comforter in the midst of affliction. Prayer is part of his ministry toward us into conforming our hearts to his. So, in the trial call on the Lord to remember you in your pain. He sees you, he hears your cry, he knows the depths of your heartache, and he is moving toward you as a Loving Father would.

### Pause and Discuss

*What do our prayers look like in the midst of a trial?*

*What do they look like in its aftermath?*

*How do we respond when God's answer is "No"?*

## Reflect upon the character of God as revealed in his Word.

As he was calling out to the Lord in his despair, Jeremiah was also recalling the character of the Lord. Likely a reflection on the covenant name of the Lord as God revealed when his glory passed behind Moses in Exodus 34 and his study into Israel's history, Jeremiah highlighted three aspects of the character of God.

- 1. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.**
- 2. God is faithful and his mercy never runs out.**
- 3. The Lord is our portion.**

Read this excerpt from Pastor Randy's sermon from March of this year where he reflects upon these three characteristics:

*"Our love is not steady; it is fickle. We find it easier to love God when life is good, and more challenging to love him and express it when we face hardships. In John 14:15, the Lord links our expressions of love with our obedience to him, so admittedly we falter to love him well.*

*Nonetheless, according to Lamentation 3, God's love is steady and unceasing. The word translated as love is powerful in the Old Testament. It is from the Hebrew word "hesed." It is God's loyal, gracious love. John MacArthur notes that it is a comprehensive word describing "love, grace, mercy, goodness, forgiveness, truth, compassion, and faithfulness." All of this is steady and unending from the Lord.*

*God's mercies are new to us every morning; he will faithfully supply his mercy every day. If you have thought that God is put out with you and you have met his limit, then you're wrong. His mercy is extended to you every day. If you've thought, "My sin is too great" or "My life is too far gone," then know this, Jesus brings a fresh supply of God's mercy today. If you're alive and breathing, God's mercy is extended to you. Righteous living IS trusting God for his mercies, faithfulness, and portion every 24 hours.*

*We can trust that the Lord will be faithful every morning with enough new mercy to get us through the days' troubles, temptations, sins, troubles, and pains. If you've read Lamentations, you know that it is a book filled with pain, despair, and the consequences of living in a sinful and broken world. However, the writer tells us of the wondrous gospel-hope and the sufficient, powerful, present, and faithful care of God for each person who belongs to him."*

This type of reflection flows from time spent in the Word of God. Therefore, in the midst of the trial, it's vital we press to the Lord relationally in his word. We need to read his word, study his word, meditate on his word, and memorize his word—not to prove something to God but to spend time with him. In our engagement of the Scriptures, we meet with God.

**Aggressively wait on the lord as you grow in the midst of his discipline.**

Waiting on the Lord is not like a passive husband waiting on his wife to come out of Target. No, waiting on the Lord involves the whole will of the person. The one who waits aggressively seeks the Lord in his circumstances. He pores over the scriptures and engages God in prayer. The one who waits does not grumble at the circumstance, but endures the trial as a mature adult, learning wisdom in the midst of it all. Lastly, the one who waits hopes in the fulfillment of the salvation provided through the New Covenant.

Our sufferings have an expiration date. The steadfast love of the Lord, however, never ceases. For all eternity, we will rejoice in the love and mercy of God. Hope in Christ and his kingdom as you allow the Lord's discipline to mold you into more faithful disciples.

*For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11 ESV)*

## Pray

*Take time to pray together as a group for those who are undergoing trials. Use the Lord's Prayer as your guide:*

*"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.  
<sup>10</sup> Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. <sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily bread, <sup>12</sup> and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. <sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. (Matthew 6:9-13 ESV)*

## God is Sovereign Over Pain but Not the Author of Your Pain

God's sovereignty over the trial does not mean he is actively inflicting pain upon his children. Lamentations highlights how God both causes grief and how God does not grieve the children of man. We need to look no further than Christ to see this truth in action. Jesus freely decided to lay his life down for his sheep, and when he suffered at the hands of the wicked, he continued entrusting himself to God. God did not kill his Son, his people did—but all according to the sovereign plan of God. Satan entered Judas that he might betray him. The Pharisees conspired with the Sadducees and the Herodians to have him put to death, and Pontius Pilate had him beaten by Gentile soldiers and crucified. These people inflicted pain upon their innocent Messiah in order to achieve their wicked goals. However, this all happened by God's allowance and was achieving something far greater and more glorious than if it were to never happen. It was God's will that Christ would die, but God did not actively cause the injustice Christ experienced. He worked it together for the good of those who love him and are called according to his purpose.

Now let's relate this to our trials. The Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, knew all things and willfully took on flesh and endured what he endured—knowing the glory it would bring the Father and the good that would result for mankind. Thus, if Jesus, who suffered something far worse than anything we will ever experience, willfully and joyfully endured the cross without wavering even for a moment in his faith, we can trust that God is good in the midst of our trials.

God isn't a bully with a magnifying glass over an ant hill, but a loving Father who has our best in mind and knows what he is doing.

## Daily Bread

God's provision for his people is given daily. All throughout the Scriptures we see this principle. The people were only to gather manna for that day—anything over would spoil; Jesus taught his disciples to ask for daily bread and not worry about tomorrow's needs, while condemning those who hoarded unnecessarily; and Paul highlighted that the inward renewal of God was provided day by day. This does not preclude wise planning, however it does preclude us putting hope in our plans.

In the trial, we must not be so quick to shed the lot we have been given and learn to come to God for the daily bread he has in store for his children. It is enough. You can be sure of it.

# Instructions for the Exiled

## Jeremiah 29:1-14 | July 25<sup>th</sup>, 2021

When you build or cook something, do you follow instructions or wing-it?

Read Jeremiah 29:1-14

What stands out to you in Jeremiah's letter?

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*And if you call on him as Father who judges impartially according to each one's deeds, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile, (1 Peter 1:17 ESV)*

In this one verse, Peter likens the entire Christian life lived on this earth to the exile of the faithful Israelites to Babylon. In many ways, this also forms the predominant metaphor in the book of Revelation where God's faithful people are living in unholy Babylon as they wait for the Lord to return and bring them into the promised land of the new creation. What formed a metaphor for New Testament writers, Jeremiah experienced. In a key section in his book, Jeremiah addresses the faithful who have been taken away from their homes, giving them instructions for how they are to live in the midst of their time in exile. What were his instructions? How did Jeremiah ground the people of God? How can we learn from his instructions to the exiled as we seek to conduct ourselves in the fear of the Lord during the time of our exile?

### Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

### Apply Respond

#### Additional Passages:

- 1 Peter 2:9-12
- 1 John 4:7-21
- Luke 10:25-37
- Jude 1-25

### Instructions to the Exiled: Be holistically faithful and hold onto hope.

While false teachers were proclaiming peace and a speedy return, Jeremiah—God's true spokesperson—was proclaiming a 70-year exile for the people of God in what was effectively an extended Sabbath for the promised land that had been defiled by idols. Though his message did not remove hardship, it elevated joy in God's provision in the midst of the trial, called them to a higher standard of love, and was a message filled with hope. His instructions can be broken down into five takeaways:

#### 1. Find the right joy in God's provisions and productive living.

Even in the exile God desired for his people to rejoice in his provision and find satisfaction in productive living. He wanted them to settle, build houses that would become homes, plant gardens that provide delicious food, and experience the joys of marriage and parenting. For too long the people had been elevating the created over the Creator, and in this elevation, they forfeited the joy that was to be found in God's provision. The joy was not primarily in the house or the garden or the family or the work, but in God. The joys experienced in creation are secondary joys that are derived from the primary joy of knowing and loving God above all else. When we elevate the created over the Creator, we find ourselves ever-laboring to lay hold of something that is ever-fleeting. Tim Keller, reflected on this in article he wrote about his Pancreatic Cancer:

Since my diagnosis, Kathy and I have come to see that the more we tried to make a heaven out of this world—the more we grounded our comfort and security in it—the less we were able to enjoy it... A short, green Jedi Master's words applied to me perfectly: "All his life has he looked away to the future, the horizon. Never his mind on where he was." Kathy and I should have known better. We did know better. When we turn good things into ultimate things, when we make them our greatest consolations and loves, they will necessarily disappoint us bitterly. "Thou hast made us for thyself," Augustine said in his most famous sentence, "and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."



## 2. Build up your community (Love and pray for your neighbor/enemy).

This might seem odd given all that had occurred, but Jeremiah desired for the exiles to seek the welfare of Babylon. They were to do good to their neighbors, who though likely had little to do with the events of the exile, still were viewed as enemies. This anticipates the clear teaching of Christ and the radical nature of the love his followers are called to: <sup>44</sup> *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,* <sup>45</sup> *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.* (Matthew 5:44-45 ESV)

We love because of who we are in Christ, not based on the people we are loving. This frees us to love like Jesus, who gave his life for us though we were still sinners.

What are practical ways you can do this as a Life Group?

## 3. Live by the truth.

During the exile, Jeremiah draws their attention not to the threat of the pagan teachers of Babylon but to the Israelites who claim to speak for God but, in fact, did not. We are to be on guard against any and all false teaching that seeks to encroach upon the church. We are to live by the Word of God as it is rightly understood. Be diligent to avoid being deceived by those who would twist God's Word to their unholy ends.

## 4. Know there's an expiration date for the exile.

While many would die in exile, many would not. Either way, it had an expiration date. The time of our exile has an expiration date as well. This life of suffering is just a blip on the radar in comparison to the eternal rest God is bringing about for his children. Rest securely in that hope, knowing that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing to the glory that is to be revealed to us.

## 5. Hope in the Lord's plan. (Please do not cheapen Jeremiah 29:11)

Even though the curse of exile was laid upon the Israelites, God had plans for his people. His plan was for their welfare, not their harm. They had a future and hope. Ultimately, Jeremiah points them to the same hope we hold onto today: the hope of the New Covenant. His plan was not that the hardships of exile would come to an end, but that the hardships of the exile were not all that was in store for them. They had the hope of a future intimacy with God to be experienced in the New Covenant Jeremiah is about to highlight. This hope manifested itself partly in the return from exile, more fully in the first advent of Christ, and will be fully realized in the new heavens and the new earth where God will forever dwell in the New Jerusalem with his people in perfect peace. Those who cheapen this promise by promising financial, academic, or familial success for high school graduates and others exchange something gloriously eternal for something embarrassingly temporary. They choose Salisbury steak over filet mignon.

In this life of exile, hope in the Lord's plan. Your situation might not get better. In fact, every day in this life might be harder than the previous day. Our hope is not in how good tomorrow will be. Our hope is that the God of the universe sent his Son to die for us and rise again so we might have eternal life with him in his new creation. Our hope is that in the midst of the trial God has not left us alone but is ever-present in us through his Holy Spirit. Our hope is that this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory. Our hope is in the coming kingdom of Christ. Whatever the rest of this life has in store for you, because we know that our bodies will rise from the dust, we can be confident that indeed the best is yet to come.

## The Character of our Loving God

### *Our God condescends to our level.*

We would have no hope of entering into relationship with God if he did not first visit us in both his revelation through the Scriptures and in the person of Jesus Christ. Our God is a God who visits us.

### *Our God is faithful.*

Every promise God makes, he keeps.

### *Our God is good.*

God's sovereignty over our trial does not diminish God's goodness. He is operating on a higher plane of existence than Satan and definitely higher than ours. We can trust in every circumstance that God is good and he is working all things together for the good of those who love him.

### *Our God hears our prayers.*

The Lord is not indifferent to us and our concerns, but he willingly lends us his ear and has sovereignly ordained that part of his work in this world will be accomplished through our prayers. How glorious!

### *Our God can be found by those who seek him.*

Our God does not play hide and seek with us. All those who search for him with their whole heart find him. He does not turn anyone away. All who knock in surrendered faith, enter.

### *Our God restores.*

He does not merely forgive, he restores. Our hope is in the restoration God will bring about in the new creation. We know that what we will experience physically in that day can be experienced spiritually today, partial as it may be.

# The New Covenant

## Jeremiah 31:10-14, 31-40 | August 01<sup>st</sup>, 2021

What do you find most encouraging about the gospel of Jesus Christ?

### Read Jeremiah 31:10-14, 31-40

What stands out to you in Jeremiah's prophetic announcement?

What context and literary devices are important to understanding the meaning of the text?

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We end the final lesson in our four-summer journey through 1st & 2nd Kings and the narrative of Israel's fall from its high position during the reign of Solomon to its utter destruction in both the Assyrian and Babylonian exile with a call to hope. Jeremiah recorded Israel's history, lifted up God's grace, mercy, and justice in the exile, showed his people how to lament and grieve in Lamentations, gave instructions for how they are to live in the exile, and now, we will focus on how he encouraged the faithful with a message of hope.

### The Hope of the Gathering of the Lord (Jeremiah 31:10-14)

The exile was an "ungathering" of the people of God. Both Israel and Judah were scattered about as a result of this un-gathering. Jeremiah wanted to know this scattering would not be permanent. God would gather his people to himself. While this certainly had partial fulfillment in Judah's return from exile, it was even more fulfilled in the spiritual gathering of the people of God through Jesus Christ into his church (*ekklesia*, lit. gathering). Ultimately, this gathering Jeremiah mentions still awaits ultimate fulfillment when God gathers his entire bride unto himself after the resurrection in his new creation.

In this gathering, the Lord reveals his glory and righteous character as he pours out grace and mercy on his undeserving people. Jeremiah highlights three ways the Lord does this:

#### 1. The Lord redeems his people.

Because of the fall, we found ourselves in bondage to sin living in the dominion of darkness following after the prince of the power of the air. However, Christ willfully gave his life on the cross and rose again so his people might be liberated from their bondage and purchased for new life with God. We have been redeemed by his blood. In his love for God and us, Jesus paid the full and total price for our sin. What incredible, life-altering news we will celebrate for all eternity!

#### 2. The Lord comforts his people.

Sin did not just leave us in bondage; it also left us in brokenness. We felt and still feel the bitter consequences of sin: heartache, pain, sickness, strife, betrayal, and death. In this broken world, we live not by denying the brokenness, but relying on God's comfort in the midst of brokenness as we look forward to the day where Jesus "will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:4 ESV) The Lord is comforting and will comfort his people.

## Highlight Explain

- What do we learn about God?
- What do we learn about ourselves?
- What is the good news of this text?

## Apply

## Respond

### Additional Passages:

Hebrews 7:11-8:13

Mark 14:22-26

Acts 2

Revelation 22:1-5

*"For every New Testament doctrine, there is an Old Testament picture."*

*– Dr. Robert Smith Jr.*



### 3. The Lord satisfies his people.

Sin had us in bondage, afflicted us in oppression, and ultimately, left us unsatisfied. God will satisfy his people perfectly. We cannot even begin to comprehend the glory of God's promise that,

*"I will feast the soul of priests [all those in Christ by the way], and my people shall be satisfied with my goodness, declares the Lord." (Jeremiah 31:14, brackets added).*

As the great theologian Augustine so perfectly said in his prayer to God: "You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you." Sin over-promises and under-delivers. God and his holiness will always satisfy and never run out. For those of you in Christ, you will forever be stuffed with the goodness of God.

This message of hope would have been an incredible comfort for the faithful as well as the unfaithful who had been confronted with their own sin and were ready to repent.

#### Pause and Discuss:

*How does God's future gathering of his people affect the way we view the local church gathering?*

### The Hope of the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34)

Jeremiah did not just point to the hope of a regathering, but to a regathering under a New Covenant. The Old Covenant from its inception anticipated a better covenant enacted on better promises, brought about and guaranteed by a greater high priest who would offer an eternally adequate sacrifice. It was never meant to last. The Old Covenant was the steward of the house, the New Covenant is the master. Both brought people into relationship with God by grace through faith, but the structures of the Old Covenant were mere shadows of what was to be fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ in the New Covenant. Like the gathering of God's people, the blessings of the New Covenant are enjoyed in part today, but will not fully be enjoyed until God's resurrected people dwell with him in his new creation. What are the marks of the New Covenant?

#### **Marks of the New Covenant**

##### **1. In the New Covenant, God makes his people inwardly righteous.**

In the New Covenant, God's righteousness is internalized within his people. God's law, in summary, commanded that one love God with their entire being and their neighbor as themselves, that one would be holy as God is holy. None of us met that standard, save for one: Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ and Son of the Living God. He fulfilled God's perfect standard in our place and on the cross, became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God. Now, his Spirit dwells within us and is writing the law of God on our hearts, transforming us from the inside out and conforming us to God's righteous character in increasing measure until one day we will be presented blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We will be righteous as he is righteous.

##### **2. In the New Covenant, God reconciles us to himself so that each of us might enjoy intimate fellowship with him through the indwelling of his Spirit.**

Once we were not a people, but now we have been made into a people—God's people—by the blood of Christ. We were enemies, now we are rightly called friends of God. In his body, Christ reconciled God and Man as our Great Mediator. Now we forever live in intimate fellowship with God who is always with us through his indwelling Holy Spirit. Now, we walk by the Spirit and enjoy the abundant life of fellowship with our creator as we engage him in his Word, prayer, and corporate worship, longing for the day we will see him face to face.

### **3. In the New Covenant, God forgives and cleanses sinners.**

Lastly, we are forgiven and cleansed of all our sins. God will remember them no more. That which used to bring us shame and riddle us with guilt has been erased because of what Jesus has done for us. Rest in that forgiveness and extend it to others.

#### **Apply**

**What will be experienced in the ultimate gathering of God's people, pursue today in the community of the church.**

The Lord will reveal the fullness of his redemption, comfort, and satisfaction when he gathers his people unto himself. This future, universal gathering will include people throughout history of every tribe, tongue, and nation. This gathering is anticipated today in small local gatherings of the saints of God in churches. In and through these gatherings, let's join God in the work he is doing.

- Be a proclaimer of the gospel, both to the unsaved and the saved.
- Be an agent of his comfort.
- Be one who stirs one another up to find satisfaction in Christ.

***How does viewing the church as the first step in God gathering his people unto himself in the new creation change the way you view church?***

***How can you better engage the life of MeadowBrook this upcoming school year?***

**What will be experienced in the ultimate fulfillment of the New Covenant, pursue today in your own Christian life.**

The New Covenant, though not fully experienced in all its benefits, is in fact experienced in all its aspects. The righteousness of Christ is ours, we have peace with God, and we are forgiven and cleansed. How can we live in light of this glorious covenant?

- Pursue greater expressions of the righteousness already given to us.
- Be a peace-maker.
- Forgive others.

***Which of these is most difficult for you to do? Does it correspond to what is hardest for you to believe about what Christ has done for you?***

***Does your approach to the pursuit of righteousness need to change?***

***Where is God calling you to righteousness? To be a peace-maker? To extend forgiveness?***



MeadowBrook  
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