



Our Jewish Roots

The Continuity of the Old and New Testaments

Advent Study

Day 1

Read: Matthew 5:17-20; Isaiah 40:6-8

The Word of Our God Will Stand Forever

I invited my Jewish friend to attend an evening at my church to hear our pastors speak on the topic of “prayer.” The inspirational and motivational talks were grounded in Scripture from the Old and New Testaments. As he said goodnight in the church parking lot, my friend remarked, “I had no idea the Christian Church relied so much on the Old Testament.” The truth is that all of the Old Testament stories we study in Sunday school and in church (Creation, the Fall, the Flood, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, David, etc.) find their fulfillment (Matthew 5:17) and/or parallels in the New Testament. In fact, when my wife and I share the Gospel with our Jewish friends, we start by thanking them for giving us our Scriptures and our Messiah!

As a young boy I served as an acolyte. I was taught to light the candle on the Old Testament or lectern side first, and then to light the candle on the Gospel or pulpit side. The rationale given to me was that the Gospel never stands alone; it is always supported by the Old Testament. While it was probably a nice way to help me remember the routine for lighting the candles, there is truth in the rationale.

We believe, “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). But often we teach as if the stories in the Old Testament are not connected or related to the New Testament. The study ahead in *The Journey* could be entitled, “The Continuity of the Old and New Testaments.” As Isaiah reminds us, “The word of God (*all of it*) will stand forever” (Isaiah 40:8).

R&D How would you respond to a friend who said, “The God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and the God of the New Testament is a God of love”?

Prayer: Thank you, Jesus, that you are “the same yesterday and today and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

Day 2

Read: Genesis 1:1-15; John 1:1-5

In the Beginning

The Gospel of John uses the opening words of Genesis, “In the beginning,” to dramatically show that God planned, in the fullness of time, to send His Son, Jesus, to dwell among us full of grace and truth (John 1:14). Both our readings express the Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This Trinity, representing Creator, Savior, and Sustainer was, is, and always will be at work in all creation.

God works eternally to bring light to a dark world. In creation God said, “Let there be light” and, by the power of His word, God separated the light from the darkness (Genesis 1:3-4). In the dark world of our lives where sin and death seem to hide the light of life, God speaks

through His only and eternal Son, the Word made flesh, and that life, the light of the world, shines in the darkness and the darkness has not, indeed cannot, overcome it. Through our faith in the saving work of Jesus on the cross, God, who loves us (Jeremiah 31:3), sees that everything He has made is very good. I have only heard the audible voice of God once in my life. It was in the darkest night of my soul when I cried out to Him, and He answered, “You are my child.” It was the word I needed to hear and the darkness lifted.

There is new life in Jesus; in fact, a new creation. That which God created in the beginning is filled fuller by this new life through His Son. It is good news that must be shared! That which came to be in him, Jesus, was life and that life is the light of all mankind.

R&D Share with a friend, who needs to hear you speak the Word, the good news that in Jesus the darkness of sin and death has been overcome.

Prayer: *“Speak, Lord, for thy servant hears.” (1 Samuel 4:9)*

Day 3

Read: Genesis 3:1-7; Exodus 34:6-7; Romans 5:6-17

The Fall

In the Creation story we learn “God saw everything that he had made was very good” (Genesis 1:31a). Through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, mankind loses its primal innocence and happiness and enters upon its actual condition of sin and toil. Sin arises by free human choice. Mankind has “fallen” from that which was purposed for it by the Creator. The serpent in the Garden is identified with the devil, or Satan, a spiritual being, created good but obviously previously fallen. The original “fall” was that of Satan and the angels which followed his rebellion against God.

The Hebrew Scriptures, the historical foundation of our Christian faith, reflect the story of fallen mankind’s rebellion against its Creator. They also record God’s continual effort to reveal the blessing of an obedient relationship with Him. Through this record we come to understand the reality that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23). Our merciful God of steadfast love cannot abide sin (Exodus 34:7). Paul explains God’s solution to the “fall”: “For, if by the transgression of the one, death reigned through the one, much more those who receive the abundance of grace and the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:17).

It is not difficult for most of us to identify in ourselves the tendency to rebellion reflected in Scripture. Sometimes it is hard to believe that, from creation, a loving God has intended our reconciliation with Him through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, who bore our sin on a cross and rose from the dead to overcome sin and death and redeem fallen mankind.

R&D How would you reply to someone who asked you, “Why does God blame me for what Adam did?”

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, that it is by grace that I am saved through faith and not by works. (Ephesians 2:8)*

Day 4

Read: Isaiah 55:10-11

Our Jewish Roots

The author of Hebrews teaches, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). While most Christians understand that the God of the Old Testament is the same God found in the New Testament, the great stories of the Hebrew Scriptures are often taught and learned without reference to their fulfillment/connection to/completion in the New Testament. Understanding the Jewish roots of the Christian faith dramatically enhances the depth of understanding of “the biblical story” upon which our faith is built.

God always intended His word to accomplish His purpose and to prosper in the thing for which He sent it (Isaiah 55:11). “All Scripture” is inspired by God to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16-17). One goal of this study is to focus attention on the continuity of God’s plan for salvation as revealed in the entire biblical story.

Consider what the Israelites, the Jewish people, the nation/people chosen by God through whom He would reveal Himself, understood. The Hebrew Scriptures under which Jesus himself studied and lived consisted of: (1) the Torah; (2) the Prophets; (3) and the Writings. Jewish people refer to their Scriptures as the Tanakh, which is an acronym of these three sections of the Hebrew Scriptures. The “T” is for “Torah” (first five books), the “N” is for *Nevi'im* (Hebrew for Prophets), and the “K” is for *Ketuvim* (Hebrew for Writings).

Jesus said, “Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have come to fulfill [i.e. rightly interpret] them” (Matthew 5:17). Our study of the continuity of the Old and New Testaments will help us understand how our Lord accomplished this.

R&D Share with a Jewish friend your gratitude for the Hebrew Scriptures, the Tanakh upon which your Christian faith is built.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, for sending and inspiring Holy Scripture that we might be equipped to do the work You have called us to do.

Day 5

Read: Genesis 6:17-22; 2 Peter 2:1-10

The Flood

The Bible tells us that the God who created and sustains us is concerned with right and wrong. We live in a moral universe. There are basic realities with which we all must come to grips—life, death, sin, judgment, and salvation. The history of the “wickedness of man” (Genesis 6:5 and Romans 1:18, for example) is recorded in the Old and New Testaments. Holiness among people is something for which God will sacrifice everything, even His own Son!

Genesis 6 to 9 records the story of God’s intention to sacrifice the whole creation in a universal flood because of the wickedness He saw among the people. Fortunately for us, He finds one man, Noah, in the corrupt society of creation “who walked with God” (Genesis 6:9). He preserved a remnant of His creation as described in our Genesis text: “Only Noah was left, and those with him on the ark” (Genesis 7:23).

The Flood reveals God’s judgment of sin and His gracious redemption that will forever represent His love for mankind. The Gospel writers—for example, Matthew 24:37—use the story of Noah and the Flood to warn that a final judgment will take place when Jesus comes again.

Our text from 2 Peter reminds us “The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trial and to keep the unrighteous under punishment” (2 Peter 2:9).

Do false teachers today in their wickedness think they can escape God’s judgment because of their large numbers? Peter reminds us that God can judge evil even when it involves the entire human race with the exception of eight people—Noah, his wife and his three sons and their wives.

R&D How do you know that it is God’s plan for good to triumph over evil?

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that You will never again destroy every living creature [by water]. (Genesis 8:21)

Day 6

Read: Genesis 12:1-5

Our Father Abraham

Abraham is the father of all the faithful! Paul writes that we who believe in God’s Messiah, Jesus, are “children of Abraham by faith.” For the next few days, let us focus on this amazing patriarch and how he put his total trust in God’s faithfulness to His word.

In spite of Adam and Eve’s rebellion, Noah’s generation and the Flood, God fixes His eyes on Abram in Ur (today’s Iraq). Once again God speaks: “Leave your homeland, your people and your father’s household and go to a land I will show you.”

With God as his only GPS, Abram responds in obedience to the voice of God. He steps out in faith and leaves his pagan, moon-worshipping, ancient Near-east culture. There are promises attached to obedience: Abram will be a great nation, his name will be great, and he will be blessed and be a blessing to the entire world! Believers today live in these same Abrahamic blessings!

Each believer experiences that our first “yes” to God is only a beginning of allegiance to the true and living God. For Abram, trials followed: famine, a promise of children in the face of barrenness, time running out as bodies grow older... Though he stumbled, Abraham held on to God’s promises, even to the point of offering the child of promise, Isaac, up when God spoke again for him to do so (Genesis 22). Abraham believed God even then! He believed in resurrection power!

Hebrews 11 says, “Abraham considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore” (vv.11-12).

R&D Think of the first “yes” you said to God when He reached out to you. Were there trials which followed? What were the blessings?

Prayer: Lord, thank You for your faithful covenant promises to Abraham and to his children by faith.

Day 7

Read: Psalm 117; Romans 11:11-32

To the Jew...and Then to the Nations

God desires that all be saved and none perish. Paul says the Gospel is “to the Jew first and then to the Greeks.” The psalmist is clear: All nations will praise the Lord! And Isaiah sees that Israel is to be “a light for the Gentiles [nations], that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth” (Isaiah 49:6).

Paul unfolds the “mystery” of the place of ethnic Israel in the plan of God in Romans 11. He uses the picture of the one olive tree. It is a wonderful picture of unity. Whether one is Jewish [a cultivated olive tree] or Gentile [a wild olive tree], all who come to faith in the Jewish Messiah, Jesus, are grafted into the one olive tree! Paul is quick to remind us that the roots of this tree are Jewish, based on Abraham’s faith! As Paul prays for the salvation of his own Jewish people, he sees that their “stumbling” is both *partial and temporary*. In fact, it will be through the mercy shown to the Jews by the believing Gentiles that the Jews will again come to faith in their own Messiah—through faith and grace.

No wonder Paul finishes Romans 11 with a doxology, praising God for His great wisdom and unsearchable plan for the salvation of the world—Jew and Gentile!

R&D Have you thought (enough) about God’s plan for the salvation of both Jews and Gentiles based on these words of Scripture? Perhaps read them again, slowly.

Prayer: Lord, Your ways are unsearchable. Thank You for Your Word that tells us about Your plans. Send Your Holy Spirit and give me the gift of understanding today.

Day 8

Read: Genesis 24:45-58; Revelation 19:7; 22:17

A Bride for Isaac

If the promises of land, posterity, and blessing had died with Abraham, there would be no more to say about a revealing God or the Messiah He sent to redeem the world! But true to His word and despite all that came against the promise of children through Abraham and Sarah, the line continued miraculously through the birth of Isaac and later Isaac’s son, Jacob.

Because the promises were dependent on descendants coming from the patriarch’s line, a bride had to be chosen for Abraham’s son Isaac. In today’s passage we read the lovely story of Abraham’s servant going to seek God’s chosen bride for Isaac. The obedient servant goes, asking for the Lord’s guidance. Rebecca is the answer to that prayer. She in turn shows her faithful obedience by assenting to go with the servant immediately to meet and marry Isaac. From their union, Jacob is born to carry on the promises of God.

This scene has always reminded me that God sent His servant the Holy Spirit to find a bride for His Son. The Holy Spirit is humble and obedient and full of wisdom. It is almost too good to be true that we, the Church, are chosen to be the bride of Jesus. We are called, like Rebecca, to go quickly to our bridegroom with obedient hearts and to do his bidding so that the kingdom can come.

R&D What is the picture you have of being the bride of Christ? Can you share how you were wooed by the Holy Spirit to come to Jesus?

Prayer: How humbled we are, O Lord, to think of Your grand plan in seeking us who were lost to be the very bride for Your Son, Jesus.

Day 9

Read Exodus 6:2-8; Hebrews 3:1-6

Moses and the Exodus

Using the inspired leadership of Moses described in the Book of Exodus, God delivers the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob from 430 years of slavery in Egypt. In the fullness of time God sends His own son, Jesus, to deliver us from the bondage of sin and death. We will focus in the days ahead on the significance of the Ten Commandments, the rebellion of God's people, and the feasts of Israel. Today we look at Moses.

Moses spent 40 years in the house of Pharaoh and then 40 years as a shepherd in the desert of Midian before he led the "multitude" (Exodus 12:37-38) through the Red Sea out of Egypt. Against daunting odds he accepted God's divine commission (Exodus 3). For 40 years he became God's commanding agent in fulfilling His covenant promise to deliver the Israelites to "a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8). Many scholars point to the Exodus as the central story of the Hebrew Scriptures. We come to know our God as a very personal God who cares deeply and provides faithfully for His children. He keeps His covenant promises.

Our Hebrews text reminds us that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is high above Moses. Jesus, the Son of God, is Lord over the house; Moses, the servant of God, is faithful in the house. Moses was a man of God. Christ was God himself. Moses was the fallen descendent of Adam. Christ was sinless and holy. Moses was a prophet through whom God spoke. Christ was truth himself. Moses led Israel through the wilderness. Christ delivered all who received him out of the wilderness of sin and death into eternal life.

R&D What blinded the Jews of Jesus' time on earth from recognizing his superiority over Moses (John 9:29)?

Prayer: Send Your Holy Spirit, Lord, to impress our hearts more and more with the exalted dignity and unique excellence of our Savior.

Day 10

Read: Exodus 20:1-17; Matthew 5:17-20

The Law of Love

Three months after His miraculous deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt, God speaks to Moses from Mount Sinai with a message for the people: "If you (the people) will indeed obey my voice and keep my commandments, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples" (Exodus 19:5). Then God speaks from the mountain the "Ten Commandments," the crystallization of the entire law given to Moses. The first four commandments have to do with our relationship with God, and the next six have to do with our relationship with our neighbor. Jesus summarized the Commandments in Matthew 22:37-40 when he said, "Love the Lord your God" and "Love your neighbor as yourself."

We understand the law to be rules that regulate conduct. God's standards are holy, just, and good because He is! The ideals of a fallen people are far removed from God's divine stand-

ards that reflect His character. The 40 years the people of Israel spend in the desert as described in the book of Exodus reflect our own struggle to love and act as God has called us to do.

Jesus makes it clear that he did not come to abolish the law or the prophets, but to fulfill them (Matthew 5:17). Until God sent His Son to fulfill the law, His divine blessing was conditioned upon our performance of the entire law of God. Under the new covenant of grace which we receive by faith (Ephesians 2:8), God's divine blessing is bestowed by His favor, not by keeping the law. We respond in recognition of having already received God's favor and blessing by "Loving God and loving our neighbor as ourselves."

R&D *What would you say to a friend who hopes for eternal life by "trying to be a good person"?*

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, that I am saved by grace through faith and not by works.*

Day 11

Read: Exodus 32:1-14, [15-24], 25-35; 1 Corinthians 10:1-13

The Golden Calf and Amazing Grace

Once I spent over a week in the Sinai wilderness—sleeping on the sand with no water or bathroom facilities, just dry riverbeds and red, stony mountains. Twice I climbed Mt. Sinai, the traditional site of God giving Moses the Ten Commandments. It is a desolate place of stark beauty.

Exodus 32 is one of the most tragic chapters in the Bible. While Moses is on the mountain with God, the people who had just said "I do" to God (see Exodus 19:3-9) rebel and revert full scale to idol worship. The Golden Calf is their undoing. If they had any favor with God their Deliverer, they blew it there at the foot of the holy mountain.

Have you ever been in such a precarious position: in rebellion against God, sure He was nowhere near your urgent need? Sure that you were left in your wilderness with no hope? So you turned to things for temporary comfort and security? Can God possibly have anything more to do with us?

After the Golden Calf there was *no* hope left for the children of Israel—*except* the deep, wide river of God's *mercy* and amazing *grace*. In similar circumstance we, too, can only put our rebellious hearts before the merciful God, repent and thank Him forever for His unending mercy. Paul uses incidents like the Golden Calf disaster to warn believers against rebellion in strong terms: "If you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" (1 Corinthians 10:12).

R&D *If you have lost faith in God's presence in your life, turn back to Him today. Ask His forgiveness and rely on His mercy and grace to bring you back to Him.*

Prayer: *Lord, forgive me my rebellious heart. Thank You for your great, unending mercy and grace.*

Day 12

Read: Leviticus 23:1-22 [23-44]; John 2:13, 23; 5:1, 9-11

The Feasts of the LORD

"The appointed feasts of the LORD" is the name Leviticus gives to these special days of remembrance of the works of God. John's Gospel is set against an outline of these feasts. Each

time we celebrate Holy Communion we say, “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore, let us keep the feast.” It is good to stop and ask, “What does this mean?”

We who work in the historic Anglican mission to the Jews, the Church’s Ministry Among Jews (CMJ), regularly teach on the feasts of the Lord and the fact that Jesus, our Jewish Messiah, kept the feasts and fulfilled their deepest meaning. As believers, we, too, can keep these biblical feasts as reminders of God’s intervention in His creation.

The first of the feasts listed is the Sabbath, the seventh day rest. This weekly feast reminds us that on the seventh day God rested from His labor of creation. In our 24/7 culture, taking a biblical Sabbath is crucial to life! As you read the John selections today, note that the plot to kill Jesus began in Jerusalem when he healed people on the Sabbath.

The remaining feasts are annual ones—three are in the spring: Passover (deliverance from slavery); First Fruits (resurrection); and Pentecost (giving of the law; coming of the Spirit).

The fall feasts begin with the Blowing of Trumpets. Ten days later is the solemn Day of Atonement followed by the final harvest feast, the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. It is good to remember the works of God. The Feasts help us do this.

R&D How can knowing more about the feasts of the Lord inform us about the background of the New Testament Scriptures and Jesus himself?

Prayer: Lord, help me to meditate on the meaning of every word of Your Bible, especially today about Your feasts. Teach me to know Jesus better through this study.

Day 13

Read: Joshua 1:1-9; 2 Timothy 2:1-9

Be Strong and Courageous

After 40 years of wandering in the wilderness with the often unruly tribes of Israel, Moses dies. God calls Joshua to lead the people into the land that He has promised them in His covenant love for them. The Lord commands Joshua three times to “Be strong and courageous” (Joshua 1:6, 7, and 9). The Lord gives Joshua three reasons to take courage in the face of the challenge that lies ahead: His promise (vv.5-6), His word (vv.7-8), and His presence (v.9).

We are often encouraged to remember: “God’s calling is His enablement.” Our faith is not in what we are, but in who He is. Our courage comes not from what we feel, but in the reality of His promise, His word, and His presence!

In the struggles that lay ahead for the people of Israel documented in the Hebrew Scriptures; in the challenges that faced the Lord himself during his life among us reflected in the Gospels; in the growth of the church recorded in the New Testament; and in the years since that continue until Jesus comes again, two things are clear: (1) there is always opposition and (2) the opposition cannot prevail against God’s empowered people (Jeremiah 1:19 and Matthew 16:18).

The call to be strong and courageous in the undeserved ability that comes from the Lord’s empowerment resounds throughout Scripture. Not only are we to be strengthened to serve as was Timothy (2 Timothy 2:1-2) because of God’s promise, His word, and His presence, but also, we are to entrust what we have heard to the faithful who will be able to teach others also.

R&D Has God called you to lead, to teach, or to serve where you must rely on His promise, His word and His Presence? Be strong and courageous!

Prayer: Strengthen my faith, Lord, that I may see You more clearly, love You more dearly, and follow You more nearly.

Day 14

Read: 1 Samuel 12:6-18; Galatians 4:4-5

In the Fullness of Time

Under Joshua's leadership, the twelve tribes of Israel settled into the promised land of Canaan with varying success dependent upon tribal leadership. After Joshua's death, disorganization, tribal discord, and defeat followed. When the people cried out to the Lord, "The Lord raised up judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them" (Judges 2:16). These "deliverers" led them in battle and ruled them in peace. We see in the judges a prophetic representation of the Messiah, who, "in the fullness of time," will be with us as our leader, our judge, and our deliverer.

Sadly, the last verse of the book of Judges reflects not only the reality of the conduct of God's chosen people, Israel, but also the reality of all of us who have fallen short of the glory of God: "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

The good news is that God will never forsake or abandon us. In the case of rebellious Israel, God called Samuel to serve Israel as Prophet and Judge. As directed by the Lord, Samuel also leads Israel through the process of choosing a king (both Saul and David). In our text Samuel reminds Israel (and us) of the faithfulness of our God.

The process of rebellion and return seems to be a pattern of God's people. Those God sends to shepherd us in paths of righteousness for His name's sake (Psalm 23:3) also warn us as does Samuel (1 Samuel 12:14-15) that the choice of whether or not "it will be well" is ours.

R&D Reflect on God's faithfulness in your life to send, in the fullness of time, shepherds to lead you toward Him.

Prayer: Lord, I pray that when I hear You call my name, I will recognize Your voice and answer, "Speak, for your servant hears." (1 Samuel 3:10)

Day 15

Read: 2 Samuel 7:8-17; Matthew 22:41-46

David, a Man After God's Heart

Our passage from 2 Samuel describes the covenant God made with King David, including the promise to establish the throne of his kingdom forever (v.12). This covenant promise is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus Christ, "the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matthew 1:1). Mary, the mother of Jesus, herself a descendent of David, is told that "the Lord God will give to him [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever" (Luke 1:32-33). It is as the "Son of David" that Jesus is welcomed to Jerusalem before his death on the cross (Matthew 21:9). Seventeen verses in the New Testament describe Jesus as the Son of David. Yet, as Israel's greatest king, in Psalm 110:1, quoted in our Matthew text (v.44), David, the author of the psalm, acknowledges the Messiah who was to come from his lineage to be, as the Son of God, his Lord.

When I first considered full-time ministry as a vocation, I went to my bishop with a genuine concern that I was a sinner. He shook my hand and said, “Congratulations, admitting that is the criteria for entry!”

David’s story includes sins of omission and commission, including adultery and murder, yet he remains a model for all of us called to serve the Lord. He is called “a man after God’s heart” because: (1) he understood life was about honoring God, not about physical ambitions; (2) he knew he wanted God in control of his life; (3) he accepted responsibility for his failures; (4) he was ready to repent when he was made aware of his mistakes; and (5) he did not try to justify himself by blaming others.

R&D Considering the strengths of David, how is God calling you to be a person after His heart?

Prayer: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me.” (Mark 10:47)

Day 16

Read: 1 Samuel 16:10-13; 17:45-47; Acts 13:16-27

Slaying Goliath

Over God’s objection, Israel called for a king to rule over them. God gave them Saul, who failed and was removed. Through divine guidance, Samuel, the last of the judges of Israel, anointed David the youngest son of Jesse, a Judean of Bethlehem, a keeper of sheep, to be Saul’s successor as King (1 Samuel 16:13).

In one of the powerful Bible stories, encountered often in Sunday School, David first appears as a fearless, youthful warrior as he slays the Philistine giant, Goliath. In the story it is not only his skill with the sling and five smooth stones, but also his faith that gives him the courage and the victory over the taunting Goliath. David confronts Goliath: “This day the Lord will deliver you into my hand” (1 Samuel 17:46).

As Paul explains God’s plan for Israel in our text from Acts, he asserts, “Of this man’s (David’s) offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised” (Acts 13:23).

In the time of Jesus, Israel, under the yoke of Roman occupation, longed for a “Messiah like David” who would defeat the “Goliath” that oppressed them. This Messiah would make their enemies a footstool under their feet (Psalm 110:1). Instead, Jesus came as a suffering servant to “make many to be righteous and bear their iniquities” (Isaiah 53:11).

We who follow Jesus know that, having defeated sin and death by his own death on the cross and resurrection from the grave and having ascended to heaven, he will come again to fulfill the prophecy of Psalm 110, and “On his robe and on his thigh, he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:16).

R&D Is there any area of your life that seems like a “Goliath”? Face it with David’s conviction that God will give you the victory.

Prayer: Come, Lord Jesus, “Rule in the midst of my enemies!” (Psalm 110:2)

Day 17

Read: 1 Kings 11:4-13; John 11:47-53

Keep Yourselves from Idols

Solomon had 700 wives, “who turned away his heart after other gods” (1 Kings 11:4). Because of Solomon’s idolatry, God caused a division of the tribes of Israel into a Northern Kingdom of ten tribes and a Southern Kingdom (Judah). Following continuing idolatry, the Northern Kingdom was conquered by Assyria in 722 BC, and the ten tribes were scattered. In 586 BC the Babylonians defeated the Southern Kingdom and the people of Judah were taken into exile for 70 years.

After the raising of Lazarus by Jesus, the chief priests and Pharisees gathered in Jerusalem. They were afraid that “the Romans will come and take away both our place (the Temple) and our nation” (John 11:48). “So, from that day on they made plans to put him (Jesus) to death” (John 11:53). Their idolatry, love of power and place, blinded them. Some 40 years later (in 70 AD), the Temple was destroyed by the Romans, and they lost both power and place.

Paul wrote to the believers in Rome about idolatry. He said that what can be known about God has been plain “ever since the creation of the world” (Romans 1:20). He added, “We cannot exchange the truth about God for a lie. We cannot worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator” (Romans 1:25).

Paul encouraged the Corinthians who were confronting idolatry by reminding them, “God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation, he will also provide a way to escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Corinthians 10:13).

Idolatry has taken many forms in each generation, and it has always led to separation from God (exile) and defeat.

R&D What would you have to do to make your priorities: God, family, job, and ministry in that order?

Prayer: Help me, Lord, to love You with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my mind. (Matthew 22:36-37)

Day 18

Read: Jeremiah 23:1-6; John 10:1-16

The Good Shepherd

The call came to Jeremiah the prophet to speak words of judgment and hope to the Southern Kingdom (Judah) nearly a century after the fall of the Northern Kingdom. Under false shepherds Judah continued to dwell in idolatry. Jeremiah foretold the 70-year exile under the Babylonians that was to come as a result of their rebellion against God. Judah’s exile in Babylon would not last forever, he said, and Babylon herself would be overthrown. The law, he prophesied, would be written, not on stone but on the heart (Jeremiah 31:33). Jeremiah looked beyond Judah’s return from exile to a time when good shepherds would rule over them who cared for them, and indeed, God would establish the rule of a Messianic King over them.

The idolatry that is prevalent in the Old and New Testaments is caused by false shepherds (2 Peter 2:1). It is countered by good shepherds. Jesus, in our text from John, is addressing some Pharisees who claim to be the rightful shepherds of Israel. In Jesus, God has raised up for His people a “righteous branch” who identifies himself, proclaiming, “I am the good shepherd” (John 10:14).

For all who are called to Christian leadership (the family included), Jesus provides a job description in John 10 for “good shepherd.” Our text from John is the context for Jesus’ statement, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6).

The good news of John 10:16 is that the “fold” that is Israel is expanded to a “flock” that includes all who will recognize Jesus as the “one shepherd.” It is for this flock that “the good shepherd” laid down his life for the sheep (John 10:11).

R&D Identify the flock God has called you to shepherd.

Prayer: Lord, give me the courage and grace to speak words of judgment and hope to those in my flock.

Day 19

Read: Isaiah 11:1-12; Romans 11:25-32.

God’s Irrevocable Gifts and Calling

“I will never leave you nor forsake you” is God’s promise to the Jews, His chosen people (Deuteronomy 31:8). The author of Hebrews repeats this promise to Jewish believers in Jesus to whom he is writing (Hebrews 13:5). It is good to remember, “God’s gift and his call are irrevocable” (Romans 11:29). In our Isaiah text, not only does God promise to bring His people out of exile, but He also promises them a Messiah from the house of David.

Our Romans text is clear: Gentile believers in Jesus have not replaced the Jewish people as heirs to the promises that a faithful God made to them. The Gentiles are to be brought into one sheepfold with the Jewish people under Christ, the Good Shepherd (John 10:16). Christ died for all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike. All partake of the same grace and are heirs of the same glory.

Paul uses the image of an olive tree to describe God’s plan for Israel and the relationship of the Gentile believers to that plan. The olive tree has as its root God’s call and covenant with Israel. Gentile believers are “grafted in” and thus inherit the promise and covenant relationship offered.

We rejoice that God has revealed to us His mercy in His faithfulness to Israel. Their captivity, their dispersion, and their temporary separation from the olive tree because of their disobedience, are examples for us of God’s correction for those who go astray from His plan of salvation. As restoration is promised for them, so it is available for us who repent and return. We are reminded always of the patience and love of God.

R&D Can you relate God’s faithfulness to the Jewish people to your walk with Him? Do you trust that He will never leave you or forsake you?

Prayer: Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the nourishing Jewish roots of the “olive tree” that support my faith in you.

Day 20

Read: Isaiah 9:2-7; Matthew 1:18-25

With Us-God

Over 700 years before Jesus' birth, the prophet Isaiah gave Ahaz, the king of Judah, a sign of deliverance from the evil of a besieging army. This "Sign of Immanuel" (Isaiah 7:14), described more fully in our Isaiah text, prophesied the establishment of a messianic kingdom that would bring justice and righteousness from the time of the arrival of Immanuel until the end of recorded time. More immediately, God gave Ahaz the assurance that He was with him.

Ahaz refuses to put the Lord to the test (v.12), so the Lord gave him through Isaiah a greater sign of hope than he could possibly have thought or imagined. Paul, writing to the Galatians, tried to explain that what was prophesied by Isaiah had always been God's plan of redemption for a fallen world. He wrote, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his son born of a woman, born under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons" (Galatians 4:4-5).

In our Matthew text reporting the birth of Jesus, the miracle of the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophetic word is described. Immanuel (literally "With us-God") had come in the fullness of time "to save his people from their sins" (Matthew 1:21). In Hebrew Jesus' name is *Yeshua*, which means "salvation"!

There is a little Ahaz in all of us. Perhaps a challenge we face is overwhelming, and no solution seems possible. Perhaps we think that our problem could not possibly be on God's radar screen. God's answer is the same yesterday, today, and forever: "Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God" (Isaiah 41:10).

R&D Apply Romans 8:31, "If God be with us, who can be against us," to a challenge you face.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that I need fear no evil, for You are with me. (Psalm 23:4)

Day 21

Read: Micah 5:2-5; Matthew 2:1-12

Our King and Shepherd

At the time of Jesus' birth the old kingdom of David had been dismembered, conquered, and devastated. Israel had been led away into a captivity from which few had returned. The house of David, of the tribe of Judah, was survived by a small remnant. Yet, God had promised that, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs" (Genesis 49:10).

The Old Testament prophet Micah foresaw the fall of Jerusalem (Micah 3:12), but he also saw that a shepherd would come who would "stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord his God" (Micah 5:4). His prophecy is fulfilled as Jesus is born in Bethlehem. The scepter comes to whom it belongs.

Bethlehem, meaning "the house of bread," is a fitting place for the birth of the true "Lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5). Jesus is the bread which came down from heaven and gives life to the world" (John 6:41 and 6:51). The story of the wise men who give noble witness to the divinity and kingly estate of the long expected Messiah and King stands in sharp contrast to the witness of Herod the king, who plots to destroy the infant. In fact many of the leaders of his own Jewish people "did not receive him" (John 1:11).

When we by faith view the Son of God coming as a baby and lying in a manger, our vanity, ambition, and energy are checked. We cannot, with the reality of the humble birth of our King and Shepherd, claim for ourselves a lordship that is rightly his from everlasting to everlasting.

R&D Is there a room in the house that is your life into which you have not invited Jesus? Open that door to him today.

Prayer: Jesus, by your Spirit, be “Lord of all” in my life.

Day 22

Read: Jeremiah 32:17-22, 37-41; John 20:30-31

Signs and Wonders

God tells Jeremiah to buy a field in the midst of the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (Jeremiah 32:6). The prophet does not dispute God’s will. He seeks to understand what God means. He prays a prayer of confidence in the omnipotence of God recalling the signs and wonders shown by him “among all men” (Jeremiah 32:20). Jeremiah understands that there is no difficulty that God cannot overcome. God responds to Jeremiah’s prayer with a comforting reminder of His faithfulness to His chosen people, Israel, “They shall be my people and I will be their God” (Jeremiah 32:38).

Signs and wonders stand in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation as indications of God’s presence, power, judgment, love, and mercy. In the Gospels they are marks of the ministry of God’s divine Son, Jesus. When the apostle John writes, “Jesus did many other signs which are not written in this book; but these are written...” (John 20:30-31), the word “these” refers to the seven miracles or signs and wonders recorded in the Gospel of John from changing water to wine to the raising of Lazarus. The seven miracles as well as the greatest of all signs and wonders, the raising of Jesus from the dead, are documented so that we “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing have life in his name” (John 20:31).

Like Jeremiah we can remember in prayer that whatever trouble we are in, personal or public, we can trust that the Lord sees it and knows how and when to remedy the problem. God wants us to believe in Him and His faithfulness to us so that we might be with Him for all eternity.

R&D Recall an instance where God demonstrated His presence and power in your life. Share that story.

Prayer: Thank You, Lord, that “nothing is too hard for You.” (Jeremiah 32:27)

Day 23

Read: Isaiah 53:3-9; John 19:24-37

Christ Has Died

All four Gospels record the story of the crucifixion and burial of our Lord. The Christian Church remembers this event on Good Friday as we hear the “seven last words of Christ” described in memorial sermons. We are reminded in these sermons that the death of our Lord on the cross, the words he spoke, and the actions of those involved had been prophesied in the Old Testament. For example, John describes the casting of lots for Jesus’ garments (Psalm 22:18),

Jesus' thirst (Psalm 69:21), and the piercing of Jesus' side (Zechariah 12:10) so that, as in the case of the Passover Lamb (Exodus 12:46), no bone of our Lord would be broken.

We see prophetically in our Isaiah text God's eternal plan for our redemption through the suffering servant whom we acknowledge today as His only and eternal Son, Jesus. He would bear our grief and carry our sorrows: "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all" and "upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace. With his wounds we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5-6).

There is much to be considered in the dying words of our Savior, "It is finished" (John 19:30). In Christ's death the prophecies of the Old Testament which pointed toward the sufferings of the Messiah have been accomplished. A "son of David," superior to all the kings of the earth, has by his sacrificial death become the lamb that takes away the sin of the world. God's righteousness is possible for me (2 Corinthians 5:21). The work of man's redemption and salvation, which God had planned from the foundation of the world, is now completed. We did not earn it or deserve it. It is a free gift of God's everlasting love.

R&D What in your life has been healed by Christ's death on the cross? Has it brought you peace?

Prayer: Send Your Holy Spirit, Lord, that I may have "eyes that see and ears that hear." (Proverbs 20:12)

Day 24

Read: Psalm 16:8-11; Acts 2:22-33

Christ Is Risen!

The apostle Paul wrote, "...and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain, and your faith is in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:14). The foundation of our faith is the empty tomb. In the resurrection of Christ from the dead our faith gives us confidence that sin and death has been overcome. Believers have hope in Christ as a redeemer and hope for redemption and salvation through him.

Peter, preaching to Jews gathered in Jerusalem at Pentecost after the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, speaks boldly of the resurrection of our Lord. He reminds those to whom he preaches and all future generations who read his words that, as David prophesied, God would not let the body of His Messiah see the corruption of the grave (Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:27). Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, also reminds us in Acts 13:33 that the kingdom of the Messiah is based upon an eternal decree of God as he quotes Psalm 2:7: "God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus."

Death may destroy the hope of man. It does not destroy the hope of the Christian. Christ's resurrection from the dead is a guarantee of the believer's resurrection to eternal life. Whatever our lot in life, whether sorrow, joy, pleasure, or pain, that lot is but for a moment compared to that which we will experience forevermore in the presence of the risen Lord. We are called to live in the light of David's confident words, "You [God] make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore" (Psalm 16:11).

R&D How does God make known to a follower of the risen Christ the path of life?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, that when “the perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the same that is written, death is swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:54; Isaiah 25:8)*

Day 25

Read: Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-8

Christ Will Come Again

In the Nicene Creed we affirm that Jesus “will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.” The time between the first and second comings of the Messiah is often described as living in “the already and the not yet.” Christ has come and proclaimed, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 4:17). The events described in our texts will come to pass when he comes again.

The prophet Isaiah prayed that God would have compassion on the sinful and hopeless people of Israel. God’s answer was a promise to create a new heaven and a new earth in which old conditions of pain and sorrow will no longer exist. The apostle John also records God’s revelation to him of a new heaven and a new earth that will come to pass after Satan has been defeated and divine judgment has occurred (Revelation 20). The old heaven and earth will pass away and all things will become new!

Our study of the continuity of the Old and New Testaments began by describing God’s eternal plan from Creation and, despite man’s “fall,” to bring light into a dark world. We have traced God’s plan through His revelation of Himself first to Israel, His chosen people, and then to the whole world through the life, death, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus, and the apostolic spread of the Gospel. We conclude the study with the promise in Isaiah and Revelation of the new heaven and new earth that will be fulfilled when all of God’s enemies are defeated and Christ comes again. On that day “the dwelling place of God will be with man” (Revelation 21:3).

R&D *How would you answer a friend who asks, “How do I know if my name is written in the book of life?” (Revelation 20:15)*

Prayer: *“Amen. Come Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.” (Revelation 22:20-21)*

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