

Jesus spent three and a half years preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and the apostles were with him all the time and heard his teaching. They were sent out to preach the same kingdom of God ^{vs.1-2} and went through the towns preaching it.^{v.6} At that time they knew nothing of Jesus' approaching death and resurrection, although he did tell them in advance of his suffering at the hands of wicked men,^{v.22} but they did not understand and were afraid to ask.^{v.45} Clearly, therefore, they preached the gospel in ignorance of his crucifixion, showing that the gospel they preached did not concern the crucifixion of Christ - the true gospel preached by Jesus and his apostles is "the gospel of the kingdom of God" - good news of the glorious time to come when Jesus reigns in Jerusalem on the throne of the LORD over the restored kingdom of Israel.

Jesus gave his apostles power to heal the people as evidence their message was from God. He also permitted three of them to see a vision of the future when he comes in glory ^{v.26} to establish the kingdom of God.^{v.27} He took Peter, James and John up a mountain where he was transfigured before them ^{v.29} and they saw him as he does now and as he will look in the future, glowing in bright glory. He will then be with the immortal saints raised from the dead, including Moses and Elijah ^{v.30} whom the apostles saw with him in glory. This vision was later cited by Peter as evidence that they had "not followed cunningly devised fables when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his ^{2Pet.1:16} majesty".

The future glory God offers is marvellous, and to receive it we must follow Jesus wholeheartedly: "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away?" ^{vs.24-25} The word here translated "life" is the same Greek word often translated "soul", and means "self" - we are required to sacrifice ourselves in Jesus' service.

Jesus sent out seventy other disciples in pairs to preach the gospel, ^{v.1} and they too proclaimed the kingdom of God.^{v.9} These disciples also were given power to heal the sick ^{v.9} and on their return expressed amazement at the healing of the mentally ill (the demoniacs, translated "devils").^{v.17} Mental illness, disease, and all kinds of suffering are the consequence of Sin, and the work of Christ is to destroy this. Sin is also endemic in the rulers of the world, and the words of the seventy moved Jesus to look forward to the day when "the adversary (Satan) will fall from heaven".^{v.18} This is a common figure in the Bible by which rulers are likened to luminaries in the sky, such as the sun, moon and stars, which are to be eclipsed and removed from the political and ecclesiastical heavens. For example, this is how Jesus described the overthrow of the Jewish authorities by the Romans to come in A.D.70. ^{Mat.24:29} The purpose of God is to abase the high and mighty and to exalt the humble ^{Lu.14:11} so he declared that cities which exalted themselves to heaven would be brought down to hell [Greek: "Hades", the grave].^{v.15}

The words of Jesus must be received “as babes” ^{v.21} but, unfortunately, “the wise and prudent among men” ^{v.21} often wrest passages out of context, weaving words like heaven, hell, devils, Satan, and spirits, which occur in this chapter, into fantastic stories which distort the teaching of Christ. Accepting the whole teaching of God’s word will place anyone in a very happy position, as Jesus said to his disciples: “Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see”. ^{vs.23-24} It is vital to “choose that good part” like Mary ^{v.42} who “sat at Jesus’ feet and heard his word”. ^{v.39}

The disciples of Jesus are required to obey God’s commandments which are epitomised in the two greatest of them: to love the LORD with all our being; and to love our neighbour as ourselves, ^{v.27} for this will bring eternal life. ^{v.25} We can all love those who love us but, just as the Jews were called upon to love the Samaritans whom they traditionally hated, we are commanded to: “Love our enemies, do good to them which hate us”. ^{Lu.6:27} The Jews also hated Jesus and sought to kill him and he is represented by the Samaritan in this parable for he is the one who saves the afflicted, binds up our wounds, ^{v.34} has paid the price of our healing, ^{v.35} and promises to come again. ^{v.35}

Week 29

Luke 11

Day 199

Jesus taught his disciples to pray, emphasising reverence to God, the coming of his kingdom, his will being done in earth as in heaven, and forgiveness of sins. He urged his disciples to be importunate (ask ceaselessly) in their requests and taught this by parable. ^{vs.5-9} Great blessings will certainly come to the saints at the return of Jesus if they ask for them earnestly in prayer, ^{v.9} and they include the gift of the Holy Spirit. ^{v.13} The apostles and the early disciples had a foretaste of “the powers of the world to come” ^{Heb.6:5} which enabled them to perform miracles of healing, and in the future the saints will possess these powers on a much greater scale to bless of Israel and the whole world. God will account these saints are his and will give them the very best gifts. ^{vs.11-13}

The truly blessed, said Jesus, are “they that hear the word of God, and keep it”. ^{v.28} Sadly, there have not been many such in any generation since those days. Even when Jesus was in their midst doing mighty deeds the Jews did not receive his teaching, so the opportunity was given to the Gentiles to hear and obey. Jesus alluded to this when he referred to the prophet Jonah, sent to Gentiles who repented at his warning, ^{v.32} and the word of “the greater than Jonah” was also received joyfully by Gentiles in the Roman Empire. ^{Acts 13:48} The Jewish religious leaders were more concerned with the minutiae of the Law, such as taking from the people their rightful tenth, even of the smallest herbs, instead of the really important matters like justice and the love of God. ^{v.42} They were just like their ancestors who had killed righteous men from Abel to Zechariah, the last prophet of the Old Testament to be killed by his brethren. ^{v.51} They not only rejected the word of God themselves but also took away the key of knowledge from the people, ^{v.52} and they listened to Jesus, not to learn the truth but, “saught to catch something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him”. ^{v.54}

Jesus often used figures of speech, e.g. he called the teaching of the Pharisees “leaven”.^{v.1} This is yeast which quickly permeates a loaf of bread, just as false teaching corrupts God’s truth, therefore Jesus said: “Beware”.^{v.1} The Pharisees were powerful men who engineered the death of Jesus and later persecuted the apostles, but Jesus taught his disciples not to be afraid of them because they could only kill the body ^{v.4} and in the future God would raise them bodily from the grave. They were, however, to fear God because he can totally destroy a person so that he will have no existence ever again. Jesus used the rubbish dump in the valley south of Jerusalem as a metaphor for the judgment of God. This valley was called “Gehenna” (translated “hell” ^{v.5}) and, as it was where the bodies of criminals were thrown after execution, it is a fitting symbol for punishment after the judgment of God. The Pharisees in particular took a great risk in attributing the miracles Jesus performed by the Holy Spirit to “Beelzebub”, the god of the Philistines,^{11:15} because “blasphemy against the Holy Spirit” is the one sin which cannot be forgiven.^{v.10}

Jesus exhorted his disciples to “Seek the kingdom of God” ^{v.31} because “it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom”. ^{v.32} He urged them not to be full of care for the natural requirements of life ^{v.22} nor to be covetous ^{v.15} - life is far superior to possessions - and they were not to be like the man in the parable.^{vs.16-20} “Soul” means “self” - the man spoke to himself.^{v.19} God brings judgment upon a man himself,^{v.20} and this same word is also translated “life”,^{v.22} meaning “take no thought for yourself”. True disciples are “rich toward God”,^{v.21} seek first the kingdom of God, ^{v.31} and are like men who wait for their Lord.^{v.36} Jesus will return unexpectedly,^{v.40} and the happiest people will be those who are ready and watching then ^{v.37} for Jesus himself will come forth and serve them!

People have always been keen to make predictions, especially about the weather,^{vs.54-56} but few can see the signs of the times in the purpose of God. The Jews did not recognise the signs in those days which indicated the Messiah was in their midst, and few today can see the signs which indicate the early appearance of Christ when he will judge everyone according to his deeds.^{v.48}

His teaching brought hope and blessing to the people but Jesus knew that it would also bring division and war.^{vs.51-53} This has been proved by history and, indeed, many have used the fact of wars between men professing allegiance to Christ to decry Christianity, but it is the nature of men which is at fault, not the teaching of Jesus who says we should love our enemies and bless them which persecute us. Jesus also knew that his teaching would lead to his own death, which he referred to as a “baptism”. We can imagine how traumatic the prospect of certain crucifixion was to him, as he said: “I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened [pained] till it be accomplished!”

^{v.50}

Catastrophes do occur in life, either accidentally or directly from the actions of wicked men, and the victims evoke our sympathy, but every one of us is in constant danger of death. However, if we repent of our sins, we need not

perish.^{vs.1-5} It is essential, if we are to be raised to eternal life, to be fruitful to God. Israel failed to bring forth fruit and were like the unfruitful fig tree ^{v.6} but God, who is longsuffering and merciful, gave them further opportunity to bring forth the desired fruit. ^{v.8} Regrettably, they failed to respond to the labours of Jesus and his apostles to turn to righteousness, and so they were “cut down” ^{v.9} and ceased to be a nation in the Promised land. Instead of rejoicing at the teaching of Jesus, they found fault. For example, when Jesus cured a woman who had been laid low by infirmity for eighteen years ^{vs.11-13} they complained because she was healed on the sabbath day.^{v.14} Such people, said Jesus, were hypocrites.^{v.15}

Not many received the teaching of Jesus and when one asked him “Lord, are there few that be saved?” ^{v.23} he answered in the affirmative, and exhorted: “Strive to enter in at the strait [narrow] gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able”.^{v.24} Popular religious teaching contradicts this, declaring that everyone will be saved! In fact, Jesus declared that these Jews would be “thrust out”: “There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God”.^{vs.28-29} However, some Jews and Gentiles throughout the generations since have welcomed Jesus’ teaching and obeyed him, and they will come from the four quarters of the earth to live with Jesus in the kingdom of God.

The judgments of God came upon that generation of Jews in A.D.70 when the Roman legions destroyed Jerusalem, killed many Jews, and carried the rest away to be slaves. The prospect of this distressed Jesus because he knew it could have been so different.^{v.34} Although he wept over Jerusalem at that time, he also knew that in due course he would come again to the city and be received willingly by Israel, who will then say: “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord”.^{v.35}

The Pharisees exalted themselves, taking the highest places at functions,^{14:7} but Jesus taught his disciples to humble themselves ^{v.8} so that they will be exalted in the future ^{v.10} “for whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted”.^{v.11} The truly blessed will be those who eat, not at the great banquets of the world, but at the marriage feast of the Lamb ^{Rev.19:9} in the kingdom of God. ^{v.15} The invitation to the feast has been issued, as Jesus taught by parable.^{vs.16-17} The Jews found all kinds of excuses to reject the invitation ^{vs.18-20} so it was extended to the people of the Roman Empire ^{v.21} and later to everyone in the world.^{v.23} Not many people, however, accept God’s invitation. We are invited to become Christ’s disciples and ultimately to sit down with him in the kingdom of God, but each person must consider beforehand what is required of him so that he can be successful in his endeavour.^{vs.27-35}

Week 29

Luke 15 and 16

Day 202

Jesus came to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel” ^{Mat.15:24} but this class of men and women was despised by the religious leaders of the day and labelled “publicans and sinners”.^{vs.1-3} He therefore spoke a number of parables to show

how they should have rejoiced when these people turned from their sinful ways into paths of righteousness - “they had been lost, but now they are found, therefore rejoice with me”.^{vs.6,9} The last of these parables concerns two sons, one of whom was prodigal (wasteful) and lost all his inheritance by dissolute living. Nevertheless he felt sure he could return to his father who would receive him, and his expectations were greatly exceeded for his father welcomed him joyfully and poured out his love on him saying: “This my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found”.^{v.24} This prodigal son represents the “publicans and sinners” who responded to the teaching of Jesus, repented of their past ways, and returned to God. In such circumstances, Jesus informs us: “there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth”.^{v.10}

The elder son, however, was displeased at the welcome given to his brother because he himself had never received such treatment although he served his father steadfastly. Jesus was not here teaching that these qualities are not appreciated by God but he was highlighting the attitude of the Pharisees who considered themselves “righteous” and were unable to welcome the change in “sinners” brought about by his teaching. They should have rejoiced, as the father in the parable said: “It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found”.^{v.32}

People are generally wise in acting to secure their future in this life, but Jesus lamented that his disciples, “the children of light”, often do not show the same wisdom in securing their eternal futures. In the parable ^{16:1} the unjust steward used his master’s money to make sure he had friends who would receive him into their houses after he lost his position.^{v.4} Jesus teaches us likewise to use the resources we have, even “the mammon of unrighteousness” (money), to make friends for ourselves.^{v.9} These friends are Jesus himself and his Father who will receive the faithful into their household for ever: “they will receive you into everlasting habitations”.^{v.9}

The Pharisees distorted the teaching of scripture and believed that the dead existed either in a paradise they called “Abraham’s bosom” or a place of eternal torment called “Hades”.^{v.23} This is false but Jesus based a parable on these beliefs to teach: “If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead”.^{v.31} This parable was of a rich man and a poor man named Lazarus, and as Jesus had in fact raised his friend Lazarus from the dead, whom the authorities had then conspired to kill, this parable must have stung them to the quick.

Unfortunately, not realising Jesus was using the Pharisees’ false beliefs as the basis of his parable, people think that he taught that we go either to paradise or to torment at death, although they do have to change the parable to suit their point of view, e.g. they change “Abraham’s bosom” to “Heaven”. However, simple examination of the parable shows this is a mistake. In the parable these supposedly disembodied immortal souls have body parts like fingers and tongues, and no-one would enjoy eternal life in a paradise if all the time he could see other people, even their loved ones, suffering excruciating torture.^{v.23} The true hope given to us through Christ is resurrection from the dead to everlasting life in the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Jesus exhorted his disciples and warned them to care for his “little ones”,^{v.2} to forgive fellow disciples when they repent however many times they offend,^{vs.3-4} and to keep his commandments, doing their duty to the Lord. We must overcome our own human nature to obey Jesus in these matters, and an incident involving the ten lepers who were healed by Jesus highlights one of the many faults of our nature - ingratitude. Significantly, the one leper who did express his thankfulness was a Samaritan, a Gentile, and when the Jews rejected his teaching it was Gentiles who willingly accepted salvation, “giving glory to God”.^{vs.16-19}

Jesus preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the Pharisees, who knew that this was the kingdom of Israel restored as in the days of king David, asked when it would come.^{v.20} It will come when the Lord Jesus returns from heaven and such tremendous events will take place that there will be no doubt that it has been established in the land of Israel. Jesus therefore taught his disciples that they should not be deceived by declarations in the coming years when: “they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them”.^{v.23} The coming of the Son of man would be like lightning in the east which shines over all the land.^{v.24} When the kingdom of God comes they will say: “The kingdom of God is among you”.^{v.21} Unfortunately, “among you” was translated as “within you” which has been taken by many to mean that the kingdom of God is within disciples’ hearts! But it is not possible to have a kingdom consisting of a king, people, territory, etc., in one’s heart. People who are misled in this way are forced to deny the true nature of the kingdom of God which will be an actual kingdom in the promised land with Jesus, the King of the Jews, ruling over Israel assisted by his faithful disciples raised from the dead.

However, the kingdom was to come a long time in the future from the day Jesus spoke these words. First he was to suffer crucifixion and death, being rejected of that generation,^{v.25} and that generation of Jews was in turn to suffer at the hands of the Roman legions who would destroy their cities and carry them away captive as slaves throughout their empire. Therefore Jesus warned his disciples to save themselves in this catastrophe by fleeing into the mountains of Judea. They would not have time to go into their homes to collect their belongings, even if they were very close by, on the flat roof or in the field.^{v.31} They would therefore have to be alert every day and ready to flee at a moment’s notice, so Jesus gave them signs to watch for, and these terrifying events occurred in A.D.70. Most of the Jews, of course, would not know the signs or they would ignore them and Jesus said it would be like the days of Noah^{v.26} when people carried on their normal activities until the very day that Noah entered the ark and the flood came.^{v.27} Those who were ignorant of Jesus’ warnings would be totally unaware of what was about to happen, but faithful disciples would watch the signs of the times and be ready and vigilant to save themselves. We have a similar situation today when the signs of the coming of Christ are so clear, but most people are ignorant of Jesus’ teaching and carry on their normal activities with no thought of what is about to happen in the earth. Faithful disciples, however, study the word of God, learn the signs of the times, observe political events as the world gets

ever closer to the situation described by the prophets of the LORD, and prepare themselves for the coming of Christ so they are not caught unawares.

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Week 30

Introduction

David had been anointed by Samuel to be king over Israel instead of Saul but, as is usually the way in God's purpose, David did not reign immediately. He first had to suffer persecution at the hands of men who attempted to kill him. Eventually, at Saul's death, David became king of his own tribe, Judah, and seven years later became king of all Israel. There are, likewise, stages in Jesus' attainment to the same throne. He first had to suffer, and when he returns he will "save the tents of Judah first" Zech.12:7 before joining all Israel together as one kingdom with one king reigning over them all. Ezek.37:22

Week 30

1 Samuel 19

Day 204

King Saul had a son named Jonathan whom his father expected to succeed him on the throne but Israel was a theocracy and God had decreed that David would become king instead. Jonathan and David were close friends, and Jonathan's brotherly love for David was so great that he was content that his place as heir to the throne should be taken by David. But this was not the attitude of his father, Saul, who was determined to kill David. At first Saul tried surreptitious methods to kill him, such as placing him in dangerous positions in battle so that Saul could claim he was innocent of David's death, but all these attempts failed. His intentions then became more obvious and his attempts more open but Jonathan took David's part and did all he could to save him. Jonathan is an excellent example of a man free from envy, prepared to take a lower position in life in accordance with God's will and to rejoice at the exaltation of another, and the love he had for David is the love we should have for Jesus, David's greater son.

David had married Saul's daughter, Michal, and she also helped him escape from her father's men. Most importantly of all, David had God on his side and by his Holy Spirit intervened to prevent Saul from capturing David and carrying out his intention to kill him. For the next few years David was hounded by Saul so that he had to hide in the hills and caves with faithful followers and to move from place to place to avoid traitors and to escape from Saul's men who searched for him throughout the land.

Week 30

1 Samuel 24

Day 205

Although Saul was determined to kill him, David recognised that Saul was the LORD's anointed and Israel's rightful king. Therefore he would do nothing to harm him. It is against human nature to be non-resistant to evil and to do good to those who persecute us, but Jesus requires us to "turn the other cheek" and to love our enemies, and David is a supreme example of one who did this - doing good in return for evil and blessing them that cursed him. In this chapter we read how he had the opportunity to kill Saul while he slept, and indeed his men urged him to do it.^{v.4} It seemed to them that God had brought this opportunity to David to fulfil his promise,^{v.4} but David would not harm the LORD's anointed.^{v.6} He did, however, show Saul how close he had come to death and how his life had been spared.^{vs.9-14} This brought a confession from Saul that David was a righteous man.^{v.17} He also expressed

his recognition that David would sit upon the throne, even though he was pursuing David to prevent this,^{v.20} and therefore sought David's promise that when he became the king of Israel he would not harm any of his sons,^{v.21} and David gave his word.^{v.22}

In the following chapters we can read how Saul quickly resumed his pursuit of David, forcing him even to live in the land of the Philistines, Israel's enemy, to escape.^{27:7} This suffering of David before he became king of Israel foreshadowed the suffering of his greater son, Jesus, who was to suffer at the hands of men before he too would sit upon the same throne of the LORD over Israel. The darkest hour came for Jesus when he was betrayed by one friend, deserted by the rest, and scourged and killed by wicked men. The darkest hour is often the one just before the dawn, and David's darkest time came just before he became king. His whole family and those of his companions were taken captive by the cruel Amalekites ^{30:1-3} and this brought so much distress that his own men "spoke of stoning him"! ^{30:4-6} But David is a great example of faithfulness. He "encouraged himself in the LORD his God" ^{30:6} and took action to recover the wives and children from the abductors, and none was harmed. Immediately afterwards Israel's army led by Saul was defeated by the Philistines, and Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in the battle, so the people sought a new king, and some turned to David.

Week 30

2 Samuel 1

Day 206

It may have been thought that David would have rejoiced at the news of Saul's death because it seemed to his personal advantage. Indeed, an Amalekite thought he would receive a reward by bringing this "good news" to David, even embellishing the account by claiming that he himself had slain king Saul, hoping to receiving even greater reward. This was grossly to misjudge David's character. He was not seeking personal advancement, but to do the LORD's will. He acknowledged that Saul was the LORD's anointed and wished him no harm, even though Saul continually tried to kill him, and he loved Jonathan, who also had been killed, as a brother. Therefore, after great mourning and weeping for Saul and Jonathan,^{v.12} he brought the reward of the Amalekite's action upon his own head. ^{vs.14-16}

David lamented over Saul and Jonathan, expressing his heartfelt sympathy for the LORD's anointed and his son, slain together in battle,^{vs.17-27} but especially for Jonathan whom he loved as a brother with a love greater than that for his wives.^{v.26} Most people of the time would have been amazed at David's reaction to the death of the enemy who sought to kill him and whose life prevented him sitting on the throne of Israel, but those who serve the LORD develop characters which lead them to behave in ways bemusing to others in the world. It is not natural to "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you", as Jesus commanded.^{Mat.5:44} Nevertheless, those who hope to receive the promises of God, as David did, suppress their natural inclinations and act like both David and Jesus.

Week 30**2 Samuel 2****Day 207**

Directed by God,^{v.1} David went to Hebron, a chief city of the tribe of Judah, where the people of Judah anointed him their king,^{v.4} David, however, was still thinking of Saul and Jonathan and when he heard that the men of Jabesh-gilead had come from the other side of the river Jordan to give king Saul a proper burial he sent them a message of gratitude. In fact these men themselves had done this deed in gratitude to Saul, for he had saved them from mutilation by the Amorites when he first became king.^{1Sam.11}

At this time only one tribe, his own tribe of Judah, accepted David as king, and he reigned over them for seven and a half years before he reigned over all Israel.^{v.11} The other eleven tribes appointed Saul's son Ish-bosheth to be their king,^{vs.8-9} under the influence of Abner, the captain of Saul's army,^{v.8} a mighty man who had the real power over the eleven tribes. He was pursued by David's nephews,^{v.18} the sons of Zeruiah David's sister, and he reluctantly killed one of them, Asahel.^{vs.22-23} This had significant consequences later for when Abner entered into negotiations with David to transfer the eleven tribes into David's hand ^{3:21} Joab, Asahel's brother, killed Abner in exactly the same way that he had killed Asahel.^{3:27} Again this caused David to lament, not about the failure to gain the eleven tribes, but that "a great man had fallen in Israel".^{v.38} Joab was to cause David much further distress but in the end Joab received his just reward.^{v.39}

Week 30**2 Samuel 5****Day 208**

Ish-bosheth's position as ruler of the eleven tribes became much weaker after the death of Abner, and he was eventually murdered by two of his own captains.^{4:1-2,7} These men also made the mistake of misjudging David's character. They too thought that David would rejoice at the death of Israel's king and brought the king's head to David. They hoped to be greatly rewarded, but they suffered the same fate as the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul. With the death of Ish-bosheth, the eleven tribes sought David to be their king and all the twelve tribes appealed to him, citing the promise God had made.^{vs.1-3}

And so the word of the LORD was fulfilled, with David reigning over all Israel. His total reign as king lasted forty years: seven and a half years over Judah alone and thirty three years over all twelve tribes.^{v.4} It was when he first reigned over all Israel that he took the city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites and made it the capital of his kingdom. This city had long been chosen by the LORD as the place where he would put his name and to which all Israel would come and worship him, but for four hundred years after Israel entered the land it remained in the hands of these Gentiles. When Jesus returns to reign over all Israel he will make Jerusalem his capital where he will sit on the throne of the LORD as David did, and all nations will go there to worship God.^{Zech.14:16} The main fortress of the city was on the hill

called Zion,^{v.7} and Jerusalem is often referred to by this name. This citadel was so strong that it had been unconquered by Israel until David's day and the Jebusites were over-confident that it could not be taken - even "the lame and blind" could defend it successfully.^{v.6} Taken by David, this city became known as "the city of David", not to be confused with the other "city of David", Bethlehem - one of these being where the Messiah was born and the other where he will reign.

David, at this time, received help from another ruler: Hiram king of Tyre.^{v.11} Tyre was a small island off the coast and a great commercial and maritime centre for the whole of the region, with ships coming from all the ports of the Mediterranean with goods for distribution. This king used his wealth and power to help David build his palace ^{v.11} and, later, the temple of the LORD. This relationship is particularly interesting because it prefigures the help that King Jesus will receive from another island power. It is not an accident that Britain was the country which drove the Turks out of Palestine in 1917 and declared the Jews could have a national home in the land, that she had the League of Nations mandate for Palestine between the two world wars, that she drew up the conditions for the State of Israel which the United Nations adopted in 1947, and that she will be the principal protester when Russia invades Israel before God intervenes to save his people by the hand of Jesus. Just as Tyre had a role to play in the purpose of God in the days of David, so Britain has a principal role to play in these last days.

Week 30

2 Samuel 7

Day 209

Chapter six describes how David brought the ark of God to Jerusalem so that this city became "the dwelling place of the LORD". The ark had been constructed in the wilderness four hundred years earlier and kept in the tabernacle. David compared the palace he lived in with the tent in which the ark resided and decided he should build a temple for the LORD.^{v.2} He was not permitted to do so, however, though his desire was commended by God. He was nevertheless promised that his son would build God's house and with this promise he received great assurances concerning himself, the LORD's house, and a greater son who would arise in the future.

This son of David would also be the Son of God for the LORD said: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son", ^{v.14} and he would build a house for God's name, and God would establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.^{v.13} This, of course, is the Lord Jesus who was born in David's line a thousand years later. David knew this would happen a long time in the future, after he was dead (slept with his fathers ^{v.12}), but he also knew that he would be alive to see this great descendant sit on his throne for ever because God promised that his house and kingdom would be established "before him".^{v.16} Therefore David knew he would be raised from the dead when the Messiah sat upon his throne. He also knew that the Messiah would build God's temple and sit on the throne of the LORD over Israel, that the kingdom would last for ever, and that he too would live for ever. This was his hope and faith, the same hope and faith of all God's servants since that day who look for the coming of the

Messiah to fulfil God's promise to David.

This promise also contained the statement that the Messiah would suffer at the hands of men ^{v.14} and in due course Jesus did suffer before entering into his glory. When he returns Jesus will build a temple for the LORD at Jerusalem, and details of its design are given through the prophet Ezekiel (chapter 40 onwards) but the promise also refers to the building of a house of God composed of people. Therefore the purpose of Christ's teaching, and that of his apostles, is to develop this house composed of living stones, with Jesus himself the chief corner stone and the apostles and prophets the foundation stones. Eph.2:19-22 All the elements of this house of God will be brought together when Jesus returns, forming "an habitation of God through the Spirit".

Week 30

2 Samuel 23

Day 210

Just before his death David, inspired by God's Spirit, expressed his hope for the future. ^{vs.1-2} He had been given marvellous promises which were to be fulfilled in his greater son who would also be the Son of God and who would reign over Israel "in justice and in the fear of God". ^{v.3} The Messiah would make the land and people flourish ^{v.4} and David's house would be established for ever because God had made him "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure". ^{v.5} David knew that God would keep his promise and that he would be raised from the dead when the time came. It does not matter to David that three thousand years have gone by because, unconscious in the grave, he has no knowledge of the passage of time, but one day soon he will awake from the sleep of death and see the Lord Jesus Christ performing all that God promised.

But Jesus was also to suffer, and this is indicated in verse 7 for God moved David to declare that wicked men (sons of Belial) would afflict the Messiah so that he would be "filled [not *fenced* as in the KJV] with iron and the staff of a spear" which occurred when a soldier pierced his side. This was at Jerusalem where the judgments of God were executed on the wicked and the city was "utterly burned with fire in the same place" in A.D.70.

The record then gives a list of David's mighty men. This is not of any interest to most people but it is of great interest and encouragement to those who hope in God. There is a similar list of individuals who are associated with Jesus. The names of these people are recorded in the book of life, ^{Rev.3:5} and it will be a matter of life or death to us when, at the return of Jesus, that book is opened and the names revealed. David had faithful companions and their names and deeds were remembered by God. Jesus too has many who are counted as his companions, and God also remembers their names and deeds even though they may have lived and died a long time ago. May our names be included in that list! If we do the right deeds in our time of opportunity "he will not be ashamed to call us brethren, saying to God: I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee". Heb.2:12; Psalms 22:25

Week 31

Introduction

During the last week of his life, Jesus visited Jerusalem every day, staying each night just outside the city, at Bethany. One night, however, he remained at Jerusalem, providing the opportunity for Judas to betray him and for the authorities to arrest and kill him. His crucifixion had long been foreordained by God, and events took place exactly as prophesied in the Old Testament scriptures.

The apostles, however, were taken completely by surprise, and were utterly devastated by his death, but their sorrow was turned to joy when he rose again three days later, met with them, and commissioned them to preach the gospel to the world. We are among the beneficiaries of their preaching, through their writings, and by obedience to the gospel we can, like them, benefit from the sacrificial death of Christ and at his return have our sins forgiven and inherit everlasting life.

Week 31

Luke 18

Day 211

Jesus taught his disciples to pray. He instructed them to “pray always” ^{v.1} and not to be discouraged but to be importunate like the widow in his parable.^{vs.3-7} God promises to hear our prayers if we believe and obey him, and we can have “the confidence that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us”. ^{1John 5:14} The vital requirement is to determine God’s will from his word so that our requests are indeed “according to his will”. Jesus told another parable to show two attitudes in prayer, one acceptable, the other not. Those who pray “trusting in themselves that they are righteous, and despising others” ^{v.9,11-13} are rejected by God. But those who recognise their own faults and humble themselves as little children will not only have their prayers heard, but also enter into the kingdom when Jesus returns, “for of such is the kingdom of God”.^{v.16}

Jesus is able to discern our innermost thoughts and character, and when a certain rich ruler came to ask what he had to do to inherit eternal life ^{v.18} Jesus knew that his particular weakness was covetousness. The answer to his question is: we can inherit eternal life if we keep the commandments. We today must keep the commandments of Christ but this man was under God’s law through Moses and so Jesus cited those of the ten commandments which related to character, but omitting “thou shalt not covet”! This man had kept most of God’s commandments from his youth ^{v.21} and his character was such that Jesus loved him ^{Mk.10:21} but when he was told how to overcome his weakness ^{v.22} to gain eternal life, he could not do. it ^{v.24} Jesus therefore commented how difficult it is for the rich to enter the kingdom of God,^{vs.24-25} but not impossible ^{v.27} for wealthy people can use their money in the service of God. The young ruler could not forsake his riches but the apostles had forsaken all to follow Jesus and they will receive eternal life in the world to come ^{v.30} for this is the reward for faithfulness to Christ.

Jesus knew, however, that there would be much tribulation before that

glorious time came as God had revealed this beforehand through his prophets.^{v.31} Jesus, therefore, was able to declare of himself: “He shall be delivered unto the Gentiles, and shall be mocked, and spitefully entreated, and spitted on: and they shall scourge him, and put him to death: and the third day he shall rise again”.^{vs.32-33}

Although this was so plainly stated by Jesus to his apostles, they did not understand him: “And they understood none of these things: and this saying was hid from them, neither knew they the things which were spoken”.^{v.34} Even though the apostles had been with Jesus for three and a half years, hearing him preach the gospel and preaching it themselves, they emphatically knew nothing of his death as a sacrifice. This should be noted because it is often claimed that the gospel is the good news of Jesus’ death, whereas in fact it is the good news of the coming kingdom of God.

Week 31

Luke 19

Day 212

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem knowing that he would be crucified there, but the people expected he would immediately sit on the throne of the LORD, save Israel, and establish the kingdom: “They thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear”.^{v.11} Jesus therefore told them a parable to show there would be considerable delay. He would be like a nobleman going to a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return.^{v.12} In fact Jesus would go to heaven to receive the kingdom from his Father and then in due time return to take possession of it in Israel. In his absence “his citizens [the Jews] hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us”,^{v.14} and the Jews have ever since consistently rejected Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah. He also left behind instructions as to how his disciples should occupy themselves until his return ^{v.13} when he will judge their performance. Those who have done well will be rewarded with rulership with him in the kingdom of God,^{vs.17,19} but any who fail will be rejected.^{v.24}

Jesus entered into Jerusalem a week before his crucifixion and the people hailed him as their king,^{v.37} saying: “Blessed be the King that cometh in the name of the Lord: peace in heaven, and glory in the highest”.^{v.38} He entered the city riding on an ass, the mode of transport of the ancient kings of Israel because they were forbidden by God to have horses,^{Deut.17:16} and fulfilled a prophecy in Zechariah: “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass”.^{Zech.9:9}

In the midst of this rejoicing, Jesus’ heart was heavy, not only because of his imminent death, but also because he knew what would soon happen to Jerusalem and her people when (in A.D.70) the city would be destroyed.^{v.14} He wept over it,^{v.41} lamenting that the people had not recognised their day of

opportunity ^{v.42} and their treatment of God's house in Jerusalem. He had made it "a house of prayer for all people", ^{v.46}, Isa.56:7 but they had made it "a den of thieves".^{v.46}, Jer.7:11

Week 31

Luke 20

Day 213

After Jesus had cast the moneychangers out of the temple ^{19:45} the chief priests and scribes challenged his authority to say and do what he did.^{vs.1-2} They should have known he had God's authority because he performed miraculous deeds which no man could do without divine power. These religious leaders had a duty under God's law to investigate prophets and inform the people whether they were true or false, but they had failed in this duty in the case of John the Baptist, considering they could neither obey nor condemn him because the people received him.^{vs.3-8} Jesus therefore told a parable to illustrate Israel's treatment of all God's prophets and, finally, of his Son.

The people of Israel throughout their history persecuted and rejected the prophets which God sent to turn them back to righteousness,^{vs.9-12} and in due time they also killed God's Son and heir.^{vs.13-15} The vineyard is used consistently to represent the promised land of Israel in which the people should have brought forth fruit unto God. What then would God do, following centuries of fruitlessness and disobedience? ^{v.15} "He would come and destroy these husbandmen [the Jews] and give the vineyard to others", ^{v.16} and so the Jews were scattered and the opportunity of inheriting the Promised Land with God's heir, the Lord Jesus Christ, was offered to Gentiles.

The religious leaders of the Jews only listened to Jesus to accuse him to the Roman governor ^{v.20} and they asked him trick questions to this end. The first concerned paying taxes to the Romans, to which an answer "Yes" or "No" would bring disfavour, either with the people or the governor, but Jesus avoided the trap by commanding: "Render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's, and unto God the things which be God's".^{v.25} The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead ^{v.27} but asked Jesus a trick question regarding it.^{vs.28-33} Jesus' answer is enlightening for he taught plainly that those who are accounted worthy of resurrection and the future world ^{v.35} will never die any more, being the children of God and equal to the angels.^{v.36} This is a marvellous declaration and gives us a glorious hope for the future, encouraging us to make ourselves worthy of it. Incidentally, these words of Jesus strike a fatal blow against the concept of a supernatural devil, who is supposed to be a fallen angel, because the angels cannot sin, fall from grace, or die, and those who are made like the angels at Christ's return will never, throughout eternity, have to fear that one day they might sin, and die as a consequence.

The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead even though they claimed to believe the writings of Moses in the first five books of the Bible, therefore

Jesus proved these same writings did indeed teach resurrection.^{v.37} The LORD called himself “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” who are now dead in the grave, therefore these men must be raised from the dead: “For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him”.^{v.38} Jesus then asked the scribes, supposed experts in the scriptures, how David could call the Messiah “Lord” ^{Psa.110:1} if he was his son? ^{vs.41-44} The explanation, of course, is that Jesus was not only the son of David through Mary, but also the Son of God by the Holy Spirit acting on her to produce a child. Therefore he was both David’s son and Lord. The scribes, however, were unable to supply an answer because they were ignorant of the truth, although they were ostentatious in their religious observance. Therefore Jesus said: “Beware of the scribes”,^{v.46} a warning to which we should take heed, applying it to “religious leaders” today who are also ignorant of God’s truth.

Week 31

Luke 21

Day 214

Jesus observed people in the temple and commended the widow who cast in “all her living” though it was a very small amount of money, but it was relatively large in relation to the wealthy who cast in just a small portion of their wealth, on the principle: “If there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not”.^{2Cor.8:12}

The temple was a glorious building, recently completed after forty-six years’ construction,^{v.5} but Jesus made a dramatic statement: “The days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down”.^{v.6} The disciples naturally wished to know when this would happen ^{v.7} and Jesus told them of future events which would affect them personally, Jerusalem, and the Jews in the land; speaking both of the near future and of the time far off when he would finally return. That time was a period of peace and tranquillity, maintained by the Roman legions, but Jesus told them this would soon end with “wars and commotions” but this would not signify the end.^{v.9} Nation would soon rise up against nation,^{v.10} there would be great natural calamities,^{v.11} and the disciples would be persecuted by the authorities ^{v.12} and betrayed by their nearest and dearest,^{v.16} but they were to trust in God ^{v.18} and be courageous.^{v.19}

He also gave them a specific sign to watch for so that they could act to save themselves. Jerusalem would be encompassed with armies and the disciples would then know its destruction was imminent ^{v.20} and should flee into the mountains of Judea.^{v.21} And so in A.D.70, following a Jewish rebellion, the Roman legions besieged Jerusalem. Dramatically the Jews sallied forth and discomfited the Roman soldiers who retreated briefly, giving the disciples of Christ the opportunity to flee before the Romans returned to destroy the city and slaughter most of the inhabitants.^{vs.22-23}

Jesus also said that the Jews “shall be led away captive into all nations: and

Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled".^{v.24} And so Jerusalem was in the hands of the Gentiles for eighteen hundred years, with the Jews scattered throughout the world, but recently they have returned to the land. The State of Israel was established in 1948 and the whole city of Jerusalem was taken by the Jews in 1967. This is a great sign that we are very near to the return of Christ. He observed that people recognise summer is close when the leaves begin to appear on the trees,^{vs.29-30} and so we should know from these signs the nearness of the summertime of the world's history when God's kingdom will be re-established: "So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand".^{v.31}

Week 31

Luke 22

Day 215

The chief priests and scribes were determined to kill Jesus ^{v.2} and they found an ally in one of the apostles, Judas Iscariot, who promised to betray Jesus for money.^{vs.3-5} It is said of Judas that Satan entered into him.^{v.3} This does not mean that a supernatural evil being came into him, so that he was not responsible for his action. The word "satan" is a Hebrew word meaning "adversary" and, in particular, a secret enemy as Judas was and, just as we might say that envy had entered into someone to make him extremely jealous, so the Jews used this word to express the emotion that made one a secret enemy of another. The betrayal was in God's purpose but Judas did this by his own volition, and he himself would bear the responsibility and the punishment.^{v.22}

Jesus was to die on the same day as the Passover lamb was killed,^{v.7} and at the start of that Jewish day, in the evening, he kept the Passover with his apostles.^{vs.9-20} During that last feast with his apostles Jesus broke bread to represent his body broken for them ^{v.19} and drank wine to represent his blood shed for them, confirming the New Covenant of God with his people.^{v.20} And he requested his disciples to break bread during his absence in remembrance of him.^{v.19} Also during this feast he assured them that they themselves who had endured trials with him would, when the kingdom is re-established, "sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel". ^{v.30} However, first he and they had to go through severe trials. Indeed, Jesus prayed to his Father that if it was possible he should not have to suffer the terrible ordeal of crucifixion, but he said: "nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done".^{v.42} Jesus also warned Peter that he would deny him that night ^{v.34} and when it happened through the weakness of the flesh Peter wept bitterly.^{v.62} Peter was most zealous in the defence of Jesus, for example cutting off the ear of one that came to take Jesus into custody,^{v.50} but Jesus is merciful and he both restored the man's ear and forgave Peter his denial. Jesus was taken to the high priest's house, mocked and ill-treated until dawn when he was brought before the Jewish council.^{vs.63-66} They could not bring

any legitimate charge against this innocent man but when he affirmed he was the Son of God ^{v.70} they dispensed with witnesses ^{v.71} and led him to the Roman governor to have him sentenced to death.

Week 31

Luke 23

Day 216

When the Jews brought Jesus before the Roman governor early in the morning they had to alter the charge. Pilate would not have crucified him for saying he was the Son of God and so they said he made himself a king ^{v.2} which was treason against Caesar. Jesus claimed to be the Christ, the Messiah who is the King of Israel ^{v.2} therefore Pilate asked him: “Art thou king of the Jews? ^{v.3} which Jesus answered in the affirmative: “Thou sayest”. Nevertheless neither Pilate nor Herod could find any fault in Jesus ^{v.4} and Pilate determined to let him go.^{v.16} However, the Jews bayed for his blood and demanded the release of a murderer, Barabbas,^{vs.18-19} instead of Jesus, and so the Governor issued the order to crucify him.^{v.24} The soldiers then led Jesus to Calvary just outside the city wall and crucified him with the accusation above his head “THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS”.^{v.38}

Two malefactors were crucified alongside Jesus,^{v.32} one of whom joined in the mocking of Jesus ^{v.39} but the other recognised that, while he himself had done wrong and was receiving a just reward, Jesus was completely innocent.^{v.41} He clearly believed the gospel for he requested: “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom”.^{v.42} This request accords with a correct understanding of the gospel which proclaimed that one day Jesus will come into his kingdom, the kingdom of God in Israel. The malefactor believed this and requested that Jesus remember him in that day, and Jesus promised to do so, assuring him that he would be with Jesus in that paradise.^{v.43} There is no punctuation in the original Greek but, unfortunately, the translators inserted a comma before the word “today” so that many have wrested this scripture and made it mean that Jesus promised the malefactor that he would be with Jesus in paradise that very day! In fact, Jesus was in the grave that and the following two days - certainly not paradise. The paradise which God promises is the transformed land of Israel, when Jesus reigns as the King of the Jews and they shall say, “This land that was desolate is become like the garden of Eden”.^{Ezek.36:35} Taking the rest of scripture teaching into account, we can appreciate the assurance Jesus gave the malefactor: “Verily I say unto thee today, [this very day when we are dying this cruel death and everything looks hopeless] when I come into my kingdom thou shalt be with me in paradise”.

Jesus died at the sixth hour, noon, and the veil of the temple was rent to show that the way into the Most Holy, the immortal state, had been opened by his death. Jesus, however, knew that God would soon awake him from the sleep of death and with his last breath he cried to his Father: “Into thy hands I

commend my spirit”.

v.46 This spirit was his breath which he knew would soon return to him after he had “breathed out” his last breath, which is the meaning in the original of the phrase translated “gave up the ghost”. The prophecy said he would make “his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death” Isa.53:9 so Jesus was crucified alongside malefactors and afterwards a rich man, Joseph, v.50 provided a newly built sepulchre for him. v.53 And certain women disciples observed where he was laid, v.55 prepared spices and ointment for the body, and waited for the passing of the Sabbath days.

Week 31

Luke 24

Day 217

Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week so that when the women came to the sepulchre early in the morning they found the stone moved from the entrance. v.2 It is profitable to collate the information we are given in the four gospels about these events because we then get a complete picture, with every element agreeing together. When the women found the tomb empty, Mary Magdelene v.10 immediately ran to Peter and John who rushed to the tomb. In the meantime angels spoke to the other women vs.4-8 who went to tell the remaining apostles and disciples. v.9

Jesus himself also met with the disciples the same day he rose from the dead. He met first with Mary Magdelene when she returned to the tomb, to the other women as they went to tell the disciples the angels’ message, to Peter alone, v.34 to two disciples on the road, v.15 and finally to the disciples in the upper room. v.36 Certainly there was no lack of evidence that Jesus himself was alive again, a man of flesh and bones v.39 who ate with his disciples v.43 and who was handled by them. 1Jn.1:1 Blood is not mentioned because he no longer had a body whose life is in the blood, but he now had a spiritual body energised directly by the power of God, having become a partaker of the divine nature. The promise is that when he returns he will transform the body of each disciple into this same glorious body. Phil.3:21

The disciples had trusted that he was the Messiah and would redeem Israel v.21 and did not understand why he had been crucified, but Jesus explained it to them, providing evidence from the Old Testament scriptures that both the suffering and the glory to follow were foreordained by God: v.26 “Beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself”. v.27 Thus their understanding was opened and they declared: “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” v.32 This is the experience of all those who have their eyes open to the truth. We can read the Old Testament scriptures, all written before Jesus was born, and see the suffering and glory of Christ revealed hundreds of years beforehand, and

rejoice in this knowledge. And so Jesus also opened the eyes of the disciples in the upper room, saying: “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures”.^{vs.44-45}

These disciples were to be witnesses of his resurrection ^{v.48} and take his message to all nations ^{v.47} that through his name men and women might obtain repentance and remission of sins.^{v.47} Therefore, after Jesus ascended to heaven,^{v.51} they were endued with power from on high, as recorded in Acts 2, and they fulfilled their commission, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God and the things concerning the name of Jesus Christ, first to the Jews and then to Gentiles throughout the world.

ooOoo

Week 32

Introduction

The two books of Kings and the second book of Chronicles detail the history of the twelve tribes of Israel from the end of David's reign, about B.C.1000, to the time when the Jews were carried away captive to Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar, about B.C.650. Solomon, David's son, reigned for 40 years over Israel, and his son, Rehoboam, succeeded him, but Rehoboam reacted violently to the request of the people for a tax reduction, and provoked the ten northern tribes to revolt and appoint their own king, Jeroboam. The two books of *Kings* give the history of both the ten tribe kingdom of Israel and the two tribe kingdom of Judah, while the second book of *Chronicles* emphasises the history of the two tribe kingdom which constituted the kingdom of God.

We will only read a few chapters in these books, but these chapters highlight the critical changes in the constitution of Israel and the kingdom of God, essential for a proper understanding of God's purpose in that the future kingdom of God is the "restitution of all things" Acts 3:21 as they were in the days of David, king of Israel.

Week 32

1 Chronicles 29

Day 218

David was not permitted to build a house for God but was promised that his son would do so. This promise will be fulfilled by Jesus but it had a typical fulfilment in Solomon whose reign, including his temple building, was a pattern representing beforehand the future reign of Christ. David was disappointed not to build the temple but, having been given its design by God, did all that he could in preparation, especially in offering great material wealth for its construction.^{vs.2-5} He did this "with all his might" ^{v.2} and invited others to contribute, ^{v.5} and the rulers responded willingly in abundance.^{vs.6-8} This caused David and all the people to rejoice with great joy "because with perfect heart they offered willingly to the LORD",^{v.9} and this illustrates the attitude we should have in service to God - willingness with perfect hearts - recognizing that everything we have and can offer to him: health, wealth, strength, intelligence, all have come to us from him.^{v.14} The state of our heart is the important thing because God takes "pleasure in uprightness".^{v.17} Therefore David prayed to God that all the people, and especially his son Solomon, would have "a perfect heart, to keep thy commandments, testimonies, and statutes" ^{v.19} and that Solomon would indeed build God's house for which he had made provision.^{v.19}

David was king of Israel but he recognised that the kingdom was the LORD's who is above all.^{v.11} David, coming to the end of his life and reign, made the best provision he could for the future. He knew that God had chosen his son Solomon to succeed him ^{v.1} and therefore he ensured that Solomon was anointed to be king.^{v.22} It is important to note that Solomon then sat on "the throne of the LORD" ^{v.23} and that Israel was "the kingdom of the LORD" because all later references to the kingdom of God, including those by Jesus and his apostles in preaching the gospel, relate to this same kingdom.

Week 32**1 Kings 3****Day 219**

“Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father” v.3 and he built the house of God in Jerusalem according to the wishes of David and the LORD. His name means “peace” and his reign of forty years was a period of peace and prosperity for Israel, and a time which is typical of the thousand year reign of Christ. However, Solomon was not perfect. For example, he sacrificed to the LORD in the high places where idolaters worshipped their gods, v.3 a practice not stamped out until many generations later. 2Kgs.18:4

Solomon recognised that God had permitted him to “sit on the throne” v.6 “as king instead of his father David” and he humbled himself as a little child. v.7 When God invited him to request anything he desired, Solomon asked, not for great wealth or long life, but for wisdom to rule God’s people: “Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?” v.9 God commended him for his selflessness, granted his request, and also gave him wealth and long life for which he had not asked. And all the people soon acknowledged “that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment”. v.28

Israel were God’s chosen people and Solomon was given wisdom to rule them, and many of his sayings inspired by God are recorded in the books he wrote: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. However, Solomon was not always wise in his personal life and he made serious errors in marrying princesses of neighbouring countries, e.g. Egypt, v.1 who, when he was old, “turned away his heart after other gods: and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father”. 11:4 The consequence of this was very serious because God punished him by taking most of the kingdom away from his son, but for David’s sake the LORD allowed him to keep his own tribe of Judah and also the tribe of Benjamin in which Jerusalem was situated because “the LORD had chosen to put his name there”. 11:36

Week 32**1 Kings 12****Day 220**

Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, on becoming king, was immediately faced with the people’s earnest request that the taxes be reduced. Samuel had warned Israel about the high cost of a human king and Solomon proved to be most expensive. Rehoboam foolishly took the advice of his young companions, instead of that of older and wiser counsellors, and rejected their request, even threatening to increase the burden of taxation severely. The consequence was that the ten northern tribes rebelled and appointed Jeroboam, who had been Solomon’s servant, to be their king, leaving Rehoboam with just two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, according to the word of the LORD.

Jeroboam realised that his subjects would turn back to David’s royal line if

they travelled each year to Jerusalem to keep the feasts of the LORD, so he placed golden calves at the two extremities of his kingdom for the people to worship. Dan was in the north and the idol there took the people away from Jerusalem, and Bethel was in the south on the the border with Judah and the idol there stopped the people from travelling on to Jerusalem. The northern kingdom of ten tribes was called “Israel”, and sometimes “Ephraim” after the major tribe, and the nation was soon submerged in all kinds of idolatry and, during the rest of its history, had only kings who were idolaters. The southern two tribes were called “Judah”, after the major tribe, and in its history it had some kings who were faithful to the LORD after the example of David so that the people were blessed by God, but they also had many who turned aside to idolatry and led the people astray. This kingdom however still constituted the kingdom of God, as Rehoboam’s son declared to Jeroboam,^{2Chron.13:8} and Rehoboam and his successors sat on the throne of the LORD in Jerusalem.

Week 32

1 Kings 17

Day 221

The ten tribe kingdom of Israel turned away from God to idols and, throughout the following centuries, the LORD sent many prophets to them to turn them back to righteousness. One of the most prominent of these prophets was Elijah ^{v.1} who had to face severe persecution at the hands of Israel’s king, Ahab. Ahab not only worshipped the golden calves set up by Jeroboam but also Baal, the god of the Canaanites, because he had married Jezebel, the daughter of the king of Zidon.^{16:30-31} Jezebel was notoriously evil and determined to eradicate the worship of the LORD in Israel and she murdered a great many faithful prophets and worshippers of the true God. Therefore Israel suffered divine retribution, and the LORD brought a drought upon the land. Elijah had prayed for this and also, three years later, for the rain to return, and he was heard by God and his requests granted. These events are cited by both Jesus and the apostle James as evidence that “the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much”.^{Jas.5:16-18}

During this famine Elijah was preserved by God,^{vs.2-7} and afterwards he was sent to a certain widow concerning whom the LORD said: “I have commanded her to sustain thee”.^{v.9} This illustrates how the providence of God works because the woman knew nothing of this commandment but God knew her character and how she would respond to the prophet’s need. When Elijah came to her she was about to make a final meal for herself and her son before they died of starvation. ^{v.12} Nevertheless Elijah told her to make him a little cake FIRST! ^{v.13} and then she would be provided for throughout the famine.^{v.14} She believed him and obeyed ^{v.15} and therefore she had food until the rains came.^{v.16} No doubt this is recorded as a lesson for us. We live in a time of famine, not of bread or of water, but of hearing the words of the LORD Amos 8:11 and we are all dying. However, the prophets of the LORD have brought us instruction as to how we can preserve our lives: “Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? But seek

ye FIRST the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you". Mat.6:31-34 The LORD knows we need the necessities of life, and he will provide. If, like the widow, we obey God's word through his prophets and seek his kingdom by belief, baptism, and obedience, we will be provided for now by God's providence and at last inherit eternal life in his kingdom.

This is not to say we will not become sick and die, but we are assured that Jesus will come and do for us what Elijah did for the widow's son - restore us to life. The word "soul" means "life". The child's life left him but, through the action of Elijah, he revived and his life returned. Jesus referred to these incidents when in his own town of Nazareth and it so incensed the people that they tried to kill him! This was because he pointed out that Elijah did not heal people of Israel, but Gentiles. Lu.4:25-29 Gentiles today can likewise respond obediently to the words of God through Jesus to save our lives which will be restored to us "at the resurrection of the just". Lu.14:14

Week 32

1 Kings 18

Day 222

At the end of three and a half years God sent Elijah to king Ahab to inform him that the rain would return and the famine end.^{v.1} On his way Elijah met a faithful man, Obadiah, who had saved the lives of many prophets of the LORD when Jezebel was slaughtering them.^{v.4} When Ahab met Elijah, he accused him of being the cause of Israel's suffering even though his own wickedness had brought the famine upon the land.^{vs.17-18} The LORD was going to send rain but first Elijah would demonstrate to Israel that YAHWEH is the true God. He therefore issued a challenge to Ahab and the prophets of Baal resulting in he, Ahab, four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and many people of Israel meeting at the top of Mount Carmel.

Elijah invited the prophets of Baal to call upon their god to demonstrate he existed by bringing fire on the sacrifices. The prophets of Baal spent all day calling upon their god to no avail, and then Elijah called upon the LORD. First of all, water was brought up from the sea to drench the sacrifices and then Elijah, eschewing all the wild excesses of the false prophets, made a quiet and simple request to the LORD. The result was immediate: fire came down from heaven and devoured the sacrifices and licked up all the water. There was therefore no doubt that the LORD (YAHWEH), not Baal, was the true God, and all the people cried: "YAHWEH, he is the God, YAHWEH, he is the God", and slaughtered all the prophets of Baal who had deceived the nation and brought calamity upon them.

It should be noted that such a demonstration would not work today. This is because we live in a different dispensation when there is no open vision and no-one has the Holy Spirit, as Elijah had. Furthermore, Elijah was specifically told to conduct this demonstration by God ^{v.36} and because he obeyed the LORD responded to his prayer on the principle that always applies: "If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us".^{1Jo.5:14} God had also told Elijah he was going to send rain on the earth, but Elijah still prayed for it to

happen.^{Jas.5:18} God tells us in his word what he is going to do, e.g. send Jesus to the earth, re-establish his kingdom in the land, raise the dead and give life to the faithful, and establish righteousness and peace in the earth, but he still requires us to pray for these things to happen.

Week 32

2 Kings 5

Day 223

Jesus also referred to the incident recorded in this chapter concerning Naaman the leper, pointing out to the people of Nazareth that, while there were many lepers in Israel at that time, Elisha healed a Gentile.^{Luk.4:27} Elisha succeeded Elijah as the LORD's prophet to the ten tribes of Israel and he also endeavored to turn the people back to God. Naaman was the commander of the Syrian army but also a leper with no possibility of a cure until a captive Israelite girl spoke about Elisha, the prophet of YAHWEH. Naaman therefore obtained permission from his own king and that of Israel, who suspected a trick, to visit Elisha.

Naaman was an important person of those times and he expected to be received accordingly by Elisha and he also anticipated being asked to do some great deed in order to be cured of the leprosy. In the event, Elisha merely sent his servant out to Naaman to tell him to immerse himself seven times in the River Jordan. Naaman was incensed at this treatment and dismissed the idea of immersing in the Jordan when there were superior rivers in his own country of Syria. However his servants wisely persuaded him to obey the prophet's simple instruction with the result he was healed of his leprosy. This is an instructive example of how human nature resists the simple commandments of God. People react in the same way today, being prepared to do great deeds in the hope of gaining eternal life and often making impressive sacrifices in their lives, confident that God will reward them accordingly. But the commandment is: "Believe the gospel and be baptized".^{Mk.16:16} This is very similar to the instruction given to Naaman: immerse yourself in water. One would imagine that everyone professing discipleship of Jesus would obey his simple command to be baptized, but most find excuses for not doing so and, like Naaman at first, refuse to take this simple step!

Naaman offered money to Elisha once his leprosy was removed, but Elisha refused it because the healing was a free gift from God. Leprosy is used in the scriptures as a metaphor for sin and, just as Naaman's leprosy was removed by immersion in the water, so baptism removes a believer's past sins: "And now [having believed] why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord".^{Acts 22:16} The price for our salvation from sin has been paid by the sacrificial death of Jesus ^{1Pet.1:18-19} and salvation is offered to us freely.^{Rom.3:24} Elisha's servant, Gehazi, arranged to receive money for the healing of Naaman and since the days of Jesus men have made money out of the offer of salvation, taking cash from people to procure good livings for themselves. The consequence of such action is represented by Gehazi's punishment.

The books of Kings and Chronicles record how the northern kingdom of ten tribes continued in wickedness and idolatry despite all the prophets sent to exhort them into the right way, and eventually, about B.C.720, the Assyrian armies invaded the country, captured their capital city of Samaria, and carried all the people away captive. Thus the ten tribes were scattered among the nations, later becoming indistinguishable from the “Jews”. The Assyrians pursued a policy of moving conquered people into other lands, and those they brought into the land of Israel became known, after the capital city Samaria, as “Samaritans” whose descendants we read of in the New Testament.

The southern two tribes, called Judah, was the kingdom of God but these also became so wicked and idolatrous that they were removed out of the land. This was done by Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, situated in what is now Iraq, and this chapter records the last years of the kingdom. It was first oppressed by Pharaoh king of Egypt and then it was invaded by Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah was placed on the throne by Nebuchadnezzar but after eleven years he rebelled, with the result that the Babylonian armies besieged Jerusalem and when it fell the king, princes, and virtually all the people were taken captive to Babylon. However, God declared through his prophet Jeremiah that after seventy years they would be permitted to return.^{v.21}

At the end of seventy years Cyrus, king of the Persians who had overthrown the Babylonians, issued a decree that any Jew who so desired could return to the promised land.^{vs.22-23} This illustrates how God proclaims his intentions beforehand and then controls events, moving the mightiest of men to carry out his will, even if they do not know they are doing it. We can see this happening in our own times. For example, God also proclaimed what would happen to both the ten tribes and the two tribes long after they were scattered among the nations. The prophecies of the scriptures declare that the people of the two tribes would return to the land before the coming of Christ, and in recent times we have seen their return and the establishment of the State of Israel. However the descendants of the ten tribes still remain among the nations and these will be brought back to the land once Jesus has returned to Jerusalem as king.

Zedekiah was the last king to sit on the throne of the LORD in Jerusalem and he was told by the prophet Ezekiel: “Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown... I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it: and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him”.^{Ezek.21:26-27} Jesus is heir to this throne because God made the specific promise to king David that his seed would sit on the throne and reign over the kingdom of God for ever, and the signs indicate that we are very near the time when he will return from heaven to sit upon this throne of glory.

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