

Praise the Lord!!! This month we celebrate fathers, our earthly fathers and our Heavenly Father. ***And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty*** (II Cor. 6:18). Society has set aside one day a year to celebrate and honor our fathers, but we should be celebrating and honoring our Heavenly Father every day. What are some ways that you honor our Lord and Savior every day? Do you tell others what He has done for you and can do for them? Do you show reverence for Him through your actions? Do you give Him praise? As you read and study His Word this month, I urge you to take a moment each day to celebrate your Heavenly Father. ***But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts; and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*** (I Pet. 3:15).

I want to thank everyone who has participated in our \$50 for 50 years celebration, as well as all of you who have sent generous donations to help with our flood damage and lost inventory. I am overwhelmed by your caring and generosity. To give a quick update on our progress. We have encountered some delays with our contractor and insurance, so the reconstruction work has yet to start. All the mold mitigation has been completed, and the building is safe to be in. Please pray for the Lord to send us the right contractor for the job. We are back to working in the office, but until reconstruction is complete, we are still limited to the back of the building. We are unable to use the air or heat at this time due to the ongoing construction, but we are making the best of it. We will continue to keep our heads up for the glory and honor of our Lord by making sure that the Word of God goes out to everyone seeking His face. ***Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you*** (James 4:7).

I am leaving you with some Scriptures that have been near and dear to my heart for the past several months. Jesus answered and said unto them, ***If ye But without faith it is impossible to please Him: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him*** (Heb. 11:6). ***And Jesus answering saith unto them, Have faith in God. For verily I say unto you, That whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatsoever he saith. Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them*** (Mark 11:22-24).

In His Love, *Jennifer*

**Who is there among you of all his people? his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel, (He is the God,) which is in Jerusalem. And whosoever remaineth in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, beside the freewill offering for the house of God that is in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:3-4).**

**That saith of Cyrus, He is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid (Is. 44:28).** In fulfillment of God's Word delivered through His faithful prophet, Isaiah, Cyrus, king of Persia, had seized control of the Babylonian Empire and issued a proclamation allowing the Jews to return to **Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel.**

When Cyrus began conquering the nations, the God of Israel was undoubtedly far from his mind. He did not know the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah, and he had no way of knowing that the One True God was uplifting him and making his victories possible. Yet just because he didn't realize that God was responsible in no way changed the fact that He was. The Lord is not just the God of Israel; He is the Lord of the entire world. **The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein (Ps. 24:1).** In accordance with His perfect plan, God can and will work through anyone, anytime, regardless of their status as a follower of God.

**Then rose up the chief of the fathers of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, with all them whose spirit God had raised, to go up to build the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem (1:5).** In marked contrast to Cyrus, however, the Israelites **whose spirit God had raised** knew precisely what was happening, and why. They had remained faithful to the Lord their God and were eager to see His prophecies fulfilled. The number of this faithful remnant was small.

The majority of the new generation had settled into a life of relative prosperity and freedom in Babylon, but those who

felt God's stirring in their hearts and answered His call were richly blessed. On this journey, there was neither a pillar of fire by night nor a cloud by day, and no manna fell from Heaven to provide them with sustenance. Even so, there is not one recorded complaint among them. Unlike their ancestors, who had continually murmured against God as they traversed the wilderness (Num. 14:1-4,22-23,27), these men and their families understood that they had been granted the extraordinary privilege of being of service to God, and they were at peace.

Cyrus was a rich and powerful king, and the Lord powerfully used him, but the returning children of Israel received the greatest blessing. As they actively and knowingly prepared to do His will, they felt the full measure of the Lord's love. God works today in the unlikeliest of people, often without being recognized or acknowledged. Through them, He brings about great things, but if they are unaware that He is the driving force behind their accomplishments, they cannot experience the boundless joy of being a servant of God.

***For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 14:17).***

**Thought for the Day:** *In the end, those that reject God's love will get their wish. They will be apart from Him forever.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By ***Sheshbazzar***, another name for Zerubbabel, ***the prince*** (governor) ***of Judah*** (Ezra 1:8). Christ is both ***The Prince of Peace*** (Is. 9:6) and ***the Lion of the tribe of Juda*** (Judah) (Rev. 5:5).

**Word Studies:** 1:6 **strengthened their hands** = gave them assistance; 2:43 **Nethinims** = Temple servants; 2:63 **Tirshatha** = Governor

**Pray for Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Lucy McBeth (CA) • **Country:** Palau (21,108) North Pacific Ocean • **Major Languages:** Palauan, Filipino, English • **Religious Freedom** • 41.6% Roman Catholic; 23.3% Protestant; 8.8% Modekngei (Indigenous to Palau); 5.3% Seventh-Day Adventist; 0.9% Jehovah's Witness; 0.6% Mormon; 3.1% Other; 16.4% Unspecified/None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray that people will come to a knowledge of the Lord God (I Kings 18:36-37).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 3

***And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the LORD; because He is good, for His mercy endureth for ever toward Israel (Ezra 3:10-11).***

Zerubbabel and his Jewish entourage had returned to Jerusalem for a singular reason; Cyrus commissioned them to rebuild the Temple of the Lord. After undertaking a long and arduous journey, they arrived in a land that bore only a passing resemblance to the beloved homeland of their memories and stories. To their further dismay, they also found that adversaries of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin (4:1) already inhabited the area. Their dreams of a quick and easy restoration were dashed, and they were forced to acknowledge that the task before them was fraught with both difficulty and danger. Despite this, they were still determined to fulfill their mission and serve the Lord their God.

***Then stood up Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and his brethren the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brethren, and builded the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings thereon, as it is written in the law of Moses the man of God (Ezra 3:2).*** To the repatriated Jews, spiritually reconnecting with God was of a higher priority than seeing to their immediate defensive needs. After restoring the altar of the God of Israel, they celebrated the Feast of Trumpets in accordance with God's Law (Lev. 23:24; Ezra 3:6), followed 14 days later by the feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:34; Ezra 3:4).

After taking the time to worship and make themselves right with God, they approached the difficult task of laying the foundation for the new Temple. This work was undertaken with a joyous spirit. Working as one, they set aside self-interest and dedicated themselves to restoring the site dedicated to true worship according to the laws of God. ***And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the***

***sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the LORD, after the ordinance of David king of Israel.***

These people were living in a dangerous land, with enemies on all sides eager to see them fail, yet they rejoiced instead of cowering in fear. For that brief moment in time, they shared in the glory of God that their ancestors had experienced at the dedication of the Temple. United under God, they felt the peace and joy that only He could provide (Phil. 4:7).

Sadly, this single-minded dedication to the Lord's service didn't last. As their enemies banded together and hindered their work, the men faltered in their tasks. At last, the current king of Medo-Persia, to whom they still owed allegiance, forbade further work on improvements in God's city (Ezra 4:17-23). The servants of God then bowed to the will of man. ***Then ceased the work of the house of God which is at Jerusalem. So it ceased unto the second year of the reign of Darius king of Persia*** (4:24).

***Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the LORD, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the LORD*** (I Cor. 15:58).

**Thought for the Day:** *A foundation of faith will support a lifetime of effort.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the **great** (huge) **stones** used in building the Temple of God (Ezra 5:8). Jesus Christ is **the Stone which the builders refused** (rejected), and He has **become the Head Stone of the Corner** (Cornerstone) of our faith (Ps. 118:22; Matt. 21:42).

**Word Studies:** 3:3 **his bases** = its original foundation; 3:8 **set forward** = oversee; 3:11 **by course** = by the assigned divisions of priests; 4:4 **weakened the hands of** = discouraged and frightened; 5:10 **certify** = inform.

**Pray for Government Official:** Rep. Delia Ramirez (IL) • **Country:** Panama (3,559,408) Southern Central America • Major Languages: Spanish, English • Religious Freedom • 85% Roman Catholic; 15% Protestant; (Small groups of: Seventh-Day Adventist; Mormon; Jehovah's Witness; Hindu; Buddhist; Rastafarian; Jewish; Muslim) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray, in faith, for God to work a miracle (II Kings 4:33-34).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 4

***And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king (Ezra 6:14-15).***

Construction on the Temple of the Lord had been at a standstill for fourteen years. God's people had yielded to worldly pressure, and all work had ceased. ***Thus speaketh the LORD of hosts, saying, This people say, The time is not come, the time that the LORD's house should be built*** (Hag. 1:2). In response to the weakness of His people, God sent to them ***Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo*** to strengthen them through the power of His Word. Although their circumstances had not changed, and they still faced the same intense opposition as they had for the last decade, the power it had over them was broken. ***Then rose up Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and began to build the house of God which is at Jerusalem: and with them were the prophets of God helping them*** (Ezra 5:2).

As the prophets carried God's Word to His people, strengthening them to work His will, God Himself had been busy behind the scenes. Just as He had laid it upon the heart of Cyrus, king of Persia, to return the Jews to their homeland with instructions to rebuild the Temple, so too did He motivate Cyrus' successor, Darius, to search for and uphold the original decree. ***Now therefore, Tatnai, governor beyond the river, Shethar-boznai, and your companions the Apharsachites, which are beyond the river, be ye far from thence: Let the work of this house of God alone; let the governor of the Jews and the elders of the Jews build this house of God in his place*** (6:6-7). His orders freed the Jews to finish their work unimpeded, ***and they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment***

**of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia.**

Although the legal and political support of the king made the situation easier for God's people, the power of God's Holy Word is what enabled them to return to work on His Temple. It was God, not Darius, that motivated them to see through the trickery and lies of their enemies and returned their focus to the mission He had given them. ***And thus they returned us answer, saying, We are the servants of the God of heaven and earth, and build the house that was builded these many years ago, which a great king of Israel builded and set up (5:11).***

Dedicating oneself to the service of God means facing near-constant opposition from the world in which we live. National politics are constantly in flux, and the 'support' that we get from laws, customs, and public opinion will vary wildly from day to day. As Christians, we should rejoice when the hearts of others seem to be softening and turning towards God, but we should never seek to draw our strength from their approval or support. We should always turn our hearts to Him, allowing His Word to comfort us, strengthen us, and lead us in His will.

***Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might (Eph. 6:10).***

**Thought for the Day:** *It is not wise for Christians to place our trust in the systems of the world, but what we can trust in is God's complete power over them.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through ***the Feast of Unleavened*** (yeast-free) Bread (Ezra 6:22). Jesus is ***the Bread of Life*** (John 6:35), and He was ***without sin*** (Heb. 4:15). Leaven is symbolic of sin.

**Word Studies:** 6:1 **house of the rolls** = building where records were kept on scrolls; 6:4 **king's house** = royal treasury; 6:15 **Adar** compares with February and March; 7:21 **the river** = Euphrates.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Country:** Papua New Guinea (6,552,730) Southwestern Pacific • **Major Languages:** Tok Pisin, English, Hiri Motu, 836 Indigenous Languages • **Religious Freedom** • 69.4% Protestant; 27% Roman Catholic; 0.3% Baha'i; 3.3% Indigenous Beliefs/Other (Muslim; Confucian) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray, remembering that there is no one like God (II Kings 19:14-15,19).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 5



**N**ow when these things were done, the princes came to me, saying, *The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites* (Ezra 9:1).

Ezra had arrived in Jerusalem from Babylon with hope in his heart. He had heard that the former exiles that had returned many years before had accomplished great things for the Lord. The Temple had been rebuilt, and now he and a God-selected group of priests and Levites had arrived to teach and minister to the people. Ezra was filled with godly confidence and a sincere desire to see this once-great nation fully reconcile her relationship with God. *Wherefore in all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people* (Heb. 2:17).

As it turned out, however, their reconnection to God was far from complete. Soon after his arrival, Ezra made a shocking discovery. *The people of Israel, and the priests, and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the people of the lands, doing according to their abominations, even of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites.* These people, the faithful remnant of God's chosen nation, were revisiting a sin that had plagued them since their earliest days. God had made his requirements very clear when He delivered the Law to Moses. *Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly* (Deut. 7:3). Over the centuries, they had violated this command countless times, and, as a nation, they had suffered the dire consequences of their actions.



Knowing that, Ezra could scarcely comprehend why they were committing the same sin again!

This news laid heavily upon the heart of Ezra. Over the last 60 years, the Lord had done amazing things for His people. Even though they were still under the rule of Persia, they were back in their homeland. The Temple was restored, and their future was bright. The fact that they turned so quickly back to past sins overwhelmed the man of God. Even so, Ezra knew what needed to be done. He humbled himself before the Lord and began to cry out to Him. Ezra testified of all the good that God had done for them. He also acknowledged all the wrongs that the people had done. In an act of submission, Ezra looked to the Lord for forgiveness and mercy.

Ezra was following the biblical process of reconciliation. He recognized the holiness of the Lord, admitted his guilt and the people's guilt, and asked for forgiveness. Through these steps, he hoped to restore the righteousness of Israel.

***That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:9-10).***

**Thought for the Day:** *The number, frequency, and type of sins that man commits are unsurprising to God; we should not let any feeling of humiliation over our sins prevent us from confessing them.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By Ezra, who mourned over the sins of the people of Jerusalem (Ezra 9:5). Twice it is recorded that, when Jesus looked upon Jerusalem, He also mourned for the people (Luke 13:34; 19:41).

**Word Studies:** 8:29 **chambers** = storerooms; 9:3 **mantle** = robe; 9:7 **confusion of face** = shame, confessing to following God but living like the world.

**Pray For Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Sen Mike Lee (UT), Rep. Chris Pappas (NH) Rep Jim Baird (IN) • **Country:** Paraguay (6,703,860) Southern South America • **Major Languages:** Spanish, Guarani • **Religious Freedom** • 89.6% Roman Catholic; 6.2% Protestant; 1.1% Other Christian; 1.1% None; 1.9% Unspecified/ Other (Jehovah's Witness; Jew; Mormon; Muslim; Buddhist; Baha'i; Mennonite; Unification Church; Indigenous Tribal) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray for spiritual prosperity (I Chr. 4:9-10).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 6

**N**ow therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them, according to the counsel of my lord, and of those that tremble at the commandment of our God; and let it be done according to the Law (Ezra 10:3).

Few chapters in our study of the Old Testament are as conceptually confusing for us to read as Chapter 10 of the Book of Ezra. When we read it from the perspective of a modern-day Christian living under the Covenant of grace sealed by the blood of Christ, we are appalled at what we perceive to be the ungodly directive of Ezra: **Now therefore let us make a covenant with our God to put away all the wives, and such as are born of them.** Our minds immediately flash to the words of Christ: **He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery** (Matt. 19:8-10). If we approach the passage from the viewpoint of a post-exilic Jew living under the Law, however, then the directive becomes much more understandable.

The Lord had given His people a direct command. **Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following Me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly** (Deut. 7:3-4). Instead of following His Word, they blatantly disobeyed Him. Ezra was sickened by the news because he knew that this was the same path that had led to the fracture and eventual destruction of the nation of Israel. For this reason, he took immediate corrective actions in line with the Law of the Old Covenant. While painful for all involved, these actions were necessary for the people to reconcile themselves with God.

It is still of the utmost importance to our spiritual well-being

that our spouse be a follower of Christ. No matter the physical attraction or genuine affection, it is impossible for a child of God to have true compatibility with a non-believer. ***Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness*** (II Cor. 6:14)? A marriage contract is more than a piece of paper; it is a lifetime commitment. A commitment that will either provide unconditional love and support during all of life's seasons or else bring heartache, strife, and spiritual corruption. Next to our decision to accept Christ, our choice of spouse is the decision that will have the greatest impact on our lives. For this reason, marriage should never be entered into in haste. As in all things, ***seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you*** (Matt. 6:33).

***And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder*** (Matt. 19:5-6).

**Thought for the Day:** *Worldly influence is at its most deadly when it is applied by someone we love.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the ram (male sheep) that was offered for the offenses of the sons of the priests (Ezra 10:19). Christ offered Himself for the sins and offenses of all mankind. ***He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them*** (Heb. 7:25).

**Word Studies:** 10:1 **wept very sore** = wept bitterly; 10:2 **strange** = foreign; 10:8 **substance** = property; 10:13 **without** = outside in the rain; 10:15 **were employed about** = were opposed to; 10:19 **gave their hands** = promised, vowed.

**Pray for Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Government Official:** Gov. Tate Reeves (MS)Rep.Christy Houlahan (PA) • **Country:** Peru (30,147,935) Western coast South America • Major Languages: Spanish, Quechua, Aymara • Open to evangelism and Bible distribution • 81.3% Roman Catholic; 12.5% Evangelical; 3.3% Other (Seventh-Day Adventist; Mormon; Jehovah's Witness; Israelites of the New Universal Pact Baptist; Jew; Baha'i; Hare Krishna; Muslim); 2.9% None/Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and then obediently do what God says (I Chr. 14:14-16).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 7

***And I said unto the king, If it please the king, and if thy servant have found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldest send me unto Judah, unto the city of my fathers' sepulchres, that I may build it. And the king said unto me, (the queen also sitting by him,) For how long shall thy journey be? and when wilt thou return? So it pleased the king to send me; and I set him a time (Neh. 2:5-6).***

Nehemiah was a man of power and influence (Neh. 1:11), a fully accepted member of Persian society. He had been born and raised in the land of Persia, and he had risen to a position of importance in the king's house. Yet Nehemiah was not defined by the circumstances of his birth nor by the privileges he enjoyed. First and foremost, Nehemiah was a child of God, a descendant of Abraham, and a citizen of the nation of Judah. Therefore, when he received a first-hand report of the dismal conditions in Jerusalem (1:2-3), he was filled with great sorrow (1:4). In a state of anguished repentance, he turned to God (1:6).

Over the next four months (1:1; 2:1), Nehemiah fasted, prayed, and planned. His heart was with his people, but he recognized and obeyed the God-given authority of his earthly master, the king. ***Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation*** (Rom. 13:1-2). Nehemiah felt pulled to go to Jerusalem, but he was well aware that he needed the king's permission to travel. He also trusted that the king would permit him to go if God willed it.

To that end, Nehemiah went to great lengths to discover the fullness of God's will. By the time he went in front of the king, he knew exactly what he was being called to do. He took the time to explain to Artaxerxes, in terms that the king could understand, every salient point of the mission that he was being led to undertake. As a result of his time spent with God, Nehemiah had an answer for every question the king posed to him (2:5-6). Nehemiah's request was met with very little

resistance because of this careful, reasoned approach.

Frequently, when the Holy Spirit has moved us, we are overcome with a sense of urgency. We feel compelled to act immediately, no matter how complicated the mission is. These feelings are helpful in that they ensure that we wholly commit ourselves to God's cause, but they can also hinder us in our attempt to follow Him if we allow them to drive us to take action before praying it through. Often in today's world, working for God will entail going through multiple layers of 'red tape.' While that might be frustrating for all involved, in the end, our witness for God will be made stronger because we simultaneously followed His will AND held fast to His Word by respecting those He has placed in authority over us.

***Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; Or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well*** (1 Pet. 13-14).

**Thought for the Day:** *When we work for God, we work on His perfect timetable; there is nothing we can do to delay or expedite His plans.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Nehemiah's prayer for his people (Neh. 1:4-11). Christ also prayed for His own throughout the ages, which includes us today (John 17:20).

**Word Studies:** 1:5 **terrible** = awesome, greatly to be feared; 2:2 **countenance** = face; 2:7 **convey me over** = allow me to pass; 2:20 **no portion** = no part or property; 3:19 **turning** = corner; 3:23 **over against** = in front of, opposite of.

**Pray for Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Marie Perez (WA) Rep. Madeline Dean (PA), Sen. Marsha Blackburn (TN) • **Country:** Philippines (107,668,231) Southeast Asia • **Major Languages:** Filipino, English • **Religious persecution in some areas** • 82.9% Catholic; 2.8% Evangelical; 5% Muslim (mostly Sunni); 4.5% Other Christian; 2.3% Iglesia ni Kristo; 1.8% Other; 0.6% Unspecified; 0.1% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Seek God in prayer continually and depend on His strength (1 Chr. 16:11).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 8

**But it came to pass, that when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, and the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard that the walls of Jerusalem were made up, and that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth, And conspired all of them together to come and to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it (Neh. 4:7-8).**

Approximately 73 years after the rebuilding of the Temple of God (Ezra 6:15; Neh. 1:1; 2:1), Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem accompanied by a small contingent of Persian soldiers (Neh. 2:9). He arrived with letters of instruction, sealed by the king, which empowered him to gather the necessary resources and complete the construction of the city wall with all due haste (2:7-8). Just because he had the king's permission did not mean Nehemiah was universally welcomed in Judah. The Jewish population was steadily growing but still very much in the minority. Those who had claimed the land since the dissolution of Israel and Judah viewed them with suspicion and distrust. Nehemiah's stated intention to repair the walls and strengthen the Jewish city of Jerusalem was met with anger and fear.

The opposition, led by Sanballat the Horonite, was vocal in its quest to stop the work on the wall. Still, no matter what they attempted, Nehemiah's calm and sure leadership kept the Jewish workmen motivated and on task. **So built we the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto the half thereof: for the people had a mind to work** (4:6). When the verbal attacks gave way to physical threats, Nehemiah organized his workers in such a way that work continued under the protection of armed guards (4:13-16), and the repairs continued. As the wall neared completion, two last-ditch attempts were made to discredit Nehemiah and bring his work to a halt.

The first try was no doubt intended to be an ambush. An attempt was made to draw Nehemiah out of the city and away from his established protective guard. Nehemiah, however, refused to allow them to draw him into conflict. **And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you** (6:3)? By keeping

his focus solidly on God's work and refusing to pause in that work for any reason, Nehemiah neatly sidestepped the trap they had laid out for him.

When Nehemiah proved he could not be easily distracted, they sought to grab his attention in a more devious manner. They had letters drawn up claiming proof of a plot, headed by Nehemiah, that sought to liberate Judah from Medo-Persian rule and instate Nehemiah himself as king in Jerusalem. They felt confident that such an attack on his reputation would cause Nehemiah to turn aside from his task and defend himself. Yet once again, they were mistaken. Nehemiah knew he was in the right, and he was unconcerned with his reputation. He ignored the lies and innuendos, confident that he stood blameless before God.

As we follow the path set before us by the Lord, let us resolve to stand as firm in our convictions as Nehemiah. This devout servant of God allowed no one to distract him from his assigned task. Although there will always be those whose fear and hatred of the Lord will lead them to attempt to sabotage our work, we must trust in God to protect us and always maintain our focus on the task at hand.

***I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus*** (Phil. 3:14).

**Thought for the Day:** *Life only 'gets in the way' of living for the Lord when we attempt to hide certain aspects of our lives from Him.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By Nehemiah and other Jews who had bought back (redeemed) Jews who had been sold to the heathen as slaves while in Persia (Neh.5:8). We, ***which He hath purchased with His own blood*** (Acts 20:28), were redeemed when we accepted Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

**Word Studies:** 4:7 **breaches** = broken places; 4:10 **strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed** = strength of the workmen is failing; 4:20 **resort ye thither** = assemble there; 5:3 **dearth** = famine; 5:7 **usury** = interest.

**Pray for Staff:** Kevin Jennings • **Government Officials:** Sen. Ben Luján (NM) Rep. Susan Wil (PA) Rep. Alex Mooney (WV) • **Country:** Pitcairn Islands (48) South Pacific Ocean • Major Languages: English, Pitkern • 100% Seventh-Day Adventist • **Prayer Suggestion:** Humbly kneel before the Lord in prayer and worship the Lord (II Chr. 6:13).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 9



***And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: And Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground (Neh. 8:5-6).***

***Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits (Ps. 103:1-2). Bless the LORD, all His works in all places of His dominion: bless the LORD, O my soul (103:22).*** Centuries after these words were first composed by King David, the remaining children of Israel again joined together in unadulterated worship and praise. The people now gathered in the city of David (II Sam. 5:7) had a multitude of reasons to celebrate. Under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:2; 3:2,8; Neh. 12:1), Ezra, and Nehemiah, God's people had been granted the privilege of restoring the Altar, the Temple, and now, at long last, the walls and gates surrounding the city of Jerusalem. For the first time since their return from exile, the Jews had a concrete, physical means of security and protection.

As they gathered together, ***bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground***, they thanked God for His physical provisions, but they also acknowledged an even greater truth. Just as Jerusalem's physical buildings and walls had been in shambles, so too were their spiritual lives. Timber, iron, stone, brick, and clay had been utilized in the physical restoration of buildings and walls, but there was only one thing upon which their spiritual restoration could be based. ***And Ezra the priest brought the law before the congregation both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. And he read therein before the street that was before the water gate from the morning until midday, before the men and the women, and those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were attentive unto the book of the***

**law** (Neh. 8:2-3).

Their spiritual renewal began with the public reading of God's Word, the first such reading to occur since their return from exile. ***Truly my soul waiteth upon God: from Him cometh my salvation. He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defence; I shall not be greatly moved*** (Ps. 62:1-2). The Levites moved out amongst the crowd, answering questions and offering clear explanations on the law being read (8:7-8), and the people were overcome with emotion. The shaky foundation upon which their faith had been built was now being reinforced, strengthened, and made whole. For quite possibly the first time in their lives, they truly felt the presence of God.

If our lives are not built upon the living Word of God, then they are built upon unsustainable lies. It is imperative to our spiritual health that we embrace His Word and hold it safely within our hearts and minds at all times. Only in this way will we, too, find solid ground on which to stand.

***Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock*** (Matt. 7:24-25).

**Thought for the Day:** *Over time, untended faith can grow so dim that it is imperceptible, but His Word can kindle it into a light that all can see.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the names required to be registered for priestly service (Neh. 7:64). Christ, our Great **High Priest** (Heb. 3:1), will soon return, wearing His Name, **KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS** (Rev. 19:16).

**Word Studies:** 7:2 **feared** = had reverential, heartfelt submission to; 7:3 **stand by** = stand on guard; **watches** = guards; 7:61 **seed** = genealogical descent; 7:65 **Urim and Thummim** = two objects kept in the high priest's breastplate and used to determine the Lord's will (Ex. 28:30); 8:14 **booths** = temporary shelters.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Government Official:** Rep. Ken Calvert (CA) Rep. John James (MI) • **Country:** Poland (38,346,279) Eastern Europe • **Major Language:** Polish • **Religious Freedom-Reports of Societal abuses or discrimination** • 89.8% Roman Catholic; 1.3% Eastern Orthodox; 0.3% Protestant; 8.3% Unspecified; 0.3% Other (Jew, Muslim) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and praise God for His faithfulness and mercy in keeping all His promises (II Chr. 6:14-15).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 10

**N**ow in the twenty and fourth day of this month the children of Israel were assembled with fasting, and with sackclothes, and earth upon them. And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers (Neh. 9:1-2). *And the rest of the people, the priests, the Levites, the porters, the singers, the Nethinims, and all they that had separated themselves from the people of the lands unto the law of God, their wives, their sons, and their daughters, every one having knowledge, and having understanding; They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our LORD, and His judgments and His statutes* (Neh. 10:28-29).

The children of Israel that stood before Ezra and Nehemiah were over 900 years removed from the descendants of Jacob, whom God had led out of Egyptian slavery and escorted to the promised land of Canaan. During the intervening centuries, promises had been made and broken, kingdoms had risen and fallen, and the Israelite's bond with God had been stretched to its breaking point. The kingdom of Israel had first split in two and later shattered altogether. Now the remnants of God's people had returned to the land He had given their ancestors, but they no longer ruled. ***Behold, we are servants this day, and for the land that thou gavest unto our fathers to eat the fruit thereof and the good thereof, behold, we are servants in it: And it yieldeth much increase unto the kings whom thou hast set over us because of our sins: also they have dominion over our bodies, and over our cattle, at their pleasure, and we are in great distress*** (Neh. 9:36-37).

Despite their status as tributaries of a foreign king, they once again occupied the home provided for them by God. The Temple of the Lord had been rebuilt, and the strict observance of sacrificial law had resumed. For the majority of the Israelites there, this was a new experience. Their lives to that point had been lived as a series of compromises and

adjustments as they'd attempted to mesh their faith with the world around them. Now that they had heard God's law in its entirety and received instruction and guidance on discerning His will, they realized that continuing as they had been was unacceptable. ***And the seed of Israel separated themselves from all strangers, and stood and confessed their sins, and the iniquities of their fathers...They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law.***

***No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon*** (Matt. 6:24). If we are to serve God effectively, we must cease to serve the world. There is no middle ground, no way we can successfully divide our time and attention between the two agendas. God directs us to be actively involved in the world around us, but only inasmuch as we are working for His glory and the furtherment of His kingdom. God's truth is timeless and universal. It is to Him, and Him alone, that we owe our allegiance.

***They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth*** (John 17:16-17).

**Thought for the Day:** *Our service to God must be more than a token action we have grudgingly made room for in our worldly schedule.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the Creator of heaven and earth (Neh. 9:6). ***All things were created by Him, and for Him*** (Col. 1:16).

**Word Studies:** 9:18 **wrought great provocations** = committed great blasphemy; 9:22 **didst divide them into corners** = allotted and set boundaries; 9:25 **fat** = rich; 9:29 **withdrew the shoulder** = turned away rebelliously; **hardened their neck** = were stubborn, obstinate; 10:1 **Tirshatha** = governor; 10:28 **Nethinims** = Temple attendants or servants

**Pray for Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Country:** Portugal (10,813,834) Western Europe • **Major Languages:** Portuguese, Mirandese • **Limited Religious Freedom** • 81% Roman Catholic; 3.3% Protestant; 0.6% Other (Muslim, Hindu, Jew, Buddhist, Taoist, Zoroastrian); 6.8% None; 8.3% Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Humble yourself, pray, and seek the will of God as you read His Word (II Chr. 7:14).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 11

***And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites out of all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem, to keep the dedication with gladness, both with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, psalteries, and with harps. And the sons of the singers gathered themselves together, both out of the plain country round about Jerusalem, and from the villages of Netophathi; Also from the house of Gilgal, and out of the fields of Geba and Azmaveth: for the singers had builded them villages round about Jerusalem. And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and purified the people, and the gates, and the wall (Neh. 12:27-30).***

All that we have belongs to God. There is nothing that we have earned, purchased, or worked to make that is not already owned outright by our Creator. ***Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD's thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is*** (Deut. 10:14). A dedication, then, is not done to signify a transfer of ownership, but rather to acknowledge our understanding and acceptance of God's sovereignty over all aspects of our lives and reaffirm our commitment to Him.

The citizens of Judah gathered together to dedicate the newly restored wall to God with humble, penitent hearts. Their joy was not merely in the restoration of their city's physical security but also in the restoration of the spiritual security that came from placing all of their trust in the Lord. Over the course of a little more than 70 years, step by slow and careful step, they had rebuilt the city upon which God had placed His name (II Chr. 6:6). First the altar (Ezra 3:2), then the Temple (Ezra 6:15-16), and finally the walls and gates (Neh. 7:1) had been restored to at least some semblance of their former glory. Along the way, the same reconstructive force that had spurred the physical restoration of the city had also been at work in the lives of the people (Ezra 9,10; Neh. 8,9). Now they came before Him in thanksgiving and worship, secure in the knowledge that they and the city belonged wholly to God. ***Then shall ye call upon Me, and ye shall go and pray unto Me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek Me, and find Me, when ye shall***

***search for Me with all your heart*** (Jer. 29:12-13).

***For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them*** (Matt. 18:20). As the people raised their voices in joyful praise, the Spirit of God returned to Jerusalem. ***According to the word that I covenanted with you when ye came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remaineth among you: fear ye not*** (Hag. 2:5). Yet the Glory of the Lord (II Chr. 7:1), which had visually filled the Temple constructed by Solomon, was not seen. God's people had entered into a time of transition and waiting. Although they once again lived in the land God had given them, they did so under foreign rule. The throne of David was vacant, and it would remain so until the coming of the Messiah and the return of God's glory (Hag. 2:6-7).

***And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: And He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end*** (Luke 1:31-33).

**Thought for the Day:** *A life spent dedicated to God is a life spent in preparation for Him*

**Christ Portrayed:** By the priests and Levites who purified (sanctified) themselves and the people (Neh. 12:30). Christ our High Priest, through His perfect sacrifice, purified His believers by His Word. ***Now ye are clean through the Word which I have spoken unto you*** (John 15:3; 17:17).

**Word Studies:** 11:16 **outward business** = external business of the Temple; 11:24 **was at the king's hand** = was advisor, administrator of the king; 12:44 **that waited** = who officiated, ministered, kept the watches.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Country:** Puerto Rico (3,620,897) Caribbean • Major Languages: Spanish, English • Religious Freedom • 85% Roman Catholic; 15% Protestant/Other (Buddhist, Jehovah's Witness, Jew, Muslim) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Ask the Lord when you have a need (II Chr. 14:11).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 12

***And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field. Then contended I with the rulers, and said, Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries (Neh. 13:10-12).***

Had the Book of Nehemiah ended with chapter twelve, we would have been left with a sense of peace and great accomplishment. Jerusalem had been rebuilt and repopulated, and the people had rededicated themselves to following the law as it had been given to Moses (10:29). They separated themselves from those that were not of the family of God (13:3) in compliance with His will, and they set their sights upon finally living entirely within the Covenant that the Lord had established (Ex. 20 – 23; Deut. 28). Sadly, chapter twelve was not the final chapter.

Twelve years after arriving in Jerusalem, Nehemiah returned to the king's service in Babylon (Persia) for a short time. During his absence, the people grew lax about attending to their everyday duties to God. Upon his arrival back in Jerusalem, he discovered that the Levites and their families had not been receiving the material support God promised them as their portion of the inheritance of the tribes of Israel. As a matter of survival, the Levites had left Temple and returned to farming the land. This, in turn, left the people with even less spiritual guidance. One of Nehemiah's first actions upon returning was to recall the Levites and restore their rightful portion of tithes and offerings to them. ***And, behold, I have given the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel for an inheritance, for their service which they serve, even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation (Num. 18:21).***

Today, the call to dedicate one's life to the work of God is not limited by one's genealogy. ***And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues (I Cor. 12:28).*** Anyone,



at any time, may be called into His service. A genuine servant of God does not answer the Lord's call expecting riches or an easy life, but following His call does not mean that their basic needs no longer have to be met. They and their families still need food, clothing, and shelter. Although their calling is to minister to others, if we refuse to heed His Word and do not help to support them while they do so, then they will be forced to split their attention between the work of God and the work necessary to keep their families from starving.

***Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat*** (Matt. 8:10). When we support a worker dedicated to the Lord, we are giving much more than we know. Through our contributions, we are opening doors and marking pathways; we are offering people we may never meet the chance to experience God's love and saving grace.

***Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel*** (1 Cor. 9:14).

**Thought for the Day:** *To introduce a person ignorant of God to His Word is the greatest charity of all.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By Nehemiah, who cleansed the priests and Levites and defined their duties (Neh. 13:30). Christ cleanses us from all our sins when we confess them (1 John 1:9). Through Him we have been made **a royal priesthood** to serve the Lord (1 Pet. 2:9).

**Word Studies:** 13:17 **contended with** = confronted, rebuked; 13:26 **outlandish** = foreign idol worshiper; 13:30 **strangers** = idol-worshipping foreigners; **wards of** = duties for.

**Pray For Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Country:** Qatar (2, 123, 160) Southwestern Asia • Major Languages: Arabic, English • Muslim conversion to Christ is forbidden, but expatriate Christians are allowed to meet informally • 77.5% Muslim; 8.5% Christian; 14% Other (Hindu, Buddhist, Anglican, Egyptian Copt, Baha'i, Greek & Eastern Orthodox Church) • **Prayer Suggestion:** When you are in desperate circumstances, turn to the Lord with fasting and prayer (II Chr. 20:2-4).

**Optional Reading:** II Corinthians 13

***Now in Shushan the palace there was a certain Jew, whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjamite; Who had been carried away from Jerusalem with the captivity which had been carried away with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had carried away. And he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter: for she had neither father nor mother, and the maid was fair and beautiful; whom Mordecai, when her father and mother were dead, took for his own daughter (Esth. 2:5-7).***

Over the past two weeks, we have read through the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah and have explored some of the events that occurred after the Jews had been permitted to return to their homeland from their exile in Babylon. Today, we turn our attention to the Book of Esther and to an account of what was happening among the Jews that were still living in the land of Medo-Persia.

As the Book opens, we are given an insider's view of royal life in the Shushan palace of the Persian king, Ahasuerus. Toward the end of a long drunken party (1:1-9), the king made specific demands of his queen, Vashti, which she refused to honor (1:10-12). This sent the king into a towering rage and resulted in him issuing an unbreakable decree banishing her forever from his presence and stripping her of her title as queen (1:19-22). Not long afterward, the lonely king (2:1) held "auditions" for a new queen. ***And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins unto Shushan the palace, to the house of the women, unto the custody of Hege the king's chamberlain, keeper of the women; and let their things for purification be given them: And let the maiden which pleaseth the king be queen instead of Vashti. And the thing pleased the king; and he did so (2:3-4).***

At this point, we are first introduced to Esther and her cousin/adoptive father, Mordecai. As Jews descended from those taken into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, their presence in the country had not come about through personal choice. Likewise, when

the king decided to search for a new queen, Esther did not volunteer. She was brought to the king's house along with other maidens to be trained and judged. Neither her consent nor that of Mordecai, her adopted father, was sought beforehand. These events could have easily led to bitterness and dissatisfaction on the parts of Mordecai and Esther. Instead, we find in each of them an attitude of quiet confidence. Esther trusted entirely in the counsel of her father as she had been raised to do under the Law (Ex. 20:12; Esth. 2:10), and Mordecai trusted utterly in God (Ex. 20:2-6; Esth. 3:1-4).

A person that has surrendered their life to God is the recipient of a peace that can be found in no other way. ***And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*** (Phil. 4:7). When you KNOW that God is in control, you can accept any situation that comes your way with equanimity and grace. You can stand strong in the face of adversity, confident that God's plan will prevail no matter your current struggles, and your eternity is secure!

***For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God*** (1 John 5:4-5)?

**Thought for the Day:** *Despair is a rejection of the possibility of hope and thus a rejection of God. No matter what, we must hold onto our faith and trust in Him.*

**Christ Portrayed:** By Mordecai, who adopted Esther (Esth. 2:15). We are adopted into the family of God by Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5; 1 John 3:1). ***Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus*** (Gal. 3:26).

**Word Studies:** 1:10 **chamberlains** = officials; 2:16 Tebeth compares with our December/January; 3:8 **to suffer them** = to let them remain; 3:13 Adar compares with our February/March; 3:15 **posts** = special messengers.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Government Officials:** Rep. Mark Amodel (NV) • **Country:** Romania (21,729,871) Southeastern Europe • **Major Languages:** Romanian, Hungarian • **Freedom of Worship** • 86.8% Romanian Orthodox Church; 7.5% Protestant; 4.7% Roman Catholic; 0.9% Other/Unspecified (Muslim; Jew, Jehovah's Witness, Baha'i, Mormon, Zen Buddhist, Unification Church, Krishna); 0.1% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Intercede in prayer for others, knowing that God hears your prayer (II Chr. 30:18-20).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 1

***And Harbonah, one of the chamberlains, said before the king, Behold also, the gallows fifty cubits high, which Haman had made for Mordecai, who had spoken good for the king, standeth in the house of Haman. Then the king said, Hang him thereon. So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then was the king's wrath pacified (Esth. 7:9-10).***

Although God's name is never once spoken in the Book of Esther, His presence is so clearly displayed that the book could efficiently serve as standalone proof of His existence. So many different things had to simultaneously fall into place to preserve the Jews that the chance of everything occurring by happenstance is infinitesimally small. Unless one is willfully spiritually blind, it is impossible to read this account and not see a higher power at work. Esther provides one focused scenario, but this same sentiment can be applied to all of God's creation. The proof of His existence is all around us. It takes more of a leap of faith to deny God than to believe in Him. ***For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse (Rom. 1:20).***

Can you imagine being so evil that you would be willing to commit genocide just because you felt disrespected? That is precisely what happened with Haman. He sought to destroy the Jews simply because Mordecai would not bow before him. Little did he know that God was at work in the lives of this man and his family. Haman confidently moved ahead with his plan, including the construction of giant gallows from which to hang Mordecai. He knew he had the favor of the king, so he had no reason to believe that things would not go exactly as he had planned. Unknown to Haman, God was moving behind the scenes to expose his great evil. No amount of clever plotting will ever overcome the wisdom of God. ***Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Cor. 2:13).***

While Haman plotted and Esther prepared for a feast at which she intended to reveal her Jewish heritage and express her grief at his plans, King Ahasuerus was troubled by insomnia. While attempting to tire himself, he read of Mordecai's heroic deed. The king realized that he had not offered much appreciation at the time, so he resolved to honor Mordecai. Early the following day, he called upon Haman to bestow the honors upon Mordecai. By the time of the feast, Haman was unsettled by how quickly his plans were falling apart, especially after Esther revealed her heritage and exposed his plot. The day ended, not with the death of God's faithful servant Mordecai, but with the hanging of the man who had plotted against him.

God's Word clearly states that He is in control, and He will win out in the end. Mordecai and Esther trusted that the Lord was there and that He was larger than their troubles. When we find the same trust inside ourselves, we, too, will be able to recognize the fullness of God's involvement in our lives.

***And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever (Rev. 11:15).***

**Thought for the Day:** *There is no such thing as coincidence in a world directed by His perfect plan.*

**Christ Revealed:** In the honor shown to Mordecai as he was led through the streets (Esth. 6:10-11). Jesus was greatly honored in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt. 21:8-9).

**Word Studies:** 4:1 **rent** = tore, as an act of grief and mourning; 6:13 **be of the seed of the Jews** = is of Jewish origin; 7:4 **countervail** = justify, compensate, or make up for; 7:5 **that durst** = who dares to.

**Pray for Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Jerrold Nadler (NY), Gov. Roy Cooper (NC) • **Country:** Russia (142,470,272) Northeastern Europe and Northern Asia • Major Languages: Russian, Dolgong, German, Chechen, Tatar • Restricted Religious Freedom • 15-20% Russian Orthodox; 10-15% Muslim; 2% Other Christian; Large population of non-practicing & non-believers • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray for national leaders and their families (Ezra 6:10).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 2

**Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur. Therefore for all the words of this letter, and of that which they had seen concerning this matter, and which had come unto them, The Jews ordained, and took upon them, and upon their seed, and upon all such as joined themselves unto them, so as it should not fail, that they would keep these two days according to their writing, and according to their appointed time every year; And that these days should be remembered and kept throughout every generation, every family, every province, and every city; and that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed** (Esth. 9:26-28).

Haman had felt himself to be invincible. His decree to execute all Jews had been approved by the Persian king, whose word was irrevocable law (1:19). Since Haman believed that no power in the world existed that was greater than the king, he knew that he could not fail. Haman's astrologers had cast pur (meaning they had cast lots) to determine the most favorable time for the execution of all the Jews. Haman's 'lucky day' had fallen on the thirteenth day of the last month. It is doubtful how 'lucky' it truly was for him, though, considering he didn't even live to see it (7:10). Haman would have been much better served if he had taken to heart the wisdom of God: **The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the LORD** (Prov. 16:33).

**Wherefore they called these days Purim after the name of Pur.** God turned the determined day of execution from one of death to one of deliverance. In turn, the Jews turned it into an annual celebration of the wondrous miracle afforded them by God, **that these days of Purim should not fail from among the Jews, nor the memorial of them perish from their seed.** The Feast of Purim is testimony to the fact that what often appears to us as chance, good luck, or worldly happenstance is, in actuality, a manifestation of the will of God, the Almighty Ruler of the world. **The LORD hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all** (Ps. 103:19).

We, too, should remember and celebrate the times God has moved dramatically in our lives or on our behalf. By reflecting on the times that the Lord blessed us with hope, help, or deliverance, we will remind ourselves that we serve a loving God that cares for His children deeply. ***If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him*** (Matt. 7:11). It is right and good that we celebrate the miracles that the Lord has caused to affect our lives here on earth. Still, when doing so, we must never allow ourselves to lose sight of how all of this pales in comparison to His greatest gift of all, Christ Jesus, in whose blood all who are washed are redeemed.

***For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved*** (John 3:16-17).

**Thought for the Day:** ‘Chance’ and ‘luck’ are often merely prideful and self-centered descriptors of God’s will.

**Christ Portrayed:** By Mordecai, who was exalted from servanthood to a position of honor and glory ***next unto*** (the) ***king*** (Esth. 8:2,15; 10:3). His life illustrated Christian conduct. Christ came to earth as a servant and was exalted to ***the right hand of God*** (Phil. 2:5-11; Mark 16:19).

**Word Studies:** 8:3 **put away the mischief** = avert the evil; **device** = scheme; 8:10 **posts** = couriers; 9:4 **waxed greater and greater** = became increasingly popular and powerful.

**Pray for Our Nation:** Today is Flag Day • **Government Officials:** Rep. Steny Hoyer (MD) • **Country:** Rwanda (12,337,138) Central Africa • Major Language: Kinyarwanda • Religious Freedom • 56.5% Roman Catholic; 26% Protestant; 11.1% Adventist; 4.6% Muslim; 0.1% Indigenous Beliefs; 1.7% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Glorify God, who is able to use national leaders to accomplish His purposes (Ezra 7:27-28)

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 3



***And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD (Job 1:12). And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life (Job 2:6).***

***For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist (Col. 1:16-17).*** God is Lord of all. There is nothing in all creation that is not His to command, including Satan. Satan answers to God as a subordinate, even though he does not strive to do His will. Before he can tempt and torment human beings, Satan has to have God's permission. That is not an easy concept for man to accept. We struggle to understand why God would allow an innocent to suffer at the devil's whim.

Written out in black and white, as it is in the Book of Job, the words are painful to read. Yet a beautiful picture emerges if we take a moment to look deeper into their meaning. ***And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26).*** God did not create mindless minions. He created man to stand beside Him. ***If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee shall be his desire, and thou shalt rule over him (4:7).*** He has given us the unique privilege of following Him, not because we have to, but because we want to. No other creature created by God has that right, not even Satan or the angels in heaven.

By allowing us to be tempted and tested, God is allowing us to freely choose Him. Many conclude that He is the author of our suffering because He permits it to happen, but God is not the cause of our misfortune. Pain and suffering entered this world through the decision of man, and God will not protect us from

the consequences of that decision. ***And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat*** (3:6). Satan is now a part of the world, and his influence and interference will cause us pain. We cannot be 'good' or 'righteous' enough to avoid him. Even so, we can draw comfort from God's presence. He will give us the strength to endure, and if we persevere and take refuge in Christ, we will ultimately receive our birthright. We will at last stand alongside God.

***There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it*** (1 Cor. 10:13).

**Thought for the Day:** *No force can truly oppose God, no matter what they may claim; they can only choose not to follow Him.*

**Christ Revealed:** In the conversation between Satan and God Almighty (Job 1:6-12). We can see the meaning of Christ's warning to Peter that Satan wanted to sift him ***as wheat*** (Luke 22:31). It is comforting to know that Satan cannot test us beyond the will of God.

**Word Studies:** 1:1 **eschewed** = avoided; 1:20 **rent** = tore; **mantle** = robe; 2:8 **potsherd** = piece of broken pottery; 3:16 **untimely birth** = stillborn; 3:24 **roarings** = grief, groanings; 4:2 **assay** = attempt; 4:4 **upholden** = helped, upheld.

**Pray for Government Officials:** Rep. Rick Larsen (WA), Rep. Adam Smith (WA) Rep Kevin Mullin (CA) • **Country:** Saint Barthelemy (7,267) Caribbean • Major Languages: French, English • Religious Freedom • Roman Catholic; Protestant; Jehovah's Witness • **Prayer Suggestion:** Humbly kneel before the Lord with a contrite heart as you pray (Ezra 9:5-6).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 4

***To him that is afflicted pity should be shewed from his friend; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty. My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook, and as the stream of brooks they pass away; Which are blackish by reason of the ice, and wherein the snow is hid: What time they wax warm, they vanish: when it is hot, they are consumed out of their place (Job 6:14-17).***

The suffering of Job was sudden and extreme. He'd lost his possessions, children, and health without warning that anything was amiss prior to the striking of catastrophe. His wife had given into despair and turned from him, raging in bitterness towards the Lord. For the beleaguered man, the appearance of his three friends must have appeared to be God sent. ***And when they lifted up their eyes afar off, and knew him not, they lifted up their voice, and wept; and they rent every one his mantle, and sprinkled dust upon their heads toward heaven. So they sat down with him upon the ground seven days and seven nights, and none spake a word unto him: for they saw that his grief was very great*** (Job 2:12-13). As they silently joined him in mourning, their presence provided him with desperately needed comfort and strength.

After a week of grief too powerful for words, Job began to verbally express his heartbreak and confusion. He was not seeking answers from his friends; in what he believed to be their supportive presence, he allowed his anguish to pour forth as he addressed his questions to God. Yet as soon as he began to speak, his friends switched from consolers to counselors. Drawing from the 'wisdom' of self-righteousness, they quickly concluded that Job was being punished for some horrible hidden sin that had drawn the wrath of God. Instead of offering comfort and understanding, they gently prodded him to confess the sin and seek the Lord's forgiveness and mercy.

The tone of their lectures ranged from mild censure to outright cruelty, and Job inwardly cringed at the force of their combined attack. ***To him that is afflicted pity should be shewed from his friend; but he forsaketh the fear of the Almighty. My brethren have dealt deceitfully as a brook,***

***and as the stream of brooks they pass away.*** Job knew the hallmarks of true friendship, having been a friend to many during his long and previously prosperous life. Now he was in desperate need, but he was forced to watch helplessly as his sole means of support was swept away and replaced by yet another level of torment. Friends had become foes in the blink of an eye, and Job was left reeling from the shock.

When a friend is suffering or in crisis, God expects us to offer comfort and support, not blame and judgment. We are NOT called to speak for God, and it is NOT our place to dig around in their lives in search of hidden sin. Even if it seems clear to us that their actions brought about their pain, lecturing them will not help. The next time you are in a position to comfort a friend in need, try offering only love, physical and emotional support, and continuous prayers instead of 'helpful' advice. You might be amazed at the results!

***A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another*** (John 13:34).

**Thought for the Day:** *We cannot dictate to another the terms of their relationship with God, but we can share in the joy of their service.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Job's sorrowful condition (Job 7:1-6). Christ was known as ***a Man of sorrows . . . acquainted with grief*** (Is. 53:3). On the cross, separated from God in His humanity, Jesus felt the pain of that separation as well as the pain and suffering for all the sins of mankind for all time (Mark 15:34).

**Word Studies:** 5:12 **devices** = plans, plotting; **enterprise** = schemes; 5:13 **froward** = deceitful; **carried headlong** = frustrated; 5:18 **maketh sore** = inflicts pain; 6:3 **swallowed up** = rash; without restraint; 7:21 **sleep in the dust** = be dead in the grave

**Pray for Government Officials:** Gov. Dan McKee (RI), Rep. Jason Smith (MO) • **Country:** St. Helena, Ascension, and Tristan da Cunha (7,776) South Atlantic Ocean • Major Language: English • Religious Freedom • Protestant (Anglican (majority); Baptist; Seventh-Day Adventist); Roman Catholic • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and fast as you confess your sins and intercede for our nation (Neh. 1:4-6).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 5

***I know it is so of a truth: but how should man be just with God? If He will contend with him, he cannot answer Him one of a thousand (Job 9:2-3). For He is not a man, as I am, that I should answer Him, and we should come together in judgment. Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, that might lay his hand upon us both (Job 9:32-33).***

As we read Job's rebuttal to the advice given by Bildad, we quickly pick up on his bitter hopelessness. ***I know it is so of a truth.*** Job believes, intellectually, that Bildad's interpretation of God's relationship with man is correct, but he is at a total loss for what he should do with that belief. Before his tribulations had begun, Job had been just as confident as his friends that he knew what God expected of him. Now, having been subjected to such intense suffering without any reason he could discern, he had to re-evaluate everything he thought he knew. He did not doubt God's sovereignty over man or His ability or right to control everything in existence (9:4-10). But Job's pain forced him to look deeper at his faith, and what he found pushed him to the edge of his sanity. Job concluded that the gulf between God, the Creator, and mankind, His fallen creation, was too great for a man to breach. ***But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you, that He will not hear (Is. 59:2).*** Although Job had a profound need to communicate with God, he believed that the differences were too great for that to be possible.

Praise God that today's believer will never have to suffer the utter despair of Job! ***For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time (1 Tim. 2:5-6).*** God Himself bridged the gap in the person of Jesus Christ His Son. ***For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life (John 3:16).*** No matter what our situation or how great our earthly pain, we can cling to the knowledge that even now He stands at the throne of God, making intercession for us. ***For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the***

**true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us** (Heb. 9:24).

We are blessed beyond measure to be the children of a loving God. He knows our weaknesses and fears, and He knows we are ill-equipped to handle them on our own. From the moment that we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior, we will never be alone again. **And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever** (John 14:16). God has sent the Holy Spirit to dwell within us to provide us with comfort, support, and guidance for the rest of our earthly lives.

**Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered** (Rom. 8:26).

**Thought for the Day:** *God does not lower Himself to hear our troubles; we are elevated into His presence to speak them.*

**Christ Portrayed:** Through the daysman (mediator) that Job longs for (Job 9:33). Christ is the only **Mediator between God and men** (I Tim. 2:5).

**Word Studies:** 9:33 **daysman** = mediator; 9:34 **rod** = chastisement; 10:11 **fenced** = knit me together; 11:6 **exacteth** = demands; 11:14 **tabernacles** = dwellings; 11:19 **make suit unto thee** = seek your favor; 12:19 **spoiled** = stripped and plundered.

**Pray for Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. Scott Peters (CA), Rep. Jerry Carl (AL), Rep. Marcy Kaptur (OH), Rep. Brad Wenstrup (OH) • **Country:** St. Kitts and Nevis (51,538) Caribbean • Major Language: English • Religious Freedom • 50% Anglican; 25% Roman Catholic; 25% Other (Protestant; Seventh-day Adventist; Jehovah's Witness; Mormon; Rastafarian; Muslim; Hindu; Baha'i) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Confess and forsake any known sin (Neh. 1:6).

**Optional Reading:** Galatians 6

***Then call Thou, and I will answer: or let me speak, and answer Thou me. How many are mine iniquities and sins? make me to know my transgression and my sin. Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, and holdest me for Thine enemy? Wilt Thou break a leaf driven to and fro? and wilt Thou pursue the dry stubble (Job 13:22-25)?***

Today's reading is simultaneously one of triumphant faith and bitter despair. Job had initially hoped that the discourse with his friends, no matter how emotionally painful, might have helped him understand the situation he found himself in, but now he realized that was false hope. His friends were so fixated on his supposed 'secret sin' that they could not view what was happening from any other angle. To them, the solution was simple – repent and humbly accept God's judgment. They were baffled and growing increasingly angry that Job had the audacity to stand before them and continue proclaiming his innocence, and Job had concluded that it was pointless to continue trying to explain himself to them. ***What ye know, the same do I know also: I am not inferior unto you (Job 13:2). But ye are forgers of lies, ye are all physicians of no value. O that ye would altogether hold your peace! and it should be your wisdom (13:4-5).*** Instead, Job chose to direct His plea for understanding directly to God. ***Surely I would speak to the Almighty, and I desire to reason with God (13:3).***

His decision made, Job begins by stating, in no uncertain terms, his allegiance to God. ***Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him: but I will maintain mine own ways before Him. He also shall be my salvation: for an hypocrite shall not come before Him (13:15-16).*** Despite everything that had happened to him, Job's trust in the Lord was absolute. The devil was wrong when he proclaimed to God that Job would curse Him if subjected to great bodily suffering (2:4-5). Job was in immeasurable physical, emotional, and spiritual pain, but he still proclaimed God to be his ***salvation***. Job still lived as he had always lived, by faith. He knew that if only he could speak with God, all would be made clear.

Yet even in the light of his great faith, Job's despair and an-



guish were palpable. No matter what he asked, God remained silent. ***Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, and holdest me for Thine enemy?*** Job held fast to his faith, but his hope was utterly gone. He did not expect to survive his ordeal. Despite his pleas to them to stop haranguing him, Job's friends persisted. Job moved from defending himself against their attacks to shaming them for their words. Job was adamant that had the situation been reversed, he would have expressed compassion and brotherly love, not judgment and condemnation (16:2-5). Having had all he could stand, he dismissed them as irrelevant and unnecessary for support in his grief and turned his face toward God. ***Also now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high. My friends scorn me: but mine eye poureth out tears unto God*** (16:19-20).

***For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal*** (II Cor. 4:16-18).

**Thought for the Day:** *Ultimately, searching the world for answers to our problems is pointless; only with God can we find the truth.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the smiting of Job (Job 16:10). Christ also was struck by those who ridiculed Him (Matt. 27:29-44; John 18:22-23; 19:2-3; Ps. 22:7-8; 109:25; Is. 53:3-5,7-10).

**Word Studies:** 14:5 **days are determined . . . with Thee** = allotted time to live depends on You; 15:4 **restrainest** = hinder; 15:25 **strengtheneth himself against the Almighty** = defies the Almighty; 15:26 **upon the thick bosses of his bucklers** = with massive shields.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Government Officials:** Rep. Andy Ogles(TN), Rep. Paul Tonko (NY), Rep. Jen Kiggans (VA) • **Country:** St. Lucia (163,362) Caribbean • Major Languages: English, French Patois • Religious Freedom • 61.5% Roman Catholic; 25.5% Protestant; 3.4% Other Christian; 1.9% Rastafarian; 0.4% Other; 1.4% Unspecified; 5.9% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** The Word of God, confession, and prayer bring the believer into close communion with God (Neh. 9:2-5).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 1

***My breath is corrupt, my days are extinct, the graves are ready for me. Are there not mockers with me? and doth not mine eye continue in their provocation? Lay down now, put me in a surety with thee; who is he that will strike hands with me? For thou hast hid their heart from understanding: therefore shalt thou not exalt them (Job 17:1-4). Upright men shall be astonished at this, and the innocent shall stir up himself against the hypocrite. The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger. But as for you all, do ye return, and come now: for I cannot find one wise man among you (Job 17:8-10).***

Job's life lay in ruins. His peace and joy had drained away, leaving him with only pain and despair. Even his closest friends had turned against him. Though they initially showed sympathy for his plight, his continued protestations of innocence had frustrated and annoyed them. They mocked his claims of righteousness and insisted he was punished for some hidden, grievous sin. Job felt as if he were being victimized twice, once through the destruction of his life and the second time through the harsh judgment of his friends.

Job's confusion and anguish over what he perceived to be God's unexplained abandonment of him is apparent in his words, but his anger was reserved for his friends. Just as they had mocked his claims of innocence, he mocked their delusions of wisdom. The more they said, the more Job became convinced of their foolishness. ***But as for you all, do ye return, and come now: for I cannot find one wise man among you.*** His friends spoke with self-confident assurance, but they answered none of his questions. Job concluded that God had hidden the truth from his friends as assuredly as He had from Job and that their empty words were their desperate attempt to alleviate and hide their personal fears and inadequacies.

Job was not without hope, though it brought him little comfort. ***The righteous also shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall be stronger and stronger.*** He believed in the power and authority of God to carry the righteous through

trials and tribulations and deposit them stronger on the other side. Still, he concluded that God's silence meant ***the grave*** was the only "other side" waiting for him. ***If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister. And where is now my hope? as for my hope, who shall see it? They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when our rest together is in the dust*** (Job 17:13-16). Job's faith was strong, but his mortal body was overwhelmed with physical, mental, and emotional pain. He had resigned himself to what he believed to be the inevitable end, and even sitting in a circle of what once were his closest friends, he knew he would face that end utterly alone.

***And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me*** (Mark 15:33-34)?

**Thought for the Day:** *Even those closest to us cannot fully understand our personal relationship with God, nor do they need to. It is His private gift to us.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the ***Redeemer*** (Job 19:25). Jesus Christ is our Redeemer. By His death, He provided the required sacrifice to pay for our sins (Acts 20:28; Eph. 1:13-14; Rev. 5:9). ***Our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity*** (Titus 2:13-14).

**Word Studies:** 17:1 **My breath is corrupt** = My life is ruined; 17:6 **a tabret** = an object of contempt, ridicule; 17:14 **corruption** = decay; 17:16 **bars of the pit** = unseen state; **our rest . . . is in the dust** = we are buried; 18:9 **gin** = snare, trap; 18:20 **day** = fate; tragic end; 19:3 **make yourselves strange to me** = wrong me; 19:14 **familiar** = close; 19:17 **strange** = unbearable, repulsive; 19:19 **inward** = dearest, intimate; 19:27 **reins** = heart.

**Pray for Government Officials:** Rep. Josh Brecheen (OK), Rep. Pete Aguilar (CA) • **Country:** St. Martin (31,530) Caribbean • Major Languages: French, English, Dutch • Religious Freedom • Roman Catholic, Jehovah's Witnesses, Protestant, Hindu • **Prayer Suggestion:** Intercede for your nation and friends in prayer with fasting and a self-sacrificing spirit (Esth. 4:16).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 2

**Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them** (Job 21:7-9).

How much simpler would it be to live in a world where we could determine the state of a person's soul by observing their worldly success? This is the world in which Job's friends honestly believed they lived. The words of Zophar the Naamathite rang with the power of his conviction. Indeed, viewed from a heavenly perspective, his words speak the absolute truth. Suffering and destruction are certainly what ultimately await the wicked. **But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death** (Rev. 21:8).

Zophar, however, was speaking solely from the viewpoint of a mortal man. His well-organized mind placed everyone neatly into one of two categories – the righteous, who lived according to God's will, and the wicked, who did not. He believed that righteousness was always rewarded and that evil deeds brought pain and suffering. Therefore, you could tell the righteous from the wicked simply by observing their worldly successes. He acknowledged that the wicked might occasionally appear to prosper for a short time but that God would always “catch up with them” in the end (20:27-29).

Job understood all too well the foolishness of Zophar's words. **Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power?** He knew from experience that the righteous frequently suffered and that the wicked often prospered. He scoffed at the idea that God needed to “catch up” to anyone since He was the Creator and Judge of all. **Shall any teach God knowledge? seeing He judgeth those that are high** (21:22). Job believed that his friends were grasping at straws in their attempts to comfort him and that their words were based on faulty data. **How then comfort ye me in vain, seeing in your answers there remaineth falsehood** (21:34)?

As he has done with each of his friends in turn, Job does an admirable job of outlining the flaws in Zophar's reasoning, but then he jumps to an erroneous conclusion. Job explains that God is not swayed by the behaviors of His creation and that it does not matter if a man is righteous or wicked; blessings and curses fall with equal measure, and all will come to the same end (21:23-26). Job's faith is still strong. He believes in the One True God and is still determined to live within His will, but at this point, he doubts the Lord's love for him or any of His creation.

We live in a fallen world, and pain, grief, and heartache are all components of it (1 Pet. 4:12-19). Even so, we do not ever have to suffer alone. God's Word reminds us that He is there (Josh. 1:9; Matt. 28:20), He cares (Matt. 10:29-31), and He will bring about good from even our darkest moments of despair (Rom. 8:28). As Christians, we must remember that earthly suffering is just a temporary condition, but God's love is constant.

***And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away*** (Rev. 21:4).

**Thought for the Day:** *We are unqualified to judge others' standings in the eyes of God; each person's relationship is unique and personal.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Job's faithfulness to God throughout his suffering (Job 23:10-12). Christ's faithfulness to the Father is seen as He prayed for the Father's will to be done, not His own (Luke 22:42).

**Word Studies:** 21:2 **consolations** = sympathy; 21:3 **Suffer** = Allow; 21:8 **seed** = children; 21:10 **gendereth** = breeds; **casteth not** = does not miscarry; 21:29 **tokens** = testimony and experience; 24:5 **rising betimes for a prey** = seeking diligently for food; 24:21 **evil entreateth** = cruelly takes advantage of.

**Pray for Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Ralph Norman (SC), Rep. Don Beyer (VA), Rep. Deborah Ross (NC), Gov. Josh Shapiro (PA) • **Country:** St. Pierre and Miquelon (5,716) North America - North Atlantic Ocean • Major Language: French • Religious Freedom • 99% Roman Catholic; 1% Other • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray and intercede for your family (Job 1:5).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 3

***How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even to the moon, and it shineth not; yea, the stars are not pure in His sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm (Job 25:4-6)?***

Occasionally when we read through Scripture, our hearts can be struck by a 'hidden' message. Although it might not qualify as the passage's main idea, it reveals itself as a lesson that speaks to our hearts and allows us to better understand God's will. Such is the case with Bildad's short but impassioned speech in chapter 25.

***How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?*** When Bildad spoke these words, he meant them as a compliment to God and an indictment of the presumed arrogance of Job. The point he was trying to make was a righteous one. God is much greater than man can ever aspire to be. The Lord exists on a plane that is beyond human comprehension. However, in an effort to emphasize the magnificence of the Lord, Bildad maligned God's greatest creation. ***And God said, Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth (Gen. 1:26).*** We were created in the image of God, and He loves us with an everlasting love. ***The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee (Jer. 31:3).*** In his attempt to glorify Him, Bildad managed to insult and criticize God instead.

***Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).*** Humility is an essential component of our service to the Lord. We can't follow God if we are blind to everything other than our own accomplishments, needs, and desires. But being humble does not mean being self-deprecating. ***For in Him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also His offspring (Acts 17:28).*** We are the pinnacle of God's creation. That gives

us an indelible worth that would be a sin against our Creator to deny. When we put ourselves down and deny the gifts that God has given us, we essentially tell God that we think He made a mistake. If we claim, as Bildad claimed, that we are no better than the animals that crawl upon the earth, then in the same breath, we are making the same comparison of God. God is not a **worm**, and neither are those He created in His image. We, alone amongst the many wonders of creation, have been offered a most precious gift, an opportunity to become true children of God. ***But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name*** (John 1:12). By quietly respecting ourselves and the life that God has given us, we are giving Him the honor that is His due.

***For Thou hast possessed my reins: Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise Thee; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are Thy works; and that my soul knoweth right well*** (Ps.139:13-14).

**Thought for the Day:** *To be impressed with what we have done demonstrates unwarranted pride; to be impressed by what God has enabled us to do demonstrates reverent understanding.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Job's compassion for others (Job 29:15-17,21-41 25). Jesus was moved to compassion when He saw great crowds in need of healing and feeding (Matt. 14:14; 15:30-39).

**Word Studies:** 27:22 **fain flee** = desire to flee; 29:14 **diadem** = turban.

**Pray for Bible Pathway Printer:** Pollock Printing, Nashville, TN • **Country:** St. Vincent and The Grenadines (102,918) Caribbean • Major Languages: English, French Patios • Religious Freedom • 75% Protestant; 13% Roman Catholic; 12% Other (Hindu, Seventh-Day Adventist, Other Protestant) • **Prayer Suggestion:** Intercede in prayer for your friends (Job 42:7-10).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 4



***If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; If I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much; If I beheld the sun when it shined, or the moon walking in brightness; And my heart hath been secretly enticed, or my mouth hath kissed my hand: This also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above (Job 31:24-28).***

In today's reading, Job once again attempts to answer the charges his friends have laid against him. In his latest speech, Eliphaz advanced the theory that perhaps Job had been lacking in mercy for others, which was why his suffering was not evoking any mercy from God. ***But as for the mighty man, he had the earth; and the honourable man dwelt in it. Thou hast sent widows away empty, and the arms of the fatherless have been broken. Therefore snares are round about thee, and sudden fear troubleth thee*** (Job 22:8-10). Bildad then opined that perhaps it was Job's arrogance in not accepting the fallen nature of man that had caused God to turn His back on him (25:2-6). As Job disputed his friend's conclusions, he painted a clear picture of how he had lived his life pre-tragedy.

God had described Job as ***a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil*** (1:8). Job had expanded on God's description without even realizing it, revealing to us a life that had been openly and selflessly lived. Job had reveled in the blessings of God, but not as a selfish, miserly man might. He had not hoarded his riches, concerned first and foremost with his own welfare. On the contrary, he had shared all that he had with the poor, paying particular attention to the plight of widows and orphans. He had seen to it that the naked were clothed and the hungry were fed, and he had ensured that those traveling through his town were afforded a safe and secure place to rest. Perhaps most tellingly, he had done all this while living a transparent life. ***If I covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding mine iniquity in my bosom: Did I fear a great multitude, or did the contempt of families terrify me, that I kept silence, and went not out***

**of the door** (31:33-34)? Job never claimed to be perfect, nor did he fear what others might think of him. He was not driven by the need to maintain a reputation with his peers but rather by the desire to meet the expectations of God.

***Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand, Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye gave Me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave Me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took Me in: Naked, and ye clothed Me: I was sick, and ye visited Me: I was in prison, and ye came unto Me*** (Matt. 25:34-36). Well over a millennia before the coming of Christ, Job had lived as a shining example of all that He calls us to be. Job had accepted God's love and allowed it to fill him to the brim, and he had in turn shared that love with everyone he ever came into contact with. Job shone brightly with the light of God, so much so that even Satan had been forced to take notice.

***Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*** (Matt. 5:16).

**Thought for the Day:** *We can keep no secrets from God. If we truly hold His opinion above all others, we shouldn't feel the need to hide anything.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through the ridicule and affliction which Job suffered (Job 30:10-11). Christ was afflicted and spit upon. After Pilate delivered Jesus to the Roman soldiers, they beat Him, hit Him with an open hand and spit on Him; and then they crucified Him (Mark 15:15-20; Is. 50:6; 53:2-5; Matt. 27:26-31; John 18:22; 19:1-3).

**Word Studies:** 30:2 **whereto** = how; 30:4 **mallows** = plants of the salt marsh; 30:14 **wide breaking in of waters** = waters gushing through a wide break in the wall; 30:27 **My bowels boiled** = My heart is continually troubled.

**Pray for Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Blake Moore (UT) Sen. Dianne Feinstein (CA), Sen. Elizabeth Warren (MA), Rep. Adam Schiff (CA) • **Country:** Samoa (218,764) South Pacific Ocean • Major Languages: Samoan, English • Religious Freedom • 57.4% Protestant; 19.4% Roman Catholic; 15.2% Mormon; 1.7% Worship Centre; 5.5% Other Christian; 0.7% Other 0.1% None/Unspecified • **Prayer Suggestion:** Delight in the Word of God; prayerfully meditate upon it for daily guidance (Ps. 1:2).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 5

**Look unto the heavens, and see; and behold the clouds which are higher than thou. If thou sinnest, what doest thou against Him? or if thy transgressions be multiplied, what doest thou unto Him? If thou be righteous, what givest thou Him? or what receiveth He of thine hand? Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man (Job 35:5-8). Behold, God is great, and we know him not, neither can the number of his years be searched out (Job 36:26).**

The last to speak was Elihu, the youngest of Job's friends (Job 32:4). After listening to Job's complaints and the non-answers provided by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, Elihu was consumed with what he believed to be righteous rage against his elders. To Elihu, Job's actual sin was declaring himself pure before God and demanding an explanation as to why he was suffering. **For Job hath said, I am righteous: and God hath taken away my judgment (34:6).** He also couldn't understand how the other three had sat there and listened to Job's words without confronting him on the grievous sin that he was committing right in front of them. **Job hath spoken without knowledge, and his words were without wisdom. My desire is that Job may be tried unto the end because of his answers for wicked men. For he addeth rebellion unto his sin, he clappeth his hands among us, and multiplieth his words against God (34:33-37).**

As with the three men who spoke before him, Elihu believed that Job had likely brought his suffering on himself. Where he differed from them was over their belief that Job was suffering divine punishment for a specific sin. Elihu was beside himself with anger at the implication that mankind's behavior predicated the actions of God. **Yea, I attended unto you, and, behold, there was none of you that convinced Job, or that answered his words: Lest ye should say, We have found out wisdom: God thrusteth him down, not man (32:12-13).** Elihu stood in front of the other four, confident in his knowledge of God, and set himself out as the mediator that Job had sought (9:33). He then explained that God was our superior in all things, far beyond

our understanding. Nothing a man said or did could affect God in any way, positive or negative. ***Thy wickedness may hurt a man as thou art; and thy righteousness may profit the son of man.*** Elihu did not express an opinion on the root cause of Job's troubles, but he was adamant that Job's actual sin was in 'blaming' God and demanding an explanation from Him.

In a limited context, Elihu was not wrong in his assessment of Job's sin. God Himself made a similar point when He broke His silence and spoke to Job. ***Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding*** (38:1-4). But overall, Elihu proved himself to be just as guilty of prideful arrogance as he accused Job of being. Even as he spoke the words, ***Behold, God is great, and we know Him not,*** Elihu claimed to have both the knowledge and authority to speak for God (36:2).

***For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith*** (Rom. 12:3).

**Thought for the Day:** *Pride tempts us into speaking for God; when we attempt to usurp His authority to elevate ourselves above our peers, we only succeed in showing our ignorance.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the One who watches how we live and what we do (Job 34:21). The Lord keeps His eyes on ***the righteous*** (I Pet. 3:12).

**Word Studies:** 34:36 **wicked men** = evil men; 36:8 **holden** = held fast; 36:16 **no straitness** = no restraint or restriction; 36:23 **enjoined** = appointed.

**Pray for Government Official:** Justice Clarence Thomas (US Supreme Court), Rep. Nick Lalota (NY) • **Country:** San Marino (32,742) Enclave in Italy • Major Language: Italian • Religious Freedom • Roman Catholic • **Prayer Suggestion:** The Lord is a shield for you in times of trouble (Ps. 3:1-3).

**Optional Reading:** Ephesians 6

***Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said, Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge? Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me (Job 38:1-3).***

Today's reading brings us to the point in the narrative we have all been waiting for. At long last, God breaks His silence and speaks. Ignoring, for the moment, the rather pompous group of men that had appointed themselves as His representatives against His servant, God speaks directly to Job. As in all things, God speaks on His terms. He neither answers Job's questions about the nature of Job's sins nor offers any explanation for Job's suffering. Instead, God comes before Job with multiple questions of His own.

We know, from His conversations with Satan, that God held Job in high esteem (Job 1:8; 2:3). Satan may have been shocked when Job had held fast to his faith even when all of God's blessings had been withdrawn and replaced with curses, but God had known the steadfastness of Job's heart all along. God, therefore, did not attempt to bolster Job's faith by reaffirming His love for him, nor did He directly address the wrong-headed nature of the other men's accusations against Job. God took the opportunity that Satan's evil machinations had given Him to expand Job's understanding of the nature of mankind in correlation to God and to emphatically remind him of the all-sufficiency of the Lord to whom he had declared his allegiance.

***Gird up now thy loins like a man; for I will demand of thee, and answer thou me. God's questions fell thick and fast. Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? or who hath stretched the line upon it? Whereupon are the foundations thereof fastened? or who laid the corner stone thereof; When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy (38:4-7)? Where is the way where light dwelleth? and as for darkness, where is the place thereof, That thou shouldest take it to the bound thereof, and that thou shouldest know the paths to the house thereof (38:19-***

20)? Although He nominally was seeking an answer from Job, God knew full well that neither Job nor any other person present had the knowledge to answer Him.

Over the course of his questioning, the Lord listed many different aspects of creation and the natural world, each time challenging Job to explain them. He then referenced the many powerful animals in creation, asking Job if he knew how to show dominion over the monstrous beasts. Through His words, God reminded Job that He is the Creator AND the Controller of all things, from the dawning of the day and the pull of the tides to the ebbs and flow of blessings in the lives of men and beasts. The more God spoke, the clearer His message became.

At no time throughout Job's entire ordeal had God been absent. Furthermore, he had always been in complete control. God fully understood what had occurred and why. And in that knowledge, Job would have to be content.

***For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts*** (Is. 55:8-9).

**Thought for the Day:** *When we speak to others of God, we would do well to remember that He is also listening.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the One who ***laid the foundations of the earth*** (Job 38:4). By Christ, God created our universe (Heb. 1:1-2). ***All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made*** (John 1:1-3).

**Word Studies:** 38:9 **swaddlingband** = wrapping; 38:12 **dayspring** = dawn; 38:31 **Pleiades** = the seven stars that stood for the 7 influences of spring; **bands of Orion** = storms; 39:9 **unicorn** = wild ox; 40:4 **vile** = insignificant; 40:21 **fens** = marshes.

**Pray for Staff:** Ryan McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Haley Stevens (MI), Rep. Shontel Brown (OH) • **Country:** Sao Tome and Principe (190,428) Central Africa, Gulf of Guinea • **Major Languages:** Portuguese, Forro • **Religious Freedom** • 70.3% Catholic; 3.4% Evangelical; 2% Apostolic; 1.8% Adventist; 3.1% Other (Including Muslim); 19.4% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Pray aloud with your voice – God hears (Ps. 3:4).

**Optional Reading:** Philippians 1

***I know that Thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee. Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not. Hear, I beseech Thee, and I will speak: I will demand of Thee, and declare Thou unto me. I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes*** (Job 42:2-6).

After listening to the Words of God, Job spoke one last time. This one was short and to the point, unlike his earlier lengthy speeches that focused primarily on his righteousness and confusion. ***Who is he that hideth counsel without knowledge? therefore have I uttered that I understood not; things too wonderful for me, which I knew not.*** Job stood before God and confessed his sin, which he had been unable to recognize before his trials. Job confessed the sin of pride. Although he had always served God with a willing heart, Job had taken great pride in his righteousness and knowledge of the Lord. ***I put on righteousness, and it clothed me: my judgment was as a robe and a diadem*** (29:14). Now, after hearing from God Himself, Job knew that the spiritual righteousness that he had once held in such high esteem had been based on faulty human logic. Much like his three friends, Job had categorized God. In dismay, Job admitted this to God. ***I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.***

We must understand that, at the time he spoke these words, nothing had physically changed for Job. He was still covered in boils and suffering from unrelenting pain. Yet the one question that had vexed him from the very beginning, “Why?” no longer mattered to him at all. It was enough for him to know that God knew and that God was there. Job’s great faith had always been the technical basis for his life, but now it went beyond knowledge. Job had transitioned to a profoundly personal relationship with God. He saw the true nature of God, and he was spiritually fulfilled by it. Job was at



peace at last. ***For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's*** (Rom. 14:8).

There is much that we can learn from Job. His patience in the face of adversity is regularly lauded, as is His unwavering faith in the Lord. His willingness to be changed by God is just as important, although less widely discussed. Despite what he thought he knew, he listened with his whole heart when God spoke. God still has much to say to us today from the pages of His Word. Just as he did with Job, He seeks to change his relationship with us from a doctrinal one to a personal one. Are you willing to be changed by Him today?

***For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ*** (II Cor. 4:6).

**Thought for the Day:** *It is easy to accept God's redirection when we know we are wrong, but we must be prepared to do so even when we believe we are right.*

**Christ Revealed:** Through Job's praying for his "friends" (Job 42:10). We are reminded that ***it is Christ . . . who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us*** (Rom. 8:34).

**Word Studies:** 41:13 **discover the face of his garment** = strip off his outer coat of armor; 41:17 **sundered** = separated; 41:23 **flakes** = folds; 42:6 **abhor** = loathe.

**Pray for Staff:** Gilbert Palafox • **Government Officials:** Justice Sonia M. Sotomayor (US Supreme Court) • **Country:** Saudi Arabia (27,345,986) Middle East • **Major Language:** Arabic • Any religion other than Islam is prohibited • 100% Muslim • **Prayer Suggestion:** Offer up your prayer to God, your King, who will hearken to your prayer (Ps. 5:2).

**Optional Reading:** Philippians 2

**Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision (Ps. 2:1-4).**

**Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things? The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against His Christ** (Acts 4:25-26). This question plagued David during his tenure as king of Israel. It was asked again by Paul in the aftermath of Jesus' persecution and crucifixion, and it remains highly relevant today. Who do we (mankind as a whole) think we are to stand against God? Who are we to question His Word, adding to it and subtracting from it to make it pleasing and acceptable to us? Who are we to declare His work flawed and in need of revision? Who are we to form governments that speak His Name while denying His authority? Governments that, through their compromises and political diplomacy, declare Him one among many, not worthy of any more or less respect than the rest.

Who are we (in the universal sense)? We are fools. **Through desire a man, having separated himself, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom. A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover itself** (Prov. 18:1-2). **The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abominable works, there is none that doeth good** (Ps. 14:1). We think we are making a stand, taking charge of our own lives, and leading the way to enlightenment. When really, we are stumbling alone in the dark, pitching tantrums and rebelling against God even as we refuse to acknowledge Him.

**He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision.** God is still in complete control. His plan is not being thwarted. In the long run, the only people we hurt with our rebellious delusions are ourselves. Jesus was

persecuted and crucified, but He arose, triumphant over sin and death. He is our hope, our future, and our way out of the madness surrounding us. Cleansed in His blood, standing in His light, we can separate ourselves from those who wish to remain fools. ***Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him*** (2:10-12).

***And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption*** (Acts 13:32-37).

**Thought for the Day:** *The struggle of many to find acceptance and meaning in life is a direct consequence of their willful rejection of God.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the Son of God (Ps. 2:7). ***God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life*** (John 3:16; Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5).

**Word Studies:** 2:2 **Anointed** (One) = Messiah (Hebrew) and Christ (Greek); 5:6 **leasing** = lies.

**Pray for Staff** • Kevin Jennings • **Country:** Senegal (13,635,927) Western Africa • Major Language: French • Religious Freedom • 94% Muslim; 5% Christian (Mostly Roman Catholic); 1% Indigenous Beliefs • **Prayer Suggestion:** Begin each morning with prayer (Ps. 5:3).

**Optional Reading:** Philippians 3

**How long wilt Thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death; Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in Thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation. I will sing unto the LORD, because He hath dealt bountifully with me (Ps. 13:1-6).**

Sometimes, life is hard. This is a consequence of living in a fallen world, and it's not something we can avoid. Frustration, disappointment, failure, rejection, persecution, betrayal – we will experience all of these to varying degrees over the course of our lives. Some come to Christ with the misconception that knowing Him means their troubles are over, but Jesus himself made it clear that that's not the way it works. **Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also** (John 15:20). What we do have as Christians are the reassurance that our troubles are temporary and the promise that we don't have to face them alone. **These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world** (16:33).

In the 13th Psalm, David provides a beautiful example of how to get through these times of distress without falling into despair. First, he reminds us that we do not have to bear them alone. **Consider and hear me, O Lord my God.** God's ear is always turned to us, open and ready to receive. He is strong enough to handle our anger, pain, and fear and will never turn us away unheard or unsupported.

Next, David reminds us to trust in God's truth and the promises He has already provided us. We belong to Him, and He takes care of His own. He is faithful and loving, and His mercy and grace will always be visible to those who choose to

look, no matter how challenging life becomes. The salvation He has granted us through the redeeming blood of Jesus anchors us to Him and assures us of eternal life in His presence, and nothing we might be faced with on this earth can change that.

Lastly, David demonstrates the best way for us to get a handle on our emotions in the here and now. ***I have trusted in Thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because He hath dealt bountifully with me.*** Instead of dwelling on our misfortunes, we should count our blessings. Trust in God, rejoice in His bounty, and lift our hearts, minds, and voices in grateful song. God is here, and He will carry us through.

***Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light*** (Matt. 11:28-30).

**Thought for the Day:** *To focus solely on worldly strife and pain is to let sin have more sway in our lives than God.*

**Christ Revealed:** In the prophecy that God would not allow His **Holy One** to see decay (Ps. 16:10). This foretells the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:25-27; 13:35-39). When Jesus spoke His Revelation to John, He declared: ***I am He that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death*** (Rev. 1:18).

**Word Studies:** 10:5 **puffeth at** = makes light of; 10:13 **contemn** = defy; despise; 11:3 **foundations** = principles of society based on the Word of God.

**Pray for Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Government Officials:** Rep. David Scott (GA), Ashley Hinson (IA) • **Country:** Serbia (7,209,764) Southeastern Europe • Major Language: Serbian • Restricted Religious Freedom • 84.6% Serbian Orthodox; 5% Catholic; 3.1% Muslim; 1% Protestant; 1.1% Atheist; 0.8% Other; 4.5% Undeclared/Unknown • **Prayer Suggestion:** Glorify the person, character, and attributes of God as you pray a prayer of praise (Ps. 8:1-9).

**Optional Reading:** Philippians 4

***For by Thee I have run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall. As for God, His way is perfect: the word of the LORD is tried: He is a buckler to all those that trust in Him. For who is God save the LORD? or who is a rock save our God? It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places. He teacheth my hands to war, so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. Thou hast also given me the shield of Thy salvation: and Thy right hand hath holden me up, and Thy gentleness hath made me great (Ps. 18:29-35).***

***In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried unto my God: He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears (Ps. 18:6).*** When David found himself in a bad situation, he didn't panic. Instead, he called on God for protection and support. ***He bowed the heavens also, and came down: and darkness was under his feet (18:9).*** God answered him, as David had known he would, and David felt the Lord as a physical presence around him. ***He sent from above, He took me, He drew me out of many waters (18:16).*** David had initially felt himself being sucked down under the weight of his troubles, but once he turned them over to God, he felt himself being lifted up and placed once again on solid ground. ***He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them which hated me: for they were too strong for me (18:17).*** David was under no illusion that he could have won this battle on his own. ***He brought me forth also into a large place; He delivered me, because He delighted in me (18:19).*** He rejoiced in being brought to safety by God and took comfort from the truth that God loved him enough to save him.

In the eyes of the world, David was an extraordinary man who achieved great things. From the moment he burst onto the scene, an unknown shepherd boy standing against the mighty giant Goliath, he was lauded for his heroism, strength, and bravery. As his reputation grew, so too did the praise of the world. ***And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands,***

**and David his ten thousands** (I Sam. 18:7). **But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he went out and came in before them** (18:16).

It would have been easy for David to buy into the world's image of him. He could have internalized the many gifts God had given him and rationalized that he (David) was cleverly using them for God's glory, thereby keeping himself the star of the show. But he didn't. Instead, David remained humble. He took nothing for granted and received every gift from God with gratitude and awe. ***It is God that girdeth me with strength, and maketh my way perfect. He maketh my feet like hinds' feet, and setteth me upon my high places.*** He praised God for everything and blamed Him for nothing, confident that God's love was enough to sustain him forevermore.

***Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*** (James 1:17-18).

**Thought for the Day:** *It is easier to be humble in your achievements when you take the time to reflect on God's role in them.*

**Christ Revealed:** As the One to whom the Psalms refer when they speak of the nails that pierced His hands and feet on the cross and the parting of His clothing (Ps. 22:16,18). ***When they had crucified Him, they parted His garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take*** (Mark 15:24; also Matt. 27:35; Luke 23:34; John 19:18).

**Word Studies:** 18:2 **horn of my salvation** = my strong deliverer; 18:26 **froward** (first use) = crooked; **froward** (second use) = opposed; 18:45 **close places** = fortresses or strongholds; 22:5 **confounded** = put to shame.

**Pray for Staff:** Tiffany Parisi • **Country:** Seychelles (91,650) a group of islands in the Indian Ocean • Major Languages: Seychellois Creole, English, French • Religious Freedom • 76.2% Roman Catholic; 10.6% Protestant; 2.4% Other Christian; 2.4% Hindu; 1.6% Muslim; 1.1.% Non-Christian; 4.8% Unspecified; 0.9% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Let your prayers express gratitude to God for His wonderful works (Ps. 9:1).

**Optional Reading:** Colossians 1



***The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever (Ps. 23:1-6).***

This short Psalm is one of the best-known, most often quoted passages in the Old Testament. From its verses, we draw comfort and strength. The image of God leading us, guarding us, and painstakingly caring for us acts as a balm for bruised and battered hearts, and the promise of an eternal future ***in the house of the LORD*** soothes our troubled spirits. Oftentimes we read or recite this Psalm to aid in restoring our faith in the face of otherwise unbearable sorrow. Yet, while the words offer tremendous comfort in times of tragedy, they apply equally well to our day-to-day journey with the Lord.

No other livestock requires quite as much attention as sheep. When left alone, a sheep will find its own path, blindly following it back and forth until it becomes rutted and spoiled, gradually wandering further and further in its own direction until it has become separated from the rest of the flock. Lost and alone, it will soon perish if it is not found.

Human beings, by nature, are much like sheep. We, too, will blindly and habitually follow a single path, becoming so wrapped up in our own affairs that we lose sight of all else. Left to our own devices, we wander down crooked walkways that ultimately lead to utter ruin and destruction. This is what would happen to every single one of us were it not for the guidance and the saving grace of our Lord and Savior. ***All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all (Is. 53:6).***

The 23rd Psalm should be a message we reflect upon daily, not just during times of weakness and fear. The enemy has laid his trap; he waits for us stray from the **paths of righteousness** so that he might snare us while we are alone and confused. ***In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*** (II Cor. 4:4). It is only our Lord, our great and faithful **Shepherd**, that ensures our safety and can lead us back to the path of righteousness, but He will do so only for those who are willing to follow Him. We must accept Him as our Shepherd and give ourselves entirely to His loving care. Only then will we know the peace that comes from living within the all-encompassing protection of God.

***My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand*** (John 10:27-28).

**Thought for the Day:** *Accepting the folly of our nature is the first step to accepting we need God's guidance.*

**Christ Revealed:** As our **Shepherd** (Ps. 23). Christ called Himself **the Good Shepherd** and vowed to lay down **His life for the sheep** (John 10:11).

**Word Studies:** 26:1 **slide** = waver, fall; 26:2 **reins** = desires and thoughts; 26:4 **dissemblers** = pretenders, deceitful ones; 28:2 **Holy Oracle** = Mercy Seat in the Holy of Holies; 28:3 **mischief** = evil.

**Pray for Staff:** Judy McCrary • **Government Officials:** Rep. Virginia Foxx (NC) • **Country:** Sierra Leone (5,743,725) Western Africa • **Major Languages:** English, Mende, Temne, Krio • **Religious Freedom** • 60% Muslim; 10% Christian; 30% Indigenous Beliefs • **Prayer Suggestion:** Trust the Lord; He will never forsake you (Ps. 9:10).

**Optional Reading:** Colossians 2

***Rejoice in the LORD, O ye righteous: for praise is comely for the upright. Praise the LORD with harp: sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings. Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise. For the word of the LORD is right; and all his works are done in truth (Ps. 33:1-4). I will bless the LORD at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together (Ps. 34:1-3).***

At the opening of Psalm 34, David extended a most welcoming invitation. ***O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together.*** He was so filled with his love for God that it spilled over, engulfing everyone in its path. My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. His praise was so great that all who heard it were humbled before the Lord. ***I will give Thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise Thee among much people (35:18).***

As Christians, we proudly praise God. We sing His praises during worship services, bow our heads at mealtime, and honor Him during our daily devotions. David, however, did not limit his praise to the ‘customary’ times. ***And my tongue shall speak of Thy righteousness and of Thy praise all the day long (35:28).*** David believed that the Lord deserved praise at all times and in all things, no matter what troubles he might have at the moment. ***Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice (Phil. 4:4).*** Furthermore, he believed that it was his duty to share that praise with those around him. Centuries before the earthly ministry of Christ, David understood this directive: ***Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid (Matt. 5:14).*** David knew how to shine for God.

Many ask, “how is it possible to praise the Lord continually? How can we praise Him amid tragedy? What if we can find nothing in our daily lives to be thankful for?” We must realize that God sees and knows our every trial — as well as our every

joy. Our loving God always works to accomplish good for us, even when we cannot see it. When we least feel like praising Him is often the time when we should be praising the loudest. ***Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when His glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy*** (I Pet. 4:12-13).

Through our constant praise to God in both word and deed, we do more than bring honor to His name. As we bless the Lord at all times, we are drawn into His presence. By acknowledging His role as the Lord of our lives and praising Him for His limitless grace, we allow His Spirit to move within us, providing us with a peace that we would otherwise never know. ***And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*** (Phil. 4:7).

***By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His Name*** (Heb. 13:15).

**Thought for the Day:** *Consistent praise of God means consistent acknowledgment of His presence; He requires this not for His benefit but for ours.*

**Christ Revealed:** In the prophecy that not one of His bones would be broken as recorded concerning His crucifixion (Ps. 34:20). These things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken (John 19:36).

**Word Studies:** 31:4 **privily** = secretly; 31:6 **lying vanities** = all other gods; 31:8 **shut me up** = given me over; 32:2 **guile** = deceit; 32:3 **roaring** = complaining; 35:12 **spoiling** = determined to take my life; 35:15 **objects** = slanderers.

**Pray for Staff:** Jennifer Palafox • **Country:** Singapore (5,567,301) Southeast Asia • Major Languages: Mandarin, English • Religious Freedom • 33.9% Buddhism; 14.3% Muslim; 11.3% Taoist; 7.1% Catholic; 5.2% Hindu; 11% Protestant; 1.7% Other (Sikh, Zoroastrian, Jain, Jew); 16.4% None • **Prayer Suggestion:** Sing praises to the Lord; tell others what He has done (Ps.9:11).

**Optional Reading:** Colossians 3



## Dear Friend of our Christian Youth:

Most of us are too old to go to the foreign mission field, or don't feel qualified to give someone a Bible or tell them about the Lord, but there is a way each of us can be a missionary where the need is greatest—among the youth of the world—and let them know how much—how very much—God cares.

I wish you were able to sit at my desk for one day and see the great, overwhelming needs that truly exist among youth throughout the world. I pray that God will burden your heart with the magnitude of responsibility we face in helping them.

These few lines that I write are inadequate and can, at best, give only a glimpse of the heartbeat of the Christian youth and how you can share.

The many letters we receive from our young people confirm the fact that Bible Pathway is having a tremendous impact on the Christian youth in America. So we have dedicated this issue of Bible Pathway to America's youth who will be our spiritual leaders of tomorrow. And if they are to fulfill their responsibility, we must help them now.

Many of these young people have told us how their lives were turned around when they began reading through the Bible.

JoAnn Kendrick, a typical high school girl from Louisiana, came to see us about four years ago. She said that Bible Pathway had helped her read through the Bible, and that it was one of the most important and joyful experiences of her life.

That summer, she took twenty-five copies of Bible Pathway to camp, and several young people were saved through her efforts. When she entered college, she continued to be a Pathway Distributor and shared Bible Pathway each month with all the girls on her dormitory floor. As she handed them a Pathway, she shared something helpful or exciting they would find in that month's reading. This encouraged them to get into the Scriptures and follow the daily Bible readings in Bible Pathway.

JoAnn, who has been a faithful Bible reader for more than four years now, said, "By using Bible Pathway, I continually discover 'gold nuggets' in God's Word. As I daily read my Bible, I am inspired to pray; my faith is strengthened; and I am enlightened to God's purposes for my life."

An 18-year-old boy named King was saved as a result of Bible Pathway (see story on page 5A). We must help the "Kings" all across America.

Young people are looking for reality, and they need to know that we care. Let's give our youth something worth living for. We can help by giving them the supplies they need—Bibles, Bible Pathways, material on how to get Bible clubs started, and how they can more effectively pray for others.

The youth who are committed to Christ today aren't looking for a handout. They are saying, "Yes, I'm committed, and grateful for your help."

(continued on page 7A)



JOHN A. HASH, LITT.D., EDITOR

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## REACHING THE YOUTH WITH HIS

# WORD

### The Nation's Leaders of the Future Are the Youth of Today!

Here are some of the ways Bible Pathways are being distributed to the youth of the world:

#### Foreign Countries

- High schools
- Bible institutes
- Bookstores
- Colleges
- Youth academies
- Missionary children's schools

#### United States

- Bible colleges
- University campuses
- Leadership training schools
- Christian radio stations
- Schools for delinquent youth
- Teen Challenge groups
- Christian Television
- Youth Centers
- Pathway Distributors

Young people all over the world are united each day in reading through the Bible, using Bible Pathway. In homes, churches, and schools, their young lives are being molded into God's image as they read His Word. More than 50,000 Bible Pathways are sent each month to places where we could not go, and minister to people that we could not personally reach.

But we must face reality. Still thousands of youth have never even considered accepting Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord.

Just think! God has chosen you and me to reach them through Bible Pathway. And there is no way we can be more effective than by encouraging them to read His Word.

(continued from inside cover)

Although you cannot physically go back to the time you were a youth and relive your life, you can share Christ with today's young people who will be eternally grateful.

Bible Pathway readers have always been generous in their giving; and, by faith, I have told the young people we will help them.

At present, thousands of requests for Bibles and Bible Pathways come from organizations that serve youth in many nations. We have already received far more requests for Bible Pathway than we are able to provide.

We are praying that funds will be provided so we won't have to write to these dear precious people and tell them no.

There is an immediate need for \$100,000. Your gift—whether large or small—will say, "Yes, I care, and I am willing to postpone the purchase of some personal needs in order to provide help for these young people."

Has the Lord a servant who will invest \$10,000 . . . \$5,000 . . . \$1,000?

Just think how grateful you would have felt when you were a young person if someone had cared enough to dig down into their savings to make your life worth living! Well, here's your opportunity to do just that for the youth who will be our leaders of tomorrow.

\$100 will provide 80 youth with 5 Bible Pathways to distribute to their friends . . . \$10 will provide Bible Pathways for 8 young people to share.

The responsibility of reaching our youth rests upon us. And it should be the desire of every Christian to hear the Lord say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant . . ." (Matthew 25:21).

One person cannot do the job alone; but together, we can make an eternal investment in our youth. Here's your opportunity! Can I hear from you today?

In warmest Christian love,

*John A. Hash*  
John A. Hash



## Dear Friend of Pathway,

Our life is so short, and the opportunities we have to help others know the Lord will soon be gone—forever.

The average Christian in our fast-moving society often forgets the vital importance of helping others read the Word of God. But when we remember that it is only through the living Word—Christ Himself—that a person can receive eternal life, we will realize the serious consequences of failing to provide God's Master Plan to every hungry soul. That would be the tragedy of all tragedies—the mistake of a lifetime. So we have a responsibility to share His Word with the world.

Satan would love to see us “successful” in worldly things if it would keep us from being useful in the ministry of God's Word. Oh, how he tries to keep us from giving anything to Christ—our time, praise, possessions, and especially our prayers!

Satan will try to rob us of the joy of giving God's Word to some lost soul who has no Bible. He will attempt to make us forget there is a lost world that needs to hear the Good News by making us believe our gift is small and will not help in the task of reaching and changing lives for eternity.

But we dare not accept his lies or allow him to rob us of our opportunity to give. By faith, we must believe God's promise: “. . . my word . . . shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isaiah 55:11).

It is our prayer that the Word of God will be quick and powerful (living and active) in your life this month.

Your Bible-reading companions,

The Staff