mercy because there was no way the small nation of Israel could overcome such tragedy. God assured Amos these would not happen but then gave a third vision which showed Israel’s facing an even more terrible judgment. With a plumb line, God measured the people against His own holiness, and they were found to be out of line. God would judge their sin harshly.

 God was judging them for their continual sin against the poor, the needy, and Him Himself. They had forgotten the commands of God to care for those who were vulnerable in large part because they had forgotten to keep Him as the One and only God in their lives. Their lack of faith and trust in Him corrupted their hearts and minds so they could not live faithfully and sacrificially. To illustrate their sin problem, God was going to bring a famine on the land—not of food but of the word of God (8:11).

 In His pronouncement, God guaranteed punishment, but He promised not to destroy the nation of Israel totally (9:8). The judgment process would refine the nation, and He would then restore and rebuild them into something more prosperous than they could imagine (9:13-15).

 Praise God for His holiness, power, faithfulness, and forgiveness.

Saturday, July 1, 2017—2 Kings 15-17

 God is sovereign. He is in complete control. God is good. He is fully good and without any fault or evil. To know these truths is helpful when life presents challenges and hurts, especially those that seem unfair or inexplicable. Whatever comes, He is good and able to overcome.

 Knowing He is good is vital when He doesn’t overcome. When He allows His people to suffer for a time or intentionally afflicts them with hardship, this can seem unjust or overwhelming if they do not trust He is good. King Azariah did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh (15:3), yet he suffered with leprosy. Scripture gives no reason for the leprosy, but Azariah did not use that as an excuse blaming God. Though afflicted and limited, Azariah led the people toward faithfulness for 52 years.

 Contrast that with the northern neighbors who lived under six different kings during those years, all of whom led them toward unfaithfulness. In further contrast, Azariah’s grandson Ahaz became king and led the people to sin. He even sacrificed his own son in the fire (16:3). He used the treasures of the Temple to pay a bribe to Assyria for protection, and he had a pagan altar built in the Temple (16:11)

 The seeds of sin in Israel (17:7-23) finally burst forth with the fruit of judgment. The king of Assyria marched against Israel, attacked Samaria, and deported the people (17:1-6). God remains sovereign. Faithfulness remains necessary. Recognize the former. Practice the latter.

*Read the Bible Through 2017*

Week 26

Sunday, June 25, 2017—2 Kings 11-14:20

 When chaos comes calling, there is no better place to run than the presence of the Lord. In His presence there is fullness of joy and peace of soul that the circumstances of life cannot remove regardless of their size or strength. He will sustain and encourage until order is restored.

 Jehu unleashed a tidal wave of chaos when he killed the kings of Israel and Judah. The mother of King Ahaziah of Judah, Athaliah, sought to kill the rest of the royal family so she could rule. One of the royal daughters hid a son, Joash, in a bedroom at the Temple for six years while Athaliah implemented her evil scheme (11:3). When he was seven, the priest Jehoida staged a coup which installed Joash as king and began a process of significant revival in the land (11:17-20) and repair in the Temple.

 Despite the heightened level of waywardness in Israel, there was still hope for them because Yahweh remained on His throne and faithful to His covenant (13:23). Jehoahaz did evil in His sight, but when severely oppressed by Aram, he sought the Lord’s favor (13:4-5) and found deliverance, but the people were not humbled and did not repent. Even so God provided victory and recovery against Aram (13:25).

 When life does not find direction and discipline in the Lord, chaos will find an open door through which to visit often. Judah and Israel turned on themselves (14:1-14), and Israel looted the Temple. Pray for discipline to follow Him faithfully, even in chaos. Be a blessing and an example.

Monday, June 26, 2017—Joel 1-3

 Elijah and Elisha played significant roles as prophets in Israel. They were joined by a number of others, some of whom have their words recorded in books titled with their names. Joel was one of those Minor Prophets, considered minor not because his message was minor but simply because it was shorter than that of the Major Prophets.

 A great swarm of locusts (what most Americans call a grasshopper) had invaded the land and wiped out the grain and grape crops. This would have significant impact on every life in the land as those two crops were vital for personal food supply, commercial enterprise, and worship offerings. Through Joel, God called the people to repentance. The visible devastation of the land was a symbol of their own spiritual drought and barrenness before God, and if they did not repent, the coming Day of the Lord would do to their souls what these insects had done to the land.

 God’s promise was amazing. If they repented and returned to Him, He would repay for the years the locusts had eater (2:25). What no man could do God would accomplish. When a crop fails, the farmer has no other choice but wait for the next growing season. With God at the helm, however, abundance can be simply a moment away—whether physical restoration, spiritual renewal, or relational healing.

 Pray for repentance which restores your faith and discipline. Pray for a powerful movement of God like Joel describes in chapter 3, an unmistakable display of His power and righteousness.

Tuesday, June 27, 2017—2 Kings 14:21-25, Jonah 1-4

 The kingly carousel continued in Israel and Judah, and scripture records how Jeroboam II continued in the sins of Jeroboam I, leading the people to sin (14:25). God was not only concerned with the spiritual health of His people. He raised up Jonah to go to the Ninevites, and to preach against their wickedness. One problem immediately presented itself—Jonah was not interested in completing the task.

 Jonah had forgotten the words of Psalm 139:7, “Where can I flee from your presence?” God was fully aware of Jonah’s physical location and emotional condition, so he orchestrated circumstances to give Jonah the opportunity to think fully through his calling. The lots fell to Jonah, and Jonah fell into a whale. For three days and three nights, Jonah survived within the great fish and pondered his predicament. He prayed, and God heard him. He realized the destiny of those worshiping false idols was worse than his current condition (2:8), and he promised obedience to the God of true salvation.

 After the fish deposited Jonah on dry land, God called Jonah a second time to Nineveh. His call to repentance over the great city was heeded (3:1-10), and God did not bring the calamity on the city He had planned. Rather than rejoicing over their repentance, Jonah was angry and pouted. Like the older brother in Luke 15, he resented God’s grace and wished he were dead (4:8).

 Pray for compassion for the lost that moves you to proclaim His worth and rejoices in repentance.

Wednesday, June 28, 2017—2 Kings 14:26-29, Amos 1-3

 The provision and protection of God are not an immediate indication of faithful obedience on the part of the recipient. Because of His faithfulness to His covenant, God will be present, protect, and provide in certain ways which the covenant demands, yet He will not work in His fullest capacity if His people are lacking in faith and obedience. For instance, after refusing to go into the Promised Land, the people found God faithful to protect and provide in the desert though He could not bless them as fully as they would have been in Canaan.

 Under the reign of Jeroboam II, the people cried out in anguish because of their enemies. While Jeroboam led the people to continue in idolatry, God nonetheless worked to restore some of the territory Israel had lost and subdue some of their enemies (14:26-29). Amos prophesied God’s further judgment on these enemies in the coming days. Damascus would suffer because of theft from God’s people (1:3). Gaza and Tyre would fall because of enslaving people (1:6, 9). Edom lacked compassion (1:11). Ammon committed atrocities against pregnant women (1:13).

 God was circling around Israel in His pronouncement of judgment, and He promised to punish even Judah for their idolatry (2:4), so His promise of judgment on Israel for their litany of grievous acts (2:6-8, 12) is no surprise. Through His prophets, God made clear God will not let injustice and disobedience stand (3:1-15).

 Assess your faith and obedience. Are you experiencing the fullness of what God can do?

Thursday, June 29, 2017—Amos 4-6

 Parents use a number of sayings. “If I’ve told you once, I’ve told you a thousand times . . .” and “How many times do I have to tell you . . . ?” are just two. They are a collective expression of frustration and amazement—frustration with the way things are and amazement the child has not responded to repeated urgings for change or growth.

 From the beginning, God called His people to holiness and warned them of the dire consequences of not choosing His ways. Despite those initial words and the repeated warnings of prophets and circumstances, the people chose wickedness. Amos told of impending doom in chapters 1-3 and then a number of the uncomfortable warning signs God had provided. Despite hunger, drought, thirst, disease, plague, and destruction, the people had not repented and returned to Yahweh (4:4-11). “Therefore,” God told them, “prepare to meet your God, O Israel” (4:12).

 There was coming a day of intense destruction, and no amount of military might (5:3-4) or religious activity (5:5-6) would sway the wrath coming against them. Their sinful actions against the poor and idolatrous lifestyle would soon bear the fruit of bitterness (5:16-17). God needed to purge the land of sinfulness so worship could be pure (5:21-23) and righteousness and justice could flourish (5:24).

 God wants worshipers who have outward action and inward conviction (6:6). Pray for deeper humility (6:8) and renewed passion. Ask God to remove any complacency or compromise corrupting your walk.

Friday, June 30, 2017—Amos 7-9

 Anyone who has experienced a natural disaster can share the stories of fear, helplessness, and devastation. The forces of nature are unstoppable and unforgiving. In two visions, Amos saw Israel suffering under a swarm of locusts and a destructive fire. He cried out for God’s