

Sunday, August 5, 2018—Obadiah, Jeremiah 1-2

“Your arrogant heart has deceived you . . .” (Obadiah 3). How many times could God have said this through the ages? Humans have the tendency to think too highly of themselves and too little of God and others. As a result, they wrongly worship self and mistreat others.

Edom, the nearby country to Israel and descendants of Esau, were self-absorbed because they lived in a high, rocky place they felt was impenetrable by outsiders. They watched as invaders destroyed Jerusalem, even gloating over and participating in its pillaging. God said as they treated others so they would be treated. Justice was coming.

From the arrogance of Edom, the scene turns to the brokenness and humility of Jeremiah. God told him he was to be a messenger to the nations, but Jeremiah protested, “I am only a youth” (1:6). He could not imagine being useful to God at a young age. Sometimes humility can be arrogance in disguise, thinking too little of ourselves and, thus, limiting the all-powerful God who calls us. “He could never use me” is self-oriented.

God assured Jeremiah He had indeed called him to speak a vital message to His people as they faced the judgment He had long promised. He was to remind the people of the glory God gave them at the beginning and the wasteful way they and their ancestors had lived, making themselves worthless to God and His Kingdom (2:5). Like a prosecuting attorney, God was bringing a case against His people (2:9). The evidence was clear.

Pray for true humility and unwavering obedience.

Saturday, August 4, 2018—2 Kings 22-25

The dawning of the morning sun is a great relief after a night of storms. The coronation of Josiah as king was such a dawning. His father, Manasseh, led for more than 50 years and was responsible for great wickedness for his people. Josiah reversed much of the pagan practice of his father and the people, and he reinstated an appreciation for and adherence to the statutes of the Law. The amount of courage this required cannot be overstated. Josiah brought much-needed revival.

“In spite of all that, the Lord did not turn from the fury of his intense burning anger, which burned against Judah . . .” (23:26). Josiah died at the hands of the Egyptians, and within a few years, Babylon invaded Judah (24:1). A succession of kings oversaw the decline of the nation.

So many of the fairy tales end with some version of “. . . and they lived happily ever after.” The prince had rescued the princess. The villain had been deposed. The treasure had been found. What was wrong had been made right, and everyone could celebrate—characters in the story and readers alike. What 2 Kings chronicles is no fairy tale.

As a result, the ending of the book is not “happily ever after.” The grand story of Scripture is not complete, but the participants in the story did not know that. They had heard calls of the prophets for repentance and predicting judgment. Did they remember the promises of restoration?

Pray for daily repentance and obedience. Trust despite difficulty.

Friday, August 3, 2018—Habakkuk 1-3

Habakkuk asked the question so many have asked before and after him, “How long, LORD, must I call for help?” (1:2a). Humans are not known for their patience, and those who have faith in God believe He can overcome any hardship, so they wonder why He doesn’t answer their prayers for relief in a timely manner. Does He care? Does He even hear?

God’s answers to that prayer are sometimes worse than the question. He told Habakkuk to look and be amazed. He was doing something utterly astounding (1:5). He was raising up ungodly

people, the Chaldeans, to do His work. Habakkuk was certainly stunned. How could a pure, undefiled God look on, much less allow, such evil (1:12-13)?

To his credit, Habakkuk asked his question and was willing to stand at his post waiting on God to answer (2:1). Some will grow frustrated with God's lack of answers or action and stop listening. In faithfulness, God indeed answered and told Habakkuk to write down what God said.

The arrogant would indeed face punishment, and the righteous would live by faith (2:4). God was at work, and they needed to trust Him. The Chaldeans were undoubtedly sinful, but God's people had been sinful as well. That's why they were facing judgment. Faith believes that God will work things out in His time in His ways for His glory.

In distress, take time to look intently at who God truly is and how deep His love is for His people and how strong He is (3:1-16). Praise Him, like Habakkuk, no matter the circumstances (3:17-19).

Thursday, August 2, 2018—Zephaniah 1-3

Zephaniah prophesied during the reign of Josiah, the son of Manasseh, one of the most wicked kings in Israel's history. Josiah walked in a much different direction than his father had walked for more than 50 years, and it may well be his righteousness which allowed a prophet once again to hear from God and speak to the nation.

Like the prophets before him, Zephaniah spoke of the Day of the LORD. Whatever this day would be and whenever it would come, there was no doubt it would be a time of trouble, distress, destruction, desolation, darkness, gloom, clouds, total darkness, trumpet blasts, and battle cries (1:15-16) in order for God to bring judgment on all those who sinned against Him (1:17). The punishment would match the crime.

Some likely heard Zephaniah and doubted or scoffed. They had been hearing this promise for more than a generation from him and prophets alike. If God were going to do something, He would have already done it. Maybe God threatened but couldn't actually act. Why listen now?

Zephaniah told them why. "Seek the LORD, all you humble of the earth, who carry out what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be concealed on the day of the LORD's anger" (2:3). God was patient, but He was also angry. He would not wait forever. Those who truly wanted to please Him would have responded with repentance, regret, and resolve to obey and follow Him no matter the consequences.

Thank God for Jesus, who removes the punishment and restores the relationship. Take joy in knowing God delights in you (3:14-20).

Wednesday, August 1, 2018—2 Kings 20-21

In Matthew 10:16, Jesus told His disciples he was sending them out into a world that would be like wolves to them. He urged the disciples to be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. They needed to be shrewd to survive and yet have the peace that only He could provide.

Hezekiah needed this warning 700 years earlier. He contracted a terminal illness and prayed for God's healing. God heard Hezekiah's prayer and said He would add 15 years to his life. God even provided Hezekiah with a sign—moving the sun back and adding even more time.

After his healing, Hezekiah welcomed envoys from the distant city of Babylon, the capital of Chaldea. This is where he needed shrewdness and innocence. They came in peace, and Hezekiah showed them favor, but he unwisely showed them all his possessions. Isaiah told him later he was foolishly giving them an inventory of all they would plunder.

Hezekiah had a new lease on life, but he knew he would only live another 15 years. The Babylonian invasion would come after his death, so he would continue to know peace and security. How much better would he have reacted to give praise to God but also begin preparing his people

with spiritual security for the day their physical security was threatened? This spiritual strength would have served them well when Hezekiah's son Manasseh became king. He served for 50 years as one of the most spiritually bankrupt kings in history.

Pray for wisdom and innocence to walk well in the world.

Tuesday, July 31, 2018—Nahum 1-3

Children thrive when parents compliment them. They also grow when parents use godly discipline in their lives, but they can suffer when the disciplining makes them believe they never do anything right or that the parents never see anything positive or valuable in them.

To this point, God has spoken through His prophets to call His people into repentance and righteousness. He has pointed out their flaws, and He has pointed out the flaws of the surrounding nations. All of them will face judgment. Nahum provides a slightly different perspective. He turns his attention solely to Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians, the greatest foe of God's people at the time. His pronouncement of impending doom on this great power surely brought encouragement to God's people.

"The LORD is a jealous and avenging God; the LORD takes vengeance and is fierce in wrath. . . . he is furious with his foes" (1:2). His power over nature testifies to His ability to bring judgment on the earth. Because of this, Nahum guaranteed Nineveh's destruction (1:8, 15). God Himself said, "Beware, I am against you. . . . I will make your chariots go up in smoke . . ." (2:13a). He was aware of the idolatry of Nineveh (3:4) and the sin it inspired, and they would pay the price (3:19-20).

In contrast, He is a source of hope and safety for those who trust in Him. "The LORD is good, a stronghold in a day of distress; he cares for those who take refuge in him" (1:7). Renew your complete trust in Him.

Monday, July 30, 2018—Micah 5-7

More than 700 years before Jesus came to earth, Micah predicted His arrival. "Bethlehem Ephrathah, you are small among the clans of Judah; one will come from you to be ruler over Israel for me. His origin is from antiquity, from ancient times" (5:2). This word was timely in that the people felt oppressed and attacked (5:1), but the word was cautionary in that the deliverer would not arrive quickly (5:3). God had work to do in His people.

God was planning to remove their sources of strength and sin. His anger and wrath would be on display against those who had not obeyed (5:10-15). When He restored them, He would shepherd them in strength and bring security and be their peace (5:4-5). (Interestingly, Bethlehem means "house of bread," and Ephrathah means, "abundantly fruitful." Jesus accomplished the task God promised, and His people commemorate that with the Lord's Supper's two elements—bread and the fruit of the vine.)

God was seeking wholeheartedly devoted people, and He knew the cleansing process was necessary. He wasn't looking for people to bring Him thousands of sacrifices but those who would act justly, love faithfulness, and walk humbly with God (6:8). The wickedness of kings would give way to the righteousness of commoners.

"Because I have sinned against him, I must endure the Lord's rage until he champions my cause and establishes justice for me. He will bring me into the light; I will see his salvation" (7:9). Praise God for being like no other, being forgiving and showing compassion (7:18-20).